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AGAINST UTOPIA:
OSIP BRIK AND THE GENESIS OF PRODUCTIVISM

by

NATASHA KURCHANOVA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Facutly in Art History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____	_____
Date	Chair of the Examining Committee, Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long
_____	_____
Date	Executive Officer, Professor Patricia Mainardi

Professor Rosemarie Haag Bletter

Professor Stuart Liebman

Professor Jane A. Sharp

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERISTY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

AGAINST UTOPIA: OSIP BRIK AND THE GENESIS OF PRODUCTIVISM

by

Natasha Kurchanova

Adviser: Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long

This dissertation explores the life and career of Osip Brik, a prominent member of the artistic left in Russia during the revolutionary period. It traces his life from his youth in Moscow to his acquaintance with the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii; his involvement with pre-revolutionary scholarly and political organizations; his joining of the Bolshevik government after the revolution; his active participation in the establishment and management of institutions of artistic education; his leading role in supporting emerging Constructivist artists, the formulation of the Productivist theory, and the foundation of the journal *LEF*, a mouthpiece for the expression of ideas by the Russian artists and writers of the avant-garde. The last chapter explores Brik's pioneering efforts to establish photography as a legitimate form of artistic expression in Soviet Russia and examines his role as a film critic and a scriptwriter for a Moscow film studio.

Apart from Brik's contribution to the development of Constructivism and Productivism, this dissertation also looks at his not-so-glorious involvement with authoritarian politics of Bolshevik Russia and his attempt to position himself and the artists he protected in such a way as to become immune to inhumane acts committed by the repressive political regime. For example, Brik's service in the Cheka, the Bolshevik Secret Police, marked him in the eyes of many as an evil figure, willing to go to extremes to prove his allegiance to those in power. A close look at Brik's writings and his career

does not show him as a monster, however, but as an extreme pragmatic and a skeptic who did not believe in abstract ideals that were not buttressed by a solid political foundation.

In its focus on a controversial figure within the Russian revolutionary art, this dissertation contests the tendency of recent investigations of the Russian avant-garde to ascribe its motivation to either a "utopian" or a "dystopian" extreme and argues that in its day-to-day operations much of its activity was directed by immediate pragmatic concerns, which, in the absence of belief in a greater good, sometimes led to its affiliation with repressive politics.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Agitprop – Agitation and Propaganda Department of RKP

Cheka – Committee on Extraordinary Measures [*Chrezvychainaia kommissia*]

GPU – State Political Directorate [*Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*]

INKhUK – Institute of Artistic Culture [*Institut khudozhestvennoi kul'tury*]

IMO – Art of the Young [*Iskusstvo molodykh*]

IZO -- Art Department [*Otdel izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv*]

LEF – Left Front of the Arts [*Levyi front iskusstva*]

MAF – Moscow Association of Futurists [*Moskovskaia assotsiatsiia futuristov*]

MAPP – Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers [*Moskovskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei*]

Mezhrabpom – International Workers' Help [*Mezhdunarodnaia rabochaia pomomoshch'*]

Narkompros – People's Commissariat of Enlightenment [*Narodyi kommissariat prosveshcheniia*]

NEP – New Economic Policy [*Novaia ekonomicheskaia politika*]

OBMOKhU – Society of Young Artists [*Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov*]

OPOIAZ – Society for the Study of Poetic Language [*Obshchestvo po izucheniiu poeticheskogo iazyka*]

PEGOSKhUM – Petrograd State Free Art Workshops [*Petrogradskie gosudarstvennye svobodnye khudozhestveno-uchebnye masterskie*]

Proletkult – Proletarian Culture [*Proletarskaia kul'tura*]

RAPP – Russian Association of Proletarian Writers [*Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei*]

RGALI – Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva*]

RKP – Russian Communist Party [*Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia*]

ROPF – Revolutionary Society of Proletarian Photographers [*Revoliutsionnoe obshchestvo proletarskikh fotografov*]

RSDRP – Social-Democratic Labor Party of Russia [*Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia*]

RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic [Rossiiskaia sovetskaia federativnaia sotsialisticheskaia respublika]

SDI – Union of Art Workers [*Soiuz deiatelei iskusstv*]

SSSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [*Soiuz sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik*]

SVOMAS – Free Workshops [*Svobodnye masterskie*]

UNOVIS – Affirmers of New Art [*Utverditeli novogo iskusstva*]

VAPP – All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers [*Vserossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei*]

VKhUTEMAS – Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops [*Vysshie khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie masterskie*]

YUGOLEF – South Left Front of the Arts [*Iuzhnyi Levyi front iskusstva*]

Zhivskul'ptarkh – Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture Collective [*Zhivopis', skul'ptura, arkhitektura*]

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION, STYLE, TIMES, AND PLACES

In this dissertation, I used the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian names and titles, except when a word has an established spelling in English, such as Lev Tolstoy (not Tolstoi), El Lissitzky (not Lissitskii), or Bolshevik (not Bol'shevik).

Because the Gregorian calendar was introduced in Russia on January 31, 1918, all dates before then follow the Julian calendar, which is twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar. The dates between 1900 and 1918 are thirteen days behind. The city of St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 and Leningrad in 1924. Although both names were used in publications until 1924, in this dissertation I use Petrograd as the name for this city for the period between 1914 and 1924.

Titles of books, catalogs, journals, newspapers, and exhibitions are italicized; titles of articles are in quotation marks while names of groups, societies, and institutions are not. For ease of reading, Russian titles of books and articles have been translated in the text, but titles of journals and newspapers have been transliterated with a one-time translation in parentheses.

INTRODUCTION

Osip Maksimovich Brik (1888-1945) is an important and controversial figure in the history of Russian art of the revolutionary period. To his advocates, he is known as a collaborator and a close friend of the posthumous giant of the Soviet literary establishment, the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii, a founding member of a group of Russian Formalists, a polemicist, and a left-wing critic. After he met Maiakovskii in the summer of 1915, Brik became actively involved in the aesthetic enterprise of the Futurists by financing publications of his friend's poetry and placing his own article in a Futurist almanac. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, he joined the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers, a politically independent organization formed after the February Revolution of 1917, and became one of its most outspoken negotiators by outlining its policy that emphasized the freedom of the arts from governmental supervision. Soon after the Bolshevik revolution, Brik became a member of Narkompros, the Bolshevik Commissariat of Enlightenment, as an editor of and an active contributor to *Iskusstvo kommuny* (The Art of the Commune), the newspaper of the Art Department of Narkompros, and as the head of the Bureau of Artistic Labor, responsible for organizing design competitions for first projects of socialist construction, such as kiosks, apartment buildings, and monuments to the revolution (even though those often existed only on paper). Because of his association with Maiakovskii and his staunch defense of experimentation in the arts, Brik is frequently associated with the utopian drive to merge art and life that defines the revolution.

Although he did take an active part in the promotion of Russian Futurism in general and of Maiakovskii's poetry in particular during the tumultuous revolutionary

years, Brik is best known for his efforts to institutionalize Futurism through its affiliation with the Bolshevik government, the Communist party, and the movement's efforts to fuse with the production-oriented mentality of the Soviet political and ideological system. In Soviet artistic circles, Brik became a leading supporter of Constructivism, an art movement that sought to explore the qualities of "material, tectonics, and construction" in a work of art,[1] and a founder of Productivism, a theoretical correlate of Constructivism, a movement that called for artists to put their experiments to useful ends by entering factories and contributing their skills and knowledge to the industrial production of things. Brik implemented these ideas through his active involvement in the governance of PEGOSKhUM (The Petrograd Free Art Workshops) in 1918, his support of VKhUTEMAS (The All-Union Artistic-Technical Workshops), established in Moscow toward the end of 1920, his directorship of INKhUK (The Institute of Artistic Culture) in the 1920s Moscow, and, most importantly, through his participation in the publication of a 1921 booklet *Art in Production* (*Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*), which outlined major tenets of the Productivist theory.[2]

In line with this theory, Brik took an active part in the debate about the nature of a "thing" [*veshch'*], a central concept in the Constructivist and Productivist vocabulary that revolved around the distinction between the usage of the words *predmet* (object) and *veshch*'. According to the discussions conducted at INKhUK under Brik's leadership, the word *veshch'*, traditionally connoted with vagueness, the unknown, and the unknowable, became a virtual synonym of an engineered Constructivist *predmet*, transparent in its

[1] "Program of the Constructivist Working Group of INKhUK," in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914-1932*, introd. by Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska, exh. cat. Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, July 4 -September 2, 1990 (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 67.
[2] David Shterenberg et al., *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (Moscow: IZO Narkompros, 1921).

construction and the principles of its functioning. Brik and other theoreticians of Constructivism employed language to their ends by using *veshch'* almost exclusively instead of *predmet*, thereby making *veshch'* completely transparent to an empirical scrutiny, a concept that was foreign to the traditional use of the word.[3]

The attention bestowed upon language manifested itself in another key project undertaken by Brik – the foundation of the group LEF (the Left Front of the Arts) and the three-year editorship, together with Maiakovskii, of the eponymous journal, a mouthpiece for Constructivism and Productivism, that the two friends launched in Moscow in 1923. Under Brik's and Maiakovskii's leadership, *LEF* propagated the application of Productivist ideas to book and textile design, utilizing the state-of-the-art technique of photomontage for the former and non-figurative geometric patterning for the latter. On the pages of this journal, Brik actively promoted Aleksander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Anton Lavinskii, and Liubov' Popova as artists who earnestly embraced the Productivist ideology. At the same time, the editors willfully ignored other prominent left artists, such as El Lissitzky and Gustav Klutsis, who, at some point in their careers, were associated with Kazimir Malevich and Suprematism. It is this exclusionary attitude to experimental art that critics of Brik cite as one example of his negative attitude toward revolutionary utopia -- an attitude enhanced by his service in the Cheka (The Committee on Extraordinary Measures), the Bolsheviks' oppressive secret police, from 1920 until 1924.[4]

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[3] On concurrence of meaning between *veshch'* and *predmet* in the Futurists' and later Productivists' and Constructivists' usage, see chapters 1 and 3, pages 68-71 and 160-178 of this dissertation.

[4] For information on Brik's service in the Cheka see note 20 of this introduction and notes 6 and 25 of chapter 2.

Another divisive aspect of Brik's activity on behalf of *LEF* was his treatment of a popular topic of the day, the so-called *zhenskii vopros* (the woman question), which Brik addressed in his story *Not a Fellow-Traveler* [*Ne poputchitsa*], published in the first issue of the journal. Because of the structure of its argument, which was risqué and anti-feminist at the same time, the story managed not only to offend some of the conservative colleagues at *LEF,* such as Nikolai Chuzhak, but also to displease progressive party leaders, such as Lev Trotsky. The opposition to *Not a Fellow-Traveler* from both the conservative and progressive party alliances marked a widening division in the ambiguous relationship between *LEF* and the official party line. Even before the formation of the journal, Brik and Maiakovskii were ceaselessly attacked for favoring artists of bourgeois descent by advocates of proletarian art, who were first concentrated in the organization for proletarian culture Proletkult, and later in its various offshoots, such as October, MAPP (The Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers), and VAPP (The All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). During the years of the Civil War (1918-1921) and in its immediate aftermath, Brik and his allies could openly attack ideas propagating "art by proletarians." With the change of the political climate during the years of NEP (The New Economic Policy, 1921-1928), they were forced to ally themselves with some of the earnest proletarian rhetoric, to which the agreement of cooperation between LEF and MAPP, published toward the end of 1923 in the fourth issue of *LEF*, bears witness. Despite these efforts, LEF and its journal were still accused of "Formalism" to indicate their preference for the analysis and perfection of the superficial "form" over concern with the depth of the politically acceptable "content," which included the proletarian origin of artists. After Lenin's death in 1924, internal

tensions over the direction of the journal led to its closure in 1925, two years after its first issue was launched.

The journal reappeared two years later under the name of *Novyi LEF*, signaling that the editorial board gauged the new political leadership and adjusted itself accordingly. Anticipating the Stalinist need for popular enthusiasm during the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), the reemerged journal launched the slogan of the journalistic "literature of fact" and introduced photography and film onto its pages not only as forms of artistic expression, but also as tools for ideological propaganda serving the party and the state. Brik became a leading spokesman of the journal for photography, publishing inaugural articles that promoted this form of visual expression as the most fitting for the Soviet version of modernity. His articles on photography, published from 1926 through 1928 in *Novyi LEF, Sovetskoe foto,* and *Sovetskoe kino,* marked Brik as one of the most eloquent and energetic supporters of this medium in Russia. In film, Brik became the head of the scriptwriting department at Mezhrabpom Rus', a semi-private and therefore relatively independent film studio, funded by the international organization of the Workers' Aid, based in Berlin. As a scriptwriter, Brik became known for his work with Vsevolod Pudovkin on the 1928 film *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* [*Potomok Chengiz-khana*], renamed for English-speaking audiences as *Storm over Asia.*

After the dissolution of *Novyi LEF* in 1928, Brik founded, together with Maiakovskii, the group REF (The Revolutionary Front of the Arts) in June of 1929. The slogans of REF sounded very much like the ones which accompanied the foundation of LEF and its journal, calling for the active participation of literature in socialist propaganda. REF planned to publish two almanacs, but because Maiakovskii left it in

the beginning of 1930 to join an adversarial organization, RAPP (The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), the project was never realized. On February 18, 1930, Osip and his wife Lilia Brik left for a trip to London and Berlin for two months. When they returned on April 17, Maiakovskii was dead, having shot himself with a revolver two days earlier. For Osip, Maiakovskii's suicide proved to be a shock, a "tragic chance" that Maiakovskii took because of a momentary weakness. Because of the Cheka supervision of Maiakovskii's activity, some aficionados of the poet suspected the organization in the poet's murder. Brik denied these rumors. According to him, Maiakovskii died because for a moment he "could not control his contradictions" with reason. In his reflections on the death of the poet he compared him to the "talentless" representatives of RAPP, who did not have any contradictions whatsoever.[5] After Brik's death, some of his nemeses accused him of complicity in his friend's murder, because of his closeness to high-placed Chekists and his work for the Cheka in the early 1920s.[6] Because of the absence of any direct evidence for these accusations, Brik remains known as a critic who furnished a functional aesthetic theory for radical artists in Russia at the time of a major political change. In this dissertation, I argue that Brik's involvement with the oppressive political organizations of the Bolsheviks has been justified by his ability to serve as a political shield for the Futurists and Constructivists, guiding them through the rough waters of proletarian aesthetics and protecting them from attacks of retrograde aesthetes of various persuasions.

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[5] Osip Brik, "Poet proletarskoi revoliutsii" (Poet of the proletarian revolution), *Pioner* 14 (1930): 15-16, quoted in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik: materialy k biografii* (Akmola: Niva, 1993), 33 and Lilia Brik, "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche," in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 145.

[6] On Brik's involvement with the Cheka, see notes 3 and 20 of this introduction and notes 6 and 25 of chapter 2.

Literature on Brik is also divided according to his ambiguous legacy on behalf of Russian revolutionary art. In her history of Russian Constructivism, Christina Lodder mentioned Brik as one of the active members of the Bolshevik government who helped to establish and manage the art policy of the new state and as a chief theoretician of the art into production movement, initiated on the pages of *Iskusstvo kommuny*. In her account of Constructivism and Productivism, Lodder noted that Brik was instrumental in promoting INKhUK and adamant about supporting the Productivist faculties of VKhUTEMAS, where the INKhUK artists taught. Lodder remarked that among the various Productivist causes, Brik was especially supportive of textile design. The result of Lodder's overview was a portrait of Brik as an ardent advocate of the union of art and politics who was instrumental in establishing Rodchenko, Popova, and Stepanova as prominent Constructivists and talented supporters of Production art.[7] Apart from Lodder's introduction of Brik as a leader of Productivism, Christopher Phillips' anthology of modern photography has positioned him as one of the foremost theorists on this medium in Russia, who had argued for the superiority of this technologically enhanced medium over traditional visual arts, painting in particular.[8]

Several recent studies and museum exhibitions that focused on the Russian radical artists' involvement in politics emphasized the connection between an impractical, utopian element in their attitude toward the world and the equally impractical and utopian political character of the Russian revolution. Those authors who chose to address an intrinsic correlation of utopia – the dystopian aspect of the aesthetic and political

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[7] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), passim.

[8] Osip Brik, "The Photograph versus the Painting," "What the Eye Does not See," and "From the Painting to the Photograph" in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 213-220, 227-233.

experiment, which left the country with the creative bankruptcy of Socialist Realism and in economic and moral ruin -- include philosopher Boris Groys, art historian Igor' Golomshtok, and literary historian Irina Gutkin. Groys can be considered a pioneer of this approach, introduced in his book *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, first published in German in 1988 as *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin.* In this book, Groys has famously advanced a thesis that in their unbounded will to power the Russian avant-garde artists compromised their identity as interpreters of reality by wishing to change it. By fusing their aesthetic and political goals together in their striving to use "reality itself" as "material for artistic construction," they became politicians and therefore regarded the "world itself as material," which led to their unrealistic "demand for power over the world."[9] This thesis was applied in Golomshtok's book *Totalitarian Art*, in which the author found many structural and thematic correspondences between artworks of Stalinist Russia, Hitler's Germany, and Mussolini's Italy. In the domain of literature, Gutkin used this argument to outline her theory of the origins of the Socialist Realist aesthetic.[10]

Other recent contributions in art and political history tend to be more optimistic concerning the utopianism of the Russian left art and its engagement in politics. The major exhibition, *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde 1915-1932,* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York outlined a history of Russian art during a crucial stage of its transition from a-political to political, but interpreted the political self-consciousness and utopianism of the artists as their laudable characteristic. As Paul

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[9] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21.
[10] Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, c 1999).

Wood, the author of the introductory article to the catalogue, opined, it was precisely the Russian revolution that made the avant-garde's aesthetic contribution interesting.[11] Victor Margolin, in his published dissertation *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946*, linked the early twentieth-century artists' desire to "become a signifier of a new spirit" and to "create a new social role for art" to the ideas of an early nineteenth-century French Utopian, Henri de Saint Simon, who called for artists to become "social visionaries," conceiving of ways of social arrangements, which could be evaluated by scientists and put into practice by industrialists.[12]

Christina Kiaer, in her dissertation "The Russian Constructivist 'Object' and the Revolutionizing of Everyday Life," investigated various ways through which the Constructivist artists – Vladimir Tatlin, Rodchenko, Stepanova, and others – endeavored to reject the visual aspect of their objects made for use in *byt* (the domain of the everyday) in favor of their tactile, "sensual" qualities. In this transition, Kiaer saw a positive utopian tendency, which "deconstructs the binary opposition of production and consumption…, activity and passivity" thereby introducing an "asymmetry" into the relations of (masculine) production and (feminine) *byt.*[13] Finally, in her recent book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of the Mass Utopia in East and West*, political scholar Susan Buck-Morss called for a resurgence of the vanishing dreamworlds of modernity in line with Walter Benjamin's appeal for a "dream-of potential for social transformation." According to Buck-Morss, despite its failure and the catastrophes to

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[11] Paul Wood, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 2.
[12] Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy*, *1917-1946* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1-3.
[13] Christina Kiaer, "The Russian Constructivist 'Object' and Revolutionizing of Everyday Life" (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Berkely, 1995), 1-5.

which the dreamworlds led, utopia is necessary in order to counteract the unrestricted expansion of the global capital and its economy, which has its own economic profit and not the benefit of the people as the ultimate aim of its existence.[14]

Because he was not an artist, but a theoretician who advocated the rapprochement between left art and the Bolshevik government, Brik is frequently described in dystopian terms, especially by his critics in Russia. There, Brik's personal achievements tend to be overshadowed by his close association with Maiakovskii. In some accounts by writers from the former Soviet Union, Brik has been assigned the role of a "canny" Jew who managed to sneak into the good graces of a benign Russian genius and build himself a career at his expense. Yet during his life, Brik was a much respected, if not much loved, leader of a radical Futurist group centered around Maiakovskii and the magazine *LEF*. In the 1960s, less than twenty years after his death, he became a veritable pariah of Russian literature, accused of all mortal sins including treachery and murder.

The apparent cause of the disfavor toward Osip and his wife, Lilia, was their unorthodox social relationship, in which Lilia became Maiakovskii's muse and lover, but never abandoned her husband. The first articles casting the Briks in an unfavorable light appeared in Russia during the Khrushchevian "thaw."[15] Although these first hostile publications were directed against Lilia, by the late 1960s Osip also entered the orbit of

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[14] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2000), ix-xiv.

[15] Anatolii Valiuzhenich was very helpful in providing me with information on publications about the Briks in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Information on the anti-Brik campaign is taken from his article "Operatsiia *Ogonek* ili Kak Kommunisticheskaia partiia borolas' s Lilei Brik" (Operation *Ogonek* or how the Communist party fought with Lilia Brik) published in a Moscow journal *Bibliografiia* no. 5 (2001): 61-74 and no. 6 (2001): 81-96. Although in this article the author refers primarily to the mistreatment of Lilia in the official press, Osip was also a target of the attack.

the anti-Brik campaign, sanctioned it appears, at the highest echelons of Soviet power.[16] In 1968 the Soviet popular magazine *Ogonek* published two articles dedicated to Maiakovskii – "The Poet's Love" and "The Poet's Tragedy" – in which the Briks were shown as a profiteering, machinating, unprincipled couple, concerned only with preserving their well-being at the expense of an idealistic, trusting, and faithful Maiakovskii.[17] Lilia was accused of being a destructive force in the poet's life that precipitated his untimely end. Brik was defamed as the poet's "sham friend" who "abused the great poet's trust during his life and after his death began to use his fame for his own aggrandizement…"[18]

One of the authors of the articles, Aleksandr Koloskov, wrote a book on Maiakovskii, which never appeared in print, but the last chapter of which, "Ia obviniaiu" (I accuse) circulated widely in the *intelligentsiia* underground in typewritten form. The provocative title of the chapter, referring to Zola's defense of Dreyfus, recalled the famous anti-Semitic case and defined the terms of the discussion. Similar to Zola, the author attacked his adversaries, but contrary to Zola, who opposed French anti-Semitism, Koloskov struck a blow against the Jews who were "foreign to Russian native life" and who exploited Maiakovskii financially and knowingly participated in his murder. The

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[16] Valiuzhenich points to Khrushchev himself and the party ideologue Suslov as heading the campaign against the Briks. See "Operatsiia *Ogonek,*" 61-64.

[17] V. Vorontsov and A. Koloskov, "Liubov' poeta," *Ogonek* no. 16 (April 1968): 9-13; A. Koloskov, "Tragediia poeta," *Ogonek* no. 23 (June 1968): 26-31; A. Koloskov, "Tragediia poeta," *Ogonek* no. 26 (June 1968): 18-22. Apart from the *Ogonek* publication, the memoirs denouncing the Briks appeared in the collection *Maiakovskii v vospominaniiakh rodnykh i druzei* (Maiakovsii in Memoirs by Relatives and Friends) that were published with encouragement from Maiakovskii's sister, Liudmila. Evgeniia Lavinskaia, the wife of the LEF artist Anton Lavinskii, authored the most hostile of these memoirs. The gist of them was the same as in the *Ogonek* articles: the Briks did not appreciate Maiakovskii's talent and did not care for him as a person, but maintained him as a friend for a political and material advantage. See E. A. Lavinskaia, "Vospominaniia o vstrechakh s Maiakovskim" (Memoirs about Meetings with Maiakovskii) in *Maiakovskii v vospominaniiakh rodnykh i druzei* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1968), 321-374.

[18] The denunciation of Brik was printed in the last part of the "trilogy": Koloskov, "Tragediia poeta," 18-20.

material for accusations was provided by Maiakovskii's sister, Liudmila, who asserted that the Briks used their connections within the fearsome Cheka to refuse Maiakovskii a visa to France, which prevented him from marrying his newly found love, Tatiana Iakovleva. Then, according to Koloskov, the couple cooperated with the Cheka in arranging the poet's murder.[19]

The anti-Brik campaign picked up during yet another, and most recent, political thaw. In 1989, a journalist, Valentin Skoriatin, began an "independent investigation" into the facts of Maiakovskii's death.[20] By this act, he was following up on the accusations that were leveled against the Briks twenty years earlier on the pages of *Ogonek.* The aim of his project was the unearthing of alleged "facts" that formed the basis of Koloskov's accusations. In the course of his inquiry Skoriatin discovered that Maiakovskii was never refused a visa in the fall of 1929 because he never applied for one. At the same time, Skoriatin provided the Cheka ID numbers for both Osip and Lilia.[21] The mystery of

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[19] Aleksandr Koloskov, "Ia obviniaiu," *Molodaia gvardiia* no. 10 (1991): 244-255.

[20] Valentin Skoriatin's articles were published in *Zhurnalist* in the following issues: "Pochemu Maiakovskii ne poekhal v Parizh?" (Why Maiakovskii did not go to Paris?) no. 9 (1989): 87-95; "Mezhdu dekabrem i martom" (Between December and March) no. 1 (1990): 56-63; "Vystrel v Lubianskom" (The shot in Lubianskii [alley]) no. 2 (1990): 52-57; "Posleslovie k smerti" (Postface to death) no. 5 (1990): 52-62; "Mne by zhit' da zhit…'" (I wish I could keep living) no. 5 (1991): 70-71; "Prozreniie" (Seeing again) no. 6 (1991): 84-93; "Moment lzhi" (A moment of lie) nos. 5-6 (1992): 84-90; "Zevs' osvedomliaet" ('Zeus' informs) no. 1 (1993): 68-73 and no. 2 (1993): 43-47; "Sretenka. Malyi Golovin, 12…" no. 7 (1993): 50-53; "Skazano eshche ne vse" (Not everything is said yet) no. 10 (1994): 37-44.

[21] Bengt Jangfeldt was the first to mention that Osip belonged to the Cheka on the basis of a certificate of a Moscow Political Directorate, issued in Brik's name and located in his private archive, then in the hands of Lilia Brik (Skoratin, "Pochemu Maiakovskii ne poekhal v Parizh," 95, note 1). I discovered this certificate during my research in the archive, when it was relocated to RGALI. The certificate was dated April 27, 1922 and signed by the head of the Moscow Political Directorate, Medved'. In it, Brik was dispatched to the Moscow Allocation Committee as a legal adviser from the Political Directorate. During his research, Skoriatin managed to get a rather detailed report on Brik's activities in the Cheka-GPU. He began working for the organization in 1920 first as an "investigator of the speculative department of the Moscow Cheka." Later, he moved on to become a "representative of the 7th division of the secret department." In January 1924, Brik was dismissed from the organization as a "deserter." Apparently he accumulated so many sick leaves from work that he was ignominiously removed from his job (Skoriatin, "'Zevs' osvedomliaet," 47, note 3). Skoriatin discovered the membership numbers of Osip and Lilia's Cheka identity cards in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in connection to one of their trips abroad. He suggests that the

Maiakovskii's death remained unsolved, but both Briks' membership in that organization was definitely established. Finally, in 1999, a journalist Arkadii Vaksberg provided a dubious insight into Brik's experience with the Cheka. According to this author, Brik loved reminiscing on his time spent within the walls of this organization. Particularly, said Vaksberg, Brik enjoyed recalling the bloody tortures he witnessed there. The author failed to back up his outrageous statements with documentary evidence – his text lacks a single footnote.[22]

In Russia, only one writer launched a comprehensive investigation of Brik's life. Anatolii Valiuzhenich's *Osip Maksimovich Brik: materialy k biografii* (Osip Brik: materials for a biography) stands as the first counterexample to the prevailing tendency to treat the critic as an outsider and the mythical bad genius of Maiakovskii's life.[23] The volume contains a thoroughly researched biographical essay, excerpts from Brik's writing and his correspondence, memoirs, archival publications, and up-to-date bibliographic information on its subject. Also, the recently published account of the Russian avant-garde activities by Andrei Krusanov provides valuable information on Brik's participation in the artistic life of the country before and after the revolution.[24] The critical evaluation of Brik's theories was, however, beyond the scope of these books.

The prevailing accusatory pathos of the Russian press left little to discuss about Brik's constructive contribution to Russian culture. Publications in the West, by contrast, brought out positive aspects of the critic's work and his personality. Wiktor Woroszylsky

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Briks' affiliation with Cheka can be linked to their frequent trips abroad ("Posleslovie k smerti," 60-61). See note 25 in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[22] Arkadii Vaksberg, *Lilia Brik: zhizn' i sud'ba* (Lilia Brik: life and destiny) (Moscow: Olimp and Smolensk: Russich, 1999), 97, 125, and 147.

[23] Anatolii Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik: materialy k biografii* (Akmola: Niva, 1993).

[24] Andrei Krusanov, *Russkii avangard, 1907-1932. Istoricheskii obzor* (The Russian avant-garde, 1907-1932. A historical overview), vol. 2, *Futuristicheskaia revoliutsiia* (The Futurist Revolution) (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozreniie, 2003).

in *The Life of Mayakovsky* published excerpts from numerous memoirs depicting the Briks as a dynamic force in the life of the poet.[25] Bengt Jangfeldt, in *Maiakovsky and Futurism* provided a detailed historical account of Brik's efforts to institutionalize Futurism.[26] Vahan Barooshian's *Brik and Maiakovsky* is largely a biographical, non-analytical venture into the lives of the critic and the poet,[27] where Jangfeldt found numerous errors of fact and unsubstantiated generalizations.[28]

Academically, it was also in the West that Brik's contribution was acknowledged as worthy of attention. Because Brik wrote on many topics – literature, visual arts, performance arts, film – articles on him and books that mention him are scattered among those disciplines. The literary world, where interest in Brik first surfaced, has always had an ambivalent attitude toward the critic. In his book on Russian Formalism, Victor Erlich was the first to introduce Brik as a "friend and admirer of Maiakovskii," an effective orator and an important founding member of OPOIAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language).[29] Although Brik published only two analytical articles on poetic language, Erlich emphasized his contribution to the Formalist theory, rather than his all-absorbing political engagement. To complement Erlich's introduction, Roman Jakobson published Brik's two essays on poetic language. Jakobson wrote a postscript to the publication, presenting the author as one of the most important "young Russian investigators who in the second and third decades of this century notably advanced the international

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[25] Wiktor Wororszylsky, *The Life of Mayakovsky* (New York: The Orion Press, 1970).
[26] Bengt Jangfeldt, *Maiakovsky and Futurism: 1917-1921* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1976). This book covers only the pre-1924 period of the critic's activity and does not discuss his theoretical writings.
[27] Vahan D. Barooshian, *Brik and Maiakovsky* (The Hague, Paris, and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978).
[28] Bengt Jangfeldt, "Osip Brik: A Bibliography" in *Russian Literature* 8 (1980): 579-604, esp. 596-603.
[29] Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), 68.

development of scientific poetics."[30] Apart from Erlich's favorable introduction and Jakobson's authoritative support, subsequent scholarly discussions on Russian Formalism and literature either ignored Brik completely or treated him in a cursory manner.[31] The latest book on the subject by Jurii Striedter, mentioned Brik only once as a "sounding board and organizer for the others."[32] Among literary anthologies, I found only Anna Lawton's collection of manifestoes of Russian Futurism that published one piece by Brik.[33]

In contrast to the prevalent tendency of recent academic work to overlook Brik, he has attracted attention from those writers and publications that favored art's engagement with politics. Ten years after Jakobson's piece, Maria Enzensberger published a thorough introductory article and five of Brik's critical essays in the British film periodical *Screen*.[34] In her summary, Enzensberger outlined the major points around

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[30] Roman Jakobson, Postscript to Osip Maksimovich Brik, "Two Essays on Poetic Language," *Michigan Slavic Materials* no. 5 (1964).

[31] I refer here to the following anthologies and studies on Russian Formalism: Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, eds. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays.* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and its Poetic Ambience* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1968); Jurii Striedter, ed., *Texte der russischen Formalisten* (München: W. Fink, 1969); Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt, eds., *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1973); Gérard Conio, *Le formalisme et le futurisme russes devant le marxisme: problèmes de la revolution culturelle* (Lausanne: Editions l'age d'homme, 1975); Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). The texts on Russian literature where Brik is mentioned in passing include: Edward J. Brown's *Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971) and *Russian Literature since the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Victor Erlich's *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Vladimir Markov's *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1968); Viacheslav Zavalishin's *Early Soviet Writers* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1958); Boris Thomson's *The Premature Revolution: Russian Literature and Society, 1917-1946* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972); Gleb Struve's *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Marc Slonim's *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Robert Maguire's *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[32] Jurij Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1989), 18.

[33] Osip Brik, "We Are the Futurists," in Anna Lawton, ed., *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[34] Maria Enzensberger, "Osip Brik: Selected Writings," *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 35-120.

which Brik's career is discussed in the academic writing concerned with art's engagement in politics. In the beginning of her article, she mentioned Brik's service in the Cheka, but characterized it as a "fact that only attests to Brik's unreserved devotion to and identification with the Revolution."[35] As an addendum to Jakobson, who emphasized Brik's scholarly contribution to the analysis of Futurist poetry and his important role within OPOIAZ, Enzensberger also focused on Brik's active participation in politics and his ongoing concern with art's social function.

In this connection, Enzensberger stressed Brik's role as a mediator between the Union of Art Workers and Narkompros. She also has established him as an important scriptwriter, who worked for the Soviet film industry in the late 1920s through the 1930s and wrote a number of scripts, among which the one for Vsevolod Pudovkin's film *The Heir of Genghis-Khan*, produced in 1928, is the most well-known. It was Enzensberger who, in discussing Brik's writing, articulated the dichotomy of utopia versus anti-utopia. She called the art that Brik advocated "utilitarian," one that set "primacy of form over content." At the same time, she also described it as driven "toward the fusion of art and life," aiming at the "transformation of the aesthetic function into a powerful weapon for the reconstruction of society." Brik, Enzensberger wrote, was an advocate of a utopian aim to end the alienation of the producer from the product and to abolish the distinction between a worker and an intellectual.[36]

In this dissertation, I explore the career of a man who, on one hand, became an icon of the Russian art of the revolution through his elaboration of and a consistent engagement with the modernization of the formal qualities of literary and visual arts, but,

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[35] Ibid., 35.
[36] Ibid., 36, 45, 47, and 50.

on the other, distinguished himself as an unprincipled politician, an ideologue, who followed a constantly changing position of the party. The first chapter reconstructs Brik's youth and the formation of his Futurist views. Here, I focus on his friendship with Maiakovskii as an essential aspect of his Futurist experience and his contribution to the development of Formalist theory in his work for OPOIAZ. Chapter Two addresses the nature of Brik's political engagement, his pre-revolutionary political views and his active participation in the Bolshevik government. Chapter Three focuses on Brik's activity at INKhUK, his involvement in VKhUTEMAS, and his contribution to the post-revolutionary growth of Russian theater. Chapter Four explores Brik's focus on language, specifically his belief that language functions to ideologically transform the man by influencing his thought-processes, a belief which he expressed in his editorship of the journal *LEF* and his views on *byt* and the woman question. The concluding chapter analyzes Brik's fascination with photography and his involvement with film in light of his preoccupation with the ultimate value of "real facts" as opposed to those belonging to imagination.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TEXT

> I must note to you, that you are very much mistaken when you tell me that I have an inconstant character. This widely accepted opinion is completely wrong. If I often get carried away and cool off fast, this happens not because of my inconstancy, but because the object of my passion does not satisfy me. However, it never happened that something truly chosen for me stopped appearing to me as such. I demand a lot; this is why there is little that satisfies me. However, if something were to satisfy me, it would be forever.[1]

> The method is the *form* with regard to the *content* under investigation. Therefore… it is subject to the principle of unity and indivisibility of form and content… in literary studies the process is not that the content is "poured" into a ready-made, previously assigned form… Here also form (method) grows out of content itself, permeates it, shapes it. The individual, unique content under investigation is related to the individual, unique method which is appropriate to this content only.[2]

Osip Brik was born in 1888 in Moscow, in a family of a successful Jewish merchant. His father, Maksim Pavlovich (Meir Gozias) Brik was a hereditary merchant, one of the few lucky Jews who because of their occupation were able to move beyond the borders of the Pale of Settlement and relocate to capital cities.[3] At the time of Osip's growing up, Russia experienced a period of political stagnation, but economic and cultural growth. According to Reginald Zelnik, the most important characterization of

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[1] From a letter to Brik's mother dated December 15, no year (possibly 1911): "Я должен тебе заметить, что ты очень ошибаешься, говоря, что у меня характер непостоянный. Это обще-установившееся мнение совсем не верно. Если я часто увлекаюсь и быстро остываю, то это происходит не из-за непостоянства, а оттого, что предмет моего увлечения меня не удовлетворяет. Но никогда не бывало, чтобы что-нибудь истинно избранное для меня перестало мне казаться таковым. Я многого требую, поэтому мало что меня удовлетворяет, но если когда-нибудь что-нибудь меня удовлетворит, то это уже будет навсегда" (The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [cited thereafter as RGALI], Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 145).

[2] S. Adamczewski, "Miraże prostych dróg," in H. Markiewicz, *Teoria badań literackich w Polsce* (Krakow, 1960), cited in Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 13.

[3] On March 16, 1859, Alexander II sanctioned a resolution of the Council of State, which permitted Jewish merchants of the first guild to relocate from the Pale of Settlement to other areas of the Russian Empire, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. See S. M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, trans. from the Russian by I. Friedlaender (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1918), 2: 162.

the late nineteenth-century Russia was its political status as an absolute monarchy, in particular during the successive reigns of Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1895-1917). Its rulers' extreme reaction led them to oppose any reforms that would challenge their total power over the Empire. At the same time, because of progressive economic policies of some tsarist ministers, such as Count Witte, Russia had stepped on the path of industrialization, with the inevitable result of the growth of the proletariat and the intensification of contradictions between an outdated political system and a growing economy. Osip's family belonged to the "missing middle class" in Russia – a very scant layer of the native professional bourgeoisie – although as merchants, they engaged in a time-honored Russian occupation.[4]

The intelligentsia at that time was under the influence of a long-standing Russian tradition of Populist thought, which toward the end of the century became increasingly challenged by Marxism. As Andrzej Walicki's observed, Populists regarded peasants as the agents of revolutionary change and used radical terrorist tactics to achieve its political aims. Whereas Populism dominated Russian political landscape in the 1870s, as the capitalist method of production became more and more prevalent in Russian industry and agriculture, the last two decades of the century were marked by the increasing influence of Marxism, introduced to Russia through the writings of Georgii Plekhanov. In 1883, Plekhanov, then one of the leading adherents of Populism, switched his allegiance to Marxism, organizing the first Russian Marxist group *Emancipation of Labor*. In his writings, Plekhanov juxtaposed the "subjective" ideology of Populism, which was built

[4] On the subject of Russian middle class, see Harley D. Balzer, ed., *Russia's Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, c1996). On the same subject and on the popularity of trade among Russians, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), chapter 8, 191-220.

on ideas of "what should be," with the "objectivity" of Marxism, which discovered and described the rule of necessity, the inevitable development of society according to the laws of capitalist production. In contrast to Plekhanov, a younger Marxist leader Vladimir Ul'ianov (Lenin) did not believe in the rule of necessity, but in the struggle of opposites. Unlike the founder of Russian Marxism, Lenin thought it possible to skip the stage of fully developed capitalism in a country's economy in order to be able to move forward to a socialist revolution.[5] Under Lenin's influence, the Social-Democratic Labor Party of Russia (RSDRP), founded in 1898, was split into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903 with the former following Lenin and the latter Plekhanov.[6] For a left-wing intellectual in the end-of-the-century Russia, it was impossible to escape the influence of Marxism, either of Plekhanov's or Lenin's variety, because it was the latest and most progressive theory explaining the country's economic and social development.

The cultural and artistic life of the country at the turn of the century was governed by the legacy of Symbolism. According to Avril Pyman, Russian Symbolism was influenced by the French and German Romantic literature and was fueled by artists' sense of the inadequacy of the affairs of this world and of the need to look beyond to find a purpose in human existence.[7] Such a broad worldview accommodated a wide range of artists, with the majority emphasizing the apocalyptic outlook that held death and destruction would lead to the ultimate purpose of life, and the minority turning to art as an escape from such pessimism. Virtually all the key figures of the first generation of

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[5] Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 406-448.
[6] For discussion of the split within Russian Marxism, see Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1951), 1: chapter 2. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution,* 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 31.
[7] For a comprehensive account of Russian Symbolism, see Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Symbolists -- Vladimir Soloviev, Viacheslav Ivanov, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Zinaida Gippius, Fedor Sologub – adhered to an understanding of the world as separated into the opposing realms of Heaven and Hell, here and beyond, which emphasized the inadequacy of reality over imagination.

The second generation of the Symbolists wavered from this focus somewhat, and stressed concrete over abstract subjects. As Krystyna Pomorska observed, they were concerned with developing lyrical subjects, as opposed to embracing broad theoretical issues or addressing ideological problems.[8] Aleksandr Blok transformed the earlier Symbolists' general emphasis on the otherworldly into a personal drama. Konstantin Bal'mont preferred to make quick sketches of his fleeting experiences, creating a semblance of poetic Impressionism, as opposed to presenting nature as an all-embracing ecclesiastical rite in the manner of Ivanov. Andrei Bely introduced a significant element of humor into his verse and sought to synthesize art and science in addition to predicting apocalypse in the footsteps of Merezhkovskii, Hippius, and his teacher Soloviev. Bal'mont and Bely's thirst for concrete expression extended from the subject of poetry to its material – the words. Bal'mont experimented with sound repetition, and Bely, in addition to being a virtuoso in sound effects, had also added to his poetry the stylistic trait introduced by Nietzsche – the Zarathustrian "dancing" rhythm.[9]

Nietzsche's thinking had overwhelming influence on the Symbolists in general and on Bely in particular. The German philosopher's works entered the Russian book market in the early 1890s, when the Symbolist movement was at its inception. As studies

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[8] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 53-54.

[9] On differences between the first and the second generation of Russian Symbolists, see Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism,* passim. On Blok see 211-224; on Bal'mont, 56-66; on Ivanov's call to return to the collective poetic myth of the people, back to the "origins of the cult,"184-198; on Bely, 198-211.

conducted by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal indicate, Nietzsche's writings had a tremendous impact in Russia from the turn of the twentieth century onward.[10] By 1908, almost all of this philosopher's works had been translated into Russian, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; *The Birth of Tragedy*; *Beyond Good and Evil*; *Human, All Too Human; The Gay Science*; *Antichrist* and *On the Genealogy of Morals.* As Rosenthal has pointed out, virtually all of the major figures of Symbolism were influenced by Nietzsche's ideas, albeit selectively and in various degrees. Major themes of Nietzsche's philosophy, such as his love of tragedy as the supreme form of aesthetic expression, his anti-religious stance, his nihilism, his glorification of an individual man's inner drive to achieve greatness – the so-called "will to power" – all have had a major influence on Russian intellectuals, Symbolist and Marxist alike. [11]

Whereas the crux of the Symbolists' activity was the creation of "symbols" – which, in their terminology, designated familiar signs imbued with ambiguity and suggestive character– the Futurists, a poetic movement that succeeded the Symbolism, emphasized the actual sound of poetic speech, to heighten the impact of its allusive content. In their resolute denunciation of their predecessors, they rebelled against any reference to the conventional meaning of a word, turning their attention to the word's formal composition, particularly to its acoustics.[12] According to Vladimir Markov, the Futurist group was formed by a Primitivist painter and poet David Burliuk around 1910 under the name of Hylaea, but it published its first manifesto, *A Slap in the Face of*

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[10] Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal has conducted an intensive study of Nietzsche's influence in Russia in the following books: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2002).

[11] For Nietzsche's influence on the Symbolists in particular, see Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, chapter 1.

[12] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 57 and 78.

Public Taste, in 1912. Burliuk's group included the poets Velimir Khlebnikov, Alexei Kruchenykh, Vasilii Kamenskii, Benedikt Livshits, and Brik's friend Vladimir Maiakovskii.[13] They sought a new aesthetic through the experimentation with elements of mostly metonymic possibilities of poetic language – its flexibility in making new forms out of basic semantic units of the word, broken down not only into roots, prefixes, and suffixes, but individual sounds.

Maiakovskii stood apart from the other Futurists in his firm attachment to the metaphoric method of poetic composition, which was developed by the Symbolists to convey "emptiness, resignation, and boredom," but which in his case emphasized the "lyrical ego" of a Romantic.[14] It is through an extensive use of metaphor that Maiakovskii manifested his profound debts to Nietzsche's philosophy.[15] In addition to his love of metaphor, Maiakovskii's close connection to the Symbolists manifested itself in his acceptance of the dejected and the "ugly" into the realm of the aesthetics, manifesting his disregard for the traditional system of values concerning the division of "good" versus "evil." In Pomorska's words, he accepted along with other Futurists that even the "ugly" could be aesthetically pleasing as long as it was "striking enough to be noticed."[16]

Shortly after meeting Maiakovskii in July 1915, Brik became closely involved with a group of linguists and literary scholars, known as OPOIAZ, who studied the Futurists' poetry and evolved on the basis of this study a theory of poetic language. According to Erlich and Pomorska, their theory was based on several sources: the ideas

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[13] On Russian Futurism, see Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History*.
[14] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 65, 82-83.
[15] Bengt Jangfeldt, "Nietzsche and the Young Maiakovsky," in Rosenthal, *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*, 35-57.
[16] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 81.

developed by a late nineteenth-century literary scholar Potebnia; the science of phonology developed by a linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay; a distinction between oral and written speech outlined by another linguist Lev Shcherba; the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure; and the philosophy of German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl.

In his first two books on the history and theory of Russian Formalism, Erlich stressed the historical and conceptual development of the Formalists' thinking, whereas Pomorska emphasized the dependence of the OPOIAZ members on the synchronic, as opposed to historical, study of language, that is, their interest in the product and not the process of the creative act, and their attention to the expressive and not the communicative aspect of language. Both Erlich and Pomorska presented Formalism as a coherent movement, united in its stance against addressing the inner world of a man. Writing in 1955, Erlich asserted that the Formalists posed the "perceptibility of the verbal connection," its impersonal origin, and disregard toward psychology as their *modus operandi.*[17] In a similar line of argument, in 1968 Pomorska insisted that the "early OPOIAZ" rejected the problem of semantics, because of its connection to "mental phenomena."[18] A later contributor to the discussion on Russian Formalism, Fredric Jameson, considered it as a theoretical movement in its relation to the thought of the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure on one hand and to the philosophy of Structuralism on the other.[19] While Erlich and Pomorska inscribed Brik's contribution to Formalist theory within their overarching anti-psychological interpretation of the

[17] Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 75.
[18] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 15-27.
[19] Fredric Jameson, *A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).

movement, Jameson did not mention Brik at all, focusing the discussion mostly on the critic Viktor Shklovskii's concept of the artistic device.

In this chapter, I will explore Shklovskii's ideas through the prism of the Freudian theory of the unconscious. I will argue that the concept of the device that renewed a jaded, familiar perception of the world corresponded to Freud's notion of trauma, inflicted upon a patient's psyche and shattering his familiar world. Here, I will also emphasize Brik's polemical bend: whenever it was politically safe, he set himself in opposition to the majority; whenever he was politically unstable, he sided with the common opinion. In the first publications of OPOIAZ he was the only member of the group who focused on a strict formal analysis of the sound structure of poetry without linking it to the old-fashioned ideas about literary content. In an increasingly authoritarian political landscape several years later, he published a paper on rhythm in poetry that explicitly addressed the issue of meaning embedded in the formal structure.

In 1929, in a membership form for a playwrights' union, Brik defined his occupation as a *literator* -- a "man of letters."[20] In fact, by the late 1920s Brik was a respected member of the Union of Writers, an established critic and editor. Despite this secure identity publicly articulated at the height of his career, in his youth Osip had not thought seriously of what turned out to be his life-long vocation. Before his encounter with Vladimir Maiakovskii, the only letters, in which the formation of his identity could be glimpsed, were private. At that point, his only creative involvement with literature consisted in co-authoring a detective novel with his high-school friends and writing a few

[20] RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 323.

love verses.[21] Before he met Maiakovskii, Brik's life revolved around his parents, his family and a few trusted friends.

I. 1. Brik in Private

Osip was one of two Jewish boys accepted to a prestigious Moscow *gymnasium* after passing a rigorous examination. At school, he was popular for his erudition and eloquence. Although touched by the revolutionary upheaval, he preferred cool verbal argument to violent confrontation: instead of joining underground revolutionaries, he led a legal discussion group on political economy.[22] His only brush with the authorities occurred in the tumultuous year of 1905, when he was briefly expelled from school for "revolutionary propaganda."[23]

The personal likes and dislikes of the young Brik can be glimpsed from one of the earliest available letters, written to his mother, Paulina Iur'evna, at the age of twenty from a yearly fair in Nizhnii Novgorod, where he had gone to help his father in his business:

> My dear mom! If one thinks deeply and attempts to comprehend the inner meaning of such an event as a fair in Nizhnii Novgorod, then one is disgusted and horrified. Here is reflected, like sun in a drop of water, the entire rotten, vile and corrupt nature of contemporary capitalist culture. It is buying and selling from beginning to end, beginning from piles of various goods and ending with people, live people. It is strange and horrifying to see how people, forgetting about everything sacred, stupefied by this wild bacchanalia of gold and debauchery, concentrate all of their life forces into one avaricious look, into one sensuous shout – "Money and Women!" Indeed, one can say: "Satan is directing the ball there." But the most horrifying aspect of it is that there is no human being, [there are] only people. Not an individual, but a crowd…. I feel wonderful here, however…. Maybe, it is because I like being with my dad, whom I love more and more with each day. Dear mom, to have the people whom you love and who love

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[21] All biographical information is taken from Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 8 - 41.
[22] Lilia Brik, "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche…" (Now About Osip Maksimovich), in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 136.
[23] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 9.

> you is one of the most wonderful blessings of life, but also one of the most tormenting. Kiss you and all ours.[24]

This excerpt shows that Osip adored his father. He loved his mother. He felt protected by his family and was involved with its affairs. In political terms, it was not social inequality that he detested, but lust, greed, and a sort of spiritual lawlessness, which allowed free reign to the human drive for the undifferentiated and chaotic**.** In its direct criticism of the crowd, this letter suggests that the young Brik was not a Populist. In the confrontation between Populism and Marxism, Brik most likely would have chosen the latter in his linking of the society's imbalance to the capitalist way of life. More than its connection to Marx, however, the letter demonstrates an influence of Nietzsche in its juxtaposition of an individual and a crowd and its condemnation of an unrestricted popular passion. In another letter written two years later, Brik addressed the same destructive drive, but in relation to individuals -- himself and Oleg Frelikh, his "inseparable" friend from the *gymnasium* days.[25] In this letter to Frelikh, Brik confessed:

> Dear Lelia![26] Is it possible that you and I became so distant? Is it possible that the cry of my soul will not reach you -- the cry of my boundless anguish, which

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[24] "Дорогая мамуся! Если вникнуть поглубже и добраться до внутреннего смысла такого явления, как Нижегородская ярмарка, то становится противно и страшно. Здесь отразилась, как солнце в капле воды, вся гниль, мерзость и развращенность современной упадочной капиталистической культуры. Это – купля-продажа сначала до конца, начиная с груд разнообразных товаров и кончая людьми, живыми людьми. Странно и страшно видеть, как люди, забывая решительно обо всем святом, одурманенные этой дикой вакханалией золота и разврата, концентрируют все свои жизненные силы в один жадный взгляд, в один страстный крик – «Деньги и женщины!» Во истину можно сказать: «сатана там правит бал». Но самое страшное это то, что не видно человека, а видны только люди. Не индивид, а толпа... Говоря же попросту, я чувствую себя здесь прекрасно... Может быть, это оттого, что мне приятно быть с папой, которого я с каждым днем люблю все больше и больше. Дорогая мамуся, иметь людей, которых любишь и которые любят тебя – одно из самых прекрасных благ жизни, но и одно из самых мучительных. Целую тебя крепко и всех наших" (letter dated August 31, 1908. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 144; all translations are mine).

[25] Brik and Frelikh were leaders of a company of boys in their Third Moscow *gymnasium*. See Lilia Brik's reminiscences "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche…," in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 134. Frelikh came from an aristocratic family with a tradition of political dissidence and involvement in the arts. Frelikh's mother was a known opera singer; his father – a dissident lawyer, exiled to Siberia for his anti-authoritarian views. See Rashit Iangirov, "Zhizn' vslukh i pro sebia: ob Olege Frelikhe" (Life aloud and in silence: about Oleg Frelikh) *Moskovskii nabliudatel'* no. 10 (1992): 52-54.

[26] "Lelia" is a diminutive of "Oleg."

> suffocates me and from which I am ready to sob, sob with bitter tears of despair? I can't believe that twelve years of our harmony, our close life together passed without a trace…. And this is why I am writing to you, writing to you, because I do not have anyone else to write to, anyone to go to with my anguish. … Lelia, if there was a tragedy in my life, it was our break with each other. I am left alone, completely alone with my anguish, with my unrealized dreams, with the crooked and unhinged feelings and desires. Could Petia and Vasia,[27] these nice, beautiful, pure boys, ever understand all the dirt, vile, and perversion of my feelings, could they ever believe them? Remember our famous witches' Sabbath; remember that wild outrage upon everything that was just pronounced sacred? Had not that suddenly emerged mood tied us together forever? Hadn't we grasped at that moment all the depths of our souls? Is it possible to forget such things? No, never. You and I are tied forever and no force can separate us. Everything that happened this year is a lie, misunderstanding, and diabolical delusion. I felt this through and understood this to the end only now, when I realized that only to you, to you alone could I write about my anguish….[28]

Although in the memoirs about her husband, Lilia Brik mentioned reading Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* together with Osip shortly after their marriage in March 1912,[29] the two excerpted letters point to Osip's earlier familiarity with the fundamental terms of this philosopher. *The Birth of Tragedy,* one of the most popular books in the turn-of-century Russia,[30] elaborated a theory of aesthetics by examining the origins of ancient Greek theater. Writing about drama, Nietzsche demonstrated its

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[27] "Petia and Vasia" are Petr Mzhedlov and Vasilii Petrov, his and Frelikh's friends in gymnasium.

[28] "Дорогой Леля! Неужели так далеко разошлись мы с тобой? Неужели же такая глубокая пропасть легла между нами, что не дойдет до тебя крик души моей, крик тоски моей, которой нет границ, нет конца; от которой я задыхаюсь и готов рыдать, рыдать горькими слезами отчаяния? Я не верю, не верю, чтобы 12 лет совместной жизни душа в душу прошли бесследно… И потому я пишу тебе, пишу тебе, потому что мне некому больше писать, не к кому идти со своей тоской. … Ах, Леля, если в моей жизни была трагедия, так это наш разрыв с тобой. Я остался один, совсем один, с своими несбыточными мечтами, с своими кривыми, издерганными чувствами и желаниями. Разве Петя и Вася, эти милые, прекрасные, чистые мальчики, могут понять всю грязь, всю мерзость и извращенность моих переживаний; разве могут они им поверить. Помнишь знаменитый наш шабаш ведьм; помнишь то дикое надругательство над тем, что только что было провозглашено священным; разве это внезапно совпавшее настроение не связало нас навсегда; разве не постигли мы в тот момент все глубины наших душ? Разве такие вещи забываются? Нет, никогда. Мы с тобой связаны навсегда и никакие силы нас не разъеденят. Всё, что случилось за этот год, обман, недоразумение, дьявольское наваждение. И я это почувствовал и до конца понял вот сейчас, когда я увидел, что только тебе, тебе одному могу я писать о своей тоске…" (letter of June 24, 1910. Cited in Rashit Iangirov, "Oleg Frelikh i Osip Brik: 'My s toboi sviazany navsegda,'" [You and I are tied forever], *Shestye tynianovskie chteniia* [Riga-Moskva, 1992], 155-156).

[29] Lilia Brik, "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche…" in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 137.

[30] For the influence of *The Birth of Tragedy* in Russia, see Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, passim.

inherent link to tragedy, an art form that mirrored the continuous strife between Apollonian and Dionysian drives characteristic of human nature. While the dream-like Apollonian tendency emphasized symbol and myth, creating a unified, authoritarian, aestheticized and somewhat ascetic image of existence, the opposing Dionysian one underscored the "horror" as well as the "blissful rapture" of life, delivering people of their individuality and mixing them into an undifferentiated crowd of inebriated and sexually promiscuous creatures.[31]

As can be glimpsed from the letter to his mother, Brik was uncomfortable with the unrestricted reign of Dionysus, especially when it characterized the behavior of the "crowd." His knowledge of Marx and Nietzsche allowed him to link the terminology of capitalism and surplus value to the reign of the Dionysian will to power, which, unrestricted by the intellect and education, allowed for the unlimited domination of those who have it over those who do not. Those who possessed more of the excess felt superior to ordinary humans. Those dominated became mere things, alienated from their own bodies and emotions. As far as society was concerned, Brik was unhappy with the absence of the Apollonian – the ethical code curbing this unrestricted drive and transforming it into an ethically acceptable desire.

The letter to Frelikh indicated that in personal matters, Brik may have given in to Dionysian self-indulgence, which bordered on self-destruction. Despite the initial closeness in "anguish…, unrealized dreams…, the crooked and unhinged feelings and desires," however, Brik and Frelikh were gradually becoming distant. While Brik was serious about his studies of law at the Moscow University, Frelikh took acting classes

[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

while taking classes in the same law department as Brik. In 1914, Frelikh joined a newly formed Chamber Theater whose director, Alexander Tairov, entrusted him with a leading role in his opening play.[32] He successfully implemented Tairov's aesthetic, which was based on a pantomime and searched for genuine theatricality through expressive gesture. This first success was the last one for the friend of Brik's youth, after which Frelikh became increasingly alienated in his private and public life: around the time of the October Revolution, he killed his lover with a knife – a crime, alleviated by a diagnosis of a psychological illness[33] – and was unable to perform for years thereafter because of a psychopathological condition, described by Frelikh himself as "the fear of the crowd."[34] In the 1930s, Frelikh recovered and worked the rest of his life in realist theater and film productions. His memoirs written during this period reveal his adherence to "mystery" in art and revulsion against new-age entrepreneurship.[35]

Unlike Frelikh, Brik was not an aristocrat. He was an assimilated Jew, who lacked the aura of nobility and despised those who pretended to have it.[36] In law school, he was interested in criminology. His thesis addressed the problem of solitary

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[32] Frelikh played the character of tsar Dushianta in *Shakuntala.* See Iangirov, "Oleg Frelikh i Osip Brik," *Shestye tynianovskie chteniia*, note 15, 168.

[33] About Frelikh's crime, see Frelikh's reminiscences "Chelovek vozvrashchaetsia domoi" (Man is returning home) in Rashit Iangirov, "Zhizn' vslukh i pro sebia…," 63.

[34] Ibid., 53.

[35] Iangirov, "Oleg Frelikh i Osip Brik," *Shestye tynianovskie chteniia*, 155.

[36] In a letter to his mother describing a Jewish charity ball, Brik wrote: "Three days ago I attended a Jewish ball. Everything was the same, only a year older. The same lotteries and charity booths, the same cadging of money for flowers, champagne, etc, the same ladies in Spanish costumes,…, and the same boredom. But I was most of all astonished by an inappropriate aristocratic attitude displayed by the Jews. This is all complete … and most ordinary plebs; moreover, it is the plebs of a bad sort – the one that has grown rich. However, they bear themselves like hereditary gentry or princes of blood. Really, I do not care that much about this. I do not need them and do not intend to stay in their way" ("Третьего дня был на еврейском балу. Всё то же самое, только годом старше. Те же лотереи и благотворные буфеты, то же выклянчивание денег на цветы, шампанское и прочее, те же барышни в испанских костюмах, то же кабарэ, и та же скука. Но больше всего меня раздражал совершенно неуместный аристократизм, с которым держатся евреи. Всё это сплошь самый рядовой плебес, да ещё плохого сорта – разбогатевший – а посмотреть на их осанки, так можно подумать, что все – столбовые дворяне или принцы крови. Впрочем, бог с ними, они мне не нужны и я им мешать не намерен") (letter dated December 8, 1911. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 145).

confinement. It condemned penitentiary tradition as ineffective in correcting the moral character of a criminal and argued that crime was a problem that was to be solved by a society and not an individual. Unless the deplorable social conditions were not eliminated, charged Brik, crime would not cease.[37] In line with his legal theory, Brik's practical legal work consisted in defending the most despised members of the society – its sex workers – for free.[38]

Brik's attraction to outcasts of the society did not end with his legal work. In a letter to Frelikh written on December 16, 1911, he had informed his friend, excitedly, of his upcoming marriage. His wife, he said, was a "wonderful girl, from a good Jewish family, loves me very much, is young, pretty, educated…. I, on my part, am absolutely in love with her, cannot be without her for a minute and am enormously happy that she agreed to become my wife."[39] Brik did not mention that his choice was scandalous according to unwritten laws of society. Within the narrow world of Moscow Jewry, Lilia had become known as a temptress who had taunted the establishment with her amorous escapades and even one unwanted pregnancy.[40] Obviously, Lilia's bad reputation did not concern Osip. On the contrary, his beloved's unruliness must have been a positive factor that influenced his decision. Osip and Lilia were married on February 26, 1912 and moved to Petrograd shortly after the beginning of World War I.

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[37] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 211-212.
[38] Vaksberg, *Lilia Brik: zhizn' i sud'ba*, 36-37.
[39] "Невеста моя очень славная девица, из хорошей еврейской семьи, очень меня любит, молода, хорошенькая, образованная, … Я со своей стороны совершенно влюблён в неё, без неё не могу пробыть ни одной минуты и безмерно счастлив тем, что она согласилась быть моей женой" (letter dated December 16, 1911. Cited in Iangirov, "Oleg Frelikh i Osip Brik," *Shestye tynianovskie chteniia*, 157).
[40] Vaksberg, *Lilia Brik: Zhizn' i sud'ba*, passim.

I. 2. A Most Joyful Date[41]

At the end of July 1915, a struggling poet, infamous for loud and scandalous performances, entered the apartment of Osip and Lilia.[42] At that point, it seemed nothing connected the rebel Maiakovskii, who was incarcerated several times for his involvement in the revolutionary underground, and the law-abiding Briks, who were both from wealthy Jewish families and were weary of popular passion. In fact, Osip and Lilia had been shocked at the poet's uncivilized behavior during an evening honoring Bal'mont.[43] According to Roman Jakobson, who was also present at the jubilee, they "most persistently whistled and booed Maiakovskii" at that performance, where he attacked Bal'mont's poetry as outdated.[44] Mindful of his reputation as a troublemaker, they implored Lilia's sister, who had invited the poet over, not to let her friend declaim his poetry.[45] She ignored their pleas, and Maiakovskii began reciting his new poem, *The Thirteenth Apostle,* later titled *The Cloud in Trousers*. This is how Lilia described the evening:

> A door had been removed between the two rooms. Maiakovskii stood there, leaning against the doorframe with his back. He took out a small notebook from the inside pocket of his jacket, looked in it, and put it back in the same pocket. He pondered, and then looked around the room as if it were an enormous auditorium. He read the prologue and then asked – not in verse, but in prose – with his quiet, since then unforgettable voice: "You think it is raving malaria? It happened. Happened in Odessa." We lifted up our heads and did not take our

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[41] "Радостнейшая дата" is a chapter in Maiakovskii's memoirs "Ia sam" (I myself), which he wrote in 1922 and edited in 1928 and in which he described the day when he met Lilia and Osip Brik. Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955), [cited thereafter as *PSS*], 1: 23.
[42] This encounter took place at the end of July 1915. See Vasilii Abgarovich Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, 5th ed. (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985), 109.
[43] This event took place on May 7, 1913. See Bengt Jangfeldt, ed., *Love is the Heart of Everything: Correspondence between Vladimir Maiakovsky and Lili Brik, 1915-1930* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 5.
[44] Department of recorded documents of the Moscow State University, E. Toddes, "Ustnye vospominaniia R. O. Iakobsona o Maiakovskom" (Interview with R. O. Jakobson about Maiakovskii on August 21, 1967), *Sed'mye tynianovskie chteniia: materialy dlia obsuzhdeniia*, no. 9 (Riga-Moscow: 1995-1996), 314.
[45] When Maiakovskii met the Briks, he was courting Lilia sister, Elsa, the future French writer Elsa Triolet.

> eyes off the unseemly miracle till the end. … Osip Maksimovich was the first to regain his senses. He could not imagine! He could not even think of it! This is better than anything he knows in poetry! Maiakovskii is the greatest poet, even if he does not write anything else. He took away his notebook and did not give it back all evening. This was what everyone was dreaming about and awaiting for so long. Lately, there was no desire to read anything. All poetry seemed useless – either those who wrote it were wrong; they wrote it wrongly, or about wrong things. And, all of a sudden, here was the right one, who wrote rightly about the right things.[46]

The poem conquered Osip completely and irrevocably. Upon hearing it, he "fell in love" with Maiakovskii to the point of imitating the poet's low voice and his waddling gait.[47] He and Lilia learned the poem by heart and recited it constantly. Most importantly, Osip immediately financed its publication, thus initiating Maiakovskii's poem as a text.[48] From the moment of hearing the *Cloud,* Osip found his life's calling -- he became Maiakovskii's *alter ego*, a publisher and a critic. Maiakovskii, for his part, fell in love with Lilia, and, through his poetry, made her famous. Lilia, whose marital relationship with Osip "had somehow fallen apart" about a year before, became infatuated with Maiakovskii. She and Brik decided never to separate, though, because she could not conceive living without Osip and because her new friend was "too loud"

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[46] "Между двумя комнатами для экономии места была вынута дверь. Мяковский стоял, прислонившись спиной к дверной раме. Из внутреннего кармана пиджака он извлёк небольшую тетрадку, заглянул в неё, и сунул тут же в карман. Он задумался. Потом обвёл глазами комнату, как огромную аудиторию, прочел пролог и спросил – не стихами, прозой – негромким, с тех пор незабываемым голосом: «Вы думаете это бредит малярия? Это было, было в Одессе.» Мы подняли головы и до конца не спускали глаз с невиданного чуда…. Первый пришёл в себя Осип Максимович. Он не представлял себе! Думать не мог! Это лучше всего, что он знает в поэзии! Маяковский – величайший поэт, даже если ничего больше не напишет. Он отнял у него тетрадь и не отдавал весь вечер. Это было то, о чём так давно мечтали, чего ждали. Последнее время ничего не хотелось читать. Вся поэзия казалась никчемной – писали не те, не так, и не про то, а тут вдруг и тот, и так, и про то" (Lilia Brik, "And Now About Osip Maksimovich" in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 138). In Valiuzhenich's book, Lilia Brik's memoirs are not dated. However, parts of it were first published in 1934 under the title "Iz vospominanii," in *Al'manakh 'S Maiakovskim',* eds. N. Aseev, O. Brik, S. Kirsanov (Moscow: Sovetskaia literatura, 1934), 59-79.

[47] Ibid., 139.

[48] The first edition of the poem, financed by Osip, appeared a little over a month after this momentous reading. See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, 111.

for her in the long run.[49] Maiakovskii, in his turn, "did not fall in love with Osia[50] right away. But already after a short time, he understood who Osia really was, and began to trust him completely, despite being surprisingly reserved…."[51] The controversial love triangle was formed.

In her description of the encounter with Maiakovskii, Lilia offered several clues to what exactly impressed her and Osip in the poem. From the start, she noted quietness and a matter-of-fact prosaic intonation, which struck her during the reading. This remark emphasized the importance that the Briks accorded to poetry that seemed to minimize deliberate artistry and the shattering force of the poet's voice. Osip and Lilia fell in love with Maiakovskii the man through his poem. By insisting that Maiakovskii was the "right" person "who wrote rightly about right things," Lilia indicated two correlated levels on which the poem could be discussed – the text (the form and content of the poem) and the context (the historical circumstances of the work's creation). What was the text of Maiakovskii's poem?

The Cloud in Trousers was a poem about Maiakovskii himself and his unrequited love. It did not tell a logical story, with a beginning and an end. Rather, it offered glimpses into the emotional world of its hero at various stages of his identity crisis. In the

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[49] Lilia Brik, "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche…," in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 139. More on Lilia's love for Osip see Vasilii Vasil'evich Katanian, *Prikosnovenie k idolam* (Touching the idols) (Moscow: Zakharov and Vagrius, 1997), 74ff.

[50] Osia was Osip Brik's nickname.

[51] "Ося сразу влюбился в Володю, а Володя в Осю тогда ещё влюблён не был. Но уже через короткое время он понял, что такое Ося, до конца поверил ему, сразу стал до конца откровенен, несмотря на свою удивительную замкнутость…" (Lilia Brik, "Teper' ob Osipe Maksimoviche…," in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 140).

prologue, Maiakovskii established a characteristic dichotomy between himself -- a tortured romantic -- and his audience – lazy, conformist and uncontroversial.[52]

Вашу мысль,	Your thought,
мечтающую на размягчённом мозгу,	that muses on a sodden brain,
как выжирившый лакей на засаленной кушетке,	like a bloated lackey on a greasy couch,
буду дразнить об окровавленный сердца лоскут;	I'll taunt with a bloody morsel of heart;
досыта изъездеваюсь, нахальный и едкий.	to satiate my insolent and caustic self. [53]

In order to assure the sympathy of unsympathetic listeners, he declared his intention to "turn himself inside out" by revealing the extreme conditions of his being either "mad from meat" or "irreproachably tender, not a man, but – a cloud in trousers." This conflict set up the tone for the entire poem.

Maiakovskii began the poem with the hero – himself -- waiting for a lover. While anxious for her to appear, he turned away from the hostile reality of the rainy night and into his own inner self.

И вот,	And thus,
громадный,	enormous,
горблюсь в окне,	I stand hunched by the window.
плавлю лбом стекло окошечное.	and my brow is melting the glass.
Будет любовь или нет?	What will it be – a love or no love?
Какая –	And what kind of love --
большая или крошечная?	a big or a tiny one? [54]

He listened carefully to himself and heard how "quietly, like a sick man from his bed, a nerve jumped down." Soon, "the nerves – big and small, many of them, were jumping like mad, and already were unsteady on their feet!" Finally, after several agonizing hours of waiting, the woman appeared "abrupt, like 'take it!'" and declared that she was getting

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[52] On the dichotomy between himself and his audience, see, for example, Maiakovskii's early verses: "Noch'" (Night) (1912); "A vy mogli by?" (And could you?) (1913); "Nate!" (Here!) (1913); "Nichego ne ponimaiut" (They do not understand anything) (1913); "Vam!" (To you!) (1915); "Gimn zdorov'iu" (Hymn to health) (1915); "Gimn obedu" (Hymn to lunch) (1915).

[53] Translation by Max Hayward and George Reavey in Vladimir Maiakovskii, *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry,* ed. and with introduction by Patricia Blake (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975), 60. Translation modified (NK).

[54] Ibid., 65.

married to someone else. Outwardly, the poet was "calm, like a corpse's pulse." Inwardly, however, his "heart was on fire." He, like the Mount Vesuvius, was a sleeping volcano. The fire in his heart threatened to burn everything around. The firemen were trying to stamp it out, but the poet did not allow them to "climb onto the burning heart with their huge boots." He was trying to damp the fire with his own tears, but failed to "jump out from his own heart." "Them," the "fat ones" have stolen, once again, the poet's pure love.

The second part began with glorification of nihilism:

Славьте меня!	Sing glory to me!
Я великим не чета.	I am not like the great ones.
Я над всем, что сделано,	Over everything, that is done,
ставлю 'nihil.'	I inscribe 'nihil.' [55]

The subject was defined entirely by the contrast between "them" – the "fat ones," who "get suctioned to every double bed"-- and "us" – the "street's thousands: students, prostitutes, contractors," led by poets. The poets voiced the crowd's rage. Before they had found the right words, "the street contorted itself, tongueless. It did not have anything to shout and to talk with." Maiakovskii called for a revolt, leading to the overthrow of the fat ones. In the process, he compared himself to a Christ-like figure, crucified for his preaching, and to Nietzschean Zarathustra. He, Maiakovskii, was a clairvoyant, who saw the second coming in the "revolution's crown of thorns." He was the precursor of the revolution, the newly announced John the Baptist.

In the third part, the theme of madness reappeared and became prominent.

Ах, зачем это,	Ah, why this,
откуда это	wherefrom this,
в светлое весело	the brandishing of dirty fists
грязных кулачищ замах!	at bright joy!

[55] Ibid. My translation.

Пришла	It came
и голову отчаянием занавесила	the thought about madhouses,
мысль о сумасшедших домах.	and curtained my head by despair. [56]

The loss of sense turned out to be an outcome of the suffering of the soul deprived of love. Maiakovskii compared his excesses to revolutionary violence, which, in response to humiliation and repression spilled "festive blood" and "lifted up high on lamp posts bloody carcasses of merchants." It is then, at the height of revolutionary anger that the night of madness descended: "There will be nothing." The poet found a refuge from the madness and destruction reigning on the streets in the pub, where he got drunk. The "Varavva" of madness had conquered his revolutionary dream. In the pub, he noticed an icon of the mother of god on the wall. He shouted at her, blasphemously, demanding a new beginning:

Чего одаривать по шаблону намалёванному	Why bestow such radiance of painted form
сиянием трактирную ораву!	upon the horde infesting a saloon!
Видишь – опять	Don't you see! They spit
голгофники оплёванному	on the man of Golgotha again,
предпочитают Варавву?	preferring Barabbas?
…	
Дай им	Give them
заплесневшим в радости,	who are moldy with joy,
скорой смерти времени.	a time of quick death.
Чтоб стали дети, должные потраст и,	So that the children shall become
мальчики -- отцы,	Boys – fathers,
девочки -- забеременели.	Girls – pregnant. [57]

This new generation would "christen their children with the names" of Maiakovskii's verses.

И новым рождённым дай обрасти	And may newborn babies
пытливой сединой волхвов,	grow the gray hair of the magi,
и придут они –	and they will come --
и будут детей крестить	and will baptize the infants

[56] Ibid., 85. Translation modified (NK).
[57] Ibid., 95. Translation modified (NK).

именами моих стихов.	with the names of my poems. [58]

He declared himself the "thirteenth apostle," praying for a generation of new people, innocent but graced with the "grayness of the Magi."

Я, воспевающий машину и Англию, может быть, просто, в самом обыкновенном евангелии тринадцатый апостол.	I, who praised the machine and England, maybe, quite simply, the thirteenth apostle in an ordinary gospel. [59]

The concluding part of the poem returned to the poet's earthly love, which had acquired a heavenly name – Maria. Conscious of the limits of his sanity and deprived of her love, the poet was begging for her body, but in vain.

Мария! Поэт сонеты поёт Тиане, А я – Весь из мяса, Человек весь -- Тело твоё просто прошу, Как просят христиане – "хлеб наш насущный даждь нам днесь."	Maria! The poet sings sonnets to Tiana, but I am all flesh, a man every bit -- I simply ask for your body as Christians pray: "Give us this day our daily bread."[60]

Rejected, he called God himself to the account: "Almighty, you invented a pair of hands and made a head for everyone, why is it that you did not invent that we could kiss without suffering?" It is also then that the poet became ready to kill God:

Я думал – ты всесильный божище, а ты недоучка, крохотный божик. Видишь, я нагибаюсь, из-за голенища достаю сапожный ножик. Крылатые прохвосты! Жмитесь в раю! Ерошьте пёрышки в испуганной тряске!	I thought you were the Almighty great God, but you are a half-educated, tiny, puny one. See, I am bending down, and from the top of my boot am getting out a pen knife. You, scoundrels with wings! Huddle up in your heaven! Bristle your feathers in a scared shaking!

[58] Ibid. Translation modified (NK).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 103.

Я тебя, пропахшего ладаном, раскрою	You, who is stinking with incense, I will cut open
Отсюда до Аляски!	From here to Alaska! [61]

No one, not even the angels could stop the poet, because even "the stars have beheaded and bloodied the sky by butchery." The poem ended with an image of deafness of the universe:

Эй вы!	Hey, you!
Небо!	The sky!
Снимите шляпу!	Take off the hat!
Я иду!	I am coming!
Глухо.	Not a sound.
Вселенная спит,	The universe is asleep,
Положив на лапу	resting the star-infested ear
С клещами звёзд огромное ухо.	Upon its paw. [62]

Recounted in prose, *The Cloud in Trousers* does not appear particularly innovative. In the context of Russian poetry, the conflict between the poet and the crowd was a classic device of romanticism, employed by many poets of the nineteenth century, most notably by Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and, of course, by Nietzsche and Maiakovskii's contemporaries, the Symbolists. The story of unhappy love, which appeared in the first part, could not lay any claims for originality either. The subject of nihilism, developed in the second part, could come from Nietzsche's philosophy via the Symbolists as well as from the Russian classics, most notably Lev Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev. The theme of madness and the ensuing symbolic death, developed further, was also a favorite of the Romantics. From the point of view of the subject matter, only the conclusion was striking in its violence, where Maiakovskii threw away the last vestiges of propriety when he let his hardly tamed desire pour out on the page and

[61] Ibid., 106-108. My translation.
[62] Ibid., 109.

threatened to kill God if it was not satisfied. The degree of openness with which Maiakovskii wrote about the violence of his desire was new, spurred by Nietzsche and by the Futurist rhetoric of his friends, Vladimir and David Burliuk.[63] From Lilia's and Osip's initial negative reaction to the excesses of the Futurists, including Maiakovskii, it appears that the subject of patricide and the new beginning could not impress them as much as it did the Futurists themselves. For the Briks, did writing about the "right things" go hand-in-hand with writing "rightly"?

I. 3. Symbolism and Futurism

In his autobiography *I Myself* Maiakovskii laid out his story of discovering poetry. He came to it as a professional revolutionary, a member of the Bolshevik party. He read his first poems while incarcerated for arranging an escape of political inmates from a high-security prison. He began his study with the Symbolists, who comprised the literary avant-garde at the time Maiakovskii took up reading poetry.[64] He admired these poets, particularly Bal'mont and Bely for "formal novelty," and wished to write "in the same way, but about different things."[65] He soon learned that this was an impossible task. His attempts to imitate Bely "… turned out to be stilted and tear-jerking." They sounded, Maiakovskii said, something like this:

В золото, в пурпур леса одевались, In gold and in purple the forests were dressing,
Солнце играло на главах церквей. Church spears were filled with sun rays.

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[63] See Markov, *Russian Futurism*. On Nietzsche's influence on Maiakovskii, see Jangfeldt, "Nietzsche and the Young Maiakovsky," on Nietzsche's influence on the Russian Futurists, see Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism*, chapter 4.

[64] According to his autobiography, Maiakovskii began reading and writing poetry in prison, while incarcerated for revolutionary activity. This happened at the end of 1909. See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika,* 49. Boris Eikhenbaum and Pyman designate two lectures in March 1910 by Viacheslav Ivanov and Aleksandr Blok -- "The Bequests of Symbolism" and "About Contemporary Condition of Russian Symbolism" – as effectively marking the end of Symbolism as a viable literary movement. See Boris Eikhenbaum, *O poezii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969), 77; Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism*, 332-333.

[65] Vladimir Maiakovskii, "Ia sam" (I, myself) (1922, 1928), *PSS,* 1: 17.

Ждал я: но в месяцах дни потерялись, Сотни томительных дней.”	I longed: but the months and the days were depressing, Hundreds of wearisome days.[66]

At some point, Maiakovskii must have understood that if he wanted to write about different things, he must write differently also. What was the text of the Symbolist poetry and how could Maiakovskii construct a new paradigm while learning from his predecessors?

Maiakovskii's idol Bely, like many of his contemporaries, read Nietzsche with abandon. He was particularly entranced by *The Birth of Tragedy* and wrote his critical articles and his poetry under the influence of this treatise.[67] *The Birth of Tragedy* presented Apollonian and Dionysian beginnings as coexisting in human nature, the latter being primary, constantly overwhelming and threatening the former. While Apollo was the god of all plastic arts, Dionysus was the god of music, particularly emotive and Romantic music. For Nietzsche, true music was of an extreme Dionysian nature, represented by an utterly unharmonious shattering howl that came from a man's innermost being, hollering his desire for fusion with the other.

> If music was apparently already known as an Apollonian art, this was strictly speaking only as the wave-like beat of rhythm, whose plastic force was developed for the representation of Apollonian states…. Carefully kept at a distance is precisely that element which defines the character of Dionysian music and so of music itself, the shattering force of sound, the unified flow of melody, and the utterly incomparable world of harmony. … Now the world of nature is to be expressed in symbols… A symbolism of the body for once, not only the symbolism of the mouth.[68]

One sign of the enormous influence that *The Birth of Tragedy* had on Bely, was his theoretical interest in the fusion of the irregular, uncontrollable aspect of poetry – its

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[66] Ibid., translation mine.
[67] Virginia Bennett, “Esthetic Theories from *The Birth of Tragedy* in Andrei Bely's Critical Articles,” in *Nietzsche in Russia*, 161-179.
[68] Ibid., 26.

Dionysian side – with the Apollonian presence of an artist who would calculate and establish the basic parameters of a verse.[69] In practice, however, Bely clearly privileged the Apollonian intellect over the Dionysian abandon, as was evident in one of the most salient innovations in his poetry -- the exceptionally refined and deliberate nature of the rhythmical patterns in his verse.[70]

Maiakovskii found it difficult to follow Bely's intellectualized approach to writing poetry. From his initial failure to imitate Bely's style, Maiakovskii understood that he could not write better, not only because Bely stretched possibilities of the iambic tetrameter to the limit, but also because Maiakovskii's temperament was different from that of his admired predecessor. The Symbolist form, however altered, could not fit Maiakovskii's message: "He [Bely] is gay: 'I flung a pineapple in the sky' and I am whining: 'Hundreds of wearisome days.'[71] While Bely's "yearning for the ugly" took the form of variations on a classic iambic tetrameter that fit the expression of a playful and erudite *enfant terrible,* Maiakovskii could not be gay and insouciant, not only because he intimately understood the underside of life, but because he lived through that unimaginable pre-symbolic, low-life, anti-authoritarian "horror and terror" of existence that Nietzsche described as the essence of the tragic. Maiakovskii realized that if he wanted to write "about different things," he had to begin with altering the foundation of classic verse, a task, which Bely did not tackle. Then, he could use the new vocabulary taken from the lower classes that would replace the canonical one.

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[69] According to Bennett, Bely attempted to combine Apollonian and Dionysian elements of Nietzschean understanding of drama into a new aesthetics, with a greater emphasis on the collective than the "individualistic" European Symbolism. See Bennett, "Esthetic Theories from *The Birth of Tragedy* in Andrei Bely's Critical Articles," in Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, 172.

[70] As Rosenthal remarked, Bely never adhered to Nietzschean "Dionysianism," see *New Myth, New World,* 45.

[71] "Он про своё весело – «в небеса запустил ананасом», а я про своё ною – «сотни томительных дней»" Maiakovskii, "Ia sam," *PSS* 1:18.

Maiakovskii's rhythm, like that of a true artist with a tragic temperament, was maximally attuned to the non-sublimated realm of the everyday. Turning to the poet for an explanation of the method of his versification, we receive confirmation of this intentionally prosaic effect. Evidently, he began composing by walking around and "mumbling":

> I walk, swinging my arms, and mumbling almost without any words yet. I either slow down the pace of my walk, so that it does not impede my mumbling, or I mumble faster in order to keep up with the pace. This is how the rhythm is formed – the basis of any poetic work, which goes through it with a rumble. Gradually, I begin to squeeze out individual words from this rumble. [72]

In accordance with this description, the pulse of Maiakovskii's verse was very different from that of the Symbolists and their followers. The elaborate "dancing" rhythm of Bely's was a carefully calculated beat, the basis of which was developed in classical Russian poetry. Maiakovskii's rhythm did not fit within the Procrustean bed of a classic iambic tetrameter. It was highly irregular and unpredictable. Moreover, it was intimate and subjective. It was the most primal of his representative devices, marked by repetition:

> We do not know whence comes this fundamental rumble-rhythm. For me, it is any repetition in me of a sound, noise, rocking, or even in general, any repetition of an occurrence, which I mark with a sound. The rhythm can be brought out by the murmur of a repeatedly returning sea; or by a house worker, who bangs the door every day and, repeating herself, drags along in my consciousness; and even by the turning of the earth…. The attempt to organize this movement, to organize the sounds surrounding you … is one of the most important tasks of a poet – the stockpiling of the rhythms. I do not know if the rhythm exists apart from me or in

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[72] "Я хожу, размахивая руками и мыча ещё почти без слов, то укорачивая шаг, чтобы не мешать мычанию, то помычиваю быстрее в такт шагам. Так обстругивается и оформляется ритм – основа всякой поэтической вещи, проходящая через неё гулом. Постепенно из этого гула начинаешь вытискивать отдельные слова" in "Kak delat' stikhi" (How the verses are made) (1926), *PSS*, 12:100. Cited in Robin Aizlewood, *Verse Form and Meaning in the Poetry of Vladimir Maiakovskii* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1989), 8. This article was written in connection with the suicide of Sergei Esenin, a popular Imaginist poet. In it, Maiakovskii distinguishes himself from Esenin and defines his poetic mission as that of a master-craftsman who labors over his verses and creates the "new rules" as he goes along.

> me, probably, in me. However, for it to awake, something has to jolt it…. Rhythm is the fundamental force, fundamental energy of a verse. It is impossible to explain it. It can only be talked about in terms of magnetism or electricity. Magnetism and electricity are the types of energy.[73]

According to this description of Maiakovskii, then, making up the rhythm for his verse was a device not merely for writing poetry, but also for transforming and building up his own creative consciousness through the forming of his unconscious, so-to-speak. This method of self-formation is very close to Nietzsche's call for a metaphoric transfiguration from the state of a Dionysian hollering to an Apollonian rhythmic measure, articulated most purely in music and less purely in poetry, when "expressing oneself metaphorically and undergoing metamorphosis can be… assimilated."[74] As anti-utilitarian Nietzsche readily admitted, the original purpose of poetry was purely utilitarian in its attempt to master oneself and the world: "What could have been more useful for the ancient, superstitious type of man than rhythm? It enabled one to do anything – to advance some work magically … to mold the future in accordance with one's will; to cleanse one's own soul from some excess… without verse one was nothing; by means of verse one almost became a god."[75]

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[73] "Откуда приходит этот основной гул-ритм – неизвестно. Для меня это всякое повторение жо мне звука, шума, покачивания или даже вообще повторение каждого явления, которое я выделяю звуком. Ритм может принести и шум повторяющегося моря, и прислуга, которая ежеутренне хлопает дверью и повторяясь плетётся, шлёпая в моём сознании, и даже вращение земли…. Старание организовать движение, организовать звуки вокруг себя… это одна из главных поэтических работ – ритмические заготовки. Я не знаю, существует ли ритм вне меня, или только во мне, скорей всего – во мне. Но для его пробуждения должен быть толчок… Ритм—это основная сила, основная энергия стиха. Объяснить его нельзя – про него можно сказать только так, как говориться про магнетизм или электричество. Магнетизм и электричество – это виды энергии" "Kak delat' stikhi," *PSS*, 12: 101. Cited in Aizlewood*, Verse Form and Meaning,* 19.

[74] Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 12. On Nietzsche and his use of metaphor, see also Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor" and Sarah Kofman, "Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis," in David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (London, England and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 150-175 and 201-214.

[75] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 138, §84.

As Jangfeldt demonstrated, Maiakovskii's first "tragedy," written in 1913 in St. Petersburg and appropriately entitled with the poet's name, was permeated with Nietzschean themes.[76] There, Maiakovskii presented himself under a variety of guises, mostly maimed and disfigured personages, Nietzshean "symbols of the body." There were such roles as the Man without an Eye and a Leg, the Woman with a Giant Tear, and the Man with a Stretched Face. Vladimir Maiakovskii, the poet, was at the center of the action. In the course of the play, the characters complained to him about their ruined lives, arguing about the loss of order and the encroaching madness. Despite the multiplicity of roles, it was obvious that they, similar to Prometheus and Oedipus, were only masks of the main subject of tragedy – the poet himself. According to Robin Aizlewood, the poem was extremely diverse rhythmically: altogether, it counted ten poetic measures, not including the lines where they were difficult to judge. Many characters were assigned distinct meters, although some were represented through a variety of metrical forms.[77]

At this point in Maiakovskii's career, the Briks were not particularly interested in the young poet, mostly because of his scandalous reputation as a Futurist, which implied consistent public disturbance. In 1911, shortly after he began composing poetry, Maiakovskii met David Burliuk, the leader of a radical group Hylaea, which became known as Futurist (or Cubo-Futurist) a year later.[78] Burliuk was the first artist-friend of Maiakovskii to whom the beginning poet read his half-baked, "bad" lines, but who encouraged his friend in his poetic pursuits. Maiakovskii first published in Hylaea

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[76] Bengt Jangfeldt, "Nietzsche and the Young Maiakovskii," 44.
[77] Aizlewood, *Verse Form and Meaning,* 27-29.
[78] Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History*, 29-60 and 117-163. Anti-authoritarian and mostly Moscow-centered Cubo-Futurists were to be distinguished from Ego-Futurists, most of whom resided in St. Petersburg and wished to preserve the legacy of the Symbolists.

almanacs that featured experimental poetry, testing the limit of sense on the phonemic, morphological and syntactic registers. Among his fellow Cubo-Futurists, Maiakovskii was exceptional in the relatively easy readability of his verse. Unlike Kruchenykh, Maiakovskii did not stay with the "nonsense poetry" -- a collection of rhymed sounds, constituting a language of its own, without any reference to its communicative function. Unlike Khlebnikov, he was not a master of epos, looking for the ever present, noble and heroic essence of the Russian language in the roots of its words. [79] In this respect, he stayed closer to the Symbolists.[80] As Pomorska observed, Maiakovskii was the only member of the original Futurist group who clung to and developed the Symbolists' subject of "lyrical ego."[81] Maybe because of this semantic proximity, he was the only one of the prominent Futurists who denied their authority most forcefully. In the scandalous public readings/performances of the Hylaeans, in which they dressed in outrageous costumes and insulted their largely bourgeois audience, Maiakovskii was by far the loudest and most offensive performer.

It was then, during one of Maiakovskii's outrageous public appearances, that the Briks first saw the poet and recoiled in amazement mixed with fear. According to Lilia,

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[79] According to Roman Jakobson, Khlebnikov was first of all a master of epos. Roman Jakobson, "O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov" (About the generation that wasted its poets), in *Smert' Vladimira Maiakovskogo* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975), 8-9.

[80] In his reminiscences, Jakobson noted that of the three "pillars" of Futurism – Maiakovskii, Kruchenykh, and Khlebnikov – Maiakovskii seemed closest to the Symbolists. See "Ustnye vospominaniia R. O. Iakobsona o Maiakovskom" in *Sed'mye tynianovskie chteniia*, 304. As was mentioned before, Maiakovskii's early poetry in particular displayed his knowledge of Bal'mont and Bely. The former's influence was more apparent in short verses -- for example, it reverberated in the impressionistic sketchiness of "Noch'" (Night) of 1912. The style of "Noch'" reminds one of Bal'mont's studies from nature, but in a more expressive mode:

Багровый и белый отброшен и скомкан,	The purple and white is crumpled and thrown at us,
в зелёный бросали горстями дукаты,	The green is concealed under mounts of ducats
а чёрным ладоням сбежавшихся окон	And black palms of assembled windows
раздали горящие жёлтые карты.	Received burning yellow cards.

Bely's influence is discussed earlier in the chapter.

[81] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 82.

during their visit to a jubilee dedicated to Bal'mont, "… there were many enthusiastic speeches," but Maiakovskii's was the only one addressed "from … [the] enemies.' He spoke with conviction and courage, in the sense that the time for the 'steps to tremble under the feet' had passed, and that now he prefers to use the elevator… During the same evening, I saw Volodia standing in front of Repin's portrait of Tolstoy and saying to a group of gentlemen in front of him: 'One has to be a boor to paint like this.' Brik and I liked this very much, but we continued to be offended, I especially, by these trouble-makers, who could not appear in public without a policeman and broken chairs."[82]

To the phase of policemen and broken chairs belongs Maiakovskii's first "tragedy." As Aizlewood had shown, by contrast with the miscellany of voices in *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, his "second tragedy," *The Cloud in Trousers*, had one clear voice – that of the poet himself.[83] Unlike the first poem, this one was unified rhythmically – in it, accentual verse had more than ninety-percent frequency over other measures.[84] Unlike the classic syllabo-tonic system of versification, which stipulated a fixed number of syllables within a line in addition to a fixed number of stresses, accentual verse is a variety of the so-called "tonic" verse, where the number of syllables between stresses

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[82] "Не помню, кто произносил и какие речи, помню только, что все они были восторженно-юбилейные и один только Маяковский сказал блестящую речь «от наших врагов». Он говорил убедительно и смело, в том роде, что это раньше было красиво «дрожать ступеням под ногами», а сейчас он предпочитает подниматься в лифте… В тот же вечер я видела, как Володя стоял перед портретом Репина «Толстой» и говорил окружавшей его кучке джентельменов: Надо быть хамом для того, чтобы так написать». Мне и Брику всё это очень понравилось, но мы продолжали возмущаться, я в особенности, скандалистами, у которых ни одно выступление не обходится без городового и сломанных стульев" (Lilia Brik, "Iz vospominanii," in *Al'manakh 'S Maiakovskim',* 59-60).

[83] In one of his addresses to the audience made in 1915, Maiakovskii called *The Cloud in Trousers* his "second tragedy." See "O raznykh Maiakovskikh" (About different Maiakovskiis) *PSS*, 1: 347. As quoted in Aizlewood, 81.

[84] Ibid., 82-83.

may vary from zero to four or more.[85] This moving away from the syllabic base of the verse line coincided with Bely's experiments with pyrrhics. In this context, tonic verse was perceived as more unpredictable, more influenced by rhythm in Bely's definition of it, as opposed to the syllabo-tonic meter.[86]

Brik's friend Jakobson described the Futurists' challenge in his book on *Modern Russian Poetry* as having perfected all three requirements for good poetry: knowledge of tradition, mastery of the practical language of the day, and ability to represent the "poetic tendency" of the moment.[87] The last point was the most important, because it embraced the concept of artistic device, in Jakobson's understanding of it. For Jakobson and

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[85] Apart from accentual verse, other tonic rhythms include *dol'nik* (a meter that allows for one to two syllables between stresses) and *taktovik* (one to three syllables). Tonic verse was not categorized as such until early 1920s, although many poets of the late- and post-Symbolist generation used it extensively. According to Mikhail Gasparov, the epithet "purely tonic" in relation to verse was introduced by Victor Zhirmunsky in 1921 in his book *Poeziia Aleksandra Bloka.* See M. G. Gasparov, "Aktsentnyi stikh rannego Maiakovskogo" (The accentual verse of early Maiakovskii) *Uchenye Zapiski Tartusskogo Universiteta* no. 198 (1967): 324.

[86] In the hands of those writers who stayed within the confines of Symbolism, such as Blok, or sought to purify these confines, such as the Acmeists, tonic verse remained tied to classicism by the tendency to keep the line consistently short, rarely venturing beyond a tetrameter. Blok, for example, whose poetry Maiakovskii adored, was, by temperament, also a tragic and a lyric. In her reminiscences, Lilia Brik noted that at the time Maiakovskii met the Briks, his favorite poet was Blok, and because he had not written very much of his own by then, he recited Blok's verses instead of his own. (See Lilia Brik, "Chuzhie stikhi" [Verses by others] in *Maiakovskii v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* [Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1963], 332) Unlike Maiakovskii, however, Blok belonged to the old generation of writers: he was so steeped in culture and knowledge that it was difficult for him to waver away from beauty, to associate himself with the primary annihilating howl of the have-nots. His poetry, melodious and soul-wrenching, sang of a Beautiful Lady and of his personal turmoil as a Russian intellectual who sensed the end of the world as he knew it and who welcomed the coming revolution as an apocalyptic purifier, after which a new and better world would emerge. The Briks could hardly associate themselves with this worldview. Blok was definitely not the "right one" for them. Anna Akhmatova had also consistently used tonic verse, particularly *dol'nik*. She, however, like other Acmeists, was a classicist -- her goal was to purify the Symbolist legacy of religious connotations. She wrote about herself, intimately, but in a way that did not reveal much inner turmoil and torment. Although, in the opinion of many a prominent critic, the Acmeists achieved a perfect balance in their poetry between verses and words, this balance was perfectly still, devoid of grandeur that could only be brought into poetry through the use of metaphors (Eikhenbaum, *O poezii.* 85.) Shklovskii has pinpointed the difference between Maiakovskii and Akhmatova in the following way: "The *Cloud in Pants* is built entirely on metaphors… [It] deals with a world, which is unthinkable for Anna Akhmatova. Akhmatova's world is as narrow as a ray of light entering a dark room."(Viktor Shklovskii, "Already About the Briks and More About the Circle," in *Maiakovsky and His Circle* [New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972], 88). Like Akhmatova, in the *Cloud in Trousers* Maiakovskii had also achieved a balance between word and rhythm. This balance, though, appeared very unstable, because the poem was filled with the explosive emotion released through the extensive use of metaphors.

[87] Roman Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia* (Prague: Politika, 1921), 4.

Shklovskii, the device in poetry was a "difficult form" [*zatrudnennaia forma*], when it was not yet clear if a piece of writing belonged to poetry or prose. He cited Khlebnikov in his support, who remarked that when he noticed "the old lines all of a sudden become dull" and "the future concealed in them turn into the present," then he "understood that the future was the motherland of creativity."[88]

In Maiakovskii's case, "difficult form" required achieving a prosaic rhythm in poetic form, which involved increasing the length of the lines and the range of his stress application as well as diversifying these parameters within stanzas. Accentual verse gave Maiakovskii this possibility, because of its flexible rhythmic base, which could comprise various tonic rhythms.[89] *The Cloud in Trousers* was the first poem in which the author felt that he had gained "mastery."[90] This mastery, undoubtedly, had to do with unifying the poem conceptually and rhythmically. The content was the tragedy of a common man,

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[88] Ibid., 2. Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov were not the only Futurists who used accentual verse. Vadim Shershenevich, a leading representative of Ego-Futurism, published in Symbolist journals and also wrote in accentual verse. Similar to the Cubo-Futurists, a group to which Maiakovskii belonged, the Ego-Futurists were interested in developing the technical aspects of the verse by radically innovating their vocabulary, rhymes, and rhythm. The Ego-Futurists claimed a distance from their immediate predecessors -- Bal'mont and Bely -- but frequently were no more than their unwitting simulacra. Unlike the Cubo-Futurists, they did not envision Futurism as a war of the low-life against the status quo. Ego-Futurists remained tied to Symbolism by commitment to the ideals of the *haut-monde*. Igor' Severianin, their leader, had frequently walked a thin line between poetry and mannerism with his skillfully crafted and innovative in rhyme, but pretentious verse. His favorite subject – himself – was idolized in verses in which the images of the fantasized high life with carriages, courtesans, and champagne alternated with odes to his own person. Shershenevich did not dream about aristocratic exploits, but his poetry was also limited to exploring and enhancing his ego. His technical versatility and erudition served the same purpose. Early in Maiakovskii's career, Shershenevich began courting him for "forcefulness" of his poetry, novelty and precision of imagery, peculiarity of the rhythm, and the perfect match of content and form. Maiakovskii never reciprocated this attitude.

[89] The beginning of the prologue for *The Cloud in Trousers*, for example, had the following rhythm:

Vashu **mysl'**,	--'/ [dol'nik]
Mech**ta**iushchuiu na razmiag**chen**nom moz**gu**,	-'------'-- '// [accentual verse]
Kak **vy**zhirevshii la**kei** na za**sa**lennoi ku**shet**ke,	-'----'-- '---'-// [accentual verse]
Budu draz**nit'** ob okro**va**vlennyi **ser**dtsa los**kut**;	'-- '---'-- '-- '// [taktovik]
Dosyta iz'izde**va**ius', na**khal'**nyi i **ed**kii.	'-----'-- '-- '-// [accentual verse]

See Aizelwood, *Verse Form and Meaning,* 90-91.

[90] In his autobiography, written in the 1920s, Maiakovskii made a note about the beginning of the work on the poem: "I feel mastery. … I am beginning to pose the question of the subject. The revolutionary one. I am thinking about the *Cloud in Trousers".* [Чувствую мастерство. Могу овладеть темой. Вплотную. Ставлю вопрос о теме. О революционной. Думаю над «Облаком в штанах.] "Ia sam," *PSS*, 1: 22.

expressed through the person of the poet – the revolt and rage reflecting the "horror and terror" of existence. The form was accentual verse which, at the time Maiakovskii composed the poem, had not entered the canon, did not have a name, and the poem composed in it sounded unharmonious, prosaic, and unpolished.

Maiakovskii's description of the origins of rhythm in poetry reverberated with the Nietzschean conception of the origin of music in ancient Greek tragedy. In *The Cloud in Trousers* the poet managed to achieve the "difficult form," which bordered on prose and seemed to be organically connected to the poet's body. Maiakovskii, like a true Dionysian artist, became "entirely fused with the original unity, with its pain and contradiction, and produced a copy of this original Unity in the form of music…."[91] Like a true tragedian, he turned to the suffering multitude for inspiration – to the *peplos*, the lowly servants of those in power and was transforming himself into an art object by expressing Dionysian "intoxication." At the same time, however, he managed to turn monstrosity into the sublime with the help of his assiduous studies of Russian versification, Bely's in particular, in which the rhythm of each line was carefully calculated to render it maximally approximated to a prosaic expression of the everyday speech, to make it sound just barely poetic. The result of this tremendous Apollonian labor Maiakovskii called "mastery."

When Brik met Maiakovskii, the poet's emphasis on form reached the stage of "unveiled" mastery, when he found his own expressive language. This "mastery" for Maiakovskii came with the lack of "mystery," because in his Dionysian desire to be close

[91] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 35.

to the *peplos,* the poet was ready to reveal any secrets of his craft. [92] Maiakovskii's attitude coincided with Brik's artistic and civil standards because of the latter's aesthetic appreciation of flawless form and his left-wing orientation in politics. For Brik, it must have been the stunning openness -- the complete absence of "mystery" so dear to Frelikh -- that attracted him to Maiakovskii. Whereas the ideal of the Symbolist generation was a poet-scholar who apart from poetry also wrote analytic treatises explaining it, Maiakovskii and Brik had subdivided these functions, retaining the kernel of Symbolist aesthetics which called for fusion of art and life. Unlike the Symbolists, Maiakovskii let life dictate the form of his art and not vice versa, and Brik was a crucial ally for Maiakovskii in establishing this low-art aesthetic. It is in this joint Dionysian/ Apollonian effort to fuse with the people and to be understood by anyone that Maiakovskii and Brik found a team of like-minded intellectuals that proved to be extremely adaptive to the volatile cultural and political landscape of the revolutionary Russia.

In his unabashed adherence to the forms of low art and in his interest in theory, Brik clearly departed from Nietzsche, who had condemned an "unprecedented type" of "theoretical man" as a travesty of his idea of human nature. According to Nietzsche, whereas any artist, a servant of Dionysus or Apollo, was fascinated by the "truth which has been unveiled, but remains even now a veil," a theoretical man was not satisfied with veiled truth, but "delighted in the happy process of unveiling which succeeded through its own efforts." Pushing the analytic, interpretative side of Apollo to the limit, science dismantled the "ideality" of myth through words, annihilating the "spirit" of poetry. For

[92] As Pomorska observed, Maiakovskii was the only Futurist who was directly invested in using the results of his poetic experiments in a social framework. See Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 111.

Nietzsche, the theoretical and the tragic worldviews represented, at their apexes, the "profound delusion" of going beyond knowing – correcting a human being – and the belief in the senselessness of existence and imminent death. On the one hand, there was a tragic poet, who could "become a work of art" through finding the means to express his rage. On the other, in Nietzsche's unflattering description, there was a scholar, a "weak and joyless 'critic'… who was basically… a proofreader blinded by book dust and printer's errors."[93]

Brik's life and career certainly did not fit Nietzsche's depiction of a pathetic dusty creature. His last known letter to Frelikh expressed surprise at his dislike of Maiakovskii and shed light on his new passion:

> It is too bad that you did not like Maiakovskii's book, but I think that you just did not get a grasp of the text. Or, maybe, you were frightened off by a peculiar coarseness and terseness of form. I, personally, am reading this book constantly for the fourth month already; I know it by heart and think that this is one of the most ingenious works of the world literature. Also, I've become extremely keen on the so-called Futurism…. I met the entire horde of Futurists…Maiakovskii spends days and nights with us; he turned out to be an exceptional person, who, of course, is yet completely unformed: he is only twenty-two and is a terrible hooligan.[94]

[93] Ibid., 81-100.

[94] "Очень жалко, что книга Маяковского тебе не понравилась, но думаю, что ты просто в неё не вчитался. А, может быть, тебя отпугнула своеобразная грубость и лапидарность формы. Я лично вот уже четвёртый месяц только и делаю, что читаю зту книгу; знаю её наизусть, и считаю, что это одно из гениальнейших произведений мировой литературы. Кроме того, я вообще чрезвычайно увлёкся так называемым «футуризмом» … Перезнакомился с целой оравой «футуристов»… Маяковский у нас днюет и ночует; и оказался исключительно громадной личностью, ещё, конечно, совершенно не сформировавшейся: ему всего 22 года и хулиган он страшный" (Iangirov, "Oleg Frelikh i Osip Brik: my s toboi sviazany navsiagda…" *Shestye tynianovskie chteniia*, 161-2).

I. 4. Brik and Formalism

In December 1915, a Futurist almanac *Vzial* (Took) featured an article by Brik entitled "Give Us Bread." In this article, the first he published, Brik likened Maiakovskii's *Cloud in Trousers* to bread and juxtaposed it to the sickening "sugary eatables" of the Symbolists. He confined his own text to just a few paragraphs, quoting extensively from the poem and allowing it to speak for itself, as it were. Here Brik attacked the canon and addressed an educated and well-to-do audience: "Rejoice! Shout louder! We have bread again! Do not trust your servants, go and stand in line yourselves to buy Maiakovskii's book…."[95]

Apart from Brik's panegyric, the almanac also contained contributions by a host of Futurist artists – Maiakovskii, Khlebnikov, Kamenskii, Leonid Pasternak, and Nikolai Aseev -- and one critic, Shklovskii, who soon became Brik's colleague in OPOIAZ. Similar to Brik, Shklovskii had also praised *Cloud*. Unlike Brik, whose text was clearly propagandistic in its short pungent form and incantatory language, Shklovskii allowed some historical and theoretical insights to inform his account of the poem. For example, in comparing *Cloud* to the Symbolists' writing, Shklovskii spoke about the poem as quintessentially "new," reflecting the present moment, as opposed to the Symbolists' "third-generation imagery." He analyzed the poem's metaphors and parallel constructions; he spoke about its innovative rhymes and rhythm. In short, he offered a scholarly piece of writing as opposed to Brik's exhortation. This difference between Shklovskii's "scholarly" and Brik's "political" approaches marked their ideological positions within the group, which became more nuanced in their further works**.** While Brik's critical contributions continued to emphasize the importance for artists to stay

[95] Osip Brik, "Khleba!" in *Vzial: baraban futuristov,* December 1915, 12.

close to a current political tendency, Shklovskii veered toward an internal artistic discourse, focusing on the questions of an artwork's internal coherence.

The members of the group of Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language, which by late 1919 became known as OPOIAZ,[96] had regularly gathered in the Briks' apartment in Petrograd to read papers and conduct discussions on poetic language and its fundamental difference from everyday speech. As Lilia Brik remembered:

> At the time, we loved only verses. We were like drunkards then. I knew all of Volodia's [Maiakovskii's] verses by heart, and Osia [Brik] was completely immersed in them. Such were the beginnings of the so-called "doodles"… markings, with which Osia filled his notebooks. Later, from these [doodles] sound repetitions developed. … In connection with the "doodles," Osia and Shklovskii led philological conversations. … Iakubinskii and Polivanov came…. Philologists began to gather at our place, read papers and led discussions. They selected subjects and wrote articles. Every article was read aloud, and Brik published the first *Collection on the Theory of Poetic Language*.[97]

In Moscow, Lilia's childhood friend Jakobson founded a parallel group, the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The Moscow group, as its name suggested, comprised only linguists. OPOIAZ, on the other hand, included both students of literature and language. From 1915 until 1917, Brik took an active part in the Petrograd group by hosting the discussions and publishing the first and second *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language* in 1916 and 1917 respectively. After he joined Narkompros in the summer of 1918 and the Communist party in the fall of that year – calculated political moves that are

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[96] Although Erlich dated the beginning of OPOIAZ to 1916, most recently Andrei Krusanov had revised this chronology by indicating that the name of OPOIAZ was unofficially conferred upon the group of Petrograd Formalists only on October 21, 1919, and officially incorporated as such in December of that year. From the time of publication of their collection in 1916, the group went by the name of their book: The Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language. See Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 63 and Krusanov, *Russkii avangard*, 2, bk. 1: 296-297.

[97] "Мы любили тогда только стихи. Мы были как пьяницы. Я знала все Володины стихи наизусть, а Ося совсем влип в них. С этого времени и начались так называемые «козявки». Козявками я называла значки, которыми Ося исписывал тетради. Из них выяснились потом звуковые повторы. …В связи с козявками пошли у Оси с Шкловским филологические разговоры. Пришли Якубинский и Поливанов…. Филологи стали собираться у нас, докрадывать, обсуждать. Разобрали темы, написали статьи, каждая статья читалась вслух, и Брик издал первый «Сборник по теории поэтического языка»" (Lilia Brik, "Iz vospominanii," in *Al'manakh 'S Maiakovskim'*, 78-79).

explored in the second chapter of this dissertation -- he relegated OPOIAZ to Shklovskii and immersed himself completely in political work.[98] After his move to Moscow in early spring 1919, he returned to his work in poetics, regularly joining discussions at the Moscow Linguistic Circle, where only in 1919 he presented papers on "Poetic Epithets" (on April 12); "A Formal Analysis of Gogol's story *The Nose*" (on May 20); "On Verse Rhythm" (between May 23 and June 8, 1919); "Trocheic Tetrameter with Dactyllic Endings" (on October 25) and "The Problem of Proletarian Poetry" (December 23, 1919).[99]

In his comprehensive history of Russian Formalism, Victor Erlich mentioned three inaugural publications of the *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language*, which came out in 1916, 1917, and 1919.[100] The 1919 edition, entitled *Poetika*, was a compendium of the most important articles from the two preceding publications. It contained essays by Shklovskii and Brik, as well as by the linguists Lev Iakubinskii and Evgenii Polivanov, mentioned by Lilia in her memoirs. Compared to the other essays, Brik's contribution stood out distinctly in its methodology and general focus. While the majority of the contributors, in contradiction with their pronounced intentions, sought out hidden content behind the formal elements of poetic language, Brik held fast to the premise of the linguistic sign as an arbitrary entity. Like other OPOIAZ members, he

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[98] Brik remembered joining Narkompros in the summer of 1918. See Osip Brik, "IMO – Iskusstvo molodykh" (IMO – the art of the young), in *Maiakovskomu* (Leningrad: 1940); reprinted in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 84. On Brik's joining the party, Valiuzhenich cites Brik's membership card, dated May 6, 1920, which states that "…Brik is listed as a member of RKP [Russian Communist Party] from 1917" (see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,*16). It seems very unlikely that Brik joined the party as early as 1917, considering his harsh critique of the Bolsheviks up to the end of that year. It is more likely that he became an official Communist after joining Lunacharskii's Commissariat, in the summer or early fall of 1918. Krusanov confirms this dating. (Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2, bk. 1: 295).

[99] On Brik's participation in the discussions of Moscow Linguistic Circle, see Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2, bk. 1: 455-490.

[100] Erlich, *Russian Formalilsm,* 70.

was influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*.[101] Unlike them, Brik did not hesitate to take from Saussure's theory precisely those elements that emphasized the play of signifiers, while ignoring the question of semantics altogether. Moreover, for Brik, this play was not free or "found," but totally under the control of the artist. I will argue that in this reading of Saussure, Brik's position differed significantly from that of other Formalists, although it had more points of correspondence with Jakobson's understanding of poetic language than with the views of his other collaborators at OPOIAZ, including Shklovskii's formulation of the literary device.

In his article for *Poetika*, entitled "Sound Repetitions," Brik set out to analyze the "structure of sound in a verse."[102] The essay began with an argument against the entrenched academic view that poetry depended solely on images for its internal and external coherence. In Brik's opinion, the musicality and rhythm of a poem had principally to do with maintaining poetic structure. For support, Brik cited a distinguished authority, academician Aleksandr Veselovskii, who in one of his articles highlighted the musical and rhythmic aspect of folk poetry. Unlike the respected academician, however, Brik did not believe that imagery preceded sound in the constitution of a poem. For him, poetic sounds and "sound combinations" stood on a par with imagery and "served not only as euphonic additions, but were results of an independent poetic striving." As an example, Brik cited a clever folk riddle: "**cher**nyi

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[101] Saussure's book was published in 1916 in Paris, but not translated into Russian until 1933. Erlich noted that Jakobson, who was a linguist by training and who spoke French fluently, brought it to the attention of other Formalists. See Erlich, *Russian Formalism,* 65.

[102] Osip Brik, "Zvukovye povtory (Analiz zvukovoi struktury stikha)," *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (Petrograd: OPOIAZ, 1917), 24-62; reprinted in *Poetika: sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (Petrograd: OPOIAZ, 1919), 58-98.

kon' pry**ga**et v ogon'" (black horse jumps into fire), the answer to which, *kocherga* (poker), was a sum total of certain sounds from the riddle.

Brik based the bulk of his argument on the classics of Russian poetry, Aleksandr Pushkin, and Mikhail Lermontov. In their poems, he discovered the rule of "sound repetition," which he described as the systematic recurrence of "certain groups of consonants… once or several times, in the same or different sequence" and "with varying combinations of accompanying vowels." In analyzing the repetitions of consonants, Brik subdivided them into 1) two-, three-, and multiple- sound combinations; 2) repeating once and more than once; and 3) repeating in varying sequence -- i.e., simple (AB-AB and ABC-ABC), reverse (AB-BA), and complex combinations of three and more sounds (ABC-BCA; ABC-CAB; ABC-BAC, etc.) He then provided more than five hundred examples of Pushkin's and Lermontov's verses, meticulously illustrating each and every case of sound repetitions. One model of the AB pattern, for example, was a line from Lermontov's *Demon*: "Bez **ru**l**i**a i bez vet**ri**l." Another example of a simple reverse order, BA, was from Pushkin's "Echo": "**Re**v**e**t li z**ve**r' v lesu glukhom." Apart from analyzing hundreds of lines of double, triple, and multi-sound repetitions with single and multiple variants in all possible combinations, Brik also cited frequently used reiterations of consonants, such as "**te**m**n**o – **t**u**m**a**n**," "**pl**a**ch** – **p**e**ch**a**l**'," "**kl**o**n**it' – **k**o**le**n**i**," etc. Repetitions of sounds in poetry, Brik concluded, were governed by the laws of euphony, making them akin to musical themes. Brik's conclusion coincided with that of the Sybmolists --in his opinion poetic speech was a musical phenomenon, in which voiced consonants played a greater role than voiceless ones.[103]

[103] In her book on Formalism, Pomorska noted that "Symbolism was oriented toward music, whereas Futurism was oriented toward painting and visual arts" (see Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 79).

Brik's investigation of the role of sound in poetry conformed, both in its orientation toward language and in its concrete emphasis on sounds, to Saussure's ideas outlined in his *Cours*. Unlike Saussure, however, Brik did not pay much attention to the question of meaning. In his book, Saussure proposed a definition of the linguistic sign as a union "not of a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image," in which "the latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses."[104] According to this definition, Saussure's interest in studying language in depth, in its synchronic dimension, made the study of sounds paramount for linguistics. This is why, apart from phonetics – a science of the physiology of articulation of sounds – Saussure proposed the science of phonology, which would focus on "sound-images" or sounds in their meaning-producing semiotic dimension.

While reading Saussure's *Cours* and Brik's article side-by-side, it becomes clear that the latter depended on the former mostly in its method of reasoning. Although Saussure confronted Positivism in its orientation toward nature-based causality, he kept intact its deductive method of inquiry.[105] Similar to the French linguist, Brik went to great lengths to found his argument on a solid factual basis. In the beginning of his article, he scrutinized the difference between acoustic phenomena – sounds -- and their

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[104] In his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842) a French philosopher Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, described theology and metaphysics as imperfect forms of knowledge, which preceded the perfected modern form of knowledge, based on the empirical observation of facts. The method of reasoning, proposed by Comte, took cause-and-effect relationship as the basic method of scientific inquiry. Comte's followers, including John Stuart Mill, Ernst Mach, and Richard Avenarius, developed various aspects of Positivism, maintaining the basic premises of Comte's system. Saussure, unlike the Logical Positivists of the twentieth century, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap, considered the inner life of a man a considerable factor in the formation of a linguistic sign. See *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 15th edition, s. v. "positivism and logical empiricism" and Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. with an introduction and notes by Wade Baskin (New York, Toronto, and London: McGraw Hill Co., 1966), 66.

[105] For a detailed discussion of Saussure's critique of Positivism, see Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, 7-11.

graphic representation – letters. Further, he analyzed the structure of consonants at length by tracing their subdivision into voiced and voiceless, hard and soft, and noting that during the repetition, the consonant either kept its phonetic make-up or changed into a different sound within its acoustic group. The empirical method or reasoning used by Brik was not new, but the degree of his rigor in defending the validity of this method was remarkable. When arguing his point, Brik spoke forcefully against those critics who made poetry dependent on their subjective opinions and produced analyses that lacked a "scientific" method.

More so than his dependence on Saussure's methodology, Brik's article brought forth his involvement with the Moscow Linguistic Circle and his fruitful relationship with a capable student of linguistics and a childhood friend of his wife, Jakobson. In Erlich's opinion, Jakobson's *Modern Russian Poetry*, in addition to the three editions of *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language* mentioned earlier, represented a complete statement of the position of early Formalism.[106] Jakobson's book collected talks, papers, and ideas developed during the discussions of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. As is evident from his introduction, Jakobson considered Saussure's theory the guiding thread in contemporary linguistic science and was interested in dialectology as the main field of study in linguistics. In the first pages of his book, Jakobson made clear his stance on poetic form. He maintained that it was not something permanent and unchanging: it existed only when it was new, unfamiliar and not fully overtaken by a particular content, in other words, when it displayed its arbitrary nature.[107]

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[106] Erlich, *Russian Formalism,* 71.

[107] "Форма существует для нас лишь до тех пор, пока нам трудно её воспринять, пока мы ощущаем сопротивляемость материала, пока мы колеблемся: что это проза или стихи…" (Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia*, 5).

Jakobson's contribution to Formalist theory consisted precisely in his understanding of the arbitrariness of artistic form. In discussing the double-sided nature of poetry in its form-versus-content matrix, he explained that similar to, but to a much greater extent than in practical language, poetic expression was a historically circumscribed entity, i.e., time was a major factor in its production and reception. It differed from practical language in its emphasis on experimentation and formal invention. In fact, argued Jakobson, content was not very relevant for poets as producers, because they all wrote about similar things. Good poets differed from the bad ones in their ability to express familiar concepts in a way that was new, but still understood by the public. Form existed precisely while it appeared/sounded strange: "For us, form exists only when it is difficult to perceive, when we sense the resistance of the material…." As soon as it ceased being strange, as soon as the poetic language ossified and became part of the canon, content would come to the fore as the other side of the sign: "Romantics are always characterized as pioneers of the universe of the soul… However, [their] contemporaries thought of romanticism only in terms of the renewal of form, as destruction of classical unities. And the testimony of contemporaries is the only valid testimony."[108]

Brik's and Jakobson's texts had multiple points of thematic correspondence, but they certainly differed in their methodology. Like Brik, Jakobson also discussed sound repetitions in poetry. However, unlike Brik, he made a note of the semiological dimension of poetics – the meaning-producing function of sounds. Most clearly, this

[108] "Романтиков постоянно характерезуют, как пионеров душевного мира, певцов душевных переживаний. Между тем, современникам романтизм мыслился исключительно как обновление формы, как разгром классических единств. А показания современников единственно ценные свидетельские показания" (ibid., 11).

difference surfaced in their discussion of folk poetry, one of Jakobson's favorite subjects. While studying anonymous folk recitations in the context of sound repetitions, Brik discovered that unlike "high" poetry, which used words with similar sounds, but different meaning, folk verses favored repetitions of words with similar meaning, but different sound structure, for example *roditel'- batiushka* (different ways of saying "father") or *put'- doroga* ("path-way"). Also, folk poetry used simple tautology, when the word was repeated to render a poetic effect, for example: *sredi lesa-lesa* ("in the forest-forest"), na *more-moreinskom* ("on the sea-sea"), *poskrebyshki skrebut* ("those who are scratching scratch"), etc. Brik concluded that there was a general "principle of simple combination" at work, wherein the poetic purpose could be fulfilled either by the combination of sounds, their meaning, or both. Thus, in Brik's analysis of folk poetry, meaning became a euphonic device and performed the same function as the repetition of sounds in high poetry.[109]

In contrast to Brik, Jakobson chose to discuss elements of difference rather than similarity in folk tautology, i.e., instead of concentrating on the identity of sounds in *khleby khlebisty* ("bread is bread-like") Jakobson spoke about suffix formation in the second word, which made it formally (and semantically) different from the first. In this case, Velimir Khlebnikov's famous poem *O, rassmeites' smekhachi* (Incantation by Laughter) served as a perfect example of formal inventiveness in poetry. In his discussion of euphony, Jakobson had also gone further than Brik by noting that repetition was a function not only of sounds, but of phonemes, and that repetitions themselves were necessary for the creation of meaning: "Form is perceived by us only when it is repeated

[109] Such repetitions in "high" and folk poetry, however, were both distinct from the function of this device in practical language -- in poetic language, they served to achieve euphony and melodious flow, and not to accentuate the force of a specific action or attribute.

in a given linguistic system. A lone form dies away. Similarly, a sound combination in a given verse… becomes a 'sound-image' (Brik's terminology) and is perceived only when it is repeated."[110]

Of course, Brik and Jakobson were not the only ones who were influenced by Saussure. The entire first part of *Poetika* was dedicated to the role of sound in poetry. The literary scholar Shklovskii and the linguists Iakubinskii and Polivanov had all contributed essays to it. They all, however, to greater or lesser degree deviated from Saussure's empiricism by discussing the "sound-image" in terms of its emotional content, which covered up a perceived loss of logical meaning. Shklovskii, for example, in his essay "On Poetry and *Zaum* Language," chose to focus on *zaum* (beyond sense) poetry, which was based on words, sounds, and combinations of sounds that could not be connected to a habitual meaning but were charged with individually experienced emotion.[111]

In this article, Shklovskii used *zaum* constructions to juxtapose a word, an arbitrary and socially circumscribed entity, to the more permanent and unconditional universe of emotion. To illustrate his point, Shklovskii quoted Kruchenykh's famous explanation of *zaum*: "lily is a beautiful flower, but the word 'lily' is 'raped' and overused. This is why I call a lily 'euy,' thus restoring its primal purity." Or, in another instance, he cited a critic who described Pushkin's frequent use of the sound [u] in the poem *Tsygane* (Gypsies) in the following way: "at times thick, dense, and pensive, bringing us to the past, and at others, as picturesquely wild, sultry, and doleful in its

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[110] **"**Форма слова воспринимается нами лишь будучи повторной в данной языковой системе. Одинокая форма умирает; так и звукосочетание в данном стихотоворении…. становится «звукообразным» (термин Брика), воспринимаетсля лишь в результате повторности" (Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia*, 48).

[111] Viktor Shklovskii, "O poezii i zaumnom iazyke," *Poetika,* 13-26.

calling solitude."[112] Shklovskii agreed that some sounds, such as [u] and [o], evoked dark, gloomy emotions, and some, such as [a] – happy and cheerful ones. He was convinced that people needed words without a conventional, logical meaning, but those that conformed to their emotional, a-logical expressivity. In conclusion, he even asserted that "*zaum* language existed… in a hidden state, similar to a rhyme in an ancient verse – it was there, but only unconsciously."[113]

Similarly to Shklovskii, Polivanov was concerned with a hidden content behind a sound-image. Polivanov's article, "Sound Gestures in Japanese Language," explored onomatopoeia – an exception from the theory of the sign as presented by Saussure, an instance of a poetic application of language in which the sign lost its arbitrary quality.[114] Here, Polivanov discussed those linguistic elements whose role resembled physical gestures, i.e., imitative devices, such as in "taratorit'," "chirikat'," "bum-bum," etc. Polivanov believed that analogous to physical gestures whose meaning tended to be universal, "sound gestures" had "pretension to universal understanding." Polivanov was interested in such phonemes not only because they imitated certain sounds, but also because they created complex optical, tactile and olfactory impressions associated with sound through a "contact in the soul of the speaker."[115]

The remaining contributor to the first part of *Poetika*, Iakubinskii, could be expected to have more in common with Brik, because he was the only one whom the latter cited in connection with the distinction between poetic and practical speech.[116]

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[112] "Фонетика мелодического стихотворения обнаруживает как бы предпочтение гласного звука «у», то глухого и задумчивого, то колоритно-дикого, то знойного и узывно-унылого…." (Shklovskii, "O poezii i zaumnom iazyke," *Poetika*, 15).
[113] Ibid., 24.
[114] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 69.
[115] Evgenii Polivanov, "Po povodu zvukovykh zhestakh iaponskogo iazyka," *Poetika*, 27-36.
[116] Brik, "Zvukovye povtory," *Poetika,* 62.

Iakubinskii wrote on this subject in two out of his three articles published in the collection. In "On the Sounds of Poetic Language," he defined poetry as a method of communication where the "practical" purpose of conveying information was put aside and in its stead sounds and combinations of sounds were brought to the fore. However, in his analysis, Iakubinskii concentrated not so much on Saussure's method of inquiry, but on his discussion of the connection between linguistics and psychology. In fact, Iakubinskii had plenty of points of reference for this psychological angle in Saussure. Surprisingly for anyone who thinks of Saussure as operating with the terms of linguistics alone, the *Cours* was full of references to sciences tangential to linguistics, especially psychology.[117]

Iakubinskii chose to follow Saussure's psychological link at the expense of his linguistic discoveries. In his "On Sounds of Poetic Language" he introduced the term "psychophonetics" [*psikhofonetika*] to distinguish between poetic and practical languages. In Iakubinskii's opinion, everyday practical language, unlike poetry, deemphasized the phonetic and phonemic aspects of language, which, as a result, did not allow sounds to "surface in the clear field of consciousness" and "have an independent value."[118] Because of this lack of emphasis, sounds in practical language became assimilated or disappeared altogether. Such basic attributes of poetry as rhythm, rhyme, assonances and alliterations depended on the conscious attitude to how a word or a phrase

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[117] In his book, Saussure placed psychology as a discipline most closely related to linguistics, linked to it by the very sound-images and "word-images" that were the focus of his study. In fact, Saussure conceived of semiology – a new science of signs in society, which he proposed in his *Cours* -- as forming part of social and general psychology (p. 16). He had repeatedly described linguistic sign as a "complex physiological-psychological unit," which combined within itself a sound and an idea (pp. 8 ff.). In explaining the process of communication between two speakers, Saussure called the process of identification of a concept with a corresponding "sound-image" as a "purely psychological phenomenon," followed by "physiological" intervention of the brain and organs of speech.

[118] Lev Iakubinskii, "O zvukakh stikhotvornogo iazyka," *Poetika,* 37.

would ring in the ear. In a manner similar to Shklovskii, Iakubinskii believed that such an attentive attitude to sounds provoked an emotional response to them. Both thought that this attitude created a certain kind of meaning, an emotional, a-logical sense, which was as valid as its practical counterpart. In practical language, the connection between sounds and their emotional meaning was lost. In poetry, it was the conscious attitude toward emotions evoked by sounds, which dictated their choice.[119]

How do we reconcile the widely divergent interpretations of Saussure in the early publications of the Formalists with the accepted view of their work as a coherent movement that aimed to construct a singular history of the creative use of language in terms of the science of language itself? Scholars of Russian Formalism, including Erlich and Fredric Jameson, have answered this question in various ways, agreeing, however, on the basic point: this school of thought focused on the study of form, rather than content. In his historical and theoretical account of the movement, Erlich admitted the inconsistency of the early attempts of OPOIAZ to present a cogent philosophical position. He found faults of reasoning not only in the early publications of the group, which "confused the issue by equating the dichotomy of poetic versus 'practical' language with the semanticist's distinction between the cognitive and emotive uses of speech," but particularly with Shklovskii's stance, whose "notion of art as a rediscovery of the world had more in common with traditional or popular views than the Formalist

[119] In his other article, "Skoplenie odinakovykh plavnykh v prakticheskom i poeticheskom iazykakh" (Accumulation of Identical Liquid Sounds in Practical and Poetic Languages), Iakubinskii noted that in practical language, accumulation of liquid consonants – [p] and [l], for example – lead to disappearance of one of these consonants, to their assimilation. The primacy of meaning and the lack of attention to particularity of each sound in practical language produced such a result. In poetic language, where automatism in pronunciation was absent and speech tended to be slow rather than fast, assimilation of liquid consonants was much more common. See *Poetika,* 50-57.

critic would have cared to admit."[120] Despite this criticism, and despite his very favorable treatment of Jakobson's contribution to the movement, Erlich refused to differentiate between the positions of the Petrograd and Moscow spokesmen and argued against Mikhail Bakhtin's critique of Shklovskii's theory as being "bogged down in psycho-physiological conditions of esthetic perception."[121] While acknowledging complexity in the relationship between form and content in Formalism, Erlich nevertheless categorically refuted any tendency to what he called "psychologism" in early Formalist writings.[122]

Following Erlich, Pomorska reiterated the OPOIAZ aversion to topics associated with reference to a person's inner world, insisting that "in the theory of early OPOIAZ a sign in poetic language is characterized as *purely phonic.* The poetic sign was deprived of meaning, which was apparently identified with a referent, the object itself."[123] Despite her support of Erlich's position, Pomorska specified that OPOIAZ' orientation was not genetic, but historic, because it was directed "against traditional psychologism in literary scholarship."[124]

Unlike Erlich and Pomorska, Jameson proposed that Shklovskii's theory described "purely psychological laws" of human behavior, viewed from a

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[120] Erlich, *Russian Formalism,* 179 and 182.
[121] Ibid., 178. There, Erlich quoted from Pavel Medvedev's *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii*. (Leningrad: Priboi, 1928), indicating page 52 as the source of his quotation. I have not been able to find the quoted passage on this page. However, the author frequently refers to the hidden "psychologism" of the Formalists, as, for example, on pages 97 and 138. On Mikhail Bakhtin's authorship of this text, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 146.
[122] On the relationship between content and form, see Erlich, *Russian Formalism,* 184-191; on the Formalists' "deep distrust of psychology," see p. 172.
[123] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 27.
[124] Ibid., 37.

phenomenological, anti-positivistic position. [125] However, Jameson insisted that the "psychological mechanism" described by Shklovskii did not have any content, but only form. In Jameson's view, "the new concept of *ostranenie* (making strange) was not intended to imply anything about the nature of the perceptions which have grown habitual," because "it described a process valid for all literature, without in any way implying the primacy of one particular literary element (such as metaphor) or one particular genre over the others."[126]

I want to argue against this unifying analysis of Formalism in general and Shklovskii's theory in particular, which overlooks an inherent ambiguity in Shklovskii's theory and which reveals the kernel of this critic's methodological differences in his analyses of work of art from those of Brik. In order to do so, I would like to look at Shklovskii's Formalist manifesto "Art as Device," which was published in the second part of *Poetika*, in light of the Freudian theory of the unconscious. In this essay, Shklovskii had famously characterized a work of art as that which possessed a specific device employed by an artist.[127] The aim of the device was the opposite of stating something familiar and of accommodating an object to what one already knew. Instead, the art object addressed the senses directly, without the mediation of the mind, and thus stood out from the maze of other objects by its purported palpability and unfamiliarity. This strangeness became the prime attribute of an art object. Once it became familiar, it lost its poetic quality and turned into a commonplace, non-art. Specifically, Shklovskii declared that "the aim of art is to render a thing perceptible as a vision, and not recognition; the device in art is to make things strange formally, to augment the length of

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[125] Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language,* 50-55.
[126] Ibid., 51-52.
[127] Viktor Shklovskii, "Iskusstvo kak priem," *Poetika*, 101-114.

the work's perception, because perceiving process in art is an end in itself…"[128] Shklovskii called this process *ostranenie* and provided examples taken mostly from Lev Tolstoy that made the connection to the realm of the senses explicit. Tolstoy, Shklovskii said, did not give familiar names to things that struck him as inhumane and humiliating, but described them in such a way as if he were seeing them for the first time. In doing this, he used the device of unfamiliar, strange epithets. For example, according to Shklovskii, all battle scenes in Tolstoy appeared as odd and extraneous because of the unfamiliar and odd-sounding descriptions of familiar phenomena.[129]

In my opinion, Shklovskii's position as articulated in "Art as Device" can be looked at from two angles. On the one hand, it could be discussed from the point of view of the very process of "making strange," focusing on the device as the agent of change, on the other, this theory could be seen as being concerned with that which was being "made strange" – the "thing" itself, a constant in the continuous reverberations of change. Shklovskii himself acknowledged as much. According to him, the only reason for the existence of a device was to renew our perception of *veshch'* (object/thing), which is to say to renew the thing itself, "breathe life" into it, or, as he put it, to "make a stone stone-like."

Shklovskii's terminology in "Art as Device" bears an uncanny resemblance to Freud's basic vocabulary. I say "uncanny," because I do not believe that Shklovskii actually read Freud.[130] Freud used "object" in his writing much more than "thing,"

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[128] "Целью искусства является дать ощущение вещи как видение, а не как узнавание; приёмом искусства является приём «остраниеия» вещей и приём затруднённой формы, увеличивающий трудность и долготу восприятия, так как воспринимательный процесс в искусстве самоцелен и должен быть продлён…" (ibid., 105).

[129] Ibid., 109.

[130] Similar to Iakubinskii and Polivanov, Shklovskii studied linguistics with Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, a professor at St. Petersburg University, who, unlike his radical pupils, never disputed the lack of

although sometimes he interchanged them, designating either a particular object of psychic fixation/attraction (object-choice; object-cathexes) or the "thing-cathexes," its repressed progenitor, the unspeakable event/occurrence that bolted consciousness into action.[131] As opposed to a defined nature of an object, which must be associated with a word, a "thing" exists in the unconscious, is "open," and is not connected to a verbal sign. Freud wrote a series of articles that outlined his theory of the unconscious approximately during the same years that Formalism came into existence, immediately preceding the First World War and extending into the early 1920s.[132] To make sense of the OPOIAZ

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conventional content in works of literature. See Robert Sheldon, "Victor Borisovič Shklovsky: Literary Theory and Practice, 1914-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1966), 14. For Baudouin de Courtenay, however, Saussure's references to psychology would most likely bring to mind the ideas of such philosophers-idealists as Aleksandr Vvedenskii and Nikolai Losskii, or Vladimir Bekhterev, a representative of "objective" psychology, rather than those by Freud. See A. Petrovskii, *Psikhologiia v Rossii – XX vek* (Moscow: URAO, 2000), 8.

[131] Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious," in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: the Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 166-215. On "thing-cathexes" and "object-cathexes," see especially 201-204. In Appendix "C" to the above-cited work, Freud (and his editors) elaborated on his use of the words "object" and "thing": "What he [Freud] here [in his 1891 monograph on aphasia] calls the 'object-presentation' is what in 'The Unconscious" he calls the 'thing-presentation'; while what in 'The Unconscious' he calls the 'object-presentation' denotes a complex made up of the combined 'thing-presentation' and 'word-presentation' – a complex which has no name given to it in the *Aphasia* passage." In line with this explanation, then, Freud's definition of "object-presentation" in the passage on aphasia can be related to his thinking about "thing-presentations" in his later works: "The object-presentation is thus seen to be one that is not closed and almost one that cannot be closed, while the word-presentation is seen to be something closed, even though capable of extension."

[132] Freud wrote "Interpretation of Dreams" in 1899; "Totem and Taboo" in 1912-1913; "On Narcissism: an Introduction," in 1914; "The Unconscious" in 1915; "Mourning and Melancholia" in 1917, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in 1920, and "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" in 1921. According to Martin Miller, Freud's works, beginning with "Interpretations of Dreams" (which appeared in a Russian translation in 1904) were translated from German into Russian before they were translated into any other foreign language. Russian psychoanalysts began attending lectures in Vienna Psychoanalytic Society around 1910 and at that time Freud admitted that "in Russia, psychoanalysis has become generally well-known and has spread widely; almost all of my writings, as well as those of other adherents of analysis, have been translated into Russian." See Martin A. Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), xi, 24, 46. Psychoanalysis in Russia became suspect only under Stalin's rule. According to David Joravsky, whereas in the early 1920s translations from Freud proliferated, they "dwindled to a halt" toward the end of the decade, with the last translation appearing in 1930, which happened to be of *The Future of an Illusion.* See David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 217, 503, note 48.

fixation on psychology, I want to look briefly at Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," written in 1920, because it apparently reflected Freud's Russian experience.[133]

In this often cited work, Freud explored the death drive as a double of the pleasure principle, which existed as an anomaly, accompanying its benign counterpart. Freud had linked both the pleasure principle and the death drive to the phenomenon of repetition-compulsion, which operated on the level of the unconscious. In his study of repetition-compulsion, Freud described his observations in two examples -- children's games and traumatic neuroses – the former relating to its normal manifestation and the latter to pathology. While observing a child's play, Freud noticed that the hiding of toys and then retrieving them was a game through which the child adapted to a traumatic event of his mother's absence. Continuous play with the flinging away and then getting back of toys helped the child to transform his role from a passive observer into an active participant in a drama and enabled him not only manage his mother's absence but also handle unpleasant emotions and create a fantasy of mastery over the mother. The verbalization of his experiences played a very important role in the construction of this fantasy. The child's repeating of the sound "o-o-o-oh," while flinging the toy away produced the meaning of "Go away." His repeated retrieval of the toy with the exclamation "Da!" produced the meaning of "There!"

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[133] Alexander Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 110. According to James Rice, Freud was connected to Russia by numerous ties, including his ancestry – his mother was from Odessa and he had numerous relatives living in Russia – his patients – his most famous patient, the Wolf Man, was also from Odessa – and discussions at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society after the turn of the century, which frequently centered on the subject of "the Russian psyche." Rice believes that "Freud's Russia was to some extent a family affair and a personal matter, not just a purely political and figurative concept" (see James L. Rice, *Freud's Russia: National Identity in the Evolution of Psychoanalysis* [New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1993], 1-7).

Traumatic neurosis presented a pathological extension of a similar psychological process. In Freud's account, an affected person kept replaying a shocking incident in his dreams. On the one hand, repetition helped the person eventually to alleviate the trauma by bringing the incident into consciousness, but on the other, it acquired a destructive or even "demonic" character, which made this person repeat the same negative experience over and over again. In this case, an instance of "bad fate" seemed to hover over the person, and the repetition-compulsion showed its other, non-protective, but death-driven and destructive side.

I believe that the positions of Jakobson and Shklovskii could be placed rather comfortably within the Freudian view of the unconscious and the function of language within it, as formulated in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." While in *Modern Russian Poetry* Jakobson touched on the question of the formation of meaning through repetition of sounds – a "normal" developmental occurrence, according to Freud -- Shklovskii's notion of *ostranenie* fits within the Freudian description of traumatic neuroses, where a repeated element is seen not as a prosaic therapeutic device, but as its opposite, a "demonic" device, which renews the perception of a traumatic experience entailing a shock, a shattering loss of familiar reference points, which anchors an individual in his/her apprehension of reality.

In this way, Jakobson's exploration of the formative power of repetition as a device that brings the unconscious into consciousness and verbalizes the thing, making it object-like, accorded with Freud's analysis of the beginnings of conscious activity. Likewise, seen from Freudian perspective, Shklovskii described the deviant manifestation of the phenomenon of the eternal return of trauma – pain, either physical or mental, as

affecting a person's senses on both conscious and unconscious levels. Unlike Freud, Jakobson and Shklovskii studied poetic language, not psychoanalysis, and accordingly, they analyzed works of poetry from the point of view of how they were made, rather than why they were made. However, in spite of their assertions, both of them dealt with questions that tied literature to concrete events and emotions in people's lives and thus made their theories timelessly relevant. Whereas Jakobson chose to focus on the facts of language, Shklovskii was not indifferent to a hidden traumatic content within them, and the examples he chose for his flagship article bear ample proof to his partiality. His article demonstrated that he trusted the pre-verbal, unconscious senses and attachments; he held them as the loci of human existence, which were intrinsically tied to verbal creativity.

Where does Brik fit within this panoply of associations with Freud? It appears that among the Formalists he was the one for whom Freud's "thing" did not hold much weight. It also appears likely that the reason for this indifference was his dedication to Karl Marx and Marx's version of political economy.[134] As is well known, Marx's most famous discussion of a "thing" was conducted in relation to the commodity, a fetishistic and "mysterious" product of bourgeois society. In the first chapter of *Capital,* Marx described the commodity as both an "object" and a "thing": "A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of one sort or another."[135] For Marx, commodity, as a foundation of capitalist economy, could be

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[134] According to Lilia Brik, Osip conducted a discussion group on political economy at the *gymnasium* (high school), which she attended. It is likely that Brik held most radical views on the subject, because, as Lilia remembered, he was briefly expelled from his own *gymnasium* for "revolutionary activity" (see Jangfeldt, *Love Is the Heart of Everything*, 8).

[135] Karl Marx, *The Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), 1: 41-96.

divided into two components: use-value and exchange value. Of these two constituent parts, the former represented the utility of a made object, "capable of satisfying human wants" and thereby straightforward and easily understood, but the latter was purely "social" in character and therefore "abound[ed] in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." Exchange value, according to Marx, displayed the social stature of producers and manifested itself in the abstraction of concrete human labor from the actual time of production and use-value of the object. Marx linked this social valuation to the "mist-enveloped regions of the religious world," in which "the productions of the human brain appear as independent human beings endowed with life." He called this process "fetishism," clearly condemning it as socially damaging for turning "the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labor affirms itself" into "a social relation between the products." [136]

From the point of view of a Marxist, then, any reference to a purely "subjective," social, or "inherent" value of a "thing," whether an ordinary object or a work of art or literature, would be anathema. In the case of art, taking the Marxist precepts literally would mean stripping an object of its aura (and that of its producer), and therefore partially annulling its signification. In his absolute refusal to accord a question of stable meaning any place in a work of literature, Brik fits the profile of a dedicated follower of Marx, for whom the fear of making an art object into a fetish turned him away from considering artistic activity as a meaning-producing social function. For Brik, at least at his early Formalist stage, art was an arranged play of signifiers, pure and simple, a question of made linguistic objects.

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[136] Ibid., 80, 83.

It is on this point of "inherent" meaning – the crux of social significance of a work of art -- that the views of Brik and Jakobson clearly diverged. They both valued it for the prominence it accorded to the play of the signifier, but for Jakobson this play could not be controlled by the artist in all its aspects. For him, rarely was it free, because it was intrinsically connected with the signified, either embedded in the signifier or acquired with a passage of time. For Brik, signifiers operated on an abstract, mathematical plane, and existed to introduce harmony and order within the apparent chaos of things. The signifiers were hidden, then unearthed. They formed the backbone of an artwork, and were carefully placed there by a mind of a genius. In "Sound Repetitions," Brik's distaste for poetic semantics was such that his argument precluded any possibility of its discussion, except as a question of its total exclusion. Whereas Jakobson thought of language in terms of the dialectical interconnection between form and content, signifier and signified, text and context, Brik preferred to think about form in terms of sheer technical wizardry.

Brik's second important work on poetic language was presented in 1920, but not published until 1927, the year of Stalin's struggle with Trotsky's Left Opposition,[137] and addressed lacunas of his previous study, specifically the question of semantics. In "Rhythm and Syntax," Brik offered a "scientific formulation" of rhythm, which was a hypothetic "movement formed in a certain way" that had nothing to do with the physical reality of the world around the individual. It depended, rather, on inner characteristics of a particular language. Consequently, poetic rhythm could not be deduced from its

[137] Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution,* chapter 5, 120-147.

representation on a page in a written form, but only in oral recitation, because a verse line could be read in various ways, depending on the nature of its "rhythmic impulse." [138]

This impulse was precisely the organizing force of a rhythm, that which distinguished poetry from prose. It was characterized by a certain organization of "tensions" and breaks in a continuum of a movement. In a system of the syllabo-tonic versification, which conceived of rhythm as based on word division into syllables and stresses and which dominated Russian verse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such impulses could be iambic, trochaic, dactylic, anapestic, or amphibrachic. However, argued Brik, the syllabo-tonic versification had been imposed upon the Russian language from ancient Greek poetry and did not fit the specificity of the Russian linguistic system. In ancient Greek, the syllables were distinguished by the length of their vowels. In Russian, such a distinction did not pertain. Therefore, the syllabo-tonic basis of Russian verse had to be altered eventually in favor of a purely tonic one – a tendency that merged the distance between prose and poetry and manifested itself most completely in the post-Symbolist generation of poets, most notably Maiakovskii.[139]

While discussing the relationship between rhythm and syntax in a verse, Brik later affirmed the coexistence of the "rhythmic impulse" and "poetic semantics" and described their constant struggle for dominance: "at all times … there existed two attitudes toward a verse: one emphasized the rhythmic aspect of it and the other, the semantic one." The Futurists accorded attention to both in the semantically charged poetry of Maiakovskii and the purely musical euphony of Kruchenykh's and Khlebnikov's transrational

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[138] Osip Brik, "Ritm i sintaksis," *Novyi LEF*, no. 3 (1927): 15-20. The continuation of this article was printed in *Novyi LEF* nos. 4, 5 and 6 (1927): 23-29, 32-37, and 33-39, respectively. On the presentation of paper by Brik on "rhythmico-syntactic figures," used as the basis for the article, see Erlich, *Russian Formalism,* 89, note 12.

[139] Ibid.

language. Maiakovskii's political relevancy coincided with the "intensification of the semantics" when "life advanced a new theme and when old verse forms, which were intrinsically connected with its already senseless semantics, could not grasp it."[140]

In the conclusion of the article, Brik criticized the "rhythmical-syntactical clichés," according to which either the rhythmic impulse overwhelmed the semantics and allowed for any content whatsoever to be inserted into its rhythmic structure, or the rhythm was reduced to "useless exercise, some verbal trick," reflecting an attitude of people who did not see any value in poetry and would be very happy to dispense with it altogether. Brik insisted that in poetry the rhythmic and semantic elements "did not exist separately, but appear simultaneously, creating a specific rhythmical and syntactical order, which differs from regular conversational speech and from a *zaum* sonority."[141] The verse line, for Brik, was not "the result of the struggle of *zaum* and the conversational semantics," but presented "its own rhythmic semantics, which exists independently and develops according to its own laws."[142] If the rhythmic element dominated the semantics in a verse – a tendency which Brik detected in much of contemporary poetry – then poetry became more like music and "transcended the limits of poetic speech."[143] In its delineation of the dominance of rhythm over syntax, Brik joined the argument of his other colleagues, such as Boris Tomashevskii and Vitalii

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[140] "Обычно требование усиления семантики является тогда, когда жизнь выдвигает новую тематику и когда старые формы стиха, неразрывно связанные с своей уже обессиленной семантикой, не в силах эту тематику новую охватить" (Osip Brik, "Ritm i sintaksis," *Novyi LEF* no. 4 [1927]: 28).
[141] "На самом же деле эти два элемента в отдельности не существуют, а возникают одновременно, создавая специфический ритмико-синтактический строй, отличный как от обычной разговорной речи, так и от заумного звукоряда" Brik, "Ritm i sintaksis," no. 6 (1927): 36.
[142] Ibid.
[143] On "rhythmical-syntactic clichés," see "Ritm i sintaksis," no. 5 (1927): 32-37 and no. 6 (1927): 34-37.

Zhirmunskii, who defined poetic rhythm as "deviation from meter."[144] In his comparison of poetry to music Brik once again proved his connection to the Symbolists, Bely in particular, who emphasized the connection of poetry to music.[145]

In his two articles on poetic language, Brik attempted to build a theoretical base for salient features of his friend's poetry, particularly its unusual "prosaic" effect, which did not destroy its poetic nature – a concept that fit into Shklovskii's notion of artistic device both in terms of its form and content. Notably, toward the end of his article on rhythm and syntax, Brik paid a tribute to Bely in his analysis of iambic tetrameter, a classic measure of Russian poetry, which was scrupulously examined by Bely before Brik in the book *Symbolism*, intended as a philosophical and practical guide to the eponymous movement.[146] Two articles in the book devoted to the role of rhythm in poetry analyzed exceptions to the rule – various patterns of deviations from iambic tetrameter, which in its regular form alternates four unstressed and four stressed syllables.[147]

Bely demonstrated that many Russian classics used so-called "accelerations" [*uskoreniia*] to diversify the sound of their lines. Pyrrhycs, another word for Bely's accelerations, is a group of unstressed syllables, resulting from missed or unarticulated stresses within a classical metric scheme. Because the Russian language has many multi-

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[144] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 30-31. Tomashevskii and Zhirmunskii wrote two books on the subject after Brik's presentations of his lectures on rhythm, but before their publication in *Novyi LEF*: Boris Tomashevkii, *Russkoe stikhoslozhenie. Metrika.* (Petrograd: Academia, 1923) and Vitalii Zhirmunskii, *Vvedenie v metriku* (Leningrad: Academia 1925. Reprint, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971).

[145] Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory*, 73.

[146] See Andrei Bely, "Opyt kharakteristiki russkogo chetyrekhstopnogo iamba" (A case of analysis of Russian iambic tetrameter) and "Sravnitel'naia morfoligiia ritma russkikh lirikov v iambicheskom diametre" (Comparative morphology of iambic rhythm in Russian lyrical poetry) in Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910. Reprint, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969), 286-330 and 331-395.

[147] Iambic tetrameter is a meter used in Russian poetry since the early 18th century.

syllabic but mono-stressed words, pyrrhycs were common in Russian poetry. In his articles, Bely analyzed not only pyrrhycs in all of the four feet of the iambic line in a number of Russian classics, but also various combinations of such lines within a stanza. Thus, Bely completed a paradoxical task of making a rule from an exception by canonizing rhythm as "a sum of exceptions from the given metrical form."[148] In his poetry, Bely excelled at using many ingenious variations on the classic iambic tetrameter.[149] In "Rhythm and Syntax," Brik followed Bely in examining irregularities of the syllabic basis of traditional Russian versification, with one fundamental difference -- instead of labeling them "exceptions to the rule," he designed a new rule to fit the exception. In a way, Brik had made an attempt to alter theory of the versification in the same way that Maiakovskii altered Bely's legacy in writing poetry.

Brik's decision to become a critic – an intermediary between the world of literature and that of politics – not only demonstrated great energy, but also bespoke his faith in language as a play of signifiers, the focus of his earliest investigations at OPOIAZ. The question of meaning was tangential for his study of poetry, entering his discourse at a later point, when the political climate became more restrictive and focused on consolidating the power of an autocrat, Stalin. Brik's involvement in politics became earnest shortly after the victory of the Bolsheviks, when he enthusiastically embraced the

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[148] Bely, "Opyt kharakteristiki russkogo chetyrekhsotpnogo iamba," *Simvolizm,* 286.

[149] According to Kiril Taranovskii', the rhythm of Bely's early verses is very close to Pushkin's. Over time, however, Bely imparted a completely untraditional and odd-sounding sequencing of unstressed and stressed syllables upon it. In 1904, he began stressing the first and the last syllables within the tetrameter, similar, but not identical, to the Russian poets of the eighteenth century as well as to his contemporary, Bruisov. In 1906, Bely left the traditional rhythmic variations for his own version. Then, he began to stress the third ictus over the second, which resulted in very unusually sounding lines, with such structure as: -'-- -' -'. It means that the lines such as: "Pods**ma**trivaet **vsë** za **mnoi**" or "Ves**ny** blagou**kha**nnyi **za**pakh" commanded the rhythm of the verse. Bely clearly made it his goal to favor the pyrrhics over the regularity of iambic structure. See Kiril Taranovskii, "Chetyrekhstopnyi iamb Andreia Belogo" (Four-measured iambus of Andrei Bely) *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, no. 10 (1966): 127-147.

offer of the Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii to cooperate with the new regime. By this act he had opened up a new opportunity for the Futurists and the Formalists to participate in the political life of the country.

CHAPTER TWO
THE CONTEXT: LEFT ART AND ITS POLITICS

> Good and evil are opposed like "rouge" and "noir" in roulette. In order to win, it is necessary to bet systematically either on "rouge" or on "noir" -- to keep going from one to another will make one a sure loser.[1]

Apart from studies on Russian Formalism, literature about Brik explores his political activity, because of his active participation in the Bolshevik government after the revolution. In the introduction to a collection of Brik's writings published in the fall of 1974 in a British film periodical *Screen,* Maria Enzensberger described the critic as a dedicated believer in a "social role of art," which "gave impetus to his literary and organizational activities in the years following the October Revolution."[2] In the same article, Enzensberger suggested that Brik's concern with politics was not an idealistic belief, but a by-product of his and Maiakovskii's "fight for dominance in the arts" and that his post-revolutionary devotion to the Bolsheviks was the reflection of this attitude.[3] Enzensberger interpreted Brik's 1918 writings in the *Iskusstvo kommuny*, calling for artists to become "artists-proletarians" as "extreme utilitarianism" in the approach to art, justified by the changes in the society's attitudes toward art and artists.

In 1976, Bengt Jangfeldt, writing mostly about Maiakovskii, focused on the poet's participation in revolutionary politics and mentioned Brik only as a member of "the group around Maiakovskii" known for his articles in the *Iskusstvo kommuny*, participation in various Futurist initiatives spearheaded by Maiakovskii, and memoirs

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[1] "Добро и зло противоположны как «руж» и «нуар» в рулетку. Чтобы выиграть, надо систематически ставить или на «руж», или на «нуар», бросаться же от одного к другому – верный проигрыш" (Osip Brik's aphorism -- see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 250).
[2] Enzensberger, "Osip Brik: Selected Writings," 35.
[3] Ibid., 42.

about the poet.[4] Two years later, Vahan Barooshian attempted to shift the angle of scholarly investigation of the relationship between the poet and the critic and wrote a book entitled *Brik and Maiakovskii,* declaring his intention to correct the neglect that the poet's friend suffered under the pens of other writers, calling him "one of the brilliant, commanding theoreticians of the Russian avant-garde of the century."[5] Although Barooshian's avowed intent was to find "an objective path to the historical truth about Brik," his book provided an uncritical account of his subject, in which the author did not question many disputed decisions made by Brik, such as his move to join the Bolsheviks precisely at the moment when they forcefully imposed the legitimacy of their power or in his joining the party and the Cheka at the height of the revolutionary terror.[6]

In this chapter, I will approach Brik's involvement in politics through the angle proposed by Enzensberger – Brik's and Maiakovskii's desire to achieve "dominance in the arts" above all other considerations. I will begin my investigation with Brik's involvement with the liberal press, namely Maksim Gorky's journal *Letopis'* (The Annals), then will move on to his participation in the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers, his relationship with Anatolii Lunacharskii, the Commissar of Enlightenment under the Bolsheviks, and his attitude to the philosophy of Lenin's rival and the leader of Proletkult, Aleksandr Bogdanov. In describing Brik's reaction to the Bolsheviks' take-over of power in October 1917, I will trace his changing political allegiances from outright criticism of the Bolsheviks' art program to joining their government in the fall of

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[4] See Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism*, passim.
[5] Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, vii.
[6] According to Barooshian, Brik joined the party and Cheka at the urging of his friend Boris Malkin, then "a high party official" and the head of Gosizdat in order to demonstrate his and the Futurists' loyalty to the party. Brik's services to the Cheka consisted of "providing lectures to Checkists" in order to train them for "prosecuting cases in revolutionary tribunals." Judging by the tone of his narrative, Barooshian did not consider this activity reprehensible. Ibid., chapter 1.

1918, his denigration of Proletkult, and his ambiguous relationship to "Marxist Nietzscheans" – Gorky, Lunacharsky, Bogdanov – with whom he had a cooperative, but conflicting relationship. In this connection, I will argue for Brik's strong dependence on Nietzsche's philosophy in his belief in an "overman" -- an artist, capable of remaking the world according to his will -- but also his divergence from the optimism of Marxist patrons in their conviction that every worker could become such an "overman" through adequate instruction.

In connection with Brik's work for a Komfut, a collective of "Communists-Futurists," I will also discuss Brik's attitude toward *byt* or everyday life, a notion that was broached by Russian scholars within the last decade. In 1994, in her book *Common Places,* Svetlana Boym singled out the term as designating "the reign of stagnation and routine, of daily transience without transcendence," which became current with the Symbolists and the avant-garde, but gradually entered common parlance. In its absolute opposition to *bytie*, the realm of spiritual pursuit, *byt* became a reviled symbol of everything retrograde, dirty, and unorganized. [7] In her dissertation, Christina Kiaer discussed the efforts of leading Bolshevik statesmen, such as Lev Trotskii, and Constructivists artists, such as Vladimir Tatlin, to transform *byt* by cleaning it up and making it organized.[8] In this chapter, I will discuss Brik's divergence from the wide-spread Futurists' aversion to *byt* and the way he refrained from participation in discussions and campaigns against it.

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[7] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29-40.
[8] Kiaer, "Russian Constructivist 'Object' and Revolutionizing of Everyday Life," 5-40.

Brik and Maiakovskii found each other on the common ground of art and democracy. Their relationship was reciprocal. Brik financed and promoted Maiakovskii's publications. Maiakovskii helped Brik to pass from the private to the public sphere at a time of intense revolutionary turmoil when a neutral attitude to political events was hardly possible. In July 1915, when Brik "fell in love" with Maiakovskii, Russia was in the midst of a war, in the wake of two revolutions and on the brink of another. At the very least, an agreement on an attitude toward the war was a necessary condition for survival of the friendship between the two men.

The disastrous war with Japan in 1905 prompted widespread discontent with the economic and military inefficiency of the tsarist government. The propertied classes expressed their desire for a constitutional reform and, after a brutal suppression of a peaceful workers' demonstration on January 9, 1905, intensification of the workers' clashes with authorities and peasant revolts forced Nicholas II to sign the October Manifesto, which circumscribed his power by the formation of the state Duma, the Russian Parliament. However, the function of this elective government tended to be merely consultative and subordinate to the monarch. As an auxiliary governmental body, the Duma could not introduce any laws without the approval of the court. Because of the tsar's reticence to concede to any democratic measures, discontent among peasants and workers grew. The Social Democrats – both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks – did their best to channel this discontent into revolutionary action.

The beginning of First World War in 1914, which Russia fought against Germany and Austria-Hungary, exacerbated the situation. The country suffered a series of defeats and was losing vast territory along the Western border. Everyone in Russia had an

opinion on the war, which divided society into two camps of *oborontsy* (the "defensists") and *porazhentsy* (the defeatists), with the former supporting "war to the winning end" and the latter propagating Russia's defeat in order to speed up the fall of monarchy.[9] The Briks unabashedly sided with the camp of the "defeatists."[10] Apparently, by the time he met the Briks, Maiakovskii was also a "defeatist."[11] For Osip, the years between 1915 and 1921, plagued by extreme political turmoil within the country, were characterized by intensive journalistic work and changing political allegiances, guided by his desire to find his own place within the kaleidoscopic political landscape.

II. 1. Gorky and *Letopis'*

At the time of a devastating war and increasing political instability, what were the anti-war democratic poet and his like-minded patron to do? In 1915, Maiakovskii established a friendly relationship with Gorky,[12] who by then was one of the best-known national writers, firmly identified with a group of the mainstream "critical realists," such as Ivan Bunin, Leonid Andreev, and Aleksandr Kuprin. As supporters of defeatism, they found a common forum for expression of their ideas in Gorky's *Letopis',* the first issue of which appeared in December 1915.

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[9] Scholars of Russian history, namely Sheila Fitzpatrick, refer to *oborontsy* and *porazhentsy* as a way to designate the two camps of people who either supported the war or opposed it. The word *oborontsy* came from the verb *oboroniat'*, "to defend," and thus is literally translated as "the ones who are for defense." The word *porazhentsy* is derived from the noun *porazhenie*, "defeat," and is therefore translated as "the one who are for defeat."

[10] According Lilia Brik, "From the first day of the war we were passionate defeatists. We felt no patriotic uplift whatsoever, and the day before the war was declared we got away on a Volga steamer, on which we sailed until the first companies of reinforcements were sent to the front. When we received a telegram from Moscow that it was all right to return, we came back…" (Lilia Brik, Memoirs 1905-1917. Manuscript, 1929 [?] Cited in Jangfeldt, ed., *Love is the Heart of Everything*, 10).

[11] See Maiakovskii's autobiography, "Ia sam," (I, myself) in which he noted that although he harbored patriotic feelings in the beginning of the war (the end of summer and throughout the fall of 1914), toward the winter, he developed "disgust and hatred of war." See *PSS*, 1: 22-23.

[12] Maiakovskii met Gorky in the summer of 1914. See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: Khronika zhizni i deiatel'snosti*,102.

As a periodical, *Letopis'* conformed to a type of "thick journal," which from the mid-1800s was fundamental in forming public opinion in Russia.[13] It was because of this literary fame that Gorky was able to found the journal legally; on the political front, the writer remained highly suspect. Tsarist authorities were aware of his Marxist sympathies – he was affiliated with many Social Democrats, including Lenin, and he edited a Marxist journal *Zhizn'* (Life). After the events of 1905, he fled into exile for fear of persecution for his participation in the uprising against the government.[14]

Gorky founded *Letopis'* in 1915, shortly after his return from his seven-year exile. As was to be expected, the journal mixed publication of innovative modern literature with radical-liberal and moderate Social-Democratic ideas, reflecting the literary and political tastes of its founder. This radical political-literary orientation must have been one feature that attracted Brik to Gorky's journal. According to Sofia Dubnova-Erlich, a regular contributor to the journal, bringing art and politics together was a radical and experimental enterprise:

> For those of us who took part both in the revolutionary movement and in the captivatingly intense cultural life of the Silver Age, it was difficult to tie together these two spheres. The complexity of this task was aggravated by the fact that the literary 'elite,' forming around such journals as *Vesy* (Scales)*, Apollon* (Apollo) or the publishing house Scorpion, viewed Marxism as something very primitive and *terre à terre*. On the other hand, revolutionary circles adopted an old prejudice against innovation in literature and art and a habit of labeling as decadence any deviation from realism. My paper on a combination of a revolutionary attitude to politics and innovation in literature presented at the Youth Circle provoked stormy discussions and attacks from all sides. The war brought into literature a new patriotic stream. … Ideas of the defensists became widely popular among the socially conscious *intelligentsiia* circles. During the first months of the war, I

[13] "Thick journal" [*tolstyi zhurnal*] was a monthly publication, containing the latest works of fiction, as well as articles on political, scientific, and literary subjects. For a general history of such journals in Russia, see Deborah A. Martinsen, *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For information on turn-of-the-century period of this history, see Joan Delaney Grossman, "Rise and decline of the 'literary' journal: 1880-1917" in the above book.

[14] For details about Gorky's life, see Barry P. Scherr, *Maxim Gorky* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), chapter 1.

> was also caught up in the defensist mood, but after some time I was more and more troubled by its ideological instability; also, I was repulsed by the great-Russian patriotism. It became more and more clear to me that the internationalist conception of war and peace proves more clearly the primordial and for me indubitable link between pacifism and socialism. These feelings, as well as the desire to participate in an organ governed by Gorky, brought me to *Letopis'*.[15]

In the domain of literature, *Letopis'* published such international writers as Bunin, Lev Tolstoy, Evgenii Zamiatin, Isaak Babel, Valerii Briusov, Aleksandr Blok, H. G. Wells, and Romain Rolland. In the department of *publitsistika* (social and political journalism), Brik's future nemesis, Viacheslav Polonskii, was a notable presence. On the political front, *Letopis'* gathered Social Democrats opposed to the war, including a non-party affiliate Aleksandr Bogdanov, a Bolshevik Anatolii Lunacharskii, and Mensheviks Iulii Martov, Iurii Kamenev, Vladimir Bazarov, Nikolai Sukhanov, and others. Apart from being open to left-leaning political and cultural currents, *Letopis'* was known for its welcoming attitude to foreign writers and national minorities, Jews in particular. Sofia Dubnova-Erlich, who was of Jewish descent, remembered that when Gorky asked her to contribute for the review section of the journal, he specifically requested that she

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[15] "Для тех из нас, кто одновременно принимал участие в революционном движении и в захватывающе-интенсивной культурной жизни серебрянного века, установление связи между этими двумя сферами являлось нелёгкой задачей. Сложность её углублялась тем, что в среде литературной «элиты», группировавшейся вокруг таких журналов какак «Весы» и «Аполлон» или издательства «Скорпион», распространён был взгляд на марксизм, как нечто весьма примитивное и «terre-à-terre»; с другой стороны, в революционных кругах жило унаследованное от ряда поколений предубеждение против новаторства в литературе и искусстве и привычка на всякое отступление от реализма наклеивать ярлык декадентства. Мой реферат в «Кружке Молодых» на тему о сочетании революционности в политике с новаторством в литературе вызвал бурные прения и нападки с разных сторон. Война внесла в литературу новыю струю – патриотическую. … В широких кругах общественно-настроенной интеллигенции приобрели популярность идеи оборончества. В первые месяцы войны я тоже была захвачена оборонческими настроениями, но с течением времени меня всё более начала смущать шаткость их идейного обоснования; кроме того, я чувствовала определённое отталкивание от «царь-градского» патриотизма. Становилось всё более очевидным, что исконная и для меня не подлежащая сомнению связь между пацифизмом и социализмом значительно явственнее в интернационалистской концепции войны и мира. Эти настроения, наряду с желанием принять участие в органе, руководимым Горьким, привели меня в «Летопись»" (Sofia Dubnova-Erlich, *Obshchestvennyi oblik zhurnala "Letopis'"* [The Social characteristic of the journal "*Letopis'"*] [New York: Inter-University Project on the History of the Menshevik Movement, July 1963], 3-4).

regularly include information about Jewish literature. At this point, Brik's Jewish origin was not an obstacle, but an asset to publishing in *Letopis'*.

Maiakovskii was invited as a regular contributor to the journal and intended to publish his anti-war poem *War and Peace* [*Voina i mir*] in the ninth issue, but the publication was prohibited by the censor.[16] The same ninth issue, however, featured Brik's first publication for *Letopis'* -- a review of a collection of poetry *The Seventh Veil*.[17] During the next four months, Brik wrote four more short critical articles: one on a script for a play, two on a collection of stories and one on a novel.[18] These first reviews – all about lesser-known authors – defined Brik's laconic and straightforward writing style and revealed issues of concern to him.

Most of Brik's reviews for *Letopis'* were negative. He castigated poetry in *The Seventh Veil* as amateurish and non-professional. According to him, Sergei Auslender's book *Warrior's Heart* was a collection of common literary clichés. Aleksei Okulov's *On Amyl-River and Other Stories* were described as being "steeped in weak-willed and impotent romanticism… which is looking for a way out in frenzied dreams about some 'beautiful' force, as opposed to the ordinary one, sober, but 'ugly'." In Miklashevskii's script for a play, Brik criticized the author's orientation toward ancient principles of *commedia dell' arte* and called for the creation of new forms of theatrical expression that

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[16] See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika*, 116, 118. Excerpts from Maiakovskii's *Voina i mir* appeared in *Letopis'* nos. 2-4 (1917) and nos. 7-8 (1917). The collaboration, of course, was only possible with a welcoming attitude toward Maiakovskii's poetry on the part of the editors. According to Dubnova-Erlich, *Letopis'* was the only respected publication in Russia that would agree to publish his poetry. See Dubnova-Erlich, *Obshchestvennyi oblik,* 10.

[17] Osip Brik, "Otzyv na stikhi *Sed'moe pokryvalo*" (Review of the collection of verses *The Seventh Veil*) *Letopis'* no. 9 (September 1916): 311.

[18] Titles that Brik reviewed for *Letopis'* before February 1917, include: 1) script for a play by K.M. Mikhlashevskii, *Krovozhadnyi turka i volshebnik magi* (A blood-thirsty turk and a magician) (*Letopis'* no. 10 [October 1916]; 2) a book by S. Auslender, *Serdtse voina* (Warrior's heart) (*Letopis'* no.11 [November 1916]; 3) N. Timkovskii's novel *Dvorianskaia berloga* (Nobles' nest) (*Letopis'* no. 1 [January 1917]; and 4) a book by A. Okulov *Na Amyle-reke i drugie rasskazy* (On Amyl-river and other stories) (*Letopis'* no. 1 [January 1917].

would correspond to modern life. Of the five reviews, Brik wrote positively only about Timoshevskii's novel *The Nobles' Nest*. Brik liked the book, because it was

> not a novel, not an artistic structure, but a truthful and precise narration about revival of serfdom, which reappeared because of suitable economic conditions. On the one hand, we have landowners -- corrupt, cruel, abusing their power in countless ways; on the other, we have peasants -- obsequious, hiding, waiting for their opportunity for revenge. Their mutual existence is built around anger and hatred…. The story is told from the point of view of a teacher, who arrived from the city…. In horror, she escapes back to the city: "I have to go home as soon as possible. [I long to] see intelligent faces and listen to someone who is not a brutal egoist."[19]

These first reviews reveal Brik's favorite themes, as they were to surface throughout his subsequent writing, such as the defense of "truth" in art against any manifestation of "dreamy" romanticism, the advocacy of the professionalism of artistic labor and of an orientation to the present as opposed to the past. Despite their categorical tone, the *Letopis'* reviews did not indicate Brik's partiality in political matters. It was only with the advent of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, in February 1917, that his political interests came to the fore through his polemical articles, whose main concern was the defense of the artists' right to express their ideas freely, without governmental intervention.

II. 2. February Revolution and the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers

On February 28, 1917 the political unrest in the country – provoked by food shortages and the draining war -- became so extreme, that Nicholas II was forced to

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[19] "Не роман, не художественное произведение, а правдивое, чёткое повесвование о возродившемся на экономической почве крепостном праве. С одной стороны, помещики, развращённые, жестокие, всячески злоупотребляющие своей силой; с другой – крестьяне, угодливые, притаившиеся, выжидающие только случая, чтобы отомстить. На злобе и ненависти построена их совместная жизнь…Рассказ ведётся от лица учительницы, приехавшей из города на кондиции. В ужасе бежит она назад в город: «Скорей, скорей домой. Увидеть интеллигентные лица, услышать речи, продиктованные ни одним грубым эгоизмом»" (Osip Brik, review of N. Timkovskii' novel *Dvorianskaia berloga* in *Letopis'* no. 1 [January 1917]: 325).

abdicate from his throne. A unique system of dual power was established in the capital: on the one hand, there was the Provisional Government, chosen "from above" by members of the old Duma and consisting of a coalition of liberals, constitutional democrats, and socialists. On the other, there were the Soviets, elected by the factory committees, soldier garrisons, and sailor units. The latter were led by a coalition of Socialists, which included Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. At the outset of the February Revolution, these Soviet organs elected "from below" were under the Mensheviks' control. Toward the end of the summer, however, the Mensheviks, who were ready to cooperate with the Provisional Government on establishing a permanent regime, were losing their influence on the increasingly belligerent crowd, and the Bolsheviks were taking charge of the Soviets under the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!"

Collapse of the political status quo on the state level led to a house-of-cards effect upon the entire institutional and bureaucratic structure of the old regime. In the art world, the stronghold of the hierarchical tsarist system – the Imperial Academy of Arts – was all but destroyed. All classes there were cancelled; the president, director, and many teachers were asked to resign their positions; and the students convened to determine a series of reforms necessary to make their institution survive under a new regime.[20] Despite the restructuring that took place within the once all-powerful Academy, the initiative for action came not from there, but from the Commission on Art Affairs [*Komissiia po delam iskusstv*], organized by Gorky immediately after the tsar's abdication.[21]

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[20] V. P. Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Moskvy i Petrograda v 1917 godu* (Artistic life of Moscow and Petrograd in 1917) (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1983), 72.

[21] Gorky convened a meeting of established writers, artists, critics, and other cultural figures as early as March 4 (two days after the abdication) in his Petrograd apartment. See Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn',* 74-76 and Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 8.

Members of the Commission included Gorky himself, the singer Fedor Shaliapin, and artists and critics from the Symbolist journal *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art), such as Alexandre Benois, Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin, and Nikolai Rerikh. Gorky's Commission took the initiative into its hands by immediately meeting with the Commissar of Arts in the Provisional Government, Nikolai L'vov, to discuss questions relating to preservations of monuments as well as "projection of new monuments, planning of the governing organ for the Fine Arts, the organization of festivals for the people, theaters, composition of the hymn celebrating liberty, etc."[22] As is evident from their declaration, the Commission had plans that surpassed those of a purely consultative organ, and aimed at taking charge of the future Ministry of Fine Arts, under Benois' directorship.[23]

In the same way that the Provisional Government was competing for power against the Soviets, Gorky's Commission had met with a stern reserve from a host of artistic and civil groups, with Brik at the helm of the opposition. Like many rank-and-file members of the artistic community interested in the reform of art organizations, Brik joined artists, writers, and critics of varying trends in the Freedom of Art [*Svoboda iskusstvu*] group, set up on March 10, 1917 to wrestle power of decision-making not from the decaying Academy, but more importantly from Gorky's Commission. On March 12, a meeting of the group organized the Union of Art Workers [*Soiuz deliatelei iskusstv*], set up to defend interests of independent artists and art professionals.[24] One of Brik's articles

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[22] Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn',* 76. Gorky's Commission met with L'vov on March 5, the day following the meeting in Gorky's apartment.
[23] Ibid., 87-89.
[24] On Brik's fight with the Academy, see Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 48; on the confrontation of the Freedom of Art group, the Union of Art Workers and Gorky's Commission, see Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn',* 87-88, 90. A large meeting of "all art workers" on March 12 in Mikhailovskii Theater brought together various groups of artists in a heated confrontation about the future of the arts.

for Gorky's newspaper *Novaia zhizn'* (New Life), which replaced *Letopis'* in 1917,[25] took issue with Benois' support for the extensive export of works of art, which the latter justified by his fear that these works would be destroyed in Russia, unless they were sold abroad. Benois was convinced, that "a work of art defies borders: it strives… to wander around the world."[26] Brik was absolutely against the lifting of restrictions on the export of art. In the article "Buying-Selling and Art Treasures," his dedication to Marxism once again becomes apparent, as he perceptively caught Benois' penchant toward neglecting market relationships governing the sale of art: "It does not matter whether a work of art possesses cosmopolitan quality or not… what does matter, is to understand that [when sold], this unique work obeys the laws of free trade, which would equate it with any object of mass use. What Benois represents as a world tour of a work of art, spreading everywhere the joy of emotions contained within it, is, in fact, only a goal of an act of trade, the result of which would be the possession of the work by the one who pays the most. I do not think A. [leksandr] N. [ikolaevich] will insist that monetary wealth necessarily coincides with the richness of understanding of art."[27]

Gorky spoke on the necessity of forming the Commission in the conditions of anarchy; Maiakovskii, possibly Brik, and others protested against "a small group of people who took the initiative to organize a Ministry and [thereby] usurped its power." See Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn',* 92-93 and Krusanov, *Russian avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 9-16.

[25] The last issue of *Letopis'* appeared in December 1917 and the first issue of *Novaia zhizn'* came out on May 1, 1917.

[26] "Художественное произведение не признаёт границ: оно обладает… стремлением к странствованию по свету…" (Aleksandre Benois, "Zakreposhcheniie khudozhenstvennykh sokrovishch," [Binding of art treasures] *Novaia zhizn'* no. 50 [June 15, 1917]; quoted in Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn',* 170).

[27] "Дело вовсе не в том, космополитично ли искусство или нет;… а в том, подлежит ли неповторимое художественное произведение свободному безконтрольному товарному обмену наравне с предметами массового производства. То что А. Н. Бенуа изображает, как мировую прогулку художественного произведения, разносящего всюду радость вложенных в него эмоций, есть на самом деле только цель торговых сделок, в результате которых вещь остаётся за тем, кто доложе заплатит. И едва ли будет А. Н. настаивать на том, что денежное богатство непременно совпадает с богатством художественного понимания" (Osip Brik, "Kuplia-prodazha i khudozhestvennye sokrovishcha," *Novaia zhizn'* June 25 [July 8], 1917, 5).

Brik made his most comprehensive statement on the relationship between art and politics in the article "Democratization of Art."[28] Here, he explained his revolutionary sympathies and the link between politics, society, and artistic matters:

> If the meaning of the Russian revolution was limited by its political aspect, if its goal was establishment of this or that public regime, then, of course, art would have been unnecessary. … But building of the state is not the essence of the Russian revolution. It calls for posing and solving problems of social and cultural life in a new way and it is this that constitutes its worldwide significance.[29]

He then proceeded to develop his main argument concerning the relationship between democracy and art. In Brik's opinion, misunderstanding on this issue stemmed from the confusion between two meanings of the word – "art as personal creation and art as a social-cultural phenomenon." He expanded on this point:

> Confusion of these two concepts is based on the conviction that democratization of art consists in its service to the people; that artists, poets, and musicians must now create for the people. Those [people] are right who argue against this opinion, asserting that the true artist creates only for himself and for those who need him and that only on this condition is creativity possible. But those [people] are wrong who think that this objection abolishes the very possibility of application of applying democratic principles to art.[30]

It is the task of democracy to structure the relationship between artists and the rest of society:

> Without doubt, creativity must be free. However, there is also no doubt that true democracy never encroached upon this freedom. … While we talk of art in terms of personal creativity, none of the democratic principles apply. Democratization

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[28] Osip Brik, "Demokratizatsiia iskusstva," *Letopis'* nos. 7-8 (July/August 1917): 298-302.

[29] "Если бы смысл русской революции исчерпывался её политической стороной, если бы всё сводилось к установлению того или иного государственного строя, то, конечно, искусство было би ни при чём… Но не в этом суть русской революции, и не государственным строительством ограничивается её творческий размах. Её призвание – по новому поставить и разрешить основные проблемы социальной и культурной жизни; в этом её мировое значение" (ibid., 298).

[30] "На смешении этих двух понятий основано очень распространённое убеждение, что демократизация искусства в том, что отныне оно должно служить народу, что художник, поэт, музыкант – должны теперь творить для народа. И правы те, кто возражает на это, что подлинный художник творит только для себя и для тех, кому он нужен; и что только при таком условии возможно само творчество. Но не правы они, думая, что этим возражением устраняется сама возможность приложения демократических принципов к искусству" (ibid., 299).

> does not mean the education, or even less the forcing individuals to go in a certain direction. But the concept of art is not limited to any individual demands. The freely formed poets, artists, and musicians who show their creations enter into a complicated relationship among themselves and the rest of the society. This interaction creates art as a sociological and cultural phenomenon. It is here that democracy encounters problems that should be solved.[31]

Brik dedicated the rest of the article to arguing that the so-called *narodnoe tvorchestvo* (folk art), as opposed to "high art" or simply art, is the product of a hierarchical value system remaining since autocracy. He insisted that an openly contemptuous attitude toward folk art, on one hand, and, on the other, exuberantly enthusiastic ones were equally condescending. The art of the people should be judged according to new values, established by new democratic institutions. Brik concluded his first democratic manifesto with an appeal "to begin working immediately on all questions of artistic life and to chart ways of their resolution according to democratic principles."

Thus, "Democratization of Art" emphasized that each artist had to create as an individual, free from any societal pressure. The society should take care of this artist and make sure that his creative energy is not spent in vain. However, the author left open the question of how exactly such an artist would fit into a democratic society and how democracy would deal with each individual artist. In this respect, the minutes of meetings of the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers provide helpful clarification.

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[31] "Несомненно, что творчество должно быть свободно. Но также несомненно, что подлинная демократия никогда на эту свободу не покушалась. Пока речь идёт об искусстве, как о личном творчестве, никакие демократические принципы неприложимы. Демократизация отнюдь не значит воспитание, а тем менее насилование индивидуальности в определённом направлении. Но запросами индивидуальности не исчерпывается понятие искусства. Свободно определившиеся поэты, художники, музыканты, выступая с плодами своего творчества, вступают с собой и с обществом в сложное взаимотношение, создавая этим искусство, как социально-культурное явление. И тут перед демократией стоит целый ряд задач, подлежащих её решению" (ibid).

Brik and Maiakovskii joined the Left Block of the Union, which united the most radically inclined group of members,[32] in the beginning of April 1917. [33] The minutes of the meetings display Brik's active participation and leading role within the block. Out of twenty-five meetings, conducted from April 12 to November 17, 1917, he chaired fifteen.[34] Judging by the minutes, Brik emerged as a leader of the group in the course of his effort to make the Left Block more organized and to make it formulate, accept and implement a set of clearly defined principles. For example, on May 10, he proposed to introduce a number of conditions for prospective members, which stipulated that in order to join the Block, the applicants had to prove their "commitment to the Revolution" and "obedience to the tactics of the Block"; they were also required to "receive recommendations of two acting members." In the heat of his organizational drive, Brik insisted on the necessity to expel those members who refused to succumb to "party discipline." [35]

Brik made his *tour de force* by presenting a draft of the program for his subdivision of the Left Block. It consisted of four parts. The first part defined the position of the Left Block vis-à-vis the Union of Art Workers. It stated:

> Whereas the Union of Art Workers a) is based on the declaration of the complete autonomy of art, and b) that as a representative organization, it is a bearer of the idea of artistic parliamentarism, the Left Block participates in all the work of the Union, insisting on the implementation of its program and its tactics. At the same

[32] Such artists as Vladimir Tatlin, Vsevolod Meierhold, Vera Ermolaeva, Nikolai Punin and Natan Altman were members of the Left Block.
[33] E. A. Dinershtein, "Maiakovskii v fevrale-oktiabre 1917 goda," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: novoe o Maiakovskom* (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1958), 543-44 and Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 19-20.
[34] For example, on in 1917, he chaired meetings held on May 10, May 11, May 13, May 27, June 3, June 10, July 1, September 22, October 2, October 9, October 10, October 15, October 19, and November 17. See minutes of meetings of the Left Block of Union of Art Workers. See RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, dela 310-311.
[35] Ibid.

time, the group [Left Block] reserves the right to its freedom of action in case of a significant deviation of the Union's majority from the principle of the autonomy of art and the recognition of artists as individuals represented by law.[36]

The second part of the document presented the program proper, outlining its goal as:

1. The complete separation of art from the state;
2. The transfer of all legislative and executive power concerning organization and stabilization of artistic life to representative organizations of art workers ([principle of] artistic parliamentarism);
3. The recognition of all art workers as professionals, who work practically or theoretically in any domain of pure or applied art.[37]

The third part offered the tactics for achieving the stated goal:

1. Struggle with consultative commissions on art affairs collaborating with civil authorities;
2. Energetic participation in all events of the state authorities concerning organization of artistic life;
3. Organization and support of professional artistic unions and artistic cooperatives.[38]

The final part dealt with organization of the Left Block:

1. Any member of the Union of Art Workers can join the group, if he/she accepts the program and tactic of the group and if he/she submit to party discipline;
2. All public appearances of the members of the group are controlled by the general meeting of all the members;

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[36] "Исходя из того, что С.Д.И. а) основана на признании полой автономности искусства б) будучи представительной организацией, является носителем идеи художественного парламентаризма, группа Левого Блока принимает участие во всех работах Союза, настаивая на проведение в жизнь своей программы и тактики. Вместе с тем, группа оставляет за собой свободу действия в случае решительного отклонения большинства Союза от принципов автономности искусства и художественного представительства" (ibid.)

[37] "1. Полное отделение искусства от государства. 2. Переход всей законодательной и исполнительной власти в устроении и нормировании художественной жизни к представительным органам деятелей искусства (художественный парламентаризм). 3. Признание деятелями искусства всех профессионалов, работающих практически или теоретически в какой-либо области чистого или прикладного искусства" (ibid.)

[38] "1. Борьба с принципом совещательных комиссий по делам искусства при органах общегражданской власти. 2. Энергичное вмешательство во все мероприятия общегражданской власти по устроению художественной жизни. 3. Организация и поддержка художественных профессиональных союзов и художественных кооперативов" (ibid.)

3. A bureau consisting of five people is the organizational center of the group. It is elected by the general meeting of the group for the duration of one month.[39]

As becomes evident from this outline, the program defined the relationship of the Left Block toward governmental authority and the Union as a whole. In both cases, it described the block as being a separate legal entity, with full rights of participation in all activities of the government and the Union. According to his thesis, outlined on paper, the relationship of the Left Block to the Union would be built on the principle of absolute equality. In practice, however, Brik viewed this relationship in hierarchical terms, with the Left Block as the legislative branch of artistic government and the Union as the executive one. On May 17, in reply to Lev Zheverzheev's request to define executive power, Brik stated that artists would be responsible for legislation, and the executive power would lie with ministerial bureaucrats. On May 27, in elaborating this point to Sergei Isakov, he clarified, that the Union of Art Workers would play the role of the Ministry of the Arts and thus would possess executive power over decisions made by its Left Block.

Although it was eventually accepted "with minor revisions," Brik's program provoked heated debates in the course of two meetings (on May 13 and 17). Some of the members of the Block – such as Isakov and Aleksei Uspenskii – supported it, agreeing with Brik about the necessity for strict party-like discipline. Some – such as Schmidt-Ryzhova, Nikolai Andreev, Iurii Cherkasov, and Aleksandr Mgebrov – spoke out against the program. Their objections varied, but most converged when disagreeing with Brik's

[39] "1. В группу может войти всякий член Вр. К. У. С.Д.И. принимающий программу и тактику группы и подчиняющийся организационной дисциплине. 2. Все выступления группы определяютсяс общим собранием всех членов. 3. Организационным центром группы является бюро из пяти членов, избираемых общим собранием на один месяц" (ibid.)

categorical stance. For example, Mgebrov lamented the lack of romanticism in Brik's outline, opining that "members of the block must be idealistic." Andreev, Lev Bruni, Viktor Denisov, and Nikolai Punin all expressed their wish for a more inclusive platform, which would reflect cooperation between the Left, Right, and Center.[40]

During the meetings, Punin brought forward the most consistent objections to the program.[41] He challenged Brik about the very first paragraph, which called for the separation of art and state, arguing that it would damage such fundamental cultural institutions as museums, historical preservation, and schools. He also criticized the overly political orientation of the document, made in his opinion at the expense of the interests of art. For example, to counter Brik's definition of the left and the right blocks within the Union being conditioned by their relationship to state power -- reactionary art was supported by the state and the radical left art was not -- Punin argued that this difference was defined not by their attitudes to state power, but to art -- "the Left views art as revolutionary and the Right as evolutionary."[42]

In his response to Punin, Brik insisted on drawing a line between political affiliations and artistic methods and asserting that cooperation between the Left and the Right was impossible precisely because of the difference in their attitude toward the state. To emphasize his point, Brik expressed his conviction that the Union as a whole would not support the principle of the freedom of art indefinitely. When it breaks away from

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[40] Minutes of meetings on May 13, 1917, RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 310.
[41] Nikolai Punin was an art critic and a museum curator, Brik's contemporary (born also in 1888), known for his support of and correspondence with Vladimir Tatlin and Kazimir Malevich and for his relationship with Anna Akhmatova. In the past ten years, his writing and diaries have been published both in Russian and English. See Nikolai Punin, *O Tatline* (About Tatlin) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennoe agenstvo RA, 1994); Nikolai Punin, *Mir svetel liubov'iu: Dnevniki, pis'ma,* ed. by L. A. Zykov (Moscow: Artist, Rezhisser, Teatr, 2000); and Sidney Monas and Jennifer Greene Kupala, eds., *The Diaries of Nikolay Punin: 1904-1953*, trans. by Jennifer Greene Kupala (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999).
[42] Ibid., May 17, 1917.

this principle, he said, the Left Block would cease being part of the Union.[43] On Punin's objection to the first point, the separation of art and state, Brik conceded that in democracy, museums, schools and other institutions traditionally supported by the state, could and should be supported by artists themselves through independent artistic organizations, which must, in any case, receive subsidies from the government.

As becomes evident from this inter-factional confrontation, Brik was adamant about differentiating political activity and artistic matters. Further debates revealed a hierarchical structure of this segregation. Under pressure from Brik, a proposition to subdivide members into "actual members" [*deistvitel'nye chleny*] and "members-collaborators" [*chleny-sotrudniki*] within the Left Block itself was adopted on October 10. "Actual members" were to occupy themselves with the organizational and socio-political work of the block, and "members-collaborators" would participate only in artistic matters. The right of decision-making would stay only with the "actual members," whereas "members-collaborators" would possess "consultative" rights.

Thus, for Brik, even the most conscientious artists – those belonging to the Left Block – had to be governed by politically astute critics, professionals in the domain of ideology. Whereas artists themselves could not differentiate between thinking and doing,[44] critics were in a position to express an opinion on what an artist was supposed to

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[43] During subsequent meetings, participants discussed questions pertaining to their relationship to the Union as a whole. On May 27, there was a discussion about the possibility of entering Gorky's commission. Brik was categorically against any such cooperation: "we cannot send delegates to the enemy camp." He and Punin defended this stance against Altman, Erberg, and Denisov. On October 9, there was a move for the Left Block's separation from the Union because of "Lunacharskii's ministerial ways," which was eventually declined in favor of a formal protest. Brik's ultimate goal was to win over everyone's opinion to the side of the Left Block and thus to challenge the "privately elected commission."

[44] When the painter Vera Ermolaeva questioned the second paragraph, which demanded "transfer of all legislative and executive power" to the artists, by asking how they could have the time and energy to create if they were busy managing their affairs, Brik answered vaguely that only artists and no one else were qualified to make decisions concerning their professional lives and work. To Turova's objection to the third

do, and in this hierarchical relationship, the artist was left to execute the critic's orders. Overall, the minutes reveal Brik's paradoxical view of democracy in art as impossible without modeling the Left Block according to Lenin's understanding of the party, having a politically "conscious" minority govern a more emotionally affected majority.[45]

II. 3. Lunacharskii and Bogdanov

In his role as a leader of what he viewed as a political union, Brik needed powerful political allies. He preferred to affiliate himself with someone legitimated by a governmental authority at the expense of grass-root constituents. For example, at least on one occasion, he refused to support a request by a soldiers' group to decorate their club, organize debates and give concerts on a regular basis, by arguing that "the block should occupy itself with public work and not get seduced by art presentations."[46] On September 22, however, Brik introduced and supported a request by the "Group of 22," formed by *gorodskaia uprava* (city government), to decorate three rooms of the People's House and to take charge of public spectacles in that space. After 1905, People's Houses were well-established organizations for educating the poor and underprivileged, and were run and sponsored by local governments or maecenas.[47] After the February revolution, they retained their pedigree as leading institutions in people's education, offering a higher quality of instruction than any spontaneously formed workers' or soldiers' club. Brik

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paragraph, which abolished the distinction between pure and applied art, Brik flatly replied that it was "impossible to differentiate between them" (Minutes of meetings, on May 17, 1917, RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 310).

[45] Brik's hierarchical view of democratic government in the arts extended to all levels of its operation. When Zheverzheev and Isakov confronted him about their concern that artistic minority does not succumb to the demands of the philistine majority, he replied that "the fight with [mass] demand could be conducted with the help of artistic cooperatives and similar organizations" ibid.

[46] Minutes on June 10, 1917, RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 311.

[47] Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 13-14.

clearly felt more comfortable supporting a project backed by those in power, rather than that advanced by a group of disenfranchised soldiers. In any case, he went to great lengths to ensure that the Left Block backed the project offered by the "Group of 22."

According to Brik, the "Group of 22" included many participants and affiliates of Gorky's Commission, such as Gorky's wife Maria Andreeva, Benois, as well as the well-known maecenas Countess Panina, Tyrkova, Tikhonov, Karpov, Grammatchikova, Khesin, and Gaideburov, with Lunacharskii at its head.[48] Because Brik himself was a member of what was quickly named "Lunacharskii's Commission,"[49] the Left Block accepted its proposal and elected a few members for regular cooperation with the group. At the meeting on October 5, a resolution was adopted, which stated: "The Block of the Left Art Workers agrees to arrange various spectacles for the people in the People's House, including decoration, lighting, and painting of its halls, only on condition of absolute independence of conception and execution of the plan of the work…. In order to avoid any pressure on artistic freedom…, control over the monies spent can be extended only for the purpose of accounting."[50] Already on October 10, Brik presented his plan of work on the People's House, which was accepted. At the same meeting, the "organizational-executive committee" for this project was formed.[51]

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[48] Minutes of meetings on October 2 and 5, 1917, RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 311.
[49] Minutes of meeting from October 5. 1917, RGALI, fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 311. Also, see Dinershtein, "Maiakovskii v fevrale-oktiabre," 566.
[50] Apparently, "The Group of 22" did not take lightly to the restrictions outlined in the resolution of the Left Block, because on October 15, Brik passed its demand to the Left Block to "present a literary manifesto [*sic*], including sketches, scripts, and a more detailed financial estimate…." Expectedly enough, the block rejected this request, stressing that it "does not consider it possible to give more detailed factual information concerning the plan of work" and proposing instead to include one member of the "Group of 22" into the committee of the Left Block overseeing the project. This proposal was accepted and Brik's suggestion to form a joint committee with the "Group of 22" was rejected.
[51] The committee from the Left Block to work on the People's House included Brik, Meierhold, Iurii Annenkov, Inkizhinov, Zheverzheev, Erberg, and Liubavina.

As becomes clear from the minutes, Brik began cultivating the relationship with Lunacharskii long before the October Revolution. Because this connection proved crucial for Brik's career after the Bolshevik victory, it will help to take a closer look at the ideas and personality of the future Commissar of the People's Enlightenment. From the very beginning of his political career, Lunacharskii was a firm supporter of the Bolsheviks. He joined the party because of its extremism, which, for him, exemplified a necessary component of Marxism. Lunacharskii was convinced that the emotional fervor and enthusiasm accompanying the revolution was a crucial component of a new culture. In this, he disagreed with Plekhanov and Lenin. According to him, both leaders of Russian Marxism overemphasized Marx's take on the importance of economics at the expense of the questions of superstructure, which included culture and ideology.

For Lunacharskii, this ideological superstructure had distinctly religious overtones. When talking about proletarian culture, he meant "the emotional and ethical side of scientific-socialist ideology."[52] As a staunch promoter of this "emotional and ethical side," Lunacharskii developed his own interpretation of Marxism as a sort of religion of man – God-building as the ultimate stage in the development of religion in the course of which a man becomes god – an idea, upon which he expanded in his book *Religion and Socialism.*[53] The thoughts expressed in this book were inspired by his fascination with the German philosopher Richard Avenarius, with whom Lunacharskii studied at the University of Zurich. Having taken from Avenarius the concept of an

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[52] Anatolii Lunacharskii, *Velikii perevorot* (Petrograd, 1919), 17, quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Enlightenment and the Arts under Lunacharskii. October 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 2

[53] On Lunacharskii's idea of God-building, see Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat of Enlightenment,* 4 and Christopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia: The Intelligentsiia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 97.

individual's relationship to the world as based on "pure experience," Lunacharskii taught that proletarian culture would have to be built by the workers and artists (who did not necessarily have to belong to the working class) together.[54] For Lunacharskii, art and religion provided the emotional grounding for a universal understanding among people/citizens and a sufficient justification for Socialism.

A firm conviction about the importance of culture and emotional life in revolution led Lunacharskii to join forces with Aleksandr Bogdanov, a philosopher who challenged Lenin's interpretation of Marxism precisely on the point of the importance of ideological superstructure as opposed to the economic basis. Bogdanov, a former Bolshevik,[55] split from Lenin shortly after the failure of the 1905 uprising, when he insisted on the necessity to continue underground revolutionary activity, whereas Lenin advocated Bolshevik participation in a coalition government.[56] Similar to Lunacharskii, Bogdanov believed that Bolsheviks, and Lenin in particular, did not interpret Marx correctly by ignoring the questions of culture at the expense of those of the economy. Unlike Lunacharskii, Bogdanov did not view religion as the basis for a universal communion of workers. For him, the questions of culture topped a grandiose positivist schema of the development of man as a species.

The premises of Bogdanov's theory expressed his belief in the biomorphic analogy between the functioning of a human organism and a group of people. Trained as

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[54] Timothy Edward O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture: Anatolii Lunacharskii* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 10.

[55] Lenin insisted on Bogdanov's expulsion from the party for his unorthodox views. See Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: the Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 7-8.

[56] Mally, *Culture of the Future* , 4. However, Bogdanov was not always more radical politically than Lenin. For example, after the February revolution, he was against appropriation of power by the Bolsheviks, supporting their collaboration in the Provisional Government and the convention of the Constituent Assembly, thereby siding with the Mensheviks in his belief that the proletariat was not ready to take power into its hands. See Sochor, *Revolution and Culture,* 81.

a physician, Bogdanov took as a model a theory by Avenarius and another German philosopher Ernst Mach, which divided human experience into psychical and physical realms and linked them together by the "organizational" principle, ostensibly to overcome the duality of mind and matter.[57] Presaging the development of cybernetics, Bogdanov viewed any organism (biological or societal) as a self-enclosed system, governed by its own internal laws and relating to the larger systems outside themselves by the principle of "moving equilibrium." Any change within such a system could come only from the surrounding environment. Although he viewed most changes as evolutionary, Bogdanov also allowed for revolutionary breakdowns, which happen when the "boundaries between two complexes rupture."[58]

Positivist in his conviction that experience could be organized on the basis of perception and observation and developed into a coherent system by the method of logical deduction, Bodganov wrote *Empiriomonism* in 1904-06 and *Tectology* in 1913-1929*,* thus integrating epistemology and systems thinking into his version of Marxism.[59] The challenge first expressed in *Empiriomonism* proved serious enough for Lenin to rebuff Bogdanov for revisionism in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, a polemical work, first published in 1909, which decried his rival's departure from orthodox Marxism and his lack of understanding of materialism. Bogdanov and his cohorts, Lenin insisted, could not understand Marx's notion of matter that was not part of the immediate

[57] Sochor, *Revolution and Culture,* 43.
[58] Ibid., 48. Also, as Sochor observed, Bogdanov's philosophy diverged from Marx in the general conception of history: whereas he emphasized stability, cohesion and cooperation, Marx had laid stress on disruption, conflict and revolution. See ibid., 51-52.
[59] Mally, *Culture of the Future* , 5, passim; Sochor, *Revolution and Culture,* passim.

experience of the senses, but rather existed independently of the body on the conceptual level and was developed historically.[60]

Because of his belief in the importance of ideology in the smooth functioning of a society, Bogdanov taught that the major task of Bolshevik organizers was to systematically educate workers in humanities, economics, and sciences in such a way that they would be able to form their own opinions and thus possess cultural hegemony in the broad sense. These views became very popular among workers in Russia, and presented a sufficient challenge to Lenin's "authoritarian economism,"[61] that the Bolshevik leader made it his priority to systematically criticize and alienate his rival, beginning with his expulsion from the party shortly after their split.[62] The seriousness of Bogdanov's challenge to Lenin can be explained by the fact that many prominent Bolsheviks, competent in these questions of culture, supported Bogdanov. Both Gorky and Lunacharskii, the first patrons of Brik, sided with Bodganov at the time of his split from Lenin and joined him to form a school for workers in Gorky's house on Capri in the summer of 1909. The school lasted for only one season, but after its closing Bogdanov, Lunacharskii and their supporters had established a group *Vpered* (Forward), aimed at organizing workers' schools and educational groups, participating in factory committees

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[60] Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1920), 14.

[61] Left Bolsheviks, supporting Bogdanov against Lenin, viewed the latter as "authoritarian" and his theory as "economist." See Mally, *Culture of the Future*, xx, 3-10.

[62] Lenin insisted on ousting Bogdanov from the party after the latter confronted him over his authoritarian methods. After Bodganov organized a party school for workers at Gorky's house on Capri, Italy, Lenin had immediately organized a rivaling school at Longjumeau, near Paris. He countered the publication of Bogdanov's *Empiriomonism* with his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which violently attacked Bogdanov for his "Machism" and idealist deviation from Marx. In the years of the activity of Proletkult, Lenin was very wary of this organization's claims to independence from the control of the party – an attitude that eventually caused Proletkult's demise. For a detailed history of the relationship between Bodganov and Lenin, see Sochor, *Revolution and Culture,* passim.

and teaching evening classes for proletarians.[63] In 1911, Lunacharskii moved from Italy to Paris and then to Geneva. Apart from working for *Vpered,* he was involved in writing cultural and social-political criticism for the Russian press, including *Letopis'*.[64] After arriving in Petrograd, he renewed his affiliation with Gorky by writing for *Novaia zhizn'*.[65]

Brik must have met Lunacharskii shortly after the latter returned to Russia after a ten-year period in Paris and Geneva on May 22, 1917, [66] in the future Commissar's first official civic capacity as the head of the cultural-educational section of the Petrograd City Duma, because on June 1, 1917, Brik wrote a detailed report on a meeting at the Committee for People's Education, which included representatives from the Petrograd City Duma.[67] Lunacharskii occupied this position until his arrest during the disturbances in July 1917, after which he was briefly elected as deputy mayor of Petrograd. [68] By the time his name was mentioned at the meeting of the Left Block in September 1917, Lunacharskii was firmly affiliated with the Bolshevik party as President of the Cultural-Educational Commission of the Petrograd Party Committee.

By his own admission, Lunacharskii was more of a philosopher and a poet of the Revolution, inclined to seek unity and agreement with his fellow men, than a fractional

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[63] For the activity of the *Vperedists*, see Mally, *Culture of the Future*, chapter 1.
[64] Lunacharskii published his article "Rassloenie sotsial-demokratii" (Stratification of Social Democracy) in *Letopis'*, nos. 5-6 (1917), 346-357.
[65] In *Letopis'* closed in 1918, and in its stead Gorky started publishing the newspaper *Novaia Zhizn*'. See Scherr, *Maxim Gorky*, 12.
[66] O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, [13.]
[67] Osip Brik, "V komitete po narodnomu obrazovaniiu" (In the Committee on People's Education), *Novaia zhizn'* no. 37 (1 [14] June, 1917), 4. Valiuzhenich believes that Brik and Lunacharskii met in the editorial office of *Novaia zhizn'*. See Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 14.
[68] O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, 14 and Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment,* 8-9.

and combative politician.[69] Unlike Bogdanov, he was not dogmatic in his dedication to proletarians. In his ideal model of proletarian culture, workers and artists would blend in creating a positive "experiential" environment. Although Lunacharskii specifically favored workers' initiative and self-expression in art, he was very open toward all art movements, and it appears likely that he was happy to work with Brik as a representative of the radical Left Block. Brik, skillful politician that he was, could not refuse cooperation with someone who held a prominent position in public office but was not dogmatic in his views on art and, unlike Gorky, was not tainted by his affiliation with the Provisional Government.

II. 4. October Revolution and Proletkult

In the atmosphere of further devastation leveled by the war, peasant unrest, and workers' discontent, the Bolsheviks' radicalism had given them an advantage over other parties, because they were ready to take power in the name of the people, while Mensheviks insisted that Russia was not ready for a revolution. Sensing the mood of the crowd, some prominent Mensheviks, such as Lev Trotsky, switched their party affiliation. Over the objections of some of his comrades, Lenin masterminded a Bolshevik *coup d'état*, which was successfully implemented on the night of October 24/25.

For several months after the coup, the Bolsheviks' grasp on power was extremely tenuous. Not only did they take power violently, through armed insurrection, they also had a tendency to eliminate all heterodoxy – including not only their enemies, but also

[69] Lunacharskii called himself a "philosopher" and a "poet" of the revolution in his book *Velikii perevorot* (Petrograd, 1919), 31. As cited in Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, 3.

their allies – Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in particular.[70] They had great difficulty realizing their plans, however, because most local Soviets were dominated by other parties and supported by their constituents. Also, in their quest for power, the Bolsheviks had to fight against a formidable opposition: a significant part of Russia's upper and middle classes who supported the deposed government; the White armies, composed of former Tsarist officers; the invading German armies; and the hostile governments of England and France. After negotiating a devastatingly unfavorable peace with Germany in March of 1918, Russia was immediately submerged into the quagmire of Civil War in the summer of that year, which was fought on several fronts until the spring of 1921.[71] Only upon emerging victorious from the ruinous war, did the Bolsheviks set out to legalize their government and reconstitute the infrastructure, having little choice but to adopt the emergency model of the War Communism economy.[72]

In the domain of the arts, the Bolsheviks' advance was just as sudden, but also more gradual. On October 26, 1917, at the Second Congress of Soviets, Lenin appointed Lunacharskii was the head of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). Apart from matters of education, the jurisdiction of the new commissar administered the arts as well. To find workers for his administration, Lunacharskii turned to his former colleagues in the Cultural-Educational section of the Petrograd Duma and

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[70] The Bolshevik coup was nominally staged under the authority of the Soviets (which were composed of Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and other parties) and with force of the Soviet-formed Military-Revolutionary Committee, under Lev Trotsky's direction. However, at the Second Congress of Soviets (which took place during the coup) the Bolsheviks proposed only members of their party to the Council of People's Commissars, the new governing body of the country, eliminating Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and other allies from the central government. See Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 65.
[71] For information on the Civil War, see Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), chapter 6, and Donald W. Treadgold and Herbert J. Ellison, *Twentieth-Century Russia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), chapter 9.
[72] Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 78-83.

its equivalent in the Petrograd Bolshevik Party Committee.[73] He had also approached representatives of the Left Block, Brik in particular, with a proposal of cooperation. However, unlike Maiakovskii, Vsevolod Meierhold, Natan Altman, Larisa Reisner, David Shterenberg, and Aleksandr Blok, who responded immediately to Lunacharskii's appeal,[74] Brik was more cautious. He did not accept Bolshevism immediately after the coup, but neither did he reject outright offers of cooperation with the new government.

Much becomes clear when we glance through the documents available in the archives during the initial period of uncertainty of the Bolsheviks' hold on power. For example, on November 17, a few days after the Bolshevik coup, the Left Block discussed the newly appointed Commissar of Enlightenment's appeal to the Union of Art Workers to cooperate in the management of artistic life. There were three resolutions proposed to the vote of the block. The first one, authored by Andreev, rejected Lunacharskii's appeal, because it was not clear about the "relationship of the state to the principle of the autonomy of art" and "gave power to old-fashioned irresponsible guardians [*bezotvetstvennym opekunam*] of art." The second one, by Brik, was more conciliatory, but very cautious: "Having listened to the proposal of [comrade] Lunacharskii, the Union of Art Workers decrees to inquire immediately about the opinion of the organized art world concerning the further activity of state art organizations."[75] The third more inclusive resolution, collectively authored by Brik, Ermolaeva, and Zheverzheev, was finally adopted. It read as follows: "Having listened to an appeal of comrade

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[73] Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat of Enlightenment,* 11.

[74] On November 7 (20), Lunacharskii convened a meeting of art workers, to discuss their cooperation with the Bolshevik authorities. See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika*, 135.

[75] "Заслушав предложение Луначарского, СДИ постановляет немедленно приступить к выяснению организованного мнения художественного мира на дальнейшую деятельность государственных художественных учреждений" (Minutes of November 17, 1917 meeting of the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 311).

Lunacharskii, the temporary committee of the Union of Art Workers brings to his attention that it already took a series of measures toward a meeting of the Constituent Assembly of all art workers, which will represent for the entire nation the opinion of the art world about the organization of the art affairs of the country."[76]

Research conducted by Andrei Krusanov has also demonstrated Brik's dedication to the idea of the Constituent Assembly and his extreme caution in affiliating himself with the Bolsheviks. For example, at a meeting of the Union of Art Workers on November 17, Brik forcefully supported a convening a Constitutent Assembly, whereas his friend Maiakovskii emphasized cooperation with the Bolsheviks. Also, on November 17, a number of members of the Left Block, including Punin, Khlebnikov, Tatlin, and Lev Bruni, announced their resignation from the block in order to join Lunacharskii's commissariat. Brik was not among them.[77]

On December 5, 1917, *Novaia zhizn'* published an article by Brik, who by then had become its literary reviewer, entitled "My Position." In this article, Brik indignantly rejected rumors that he agreed to cooperate with the Bolsheviks as an elected member of the Petrograd Duma (City Council):

> My acquaintance told me that I was elected a member of the new city Duma on the ballot of the Bolsheviks. It was a complete surprise to me. No one asked my consent, and I did not give it to anyone.
>
> I am not a politician, I do not belong to any party, but I am a worker of culture [*kul'turnyi deiatel'*], this is why I do not know if the Bolsheviks' politics are good or not. They arrest those who think differently from them, they violate the word and the press – these and other manifestations of physical force are not the defining features of the Bolsheviks. They conduct themselves in the same way as

[76] "Заслушав обращение товарища Луначарского, временный комитет Союза Деятелей Искусств доводит до его сведения, что им уже предпринят ряд мер к созыву учредительного собора всех деятелей искусств, который выступит перед лицом всего народа органом мнения художественного мира на устроение художественной жизни страны" (ibid.)

[77] Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 25-29.

any people in power: in autocratic Russia, federal England, and democratic France….

However, the cultural program of the Bolsheviks is impossible. I became convinced of this when I attended the conference of proletarian cultural-educational organizations. If they are allowed to operate freely in this area, then nothing resembling culture will come out of it. This is why I consider it a crime before culture and the people any sabotage, any refusal of active work in the domain of culture. Only a philistine is honored with the role of waiting to see when everything falls into place. Only hopelessly blind individuals can regard the victory of counter-revolution as the condition for the victory of culture. The only true path is to adhere firmly to one's convictions concerning culture and to propagate it every place where culture is in danger, valiantly defending it from any vandalism, including that of the Bolsheviks.

Because of this position, I do not refuse my unexpected election and herewith declare that I am not a member of the Bolshevik party, I do not adhere to any party discipline, and I will not participate in any political rallies. Their cultural program, as it was expressed in the activity of the Central Committee of proletarian cultural and educational organizations, is completely unacceptable to me. It is against this program that I consider it necessary to mount an energetic resistance.

If my position does not suit the Bolsheviks, I ask to withdraw my name from those elected.[78]

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[78] "Кто-то из знакомых сказал мне, что я выбран в гласные новой городской думы по списку большевиков. Для меня это явилось полной неожиданностью: никто моего согласия не спрашивал и я его никому не давал. Я не политик, ни в какой партии не состою, я культурный деятель, поэтому не знаю, хорошую ли политику ведут большевики или нет. Аресты инакомыслящих, насилье над словом, над печатью, и прочия проявления физической силы не являются отличительным признаком большевиков: так поступает всякая власть: и в самодержавной России, и в федеральной Англии, и в демократической Франции… Но культурная программа большевиков невозможна. В этом я убедился присутствуя на конференции пролетарских культурно-просветительных организаций. Если предоставить им свободно хозяйничать в этой области, то получится нечто, ничего общего с культурой не имеющее. Поэтому я считаю преступлением перед культурой и народом всякий саботаж, всякий отказ от активной культработы. Сидеть и ждать, пока всё образуется – почётная роль обывателя. Обусловливать торжество культуры победой контр-революции могут только безнадёжно ослепшие люди. Единственно верный путь – неуклонно вести свою культурную линию, быть везде, где культуре грозит опасность, стойко защищая её от всякого, в том числв и большевистского, вандализма. По этим соображениям я не отказываюсь от своего неожиданного избранья, причём заявляю, что я в партии большевиков не состою, никакой партийной дисциплине не подчиняюсь, и ни в каких политических выступлениях участия не приму. Их культурная программа, посколько она выразилась в деятельности Ц.К. пролетарских культурно-просветительских организаций, для меня совершенно неприемлема; именно с ней я считаю необходимым особенно энергично бороться. Если большевикам моя позиция не подходит, то прошу вычеркнуть меня из списка гласных" (Osip Brik, "Moia pozitsiia," *Novaia zhizn'* no. 193 [December 5 (18), 1917], 4).

What was the Bolsheviks' cultural policy and why did Brik consider it so important to oppose it up until the last week of January 1918? The conference that so rattled Brik was the First Conference of Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organizations, which took place in the Petrograd Duma in mid-October 1917, just a week before the October uprising.[79] It sprang from Lunacharskii's initiative at the August 1917 meeting of factory committees, at which he pushed for the establishment of an agency responsible for cultural-educational work among proletarians.[80] Apart from Lunacharskii, it was organized by his friends and cohorts, such as Pavel Lebedev-Polianskii, Fedor Kalinin, Pavel Bessal'ko, and others. Apparently, Brik also took an active part in preparating this conference, probably in his function as President of the Petrograd Council of Educational Art Organizations [*Sovet uchebnykh khudozhestvennykh organizatsii*], a voluntary organization set up at the end of November 1917 as a representative political body for art schools.[81] He was the only organizer who was not a member of *Vpered* and who did not become a leader, active member, or supporter of Proletkult -- an overwhelmingly proletarian cultural-educational organization, organized by Bodganov and his supporters, which advocated the workers' hegemony in the arts. In the beginning of 1917, after the February revolution, Proletkult consisted of a "loose coalition of clubs, factory committees, workers' theaters, and educational societies devoted to the cultural needs of the working class."[82] In the span of a year, however, it was already claiming a status on a par with that of the Bolshevik party; because of its vast

[79] Mally, *Culture of the Future,* 26 ff.
[80] Ibid., 25.
[81] Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 86.
[82] Ibid., xviii.

popularity, it aimed to create a new, specifically proletarian, cultural order, in accordance with the tenets of a new revolutionary regime.

Lunacharskii set the tone at this conference. In his presentation, he emphasized the importance of considering culture on a par with the economics and politics of the workers' movement in order to "arm the working class with knowledge, to organize its feeling[s] by art, to ensure success of its titanic fight for a new social order." Lunacharskii also stressed that "as in science, in art the proletariat will demonstrate independent creation, but for this it has to take charge of [*zavladet'*] all cultural property [*dostoianie*] of the past and the present. In this cultural-educational work, the proletariat will readily accept the collaboration of the socialist and even non-party *intelligentsiia*, but it considers it necessary to critically evaluate all the fruits of the old culture, which it accepts not as a pupil, but as a builder, whose it is task to erect new and luminous [*svetlye*] structures using the blocks from the old ones." [83]

Brik spoke after Lunacharskii. Unlike the Commissar, Brik did not mention specifically proletarian creation, but the democratization of art, underscoring the importance of the creation of the new, as opposed to studying the old. As in "Democratization of Art," he railed against dividing art into "folk" and "real," and asserted that democratization could be achieved only through the initiative of the masses themselves. He also emphasized the importance of decentralization through establishing artistic centers on the local level. These local organizations should be overseen by an "organizational center of the democratic cultural-educational organizations."[84]

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[83] "Konferentsiia kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh obshchestv" (Conference of cultural-educational societies) *Rabochii put',* October 30 [17], 1917.
[84] Ibid.

As becomes clear from the transcript of Brik's presentation, he did not believe in specifically proletarian creation, but preferred to speak about "folk art," which, in the Russian context, referred to peasant, rather than proletarian art. He also supported the eradication of divisions between various artistic strata, while Lunacharskii and other supporters of "proletarian art" advocated the latter as superior to any other art by any other societal group. When we compare Brik's theses to those of Lunacharskii, it becomes apparent that the two fought for two absolutely different types of artistic environment: while Lunacharskii supported the exclusivity of proletarians as an elite class, Brik spoke about the "democratization" of all creativity, thus advocating the opposite of Lunacharskii's restrictive vision of the artistic environment.

No wonder, then, that in "My Position" Brik expressed his dismay at being counted among the Bolsheviks, with whom he disagreed on the fundamental question of class hegemony in the arts. Naively, or perhaps wishfully, the Bolsheviks confused his political affiliation with Lunacharskii as a sign of subordination and agreement on questions of cultural policy. In publicly expressing his disappointment by stating his basic disagreement with the ruling party in art and professing his impartiality in questions of politics, Brik made a sincere public statement of "his position" on the relationship of art and politics at that particular time. Maiakovskii appreciated his candor. In a letter sent to Lilia and Osip shortly after the publication of the article, he wrote: "I read Os'ka's letter with its breath of nobility in *Novaia zhizn'*. I should like to receive one like it."[85]

[85] Maiakovsky to Lilia and Osip Brik, mid-December 1917. Quoted in Jangfeldt, *Love is the Heart of Everything*, 46.

In line with his credo, Osip continued his critique of the Bolsheviks for the benefit of his vision of artistic freedom. Ten days after stating "his position" on his relationship to the party, he published a commentary about the projected copyright law, criticizing it for shortening significantly the period of copyright for authors and the imposition of a five-year state monopoly on all works by these authors. In Brik's opinion, the Bolsheviks simply ignored the essence of the law to "coordinate the necessity to pay for an author's work with the reader's need to have an affordable book," by neglecting the rights of the authors and making the process of the state approval of monopolized authors unnecessarily bureaucratic. "It is absolutely obvious," concluded Brik, "that when composing the decree, the Bolsheviks thought least of all about questions of principle. They simply needed to publish some inexpensive books, to show the people that something is being done about the satisfaction of their cultural needs. They felt uncomfortable just ignoring the copyright law, so they produced a decree. This is not a law, but a motivated circumvention of law."[86]

At the very beginning of January 1918, Brik published yet another critique of the Bolsheviks' art policies by objecting to Lebedev-Polianskii's announcement to transform the Journal of the Ministry of People's Education into an organ of the party. In the article entitled "People's Education," he decried the Bolsheviks' trampling upon "the basic principle of the socialist and democratic cultural program – the freedom of spiritual self-determination." Instead of propagating the party's views, Brik insisted, the journal must

[86] "Совершенно очевидно, что, сочиняя декрет, большевики меньше всего думали о принципиальной стороне вопроса. Просто понадобилось издать ряд дешёвых книг, показать народу, что что-то делается для удовлетворения его культурных потребностей. Обойти авторское право показалось неудобным. В результате – декрет. Не закон, но мотивированный обход закона" (Osip Brik, "Bol'sheviki i avtorskoe pravo" (Bolsheviks and the patent right), *Novaia zhizn',* December 15 (28), 1917, 1.

become a forum for discussion open to any educational organization. The task of the editors would then be reduced to "systematization and sorting" of the available material as opposed to choosing articles supporting only one point of view, that of the party.[87]

Then, all of a sudden, there was an abrupt change in Brik's attitude toward Lunacharskii's policy as a statesman and a representative of the Bolshevik party. On January 22, a Petrograd newspaper *Vecherniaia zvezda* (Evening Star) published his article "Autonomous Art," in which Brik praised Lunacharskii's cultural and educational program, presented at the Third Congress of Soviets.[88] A few days prior to the Congress, the Bolsheviks succeeded in dissolving the Constituent Assembly, thus eliminating one of the last obstacles to their political domination of Russia. As a representative of the only party at the helm of the country, Lunacharskii addressed not only workers, but also soldiers' and peasants' deputies. Instead of propagating the leading role of proletarians in the arts, Lunacharskii spoke more inclusively of people's art and how the role of the state should be limited to organizing and helping such art, as opposed to indoctrinating and dictating the content or form of expression.[89] Brik wholeheartedly supported this speech. When the Commissar of Enlightenment spoke as a representative of the party in absolute power and not as a spokesman for Proletkult, Brik was entirely on his side. Even though he did not believe in the proletarian's cultural superiority, he was ready to cooperate with a powerful politician who was idealistic enough to presume that he could retain his dedication to workers' hegemony in the arts while maintaining his official

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[87] Osip Brik, "Narodnoe prosveshchenie" (People's education), *Novaia zhizn',* December 24, 1917 (January 8, 1918), 8.
[88] The Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened at the Tauride Palace in Petrograd on January 10/23, 1918. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution,* 1: 121.
[89] Osip Brik, "Avtonomnoe iskusstvo," *Vecherniaia zvezda*, January 22, 1918, 2. Quoted in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 268.

doctrine of cooperation with all artists, including those of bourgeois descent, for the benefit of workers' education.[90]

Brik's behavior immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power has puzzled many a historian. Indeed, we are surprised to realize that this militant defender of the unity of art and politics did not join the Bolsheviks immediately after their revolution, but wavered for several months before the new power's grip was assured. There is an apparent contradiction in Brik's views and actions during the span of a few months at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918. In Bengt Jangfeldt's opinion, the proclamation in *Novaia zhizn'*, which stated Brik's fundamental disagreement with the Bolsheviks' cultural policy, indicated that the critic's affiliation with the Bolsheviks was "not a matter of political conviction," but that of tactics.[91] In other words, Brik accepted the Bolsheviks' nomination, because he wanted to have the advantage of fighting their "impossible" cultural policy on their turf.

On the other hand, we can accept an alternate explanation given by Christopher Read, in which the author subdivided the post-revolutionary intelligentsia into four camps: those who fought and conspired against the new power; the ones in the middle, who neither opposed nor supported it, but tried to preserve traditional cultural values; the group of intellectuals who sympathized with the Bolsheviks but did not fully accept their ideology and were not members of the party; and, finally, the Bolshevik intelligentsia, Lenin and Lunacharskii among them. [92] According to Read's taxonomy, Brik fit into the group of sympathizers of the Bolsheviks, because he did not oppose them, but was

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[90] On Lunacharskii's failure to pursue both his dedication to proletarians' hegemony in the arts and the open attitude toward artists of all backgrounds, see Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat of Enlightenment,* chapter 5.
[91] Bengt Jangfeldt, "Russian Futurism, 1917-1919," in *Art, Society, Revolution in Russia, 1917-1921*, ed. Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979), 123.
[92] Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia*, 56.

adamantly radical and did not belong to the party. Up until the middle of January 1918, he tried to cling to the group of independents, but unlike the overwhelming majority of that group he did not believe in the value of tradition. Instead of tradition, he had to build his identity around the radicals in power, but until the beginning of 1918, the Bolsheviks' political future was still tenuous and did not inspire the confidence of cautious non-party radicals, such as Brik. It was only after the new power dissolved the Constituent Assembly on January 19, 1918, an act that effectively eliminated their political opponents as legal partners in ruling Russia, that Brik had joined the forces with Lunacharskii.[93]

II. 5. IZO Narkompros and *Iskusstvo kommuny*

A few months after the publication of his words of praise to Lunacharskii, Brik joined the Petrograd Art Department (IZO) Narkompros as head of the Subdivision of Artistic Labor.[94] Because the Commissar of Enlightenment supported non-proletarian artists and intellectuals as the working force for his commissariat, Brik found a warm welcome there. IZO Narkompros in fact had two closely related, but separate subdivisions dedicated to artistic production and labor, respectively. The one under Ol'ga Rozanova's (and after her death I. Averintsev's) leadership was called Subdivision of Artistic Production [*Podotdel khudozhestvennogo proizvodstva*] and was responsible for the organization of schools and workshops for artists and establishing contacts with existing factories that used artistic labor, such as porcelain, textile, and others.[95] Brik's

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[93] On dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, see Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution,* 1: 112-120.
[94] See Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 16-17. On October 24, 1918, the head of IZO David Shterenberg issued a certificate, affirming that Brik was the head of the Department of Artistic Labor [*zaveduiushchii buro khudozhestvennogo truda*]. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.
[95] Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm: kontseptsiia formoobrazovaniia* (Constructivism: a concept of form-creation) (Moscow: Stroiizdat, 2003), 187.

Subdivision of Artistic Labor [*Podotdel khudozhestvennogo truga*] was charged with the organization of artistic competitions, participation in festivals and sponsorship of artistic projects.[96]

Brik's acceptance of the Bolsheviks' authority in matters of politics was well-timed, because during the Civil War (1918-1920) Futurist rhetoric became increasingly politicized and polarized. By the end of the Civil War, many artists who wanted to stay in touch with contemporary life had become explicitly political in their pronouncements. This change was prompted by increased pressure from the Communist party to strengthen its ideological grip on various strata of the population, artists in particular. According to Read, contrary to the widespread notion that the years following the Civil War were characterized by a relative ideological relaxation in the sphere of culture, they were rather the most important ones for forming the Bolsheviks' cultural policy. In his opinion, with which I agree, the major foundations of this policy were laid out in 1920-1921 and solidified in 1922, precisely during the years of the formation of INKhUK, its companion VKhUTEMAS and the reorientation of the most radically inclined artists toward the making of useful objects.[97]

The main characteristic of this period, according to Read, was "the steady encroachment in the cultural sphere of the party at the highest level."[98] The battle of influence fought between Communists of proletarian origins and intellectuals who joined the party after the revolution, was gradually being won by the intellectuals. The Central Committee's resolution "On the Proletkults," published in Pravda on December 1, 1920,

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[96] Pamela Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Retreat of the Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era" (Ph. D. diss., Indiana University, 1988), 94 and 126.
[97] On the Bolsheviks' cultural policy during and immediately following the Civil War, see Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia*, chapters 3 and 4.
[98] Ibid., 142.

opened a decisive attack on this organization of grass-roots proletarian culture, after which its power and authority greatly diminished. In 1920, the activity of Narkompros was examined by a party commission and reorganized in November of that year according to the suggestions of this commission through setting up Glavpolitprosvet, a new powerful agency within the commissariat for overseeing and implementing political propaganda in all branches of the commissariat's activity. The reorganization of Narkompros was conducted with the initiative of powerful figures within the Central Committee, such as Preobrazhenskii, who criticized Lunacharskii for the preference he had given to "high" art at the expense of basic technical education and argued that the Commissar of Enlightenment was not in touch with the basic needs of the country.[99] What the country needed, according to the precepts of classic Marxism and to a wide-spread belief in the party, was production of more wealth -- of things, first of all – in order to make possible the transition to Communism.[100]

Apart from performing his duties at the Subdivision of Artistic Labor, Brik was also involved in the publishing enterprises associated with IZO Narkompros. Shortly after joining IZO Brik ensured that the Futurists' works were supported by the state. The

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[99] Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii (1886-1937) was an old Bolshevik, a prominent member of the party and a co-author, with Nikolai Bukharin, of the party program for the populace, *The ABC of Communism.* Shortly after the program was written and published at the end of 1919-beginning of 1920, Preobrazhenskii was elected to Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist party. Throughout his Bolshevik career, Preobrazhenskii adhered to the more radical wing of the party. When the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, Preobrazhenskii joined the Left Opposition that was against Lenin's proposal of the peace with Germany. After the end of the Civil War in 1920, Preobrazhenskii opposed the introduction of NEP. During Stalin's fight for power, he joined Trotsky's opposition. Because of his link to Trotsky, Preobrazhenskii lost his party membership and was exiled to Siberia in 1927. Two years later he was readmitted to the party, but expelled again because of his criticism of the First Five-Year Plan. In 1936, he testified against Zinov'iev in the public trial against the old Bolsheviks. In January 1937, Preobrazhenskii was arrested, charged with anti-Soviet crimes, and executed. See Joseph L. Wieczynski, ed., *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History* (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1982), 29:185-192.

[100] Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia*, chapter 4, passim. On reorganization of Narkompros, see also Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, chapter 8.

Futurist "business center for artists" IMO (The Art of the Young), organized by Brik and Maiakovskii at the beginning of 1918 could now publish its books with Lunacharskii's blessing.[101] Brik's next step in his official capacity was founding *Iskusstvo kommuny*, a newspaper endorsed by IZO Narkompros.

In the second issue of the newspaper, Brik addressed the burning question of identity for new art and artists. "Proletarian art," – Brik said in "Artist-Proletarian" -- "is not 'art for proletarians' or 'art by proletarians,' but art by artists-proletarians…."

> An artist-proletarian is distinguished from an artist-bourgeois not because he creates for a different consumer, nor because he comes from a different social background, but because of his attitude toward himself and his work.
>
> The artist-bourgeois thought that creating was his personal affair, but the artist-proletarian knows that he and his talent belong to a collective.
>
> The artist-bourgeois created in order to realize his ego, the artist-proletarian creates in order to complete a socially important business;
>
> The artist-bourgeois juxtaposed himself to the crowd as a foreign element; the artist-proletarian sees his own people in front of him;
>
> In his chase for glory and profit, the artist-bourgeois tried to cater to the tastes of the crowd. The artist-proletarian does not know personal gain. He struggles against its sluggishness and leads it by way of art, incessantly moving forward. [102]

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[101] Initially, Brik organized IMO in April 1918 in order to exhibit and sell works by avant-garde artists. This avant-garde gallery did not get off the ground and its space was used for literary and artistic meetings. On IMO, see Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, pp. 273-276. Lunacharskii signed a request submitted by Brik and Maiakovskii, sanctioning IMO to publish Futurist literature. This publishing venture lasted one year and produced seven books, most of them by Maiakovskii. See Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 16.

[102] "…Пролетарское искусство – не «искусство для пролетариев» и не «искусство пролетариев», а искусство художников-пролетариев. … Художник-пролетарий отличается от художника-буржуа не тем, что творит для другого потребителя, и не тем, что происходит из другой социальной среды, а своим отношением к себе и к своему искусству. Художник-буржуа считал творчество своим личным делом; художник-пролетарий знает, что он и его талант принадлежат коллективу. Художник-буржуа творил, чтобы выявить своё «я»; художник-пролетарий творит, чтобы выполнить общественно важное дело. Художник-буржуа противопоставлял себя толпе, как чуждой ему стихии; художник-пролетарий видит перед собой своих. В погоне за славой и наживой художник-буржуа старался потрафить вкусам толпы; художник-пролетарий, не знающий личной выгоды, борется с её косностью и ведёт её за собой путями непрерывно движущегося вперёд искусства…" (Osip Brik, "Khudozhnik-proletarii" (Artist-Proletarian), *Iskusstvo kommuny,* no. 2 [December 15, 1918], 1).

This passage demonstrates that Brik was trying to solve the issue of the individual and the collective in new art. We know that sometime around the turn of the century and shortly before he met Maiakovskii Brik had read Nietzsche and there were indications that he was attracted by Nietzschean themes in his friend's poetry. It is interesting to note also that the early patrons of Brik in the field of culture and politics, Gorky and Lunacharskii, had been devout admirers of Nietzsche's philosophy. According to Mary Louise Loe, early on in his career, Gorky had reflected Nietzsche's vision of strong male leaders who strive to realize their power in his extremely popular short stories. He clearly preferred it to the Populists' doctrine of the intellectuals' leadership of the people or the Marxist egalitarianism.[103] Lunacharskii, as well, was attracted by Nietzsche's emphasis on creative will as opposed to a sense of duty and defended the philosopher's attack on traditional morality.[104] Both Gorky and Lunacharskii supported Bogdanov in his attempt to establish a proletarian educational center, because they could work with Bogdanov's basic premise of egalitarian proletarian culture through the detection and promotion of the strongest and most talented individuals among workers in Gorky's house on Capri and later in Proletkult. As Zenovia Sochor observed, although Bogdanov disagreed with Nietzsche on the question of socialism, he concurred with him on the importance of encouraging each individual's creativity and "cultural liberation."[105]

It becomes clear that from the beginning of his career Brik was patronized by prominent Marxist supporters of Nietzsche. Unlike the Marxist Nietzscheans, however,

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[103] Mary Louise Loe, "Gorky and Nietzsche: The Quest for a Russian Superman," in Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, 251-273.
[104] According to A. L. Tait, by the early 1900s, Lunacharskii's "Nietzscheanism" was "immoderate." See A.L. Tait, "Lunacharskii: A 'Nietzschean Marxist'?" in Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, 276-292.
[105] Zenovia A. Sochor, "A. A. Bogdanov: In Search for Cultural Liberation," in Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, 293-311.

who combined fascination with Nietzsche and faith in egalitarian Socialist principles, Brik was unwilling to grant to the workers the status of artists or great men, nor did he believe in their becoming such in the future. In this disdainful attitude toward the average man, Brik relied upon Nietzsche's tenet that not every man was born to be great.[106] In his life, Brik was known to befriend remarkable people, the ones who possessed some of the Nietzschean will to power and created themselves as noteworthy individuals**.** At the same time, Brik's knowledge of and attraction to the work of Nietzsche did not preclude him from paying lip service to the politically triumphant principles of the Bolsheviks, who proclaimed the creation of a proletarian state.

"Artist-Proletarian" was a polemical attempt to construct a new artistic identity, based on the synthesis of individualistic and collective philosophies. On the one hand, Brik used a word -- "artist" -- that traditionally defined an individual creator. On the other hand, in this article he went to the utmost extreme to comply with the Communist principles of collective creation and thereby to limit this individuality. It was his adjustment to a political status quo, which did not necessarily lead to abandonment of his faith in an individual's expressive genius that led Brik to membership in the Communist party some time in the fall of 1918, when he became a member of IZO Narkompros. [107] Although he was expelled from the party during the 1921 *chistka* (cleaning) because of his bourgeois origin, this move offered him an immediate advantage in his struggle against Proletkult and coincided with the publication of *Iskusstvo kommuny.*

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[106] Whereas in his *Zarathustra* Nietzsche tirelessly propagated a hero, an "overman," a natural artist charged with a boundless will to power, he turned his back on society, which in *Zarathustra* he branded as "a herd."

[107] See note 97, chapter 1 of this dissertation.

In late 1918, both Brik and Maiakovskii began to speak frequently before the workers' audiences[108] with the hope of gaining support for their vision of art for the new state. A proclamation by a group of "Communists-Futurists" (Komfut) appeared in the in the eighth issue of the newspaper, on January 26, 1919. As a collective statement, it was not signed individually, but it mentioned many of those involved in the text of the declaration, namely Brik (who was in charge of organizing the party-oriented "school of ideology"), Boris Kushner (the President of the collective), a young Communist Maria Natanson (its Secretary), and the workers Mushtakov and Krasavin.

According to the opening sentence of the proclamation, the Komfut collective was formed under the aegis of the Vyborg District party organization, and had two organizational meetings, on January 13 and 18, 1919. It announced a commitment to cultivating "Communist consciousness" as its primary goal: "Communist order requires Communist consciousness. All forms of *byt*, ethics, philosophy and art should be restructured according to the Communist principles…. Cultural-educational organs of Soviet Power displayed complete ignorance of the revolutionary task under their charge. The hurriedly assembled ideology of social democracy cannot resist the onslaught of centuries-old bourgeois ideology that exploits for its own interest proletarian cultural-educational organizations…." Further, the proclamation called for "the relentless struggle against all false ideologies of the bourgeois past," "the subordination of the Soviet cultural-educational organs to the new, state-of-the-art communist ideology of culture," "the throwing away of all democratic illusions, which thoroughly cover up the

[108] See Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism*, 92; Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 17-18; Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 189-190.

bourgeois dregs and prejudices of the past."[109] Despite the prospective collective's single-mindedness and dedication, the Vyborg District Committee rejected their application, because "the statutes of our party do not stipulate collectives of this sort" and "if we accept this collective, we may create an undesirable precedent for the future."[110]

Although *Iskusstvo kommuny* had numerous contributors, such as Maiakovskii, Kushner, Altman, and Shterenberg, the two most prolific authors were Brik and Punin.[111] Throughout their collaboration in this newspaper, Brik and Punin formed a united front against Proletkult – they opposed the ideological supremacy of the workers, if not their cultural autonomy. However, the differences between them that surfaced during the discussions a year earlier, at the meetings of the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers remained. After the end of the Civil War in 1920, Brik split from Punin to form the journal *LEF* with a group of theoreticians and artists who argued for a redefinition of art in the new society along the lines of production. Supporting their opinions by references to Marx's view of production as the basis of human activity, Brik and other *LEF* writers condemned art that catered to passive contemplation. The art of the Soviet state had to enter the daily life of each citizen and incite him or her to building this life in the present, not the future. Punin did not enter this group of Productivists. Why?

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[109] "Коммунистический строй требует коммунистического сознания. Все формы быта, морали, философии и искусства должны быть пересозданы на коммунистическх началах…. Культурно-просветительные органы Советской Власти обнаруживают в своей деятельности полное непонимание возложенной на них революционной задачи. Наспех сколоченная социал-демократическая идеология не в силах противостоять многовековому опыту буржуазных идеологов, эксплуатирующих в своих интересах пролетарские культурно-просветительные организации…" ("Kommunisty-Futuristy," *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 8 [January 26, 1919]. See also Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 219-220).

[110] Boris Kushner, "Kommunisty-Futuristy," *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 9 (February 2, 1919). As cited in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 221. According to Valiuzhenich, Komfut continued to exist at least until 1921. At the later period, party membership was not required to join the collective.

[111] Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism,* 34.

To answer this question, we have to look at both Brik's and Punin's contributions to *Iskusstvo kommuny*. In "Drainage for Art," the programmatic article printed on the first page of the first issue of the *Iskusstvo kommuny*, Brik set the tone for the debate:

> The bourgeoisie turned any flesh into spirit. It brought matter to a gas-like condition. Instead of solid things, we have ideological fumes. The proletariat restores flesh, matter, and the solid body in its rights. For proletarians, ideas are nothing before they are embodied…. The proletariat must drain the marshlands of bourgeois art. The fog must not cloud actual life, which is much better than any swampy mirages. Is this the end of art? No, only the necessary drainage…. If you are artists and can create, then create for us our human nature, our human objects…. [Our] objects are much better and more valuable than anything done by nature. … Factories and industrial enterprises await artists who might be able to provide samples of new, unprecedented objects…. Everyone who loves true art …understands that its true aim is not an idea, but a real thing.[112]

There are several pertinent and seemingly contradictory points that Brik made in this passage. He started out with an unequivocal opposition between two realms -- the old against the new, bourgeoisie against the proletariat, matter against spirit. In the first few sentences, matter was associated with "flesh" and the "solid body." In the second half of the article, however, Brik talked about a different kind of matter, intellectualized and mediated by human activity. Instead of "flesh" and "solid body," he mentioned "human nature" and "human objects" that were "much better and more valuable than anything done in nature." Almost imperceptibly, but nevertheless unmistakably, Brik made a distinction between a simplified understanding of matter as the opposite of a a

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[112] "Буржуазия превращала всякую плоть в дух. Довела материю до газообразного состояния. Сместо твёрдых тел – идеологические испарения. Пролетариат восстанавливает плоть, материю, твёрдое тело в своих правах. Для пролетариата идея – ничто, пока она не воплощена, не на пути к воплощению. … Пролетариат должен осушить эти болота [буржуазного искусства]. Пусть туман не мешает видеть живую жизнь. Она лучше всяких болотных миражей. Конец искусству? Нет, только необходимый дренаж. … Если вы – художники, если вы можете творить, создавать, -- создайте нам нашу человеческую природу, наши человеческие вещи. … эти изделья лучше и ценнее всего, что сделано природой. … Фабрики, заводы, мастерские ждут, чтобы к ним привли художники и дали им образцы новых, невиданных вещей. … Все, кто любит живое искусство… понимает, что не идея, а реальная вещь – цель всякого истинного творчества"(Osip Brik, "Drenazh iskusstvu," *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 1, [December 7, 1918], 1).

disembodied idea, existing prior to and independent of human intervention, and a definition of matter as a result of human production. This matter reproduces itself through a conscious result-oriented activity, the focus of which is production of "real" things perceivable by the senses.

In his subsequent contributions to *Iskusstvo kommuny*, Brik continued to integrate politics into aesthetics by emphasizing the notion of "proletarian" art and the passage from "low," natural matter toward the civilized, artistic one.[113] Punin, conversely, chose to address himself to one audience only – that of artists, mentioning the proletariat mainly as a matter of heated polemics. In the first issue of *Iskusstvo kommuny*, he wrote two articles, none of which talked about the proletariat. Instead, Punin discussed the old-fashioned character of street decorations for the anniversary of the October Revolution[114] and the necessity of ideological war, conditioned by the so-called "revolution of the spirit."[115] Whereas Brik appeared level-headed in his attempt to build a theoretical basis for his notion of "artist-proletarian," Punin's article clearly expressed the avant-garde paranoia described by Boris Groys in his comparison of the Soviet and avant-garde ideologies. Here, Punin raved against the bourgeoisie in general and the Symbolists in particular and warned "Soviet circles" against reactionary elements that "penetrated" them "with a definite purpose." Punin continued in the same vein in the following issues,

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[113] See Brik, "Khudozhnik-proletarii," *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 2 (December 15, 1918), 1; "Vy pravy, tovarishch Mushtakov," (You are right, comrade Mushtakov), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 3 (December 22, 1918), 1; "Utselevshii bog" (Preserved God) *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 4 (December 29, 1918), 2; "Khudozhniki tret'ei kategorii" (Artists of the third rank), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 4, (December 29, 1918), 2; "Bez rulia" (Without steering wheel), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 5 (January 5, 1919), 3; "Dovol'no soglashatel'stva" (Enough of compromises), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 6 (January 12, 1919), 1; "Est' nad chem podumat'" (There is something to think about), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 9, (February 2, 1919), 1.

[114] Nikolai Punin, "K itogam Oktiabr'skikh torzhestv" (Summary of October festivities), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 1 (December 7, 1918).

[115] Nikolai Punin, "Popytki restavratsii" (Attempts at restauration), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 1 (December 7, 1918), 3.

writing about Futurism[116] and the possibility of it becoming a "classical art."[117] Beginning with the seventh issue, some of Punin's articles bear an obligatory subtitle – "for artists only" – making his exclusive focus even more explicit.

To be sure, Punin considered himself a materialist. In the last three issues of *Iskusstvo kommuny*, Punin took to defending materialism against assaults by the "idealists," including Shklovskii. This dispute between Punin and Shklovskii was remarkable, because their positions were much closer than either of them dared to admit. In his essay "On Art and Revolution," Shklovskii accused the Futurists of bringing extraneous societal concerns into the realm of art and asserting that the new *byt* (the "low" everyday life) could create new forms in art. In fact, Shklovskii claimed, art forms refashion themselves to replace old outdated ones.[118] In response, Punin denounced Shklovskii's defense of art for art's sake and in the same breath acknowledged his sympathy for the author. Punin asserted that the Futurists also hated *byt,* because "*byt* is by its essence opposed to creativity, *byt* is ptomaine, *byt* is slag*, byt* is a lifeless corpse, *byt* is stagnant dead tissue which like a trace follows mankind and drags us into the past with its thousand hands."[119] Shklovskii's mistake was to equate *byt* with the Third International, said Punin, because although the latter was already infected with revisionism, it still was under the control of true communists and therefore could not be identified with slag. Whereas Shklovskii had grudgingly accepted Punin's argument

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[116] Nikolai Punin, "Bombometanie i organizatsiia" (Bomb-Throwing and organization), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 2 (December 15, 1918).
[117] Nikolai Punin, "O Misterii-Buff Vl. Maiakovskogo" (About Maiakovskii's Mystery-Bouffe), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 2 (December 15, 1918).
[118] Viktor Shklovskii, "Ob iskusstve i revoliutsii" (About art and revolution), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 17 (March 30, 1919), 2.
[119] "Ибо быт – по существу своему полярен творчеству; быт это трупный яд, быт – это шлаки, быт – это мертвец, оставленный жизнью, быт – это омертвевшая ткань, которая, как след, ложится за человечесвом и тысячью рук тянет нас ко вчера" (Nikolai Punin, "Kommunizm i futurizm," [Communism and Futurism], *Iskusstvo kommuny,* no. 17).

when he admitted being amazed by the "use of material outside the realm of aesthetics,"[120] Brik did not take part in this collective denunciation of *byt* by his colleagues. It appeared that for him, "the realm outside of aesthetics" took priority over aesthetics itself, or at least that the boundary between the two was not as immutable as for Punin and Shklovskii.

As we have seen, Brik was ready to respond to Lenin's appeal in February 1918 to work for the new state in administrative and executive functions. After the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, his adherence to the new order was wholehearted: not only did he answer the appeal for cooperation, he also joined the party. As a result of his unequivocal acceptance of the party's authority, he was entrusted with the leadership of the IZO Subdivision of Artistic Labor as well as with a leading position in the reformed system of artistic education, first serving as a deputy for Punin when the latter occupied the post of President of the Petrograd Free Art Workshops (PEGOSKhUM) and from the middle of November 1918, replacing him in this position. According to Krusanov, Brik's leadership in PEGOSKhUM was distinguished by his concern for having a publication associated with the school as well as with providing basic services ensuring its smooth functioning. For example, under his tenure, PEGOSKhUM opened a discount cafeteria for students as well as its own Bureau of Artistic Labor, headed by a sculptor Anton Lavinskii, where students could earn money by making artworks ordered by either individuals or collectives.[121] In November 1918, Brik had also become a member of the

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[120] "…пользование внеэстетическим материалом в художественном произведении поразило меня" (Viktor Shklovskii, "O gromkom golose" [About a loud voice], *Zhizn' iskusstva*, nos. 446-447 [May 8-9, 1920], 2, cited in Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 198).

[121] The PEGOSKhUM of Petrograd, which was formed on April 12, 1918, should be distinguished from Svomas (Free Art Wrokshops), decreed in September 1918 and opened in December of that year in Moscow. Khan-Magomedov gives September 5, 1918 as the date of their formation (Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 39). Lodder cites the dates of December 11 and 13, 1918 as the opening of the First and Second

Art and Art Industry Collegium of IZO Narkompros, an administrative organ responsible for reorganizing and regulating the artistic life of the country.[122]

Apart from having cultivated a good working relationship with Lunacharskii, Brik also became a friend of David Shterenberg, the head of IZO Narkompros. When Narkompros moved to Moscow in March 1919, the Briks and Maiakovskii shared an apartment with Shterenberg and his wife.[123] Almost immediately after this move, Brik replaced Tatlin as the head of the Moscow section of IZO and approximately one year later even Shterenberg himself.[124] Brik's advance as a cultural administrator must have been assured by his continual allegiance of faith to the party. On June 6, 1920, Brik joined the Moscow Cheka as an investigator in the Department for Fighting Speculation [*sledovatel' spekuliativnogo otdela*] following Lenin's appeal made at the Ninth Party Congress in April 1920 for all "good Communists" to become "good Chekists."[125] It was

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Free Art Studios in Moscow (Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* 109). On Brik's work for PEGOSKhUM, see Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 91-94; on his engagement with the Second Free State Art Workshops in Moscow, see Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 40.

[122] Krusanov, *Russkii avangard,* 2: bk. 1, 41-52.

[123] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 18.

[124] On Tatlin's replacement by Brik, see Varvara Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda: Pis'ma, poeticheskie opyty, zapiski khudozhnitsy* (Man Cannot Live Without A Miracle: Letters, Poetic Experiments, Notes of the Artist) (Moscow: Sfera, 1994), 80. On Brik assuming Shterenberg's position, see Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 51. Although Khan-Magomedov does not give the date of Shterenberg's replacement, it is probable that it happened in February 1921, after the reorganization of Narkompros, when Shterenberg became the head of Glavprofobr, a new section of Narkompros responsible for "professional education." Brik then might have headed IZO from February until April 1921, when IZO merged into Glavprofobr and the newly formed Academic Center of Narkompros. See Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," 153-156.

[125] Lenin's literal words were: "A good Communist is at the same time a good Chekist." See George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 351. According to Valiuzhenich, Brik was a member of the Cheka-GPU from June 8, 1920 until January 1, 1921 (see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 19). Recently, Valentin Skoriatin discovered that this period lasted longer. According to his data, in 1920, Brik worked as an investigator in the Department for Fighting Speculation [*sledovatel' spekuliativnogo otdela*] of the Moscow Cheka. He stayed in this organization until 1924, when he was fired from GPU (State Political Directorate, the successor of the Cheka), in the rank of a Plenipotentiary of the Subdivision 7 of the Secret Department [*upolnomochennyi 7 otdeleniia sekretnogo otdela*], because he avoided participating in GPU raids through frequent medical leaves (see Valentin Skoriatin, "Zevs osvedomliaet': documenty OGPU o gibeli Maiakovskogo," [Zeus Is Informing: OGPU Documents on Maiakovskii's Death] *Zhurnalist* no. 2 [1993]: 47, note 3). Whereas the primary function of the Cheka during the Civil War was combating "counter-revolutionary activity and sabotage," namely,

while performing his duties as a Chekist that Brik took charge of INKhUK and actively participated in the organization of VKhUTEMAS.[126]

physically suppressing other parties, fighting conspiracies, shooting deserters and requisitioning grain from the countryside, Brik joined this organization already at the end of the Civil War, when the Cheka shifted emphasis from military operations toward the reorganization of economy (Leggett, *The Cheka,* 222-223). At this time, the military police spread its net over a large segment of society, planting informants and collaborators not only in the military, but also in economic and artistic organizations. Charged specifically with "combating speculation," he must have participated in *oblavy* (searches and arrests) of those suspected of having any illegally kept "excess" money or engaging in private trade. It's plausible to assume that because of his father's connections, Brik knew many members of the pre-revolutionary business society in Moscow and he could be helpful to the Cheka as an informant. After the Cheka was reorganized into GPU in 1922, Brik became part of the Secret Department, which was in charge of gathering information and suppressing political opposition. There is evidence that Brik witnessed tortures – a fact that he did not hide and related to his friends (see Roman Jakobson, "Budetlianin nauki" in Bengt Jangfeldt, ed., *Iakobson-budetlianin* [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992], 37). The Russian émigré community in Berlin was deeply suspicious of Brik's activity in the Cheka. In his memoirs about the "House of Arts," a writer and a critic Roman Gul' talked about Lilia Brik's reluctance to visit this popular place of intellectual interaction, even when accompanied by Maiakovskii, because the émigrés were appalled by Osip Brik's work in the Cheka and especially by his qualification of Nikolai Gumilev's poetry as "counter-revolutionary" and "reactionary," which Gul' maintained Brik furnished as an ideological "expert" and which helped the authorities in the case leading to the poet's execution (see R. Gul', "Dom iskusstv," *Russkii Berlin* [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2003], 81-82).

[126] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 18.

CHAPTER THREE

ART AS PRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, in her pioneering book on Russian Constructivism, Christina Lodder began her study with Vladimir Tatlin's non-utilitarian constructions, Aleksandr Rodchenko's abstract sculptures and spatial constructions, Petr Miturich's spatial paintings and graphics, Naum Gabo's and Antoine Pevsner's sculptures, and Gustav Klutsis' three-dimensional constructions. In this way, she defined the subject of her study by an emphasis on artists working primarily in three dimensions. This approach excluded prominent Suprematists, such as Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky, although Lodder did specify that Russian Futurism or "left art" covered both trends and was characterized by its tendency to "regard art as a creation of life."[1] Although never stated in the book explicitly, the difference between Constructivism and Suprematism ran along the divisive line of preserving the exclusive aura of art, associated with painting in particular, versus destroying it: whereas adherents of Constructivism tended to downgrade the auratic aspects of their objects and even ended up calling themselves "engineers," Suprematists leaned in the opposite direction and proudly held on to their status of artists.[2]

In line with her definition of Constructivism, Lodder devoted considerable attention to the discussion of the artists' participation in the Bolshevik government, their successes in introducing their principles into the theater and the design of objects for

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[1] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 48.

[2] On the Constructivists' tendency to eliminate the traditional meaning of art as a mirror-like reflection of the world, see ibid. On the Suprematists' opposing tendency to preserve it, see the literature on Suprematism and its founder, Kazimir Malevich, particularly Charlotte Douglas, *Malevich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994) and Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: zhizn' iskusstva* (Vitebsk: the life of art) (Moscow: Iasyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001).

everyday life, as well as the utilization of photomontage and photography. In this connection, she briefly mentioned Brik as one of the theoreticians of Productivism. She also discussed the Constructivists' failure to realize their ideas on a grand scale, which would have made artists enter factories in the capacity of engineers and thereby realize their ideal of Constructivism as Production art.[3]

In 1984, a year after Lodder's publication, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh raised the issue of the Constructivists' transition "from *faktura* to factography." Constructivist *faktura* was initially a term applied to the paint, the actual material treatment of the canvas, and Buchloh believed it was endowed with historically conditioned flexibility allowing it to incorporate elements of the reigning political ideology. In the course of historical transformation, Productivist factography, with its emphasis on using modern reproductive media, such as photography, reintroduced figurative representation and a clear ideological message. For Buchloh, the fundamental change in the modernist model of representation in the Soviet Union was conditioned by a crisis of the artists' relationship with their audience, which was governed by politics. In this vein, Buchloh paid particular attention to photomontage and photography as exemplary techniques in which this "paradigmatic shift" had taken place. In line with his concern with the ideological and political meaning of Constructivist and Productivist practice, Buchloh concentrated his argument not on the way artists favored a particular medium, but on the ideological embedment of their work, thus discussing not only Rodchenko's sculptures

[3] On the connection between Constructivism and Productivism, see Christina Lodder, "Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s," *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *1914-1932* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 99-116. In this article, she defined Constructivists as artists and Productivists as theoreticians -- see esp. pp. 106ff. In this dissertation, I will maintain this distinction.

and photographs, but also Lissitzky's Prouns and exhibition designs, an area of Constructivist practice elided by Lodder.[4]

Another German art historian, Hubertus Gassner, turned his attention not only to the political engagement of the Russian experimental art, but also to the Constructivist object as a structurally novel entity, which, in contrast to a traditional art object, presented an "anti-individualist, universal geometric form, reproducibility, and an independence from an individual creator…" In line with this new Constructivist object, Gassner was the first to articulate the difference between an object [*predmet*] and a thing [*veshch'*] in the parlance of the Russian Constructivists, specifying that the former denoted any material entity, whereas the latter referred to an object made by hand, as in a traditional artwork. Gassner was also the first to trace a connection between the Constructivist object and the constitution of a new Communist subject, who constructed his/her consciousness and obliterated his/her unconscious in the same transparent, non-individualistic manner with which he created the objects.[5]

In their further exploration of Russian Constructivism, a generation of younger scholars, including Pamela Kachurin, Christina Kiaer, and Maria Gough, has broached various issues opened up by their predecessors. Kachurin investigated the artists' dire dependence on state policies and Communist ideology[6] while Kiaer chose to concentrate on the Productivist theoretician's Boris Arvatov's theory of the function of the Constructivist's object within society, which aimed to replace the capitalist commodity

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[4] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October* no. 30 (Fall 1984): 82-119.
[5] Hubertus Gassner, "The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization," *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 298-319.
[6] Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Retreat of the Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era."

and thus to remake the everyday life.[7] Gough, however, began unpacking complex practical implications of the period of experimental and laboratory Constructivism and its theory, arguing, for example, that Karl Ioganson's *Spatial Constructions* shown at the 1921 OBMOKhU (Society of Young Artists) exhibition, demonstrated a true engineering principle of *tensegrity*, which allowed for the elements of the piece to be held together by the forces of "discontinuous compression and continuous tension."[8] In another article, she argued that the Productivist theoretician's Nikolai Tarabukin's theory of a functional object was, in fact, directed against the unity of this object toward its dissipation into the tasks it was supposed to perform.[9]

In this chapter, I will address the issue of the nature of the Constructivist object and its mass-produced Productivist offspring by focusing on Brik as a leading ideologue of Productivism. Here I argue, in line with the above-mentioned scholars, that the political climate and Bolshevik ideology had everything to do with the development of the theory of Productivism. Following Gough, I will talk about the Constructivist object as a structurally transparent entity that by this very transparency denied its status as a thing and became an infinitely adjustable objectless engineering principle. In this connection, I will invoke Gassner's distinction between an object and a thing and his analysis of a new subject as conditioned by a new concept of the object. In fact, according to Vladimir Dal's dictionary, the definition of the word "object" [*predmet*] in Russian is closely related to the definition of the word "thing" [*veshch'*], but emphasizes

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[7] Kiaer, "The Russian Constructivist 'Object' and the Revolutionizing of Everyday Life, 1921-1929" and her "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects," *October* no. 81 (Summer 1997): 105-118.
[8] Maria Gough, "In the Laboratory of Constructivism: Karl Ioganson's Cold Structures," *October* no. 84, (Spring 1998): 111-112. See also this author's recently published book *Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995).
[9] Maria Gough, "Tarabukin, Spengler, and the Art of Production," *October* no. 93 (Summer 2000): 79-108.

the analytical nature of the former: "Object -- … everything that is presented to feeling: an object that is a [thing-like] material entity; or [everything that is presented to] the mind and imagination: an object of the mind."[10] Like its correlate, *veshch'* is defined through *predmet,* however, with an emphasis on its resistance to logic: "Thing – something, an object, a distinct entity, any inanimate entity: in general, anything that is accessible to feelings."[11] Thus, in Russian, the word *veshch'* has much more to do with the intractable domain of feeling than with the thoroughly defined and analyzed world of objects. The Productivists preferred to use "thing" [*veshch'*] rather than "object" [*predmet*] to designate the actual objects produced by artists. It is in this slippage between the meanings of the two words that the avant-garde's utopia can be located, with the optimists believing that the intractable opacity of "*veshch*" can be transformed into a transparent "*predmet*" and the pessimists casting doubt on the feasibility of such a proposition.

The division of artists into utopians and pragmatics according to their belief in the transparency of "*veshch'*" would be misleading, however. Although all Productivist theoreticians advocated the move of artists into production, to speak about Brik's version of Productivist theory is to diverge from both Arvatov's and Tarabukin's interpretations of Productivism and to introduce a note of skepticism into the discussion concerning the radical artists' belief in the integrity of not only a Constructivist and Productivist object, but also a human subject that makes these objects and lives with them. As he was

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[10] "Предмет -- ... все, что представляется чувствам: предмет вещественный; или уму и воображенью: предмет умственный" Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovyi slovar'zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 4th ed., s. v. "*predmet*."

[11] "Вещь -- ... нечто, предмет, отдельная единица, всякая неодушевленная особь; в общем смысле, все, что доступно чувствам" Vladimir Dal', *Tokovyi slovar'zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 3d ed., s. v. "*veshch*."

promoting his protégés Aleksandr Rodchenko and Anton Lavinskii, establishing institutions for the promotion of Constructivism and Productivism, or writing on photomontage and theater, Brik had always emphasized the up-to-date, flexible, and politically adjustable form of the object, refusing to grant any value to the integrity of its form to any abstract ideal, and valorizing only its expediency and faithfulness to the political tendency of the moment. Toward the end of this chapter, in my discussion of Brik's involvement in theater, I will touch upon his notion of a modern human subject, fragmented and disintegrated, but infinitely adjustable to the performance of any required task.

III. 1. Objectless Creation versus Suprematism

As the head of the Subdivision of Artistic Labor since the fall of 1918, Brik was responsible for organizing and financing key art projects of the Soviet Era such as Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (Fig. III-1)[12] and the competition for book kiosks, with participation of members of the Zhivskul'ptrarkh (Painting, Sculpture and Architecture Collective), which included Rodchenko, Nikolai Istselenov, Sigizmund Dombrovskii, Nikolai Ladovskii, and Vladimir Krinskii.[13] Tatlin's project fascinated Brik's colleague, the Futurist critic Nikolai Punin, because of its visionary scope and because it coincided with his conviction that artists were not obliged to "think practically, but correctly."[14] Punin's support for Tatlin was wholehearted: he called the

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[12] Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," 126.

[13] Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, *Opyty griadushchego modelirovaniia* (Experiments for future model-making) (Moscow: Grant, 2000), 50. On Zhivskul'ptarkh, see Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture: The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 67-69 and Khan-Magomedov, "Zhivskul'ptarkh," *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 5 (1978): 32-35. Designs for kiosks in general, including book kiosks, were a popular architectural and Productivist project of the 1920s. See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 165-169.

[14] Punin, "K itogam Oktiabr'skikh torzhestv" Punin also wrote a famous book about Tatlin's tower – see his *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala* (The Monument to the Third International) (Petrograd, 1920).

artist "the only creative force that is capable of moving art beyond the trenches of old positions," because of "the new form that he gave to the world."[15] Interestingly, Brik did not promote Tatlin's art at all; when he did express enthusiasm about any individual artist, it was Aleksandr Rodchenko.

According to Hubertus Gassner, Varvara Stepanova, Rodchenko's wife, remembered that her husband and Brik first met in March 1919 in order to discuss the formation of Museums of Artistic Culture.[16] This first meeting passed on rather formal terms. Brik kept his distance – he was professional and aloof. A month later, however, after he had seen the Tenth State Exhibition, entitled *Objectless Creation and Suprematism* [*Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm*], which opened in Moscow in April of that year, his attitude toward Rodchenko changed drastically. At this exhibition, Brik was "completely taken" with the artist, "…and said that because of Rodchenko, Malevich was finally passé… The black paintings simply astonished him."[17] What was it that pleased Brik so much in Rodchenko's canvases? Varvara Stepanova, the artist's wife, suggested an answer in the detailed description of her husband's works and the public's reaction to them:

> Anti[18] offered great painting…. His "black" works are the hit of the season. Here he showed what *faktura* actually is – firstly, as the evolution of painting after Suprematism, secondly, as a professional achievement…. In terms of the exit from…Suprematism, there is the destruction of the square and [creation] of new form, [which permits] the deepening of painting into itself. In terms of the professional moment – a new, interesting *faktura* and no "coloring," but the use of the most unyielding color, black…. In the "black" works nothing besides paint exists and this is why their *faktura* is so immensely enhanced. Those shiny,

[15] Nikolai Punin, "Balans" (Balance), *Iskusstvo kommuny* no. 10 (1918).
[16] Varvara Stepanova, diary, March 27, 1919. A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow. As cited in Gassner, "The Constructivists," 308-309.
[17] "Франкетти и Брик в восторе от Анти; Брику Франкетти ещё наговорил, тот совсем растаял и говорит, что Малевич погиб перед Родченко" (Varvara Stepanova, diary, April 19, 1919. Quoted in Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda*, 90.)
[18] Rodchenko's nickname.

> matte, shriveled up, rough and smooth parts of the surface result in an extraordinarily powerful composition. They are so effectively painted that they are not at all inferior to colors.[19]

According to Stepanova, Rodchenko's paintings struck the public with their elaboration of *faktura* – a pervasive, but elusive term in the vocabulary of the Russian avant-garde. In her article on this term, Maria Gough credited the Futurists, David Burliuk in particular, with its introduction into the parlance of Russian artists. Gough specified that the word derived from the Latin *facere* (to make) and thus related to the English *facture*, referring in these languages, to the process of making, the artist's personal touch, his unique signature brushstroke, the index of his mastery. This meaning, according to her, was obscured in the interpretations of Russian Futurists who instead of paying attention to a master's touch emphasized *faktura*'s autonomy, self-sufficiency, and the autotelism of its own materiality.[20]

The Russian "left" painters, for their part, were very specific in their choices of teachers. Of all modern painting, they preferred to borrow from those masters, such as Van Gogh, who built up the texture of their works to a thick rough crust, and whose canvases overflowed with paint, obscuring the very brushwork, the master's signature. The Futurists called this out-of-control, madly flowing paint – in actuality, the opposite of *facture* in its lack of belonging to a master's personal touch – *faktura*, and propagated

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[19] "Анти дал прекрасную живопись…Действительно, его «чёрные» -- гвоздь сезона. И на них же он показал, что такое фактура, во-первых, как новый шаг живописи после супрематизма, во-вторых, как достижение профессиональное… Как выход из супрематизма – уничтожение квадрата и новая форма, углубление живописи в самое себя; как профессиональный момент, новая интересная фактура и только живопись, не гладкое закрашивание в одной краске самой неблагодарной – в чёрной… В «чёрных» же ничего кроме живописи нет, а потому их фактура выигрывает необычайно, она производит впечатление, что вещь написана совершенно разнообразными материалами. Эти блестящие, матовые, жухлые, шероховатые, гладкие части поверхности дают необыкновенную по силе композицию, написаны они так сильно, что не уступают краскам" (Stepanova, diary, April 10, 1919. Quoted in Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda*, 88.)

[20] David Burliuk was one of the sources introducing the discussion of *faktura* in Russia. The other was Voldemars Matvejs' book on the subject. See further discussion of *faktura* in this chapter. See also Maria Gough, "Faktura," *RES* no. 36 (Fall 1999): 35.

its use in their work, reaching the extreme sometimes in emphasizing the chaotic, wild, extraneous nature of it. The poet Benedikt Livshits recalled in his memoirs how he objected in horror when one of the Burliuks brothers began dragging his newly finished canvas through the mud in his attempt to enhance the already thick *faktura* of his work (Fig. III - 2).

Apart from Western sources, such as French Impressionists, Cézanne, and Cubism, which influenced Burliuk's understanding of *faktura,* Gough also mentioned Voldermars Matvejs's important study on the term, written in 1912, but published two years later, that characterized it as "noise" [*shum*] with the origins in the lavish decorations of icons and even the dirt that covered the surface of these icons. This "noise" and dirt were specific to a material to which they belonged; they were unique, impossible to copy and reproduce. Instead of mastering the material, Matvejs called on artists "to emerge from it, adapt to it, slide along it, carefully work it."[21] David Burliuk's dragging of his painting through dirt could be considered a dramatized incarnation of Matvejs's text. Another Russian artist who took Matvejs's advice seriously was, of course, Tatlin, who in his *Selections of Materials* and *Counter-Reliefs* (Figs. III – 3a and b) shaped this nature-induced, uncontrolled aspect of *faktura* in three-dimensional space, emphasizing its tactility. Tatlin's sculptures, assembled out of wood, cardboard, paper, metal, cloth, and leather, were supposed to foreground the so-called "innate nature" of these materials, advantageously displayed by the artist, thereby conveying a particular sense of each of them to the beholder and the sense of physical proximity of disparate textures. For example, he displayed wood in flat rectangular blocks and with textured

[21] Vladimir Markov [Voldermars Matvejs], *Printsipy tvorchestva v plasticheskikh iskusstvakh. Faktura.* (Principles of Creation in Plastic Arts. Faktura.) (St. Petersburg: Soiuz molodezhi, 1914), 13-14, quoted in Gough, "Faktura," 41. Vladimir Markov was Voldemars Matvejs' pseudonym. See ibid., 38-39.

non-polished surfaces. Abutting these, the metal parts of his sculptures were bent and shaped to the degree that was allowed by a particular kind of metal and its thickness.

Rodchenko's conception of *faktura* differed from both Burliuk's and Tatlin's. Unlike Burliuk, Rodchenko was moving away from the unmanageability and unpredictability of *faktura*, emphasizing his own mastery in handling paint. Unlike Tatlin, he was interested more in the painterly and visual, rather than the tactile quality of the material element manifest in his work. Rodchenko wanted to impress the viewer with his professionalism by reducing the color to a basic monochrome and by making visible the various skillful ways in which he could manipulate paint. If we read Stepanova's diary carefully enough, though, it will become clear that her description of Rodchenko's dexterity constituted just one aspect of his opposition to Malevich's supposed carelessness in the execution of his work. The other constitutive aspect of Rodchenko's challenge to Malevich had to deal with the iconoclastic gesture of the destruction of the square.

As its title suggests and the catalogue essays underscore, there were two main trends showcased at the 1919 Tenth State Exhibition *Objectless Creation and Suprematism*. On one hand, there was Suprematism, or what Stepanova, the writer of the introduction to the catalog of this exhibition, called a "spiritual moment," which she described as "the fight for free creativity against object-oriented representation." On the other hand, there was "objectless creation," which, according to Stepanova, "deepened the professional demands of painting."[22] What did Stepanova mean by the "professional

[22] V. Agrarykh, "10-ia gosudarstvennaia vystavka 'Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm'" (Tenth State Exhibition "Objectless Creation and Suprematism"), in I. Matsa, L. Reingart and L. Rempel, eds., *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let: materialy i dokumentatsiia* (Moscow and Leningrad: OGIZ-IZOGIZ, 1933), 110-111. V. Agrarykh was Stepanova's pseudonym.

demands of painting" and why was she juxtaposing Suprematism with this professional attitude?

Malevich launched Suprematism in 1915 at the "0.10" exhibition, where he displayed his *Black Square* (Fig. III - 4) in the "red corner," the place traditionally reserved for icons (Fig. III - 5). The gaping hole of blackness, which replaced an image of divinity, has become an icon in its own right. The strategic location of the work made Malevich's symbolic message explicit. The pamphlet *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism, a New Painterly Realism*, published contemporaneously with the exhibition, was also dominated by symbol-ridden language. A "purely painterly work of art," according to Malevich, involved the transformation of the painter himself into "the zero of form," by destroying the "ring of the horizon" and getting rid of the circle of objects" that "have imprisoned the artist and the forms of nature."[23]

As Yve-Alain Bois has noticed, for Malevich the "zero of form" meant the reduction and simplification of the notions of surface and the pictorial nature of this surface, the elimination of the referent, and the concept of a new infinity, all represented by a square.[24] Charlotte Douglas has observed that Malevich's Suprematist paintings "very soon" began to be "described in terms of 'eternal sensation,' the 'cosmic infinite,' 'the void'—in a word, a philosophical sublime."[25] Thus, the square for Malevich was a collective symbol, which united within itself ideas about economy, infinity and which also doubled the most common shape of the canvas. Remarks by Rodchenko, Stepanova and other artist contemporaries of Malevich support this conclusion. In her memoirs,

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[23] Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism" (1915). Translated in John E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism* (Thames and Hudson, 1986), 118.
[24] Yves-Alain Bois, "Malevitch, le carré, le degrée zéro," *Macula* no. 1 (1978): 28-49.
[25] Douglas, *Malevich*, 24.

Stepanova called Malevich a "mystic," because of his penchant for theorizing art and replacing it with ideas. In describing a gathering at Nadezhda Udal'tsova's apartment on November 28, 1918, at which Malevich tried to recruit supporters from the ranks of the avant-garde, she wrote:

> In his conversation, Malevich has reached a point of no return… In the room there is a sense of mysticism… He proposes to gather, to propagate Suprematism, to become new objectless [artists], then [even our] faces would change somehow… Further, Malevich begins talking about the fact that maybe now we do not have to paint anymore, only preach … Rodchenko begins to argue with him… and pours cold water on his mystical propositions…[26]

Further in the text, Stepanova quoted the painter Aleksandr Drevin called Malevich a "graphic artist" [*grafik*] as opposed to a "painter" [*zhivopisets*], a remark, which meant to accentuate the Suprematist's lack of skill in painting.[27] In his memoirs, Rodchenko was demonstratively negative about Malevich's theoretical proclivities, although he profusely praised Tatlin for the high quality of his work:

> I just read Malevich's Unovis poster. It is all pure literature, with lots of words and nothing of essence. "We want," "We proclaim," "We establish," etc., but what do we want, what do we proclaim and what have we done – there is nothing, except for the poster. This is new poetry. They remind me very much of Bal'mont: "I want," etc. I become more and more convinced that it is important to get things done and the most important, most essential – one can speak and write, but about business, about essence. Now, we have all learned to talk a lot without saying anything…[28]

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[26] "Малевич уже договорился до точки… в комнате мистикой пахнет… предлагает объединиться, пропагандировать супрематизм, сделаться новыми беспредметными, тогда и лица будут какими-то другими…. Далее Малевич договорился до того, что, может быть, уже теперь не надо больше писать, а только проповедовать…. Родченко вступает с ним в полемику… и обливает холодной водой его мистические преположения.…"(Stepanova, diary, January 8, 1919. Cited in Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda*, 62). Apart from Udal'tsova, Stepanova and Rodchenko, this gathering also included Ivan Kliun, Aleksandr Drevin, and Aleksei Gan. See ibid.

[27] Ibid., 70.

[28] "Прочитал сейчас Малевича плакат Уновиса. Это сплошная литература, где много написано и совершенно ничего не сказано. «Мы хотим», «мы установляем», «мы призываем» и.т.д., но чего хотим, к чему призываем и что сами сделали – нет ничего, кроме этого плаката. Это новые стихи. Да и сильно напоминают Бальмонта: «Я хочу» и.т.д. Я всё больше и больше убеждаюсь в том, что нужно делать и делать, и главное, самое существенное, можно и говорить, и писать, но всё о деле, о существе. Мы теперь все научились много говорить, ничего не сказав..."(Rodchenko, diary, June 14,

The priority of thought over craft in Malevich's art was something that was challenged in 1919 at this Tenth State Exhibition by a group of artists, which included Malevich's former allies, such as Liubov' Popova and Mikhail Men'kov. The most forceful opposition to Suprematism on this ground was mounted by Rodchenko, who exhibited thirty-seven works, among them eight *Black-on-Black* canvases, which caused a furor comparable to the reception of Malevich's *Black Square* four years earlier. In opposition to Malevich's smoothed-out canvases, Rodchenko proposed paintings about their material – paint -- also monochrome, but black. In his 1921 essay "The Line," Rodchenko explained his concern with the integral formal and material qualifiers of his art such as *faktura*, color, surface plane, line and their interplay on a canvas.[29] Whereas in his slightly later "line" works of the same year he investigated the properties that allow to "express the structural characteristics of a system," such as "the frame, the skeleton, the relationship of surfaces to each other," and its "kinetic" qualities, such as movement, in the "black" paintings he worked on its "painterliness," which, in his own definition, comprised "impasto, priming, glazing, highlighting and layering, all taken together"[30] – the masterfully handled surface of the canvas. With his disdain of anything that dealt with the mystery and the unknown, Brik must have been attracted to Rodchenko's positivistic display of his mastery and believed that he represented a more viable force in art than Malevich. Also, in comparison to Malevich's canvases, Rodchenko's work

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1920. Cited in Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Opyty dlia budushchego* [Experiments for the Future], ed. O. V. Mel'nikov and V. I. Sveshnikov [Moscow: Grant, 1996], 83).

[29] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "The Line" (1921); trans. James West in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1990), 72.

[30] Ibid., 71.

possessed a strong iconoclastic character, which must have impressed Brik and ultimately led to his friendship with the artist.

The disagreement about an appropriate title for the work of Malevich, to which Yve-Alain Bois alluded in the opening sentence of his article "Malevitch, le carré, le degré zéro," – whether it is simply *Black Square* or *Black Square on White Background* – indicates the hesitation in recognizing Malevich's work exclusively in painterly terms rather than a statement on the relation of reason to unreason.[31] For adherents of the symbolic interpretation of the work, which maintains Malevich's link to Symbolism, the white border designates a space that is qualitatively different from the blackness inside. Without this background, the painting would have a completely different meaning. Slavoj Žižek explained this work as "the statement on the relationship between the Real and reality," where the central lack of the horrific Real – represented by the lack of light, colors, and texture – is framed by the sign of absolute intelligence.[32] As Žižek observed, the elimination of the white border in favor of the blackness would result in the emergence of a psychotic space, where the central blackness, standing for the Real, would overwhelm the human capacity for symbolization. In his *White on White* paintings, shown at the Tenth State Exhibition, Malevich did precisely the opposite – he eliminated the blackness and expanded the white border into a limitless space of flight without gravity. As Bois observed, there are hints at the illusion of depth to represent this

[31] Bois, "Malevitch, le carré, le degrée zéro," 28-49. In this article, Bois calls the latter variation of the title "abusive."
[32] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 19.

symbolic space adequately, marked by a slight gradation in texture and hue of the whites and by the asymmetric rotation of the square.[33]

In his black paintings, Rodchenko had also opened up the white border of Malevich's *Black Square*, but in a different direction (Figs. III – 6a-c). Instead of white paint, the blackness spilled out and filled the canvas. Despite Žižek's warning, I do not believe it created a psychotic space, because its emphatic *faktura* shattered the symbolism of Malevich's works and instead exposed the craft of painting which, in Stepanova's words, resulted in "a real easel painting that reached its ultimate point of expression."[34] In these works, Rodchenko may have felt that he had destroyed the last remnants of the ego-centered perspectival representation, which dominated Western painting since the Renaissance. Instead of an all-seeing eye, Rodchenko's "black" paintings were governed by the logic of the gaze, theorized most famously by a French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

In his essay on "The Gaze as *Objet Petit a*," Lacan defined the gaze in opposition to an eye – "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."[35] In the Lacanian analysis, the eye differs from the gaze in that the eye does not belong to the realm of the visual, because it is a mental construction, which represents visuality via a bipolar dictum: "I see myself seeing myself." Thus, the physical organ, the eye, becomes a mind's eye, an imaginary construction, by means of which even a blind person can compose a picture out of his imagination, because all he/she needs to

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[33] Bois, "Malevitch, le carré, le degrée zéro," 42.
[34] "Он дал в «чёрных» то, о чём так мечтает Запад – настоящую станковую картину, доведённую до последней точки"(Stepanova, diary, April 10, 1919. Cited in Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda,* 89.)
[35] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), 72.

know is a concept of distance and of geometric progression. Any image seen with the mental eye is built on the system of geometric perspective, around an imaginary line that in itself is a representation of light. Such a system, according to Lacan, has nothing to do with the fundamental requirements of vision, because our ability to see depends not on linear geometry, but on light.

In opposition to the all-seeing eye of geometric perspective, Lacan proposed the "function of the stain" as the guiding principle of the gaze. In the schema of the function of the eye, the central point is occupied by a subject who constructs an image of an object by pretending that there is a transparent screen between him and the object and the straight lines of light connect each point on the object to the corresponding point on the image. In the schema of the function of the gaze, the central place is occupied by a source of light, which projects a beam on an opaque screen, thereby producing a picture. In a gaze, the perceptual prerequisite of vision – the necessity of light to see – takes precedence over the mental processing of the data in the constitution of a representational space. Following this reasoning, the gaze "paints a picture" in the depth of my eye, but "I," the constituted Cartesian subject, the conscious self-sufficient entity, "I am not in the picture."[36] "I," the ego, become an opaque screen, a blot of darkness that obstructs the path of a light beam.

From this perspective, then, Rodchenko's works can be read as something more than positivistic objects, indexing the process of painting. By breaking open Malevich's square Rodchenko destroyed the solid ground of consciousness behind it, addressing the unconscious realm beyond it. In his black works, the gaze took center stage in place of the eye. The subject matter of these works is the absence of the subject. As paintings,

[36] Ibid., 96.

Rodchenko's works made Lacan's metaphor of the stain literal. They are stains in the Lacanian sense of the word – they invite and define the gaze. They are the other side of the gaze, that which distinguishes them from being the all-seeing subject, the eye. They invite the gaze by virtue of being paintings and return it by mimicking the pupil of the eye. They stare back at the viewer and offer him a choice of libidinal object, an *objet a*, on the surface of Rodchenko's *faktura*.

Rodchenko made his works ambiguous as to the freedom that he allows the viewer to exercise – on the one hand, his black paintings are objects, the process of making of which was made transparent in its *faktura*; on the other, they are impenetrable things that attract or repulse the viewers by the same *faktura*, now activated by the viewer's gaze. "The gaze always participates in the ambiguity of a jewel," says Lacan.[37] "The Real that serves as support of our symbolic reality must appear to be found and not produced," punctuates Žižek. The things that a viewer sees in these black paintings are those "shining, matte, shriveled up, rough, and smooth parts of the surface," worked out by the painter and described as *faktura* by Stepanova. Our gaze becomes attached to some of these flickering "parts of the surface" that deflect it and prevent it from entering the psychotic space, the all-engulfing space of the Real. In the *faktura* of Rodchenko's creation, each viewer is circumscribed to choose from a limited array of possibilities to find his/her own "piece of the Real," his own *objet a*, around which to build his/her own reality.

Brik must have liked not only the actuality of Rodchenko's *faktura* in opposition to his perception that Malevich was painting symbols, but also the artist's ultimate control over his medium which conditioned the viewers' perception of his work as that of

[37] Ibid.

a master-painter. In pointed opposition to Malevich, Rodchenko transferred the attention from the artist-thinker to the artist-maker and to his viewers as allies in the creation of the work. Also, by making his black works an embodiment of painterly *faktura*, Rodchenko pushed his definition of objectless art to an oxymoronic extreme. Although his paintings were devoid of any traditional representational value and any symbolism, they still remained objects of delectation. It is this elusive, subjective, and viewer-centered *objet a* that transformed the painting made by Rodchenko into a thing admired by a viewer. It is this hint at a mocking exposure and the despoliation of painting as well as the opening up of the domain of desire in the realm of the aesthetics that might have attracted Brik to Rodchenko. It would take more than two years, however, for Rodchenko to officially declare the death of painting with his triptych *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color* at the 5 x 5 = 25 exhibition, which opened on September 18, 1921, in Moscow.[38] During this time, his friendship with Brik developed into a close working relationship.

III. 2. INKhUK and VKhUTEMAS

Although Rodchenko's black works marked the beginning of his involvement with Brik, Rodchenko's friendship with Kandinsky had to be overcome before the artist and the critic could reach a stage of full cooperation. This friendship began some time after Kandinsky returned to Russia at the end of 1914 and, according to Stepanova, was in full swing by 1919. In her memoirs, Stepanova remarked on the older artist's

[38] On Rodchenko's declaration of the death of painting, see Gough, "Tarabukin, Spengler, and the Art of Production," 85-89. Selim Khan-Magomedov, in his book on Constructivism, notes that this exhibition had two openings, on September 18 and October 6, 1921. According to him, Rodchenko's painting was exhibited at the second opening. See Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, 60.

attentiveness toward the couple and his admiration for Rodchenko's work.[39] According to her, the only moment of tension occurred in the fall of 1920, when Rodchenko and Stepanova were moving out of the building they shared with Kandinsky.[40] In the memoirs, Stepanova did not mention a serious professional disagreement between her husband and the older painter, which surfaced at the same time when the couple moved out of Kandinsky's house. The tension emerged during meetings at INKhUK, established through the initiative of the head of IZO David Shterenberg to "work out a science of art" by "conducting analytic and synthetic studies of the basic elements of individual arts and of art as a whole."[41]

According to the Selim Khan-Magomedov, INKhUK grew out of another artists' organization, the Union of New Art, which comprised Kandinsky, Rodchenko, and Stepanova, among others. The members wishing to form a Council of Masters of Artists-Painters [*Sovet Masterov khudozhnikov-zhivopistsev*] started meeting in January 1920, and by May of that year became officially incorporated as INKhUK, with the program written by its first President, Kandinsky.[42] Kandinsky's program emphasized the

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[39] See Stepanova's diary entries for February 17, 1919; January 7, 1920, and September 2, 1920 in Stepanova, *Chelovek in mozhet zhit' bez chuda*, 74, 90, 127.

[40] Stepanova, diary, October 24, 1920. Cited in Stepanova, *Chelovek in mozhet zhit' bez chuda*, 140. According to the chronology of Dmitrii Sarabianov and Natal'ia Avtonomova, Rodchenko and Stepanova moved to Kandinsky's building on Dolgii Lane in September 1919 and stayed there until the fall of 1920. See D. V. Sarabianov and N. B. Avtonomova, *Vasilii Kandinsky: Put' khudozhnika* (Moscow: Galart, 1994), 149. The book *Alexander M. Rodtschenko-Warwara F. Stepanova: Die Zukunft ist unsere einziges Ziel* (Munich, 1991), edited by Peter Noever, specifies these dates as September 15, 1919 and October 24, 1920. Vivian Barnett in *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim*, however, wrote that Kandinsky and Rodchenko lived in the same building from 1915. See Vivian Endicott Barnett, *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim* (New York: Aberville Press Publishers, 1983), 37. I am thankful for research information on this question to Vivian Barnett.

[41] "Programma Instituta khudozhestvennoi kul'tury v Moskve" (Program of the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow) (1920), in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let*, 126.

[42] S. O. Khan-Magomedov, "Vozniknovenie i formirovanie Inkhuka (Institut khudozhestvennoi kul'tury)," (Origin and Formation of INKhUK [The Institute of Artistic Culture]) *Problemy istorii sovetskoi arkhitektury*, no. 2 (1976): 24-27, cited in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 279, note 36. See also Natal'ia Avtonomova and Dmitrii Sarab'ianov, "Vasilii Kandinsky. Chronology, 1917-21," *Experiment* no. 8 (2002): 9.

theoretical orientation of the Institute's work and its focus on the study of the viewer's physical and psychological reactions to particular formal elements within each medium, such as its color, the arrangement of graphic elements in painting or the sound and time duration in music.[43] As the head of the section of monumental art, Kandinsky placed emphasis on the traditional arts, such as painting, music and dance.[44]

Under the influence of his belief that easel art should be "objective," Rodchenko rebelled against the older artist's "subjective" stance that adhered to the traditional way of considering art from the point of view of a subject looking at the world around him and representing it in his work. To oppose Kandinsky's influence, in November 1920 Rodchenko founded the Group of Objective Analysis with the aim of studying the formal elements of an artwork as self-sufficient material elements, existing in a closed system and obeying their own laws. By January 1921, members of the group, including Rodchenko, Stepanova, Popova, Drevin, and others, managed to outvote Kandinsky's supporters on a number of important organizational issues and replaced him with Rodchenko. The life at INKhUK assumed a different direction under Rodchenko's leadership, known as the period of the "composition-construction" debate.[45]

Analyzed in detail in numerous studies, this debate attempted to define a transition from the traditional notion of pictorial "composition" to a modern one of "construction," which could be more easily expanded into three dimensions. As Khan-Magomedov remarked, the artists who participated in INKhUK meetings wished to elucidate the difference between the notions of composition and construction and were

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[43] "Programma Instituta," in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let*, 126-127.
[44] S. O. Khan-Magomedov, *Asnova, OSA i gruppy Inkhuka* (Asnova, OSA and the groups of INKhUK) (Moscow: Arkhitektura, 1994), 7.
[45] Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm,* 94.

preoccupied much more with the latter, applying it not only to sculpture and architecture, but also to painting.[46] The overwhelming majority of participants in these discussions, with Rodchenko leading the way, agreed that the notion of "construction" involved a particular goal [*tsel'*] or even a utilitarian aim [*utilitarnost'*]. Lodder and Khan-Magomedov have indicated that Rodchenko was at the forefront of the movement to replace a painterly "composition" by an engineered "construction."[47] Shortly after the onset of the debate, Rodchenko abandoned painting altogether, split from his former allies, the painters-"objectivists" Popova, Udal'tsova, and Drevin -- and founded, together with Stepanova and a critic Aleksei Gan, the First Working Group of Constructivists to concentrate exclusively on three-dimensional constructions.[48]

Pronouncements of some leading participants in the "composition-construction" debate demonstrated that the impulse behind their discussions and their attempt at finding a new form lay in the changed political atmosphere of the country. The architect Nikolai Ladovskii, for example, proposed popular definitions of composition and construction informed by his knowledge of current political tactics: for him, construction was the "joining of formed material elements according to a definite plan-scheme in order to achieve a certain effect."[49] Composition, according to Ladovskii, was based on the principle of "hierarchy and coordination." Brik's protégé, the sculptor Anton Lavinskii, introduced Nietzschean overtones into the discussion by opining that construction was a

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[46] Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivizm* (INKhUK and the Early Constructivism) (Moscow: Arkhitektura, 1994), 36-71.
[47] On Rodchenko's radicalism in the "construction-composition" debate, see Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 88-89 and Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivizm*, 39, 44, and 51.
[48] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* 94-98 and Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivizm*, 89-112.
[49] "Техническая конструкция – соединение оформленных материальных элементов по определённому плану-схеме для достижения силового еффекта" (Nikolai Ladovskii, Excerpts from minutes of INKhUK meetings, January and February 1921. Cited in Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivizm*, 41.)

"will-based system" [*sistema volevogo postroeniia*], necessary for contemporary life, whereas composition was a mere "intuitive arrangement of spots."[50] Rodchenko was also explicit about the connection between art and politics: "All new approaches to art arise from technology and engineering and move towards organization and construction."[51] For him, this was directly connected to "the life of the RSFSR [The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]," where "everything leads to organization."[52]

Rodchenko's constructions, made right before and during his directorship of INKhUK and displayed at the Second OBMOKhU exhibition, which opened up in Moscow in May 1921,[53] conveyed his continuing interest in the transparency of a made object as opposed to the opacity of a mysterious thing that the viewer's desire invoked in an object through the engagement of the gaze. In his five hanging *Spatial Constructions* modeled after common geometric shapes – an oval, a hexagon, a square, a triangle, and a circle[54] – he made concentric cuts along the perimeter of each solid two-dimensional shape and then fastened the pieces together symmetrically, which allowed the shape to unfold into three dimensions (Fig. III -7). In his explanation of the constructions, Rodchenko emphasized uniformity and transparency of the making process. According

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[50] Anton Lavinskii, Excerpts from minutes of INKhUK meetings, March 1921. Cited in ibid., 55.
[51] Aleksandr Rodchenko, Minutes of INKhUK meeting, January 1, 1921. Quoted in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* 88.
[52] Aleksandr Rodchenko, Minutes of INKhUK meeting, January 21, 1921. Quoted in ibid.
[53] Anatolii Strigalev clarified a widespread confusion about the sequence and the dating of this OBMOKhU exhibition in his entry on the Stenberg brothers and Konstantin Medunetskii first exhibition. See Anatolii Strigalev, "Konstruktivisty" (Constructivists), in *Velikaia utopia: Russikii i sovetskii avangard, 1915-1932* (The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932) (Bern: Bentelli and Moscow: Galart, 1993), 729.
[54] See Gassner, "The Constructivists," 312.

to the artist, in the hanging constructions he attempted to demonstrate that "everything can be built out of equal shapes with different methods, systems, and sizes."[55]

However, apart from the structural or "constructive" aspect of the pieces – the way they were put together – there was also a material one, which concerned the surface of these objects. In the absence of metal, Rodchenko covered the surface of his *Spatial Constructions* in silver paint, which allowed him to turn them into mirrors of sorts in order to reflect the viewer's gaze.[56] In their folded state, the constructions made the gaze transparent to itself, thereby ridding it of the opacity of the *objet a* by exposing the viewer's reflection. Unfolded, they destroyed the fictional unity of the subject by breaking the reflecting surface into many concentric shapes, which in turn broke the reflection of the onlooker into a multitude of discombobulated pieces. As is evident from the photographs of the exhibition, Rodchenko's constructions were not free-standing – they had to be suspended from the ceiling (Fig. III -8). In their suspended state, their position in space and their configuration changed constantly: the slightest current of air stirred by a passer-by would make them turn, spin, and reflect a different aspect of their surroundings. In Rodchenko's handling, the experimental Constructivist object became flexible, reflexive, infinitely adjustable to its surroundings, and conditional upon a viewer's gaze.

Brik became director of INKhUK at the end of 1921, an era of reorientation of the Institute from the "composition-construction" debate toward the Productivist stage.

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[55] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "The Experimental Transition of Painting through Constructivist Art and Spatial Forms toward Industrial Production" (1922). Quoted in Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 102.

[56] In her article "The Transition to Constructivism," Lodder points out unavailability of such industrial materials as metal for artists' use in the post-Civil War Russia. Rodchenko, she says, would have used metal were it available, for his Hanging Spatial Constructions. See Christina Lodder, "The Transition to Constructivism," *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 274.

According to Khan-Magomedov, at the meeting held on December 29, 1921, Brik proposed his program for transforming INKhUK into an "active organization" [*deistvuiushchuiu organizatsiiu*]. To this end, Brik subdivided the tasks of the Institute into three categories: theoretical (art historians, theoreticians), practical (artists participating in production), and political (propaganda and struggle for dominance over other movements).[57] Although in his verbal remarks Brik was against "the death of art,"[58] his actions were more eloquent than his words: during one of the first meetings of his tenure as director, Brik proposed that INKhUK leave the Art Department of Narkompros and enter instead the aegis of the Council of National Economy.[59] According to the information provided by Pamela Kachurin, this move must have been prompted by concerns of such officials as Ol'ga Anikst, who proposed that technical education should be removed from the domain of IZO and placed under the management of professional unions and the Council on National Economy, because IZO in her opinion was dominated by "most extreme left trends," and was capable of producing "a few hundreds of thousands of unsuccessful Futurists" instead of "such a number of artistically-trained workers."[60] Brik responded to Anikst's charges by enthusiastically agreeing to change jurisdictions, which would have assured the governmental consideration of the Institute as a body of the first order, because, in accordance with

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[57] Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, 201. To summarize the period of the transition from "composition" to "construction" in the history of INKhUK, Brik supported the artists' initiative to organize an exhibition at the end of 1921 – beginning of 1922. The exhibition never happened, partly because of the threat of political critique and being put under the aegis of the Academy of Arts. See Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivism*, 173-179.

[58] An art historian Andrei Krusanov insists that "Brik was against 'the death of art,' insisting that 'this task is not our business.'" See Krusanov, *Russkii avangard*, 2, bk. 1: 170.

[59] Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivzm*, 231-234.

[60] Olga Anikst, Minutes of a meeting at IZO Narkompros. GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), Fond A-2306, opis' 2, delo 104, list 101. Cited in Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Retreat of the Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era," 115.

Marxist terminology, it would have placed it among institutions concerned with the well-being of the economic base as opposed to those of a derivative cultural superstructure. Lunacharskii, however, was against such radical change and despite Brik's wishes this transfer never materialized -- on January 1, 1922 INKhUK became part of the newly formed Russian Academy of Art. Brik, however, had not relinquished the hope of remaking the Institute into the base of technological labor: at the meeting on October 6, 1923, he proposed to rename INKhUK into INDUK (The Institute of Industrial Culture). Brik's proposal was formally accepted, although in the long-term the old name remained extant.[61]

Apart from spearheading INKhUK, Brik was closely involved with the establishment of VKhUTEMAS organized toward the end of 1920 on the basis of SVOMAS (Free Workshops) with the explicit aim of preparing "highly qualified master artists for industry."[62] During the first year of VKhUTEMAS' existence, INKhUK artists taught basic introductory disciplines – "color construction," "graphic construction," "volumetric construction," and "spatial construction"[63]– but toward 1922-23 many switched to specialized departments of metalwork, woodwork, ceramics, textile, and graphic arts. For example, Rodchenko, who taught "graphic construction" at the Department of Painting in 1920, assumed charge of the Department of Metalwork in 1922. Artist Aleksandr Vesnin, who, together with Popova, was in charge of courses on "color construction," transferred to the Department of Architecture in 1923. Initially a

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[61] See minutes of INKhUK meeting on October 6, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.
[62] *Izvestiia VTsIK*, December 25, 1920, cited in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 112. Beginning in 1919, Brik became a representative of Narkompros to the Second SVOMAS, which was formed from the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in the fall of 1918. In this capacity, he was instrumental in influencing the formation of VKhUTEMAS. See Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas* (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 1990), 1:40, 51, 173.
[63] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 124.

specialist on "volumetric construction," Lavinskii moved to the Department of Woodwork. This reorientation of INKhUK artists toward industrial faculties was prompted by theoreticians of Productivism, Brik in particular. According to Khan-Magomedov, after Brik took charge of INKhUK, he paid particular attention to the pedagogical activity of the Institute's members and to their participation in teaching disciplines relating to production. The meeting at INKhUK on October 20, 1922, emphasized the importance of "the tightest and most organic connection between INKhUK and VKhUTEMAS" and that "the very principle of the disciplines taught at the workshops was introduced at INKhUK."[64]

III. 3. *Art in Production*

The premises of the Productivist theory were outlined in the 1921 booklet *Art in Production* [*Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*], published by the Narkompros Subdivision of Artistic Production (formerly the Subdivision of Artistic Labor), headed by Brik since 1918. This publication was intended to introduce Productivism as an official theory of art by defining it in relation to its predecessors – Nietzsche and Symbolists – its adversaries – Suprematists – and by outlining its immediate aims of the production of things and ideas. The editorial, written most likely either by the head of IZO Shterenberg or by Brik, explained the aim of the publication as the "clarification and working out of issues concerning the role of art in the production process" as "one of the basic problems of freed labor, which is tightly interlaced with the problem of the transformation of

[64] INKhUK report, dated October 20, 1922. Quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, 233.

production culture on the one hand and with the problem of the transformation of *byt* on the other."[65]

In the introduction to the collection, Shterenberg asserted that the merging of art and production was one of the main tasks of IZO Narkompros from the moment of its foundation and lamented that a "simple thought" that "a chair or a table" may become equivalent in their artistic value to "some Madonna and similar fetishes of art" required a lot of persuasion. Convincing the audience of the truth of this proposition was the main goal of the book.[66] In the "Order of the Day," Brik shifted the focus of the argument into a sociological vein by indicating that the division of art into pure and applied categories reflected societal hierarchy and that the new society did not distinguish between "architects, sculptors, painters" and "engineers, metalworkers, woodworkers," aiming at "every worker to understand why he is applying a certain form and a certain color to an object" so that he could become "a conscious, active participant in the creative process of the making of the thing."[67]

The central texts of the collection were written by Brik's protégés, who were either students from the State Free Workshops, as was the case with A. Fillipov and David Arkin, or early propagators of the fusion of artistic and technological production, such as A. Toporkov, picked out by Brik as early as March 1919 to give a lecture on the subject of "Artist and Machine."[68] Whereas Shterenberg's and Brik's short incantatory articles introduced the collection, the four main texts of *Art in Production* revealed not

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[65] "Искусство в производстве … имеют своей задачей освещение и разработку вопроса о роли художественного начала в производственном процессе… как одной из основных проблем освобождённого труда – теснейшим образом связанной с проблемой преобразования производственной культуры с одной стороны, -- и с проблемой преобразования быта – с другой" "Ot redaktsii," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (Moscow: IZO Narkompros, 1921), 3.
[66] David Shterenberg, "Pora poniat'," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 5-6.
[67] Osip Brik, "V poriadke dnia," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 7-8.
[68] See Krusanov, *Russkii avangard*, 2, bk.1: 108-109 and 205.

only references to Marx, but also a strong Nietzschean undercurrent in the foundation of Productivism in their emphasis on artistic will and this will's ability to transform the world. In "Production Art," Filippov distinguished between two modes of representation conditioned by "artistic psychology" -- "reproductive" and "constructive" -- and called for artists to paraphrase Marx's dictum about science in order to reorient themselves from merely "reflecting the world around them" to actively "building it."[69] In "Fine Art and Material Culture," David Arkin expressed most clearly the link to Symbolism by deploring art's inability to participate in the "remaking of life" [*preobrazovanie zhizni*] and insisting that this handicap caused the turn-of-the-century representational crisis. He emphasized that the task of today's art was to find a way out of this impasse and, taking the example from William Morris, to connect art with people's daily activities. To this end, an artist must learn to incorporate his work into the technological advances of society with full knowledge and power over this technology. On this point, Arkin criticized Suprematism as "one of the most astonishing examples of the artist's entrapment by the machine; the mechanized Suprematist 'objectlessness' – is wholly a hypnosis by the machine; Suprematist creation reveals a complete lack of will on the part of the artist confronted with the superior will of the machine, which had completely possessed his artistic consciousness… There is only one way out: not in the will-deprived giving in to the energy of the mechanized process, but in the artist's mastery of all possibilities of this process…-- in production art."[70]

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[69] A. Filippov, "Proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 9-12.

[70] "Так и супрематизм в живописи является одним из самых разительных примеров пленения художника машиной; механизированная супрематическая беспредметность – всецело гипноз машины; супрематическое творчество являет полное безволье художника перед сильнейшей волей машины, целиком охватившей его художественным сознанием….Исход только в одном: не в безвольном отдавании себя энергиям машинного процесса, а в овладении художником всеми

In "'Pure' and 'Applied' Art," Vasilii Voronov argued against the hierarchy of pure over applied art, tracing the history of this phenomenon. He indicated that this separation of creative activity originated during the Renaissance and was based on false premises that ignored the "conditional" [*uslovnyii*] character of representation of nature and substituted "painterly psychology" for "the true color-based painting," thus subjugating art to "naturalist tendencies." Tracing the development of Western art from the Renaissance to the present, the author noticed the mounting tendency toward "constructive-decorative art," whose force lies in "form, line, color" -- in other words, on the surface of the canvas and not in its perspectival depth. Voronov praised this move from depth onto the surface -- "the work of applied art was restricted, integral, self-sufficient; it is an indisputable creative act expressed in real images, whereas a painting is a mirage, an abstraction, the anxious instability of psychological ideas."[71] In the conclusion of the article, Voronov extolled architecture as the ultimate modern art for its essentially applied, "real" nature and for its distance from the tendency of "pure" art to fill museums, because "creation for museums is absurd. It proves the complete incapacity of a modern easel painter for life."[72]

In the last article of the collection, "Technical Form and Artistic Form," Toporkov composed a paean to the machine. According to him, the established notion that the machine was "the image of mechanical, external, blind necessity" was wrong, as was an unfavorable comparison of the machine to a human being, directed in his activities by an

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возможностями этого процесса – в производственном искусстве" (D. Arkin, "Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo i material'naia kul'tura," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 16-17.)

[71] "Произведение прикладного искусства – ограничено, цельно, замкнуто в себе, самодовлеюще; это – безусловный творческий акт, выраженный в реальных образах, тогда как картина представляет собой мираж, отвлечённость, тревожную неуравновешенность психологических идей" (Vasilii Voronov, "'Chistoe' i 'prikladnoe' iskusstvo," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 24-25.)

[72] "… Но творчестсво для музеев – это абсурд. Оно говорит о полной непригодности современного станкового художника для жизни" (ibid., 26-27.)

"inner sense." Rather, a technological mechanism was akin to an "animated body" [*odushevlennyi organism*] in its reliance on the "creative thought, which lies at the foundation of its construction." This "creative thought" [*tvorcheskii zamysel*] represented the center around which the parts were put together to bring the thought into action. Despite the appearance of wholeness and perfection, however, the machine was never perfect, it never conquered nature completely – at all times it had the potential for improvement, which was not always technically possible. This is where the artist had to come in and fill the gap between what is and what should be, to form the "formless material" in such a way that the produced thing appeared perfect. Toporkov accentuated his point with a stunning parallel between technological and intellectual production, uniting it on a conceptual level: "the machine is an embodied word."[73]

Thus, the articles of *Art in Production* traced a clear historical trajectory of the genesis of Productivism, springing from Nietzsche's proactive philosophy, moving on to the Symbolist ideas of remaking the world with art, then on to abolishing the hierarchy of pure and applied art, and finally, to the process of engineering machines as that of the ultimate creativity, the products of which should be made desirable to the public by the artist's touch. Moreover, the concluding comparison of an engineer and an ideologue underscored the anti-visual conceptual basis of Productivist theory: the word reigned over an image because, similar to an engineered mechanism, it manifested "creative thought" that was capable of transforming the world. The role of a visual artist in this situation was confined to that of an attractor of the public's collective gaze and that of a

[73] "Машина есть слово, ставшее плотью" (A. Toporkov, "Forma tekhnicheskaia i forma khudozhestvennaia," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, 31).

critic was expanded to mirroring the artist's role by intervening in creative process and directing it to real use.

III. 4. Constructivist Object or Productivist Thing?

Under the leadership of Brik, INKhUK artists and critics worked toward realizing the principles of *Art in Production*.[74] Theoreticians took the initiative at this stage of the Institute's development. In March-April 1922, Brik's colleague Boris Kushner[75] presented a series of four lectures on the "production of culture" and the role of engineers and artists in this process. In these lectures, he erased the difference between *veshch'* and *predmet* ("thing" and "object") in favor of the latter. According to him a "thing" was equivalent to "an object, organized by a human for the satisfaction of his needs."[76] However, because this thing/object was defined by space, time, and function, and because the time for the making of it was constantly diminishing, the thing/object as we know it was bound to disappear. Instead of concentrating on the idea of a conventional product, producers and manufacturers would have to switch their attention to consumers' demands and make new types of objects, which would not have a stable form, but would be fluid and multifunctional – they would change their form constantly according to the demands of their users and would be able to perform the functions of an entire complex of things.[77]

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[74] Toward the end of 1922 Arvatov replaced Brik as director of INKhUK and in 1923-1924 Brik was reinstated in this position. See Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 61, 79.

[75] Boris Kushner (1888-1937) was Brik's contemporary, a writer (he published a collection of verses *Semafory* [Traffic lights] before the First World War), and a member of the Bolshevik party since 1917. In 1918, he joined the Futurist cause by contributing to the *Art of the Commune.* See *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (1931), s.v. "Kushner Boris Anisimovich." According to Gough, in 1920-21 Kushner also worked briefly for the Supreme Council of National Economy. See Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 143, cited in Gough, "Tarabukin, Spengler, and the Art of Production," 106.

[76] "Определение вещи – предмет, организованный человеком на удовлетворение его потребностей" (Boris Kushner, "Proizvodstvo kul'tury," lecture delivered at INKhUK on March 9 and March 16, 1922. Quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm,* 206).

[77] Ibid., 206-208.

Brik considered Kushner's next lecture, presented at INKhUK on March 30, 1922, important enough to be printed a year later in his journal *LEF*, which he and Maiakovskii founded in 1923. In this lecture, tellingly entitled "The Role of an Engineer at a Factory," Kushner briefly traced the formation of the engineering profession and subdivided it into three types: the technological engineer, who "organizes, directs, and regulates the production process" with materials available at a factory; engineers-constructors who work in technological bureaus; and engineers-Taylorists, organizers of labor at large enterprises.[78] Kushner asserted that despite their theoretical knowledge of sciences, many engineers were best served by practical experience. From this point of view, engineers-constructors fared the worst, because they lacked practical experience and innovative thinking – qualities that artists possessed in full. Therefore, concluded Kushner, artists were in a very good position to become "artists-engineers" after gaining some essential knowledge for production design.[79]

Kushner's last lecture of this cycle, read on April 6, 1922, defined the role of an artist in production as a conceptual one, that of a specialist in "orientation." In his words, the "utilitarian purpose of fine art is to give the human being an opportunity to orient himself… The complexity of contemporary culture dictates a completely different form

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[78] Taylorism was a movement of efficient industrial labor, introduced by an American industrial engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Calculating the most efficient use of manual labor in factories, Taylor came up with a comprehensive study of a "motion economy," appropriate for many manual processes at industrial enterprises. Taylor's theory was further developed by his followers into generalized principles of efficient work movements, which could be applied to many occupations. In Russia, Taylorism was introduced after the 1905 revolution. After the October Revolution and the Civil War, it gained popularity in official Bolshevik circles, including Lenin and Trotsky, who supported Alexei Gastev, the chief proponent of Taylorism in Russia, and Gastev's *Tsentral'nyi institut truda* (the Central Institute of Labor), which studied Taylorism under the name of *nauchnaia organizatsiia truda* (Scientific Organization of Labor). See Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., Inc., 1996), 34-36. On Gastev, see Kurt Johansson, *Aleksei Gastev: Proletarian Bard of the Machine Age* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell International, 1983).

[79] Boris Kushner, "Organizatory proizvodstsva" (Organizers of production) *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 97-103.

of orientation, which takes the form of Constructivism…. The artist enters production as a representative of the consumer." According to Kushner, the artist must enter production as a member of a technical bureau and not as a worker at a factory shop, thus establishing a crucial difference between the old handicraft-oriented and the new engineer-oriented work of an artist.[80]

This lecture by Kushner provoked heated objections from artists, Stepanova in particular, who was not content to have her role confined to that of ideological and intellectual "orientation," but thought of herself as a hands-on practitioner of the formation of material. Rodchenko also mildly criticized the theorist for being vague about the actual details of the production process. He would have preferred for INKhUK artists to go on tours of industrial enterprises, because "for the time being we cannot go there. We are not allowed."[81] To address the concerns of the artists and to support his colleague, Brik presented his own views on the subject in a paper entitled "What the Artist Must Do for the Time Being."[82]

The first point of Brik's response was to assert the exclusivity of the Productivist group. Because sociological conditions for the artists to enter production were not ripe yet, Brik proposed to assume a radical "party" [*partiinyi*] stance toward easel painters by prohibiting INKhUK members to practice any form of easel art and by opposing any existing or potential organization of easel painters. This prohibition extended also to the

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[80] "Утилитарное назначение изобразительного искусства – дать возможность человеку ориентироваться. Сложность современной культуры диктует совершенно новую форму ориентировки, и она выливается в форму конструктивизма … Художник вступает в производство как бы представителем потребителя." (Boris Kushner, "Khudoznik v proizvodstve" [Artist in Production], lecture presented at INKhUK in April 1922. Quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm,* 196 and 209.)

[81] Rodchenko's remarks during the discussion of Brik's lecture presented in April 1922. Quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, 205.

[82] The text of Brik's lecture "Chto delat' khudozhniku poka" (What the artist must do for the time being), presented at INKhUK in April 1922, can be found in ibid., 202-205.

would-be allies on the left, such as Malevich and Suprematists, whom Brik described as "standing far away from us and scaring away our program."[83] In his opposition to Malevich and easel art, Brik propagated a tight, party-like organization, which would not accept any compromises even with would-be allies, similar to his earlier stance at the helm of the Left Block of the Union of Art Workers.

On the question of the artists' participation in production, Brik continued his speech in a purely ideological vein, which reflected his belief in the power of the productive forces over the tastes of the consumer. First, he dismissed point-by-point the artists' most common objections and reservations, such as the concern of becoming unknown as a consequence of leaving the spotlight of public attention; the danger of losing their status by becoming mere applied artists; the feeling that as a result of entrance into production valuable artistic skills were wasted; and, finally, the unwillingness to switch from solving grand issues in a work of art to performing mundane tasks at a factory.

To answer the artists' fear of falling into oblivion, Brik claimed that the popularity of artistic exhibitions was declining, but that production art was on the rise and began to replace traditional art in the eyes of the public – a statement that did not conform to the known facts.[84] About their fears of becoming applied artists, he said that this tendency was inevitable in production, but that in some enterprises artists could get lucky enough to be allowed to go beyond this stage toward production design

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[83] "С правыми нам трудно справиться. Труднее справиться с левыми, которые от нас стоят далеко и запугивают нашу программу" (Osip Brik, "Chto delat' khudozhniku poka" ibid., 202).

[84] In her study of Russian Constructivism, Lodder noted that artists were not welcome in factories, mostly because their ambitions to work in positions of authority at industrial enterprises did not meet with an equal enthusiasm by the people in charge of these enterprises. Instead, they began teaching at VKhUTEMAS. These workshops provided the only solid opportunity for the space, financing, and equipment necessary to put the Productivists' ideas into practice. See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 145.

[*proizvodstvennyi konstruktivizm*]. Everything depended on a particular factory, but artists could not pick and choose the place of their work -- they had to enter any enterprises, even those where they would become mere applied artists. The question of the forgetting of artistic skills and habits Brik dismissed as "psychology," because a true Futurist must be able to "leap" from task to task without looking back and regretting the past. Finally, an artist must not, like Malevich, "think it possible to invent once and for all one law and to reconstruct the world according to this law," because there could be no such abstract law applicable to everyone, but only "practical experience" that guided one through life. Going into production and working at the factory at this point in time was the most suitable activity for artists.[85]

Brik's response provoked a heated discussion, with objections from the architects Vesnin and Ladovskii and an artist Vladimir Khrakovskii, who did not agree with his categorical refusal to accept easel painting and his fractionalism. Vesnin did not wish to consider himself a member of a "production party." Likewise, Ladovskii defended the idea of a "general law in the human action" and rejected Brik's emphasis on an individual practical solution, calling such practical artists "handicraftsmen" [*kustari*]. Khrakovskii objected to Brik's rejection of easel painting and demanded clarification of the difference between the artist's role in "organizing" human psychology through a painting as opposed to an industrially produced work. Rodchenko, on the other hand, accepted in

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[85] "…в этом вопросе, в разрешении общих вопросов цвета и форм, нет общего закона к таким вещам, как, например, у Малевича, который считает возможным раз и навсегда построить закон и перестроить весь мир. Это лишь убеждения. Неверное представление о том, что устанавливается где-то какой-то закон…. И соотношение теоретической и практической работы, которое существовало до сих пор, коренным образом ломается, и так называемая теоретическая работа, и так называемое установление общих принципов и законов… не являются направляющими, и только сознание практического опыта, и только суммирование практического опыта на сегодняшний момент …." (Osip Brik, "Chto delat' khudozhniku poka" [April 1922]. Reprinted in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm,* 204.)

general terms Brik's propositions – he opined that now, when a "theorist made his report," an artist had to "show concrete work." "Now we have to do our job and there is nothing else to talk about – if not to work, then I do not know what."[86]

Apart from antagonizing some INKhUK artists, Brik had also disagreed with some Productivist theoreticians on their analyses of production in factories, which is evident from documents in Brik's archive that contain minutes of INKhUK meetings held in 1923, during which various aspects of artistic production were examined. For example, on March 23, 1923 Arvatov made a report on his visit to a textile factory in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, one of the factories under the jurisdiction of the IZO Subdivision of Artistic Production.[87] In accordance with the ideas outlined in Toporkov's article, Arvatov spoke about the aesthetic and the technical aspects of the production process. After describing in detail stages of textile production, he concluded that "the aesthetic side of the business is completely detached from production. Draftsmen who prepare drawings for textiles belong to the old school; they produce work not only without taking account of the production [process], but even without knowing it," a practice that resulted in design clichés and rote repetitions.[88] Inadequacies of the design were also explained by the overwhelming role of the market, which dictated poor taste and influenced decisions of the director of the factory and a trust in Moscow who were ultimately responsible for choosing designs. To improve the quality of the designs, Arvatov

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[86] "Получается так. Теоретик сделал свой доклад. Теперь мы делаем своё дело, и больше нам нечего говорить – или работу нести, или не знаю чего делать." (Rodchenko, remarks during the discussion of Brik's lecture, April 1922. Quoted in ibid., 205.)

[87] A list of workshops [*masterskikh*] for which the IZO Subdivision of Artistic Labor was responsible, was published in *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve.* See *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve,* 38.

[88] "Эстетическая сторона дела показывает полный отрыв её от производства. Рисовальщики, которые дают рисунки для ситца, прошедшие старую академическую натуралистическую школу, дают работу не только не считаясь с производством, но и не зная даже его" (Boris Arvatov, minutes of INKhUK meeting on March 23, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.)

proposed to establish experimental laboratories at the factory, staffed with artists of Productivist persuasion.

Brik's response to Arvatov was sobering. He criticized his colleague for "idealism" for his suggestion that the production process can be "united into a single creative action." According to Brik, the question of the artists' participation in production could be posed in the following way: "what is the role of the artist in the production process as one of the component parts?"[89] Brik thought it imperative to take into consideration the tastes of the market in order to manipulate it in an ideologically correct direction: "It is necessary to take into account the consumer's psychology. It is necessary to revolutionize this psychology. This question of revolutionizing the consumer's psychology is the essential one for the artist."[90]

Toporkov's emphasis in *Art in Production* on the conceptual origin of any technological mechanism helps explain the Productivists' concern with the "task" [*zadanie*] which must initiate any action – a concept, which a decade later expanded into the theory of "social command" [*sotsial'nyi zakaz*]. In INKhUK discussions, this concern surfaced frequently and prominently in the speeches of the artists and critics alike. For example, on February 16, 1923 Stepanova presented a report on the "new principles of costume design" [*novyi printsip montazha kostiuma*], in which she declared that there was no "costume in general" and that any costume should be designed with a specific function in mind, but in any case it should be comfortable and expedient. She came up with an idea of "production clothing" [*prozodezhda*] for the type of clothing that

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[89] "Вопрос фактически может быть поставлен так: какая роль художника в процессе производства как одного из видов отдельных составных частей" (Osip Brik, ibid.)

[90] "С психологией потребителя необходимо считаться. Надо революционизировать эту психологию. Этот вопрос о революционизировании психологии потребителя и есть основной вопрос для художника" (ibid.)

conformed to a person's occupation and that was designed by "beginning from formulating the task [*ot zadaniia*] and finishing by the material solution [*k material'nomu oformleniiu*]."[91]

Beginning in March 1923, much of the material discussed at the INKhUK meetings appeared in *LEF*, edited by Brik and Maiakovskii. The second issue of *LEF* featured Stepanova's sport costumes (Fig. III - 9) with an accompanying article reiterating the principles outlined in her February report at INKhUK, which specified that decorations should not be attached to the costumes, but instead the seams must "give form" to it, because of the necessity "to reveal methods of sewing of the costume, its fastenings, etc." Moreover, these seams must be "industrial seams made by machine," because "the industrial way of making a costume deprives it of the mysteries and charm of the manual work of a tailor." The types of sport uniforms presented by Stepanova were for playing soccer -- with shorts -- and basketball -- with skirts -- and had "sharp distinctive characteristics to be able to tell uniforms of one team from those of the other… In this case, the color of the sport uniform is the most active factor, because sport competitions take place in large arenas and sport parades gather an enormous audiences."[92]

The third issue of *LEF* featured another article by Stepanova dedicated this time to her husband's and his students' work at VKhUTEMAS and reflecting the principles of a multifunctional thing/object advocated by Kushner. In 1922, Rodchenko quit teaching

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[91] Stepanova, minutes of INKhUK meeting for February 16, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis'1, delo 317.
[92] "Особенностью всякой спортивной одежды является обязательное наличие в ней резких различительных признаков в костюмах одной команды от другой в виде знаков, эмблем или формы и цвета костюма. Цвет костюма в данном случае один из самых действительных факторов, так как спортивные состязания происходят в большом пространстве, а показательные спортивные праздники при огромном количестве зрителей" (Varst [Varvara Stepanova], "Kostium segodniashnego dnia – prozodezhda," *LEF* no. 2 [April-May 1923]: 65. Varst was Stepanova's acronym.)

at the Department of Painting and founded the Department of Metalwork, reorganized from the SVOMAS workshops for jewelry work, filigree-making and other traditional crafts.[93] In his department, Rodchenko's students, after a one-year obligatory term of studying the basics of color, drawing, composition and developing "initiative, ingenuity and associative skills," engaged in the design of objects for use in daily life, such as forks, pots and pans, door handles, furniture, and book kiosks.[94] Stepanova's article discussed the first exhibition of works by Rodchenko's students and was illustrated by two of the designs -- Sobolev's chair that could unfold into a bed and Galaktionov's folding bed (Figs. III – 10a and b).

In the article, Stepanova again stressed the primacy of the task as the departing point in forming any thing/object, as well as its material and construction as necessary components for performing the task. The tasks at hand for Rodchenko's students consisted of designing flexible objects, capable of being taken apart into pieces and put back together again (Galaktionov's model) and a multifunctional object for personal use in a student dormitory (Sobolev's model). In order to prevent a "psychological" reaction in a viewer, the objects were designed with a functional task in mind and not in the old-fashioned, decorative way. The impact of such a constructive/productive approach was, in fact, ethical. Stepanova concluded the article by stating that the inventive engineering of the young pupils of Rodchenko do not make them "little Rodchenkos," but

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[93] Varst, "O rabotakh konstruktivistkoi molodezhi," (On Works by Constructivist Youth) *LEF* no. 3 (1924): 53-56 and Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*, 102.
[94] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Plan d'étude de la Faculté de travail du métal des Vhutemas," 1922 and "Programme pour l'élaboration de projects d'objets en métal," 1922-1924 in Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 2: 645.

independent professionals, capable of handling a technological design task on their own.[95]

Among architectural projects, Brik focused on the work of another one of his protégées, the former sculptor Anton Lavinskii. Lavinskii's drawings of the "City of the Future" and radio-towers were discussed at the meeting on January 26, 1922 and featured in the first issue of *LEF* (Figs. III - 11a and b). At this meeting, Lavinskii presented a paper entitled "Engineerism," in which he asserted that the artist's task in the industrial era was not only to become equivalent to engineers in their technological savvy, but also to "organize the viewing experience" of the public. Lavinskii arranged his project of the City of the Future according to a circular plan similar to that of Moscow. Two central boulevards intersected the city at right angles, subdividing it into four equal quarters. Each quarter had its own boulevards surrounded by trees and intended only for pedestrian use. All buildings were made out of standard industrial materials and lifted off the ground by springs. The traffic was directed under them, traversing pedestrian sections in tunnels. Escalators were to move people up and down from their apartment buildings onto the street and the buildings were arranged to turn periodically, so that the sunlight could be distributed equally among all apartments.[96]

Lavinskii's project was criticized by a sculptor Konstantin Medunetskii, who did not think that it was much different from the works displayed at the exhibition of Constructivists, which included sculptures by himself and the Stenberg brothers, but Popova praised Lavinskii's design as a move from "objectless art" toward the construction of utilitarian objects, a necessary step in the development of art, because at

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[95] Varst, "O rabotakh konstruktivistkoi molodezhi," *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 56.
[96] For a synopsis of Lavinskii's presentation of his project, see Khan-Magomedov, *Inkhuk i rannii konstruktivizm*, 216-220.

all times, "art was justified only when it was utilitarian."[97] Likewise, on the pages of *LEF* Arvatov praised Lavinskii for addressing the multidimensional task of the design of a city – a large-scale enterprise, which made traditionally-minded architects and engineers balk at its scale. As an artist, Lavinskii did his job by proposing a project of a "realized utopia" and it was up to the engineers to put it into practice.[98]

On February 23, 1923, the meeting at INKhUK discussed Lavinskii's design for a book kiosk, which was published in the second issue of *LEF* (Fig. III - 12). The kiosk was conceived as a typical Constructivist project: it demonstrated the principle of efficiency and economy of space directed to gaining the maximum usage from the structure by putting on view as many books as possible while occupying the minimum amount of space. This goal was achieved by a rotating display mechanism, which allowed customers to look at books in stationary positions, while rotating the display stand. The checkout and stacks of unused books were located in the middle of the structure. The kiosk was closed off with the help of boards inserted on the sides of the display panels. Brik, Popova, Babichev, and others criticized several aspects of the design, especially the method of its closing. They proposed to change it to a descending jalousie.[99]

Brik served as chairman at all of the above meetings during his tenure as director. At several of them he made reports about his trips to Germany, in the course of which he visited exhibitions, established contact with artists and made observations on local artistic

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[97] Liubov' Popova, minutes of INKhUK meeting on January 26, 1922. Cited in ibid., 222.
[98] Boris Arvatov, "Oveshchestvlennaia utopia" (Utopia incarnated), *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 61-64.
[99] Minutes of INKhUK meeting on February 23, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.

life.[100] For example, on December 29, 1922, Brik spoke in general terms about his recent trip to Germany; on February 23, 1923, he gave a paper on the art of George Grosz; on October 6 he made a report on "Artistic Groups in Contemporary Germany" and on October 13 he spoke about German advertising.[101] In his reports, Brik was very critical of contemporary tendencies in German art, praising only those trends that corresponded with his idea of socially useful, progressive art. During his first presentation on this subject, for example, he criticized the preference of the Germans for easel and applied art. Only German industrial architecture, according to Brik, was entering the Productivist stage, because it ignored the phase of applied decorativeness in the design of private housing, when architects tried to imitate Cubism by displacing windows and painting the walls of their buildings in bright colors. Brik also praised German advertising when he spoke about its popularity and wide-spread appeal.[102] In his presentation on December 29, 1922, Brik mentioned contacts that he established with various artistic groups sympathetic to Communism. Unfortunately, the archival material does not contain the names of these groups. The only artist whose name appeared in the minutes of INKhUK meetings was George Grosz.

As a result of Brik's presentations, the second issue of *LEF* featured Grosz' article "[Commentary] to My Works," with two illustrations (Fig. III - 13a and b). Similar to Brik's report, which emphasized the agitational nature of Grosz' art,[103] the artist's article focused on the political message first: it began with the declaration that art itself was not

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[100] Perhaps because of his knowledge of German, Brik frequently traveled to Germany. In the early 1920s, he went there in October-November 1922 and in September 1923 (Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 21, 23).
[101] RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.
[102] Brik made this speech during a meeting on October 12, 1923.
[103] Minutes of INKhUK meetings, RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.

important in comparison to production, but if it was to be practiced at all, it had to be done with "full consciousness" of the process of its making. After attacking the "bourgeois nihilism" of "individualist" artists, Grosz appealed to them to go to a "proletarian meeting" and to find their subjects among the toiling masses. In describing his work, Grosz called his method "realist" and "photographic" as opposed to the dominant "expressionist" style of his countrymen. The conclusion of the article was appropriately propagandistic, asserting that "only Communism will lead humanity, enriching and developing it, toward a truly classless art."[104]

Neither the published materials nor the documents in Brik's archive contain information about his contacts with expatriate Russian artists and writers who lived in Germany in the early 1920s, such as El Lissitzky, Il'ia Ehrenburg, and Shklovskii, to name just a few of the sympathizers with Communist Russia who eventually ended up back in the USSR.[105] The only mention of Lissitzky's name occurred on January 26, 1923, when it was proposed to communicate to him the necessity of "entering into a

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[104] "Только коммунизм, обогащая и развивая, поведёт человечество к настоящей неклассовой культуре" George Grosz, "K moim rabotam," *LEF* no. 2 (1923): 27-30. There was no mention in *LEF* that this article was a translation into Russian of the 1921 article "Zu meinen neuen Bildern" (Regarding my new pictures) published in *Das Kunstblatt* 5, no. 1 (1921): 11-14. See George Grosz, "My New Pictures," in *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*, ed. Rose-Carol Washton Long, 275-277 (New York: G.K Hall & Co., 1993). I am grateful to Professor Long for this information.

[105] Brik's visits to Berlin have not been described by contemporaries or investigated by historians. The memoirs by Shklovskii and Ehrenburg do not contain any information on Brik's trips to Berlin (See Il'ia Ehrenburg, *A vse-taki ona vertitsia* [Berlin and Moscow: Gelikon, 1922] and Viktor Shklovskii, *Sentimental'noe puteshestvie* (Berlin and Moscow: Gelikon, 1923]). Valiuzhenich mentions only that Osip traveled to Berlin in October-November 1922 together with Lilia and Maiakovskii and that upon their return to Moscow he discussed the results of the trip at INKhUK (Valiuzhenich, 21). Other sources, such as the catalog *Moscow-Berlin,* mentions Brik's connection with Germany only through his work in Mezhrabpomfil'm (see chapter 5 of this dissertation and Ekaterina Khokhlova, "'Mezhrabpomfil'm': mezhdu iskusstvom i politikoi," *Moskva-Berlin, 1900-1950* [New York and Munich: Prestel, 1996], 194-195). In the literature on cultural connections between Russia and Germany, I was able to find only one indirect mention of Brik that relates to his German connection in the early 1920s. In his memoirs about the "House of Arts" in Berlin, frequented by the Russian émigré community, a writer, Roman Gul', talks in negative terms about Brik's work in the Cheka, implicating him in the preparation of a case against the poet Nikolai Gumilev, which resulted in the poet's execution (see note 125 in chapter 2 of this dissertation).

closer relationship with INKhUK" [*vstupil v naibolee tesnoe obshchenie s Inkhukom*] while living abroad, at the same time prescribing to expunge Altman and Varvara Bubnova "as a result of their departure abroad and as a result of their loss of contact with INKhUK."[106] The task of conveying the message to Lissitzky was given to Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg who were about to depart on a tour of Europe as part of the Chamber Theater troupe.[107]

It was perhaps not surprising that the Productivist INKhUK dealt with Lissitzky much less severely than with Altman and Bubnova, despite his fusion of Constructivism with Suprematism, which could not be much to Brik's liking. Lissitzky became a member of INKhUK at the end of 1921, when he began teaching architecture at VKhUTEMAS after he left Malevich's UNOVIS (Affirmers of New Art) group in Vitebsk.[108] It was during his tenure at VKhUTEMAS that he delivered a lecture on the connection between Suprematism and principles akin to Constructivism in his *Prouns,* which became a foundation of his brand of Constructivism, distinct from the version supported by the Productivists. After his move to Berlin in December 1921, he reiterated and reinforced the ideas delivered in this lecture, as can be seen from his articles in *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand*, which he co-edited with Il'ia Ehrenburg, as well as in his other writings. The manifesto of the journal defended art against the attacks of Productivists:

> We called our review "**THING**," because for us, art is the CREATION OF new THINGS… However, one should not think that under things we understand the

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[106] At the same meeting, it was proposed that Altman and Bubnova were deprived of their membership. See minutes of INKhUK meetings on January 26, 1923, RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.
[107] Natasha Kurchanova, "Chronology," in *Stenberg Brothers: Constructing a Revolution in Soviet Design* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 92.
[108] Nancy Perloff, "The Puzzle of El Lissitzky's Artistic Identity," in Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, eds., *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1998), 7.

> objects of everyday life. Of course, in utilitarian things made in factories, airplanes, and automobiles we see true art. However, we do not want limit the production of artists by utilitarian things. All organized work – be it a HOUSE, a POEM, or a PAINTING – IS AN EXPEDIENT THING, which does not lead people away from life, but helps them organize it. In this way, we are distant from those poets who propose in their poems to stop writing verses or from artists who propagate the refusal of painting with their paintings. Primitive utilitarianism is foreign to us.[109]

Lissitzky's other writings and public speeches emphasized his allegiance to and respect for his teacher Malevich. The gist of his argument could be summarized as follows: the Productivists and their adherents were wrong to claim that art was dead and replaced by functional and utilitarian objects mass-produced at factories. He believed art was very much alive and well, but transformed from its hierarchical religious manifestation to the purpose of "organizing life" according to the democratic principles of science, industry and construction. These principles were not contrary to those of Suprematism, but complementary to it, as they were based on abstract thinking, mathematics and laws of geometry. Rather than embellishing life or disappearing completely, giving way to industry, the artistic object organizes life through the creative principle of abstraction. [110]

Lissitzky's thoughts about incorporating art into the organization of the world were based on the ideas taught by Malevich at UNOVIS in their emphasis on the

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[109] "Мы назвали наше обозрение «**ВЕЩЬ»,** ибо для нас искусство – СОЗДАНИЕ новых ВЕЩЕЙ... Но отнюдь не следует полагать, что под вещами мы подразумеваем предметы обихода. Конечно, в утилитарных вещах, выделываемых на фабриках, в аэроплане или автомобиле, мы видим подлинное искусство. Но мы не хотим ограничивать производства художников утилитарными вещами. Всякое организованное производство – ДОМ, ПОЭМА ИЛИ КАРТИНА – ЦЕЛЕСООБРАЗНАЯ ВЕЩЬ, не уводящая людей от жизни, но помогающая ее организовывать. Итак, мы далеки от поэтов, в стихах предлагающих перестать писать стихи, или от художников, пропагандирующих с помощью картин отказ от живописи. Примитивный утилитаризм чужд нам" El Lissitzky and Il'ia Ehrenburg, "Blockade of Russia is Coming to an End: The Appearance of 'Thing,'" *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand* no. 1-2 (1922; reprint, Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 1994): 2. The authors' emphasis.

[110] See El Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction" (1920), a text of his lecture "New Russian Art" (1922), as well as the editorial from *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand* quoted above in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, ed., *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1967), 327-343

utilitarian application of Suprematism toward the creation of a "new utilitarian world of things" imbued with Suprematist imagery.[111] In his 1920 brochure *Suprematism.24 Drawings*, Malevich described the Suprematist world as an abstract one, whose forms "have nothing in common with the technical aspect of the earthly ground," but rather with the cosmos, where technical organisms" become abstract through "utilitarian necessity."[112] The foundational principles of Suprematism had also made their mark on the "Realistic Manifesto" by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, who called for the construction of a "new reality." In their manifesto, Gabo and Pevsner used incantatory language to appeal to the art of the future and scorn Cubism and Futurism.[113]

While by the mid-1920s Malevich became marginalized in the increasingly politicized artistic hierarchy, holding a politically non-influential post of as director of the Petrograd Museum of Artistic Culture, [114] and Gabo kept to the sidelines of politics, believing that his art would speak for him and for itself,[115] Lissitzky had fared much better. By January 1923, Lissitzky had become a famous man both in Russia and Germany, having established himself as a spokesman for international Constructivism firstly by editing, together with Ehrenburg, the magazine *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand* and subsequently having formed, together with Theo van Doesburg and Hans Richter, an

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[111] On Malevich's and UNOVIS' utilitarian philosophy, see Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: Zhizn' iskusstva*, 56-61 and Kachurin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," passim.

[112] "Работая над супрематизмом, я обнаружил, что его формы ничего общего не имеют с техникой земной поверхности. Все технические организмы тоже являются ничем иным, как маленькими спутниками – целый живой мир, готовый улететь в пространство и занять особое место… Супрематические формы, как абстракция, стали утилитарным совершенством" Kazimir Malevich, "Suprematism. 24 risunka" (1920), in Dmitrii Sarabianov and Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Kazimir Malevich: zhivopis', teoriia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1993), 233.

[113] For affinities between the "Realistic Manifesto" and Malevich's writings and for Malevich's liking of Gabo's art, see Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, *Constructing Modernity: The Art and Career of Naum Gabo* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 60-67.

[114] Malevich split from INKhUK after the heavy criticism of his lecture "First Task" (Pervaia zadacha) given at INKhUK in December 1921. See Sarabianov and Shatskikh, *Kazimir Malevich*, 391.

[115] Hammer and Lodder, *Constructing Modernity,* 123.

International Faction of Constructivists at the Congress of International Progressive Artists held in Düsseldorf in May 1922.[116] As Martin Hammer and Lodder described it, by 1925, when Lissitzky returned to Russia, he "… was ubiquitous within the Western avant-garde… He knew everyone and had a finger in every avant-garde pie."[117] Moreover, he also had sworn ultimate political fidelity to the Soviet state by becoming a member of the Cheka.[118] As a member of the same organization, Brik must have known of Lissitizky's political allegiance to the Bolsheviks and as such had to tolerate his brand of Constructivism that reflected Malevich's ideology. After all, Lissitzky proved his loyalty to the Soviets, which helped him to successfully enter the process of Socialist production in the early 1920s by joining INKhUK, teaching at VKhUTEMAS, editing *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand*, and designing Maiakovskii's book *Dlia golosa* (For the Voice) among other publications.

Toward the end of 1923, Efim Ravdel', the first rector of VKhUTEMAS, left his post to Vladimir Favorskii, which gave Brik an opportunity to agitate for more support for INKhUK members in the workshops. [119] During the meeting on

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[116] Ibid., 103-104.
[117] Ibid., p. 123.
[118] In their book on Gabo, Hammer and Lodder mention an interview of Gabo's widow, Miriam, who recalled her husband seeing a badge of the Cheka on Lissitzky's desk, identifying the possessor as its agent. See ibid. Peter Nisbet, however, in his well-known catalog of Lissitzky's work, remarked that the artist political allegiances were undefined, adjusting nimbly to the changing political atmosphere. See Peter Nisbet, *El Lissitzky, 1890-1941. Catalogue for an Exhibition of Selected Works from North American Collections, the Sprengel Museum Hanover and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1987), 26, 44-46. Perloff believes that the artist had to take the secret police into consideration as "one of the audiences to please." See Perloff, "The Puzzle of Lissitzky's Artistic Identity," in *Situating El Lissitzky*, 21.
[119] At the First All-Russian Conference of SVOMAS, conducted in Moscow in the beginning of June 1920, and where the creation of INKhUK was officially incorporated, Shterenberg indicated that the task of the conference was "creation of one organ of directorship over the workshops" [задача конференции – создать единый орган управления мастерскими]. Further, he indicated that it was "necessary to direct artistic education toward the creation of a united school of labor, it is necessary to create an Institute of Artistic Culture" [Надо направить художественное образование по пути единой трудовой школы, надо создать Институт художественной культуры. See Protocol of the First All-Russian Conference of State Free Artistic and Artistic-Production Workshops, RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.

October 20, Brik reported on a complete "breakdown of production faculties" [*razval proizvodstvennykh fakul'tetov*] and the "domination of the painting faculties by old easel traditions," under the influence of "mystics" like Favorskii, Pavel Florenskii, Petr Miturich, and Lev Bruni who were stifling and forcing out Productivist artists. Brik proposed to put together a report [*dokladnaia zapiska*] to the party cell of VKhUTEMAS about the deplorable condition of the workshops and to begin a "campaign for reorganization of VKhUTEMAS."[120] At the next meeting on November 3, its participants, which included Brik, Popova, Stepanova, Rodchenko, Lavinskii, as well as the artists Gustav Klutsis and Sergei Sen'kin and the critic Tarabukin worked out a "teaching plan" for the workshops, driven by the "principle of Productivism." The plan called for introduction of "production disciplines" [*proizvodstvennye distsipliny*] in the basic division, unification of diverse production departments under one "production faculty" [*proizvodstvennyi fakul'tet*] and the joining of the graphics and production departments.[121]

The program worked out at this meeting became a foundation for Brik's report on VKhUTEMAS presented at the next meeting on November 10 and published in the fourth issue of *LEF*. The report outlined a complete "ideological and organizational" breakdown of production departments that lacked the necessary equipment, teaching staff and financing. It indicated that scarce resources were spent on the enclave of the "purists" of easel and applied art, who appropriated the graphics department, the basic division, and Rabfak (Workers' Faculty),

[120] Minutes of INKhUK meeting on October 20, 1923, RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.
[121] Minutes of INKhUK meeting on November 3, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis'1, delo 317.

thereby preventing any practical work for the needs of the state. It recommended the measures proposed at the meeting on November 3 as well as the introduction of "social types of visual arts: poster, caricature, illustration, everyday grotesque [*bytovoi grotesk*], satire" at the painting faculty; the introduction of production disciplines at the Rabfak; linking VKhUTEMAS with centers of state economy and political education; and renaming production artists "artists-engineers."[122] Despite the report, the situation of production faculties at VKhUTEMAS hardly improved: as Lodder observed, four years later, in 1927, a newly appointed rector Pavel Novitskii criticized Favorskii's rectorship as favoring pure and applied art at the expense of production faculties. As a result, students in production departments were underenrolled of in comparison to departments teaching traditional arts.[123]

III. 5. Theater and Performance

In accordance with *Art in Production*'s equation of artistic and technological labor on the basis of their conceptual origin, the INKhUK artists and critics considered theater as the perfect arena for introducing Productivism. Even though the artists encountered difficulties while trying to transform themselves into engineers and enter industrial production according to Brik's plan, they did succeed in entering theatrical production via Meierhold, Brik's favorite theater director.[124] Brik became involved in theater and with Meierhold as early as 1918, when he helped Maiakovskii defend his

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[122] Osip Brik et al., "Razval Vkhutemasa: dokladnaia zapiska o polozhenii Vysshikh khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskikh masterskikh," *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923), 27-28.
[123] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 122.
[124] Meierhold was the only theater director praised by Brik on the pages of the official press. In 1923, Brik wrote two laudatory articles about him for a theater periodical, *Zrelishcha*. See "Eto ne iubilei" (This is not a jubilee) *Zrelishcha* no. 30 (1923): 11 and "APS!" *Zrelishcha* no. 61 (1923): 4.

controversial play *Mystery-Bouffe* against the attacks of its detractors and even wanted to organize, together with Maiakovskii, their own "Airborne Theater" [*Letuchii teatr*]. [125] The play, subtitled "The Heroic, Epic, and Satiric Representation of Our Time," was based on a confrontation of the "clean" and "dirty" populace – the rich of various nations, divided by their national allegiances, versus the poor, united by their common proletarian identity. During a world-wide deluge, a metaphor for revolution, the proletarians took over not only the earthly world, but also the kingdom of God, where they established their order, organized and governed by the most wonderful things imaginable.[126]

According to V. A. Katanian, Maiakovskii read the play for the first time at the Briks' apartment on September 17, 1918. Meierhold and Lunacharskii were in the audience and enthusiastically endorsed Maiakovskii's performance. Despite Lunacharskii's support and Meierhold's offer to direct the play for the anniversary of the October revolution, Maiakovskii had trouble finding trained actors for the production, because of its anti-religious and radical content. It was then that several Petrograd newspapers, including *Vestnik obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni, iskusstva, teatra i literatury* (Herald of the Social-Political Life, Art, Theater, and Literature) published an appeal to actors to audition for the play, signed by the production committee for *Mystery-Bouffe,* which included Brik. [127]

Meierhold was the only reputable pre-revolutionary director who resolutely refused attachment to the forms and methods of traditional theater and had radically

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[125] This was an understandable impulse, considering the overwhelming popularity of performance art during the revolution. See Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 17.
[126] Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Misteria-Buff* (Mystery-bouffe) (1918), in *PSS*, 2: 167-241.
[127] See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, 149-151.

transformed them "from above."[128] Although Brik admired Meierhold at least as early as 1918, when he agreed to stage *Mystery-Bouffe*, it is not a coincidence that the critic began writing about his theater only in 1922, when Popova was invited to design a set for the production of a clownish play *Magnanimous Cuckold* (Fig. III - 14). Popova built the set specifically to accommodate Meierhold's new acting theory of biomechanics, which combined the principles of Taylorism and reflexology to achieve maximum efficiency and expressiveness on stage through physical movements of the actor's body. While Taylorism taught Meierhold to define an arsenal of body movements that could be used as efficient tools in forming an actor's craft, reflexology, developed by Vladimir Bekhterev in Russia and William James in the United States, furnished him with a theory of emotions directly evoked by bodily positions. According to Alma Law and Mel Gordon, Meierhold's new method of actor training aimed at the "work output," or creation of a desired state of mind in the spectator. By taking expressive gestures and pantomime from such popular entertainment genres as the circus, the music hall, gymnastics, and other "low" theatrical forms and combining them with elements of traditional stage movement, Meierhold devised a new system of actors' movement, which made the actor experience and convey to the viewer various emotions through a meticulously planned arrangement of his/her body, which was changing constantly in accordance with the director's prescriptions.[129]

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[128] On Meierhold, see Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1995).

[129] On Meierhold and his theory of biomechanics, see Law and Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics*, chapter 2, 34-47.

Edward Braun has noted that Meierhold liked a scaffold-like set built by Popova and Vesnin for an open-air performance of *Struggle and Victory* in 1921 (Fig. III - 15).[130] In Meierhold's opinion, Constructivists were ideal designers who were willing to subjugate their artistic will in order to fulfill the social order of constructing a set according to the specifics of a task he defined. The Constructivists were looking for ways to apply the principles elaborated during the INKhUK meetings, and Meierhold was looking for a "cog in the wheel" – a set that would help the play to function in a way maximally approximated to a mechanism and that could display "biomechanical" movements of actors in the most advantageous way. The actors used Popova's set for the first biomechanical spectacle to full advantage. They climbed the open skeletal structure, constructed out of wooden beams, hung down from its connected platforms, ran up and down the steps and slid down slides (Fig. III - 16). They could move easily in their loose-fitting blue coveralls, also designed by Popova (Figs. III – 17a and b). The set itself also possessed dynamic elements, including two moving wheels, a windmill sail and a revolving disk with letters "CR-ML-NCK," indicating the name of the main character.

Stepanova's design for *The Death of Tarelkin,* made after Popova's successful set, was more referential and apparently not as effective.[131] Although she made it functional, with the "acting instruments" incorporated into the stage construction, apparently it was not put together well enough for the actors to use it freely (Fig. III – 18a and b).[132] Also, Stepanova had committed the sin of symbolization by making her wooden structure look

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[130] See Braun, *Meyerhold*, 178.
[131] *The Death of Tarelkin* was not as successful as *The Magnanimous Cuckold* and had to close only after two seasons.
[132] Law and Gordon, *Meyerhold*, 47.

like an actual object in the play -- a prison, with the boards spaced equally and arranged parallel to each other. For the historian Edward Braun, writing in the late 1970s, the spacious production clothing for the actors with its stark geometric design had resembled "nothing so much as convicts' uniforms," although to my knowledge contemporary reviewers did not make this comparison (Fig. III - 19).[133]

Brik was undoubtedly very impressed with Meierhold's directing methods, because in his two articles written in 1922, "Agit-Hall" and "About Obscenity," Brik joined the early 1920s movement agitating for the "small forms" [*malye formy*] in theater, politically-oriented plays directed at small audiences and usually performed in amateur theaters, which flourished during the Civil War.[134] Whereas the primary task of these *agitki* was propaganda for the Bolsheviks and in response to immediate social problems, Brik also attempted to include in them the elements of the *malye formy* of pre-revolutionary theater – music hall, operetta, and vaudeville – which were characterized by rigorous formal training, thus supporting Meierhold's initiative to introduce "low" theatrical forms onto the stage.[135]

Apart from his concern with remaking the performing aspect of theater production, Brik became directly involved in restructuring an aspect of theater that concerned him most – its audience – by taking charge of organizing performances in beer

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[133] Braun, *Meyerhold*, 186.

[134] Brik's other articles on theater were purely polemical, in which he rallied against academic theaters and advocates of "high" art, gave constructive advice to the Theater of Revolutionary Satire (Terevsat) and attacked defendants of traditional theater. They include "Chto povezut" (Whatever will be brought) *Ermitazh*, no. 8 (1922): 9; "Esteticheskaia ugolovshchina" (Aesthetic crime) *Ermitazh* no. 7 (1922): 9; "V zashchitu Nepa" (In Defense of NEP) *Teatr i studiia,* nos. 1-2 (1922): 2-3; "Zheleznaia piata" (Iron heel) *Teatral'naia Moskva* no. 22 (1922): 7; "Edinstvennyi" (The Only one) "Spektakl', kotoryi ia smotrel" (Play that I have not seen) and "Milaia redaktsiia" (Dear editors) in *Ermitazh* no. 6 (1922): 8-9; "Agit-khol," *Ermitazh* no. 4 (1922): 5-6, and "O neprilichnom," (On the indecent), *Zrelishcha,* no. 5 (1922): 10. On *agitki*, see Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, 37-39.

[135] On the meaning of the "small forms" theater before and after the revolution, see Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, 47-49.

halls in front of relaxing, inebriated workers. According to data provided by Kiaer, Brik headed the Cultural Bureau of the Pubs Section of the Department of Retail Trade in 1924-25.[136] In his 1927 book *Estrada pered stolikami* (Variety shows in front of café tables), Brik described his experience as a theatrical impresario. Evidently, in the fall of 1924 he was hired for the job by the Director of the Mossel'prom board, who wanted him to follow Trotsky's directive of "culturalizing" the daily lives of workers and to introduce culture into variety shows of about sixty pubs, managed by the organization.[137] When Brik took the job, the "organization of spectacles" in Mossel'prom pubs was in a lamentable situation. Traditional performances of this type were dominated by "apolitical" music and were very successful. Ideologically correct spectacles of the workers' Blue Blouse groups – mobile theater groups organized in workers' clubs, which staged propaganda sketches on current political and social subjects -- proved to be "too dry" for the pubs' audience.[138] Brik's job was to make the Blue Blouse political repertoire palatable for the pubs, or, as he put it, "to combine the Blue Blouse with innate stage effects." This was a difficult task, because the troupe did not have actors, writers, musicians or artists who were trained specifically for variety shows. Brik managed to bring together a group of young actors who wrote new texts, chose music, created costumes and eventually put together a passable repertoire. Despite the success of the shows, the enterprise failed. Brik explained the failure by the incompatibility of any educational message, however aptly presented, with beer-drinking. Ostensibly, the

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[136] Kiaer, "The Constructivist 'Object'," 114.
[137] Mossel'prom was a Moscow-based association of enterprises that transported, treated, packaged, and distributed the products of agricultural labor. Before 1922, it belonged to the Moscow Council of National Economy; beginning in 1922, it acquired an independent business status. See *Malaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (1930), 5: s.v. "Mossel'prom."
[138] On Blue Blouse, see Osip Brik, "Pivo, muzyka i 'Siniaia bluza'" (Beer, music, and the "Blue Blouse") in his *Estrada pered stolikami* (Moscow and Leningrad: Knigopechat', 1927), 3-7.

performances succeeded in gaining the attention of pub customers, but failed in making them drink beer, which resulted in fiscal losses for the pubs and in the eventual closure of Brik's enterprise.

INKhUK meetings and publications in *LEF* confirm the Constructivists' and Productivists' interest in theater. After the 1922 performances of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* and *The Death of Tarelkin*, the following year INKhUK members discussed set designs by Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg for Tairov's production of *Yellow Blouse* at the Chamber Theater (on January 19); for Meierhold's *Earth in Turmoil* by Popova (on February 9); for Sergei Eisenstein's production of Aleksandr Ostrovskii's *Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman* at Proletkult's Theater (on May 4); and Aleksei Babichev's project for an agitational theater (on May 11). Among these projects, the ones by Popova, Eisenstein, and Babichev demonstrate heterogeneity in the application of Constructivist principles and their gradual transformation of theater design, which, in addition to its own devices, by 1923 began incorporating iconic representational elements through photomontage and film. Of the three presentations, Babichev's was the most faithful to the original Constructivist model in its emphasis on the structural components of a theater set and its technological enhancement.

Babichev's movable theatrical stage, made by him in the fall of 1922, reflected the process of a radical transformation of contemporary theater, when elements of circus, performance, music-hall, and film were introduced into productions of plays (Figs. III - 20a-e). In his presentation, Babichev argued that the old type of theater was restricted by a built-in enclosed stage and would benefit from a moving one, which could be "called in by telephone into any borough or city" and "set up within a very short period of two

hours." This multifunctional stage would be able to be unfolded completely or partially, depending on the type of the performance. For example, a transportable screen and a truck carrying it from this theater set could be used separately, in order to show films, agitation or propaganda in the countryside or remote locations. In the conclusion of his speech, Babichev emphasized the open-ended character of his design, which could be adjusted to any task or location and adjusted to its particular optimal configuration on the spot.[139]

By the time of the publication of *LEF* in 1923, Meierhold had produced Sergei Tretiakov's play *Earth in Turmoil,* using a set designed by Popova (Fig. III - 21). The design, published in the fourth issue, was made as a photomontage and featured a skeletal structure, similar to the one for *Magnanimous Cuckold*, with chutes, ladders, platforms, and a moving wheel. In addition, it included photographs of Trotsky, marching toilers, and tsarist generals, the latter crisscrossed by thick white lines. Letters spelling out the name of the performance and the slogan "We Will Build a New World" were at the center of the composition. Although it was not the first photomontage published in *LEF*,[140] it had officially inaugurated a new trend within the journal, because of an accompanying article that had officially introduced the subject of photomontage and photography into the array of the magazine's topics.

I believe that it was Brik who authored the anonymous text accompanying Popova's design, because it expressed essentially the same point of view and used the

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[139] Minutes of INKhUK meeting on May 11, 1923. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 317.

[140] The first photomontage in *LEF* was by Rodchenko and it was featured on the cover of the second issue. This photomontage by Rodchenko is discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation. Also, Christina Lodder wrote incisively about the connection between photographic and cinematic montage, in her article on Rodchenko's work for *Kino-fot*, the first film journal in the Bolshevik Russia. See Christina Lodder, "Promoting Constructivism: *Kino-fot* and Rodchenko's Move into Photography," *History of Photography*, 24, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 292-299. I discuss this article by Lodder in the chapter on film.

same language as his 1924 article on photomontage published in the newspaper *Dawn of the East*.[141] Writing about photomontage, Brik emphasized the ability of the photographic apparatus to "fixate [a fact] precisely" as opposed to its manual representation. For Brik, the value of photography lay in its ability to capture documentary scenes from life and not in an elaboration of its own artistic language. According to his texts, a document was more effective and more easily communicable than someone's artistic subjectivity. However, even documentary photography was not devoid of subjectivity, because "even though the photographic apparatus does not possess a soul, a person takes a picture, not the camera, a person that has a soul, reason and understanding."[142] Photographers should learn how to work from photographic correspondents and not from artists. In his opinion, the best "masters of photomontage" in Russia were Rodchenko and Lavinskii[143] and George Grosz in Germany.[144] Popova's text, which appeared immediately after Brik's article, also underscored the factual [*zhiznennyi*] as opposed to the aesthetic character of a photograph and its subservience to the agitational task of performance.[145]

As Lodder observed, photomontage, photography, and typography became the favorite areas of the Constructivists' and Productivists' activity after their failure to join industrial production on a grand scale. Photomontage and photography especially attracted them because of their iconicity – in their fight against the traditional easel painter, the artists and critics of the Left preferred a technologically advanced method of

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[141] "Fotomontazh," *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923): 41-44 and Osip Brik, "Fotomontazh," *Zaria Vostoka* September 21, 1924, 4.
[142] Brik, "Fotomontazh," *Zaria Vostoka,* September 21, 1924, 4.
[143] Ibid.
[144] "Fotomontazh," *LEF* no. 4 (August-December, 1923): 41-44.
[145] Liubov' Popova, "Poiasnitel'naia zapiska k postanovke *Zemlia Dybom* v teatre Meierkhol'da" (Explanatory note on the production of *Earth in Turmoil* in Meierhold's theater), *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923): 44.

iconic representation to the traditional craft of the painter.[146] As is evident from his articles, Brik hailed Popova's use of photomontage precisely for its capacity to bring art closer to reality – to foreground the photograph's iconic aspect – in order to make it a propaganda tool for the party and the state.[147] If it was hypothetically possible to invite actual peasants and workers to perform appropriate parts in Meierhold play, it was highly unlikely that Trotsky, for example, or persecuted tsarist generals would agree to take part in stage action. Moreover, it was not Meierhold's practice to invite people from the street for his performances. In this case, even though Popova's set included almost exclusively real objects (cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.),[148] it was still a traditional theatrical situation with trained actors on a stage. In her use of photomontage, Popova followed a recent example by Rodchenko, who had been publishing his first photomontages in the journal of film and photography *Kino-fot* during the previous year.[149]

On the other hand, anonymous masses could and did take part in performance, but in a performance at a Proletkult theater. Eisenstein's theory of attractions, explained in the third issue of *LEF*, provided precisely for the participation of non-trained actors who would live through real emotions, even aggression on the stage – a device, which would

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[146] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* 181-187.
[147] In his article "From *Faktura* to Factography," Buchloh quoted the passage from Brik's text on photomontage accompanying Popova's design and commented on its clear propagandistic message. See Buchloh, "From *Faktura* to Factography," 98-99.
[148] Braun, *Meyerhold*, 189.
[149] On Rodchenko's first photomontages, see Christina Lodder, "Promoting Constructivism: *Kino-fot* and Rodchenko's Move into Photography," *History of Photography* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 292-299. Although Klutsis asserted in 1930-1931 that he made photomontages as early as 1919, there is no proof of the truthfulness of his assertions, because his first photomontages appeared in print in 1924. On the first published photomontages by Klutsis, see Alla Rosenfeld, "Images for New Generation: Soviet Illustrated Children's Books" (Ph. D. diss., The City University of New York, 2003), 269-276. I am grateful to Alla for providing me with a copy of an article by Klutsis in which he makes the above-mentioned assertions -- Gustav Klutsis, "Photomontazh kak novaia problema agitatsionnogo iskusstva" (Photomontage as a new problem in agitation art), *Literatura i iskusstvo,* no. 9-10 (1931): 86-95. For a differing view on the dating of Klutsis' photomontages, see Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph: 1924-1927* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), chapter 1, 9-34.

connect them to the spectator.[150] As a student of Meierhold, Eisenstein used biomechanics, but with one crucial difference – he emphasized not the choreographed movement of the actor, but the expression of his/her emotion. In the article explaining his theory of attractions, Eisenstein described his system as based on Meierhold premise of "forming of the spectator in a desired way" [*oformlenie zritelia v zhelaemoi napravlennosti*], but using "any aggressive moment in the theater" [*vsiakii agressivnyi moment teatra*] as the primary tool in achieving this effect. Eisenstein named Arvatov as one of his supporters and explicitly rejected any affinity between an emotional "attraction" and a mechanized stage movement, or in Eisenstein's derogatory description, a stage "trick" -- a streamlined formal device invented by Meierhold and supported by Brik. In his article, he cited the Marionette Theater with its unrestricted violence on stage as an example of a prototype for his system – a method of representation explicitly condemned by Brik two years later.[151] In the second part of his article, Eisenstein explained montage as a "construction of effective devices," which has its origin in film, music-hall, and circus – a method that conformed to Brik's notion of Constructivist performance.[152] The main element of Eisenstein's theater, however, was emotion. To emphasize this characteristic of his method, the photographs illustrating Eisenstein's article were not photomontages, but documentary shots "fixing" Eisenstein and Tretiakov's adaptation of Ostrovskii's play *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* performed in the Theater of Moscow Proletkult (Fig. III - 22a and b).

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[150] Sergei Eisenstein, "Montazh attraktsionov" (Montage of attractions), *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 70-75.
[151] See Brik's article "Chelovek b'et cheloveka" (A man beats another man) in *Kino*, September 22, 1925, 2. On the discussion of film in general and this article in particular, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.
[152] Eisenstein, "Montazh attraktsionov," 74.

Because theater was one of the most popular arts in revolutionary Russia, it served as the basis for Bolshevik sociological experiments in its use of actual people as the "material" for the performance of a particular "task." Brik's involvement with theater began with the production of Maiakovskii's *Mystery-Bouffe* and reflected his views on the function of production art in the Soviet state.[153] Just as in his interventions into other arts, his engagement made traditional associations of the word "art" appear irrelevant or assume a different meaning from the one it had before revolution. Similar to his attempt to transform artists into engineers and to substitute art objects for things used in everyday life, in his work on performance and theater Brik emphasized the consumer and promoted a performance practice which was based on a rigorous formal training, but lacked traditional institutional apparatus. To achieve this goal, Brik supported improvisational art, served by one actor or a small group of actors who prepared every detail of their repertoire themselves and took their acts to the workers' audience in the hopes of awakening it from drunken slumber. In this arrangement, Brik once again revealed his preference for a hierarchical administrative structure, in which the transformation of the lowest strata of the population was to be effected from "above," via artists-masters of their craft, governed by "chief engineers" – critics as propagators of the current political trends. In his two-year position in Mossel'prom Brik attempted to construct a base for such a structure, without success. Similarly, in his work as a leader of Productivism, he endeavored to shift the emphasis from traditional art to the as yet uncodified design practices of artists-engineers and to introduce these results into ordinary people's daily

[153] On popularity of theater in revolutionary Russia, see James von Geldern, "Nietzschean leaders and followers in Soviet mass theater," in Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*, 127-148.

lives – a project which lasted longer than his engagement with theater, but ultimately ended up with similar results.

CHAPTER FOUR

LEF, VISUALITY AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

In March 1923, Brik and Maiakovskii entered the publishing world by producing the first issue of the journal *LEF*, an organ representing the Left Front of the Arts, with a pronounced intention to "agitate art with the ideas of the Commune" and "fight for art, the builder of life."[1] From the political point of view, Brik's entrance into the publishing business signified his desire to have a forum for expressing his ideas and the ideas of the Russian Futurists in the precarious situation of political instability. Brik must have felt particularly vulnerable after losing his party membership during a major internal purge of 1921, intended to get rid of any "careerists," and generally "all members of the Russian Communist party who are in the slightest degree suspicious or unreliable."[2] In line with Toporkov's comparison in *Art in Production* of intellectual and technological labor, Brik made *LEF* a tool for the struggle with his enemies and for propagating a specific cultural ideology, potent enough to serve as a foundation for official Soviet culture.

According to Fitzpatrick, the post-war years of NEP, officially introduced in 1921, were characterized not only by the opening up of internal markets through introducing concessions to peasants and free trade on a limited basis, but also by a complete suppression of oppositional parties and the struggle for power among the Bolshevik leadership of the, prompted by Lenin's poor health and his gradual departure from the governance of the party and state. Between the middle of 1921, the first signs of Lenin's serious illness, and January 1924, the time of his death, three members of the Politburo of the party -- the General Secretary of the party, Stalin, and the heads of the Moscow and

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[1] N. Aseev, B. Arvatov, O. Brik, B. Kushner, V. Maiakovskii, S. Tretiakov, N. Chuzhak, "Programma," *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 6-7.
[2] Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 101.

Leningrad party organizations, Grigorii Zinov'ev and Lev Kamenev – succeeded in estranging Trotsky, the Commissar of War, from the center of political power. In the winter of 1923-24, the triumvirate defeated Trotsky and his supporters at the Thirteenth Party Conference by rallying the party apparatus behind them and presenting their rival as an oppositionist. By 1925, the final year of *LEF*'s existence, Stalin emerged triumphant after a struggle against his former allies, Zinov'ev and Kamenev, in which he presented them as usurpers of Lenin's legacy.[3]

Apart from the power struggle within the leadership of the party, the first peaceful period in the history of the Soviet state posed the challenge of the definition of its internal policies on a variety of issues that the Bolsheviks did not face during the period of the Civil War. Not counting the most urgent issue of the revival of the economy, other pressing political tasks included building up an apparatus of administrative bureaucracy and attempting to define the role of women in the new state. While in 1922 Lenin was moving Communists into responsible administrative positions, trying to weed out the tsarist governmental apparatus,[4] the woman question was less straightforward and more controversial, because of a difference of positions in the attitude of Communist party toward women at the time of the Civil War as opposed to that of NEP. Among the Productivist critics, Brik was the one to react to the party's concern with the woman question most readily: in 1923, in the first issue of *LEF*, he published a story *Not a Fellow-Traveler* [*Ne poputchitsa*], and in 1924, in the sixth issue of the journal, he placed an article "From Picture to Textile Print," which promoted a new, Constructivist-oriented approach to textile design – the domain of work, traditionally performed by women.

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[3] For the historical background on NEP, see Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 106-111.
[4] Ibid., 102-106.

During the revolution and the Civil War, women enjoyed unprecedented freedom. Immediately after the Bolsheviks took power, they formally declared complete equality between the sexes in the questions of property ownership, family rights, employment, and education. In theory, women were expected to work, participate in political life, and even fight at the front on an equal footing with men. Many of these premises were put into practice, with special provisions for pregnancies, childbirth, and nursing care as well as particularly strenuous physical labor. In order to facilitate women's participation in the political life of the country, the Communist party had also created special women's sections, which organized women locally and on the national level. Overall, during the war and the revolution, the party tended to bridge the gender division and to charge women with tasks and responsibilities traditionally performed by men. The turn to a peaceful economy reversed the tide of the women's liberation movement. During the period of the all-out call for increase in economic productivity, women were perceived as less productive than men and discriminated against in employment as laborers in industry. As a result, they were relegated to the second-tier sphere of domesticity.[5] In his story *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, Brik took a stance on the issues of the new bureaucratic Communist identity and the woman question, which in general supported the official party line.

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[5] See Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), passim, esp. 50, 52-57, 68-98, 149, 152, 159 and chapter 7. Literature discussing the relevance of the "woman question" in revolutionary Russia includes Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Sciècle Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992); Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

By focusing his attention on the woman question, Brik addressed not only a hot topic in contemporary political debates, but also a recurrent issue in Russian intellectual history. The ideological discourse of NEP reflected the beliefs of Russian revolutionaries with their pronounced tendency to suppress the demands of the body in an effort to achieve ideological purity.[6] Eric Naiman traced the legacy of this ascetic attitude, which influenced virtually every major Russian philosopher and writer of the nineteenth-century Russian intellectual tradition, such as Nikolai Fedorov, Vladimir Solov'ev, Nikolai Berdiaev, Lev Tolstoy, and Nikolai Chernyshevskii. This exclusionary thinking was based on the premise of a perennial suspicion of nature's reproductive power, the identification of reproduction with everything base and uncivilized, and the concomitant sublimation of women-free and childless masculinity to a universal ideal.[7]

In the same year that *Not a Fellow-Traveler* appeared in *LEF*, Aleksandr Rodchenko made a famous photographic portrait of Brik, in which his bi-spectacled sitter's right eye was obscured by a white circle with giant letters LEF (Fig. IV-1). The founder of the journal looks somberly at us with one eye only, partially hidden under a heavy lid. Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, Rodchenko's grandson, called this portrait "a caricature," thus designating the artist's intention to either ridicule or put down his

[6] See Naiman, *Sex in Public,* esp. chapter 1.

[7] Naiman categorized this attitude as belonging to an ideological, as opposed to a cultural tradition, because, as he explained it, culture in general, taken in the sense of how various strata of population conduct their daily lives, refuses utopian tendencies as belonging to the realm of discourse and thus to ideology. He used Terry Eagleton and Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as a "discursive arena concerned with culture's legitimacy." It is precisely this legitimizing process that characterized the Bolsheviks quest to transform a faulty man of the past into a new man, free of the guilt of being governed by the demands of his flesh (Naiman, *Sex in Public,* 17).

subject.[8] From a certain perspective, Lavrent'ev's label fits. There is some humor in the uncanny juxtaposition of Brik's unsmiling mien and his eccentric appearance. Yet, Brik propagated the abolition of a traditional definition of an art object, which usually implied a certain visual richness. The irony lies in the supposition that a man who is visually challenged may not be able to talk with authority about images. A shade of ambiguity complicates the humor. After all, Brik is not completely blinded – there are strokes of gouache on the image of the lens marking the blind spot as a glare and the lens as having a non-solid, transparent quality. Rodchenko made his subject look incapacitated only temporarily and partially. It seems to us that as soon as Brik turns his head away from the source of light, which blinds him and makes him see everything through the prism of *LEF*, he will be able to regain his sight.

Two years later, in 1925, when the publication of the journal was about to be suspended, left critic Viktor Pertsov noted a similar blind spot in Brik's line of vision. In his review of *LEF*, he observed a very special place that literature occupied in Brik's hierarchy of representations. Pertsov noted that of all traditional arts intended to be reconstructed by *LEF* – painting, sculpture, architecture, theater, and literature – only the latter remained relatively untouched by the sweeping iconoclasm of Productivism. While easel painting was to be replaced by posters, socially relevant montage, fabric and book design; sculpture and architecture by the functional design of furniture, interiors, and objects for everyday use, and theater by street demonstrations and club work, literature remained represented by verses and stories very similar to the ones that had been written for centuries, with the only requirement being to use new literary devices as opposed to

[8] Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, *Laboratoriia konstruktivizma: Opyty graficheskogo modelirovaniia* (Laboratory of Constructivism: experiments in graphic design) (Moscow: Grant, 2000), 132.

the old ones. Pertsov found this hierarchy of representational means puzzling, and he charged Brik personally with responsibility for this state of affairs.[9] This chapter will address Rodchenko's and Pertsov's observations as they relate to Brik's editorship of *LEF* during the journal's brief existence from 1923 until 1925. It argues that Brik's iconoclasm was distinguished by a peculiar attention to the visual in his attempt to construct a new visuality that would accommodate the intransigent iconoclastic landscape of the journal and its action-based philosophy. I will also claim that this complex representational philosophy was tied to Brik's conservative views on gender, as demonstrated in his 1923 story *Not a Fellow-Traveler.*

Brik's orientation toward the word and his search for a new visuality were inspired by the message of the Revolution.[10] One of the chief tasks of Narkompros, reflected in its name – the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment -- was the liquidation of illiteracy in the broad masses of the population. In the fall of 1919, the Soviet government made the ability to read compulsory for anyone between the ages of eight and fifty.[11] Brik had enthusiastically participated in this governmental initiative during the Civil War years by editing an official newspaper of the Art Department of Narkompros and by organizing a design competition of book and newspaper kiosks in 1919 under the aegis of the Department of Artistic Labor.[12] As Gleb Struve indicated, the year 1921 signaled a new era in Soviet literature with the opening of private

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[9] V. Pertsov, *Reviziia levogo fronta v sovremennom russkom iskusstve* (Revision of the Left Front in contemporary Russian art) (Moscow: Vserossiiskii Proletkult, 1925), 33-37.

[10] I use the word "visuality" instead of "vision" to indicate the difference within the visual between what Hal Foster called "sight as a social fact" and "sight as a physical operation." For Foster, the two were indelibly connected, but still needed to be analytically separated, in order to parcel out the social aspect of the visual, which, otherwise, comprises "one essential vision" or "a natural hierarchy of sight." See "Preface" in Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality,* Publication of Dia Art Foundation, Discussions in Contemporary Culture, no. 2 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), ix.

[11] Susan Compton, *Russian Avant-Garde Books, 1917-1934* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 10.

[12] See chapter 3 of this dissertation.

publishing firms, the growth of book-printing and book-selling industries, the widening of relations with foreign countries, and the entry into literature of a new generation of writers who participated first-hand in the Civil War.[13] Brik and Maiakovskii took part in all aspects of this new stage in literary life. According to Halina Stephan, as soon as the government permitted private publishing activity at the end of November 1921, Brik and Maiakovskii drafted a proposal to found a "publishing firm for left art, 'MAF' (Moscow Association of Futurists)," which they submitted to Lunacharskii. This project never materialized, despite the apparent support of the government. In the beginning of 1922, the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the party (Agitprop) decided to subsidize the Futurists, or what became known as the "Maiakovskii's group,"[14] in their losing battle against the enormously popular "boulevard literature." The Eleventh party congress, which convened during the same year, further buttressed the Futurists' position by announcing unequivocal political and financial support for publishers with the officially approved ideological directive.[15]

Simultaneously with promoting the message of universal literacy, Lenin sanctioned a campaign for monumental propaganda, which can be considered a first step in the direction of the visual education of the masses, by spreading graven images of revolutionary leaders throughout Petrograd and Moscow. According to Lodder, sixty-six such monuments were erected, most of which conformed to traditional representational

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[13] Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*, 34.

[14] At that time, apart from Maiakovskii and Brik, the group included poets Nikolai Aseev, Boris Pasternak and critics Boris Arvatov, Boris Kushner, Sergei Tretiakov, and Nikolai Chuzhak. See Halina Stephan, "*Lef" and the Left Front of the Arts* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1981), 20-21.

[15] Ibid.,19-22, 24, 29-30. A sample of "boulevard literature," which the party and the Futurists wanted to combat, was Anastasiia Verbitskaia's novel *The Keys to Happiness*, published in 1910-13, but proving to be of lasting interest to the Russian public. Other works of boulevard literature were by Mikhail Artsybashev, Leonid Andreev, Mikhail Kuz'min, Fedor Sologub, and Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal. See Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, chapter 10, 359-420.

patterns of figurative portraiture. This drive toward iconic representation allegedly sprang up from Lenin's admiration for *The City of the Sun,* a utopian novel by Tomasso Campanella, which described citizens of Rome inspired by frescoes depicting subjects that could "arouse civil feelings and … participate in the business of raising and educating a new generation."[16] Brik and the Futurists were unhappy with the old-fashioned figurative representation favored by Lenin and other party leaders and propagated a new visual language, the first well-known example of which was Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International.*[17] Brik and artists associated with *LEF* promoted a type of visuality that differed from Tatlin's concern with tactile and spatial properties of his objects and was concerned mostly with visuality subordinated to a specific ideology, venturing from designing architectural projects and objects for everyday use toward typography, book and textile design, and photography.

After Lenin's trip to VKhUTEMAS in February of 1922, where he was impressed by the enthusiasm of young artists for Maiakovskii, the leader made positive remarks about a socially relevant poem *Lost in Conference* [*Prozasedavshiesia*], which validated Maiakovskii's work in the eyes of the party and allowed him to publish in official newspapers.[18] Also, in June of that year the party decided to found a union of writers sympathetic to the Communist cause. This union was formed around the journal *Krasnaia nov'* (Red Virgin Soil), headed by Aleksandr Voronskii. It included the

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[16] Anatolii Lunacharskii, "Lenin o monumental'noi propagande," *Literaturnaia gazeta* no. 4/5 (January 29, 1933), cited in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* 53.
[17] Ibid., 55. Also, see Anatolii Strigalev, "K istorii vozniknoveniia Leninskogo plana monumental'noi propagandy," in *Voprosy Sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva i arkhitektury* (Moscow, 1976), 213-51.
[18] According to Nadezhda Krupskaia, Lenin became more favorable toward Maiakovskii's poetry after visiting VKhUTEMAS and observing the affect of his verse on the students. See N. K. Krupskaia, "Chto nravilos' Il'ichu iz khudozhestvennoi literatury" (What Lenin Liked in Creative Literature) *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1931), cited in Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: Khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985), 200.

"Maiakovskii group" and a wide variety of other writers of multiple persuasions, from Symbolists and Imaginists to Realists and the Serapion Brothers, a group of young writers united around the House of Arts in Petrograd.[19] Although the Futurists were supposed to occupy positions of authority in this amalgamation of groups, the union never materialized, because of the participants' mutual animosity and belligerence. Instead of forming a union, the groups split to form their own journals. Toward the end of 1922, the party approved a plan of *LEF*, submitted to Agitprop by Brik and Maiakovskii on behalf of the Futurists.[20]

VI. 1. *LEF*

The draft of the proposal for *LEF* submitted to Agitprop listed Brik as Editor-in-Chief as well as head of the Foreign Division. In addition to these responsibilities, he was also mentioned as a contributor to the sections of the "Sociology of Art" along with Arvatov, Chuzhak, Kushner, and Aleksei Gastev, and of "Technology of Art," along with many members of OPOIAZ, such as Eikhenbaum, Iakubinskii, Jakobson, and Vinokur.[21] Brik's actual contribution pattern differed somewhat from the projected plan. Although he bore the full load of editorial work, [22] affiliation with foreign artists formed just one aspect of his contribution to the journal.[23] From the editorial point of view, Brik

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[19] The Serapion brotherhood included such writers as Shklovskii, Konstantin Fedin, Veniamin Kaverin, Lev Lunz, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and even women, such as the poetess Elizaveta Polonskaia. See Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin,* 51-59.
[20] Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Arts,* 25.
[21] *PSS*, vol. 13, 404-405.
[22] Officially, Maiakovskii became the Editor-in-Chief [*otvetstvennyi redaktor*] of *LEF*, even though Brik was actively involved in its conception, preparation and production to the point of performing all editorial duties (Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Art,* xiii, 28-30).
[23] Brik knew German fluently, which permitted him to travel to Germany and befriend artists sympathetic to the Communists, such as George Grosz. Brik considered Grosz one of the most promising artists in the West. He published a laudatory article on the artist, "Artist-Communist George Grosz" ["Khudozhnik-kommunist George Grosz"] in *Ogonek* no. 1 (1923): 20 and placed Grosz' own article in the second issue of *LEF* (See "K moim rabotam," *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 27-30). Chapter 3 of this dissertation discusses Grosz' contribution to *LEF*. Other works in *LEF* by Western artists included Paul Citroen's

organized the journal as an organ of ideological propaganda. The contents were subdivided into five sections – Program, Practice, Theory, Books, and Facts – with the leading place tellingly devoted to the exhortatory sector, which called for the "agitation of art with the ideas of the commune" and the "fight for art, the builder of life."[24] The Program section also served as a site for important announcements and polemical responses to the critics of *LEF*.[25] The Practice section included works of literature – poetry and prose – as well as samples of architecture and production art.[26] Texts written for the subdivision of Theory consisted of thorough elaborations of the journal's ideological position and attitude toward art and politics;[27] exposés on Formalism;[28]

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photomontage (*LEF* no. 4, [August-December 1923]: 42); "Fugitive: Tragedy in Seven Telephone Conversations," a play by Karl Wittfogel (*LEF* no. 1, [March 1923]: 180-191); an excerpt from Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt,* "Mister Bebbit – amerikanets" (Mr. Babbitt – An American" (*LEF* no. 2 [April-May 1923]: 55-64) and Malcolm Cowley's "Leindekerovskii portret" (Leindecker's Portrait) (*LEF* no. 2 [April-May 1923]: 65-68). Apart from publishing works by foreign artists and writers in *LEF*, in 1923 Brik wrote several articles on Western theater, which he published in the journal *Zrelishcha*. They include "K vsenarodnomu teatru" (To the all-people theater) *Zrelishcha* no. 21 (1923): 10-11; "Balet 'Skating-Rink' Lezhe," (Léger's ballet "Skating Rink") *Zrelishcha* no. 19 (1923): 12-13; "Mekhanicheskii balet" (The Mechanical Ballet) *Zrelishcha* no. 58 (1923): 8-9. Originally, Brik planned publication in *LEF* of a wider range of Western artists and even the formation of an international Left Front of the Arts (see Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Art,* 40-41.)

[24] Nikolai Aseev et al., "Programma" *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 6-7. The program of the second issue consisted of the article "Comrades, Organizers of Life" in three languages (Russian, German and English) and verses dedicated to the International Day of Workers by the poets of *LEF*. *LEF* no. 1 (5) (1924) dedicated to Lenin, carried a programmatic article "Do Not Trade in Lenin!"

[25] The fourth issue of *LEF* published an announcement of the agreement between LEF and MAPP (The Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers) and an article "The Breakdown of VKhUTEMAS," calling for reorganization of the studios along the lines of production. In the third issue, the program was a collective polemical response to an attack on *LEF* by a *Pravda* critic Lev Sosnovskii, which included a response by Brik "Sosnovskomu." In *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 4, articles by Gorlov and Arvatov were dedicated to responses to Trotsky, Lunacharskii, Tugendhol'd, and other critics of *LEF*.

[26] *LEF* published only a few large architectural designs: two by Anton Lavinskii of a utopian city in no. 1, (March 1923): 62-63 and the Arcos building by the Vesnin brothers in no. 1 (5) (1924): 51.

[27] Sergei Tretiakov, "Otkuda i kuda" (Whence from and whereto?) *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 192-203; "Lef i Nep" (LEF and NEP) *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 70-78; Nikolai Chuzhak, "K zadacham dnia" (Toward the tasks of the day) *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 145-152; I. Grossman-Roshchin, "Sotsial'nyi zamysel Futurizma" (The social idea of Futurism), *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1924): 109-124; and others.

[28] Grigorii Vinokur, "Futuristy: stroiteli iazyka" (Futurists the builders of language); Osip Brik, "T.n. formal'nyi metod" (The so-called formal method) and Boris Arvatov, "Kontr-revoliutsiia formy" (the counter-revolution of Fform) in *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 204-230; Boris Arvatov, "Rechetvorchestvo" (Speech-Creation); G. Vinokur, "Revoliutsionnaia frazeologiia" (Revolutionary phraseology) in *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 79-91, 104-11; and others.

studies dedicated to Lenin;[29] INKhUK;[30] the latest developments in theater,[31] cinema,[32] and architecture.[33] The Books and Facts sections featured reviews of recent books and information about exhibitions, conferences and papers that could be of interest to the readers of the journal.

As far as his personal writings for *LEF* are concerned, Brik demonstrated by his own example the fusion of an individualist and collectivist principle of creative production that he tirelessly promoted. In the course of the journal's two-year existence, Brik signed off on five collective articles and eight individual ones on subjects ranging from literary formalism ("The So-Called 'Formal Method'") and production art ("Into Production," "Production Work," "From Painting to Textile Prints") to performance art ("Not in a Theater, but in a Club").[34] The Program section, composed almost entirely of collective manifestoes, outweighed all others in the sheer number of his writings. Next in line was the Practice section, where Brik co-authored an article on how to write prose and poetry with Maiakovskii; published a story; and wrote commentaries on the work of

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[29] All articles on Lenin were published in the theory section of *LEF* no. 1 (5) (1924).
[30] Boris Kushner, "Organizatory proizvodstva" (Organizers of Production), *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 97-103.
[31] Sergei Eisenstein, "Montazh attraktsionov" (Montage of attractions), *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 70-75; Mikhail Levidov, "Teatr: ego litso i maski" (Theater: its face and masks), *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1924): 172-186.
[32] Dziga Vertov, "Kinoki. Perevorot" (Kinoki. The overthrow), *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 135-145. Although Eisenstein made his first film, a short *Glumov's Film Diary,* as a prelude to his 1923 production of Aleksandr Ostrovskii's play *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* at the Theater of Moscow Proletkult, his film career did not begin in earnest until the resounding success of his first full-length film *Battleship Potemkin* two years later. In 1923, Vertov was still the foremost authority on film within the avant-garde circles.
[33] Kornei Zelinskii, "Ideologiia i zadachi sovetskoi arkhitektury" (Ideology and tasks of Soviet architecture), *LEF* no. 7(1925): 77-108.
[34] Osip Brik, "T. n. formal'nyi metod," *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 213-215; "V proizvodsvo," *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 105-108; "Proiz rabota," *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923): 59; "Ot kartiny k sitstsu," *LEF* no. 2 (6) (1924): 27-34; "Ne v teatre, a v klube," *LEF* no. 1 (5) (1924): 22. While working for *LEF,* Brik also wrote on similar subjects for such periodicals as *Krasnaia niva*, *Ogonek*, *Zaria Vostoka, Zhurnalist*, and *Zrelishcha*. For a full list of Brik's contributions to *LEF* and other journals, see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 265-342.

production artists at VKhUTEMAS.[35] For the Theory section, he wrote only two articles, none of which discussed visual art as such. The first one, "The So-Called Formal Method," explained the precepts of literary formalism to those Marxist critics who could not comprehend its emphasis on form within the Soviet context. The other, "Obliging Aesthete," critiqued a manual on book design.[36] Other theoreticians contributed detailed exposés on more or less narrowly defined topics – Nikolai Chuzhak wrote long philosophizing articles on the history and dialectics of proletarian art; Sergei Tretiakov was explicitly concerned with the task of building the new man; Boris Arvatov elaborated the concept of artistic utopia and the artists' construction of non-alienated communist objects,[37] and Boris Kushner focused on artists' participation in the process of production. Brik, by contrast, was more general and concrete at the same time. He covered similar topics, but in a different, more pungent, format. He almost never wrote long theoretical articles, but only short critical ones, with an emphasis on ideological and political currency.

As Pertsov later acutely observed, literature occupied a privileged position in *LEF'*s view of the process of ideological production. The parameters of Brik's literary struggle can be traced to the history of *LEF*'s relationship with other important formations of Soviet writers formed around various journals, such as the already mentioned Voronskii's *Krasnaia nov'*, Viacheslav Polonskii's *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* (Press and Revolution), and a militant group of proletarian writers gathered around the

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[35] Vladimir Maiakovskii and Osip Brik, "Nasha slovesnaia rabota" (Our work on the word), *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 40-41; Osip Brik, "Ne poputchitsa" (Not a fellow-traveler) *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 109-142; "Razval Vkhutemasa" (The Breakdown of VKhUTEMAS), *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923): 27-28.

[36] Osip Brik, "Usluzhlivyi estet," *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 92-103.

[37] Kiaer's dissertation discusses extensively Arvatov's theory of the Constructivist object.

journal *Na postu* (On Guard). The heat of debates between these groups revolved around an appropriate attitude toward a new phenomenon in Soviet literature, the so-called "fellow-travelers" [*poputchiki*], a group of non-Communist writers who sympathized with the revolution.[38] In the early 1920s, a rather innocent word *poputchik*, which originally meant "someone who goes along with someone else, following the same path, a sputnik,"[39] acquired a negative connotation, designating someone inauthentic, a person who "followed a certain political movement only temporarily and not wholeheartedly."[40] The negative meaning of the word became current under the influence of the group of proletarian writers called October, which drew its membership almost entirely from Proletkult. Its philosophy reflected Proletkult's insistence on the purity of class origins as a necessary condition for producing authentic proletarian literature. By this token, *On Guard* delegated all non-proletarian and non-Bolshevik writers, including those of *LEF*, to the category of mere "fellow-travelers."[41]

Voronskii, who, apart from being the editor of *Krasnaia nov'* was also the head of Glavpolitprosvet, a Soviet agency responsible for the political education of the masses, worked out an entire system of defense on behalf of the fellow-travelers. According to him, the first peaceful period in the life of the Soviet republic needed a literature which would be capable of an "artistic cognition of life." Fellow-travelers, whom Voronskii defined as "writers of middle-class, peasant or intelligentsia origin, who grew up during

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[38] According to Struve, Trotsky coined the term *poputchiki* in his *Literature and Revolution* (1924), thus designating those writers who "more or less organically are bound up with the revolution, but at the same time [do not create] the art of the revolution." See Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin*, 76.
[39] K.A. Timofeev and N.M. Medelets, eds., *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Moscow and Leningrad: Academy of Science of the USSR, 1960), vol. 10, s. v. *poputchik*.
[40] Ibid. Boris Volin, "Klevetniki" (Slanderers), *Na postu* no. 1 (1923), 10-27. Apart from *LEF, napostovtsy* also denigrated as *poputchiki* Serapion Brotherhood, "Pereval," "Literary Center of Constructivistsis," and Imaginists. See A. A. Surkov et al., eds., *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1968), vol. 5, s. v. *poputchik*.
[41] Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature,* 6-16; 21-34.

the Revolution, accepted its achievements, observed it at first hand or even took part in it," were capable of engendering such an "artistic cognition of life" and were thus welcome to represent Soviet literature on a par with proletarian writers and Futurists.[42] *LEF* disagreed with Voronskii's premise of art as reflection of life and politically it sided with the October attack on Voronskii's favorable attitude to a broad range of writers.

Although LEF disagreed with October and its successor, MAPP[43] on the necessity of proletarian origins and Communist membership to be able to build Communist culture, it was of one mind with it as far as fellow-travelers were concerned. The agreement between LEF and MAPP, published in the fourth issue of *LEF*, outlined major points of convergence between the two groups: struggle against reappearance of bourgeois influences on the proletariat, particularly in the domain of literature; "the organization of the psychology and consciousness of readers" in order to complete the "Communist tasks of the proletariat"; tireless "unveiling" [*razoblachenie*] of bourgeois and "false" fellow-traveler groups in the process of formulating the Communist principles of class art politics.[44] The critics' reception of *LEF* was far from favorable[45] and Brik's article "To

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[42] For Voronskii's views on the matter, see Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature,* 80-83.

[43] MAPP was a division of VAPP, formed in March 1923 on the initiative of October and other groups of proletarian writers in order to create an "avant-garde of proletarian literature." See A. N. Nikoliukin, ed., *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia terminov i poniatii* (Moscow: NPK'Intelvak,' 2001), s. v. "MAPP."

[44] "Настоящий этап пролетарской революции в России характеризуется, между прочим, возрождением и укреплением буржуазной и мелко-буржуазной идеологии, на почве частично возродившихся капиталистических отношений. В такой обстановке опасность идеологического перерождения пролетариата… становится вполне реальной. Наименее защищённым участком идеологического фронта пролетариата является участок искусства, в частности художественной литературы, что в значительной степени объясняется отсутствием отчётливой классовой художественной политики… Соглашающиеся стороны: 1) Не прекращая лабораторной работы, направляют всю творческую деятельность на организацию психики и сознания читателей в сторону коммунистических задач пролетариата. 2) Путём устных и печатных выступлений проводят неуклонное разоблачение буржуазно-дворянских и мнимо-попутнических литературных группировок и выдвигают свои принципы классовой художественной политики…" ("Soglashenie moskovskoi assotsiatsii proletarskikh pisatelei MAPP i gruppy Lef" [Agreement between LEF and MAPP], *LEF* no. 4 [August-December 1923]: 4-5).

[45] Attacks on *LEF* were numerous, but varied in the degree of viciousness**.** Whereas an *Izvestiia* critic Boris Gimmel'farb likened Futurists to "artistic fascists," Polonskii was much kinder toward his opponents:

Sosnovskii," in which he replied to the Futurists' accusations of bohemian elitism and incomprehensibility, was an example of his fight against the enemies of LEF.[46]

The crux of the debates between LEF, MAPP, and the defenders of the fellow-travelers revolved around the question of definition. Whereas LEF sought a rapprochement with MAPP in the hope of storing up its proletarian identity, Voronskii of *Krasnaia nov'* dashed these hopes when at a 1924 publishing meeting of the Central Committee he called Maiakovskii himself a fellow-traveler, an insult from which the poet never recovered.[47] Whereas party policy on the question of proletarian writers versus fellow-travelers varied from year to year, giving advantage to either one of the warring sides, LEF fell through the cracks of party resolutions and was attacked by everyone for elitism on the one hand and nihilism on the other.[48]

Taking into account the relevance of the subject of fellow-travelers, it is not surprising that Brik's first significant contribution to *LEF* was a story *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, fulfilling his promise expressed a few pages earlier to write "laconic prose on the subject of the day."[49] The story was written as a play or a film script -- entirely as a dialogue -- and was dedicated to a hotly discussed subject, indicated by the title. Apart from proclaiming his intention to discuss a politically charged term, Brik also inflected the gender of the noun – *poputchitsa* as opposed to *poputchik* – thereby achieving two goals: announcing his intention to discuss a popular NEP topic concerning women's

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he merely rebuked *LEF* for being an "attacking victim" [*zhertva, kotoraia napadaet*] and suggested to pay more attention to making art as opposed to discussing it. See B. Gimmel'farb "Literatura i revoliutsiia," *Izvestiia,* December 16, 1923 and V. Polonskii, "Zametki o zhurnalakh," *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* no. 5 (1923): 323-330. For other attacks on *LEF,* see Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Arts,* 35, note 17.

[46] Osip Brik, "Sosnovskomu," *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 4 and L. Sosnovskii, "Zheltaia kofta iz sovetskogo sitsa," *Pravda,* May 24, 1923.

[47] Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Arts,* 46.

[48] On the inconsistency of party policy on proletarian writers and fellow-travelers, see ibid., 45.

[49] Maiakovskii and Brik, "Nasha slovesnaia rabota," *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 40-41.

place in the building of Communism and deprecatingly comparing his opponents to women.

IV. 2. *Not a Fellow-Traveler*

The plot of Brik's story is rather trite – a love triangle. One Sandarov, whose first name we never learn, is the head of a Soviet building cooperative. He falls in love with Nina Georgievna Veliarskaia, wife of a wealthy businessman. The story begins with a fateful encounter -- as soon as Sandarov sees Veliarskaia passing by his table in a restaurant, he cannot take his eyes off her. The next scene faces us with the other side of the triangle, Sonia Bauer, also a Communist and Sandarov's common-law wife, who accidentally learns of her husband's obsession. Tortured by jealousy, Sonia reports Sandarov's non-Communist passion to one of his enemies within the party, who immediately starts churning out intrigues against his comrade. Taking advantage of the situation, the speculator Veliarskii tries to use Sandarov's attraction to his wife as the means to gain concessions for his contract with Sandarov's cooperative.

Meanwhile, Sandarov introduces himself to Veliarskaia. He charms her, and she is willing to start an affair with him. However, Sandarov, true Communist that he is, cannot tie himself to someone who does not share his ideology. He tries to convert Veliarskaia to his way of thinking, but fails. She does not want to take Communism seriously, and Sandarov cannot accept her lack of commitment to this crucial issue. They quarrel. While the affair unfolds, an envoy of Veliarskii manages to convince Sonia Bauer that Sandarov promised to authorize payment to Veliarskii's firm before the completion of the work. Sonia believes this obvious lie, because she is persuaded in advance of her lover's treachery. Without consulting with Sandarov, she gives him

Veliarskii's documents for signature, which he signs trusting that she double-checked all the facts.

The story ends with the triumph of justice. Sandarov's misdeeds become known to the Cheka, which questions all the participants in the intrigue and unravels the story. It jails the Nepmen (Veliarskii and his helper) and informs the party's Central Committee of its members' transgressions. As justice triumphs, Sonia Bauer is expelled from the party. Sandarov and his ill-fated party rival are transferred from the capital to the provinces. The last scene of the story has Sandarov trying to jump off the train to join his beloved who runs frantically along the station in an effort to find him. The friendly hand of his former rival saves him from this fatal jump.[50]

There are several levels of meaning in the story. Apart from making his hero a Communist occupying a high-level administrative position in a new state bureaucracy, Brik turned his attention to the woman question, a hot topic for discussion before, during, and after the Revolution.[51] In political terms, Brik responded to the contemporary debate on the woman question, which flared up during NEP, when the most outspoken members of *zhenotdely* (women's sections of the Communist party), began defending their institutions, established during the Civil War, from the threat of liquidation. One of the most confident and consistent voices in this chorus belonged to Aleksandra Kollontai, the head of the central *zhenotdel*. One article in particular revealed her fears of the emergent private ownership's negative influence on women. In "The New Threat," which came out in the fall of 1922, Kollontai condemned the reemerging type of idle women, which she subdivided into three subtypes: the wives of the newly rich, housewives, and prostitutes.

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[50] Brik, "He poputchitsa," *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 109-142.
[51] For literature discussing the woman question in Russia, see note 5.

While she considered prostitution a deplorable and morally offensive social ill and housewives an undesirable social phenomenon, the heat of her denunciation fell upon the "doll-parasites" of the first type. The main offence of the NEP-woman was her idleness and her unwillingness to participate in social construction. As a "harmful moth," the bourgeois woman was juxtaposed to a "woman-citizen," an active worker in the Communist collective. As Elizabeth Wood observed, Kollontai seemed to object most to the bourgeois woman's "uncontrolled sexuality – heels that were too high, lips that were too red, a walk that was too simpering."[52]

In *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, Brik disagreed with Kollontai's disparaging treatment of bourgeois women, especially her denigration of their sexual appeal. In fact, Brik starkly juxtaposed Veliarskaia, a bourgeois "real woman" [*nastoiashchaia zhenshchina*], with Sonia Bauer, an oxymoronic "Communist woman," who renounced her femininity in her quest for equality with men, but who nevertheless retained the jealous, possessive and proprietary claims that characterize bourgeois relationships.[53] The character of Nina Georgievna Veliarskaia is sympathetic and attractive, despite her hesitation to participate in Communist construction. The exemplary Communist Sandarov is confident that she is going to be a very useful and effective Communist worker, once she commits herself to his cause. On the other hand, Sonia Bauer, Sandarov's Communist companion [*sozhitel'nitsa*], betrays the ideals of the party, despite strictly following the code of a Communist lover: she works (albeit as a secretary for Sandarov) and lives separately from him. Their relationship is work-oriented; the private and intimate come into it as a distraction imposed by a necessity of nature.

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[52] Aleksandra Kollontai, "Novaia ugroza," *Kommunistka*, nos. 8-9 (1922): 5-9, quoted in Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade,* 176-178.
[53] See Naiman's *Sex in Public* for information on the Communists' views on gender difference.

Brik disparages the character of Sonia the most in his story by making it bear the most guilt and punishing it most severely. Her crime seems to reduce to the renunciation of her femininity -- charm, coquetry, and the possessive desire to be close to the man she loves -- in her quest to be just like this man, whose existence is governed by Communist ideals. The seeming equality of the relationship between Sonia and Sandarov is deceptive, however. Sandarov does not love Sonia, and she, in turn, is not happy with the arrangement between them, although she does not admit her discontent even to herself. Secretly, she longs for intimacy with Sandarov, which is precluded by her ideological convictions. By emphasizing the amorous unhappiness of a couple where the woman wants to be exactly like a man, Brik exposes the falsity of a relationship in which gender difference is eradicated.

Veliarskaia, Sandarov's true love, is very different from Sonia. When Sandarov explains to Veliarskaia what he likes about her, he says that she is "unusually true to life and to herself,"[54] by this implying that her Communist counterpart, Sonia, lives a life invented for her by someone else. Sonia has been living entirely under the impression of the books she read and the ideas expressed in them. There is no place in her life for passion and spontaneous attraction, which do not form part of the life of the mind. By making Sonia a victim, Brik reveals his rigid views on the woman question. In his opinion, retaining her personal "truth" (read: sexuality) essential for woman's happiness in her relationships with men, because the domain of the production of ideas belongs only to men. It is not that women cannot be privy to the privilege of believing in a set of ideas, but they have to be coached and guided in their search, as shown by the example of

[54] In describing Veliarskaia's qualities, Sandarov mentions that she is "какая-то необыкновенно живая, настоящая" *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 118.

Sandarov, who, in his striving to make Veliarskaia his companion, endeavors to teach her the *ABC of Communism*.

Apart from Kollontai, who represented the point of view of women-Communists and whom Brik eagerly attacked, another side of the debate on the woman question featured its relationship to the realm of everyday life [*byt*] -- a topic, which was taken up by none other than Trotsky. As is well-known, in 1923 Trotsky addressed the question of *byt* in a series of articles in *Pravda*. In these articles he expressed an opinion that during the period of NEP, the attention of all citizens should be directed to correcting and reconstructing the stagnant and inert environment of *byt*.[55] In "Man Does Not Live by Politics Alone," Trotsky referred to Lenin's recent appeal to turn attention from political questions to those of culture. In the following article, "In Order to Reconstruct *Byt*, It Is Necessary to Know It," he called for "conscious creativity in the area of *byt*" and to the rationalization of *byt.* [56] As has Kiaer noted, in his struggle to renew and rationalize *byt*, Trotsky inadvertently aimed at a complete redefinition of the concept and its replacement by its opposite – *bytie* – which, in Russian intellectual consciousness, corresponded to the realm of intellectual activity and spirituality. Because women have historically belonged to the realm of *byt*, homely and sexualized womanhood also had to be replaced with intellectualized activities that would allow women to be the equal of men in the building of Communism.[57]

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[55] In 1923, *Pravda* launched a column dedicated to the discussion of *byt*, called *Kartinki byta* (Pictures of everyday life). Trotsky contributed to the discussion with a series of articles, which included "Vodka, tserkov' i kino" (Vodka, church and cinema) and "Sem'ia i obriad" (Family and ritual). In the same year, these articles were collected into a book *Voprosy byta* (Questions of everyday life: an epoch of "culture-making" and its tasks) (Moscow: Krasnaia nov', 1923).

[56]"Ne o 'politike' edinoi zhiv chelovek" and "Chtoby perestroit' byt, nado poznat'ego" in Trotsky, *Voprosy byta*, 16, 25-31.

[57] Kiaer, "The Russian Constructivist 'Object' and the Revolutionizing of Everyday Life," 12-16, 19-20.

In portraying Veliarskaia as a likable, even lovable, woman -- lovable precisely because of her sex appeal -- Brik broke away from the chorus of contemporary writers from Kollontai to Trotsky who denounced the traditional view of woman as a sex object and encouraged a new version of femininity that would exclude sexuality from intimate heterosexual relationships as a remnant of the despised *byt.* In his story Brik proposed that woman remains a sex object, auxiliary but infinitely gratifying as far as men were concerned. Only apart from her sex appeal, a woman also had to possess Communist consciousness – otherwise, she would not be able to be a fellow-traveler alongside her valiant lovers.

Not surprisingly, Trotsky did not like Brik's story. In his review of the literature of the period, he mentioned *Not a Fellow-Traveler* only to condescendingly remark on the lack of distance between the subject matter and the author, accusing Brik of being too close to *byt* and to his bourgeois origins.[58] Nikolai Chuzhak, Brik's colleague in *LEF,* responded in a much more confrontational manner. To begin with, he was against publishing the story in the journal.[59] When it appeared despite his objections, he wrote a scathing review in the central party newspaper *Izvestiia*, accusing Brik of portraying an ugly aspect of the Soviet reality, an excessive preoccupation with the "dirty" world of prostitution, and of allowing the Communists to be marred by this filth. "What happened to the *LEF* slogans calling for the agitation for the ideas of the Commune?" asked Chuzhak. Instead, they were replaced by a representative of the bourgeois *intelligentsiia* who "tries the hardest to grab with his unceremonious hands [*razviaznymi rukami*]

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[58] Lev Trotsky, *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923; reprint, Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), 112.
[59] See Nikolai Chuzhak, "Vokrug 'Nepoputchitsy,'" (Around *Not a Fellow-Traveler*), *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 69.

everything that he used to worship" before the revolution. According to Chuzhak, the story was flawed in its mixing of the two opposing social layers: that of the bourgeois profiteers and the Soviet workers. An even more unforgivable flaw was Brik's critical portrayal of the rank-and-file members of the party, who were shown as either bureaucratic schemers or careerists. Even if such Communists exist, Chuzhak said, Brik's mistake was to "take the dirt out of the house" (literally, "to shake it out for the use of the street" [*vytriakhivaniie na potrebu ulitse*]).[60]

Obviously, the public confrontation with a member of his own group bothered Brik. In his reply to Chuzhak published in *Izvestiia* three days later, Brik expressed his dismay at the betrayal of his comrade-in-arms:

> Comrade Chuzhak became very angry with me and my *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, which was printed in the first issue of *LEF*. He called my heroes-Communists idiots and counted me among the "bourgeois *intelligentsiia*..." … My heroes-Communists are not idiots, but normal people, who are possessed by passions that are common to all. These passions are making people do things, for which they repent later. Heroism consists not in being free from sin, but, after having sinned, in admitting and overcoming one's sin. If the person cannot deal with the situation himself, then the collective– in my story, the Cheka and Tseka [the Central Committee of the Communist party] – comes to his aid and set him on the right path. The subject of my story is "a Communist in a bourgeois surrounding." This is a subject of tremendous importance, because it is here, in *byt*, that the most brutal fronts of the Communist struggle take place.[61]

In his reply to Chuzhak, Brik used polemical language to ally himself with the popular view of femininity as associated with *byt* and therefore flawed by comparison to an ideal

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[60] Nikolai Chuzhak, "O nepo-nepoputchitsakh" (About NEP-not-fellow-travelers), *Izvestiia* April 12, 1923.
[61] "Товарищ Чужак очень рассердился на меня и на мою 'Не попутчицу', напечатанную в No. 1 журнала «Леф». Обозвал моих героев-коммунистов идиотами, а меня причислил к «буржуазной интеллигенции…». Мои герои-коммунисты не идиоты, а нормальные люди, со страстями, человеку свойственными. Эти страсти толкают человека на поступки, в которых он потом раскаивается. Героизм не в том, чтобы не согрешить, а в том, что согрешив, грех свой осознать и преодолеть. Если человек сам с собой справиться не может, ему на помощь приходит коллектив – в моём рассказе ЧК и ЦК – которые наставляют его на путь истинный. Тема моего рассказа – коммунист в буржуазном окружении. Тема громадной важности, ибо здесь, в быту, пройдут одни из самых ожесточённых фронтов коммунистической борьбы" (Osip Brik, "Otvet tov. Chuzhaku," [Response to comrade Chuzhak] *Izvestiia*, April 15, 1923).

of a male Communist who is trying to build a new life by reforming both *byt* and women according to his puritanical beliefs. Brik's choice of words, describing the Communists' "sins" and their "repentance," indicated that Brik understood the connection between the religious and Communist fervor and, as an expert debater, applied this insight whenever it served his rhetoric efficiently. For polemical purposes as well, he did not mention an aspect of his story that infuriated his opponents the most – a positive view of *byt* in its association with femininity and its irrational, sensual, spontaneous attraction. In his article in *Izvestiia*, Brik implied that the point of his story was to differentiate between the virtuous Communists and the vile Nepmen and Nep-women. The story itself is more ambiguous. Although the confrontation between lofty Communist ideas and sex appeal makes Brik's priorities clear, it makes us wonder if Sandarov and his comrade denounced something important by failing to recruit Veliarskaia to their cause.

In terms of diachronic historicity, Brik's model was Chernyshevskii's 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?*[62] Despite the overt repudiation of tradition, *Not a Fellow-Traveler* had an obvious literary precedent in Chernyshevskii's famous novel, which it clearly traced in the subject matter. *What is to Be Done?* is the story of a woman, Vera Pavlovna Rozal'skaia, who is saved from her loveless and superficial existence in a traditional patriarchal household by a "new man," Lopukhov. This "new man" considers her an equal and does everything in his power to emancipate her. He is kind and generous, but also practical and sober-minded. He goes to great lengths to speak about his feelings and the intricacies of the relationship and is concerned that a woman remains an independent

[62] Vasilii Katanian, Lilia Brik's stepson, left us a convincing evidence of the overwhelming influence that this book had on both Osip and Lilia. According to him, in their youth, Brik, Maiakovskii, and Lilia Brik "loved very much" Chernyshevskii's novel. Lilia Brik in particular had always recommended this book to her friends. See Vasilii V. Katanian, *Prikosnovenie k idolam*, 118-119.

human being in a marriage, with her own feelings, desires, likes and dislikes. The action of the novel unfolds as the three main characters -- Vera Pavlovna, Lopukhov, and his friend Kirsanov -- go through their lives in the quest to make them meaningful, productive and happy. In this journey, they meet obstacles – the plot begins with the story of Vera Pavlovna's unhappiness in her mothers' house and her attempt to escape marriage to a rich, but dishonorable man – and the ultimate successes – the heroine first establishes an exemplary tailoring business and then studies to become a doctor.

For his time, Chernyshevskii expressed extremely radical views on new revolutionary consciousness and women's liberation, which made his book an instant and long-lasting success.[63] Its popularity, however, influenced a type of behavior not described nor envisioned by the author. In Chernyshevskii's time, which coincided with the onset of the women's liberation movement in Russia,[64] struggles to free the "weak sex" from the status of second-tier citizens frequently resulted in their complete identification with men. According to one contemporary description,

> Most *nigilistki* [nihilist women] are usually very plain and exceedingly ungracious, so that they have no need to cultivate curt, awkward manners; they dress with no taste and in impossibly filthy fashion, rarely wash their hands, never clean their nails, often wear glasses, always cut their hair, and sometimes even shave it off. … They read Feuerbach and Büchner almost exclusively, despise art, use *ty* [informal address] with several young men, light their cigarettes not from a candle, but from men who smoke, are uninhibited in their choice of expressions, live either alone or in phalansteries, and talk most of all about exploitation of labor, about the silliness of marriage and family, and about anatomy.[65]

It is easy to recognize the pattern of such "nihilist" behavior in Communist women in general and in Brik's Sonia Bauer in particular. The women of the revolution

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[63] Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 26-37.
[64] See Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia,* passim.
[65] *Vest'* No. 46, 1864; cited in Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, 17-18.

prided themselves on being the equals of men in everything, including dress and behavior.[66] The Bolsheviks made the equality official, by legislating it in their founding party code of 1903 and reiterating it in 1917, a few months after the October takeover of power.[67] They encouraged women's participation in military action and in factory labor; they welcomed them into the party and even promoted a few of them to ruling positions within the party and the state.[68] In fact, immediately after the revolution and during the Civil War, the Bolsheviks came close to fulfilling the prophesies of Chernyshevskii's contemporary Mikhail Mikhailov, a radical publicist of the 1860's, who preached that "there should be nothing feminine in women except their sex."[69]

Such extreme radicalism concerning the woman question did not express either Chernyshevskii's or Brik's views. Throughout his narrative, Chernyshevskii had painstakingly pointed out the traditional "womanly" qualities in his Vera Pavlovna, her beautiful face, stately figure and a "developed" chest.[70] Moreover, Chernyshevskii made his heroine attuned to her sexual desires and shaped her life accordingly. Faced with a choice of two highly qualified "new men" – Lopukhov and Kirsanov – who were very much like each other, Vera Pavlovna chose the latter, more passionate and extroverted than his friend.[71] Chernyshevskii integrated the subject of sexuality and *byt* into his narrative in such a way that it became an indispensable part of the story.

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[66] For the women's emulation of men during the revolution, see Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, chapter 10.
[67] Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade,* 49-50.
[68] Ibid.*,* chapter 2.
[69] Mikhail Mikhailov, undated letter. Published in M. L. Mikhailov, *Zhenshchiny: Ikh vospitanie i znacheniie v sem'e i obshchestve* (Women: their education and significance in family and society) (St. Petersburg, 1903), 221. Quoted in ibid.*,* 15 from Richard Stites, "M. L. Mikhailov and the Emergence of the Woman Question in Russia," *Canadian Slavic Studies* 3, no. 2 (1969), 198.
[70] Nikolai Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'? Iz rasskazov o novykh liudiakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978), 47 ff.
[71] Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism,* 152-153.

In fact, Chernyshevskii not only integrated the subject of everyday life into his novel, but made it a dominant theme by constructing a utopia of everyday life, which involved organizing the heroes' *byt* in such a way that it would maximally fit their wishes. Because the main heroine of the novel was a woman, her wishes and desires dictated the arrangement of not only her *byt*, but also that of her husbands. Chernyshevskii went to great length to emphasize the importance that Vera Pavlovna accorded to the comforts of her existence. After her business was established, she liked to spend her mornings on a comfortable sofa drinking tea with a particular kind of thick cream and cookies. She enjoyed spending time getting dressed in the morning, taking her bath, combing her hair just so, eating and indulging in other small pleasures of life. The daily comforts of *byt*, as well as a successful business, formed a core of her happiness. The men in the life of Vera Pavlovna subordinated their egos to her wishes, and after some perturbations caused by her leaving her husband and marrying his best friend, everyone achieved happiness in their private lives.

Although Chernyshevskii expressed his views on the order of life and morality most openly in the four dreams of his heroine, he broached the subject of public, as opposed to private, utopia only in the last of them. It reveals a marvelous Crystal Palace of the future, where daily life – associated with nature and country life, not with a city -- is regulated by technology to the utmost detail and precision. Although people take care of the forests, luxuriant gardens and fields with abundant harvests, almost everything is done for them by machines. Those who do not want to work in the fields prepare and serve delicious food, kept warm during meals by special pots with hot water. The work does not exhaust anyone, but brings joy to them. When colder weather comes, most

inhabitants of this fairy-tale land migrate to a warmer climate, where they transform the desert into a comfortable living place. At night, after work everyone enjoys themselves as much and as well as they can: by dancing, going to theaters, spending time with their families or making love.[72] For Chernyshevskii, therefore, the public utopia also concerned the transformation of *byt*. Unlike Trotsky's wiping out of its materiality, Chernyshevskii's reconstruction of everyday laid more emphasis on material abundance and sensual comfort as its ultimate aim.

Brik made many revisions to Chernyshevskii's version of utopia, some of which reversed its ideals completely. Unlike his predecessor, Brik focused his attention on the city and not the country. More importantly, Brik did not revel in the utopian reconciliation of desire and radical ideology, but pointed to their irreconcilable conflict. Unlike Chernyshevskii's novel, which ends like a fairytale, at the end Brik's story is neither utopian nor dystopian, but prosaic: Veliarskaia failed either to join Sandarov in his exile or make him stay with her and denounce his party career. *Not a Fellow-Traveler* pronounced a harsh judgment on the coexistence of material comfort and ideological purity. Sensuality, embodied by women and intellectual rigor, exemplified by men, could not coexist on equal terms. According to Brik, it was possible only if the former was subsumed by the latter, and not vice versa.

Also, Brik inflected his predecessor's utopia by reversing the ratio of the traditional two men/one-woman love triangles. In *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, quite uncharacteristically for the "genre" of the love triangle, two women compete for the attention of one man. The reasons for doing so were both historical and structural. When Chernyshevskii wrote his novel, the question of a love triangle was not only

[72] Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat?* 385-391.

enthusiastically discussed in the radical *intelligentsiia* circles in Russia, but also put into practice by them. In portraying the experimental lifestyle of a "new family," which included two men and one woman, Chernyshevskii recapitulated not only his own life experience, but also that of his famous and not-so-famous contemporaries, Aleksandr Herzen, Ivan Sechenov, Mikhail Bakunin, and Nikolai Shchelgunov, among others. Despite their faith in science and in cause-and-effect relationships codified by positivism, in their marital experimentation, many of the "new men" were inspired by the German romantics and the French proponents of the Enlightenment, such as Rousseau and Georges Sand.[73]

In her book on Chernyshevskii, Irina Paperno has shown that the triangular relationship in *What Is to Be Done?* was related to its author's personal dependence on masculine approval, a support network of sorts, without which it was impossible for him to become romantically involved with a woman. Paperno defined this as a psychological need to have a male "intermediary" who would approve Chernyshevskii's choice. In his life and in his works, Chernyshevskii kept returning to such triangular schemas, in which a "liberated" woman's life and consciousness would be entirely conditioned by her relationships with male friends – at least two – who would also become rivals in the quest for her amorous attention.[74] In this dependence on masculine support and approval, the generation of Russian radicals from the 1850s was not much different from that of their European contemporaries. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a similar love triangle in the English literature of that period portrayed "the bond that links the two rivals… as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved." In fact, she

[73] Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism,* 154 and passim, esp. chapter 2.
[74] Ibid., 54-60, 117-125.

found that this "bond between rivals in an erotic triangle" is "even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved."[75] Women in such relationships were nothing but "conduits of homosocial desire between men."[76] Although it is unlikely that Chernyshevskii read any of the works mentioned by Sedgwick, with the possible exception of Shakespeare's sonnets, his making a disciple of Vera Pavlovna who is a dependent of the two male friends/rivals places him squarely within the tradition of male homosociality delineated by Sedgwick.[77]

In structuring the love triangle of his story, Brik both followed Chernyshevskii and went against him. Like Chernyshevskii, Brik made the domain of the formation of ideas a male prerogative, in which women formed a background for the intellectual activity of men. Unlike his nineteenth-century predecessor, Brik compressed the role of women almost to the extreme, making them entirely dispensable as far as the goals of Communism were concerned. Of course, in a perfect world it would be more pleasant to have a sensuous female companion in the struggle for a better society. However, if she was not willing to believe in her husband's ideas, then the struggle for Communism would have to go without her, for better or for worse. In its relationship to the Communist utopia, Brik's text was double-edged: on the one hand, in its unabashed identification of women with *byt* it reflected the mega-text of Soviet reality, in which attributes of femininity were either denigrated or denied altogether; on the other, in its

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[75] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 21.
[76] Ibid., 99.
[77] In his recent study of the novel, Andrew Drozd cites Chernyshevskii's contemporaries who noted and objected to his heroine's dependence on male characters. See Andrew Drozd, *Chernyshevskii's What Is to Be Done? A Reevaluation* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 17.

portrayal of the female protagonist as beautiful, likable, and attractive it highlighted the limitations of an all-male utopia devoid of female sensuality.[78]

Brik's personal relationships reflected his ambiguous attitude toward women and his appreciation of an attractive and sensuous female companion. Brik's wife, Lilia, was an avowed *femme fatale* before her marriage. Despite Brik's assertion that he was "absolutely in love with her," their sexual relationship lasted only a few years, "somehow falling apart" in Lilia's recollection before 1915.[79] Brik never divorced Lilia, however. After he met Maiakovskii, the threesome built their own love triangle, structuring their lives according to the classic schema of two men-friends and a woman – a lover of both and an intermediary between the two. As is well-known, Lilia and Maiakovskii began seeing each other almost immediately after the first encounter of the threesome, when Osip, according to Lilia's expression, "fell in love" with the poet. Apparently, Osip was not aware of his wife's affair with Maiakovskii until it matured into a stable relationship. Although they had been seeing each other since the summer of 1915, Lilia told Osip about her involvement with Maiakovskii only in 1918, three years after she and the poet began seeing each other. The three lived together after that, sharing an apartment and remaining friends even after the final breakup of Lilia with Maiakovskii, Lilia's numerous affairs, and Osip's relationship with Evgeniia Sokolova, wife of the theater producer Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi, which began in 1925 and lasted for the rest of Brik's life.[80] Despite numerous tender letters written by Brik to Lilia and vice versa, Lilia's

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[78] Naiman, *Sex in Public,* passim.

[79] Lilia Brik, "A teper'ob Osipe Maksimoviche," in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 140 and Vasilii V. Katanian, *Prikosnovenie k idolam*, 75.

[80] Apart from Vaksberg's book, for information on Lilia Brik's life, see Vasilii V. Katanian, *Lilia Brik, Vladimir Maiakovskii i drugie muzhchiny* (Lilia Brik, Vladimir Maiakovskii, and other men) (Moscow: Zakharov-ACT, 1998) and Lilia Brik, *Pristrastnye rasskazy* (Lilia Brik: biased stories), ed. Inna Gens and

stepson, Vasilii Katanian, was convinced that whereas Lilia loved Osip more than anyone else in the world, Osip did not reciprocate with a similar kind of love.[81]

Simultaneously with its publication in *LEF, Not a Fellow-Traveler* came out as a separate book. It had only one illustration – on the cover, designed by a Lavinskii (Fig. IV - 2). To achieve the affect of speed and dynamism, Lavinskii split the rectangle of the cover diagonally and drew the letters of the title in perspective, the giant "NE" on top and "POPUTCHITSA" running along the divide. Brik's name and initials are on the bottom, printed in heavy block letters. Next to his name is a rectangle identifying the artist. The main visual element of the cover is a photograph of a train in motion. Wedged into the triangle between the words of the title, the train is inexorably moving forward and threatening to crush with its weight and power tiny human figures on the tracks. Lavinskii's image captured Brik's fascination with the ideals of progress, technology, the domination of nature and masculinity. Whether a symbol of history, Communism or human genius, the image of a train functioned as the ultimate phallic symbol and as such served as an apposite illustration to Brik's text.

Iakov Groisman (Moscow: Dekom, 2003). On Osip's relationship with Evgeniia Sokolova, see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 26.

[81] Vasilii V. Katanian, *Prikosnovenie k idolam*, 75. Lilia was three years younger than Osip – she was born in 1891 into a family of a well-known Moscow lawyer. They grew up in the same social circles and knew each other since their school years. Lilia received her famous reputation as a dangerously sexy lady already when she was a teenager: according to Vasilii V. Katanian, she had numerous suitors since the tender age of 15. Despite her success with men, Osip was the one she could not live without and after a couple of years of dating, the couple eloped in March 1912. In another two years, their relationship became purely platonic, and Lilia began seeing Maiakovskii. In the early 1920s, however, she and the poet began having affairs with other people, and in 1925, Lilia broke off her liason with Maiakovskii. Until the poet's death in 1930, Lilia had affairs with numerous men, including the critic Nikolai Punin, the film director Lev Kuleshov, and a highly placed Bolshevik functionary Aleksandr Krasnoshchekov. After Maiakovskii's death, she became involved with a Red Army commander Vitalii Primakov, with whom she traveled extensively throughout the Soviet Union and abroad. In August 1936 Primakov was arrested and shot in June 1937 on fabricated charges of "state treason." After a while, Lilia was "remarried" to Vasilii Abgarovich Katanian, a literary scholar, with whom she lived until her death in 1978. Until Brik's death in 1945, Lilia was legally married only to him and shared her living quarters with him and her successive "husbands" – Maiakovskii, Primakov, and Katanian. See Vasilii V. Katanian, *Lilia Brik, Vladimir Maiakovskii i drugie muzhchiny*, passim.

III. 3. Rodchenko

Although Lavinskii illustrated *Not a Fellow-Traveler* and several times published his work in *LEF*,[82] Brik had given Rodchenko the privilege of being the official illustrator of the journal. As Stephan informes us, out of a list of prospective publications, which included Arvatov's *About Maiakovskii* [*O Maiakovskom*] and Chuzhak's *Toward the Dialectic of Art* [*K dialektike iskusstva*], Gosizdat accepted only Brik's *Not a Fellow-Traveler* and Maiakovskii's poem *About This* [*Pro eto*], excluding the other two under the pretext of "editorial unacceptability."[83] The reasons for the Gosizdat decision can probably be explained by the marketability of the books enhanced by their focus on *byt*: both Brik and Maiakovskii wrote about love – an "eternal" subject of literature and poetry – and thus had greater chances to be sold than theoretical treatises of Arvatov and Chuzhak. Apart from *Not a Fellow-Traveler* and *About This*, the first issue of *LEF* featured Brik's panegyric to Rodchenko "Into Production!" which juxtaposed the artist's past penchant toward abstraction [*bespredmetnost'*] (literally: objectlessness) to the present correct understanding of Constructivism and Productivism.

> Rodchenko was an Objectless artist [*bespredmetnik*]. He became a Constructivist and a Productivist.[84] Not only in words, but deeds.
>
> There are artists who quickly assimilated the fashionable jargon of Constructivism. Instead of "composition," they say "construction," instead of "write," [they say] "form," instead of "create," [they say] "build." But they are doing the same old thing: little pictures, little landscapes, little portraits.

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[82] Lavinskii's project for a city of the future and radio towers was published in *LEF* no. 1 (March 1923): 62-3; his design for a book kiosk – in *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 44; poster for *Resinotrest*, *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923): 58; and his other posters and "production works" in *LEF* no. 3 (7) (1925): 76-76a.

[83] Stephan, *'Lef' and the Left Front of the Arts,* 25. Stephan did not propose any explanation of Gosizdat's preference for Brik's and Maiakovskii's books, but noticed that "the Gosizdat support for the LEF group was quite limited."

[84] Brik uses the word *proizvodstvennik* (literally: "productionist") to designate Rodchenko's occupation. In the scholarly literature, this word has habitually been translated as "Productivist."

There are others. They do not paint little pictures, they work in production and talk about material, *faktura* and construction, but what comes out is ancient decorativeness, applied art, little roosters and flowers or little circles and dashes.

Or there are still others. They don't paint little pictures and do not work in production, but "creatively cognize" the "eternal laws" of color and form. For them, the real world of things does not exist – they do not care about it. From the height of their mystic revelations, they gaze with derision upon anyone who profanes the "sacred dogmas" of art by work in production or any other area of material culture.

Rodchenko is not like them. Rodchenko understands that the task of an artist lies not in the abstract cognition of color and form, but in the ability to practically solve any task connected with the formation of a concrete thing. Rodchenko knows that there are no eternal laws of construction and that each new task has to be solved in a new way, according to the conditions of each particular case.

Rodchenko knows that it is impossible to do anything by sitting in a studio; that it is necessary to do real work, to carry one's organizational gift to where it is needed – into production.

Many people would say, looking at Rodchenko's work: "What kind of Constructivism is this? How is it different from applied art?" I would answer to this: whereas an applied artist decorates a thing, Rodchenko forms it. An applied artist looks at the thing as the point of application for his ornamental composition, Rodchenko sees in a thing material in need of formation. An applied artist does not know what to do, if he is not allowed to beautify a thing. For Rodchenko the complete lack of decoration is the necessary condition of an expedient construction of a thing.

Not esthetic considerations, but the purpose of a thing determines the organization of its color and form….[85]

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[85] "Родченко был беспредметником. Стал конструктивистом и производственником. Не на словах, а на деле. Есть художники – они быстро усвоили модный жаргон конструктивизма. Вместо «композиция» говорят «конструкция»; вместо «писать» – «оформлять»; вместо «творить» – «строить». Но делают всё то же: картинки, пейзажики, портретики. Есть другие – эти не пишут картинок, работают в производстве, тоже толкуют о матерьяле, о фактуре, о конструкции, но выходит опять-таки стародавнее украшательство, прикладничество, петушки и цветочки или кружки и чёрточки. И ещё есть – они и картинок не пишут, и в производстве не работают, они «творчески познают» «вечные законы» цвета и формы. Для них реальный мир вещей не существует, им нет до него никакого дела. С высоты своих мистических прозрений они презрительно глядят на всякого, кто профанирует «святые догмы» художества работой в производстве, или другой области материальной культуры. Родченко -- не таков. Родченко понимает, что не в абстрактном познавании цвета и формы задача художника, а в уменье практически разрешить любое заданье на оформление конкретной вещи. Родченко знает, что нет раз навсегда данных законов конструирования, а что каждое новое задание надо решать по-новому, исходя из условий вот этого индивидуального случая. Родченко знает, что сидя у себя в мастерской ничего не сделаешь, что надо идти в реальную работу, нести свой организаторский дар туда, где он нужен, -- в производство.

The passage above explains that Brik singled out Rodchenko from other artists because he was one of the few to practice what Brik preached: he was willing to subjugate his personal artistic will to the demands of the collective. In its immediate practical application, it also meant subjugation of image to text. Illustrations of Rodchenko's work incorporated into Brik's article demonstrate this tendency. Page 107 of *LEF* no. 1 features four of Rodchenko's cover designs. Two covers for Nikolai Aseev's *Selected Works* (Figs. IV – 3a and b), one for Maiakovskii's book *Maiakovskii Smiles, Maiakovskii Laughs, Maiakovskii Mocks* (Fig. IV - 4) and one for *Constructivism* by Aleksei Gan (Fig. IV - 5). For Aseev's book, Rodchenko proposed two variations on the design: in the first one, the author's name – "Н. Асеев" -- runs from the top down, printed in large black type. It overlays the title of the book – *Избрань* (Selected Works) – which spreads across the entire width of the page in bright orange letters, turned on their side, as it were, and running counter to the author's name, from bottom to top. Another variation of the cover for this book has the first letter of the title – "И" – dominate the composition, with the rest of the title and the author's name split evenly across the page in the usual, left-to-right reading sequence. For Maiakovskii's book, Rodchenko spread the title across the page, word-by- word, in white type – "Маяковский улыбается, Маяковский смеется, Маяковский издевается" -- placing each word on an alternating red-green background. For Gan's *Constructivism*, Rodchenko moved the title to the top

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Многие взглянув на работу Родченко скажут: «Какой же тут конструктивизм? Чем он отличается от прикладничества?» На это отвечу: прикладник украшает вещь, Родченко её оформляет. Прикладник рассматривает вещь как точку приложения своей орнаментальной композиции, Родченко видит в вещи подлежащий оформлению материал. Прикладнику нечего делать, если нельзя вещь украсить, -- для Родченки полное отсутствие украшательства необходимое условие целесообразного построения вещи. Не эстетические соображения, а назначение вещи определяет организацию её цвета и формы" (Osip Brik, "V proizvodstvo!" *LEF* no. 1 [March 1923]: 105).

and the first and last name of the author below with the large number 2 (indicating the edition) in the background, filling the rectangle of the cover.

On the opposite page, are two designs for "film trucks" (*kino-avtomobili*) (Figs. IV - 6a and b). The truck on the upper part of the page has the abbreviation "ГВК Всеросс. сельско-хоз. выставка" (State Exhibition Committee All-Russia Agricultural Exhibition) running across the base of the automobile, right above the wheels, with the word "выставка" (exhibition) wedged in on top of "сельско-хоз" (agricultural) for lack of space and the giant "В" of "Всеросс" (All-Russia) serving as a pedestal for the screen on top. The truck below also has the same words and abbreviations as the one above, but it is arranged differently. The "ГВК" is featured on the hood and the rest of the locution is positioned symmetrically along the large arrow placed on the side of the giant screen on top of truck's platform. According to Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, the first type of truck was used for the projection of films at night, when the projector was set on the top of the truck's cabin and pointed upward. The second type of trucks was used to show films during the day, with the projector inside the cabin, casting the image onto a giant screen on the back of the truck, seen in reverse by the spectators.[86]

Although they serve different purposes, Rodchenko's illustrations in the first issue of *LEF* share one feature – they assert the dominance of text over visual elements to the point of the text actually becoming a visual element. Because Brik chose Rodchenko's works to accompany his text, we assume that they conform closely to his definition of production art. If "the purpose of an object determines its organization of color and form," then Rodchenko's work, dominated by text, reveals the purpose of all the objects as the conveyance of a coded message. In case of books, the coding is obviously textual;

[86] Lavrent'ev, *Laboratoriia konstruktivizma,* 52-53.

in case of the agitation trucks carrying movie screens, the coding is presumably mixed, divided between visual and textual signs. Visually, Rodchenko presented only a very sketchy outline of the vehicles, with letters pushing forward in the composition. As a message to a consumer of images, it spells out its designation in words.

IV. 4. Book Design

The importance of book design for Brik's agenda is made clear by "The Obliging Aesthete," one of his two theoretical articles.[87] In this text, Brik critiqued a manual on book design by one Professor Sidorov. According to Brik, Sidorov desecrated the vocabulary of Constructivism and Productivism by promoting a pictorialist philosophy for book-making. At the outset, Brik renounced the very definition of a book given by the beleaguered author. The book was not "an object … to be taken into one's hands and examined with one's eyes," similar to an object of beauty and aesthetic contemplation, but a text to be read actively and comprehended. [88]

To formulate his argument, Brik took issue with Sidorov's defense of a traditional, abstract notion of beauty, which the latter naively described as inducing "a joy that is freer, not rational, the joy of a child running after a flower or a butterfly…," necessary to preserve because without it the text would become dry and uninteresting, from which "a conscious man [*soznatel'nyi chelovek*] would probably not turn away, because he knows that it is necessary. However, a child may turn away, and the people, in the broad sense of the word, will turn away from it as well."[89] Polemically, Brik castigated Sidorov for this comparison of the people [*narod*] to children who lack a sense of reason and

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[87] The first one, "The So-Called Formal Method," explained the precepts of literary formalism to those Marxist critics who could not comprehend its emphasis on form within the Soviet context. See Brik, "T.n. formal'nyi metod," *LEF* no. 1, (March 1923): 213-14.
[88] Brik, "Usluzhlivyi estet," *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 92-103.
[89] Ibid., 93.

propriety. He instructed the author that "it was not the people, but masters sitting on the people's hump who like an artistically decorated book." In the same breadth, Brik admitted that the people had to be taught. The Constructivists and Productivists did not want to teach the *narod* to like books in the way Sidorov liked them. "We think," punctuated Brik, "that if people have an extra kopek, they better spend it not on the same thing as the rubles of aesthetic half-wits [*tolstoumov*], but on the amelioration of the technical side of printing -- on that which makes it a better printed book, a better thing…"[90]

Apart from the question of definition, Brik also broached the issue of the relationship of text and image. He was prompted to do so by Sidorov's discussion of the fundamentals of book design, in which the author proposed to determine such factors as the width of margins in relation to the text by "opening and removing any well-printed book away from one's eyes to a distance necessary for the words and lines to blend into one undivided whole."[91] Brik had a field day mocking the reasoning of his adversary, specifying at the same time *LEF'*s own functionalist theory of the relationship between text and image:

> For us, Productivists, there is nothing difficult [in determining the relationship of text and image]. It all depends on the character of the publication. There are books, in which illustration is not only independent, but plays the main role (a monograph about a painter, illustrated children's books), in which the text is only an explanation. There are books where illustrations are as important as the text (scientific, travel); and there are those, in which illustration is only an addition to the text…

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[90] "А вот мы, конструктивисты и производственники, думаем иначе. Мы полагаем, что если у народа заведется лишний трудовой грош, который можно истратить на книгу, то пусть этот грош идет не на то, на что шли рубли эстетствующих толстоумов, не на художественное украшение книти, а на поднятие техники печатного дела, -- на то, чтобы книга лучше печаталась, чтобы она была лучше сделана" (ibid., 94).

[91] Ibid.,96.

> However, Professor Sidorov will tell us that the first two types of illustrated publications do not interest him. What interests him is the third, where the illustrations are made specifically for the text and where there arises a question of how to make them – taking the text into account or not?
>
> Taking the reader into account – we will answer… When illustrating Pushkin, an intelligent artist will first of all research the audience for this publication and will do his job in accordance with the readers' demands….[92]

A curious hierarchy is evident in Brik's polemic with Sidorov. While castigating his opponent for the substitution of textual by visual signs in book design, Brik nevertheless admitted the affinity of children's perception toward the purely visual, equating it with the abstract, feeling-based, and undifferentiated perception of the world. Brik regarded this as an infantile form of cognition, lacking in analytical vigor. In Brik's taxonomy, "scientific literature," in which illustrations played as important a role as the text itself, was one step up in the hierarchy of analytic and visual representations of the world. Textually based works crowned the list of possible interrelationships between text and image. It is the taste and demands of the prospective reader that determine the character of illustration in a publication dominated by text. In accordance with this deference to the demands of the reader, only the most educated and progressive would be interested in consuming a text-based as opposed to an image-based book: "According to this Productivist logic, one and the same book must have different covers depending on

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[92] "Для нас производственников здесь никакого затруденния нет. Есть книги, в которых иллюстрация не только самостоятельна, но играет главную роль (монография о художнике, детские книжки с картинками), где весь текст служит только объяснением. Есть книги где иллюстрации столь же важны как текст (научные, путешествия); и есть такие, где иллюстрации играют только роль добавления к тексту, платного приложения. Но профессор Сидоров укажет, что первые два типа иллюстрированных изданий его не интересуют, а интересует только третий, тот, где иллюстрации специально делаются к тексту и что тут-то вот и возникает вопрос, как их делать, -- считаясь с тексом или не считаясь? Считаясь с читателем, скажем мы… Делая иллюстрации к Пушкину, толковый художник прежде всего осведомится для кого предназначено это издание и сообразуясь с читательским кругом, приступит к своей работе… " (ibid., 100-101).

its distribution readership."[93] According to the logic expressed in "Obliging Aesthete," *LEF* aimed at the most "progressive" readers with their choice of illustrations.

In connection with Brik's preference for the text over the image, it is interesting to note that Brik never mentioned Lissitzky, even though the latter was an internationally known representative of Constructivism and was designing books at least since 1917, when he illustrated *Sikhes Khulin. A Prager Legende* (An everyday conversation. A legend of Prague), a book in Yiddish by Moshe Broderson.[94] Brik's reticence to mention Lissitzky is all the more noticeable, because in 1922 Maiakovskii collaborated with this artist on the publication of his poem *For the Voice* [*Dlia golosa*], in which an inventive graphic design, with its representational images, color, and dynamic spatial arrangement of the text added meaning to the printed text of Maiakovskii's poem.[95]

For example, in the illustration for *The Left March* [*Levyi marsh*], the first poem of Maiakovskii's book, Lissitzky drew a boat resting in water in a schematic way – a reversed trapezoid complete with parallel and perpendicular lines for masts, some oblique lines for sails, and a red flag with the abbreviation RSFSR on it, indicating the name of the young Soviet republic (Fig. IV – 7). Three zig-zag lines coming out on the left side of the main mast repeat the refrain of Maiakovskii poem: "Levoi, levoi, levoi," beating out the rhythm of the march. Although the four words on this page convey traditional linguistic meaning, they are subordinated to iconic and graphic representation: the image of the boat dominates the composition and serves as a symbol for the Soviet republic,

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[93] **"**По этой же производственной логике следует, что одна и та же книга должна иметь разные обложки в зависимости от того, среди каких групп читателей она будет распространяться" (ibid., 99).
[94] Henk Puts, "El Lissitzky (1890-1941): His Life and Work," in *El Lissitzky: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990), 15.
[95] Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Dlia golosa* with illustrations by El Lissitzky (Berlin: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923; facsimile Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

identified by the linguistic sign on the flag. The words "Levoi, levoi, levoi" follow the graphic lines of the design and are broken down in accordance with the changing direction of the lines: the first syllable of the word, "lev," follows the horizontal sequence of lines, the second, "oi," runs from top to bottom along vertical lines. The second page of the fold-out is dominated, once again, by a typographic design that integrates text into it, but leaves little space for the actual text of Maiakovskii's poem. The giant red letter "M" of "March" contains the adjective "left" in it, running from the bottom to the top inside one of M's vertical lines. A thick diagonal descends from the last letter of "March" toward the bottom of the page and the word "to sailors," colored likewise in red, a symbolic color of the revolution. The rest of the book continues the pattern of a striking and dynamic visual design for the introductory page of each poem followed by the text on the second page. [96]

If we look at the covers of *LEF* over the period of its two-year existence, all designed by Rodchenko, we cannot find daring typographic experiments comparable to those of *Dlia golosa*. Instead, we see the tendency for the graphic design to be subordinated by text, albeit using bold geometric shapes and an obligatory black-and-white color scheme, with the addition of red, green, blue and orange. On the cover for the first issue for 1923 (Fig. IV - 8), there are no images, only text in red-and-black letters on the white background. The composition is symmetrically balanced according to the imaginary vertical line separating the sheet into two parts. The giant letters LEF, the

[96] Several years later, in his 1927 article "Visual Text," Lissitzky described his method for designing books in the following manner: "in an invention, it is difficult to separate the so-called 'technical' from the so-called 'artistic'" and that "we are facing a [new] form of book [design], in which the image occupies the first place and the word only the second." El Lissitzky, "Unser Buch," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (Meinz, 1927) translated into Czech in "Kniha hlediska zrakového dojmu – kniha visuelni," *Typografia* no. 8 (1929) and later into Russian in *Iskusstvo knigi*, vyp. 3, 1958-1960 (Moscow, 1962), 163-168. See El Lissitzky, "Vizual'nyi tekst," in Lavrent'ev, *Laboratoriia konstruktivizma,* 54-58.

upper half in red and the lower in black, dominate the composition and occupy the bottom one-third of the page. In the top left corner, a large red "N" towers over the page, counterbalanced in the right corner by the number "1." The word "March," in black, is fitted in-between. Immediately below the month, there is a year -- 1923 -- and the place of the publication -- Moscow. Further below, in the middle of the page, separated from the top by a thick black line, are the words "Journal / of the Left Front." Under these words, separated by another black divider, are the words "of the Arts / Publisher: Gosizdat / Editor-in-Chief / V. V. Maiakovskii."[97] In this design, cogent textual information is interrupted three times by the elements of visual consideration -- balance and symmetry -- when Rodchenko separated "N" and "1" on the first line and "19" and "23" in the line indicating the year and when "Left Front" was cordoned apart from "of the Arts" by a divider. In the latter case, one can argue that this visual separation of the words "of the Arts" and their presentation in a smaller black type was intended to deemphasize this part of the locution from "The Left Front," a more important part of the message.

The cover for the second issue follows the format of the first in the symmetrical composition and its "header" and "footer," designating the issue number, the month(s), place, year, and title of the publication (Fig. IV - 9). They only differed in color and whether an image was present. Instead of red, as if to deny the symbolic use of it, Rodchenko used green and replaced the central part -- which had been previously filled with textual information on the title, publisher and editor -- with a photomontage. The photomontage for the cover of the second issue of *LEF* represented newspaper articles, headed by titles on the subject of jubilees and reputable individuals, such as: "The Year

[97] Slashes indicate the end of lines.

of Jubilees," "To the Twenty-Five-Year-Old…," "Jubilee Celebration of A. Ostrovskii," "…Gypsy," "Iuzhin About Himself," "A. Sobinov," etc. These fragmentary newspaper pieces were intermixed with portraits of capitalist-looking middle-aged gentlemen, all properly dressed in suits and ties, and one well-coiffed lady with downcast eyes. On the top of the montage, as if to counterweigh the theme of aging, wealth and propriety, there is an image of two smiling identical-looking babies, the first of whom is a boy, stepping onto a top hat of a grim octogenarian capitalist, under whose image we read: "The oldest man on earth." The collection of the articles and images is crossed over diagonally, sparing only the children on top of the capitalist's hat. As per Brik's prescription, the immediate message of the montage is clear: bright, innocent and defiant youth trampling upon everything old and established.

As spelled out in the manifesto of the group, not only the second issue, but *LEF* in its entirety was founded to fight against tradition. Accordingly, the fragments of newspaper articles featured on the cover of the second issue relate not only to the material in this particular issue – Tretiakov's derisory mention of a 19th-century dramatist Aleksandr Ostrovskii, for example[98] -- but also to Brik's sharp rebuke to the *Pravda* critic Lev Sosnovskii, who criticized *LEF* for its non-proletarian aesthetics: "In conclusion, you come down upon Gosizdat – how did it dare to publish *Lef*? Does it mean that *Lef* cannot be published? And the jubilee collection dedicated to Sobinov can?"[99]

The tradition of illustrating the cover of *LEF* with photomontages extended only to one more issue, no. 3 from 1923, where Rodchenko featured an ape being pierced by a pen shot from an airplane entitled *LEF* (Fig. IV - 10). The remaining four covers were

[98] Tretiakov, "Lef i NEP," *LEF* no. 2 (April-May 1923): 75.
[99] Brik, "Sosnovskomu," *LEF* no. 3 (June-July 1923): 4

illustrated either with verse (*LEF* no. 4 [1923] Fig. IV - 11), text (nos. 1 [5] [1924] and 3 [7] [1925], Figs. IV - 12 and 13) or with a sample of geometric fabric design (*LEF* no. 2 [6] [1924], Fig. IV - 14). In 1923, the basic graphic elements of the cover were uniform: the name of the periodical was always at the bottom, and the number on the upper right corner. The lines on the sides of the cover set off its middle section. In 1924, Rodchenko changed the graphic outline of the cover. Now, the letters "LEF" were on the top, set against a checkered bi-colored background; the number of the issue was in the middle, under the name; and the centerpiece, containing text in the first and third issues and an image in the second, below.

Rodchenko's works published in *LEF* no. 2, 1923 (Fig. IV – 15) and no. 1 (5), 1924 (Fig. IV-16a and b) used words to indicate a specific advertising purpose. In the emblems for a private airplane company *Dobrolet*, it was its name, fully spelled out, and in the posters, it was the products of a rubber company, *Rezinotrest*, pacifiers and balls. The images had a slap-stick quality about them, bright and flashy. The baby on the poster for pacifiers had an enormous mouth stuffed with eight oddly looking objects of various shapes and sizes. On the next poster, several balls circled around the circumference of one giant ball, which filled a considerable part of the sheet. Despite their loudness, the images were general enough to be incomprehensible without the accompanying verse by Maiakovskii: "There has never been / Better pacifiers / Which I am ready to suck / Until I grow old" and "Comrades girls / comrades boys / Ask your mother / For these balls."[100]

[100] "Лучших сосок не было и нет – готов сосать до старых лет"; "Товарищи девочки, товарищи мальчики: требуйте у мамы эти мячики." Rodchenko's and Maiakovskii's posters were published in *LEF* no. 1 (5) (1924): 35.

In 1922, when Rodchenko began working directly in typography, the publishing business flourished, attempting to reach pre-revolutionary levels in book production.[101] During the same year, Rodchenko had designed titles for Dziga Vertov's silent newsreels *Cine-Truth*;[102] and a cover for Alexei Gan's journal *Kino-fot* (Fig. IV - 17). At the same time, Rodchenko joined the newly-formed Department of Metalwork at VKhUTEMAS.[103] Although there was no specific declaration on book design in the Department of Metalwork, some of his students' works reflected Rodchenko's interest in typography (Figs. IV – 18a and b). Also, Rodchenko (as well as Lissitzky somewhat later) might have used the facilities of the Typography Section of the Graphics Department, which was well-equipped for the needs of printing production.[104] Apart from Rodchenko's typographic designs, *LEF* published similar work by other artists loyal to the idea of Production art, such as Lavinskii, Gustav Klutsis, Sergei Sen'kin, and Aleksandr Vesnin (Figs. IV – 19a-e).[105]

5. Textile Design

Despite the prominent role that men played in the organization and carrying out of the *LEF* initiative, personally, Brik had a stake in an area traditionally associated with women and *byt.* In 1924, Stepanova assumed control of the VKhUTEMAS Textile Department[106] and the same year an entire issue of *LEF* was dedicated to artists working in this area, with Brik's "From Painting to Textile Print" as its centerpiece.[107] In his article, Brik proposed a theoretical base for considering textile design as artistic activity

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[101] Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, *A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova: Mastera sovetskogo knizhnogo iskusstva.* (Moscow: Kniga, 1989), 28.
[102] Ibid., 53.
[103] Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*, 102.
[104] On the VKhUTEMAS Graphics Department, see Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 116-117.
[105] See *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923), 58, 60-61.
[106] Khan-Magomedov, *Vhutemas*, 2: 699, 706.
[107] Brik, "Ot kartiny k sittsu," *LEF* no. 2 (6) (1924), 27-34.

that sprang to life under new societal requirements. Brik argued that Soviet Russia did not consider art as separate from life, because it was against the creation of a caste of individuals who existed apart from the rest of the society. Even though the proponents of easel painting did not dispute the necessity of working for industry, they envisioned this work as elaborating general principles of design that were applied to a particular industry. However, this was a flawed approach, because "devices and habits" that helped make a painting were not the same as "devices and habits" that helped make a particular industrial design. Even if a certain number of such devices overlapped, it still did not mean that artistic training should have been considered foremost to working at a factory as a designer. The status quo of art versus design should be reversed if not eliminated altogether. "The basic thought of production art is that the outer appearance of a thing is determined by the economic purpose of this thing and not by abstract aesthetic considerations."[108]

In the article, Brik delivered personal praise to one Arkhangel'skii, director of the First Textile Factory (former Tsindel') in Moscow for extending an invitation to Stepanova and Popova to work there. However, said Brik, these artists' work could be considered only applied art [*prikladnichestvo*] and not production art, because "the actual artistic work and the work at the factory are still disconnected. The artist is still a stranger [*chuzhoi*] there. The attitude to him is suspicious. He is not allowed to come close. He is not trusted. [Workers at the factory] cannot understand why he has to know the technology of production, why he needs information of a purely industrial nature. His business is to draw, to make drawings, and the factory's business is to select the

[108] "Основная мысль производственного искусства в том, что внешний облик вещи определяется экономическим назначением вещи, а не абстрактными эстетическими соображениями…" ibid., 34.

appropriate ones and to apply them to the product."[109] In this way, "From Painting to Textile Print" made clear Brik's thought that an artist had to become a regular worker at an industrial enterprise in order to enter the process of production as an equal of other workers. The aesthetic aspect of a product had again intersected with that of the social hierarchy, the relationship of various strata of population, and, ultimately, with the ethics of social behavior.

Brik's article was illustrated with samples of textiles by Popova, Stepanova and Rodchenko (Figs. IV - 20a and b). These were all patterns consisting of geometric shapes – lines, squares, triangles, circles, ellipses – in a variety of colors and their combinations. Because representation of nature was not encouraged by Productivist theory and Constructivist practice, the artists took these precepts to their ultimate conclusion and eschewed any free-flowing organic forms, limiting them to pure geometry. The Constructivists' patterns were very busy, contained in small sections of material and repeated frequently. In their uniformity and repetition, the textile designs published in *LEF* represented the process of production, reflecting the uniformity and repetition that they thought were characteristic of factory labor and its products.[110]

In their responses to Brik's initiative, Pertsov and Chuzhak criticized him for his concern with "little textiles" [*sitchiki*], especially with his breakdown of the boundary

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[109] "Действительно художественный труд и фабрично-заводская работа ещё разобщены. Художник ещё чужой на фабрике. К нему относятся подозрительно. Его не подпускают близко. Ему не верят. Не могут понять, зачем ему знать технические процессы, зачем ему сведения чисто промышленного характера. Его дело рисовать, делать рисунки – а дело фабрики выбрать из них подходящие и налепить на готовый фабрикант" (ibid.)

[110] In her article on Soviet textiles for the *Great Utopia* exhibition, Charlotte Douglas wrote about a generation of textile designers who were Popova's and Stepanova's pupils and worked during the years of the First Five-Year Plan. Douglas noted that this younger generation of textile artists renounced their teachers' principles of geometric non-figurative patterns and asserted a realistic representational style. See Charlotte Douglas, "Russian Fabric Design, 1928-1932," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 635-648.

between the traditionally male and female spheres of work by allowing Rodchenko to design textiles. Their combined criticisms reflected the view of artistic work as insignificant in its preoccupation with the mere appearance as opposed to the substance of the thing. As such, it was not serious, more appropriate to women than to men. Chuzhak called Brik's basic premise of the artists' participation in the production process as a "vulgarization of production" and remarked that the "little textiles" would not interest a wide public: "The comrades made good things in the general sense, good little textiles in the general sense, but without their dependence on the market, on the consumer, on the peasant. Comrade Rodchenko draws textile designs very well – all these spirals – but please tell me what kind of application, apart from NEP-inspired, can these little textile have?"[111]

Pertsov criticized Brik not for the failure of Constructivists to enter production on a par with industrial workers, but for the incommensurability of artistic and engineering endeavors. In particular, Pertsov took issue with Brik's definition of production art as taking into consideration only the "outward appearance of a thing" [*vneshnii oblik veshchi*]. He noted that Brik was interested in the introduction of artists only into "light" industry [*legkaia industriia*], which was responsible for the production of things for *byt* and not into heavy industry [*tiazhelaia industriia*], because "the question about the 'outward appearance of things,' of course, cannot be posed in relation to the means and tools of production." In heavy industry, "what looks best, is constructed in the most

[111] "Товарищи строили вещи хорошие вообще, ситчики хорошие вообще, но вне зависимости их от рынка, от потребителя, от мужика. Прекрасный ситчик выделывает на рисунках тов. Родченко – все эти спирали – но скажите, какое приложение, кроме непманского, такой ситчик может иметь на рынке?" (Chuzhak's speech from a record of LEF and REF meetings, 1925-1930. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 356).

expedient way."[112] In other words, in designing machinery, buildings, cars and appliances, the artists would have to re-qualify themselves as engineers. Even when designing things for *byt*, such as clothing, shoes and furniture, continued Pertsov, the artist should be concerned in the first place with the "expediency" of the design as opposed to its appearance. Here, Pertsov brought as an example the work of Rodchenko's students at the Metalwork Department and Viktor Shestakov's multifunctional furniture made for Meierhold's production of *Lake Liul'*. Pertsov placed these works within the broad modernist tendency to streamline things by industrializing them and making them more efficient.[113]

According to Pertsov, the principle of the "outward appearance of a thing" could be applied only to book and textile design -- a point that Brik did not dispute. Brik agreed that Stepanova and Popova still produced applied art; in fact he stated so in his article. However, he argued that its "applied" character was the result of their rejection by the factory management as equal participants in the production process, and not because of their focus on the visual as opposed to the structural aspect of the object/thing. Artists were not becoming full-fledged production workers not because they were making applied art, but because they were not taken seriously as workers – not allowed to learn the ins and outs of the production process and to integrate their activity fully into this process. The breakdown of social hierarchy implicit in proletarian ideology was paramount in Brik's scheme of socially engaged art.

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[112] "Вопрос о «внешнем облике», конечно, не может быть поставлен по отношению к производству средств и орудий производства. Здесь тот облик наилучший, который явился как зрительный контур наиболее целесообразной конструкции" (Pertsov, *Reviziia levogo fronta v sovremennom russkom iskusstve* , 65).
[113] Ibid.

In her dissertation, Kiaer suggested that the busy geometry of Constructivist textiles and the functionality of costume design conflated the visual aspect of "agitational optics" with the material aspect of the costume itself, with the result that "the passive and stagnant *byt*," traditionally associated with femininity was "reanimated" through the use of bold geometry and costumes that called for an active lifestyle.[114] I want to suggest that apart from animating bodies by the iridescence of conflating lines and colors, Constructivist geometry also aimed to destroy the tradition of figurative representation in textile design, making mere iconic likeness a taboo and replacing it by geometry and the laws of optics, which in combination with each other produced an illusion of shimmering perpetual movement. This illusionist quality of the Constructivists' textile designs introduced what Jonathan Crary called a "fabricated visual space," which did not correspond to the traditional iconicity of representational painting or even to the new technologically enhanced iconicity of photography and film. Instead, they prepared the ground for later visual modes that in their optical illusionism would be completely detached from a point of view located in real space, such as computer-generated visual spaces and synthetic holography, thereby constructing a new visual reality, detached from the traditional frame of reference.[115]

There was a marked difference in the way individual designers practiced their art. As Kiaer had rightly observed, there was a certain awkwardness in Stepanova's costumes, especially the ones designed for everyday life, which did not have any relationship to either sports or production. According to Kiaer, Stepanova's clothes looked best worn by groups of people, engaged in organized and disciplined activity,

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[114] See Kiaer, "Constructivist 'Object,'" 48-59.
[115] For discussion of new modes of visuality and the observer, introduced by modernity, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

such as mass spectacles and parades (Fig. IV - 21).[116] As far as the everyday clothes were concerned, Popova's sinuous designs, especially in their cut, fit the stereotype of femininity much better than Stepanova's. Almost all of them were for women and although the artist also used geometric and optical effects, this use was subjugated to the cut of the dress, always complimentary to the body. Popova's dresses were distinguished by intricate bows, flipping sleeves and elaborate sashes; women for whom they were intended were supposed to be coquettish and young, surrounded by such "bourgeois" paraphernalia, as cars and mirrors (Fig. IV – 22 a and b). In them, geometric design served both to decorate and agitate. Lilia Brik, the *femme fatale* of the revolution, was a suitable model for Popova's designs, which she could display lying languorously on her side with a shiny silk dress tracing the curves of her body (Fig. IV - 23). As far as clothing design was concerned, Popova worked for women conscious of their femininity, not for unisex agitational teams.

The sixth issue of *LEF*, in which Brik promoted the design of Constructivist textiles, was officially dedicated to Popova, on the occasion of her untimely death in May 1924.[117] Members of LEF were so concerned that Popova's name stay associated with the group that they publicly confronted her relatives on the appropriateness of the traditional Russian Orthodox funeral for the artist.[118] Judging by a photograph taken by Rodchenko, LEF succeeded in arranging an ideologically correct funeral that emphasized Popova's identity as a Productivist artist (Fig. VI - 24). Because of such a dedication to this artist, it is surprising not to find any of her dress designs on the pages of the periodical. Perhaps because of the spirit of collectivism or the objections of members

[116] Kiaer, "Constructivist 'Object'," 57-58.
[117] Popova died of scarlet fever on May 25, 1924.
[118] LEF, "Kak budut khoronit' L.S. Popovu," *Vecherniaia Moskva* no. 119 (1924), 3.

like Chuzhak and Tretiakov, the artist's dress designs were considered too bourgeois for LEF. Instead, the editors of the eponymous journal chose examples of her geometric Constructivist textiles, stating that "she worked day and night to combine economic demands, the laws of external design, and the mysterious taste of a peasant woman from Tula."[119] Brik included Popova's textile prints along with the ones by Stepanova and Rodchenko to demonstrate the solidarity of the Left Front of the Arts, casting aside any differences as insignificant in the face of mounting pressure from LEF*'*s adversaries to challenge artistic experimentation with the historically established notions of beauty.

In his drive to demonstrate the ideological legitimacy of his group and its artistic theory, Brik subordinated art to politics by converging them into a system that was centered in a theoretical journal and based on the power of conceptual analysis. In this system, the analytical capacity to produce symbolic signs that reflected the values of a current political system overshadowed non-analytical iconic signs that were formed through likeness to its referent. In Brik's approach, the politically sensitive woman question became conflated with the question of visuality: sensuous femininity could be moral only if it was governed by a system of accepted ideological values and any image based on the principle of mere visual likeness and not on symbolic convention, had to be coded in acceptable ideological terms. In terms of artistic theory, this approach resulted not in the abolition of iconic representation, but in its subjugation to the rule of ideological convention, which in Brik's case found its most complete expression in the journal *LEF*.

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[119] "Дни и ночи просиживала она над рисунками для ситца, стараясь в едином творческом акте сочетать требования экономики, законы внешнего оформления и таинственный вкус тульской крестьянки" (LEF, "Pamiati L.S. Popovoi" [To the Memory of L. S. Popova], *LEF* no. 2 (6) (1924): 4.

CHAPTER FIVE

PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

Toward the end of 1925, after *LEF* ceased publication, Brik switched his attention to promoting a vision in which photography served as a component part of other modern art media, such as photomontage, film, painting, and even literature.[1] Already by August of that year, he took a job as a photo-correspondent for the popular weekly journal *Ogonek*.[2] Apart from this job, Brik was also an avid amateur photographer[3] and writer about the medium: between 1926 and 1928 he published four articles on photography, not counting one on photomontage, which appeared in 1924.[4] All of these articles became obligatory references for theoretical developments in Soviet photography: in 1989, Christopher Phillips anthologized three of them, in which Brik discussed photography and its relationship to painting as examples of an argument for the necessity of the replacement of traditional representational forms with machine-generated imagery. In 1996 Margarita Tupitsyn analyzed two of the essays in her history of early Soviet photography: one, examining photography's relationship to painting and the other to film. In her survey, Tupitsyn noted Brik's two-pronged approach to photography: on the one hand, his penchant toward a critique of painting's illusionism, and on the other his insistence on evaluating film in terms of photography, which, in Tupitsyn's opinion, indicated Brik's desire to describe both photography and film in terms of their

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[1] Brik, "Fotomontazh" (Photomontage), *Zaria Vostoka* September 21, 1924, 4; "Foto v kino" (Photography in film), *Sovetskoe kino* nos. 4/5 (1926): 23; "Fotokadr protiv kartiny" (Photo-still versus picture), *Sovetskoe kino* no. 2 (1926): 40-42, trans. in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), 213-218.

[2] Brik's archive has *Ogonek*'s certificate describing him as a "literary contributor and a photo-correspondent of the journal on Moscow," dated August 21, 1925. RGALI, Fond 2852, opis' 1, delo 315.

[3] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 28.

[4] The source for this information is the bibliography on Brik compiled by Valiuzhenich, see ibid., 265-343.

technological characteristics and not as art.[5] In this chapter, I will analyze the premises of and the reasons for Brik's argument for photography as the sole foundation for the film, which denied film the specificity of an independent art form.

In the context of Brik's evaluation of film as a derivative of photography, I will also address a debate on this issue, in which some members of the LEF group, Shklovskii in particular, voiced opposing views. This debate was published in the pages of *Novyi LEF,* a journal launched in January 1927 by the LEF group after the dissolution of its predecessor two years earlier. According to Stephan, *LEF* was dissolved because of internal tensions within the group, which pitted supporters of Brik and Maiakovskii against Chuzhak and a southern affiliate of the group, YUGOLEF.[6] While the editors of *LEF* wanted the group to remain a loose federation, in which each affiliate would be self-governed, Chuzhak and YUGOLEF insisted on a hierarchical organization, with the center in Moscow.[7] The disagreement on the nature of the organization of various LEF groups reflected a deeper issue concerning the debate on Formalism, which Trotsky summarized in his *Literature and Revolution,* published in 1923. In this book, apart from criticizing Brik for his bourgeois mentality in *Not a Fellow-Traveler*, he also trenchantly accused the Futurists, Maiakovskii in particular, of having a bohemian attitude and lack of self-criticism.[8] In a chapter following his discussion of Maiakovskii, Trotsky allied Futurism with Formalism and noted that the latter "opposed Marxism with all its

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[5] Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 36-37.
[6] YUGOLEF was formed in the mid-1920s in Odessa by a few enthusiastic supporters of LEF who, despite their affiliation with LEF, acted independently and formed the group without asking permission from their parent association. They attempted to form affiliations of YUGOLEF in other Ukrainian cities and regions, such as Khar'kov and Podoliia. For a letter from one of the organizers of YUGOLEF, see Osip Brik, "Maiakovskii – redactor i organizator" (Maiakovskii – editor and organizer), *Literaturnyi kritik* no. 4 (1936): 137-139.
[7] See Stephan, *'Lef' and the Left Front of the Arts,* 48-54.
[8] Trotsky, *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, 118-126.

theoretical might" in its ignorance of the "social and psychological approach, that … gives meaning to microscopic and statistical work done in connection with verbal material."[9] In his juxtaposition of anti-Marxism and Formalism Trotsky reflected a debate that had begun in the early 1920s among groups that were off-shoots of the defunct Proletkult, such as the October group and VAPP and critics Leopol'd Averbakh, Grigorii Lelevich, Petr Kagan, and Vladimir Friche who published in the October journal *Na postu* (On Guard) and in Polonskii's *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* (Press and Revolution).[10]

Novyi LEF, a journal that Maiakovskii and Brik launched in 1927 as a continuation of and a replacement for *LEF*, had a list of contributors drawn from its predecessor – the poet Nikolai Aseev, Shklovskii, Tretiakov, Arvatov. Spurred by Lenin's death and the gradually increasing pressure of the political dictatorship under Stalin, it switched its focus from poetry to the prosaic "literature of fact" and from formal analysis of works of art to emphasizing their ideological message. Maiakovskii resigned from the editorial board in the second half of 1928, ostensibly because of the marginalization of poetry in the journal, but also because he was harassed by critics for the insufficient ideological charge of his verse.[11] He was followed by Brik, Rodchenko, and Aseev. The departure of Maiakovskii's supporters left Chuzhak and Tretiakov in charge of the journal for the remainder of its run, making them responsible for the last four issues.[12]

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[9] Ibid., 130-131.
[10] On proletarian artists and critics in the 1920s, see Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917-1934; the Genesis of Socialist Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), chapter 2.
[11] For example, in March 1928 the writer Kornelii Zelinskii in the article "Should we go along with Maiakovskii"published in the journal *Na literaturnom postu* [*On Literary Guard*] accused the poet of possessing "a unique gift of belittling human values," "superficiality," "lack of capacity of orienting himself in the cultural heritage" and similar sins. See Vasilii A. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, 429.
[12] Stephan, *"'Lef' and the Left Front of the Arts*, 55-56.

Both photography and film occupied an important place in *Novyi LEF*, with Rodchenko's photographs gracing the covers and Brik's article on film appearing already in the second issue.[13] An earnest debate on film unfolded on the pages of the last issue of *Novyi LEF* in 1927, during which Shklovskii emerged as a spokesperson for an independent art of film with its own laws and specificity; Tretiakov asserted the values of documentaries as well as art films; and Brik insisted on the supremacy of the correct ideological orientation in any film. "Film is ceasing to be photography," Shklovskii wrote in this issue of *Novyi LEF*, referring to the director Sergei Eisenstein's success in creating a specific cinematic language, which "designated precisely what Eisenstein wanted [it to designate]."[14] A few pages later in the same issue, Brik contradicted Shklovskii's opinion, defining film in the opening sentence of his article as "improved photography." "Improvement consists in the camera's capacity to capture not only immovable objects, but also moving ones," explained Brik. "This technical advance is a condition for the further development of cinema."[15] The apparent conflict in opinions about the definition of film between two influential LEF critics goes further than a mere comparison of two media**.** In general terms, it reveals a broader field of debate on the boundaries between art and technology, while pointing to disagreements among left critics about this question. I will also argue that Brik's privileged treatment of photography resulted from his attitude to it as an ideological text, which reinforced Brik's acceptance of the status-quo, his continuous moving away from the ideals of the revolutionary utopia in accordance with the dominant tendency of the party to assume an increasingly authoritarian approach to the governance of the state.

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[13] Osip Brik, "Protivokinoiadie" (Cinematic antidote) *Novyi LEF,* no. 2 [1927]: 27-30.
[14] Viktor Shklovskii, "Oshibki i izobreteniia" (Mistakes and inventions), *Novyi LEF* nos. 11-12 (1927): 32.
[15] Osip Brik, "Fiksatsiia fakta" (The Fixation of fact), *Novyi LEF* nos. 11-12 (1927): 44.

Another debate in *Novyi LEF*, which took place in April 1928, concerned the montage styles of two pioneering Soviet filmmakers, Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein, and offered an insight into Brik's privileged valuation of textual/logical information over visual heterogeneity in film. Vertov, who started his career during the Civil War by editing documentary footage for propaganda newsreels, initiated his signature style of documentaries by using montage to "compose" "cinematic symphonies" by cutting and pasting film frames in diverse combinations by using the "brain of the cameraman, his eye – the camera" and "the hands of the editor."[16] Eisenstein, on the contrary, was trained in the art of theater by Meierhold and used montage to emphasize the emotional charge of his "attractions" – culminating moments in a filmic sequence that accentuated and gave expressive character to the filmic narrative.[17] In his practice, Eisenstein learned from another pioneering Soviet film director, Lev Kuleshov, who publicized one of his self-described "experiments" in film montage in a journal of film and photography *Kino-fot*, edited by Aleksei Gan. Writing in the third issue of *Kino-fot* in 1922, Kuleshov described composing a coherent filmic narrative out of diverse frames filmed at different times and in different locations. Through his "experiment" Kuleshov demonstrated that "the chief strength of the cinema lies in montage, because with montage one can destroy, repair, or completely recast material."[18]

As P. Adams Sitney observed, early Soviet film directors, including Vertov and Eisenstein, used montage to subvert the power of traditional visuality, albeit in very different ways. Whereas Vertov emphasized the disunity and chaos of the visual enhanced by the technology of the camera-eye, Eisenstein followed Kuleshov in

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[16] Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 176-177.
[17] Ibid., passim.
[18] Lev Kuleshov, *Iskusstvo kino* (Moscow, 1929), quoted in Leyda, *Kino*, 164.

"synthesizing" the cinematic narrative semantically, by making it a meaningful unit.[19] Although Brik preferred Vertov's documentary filmmaking to Eisenstein's emotionally charged montage of attractions, in *Novyi LEF* Brik faulted Vertov for getting carried away with visual heterogeneity at the expense of a clear ideological message and argued that this director lost the semantics of a cinematic sequence, because he was looking for it outside the frame, whereas it had to be "contained within the frame."[20] In other words, Vertov's fault was to ignore the importance of a scenario, a logical sequence of events that told a story and imparted a unified meaning to his documentary footage.

Spurred partly by his consideration of film as a legible text communicating a certain ideological message to the viewer and partly by a famous "scenario crisis" in Soviet cinema, which manifested itself in the mid-1920s,[21] in 1926 Brik began working for a cinematic conglomerate Mezhrabpom Rus', first as a scriptwriter and later as the head of the script-writing division.[22] Mezhrabpom Rus' combined the international organization of Mezhrabpom (International Workers' Aid), based in Berlin and headed by Willy Münzenberg, and a pre-revolutionary film studio Rus'. The merged studio

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[19] P. Adams Sitney, *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, c1990), chapter 2.

[20] Osip Brik, "*Odinnadtsatyi* Vertova" (*The Eleventh* by Vertov) *Novyi LEF,* no. 4 (1928): 27.

[21] It is likely that Brik's entrance into scriptwriting was prompted by a "scenario crisis" in the Soviet film industry, which began in 1924 and lasted throughout the 1920s. According to Denise Youngblood, the crisis was precipitated by the poor organization and the inadequate pay of professional scriptwriters. Beginning in 1923, the state film studio Goskino sponsored a series of scriptwriting contests among amateurs, which did not produce any good results. On the scenario crisis in the 1920s, see Denise J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, c1985), 25, 67-73 and Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), 100 ff.

[22] According to Valérie Posner, Brik began working at Mezhrabpom Rus' on September 14, 1926 as a regular scriptwriter and was promoted to the head of the scriptwriting department on November 27, 1926. See Valérie Posner, "Les Scénaristes," in François Albera et al., ed. *Le Studio Mejrabpom ou l'aventure du cinema privé au pays des bolcheviks* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux: Documentation française, 1996), 82, note 5.

stood out among the other Moscow firms, such as Sovkino and Goskino because of its semi-private nature, the degree of its independence from the state in terms of repertoire and financing – it had the right to produce, but not to distribute its films – and its connection to Germany, which allowed it to have the state-of-the-art technical equipment and therefore better possibilities for making technologically demanding films.[23]

Before Brik's arrival, it was a haven for such directors as Yurii Zheliabuzhskii and Iakov Protazanov, who were known for creating entertaining films catering to the tastes of the bourgeois public. From its founding in 1924, the studio and its director Moisei Aleinikov had been under constant pressure from the party and the leftist press to forego blatant commercialism in their productions in favor of ideologically charged films serving proletarian audiences. Responding to this criticism, Mezhrabpom Rus' had invited Vsevolod Pudovkin, an actor and a director who used to work with Kuleshov, and Boris Barnet to direct films on revolutionary subjects[24] and emphasized a streamlined factory-like nature of filmmaking, introduced during Russia's industrialization.[25] It is during this period that Brik and other members of LEF, including Shklovskii and Tretiakov, gained entrance into Mezhrabpom Rus' and other film studios.[26]

In Mezhrabpom Rus', Brik replaced Valentin Turkin, a well-known producer and publicist before the revolution, who worked in Rus' as a scriptwriter since 1919.[27] Turkin's methods of work were very different from Brik's. As Valérie Posner noted,

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[23] Khokhlova, "'Mezhrabpomfil'm': mezhdu iskusstvom i politikoi," 193.
[24] On the history of Mezhrabpom Rus', see Khokhlova, "L'histoire," in *Le Studio Mejrabpom*, 23-32 and "Mezhrabpomfil'm: mezhdu iskusstvom i politikoi," 193-197. Babitsky and Rimberg provide some valuable information on the internal working of the studio. See their *The Soviet Film Industry*, 18, 31, 70.
[25] On the factory-like organization of labor at Soviet film studios, literally called "film factories," see Babitsky and Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry,* 78.
[26] Shklovskii and Tretiakov wrote scripts for Mezhrabpom Rus' at approximately the same time that as Brik was there. They also worked at scriptwriters for films produced by Goskino, such as Abraham Room's *Bed and Sofa* and Kuleshov's *By the Law.*
[27] On Valentin Turkin, see Posner, "Les scénaristes," in *Le Studio Mejrabpom*, 82 note 1.

Turkin was a traditionalist: he followed pre-revolutionary filmmakers who based their films on the tradition of theatrical acting. Turkin greatly respected Stanislavskii's method of stage acting and favored reading of the scripts to the actors before filming.[28] He worked well – the scriptwriting department in Mezhrabpom Rus' was better than in other studios[29] – but he was neither innovative enough nor possessed political adeptness. Despite Turkin's proposal to create "literary groups" that would work on the film together with the director and scriptwriter, he was replaced by Brik,[30] who had much more radical ideas about the collaboration of scriptwriters and directors in film. In one of his articles written in 1927, he called for writing scripts after the material had been filmed in order to have visual material organized in the most convincing way by the scriptwriter as the main ideological weapon.[31]

At the studio, Brik wrote and co-authored several scenarios,[32] of which seven were realized.[33] Out of these seven – *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* (*Potomok Chengiz-khana*, also known as *Storm over Asia,* 1929), *Opium* (1929), *Two-Bul'di-Two* (*Dva-Bul'di –Dva,* 1930), *What Is to Be?* (*Kem byt'?* 1932), *Vladimir Maiakovskii* (1940), *People from Siberia* (*Sibiriaki,* late 1930s-early 1940s) and *Accident in a Volcano* (*Sluchai v vulkane,* 1941) -- *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin is by far the most well-known, insightfully reviewed by an American critic Harry Alan

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[28] Ibid., 75.
[29] Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 204.
[30] Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, 70.
[31] Osip Brik, "Po sushchestvu stsenarnogo krizisa" (On the essence of the scenario crisis), *Sovetskoe kino* no. 8/9 (1927), 11-12. See the discussion of this article further in this chapter, p. 281.
[32] Because creation of a script at Mezhrabpom Rus' was a collective enterprise, most of the scripts have at least one co-author. Most often, Brik collaborated on scenarios with Oleg Leonidov, who had also worked with Protazanov, Boris Barnet, and other directors on such films as *The Three-Million Case* (*Protsess o trekh millionakh,* 1926)*, Moscow in October* (*Moskva v oktiabre* 1927)*, The White Eagle* (*Belyi orel,* 1928)*, Ranks and People* (*Chiny i liudi,* 1929), and others. See Leyda, *Kino*, 270 and 431-435 and Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 363-364.
[33] For a list of films made after Brik's scripts and a list of unrealized scripts, see Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 362-364.

Potamkin, among others.[34] Some of Brik's script was based on personal experience: when he wrote about trading practices in indigenous lands, he knew what he was talking about, because his father was a merchant who traded black coral in the Far East. Before he moved to Petrograd at the beginning of the First World War, Osip worked for his father's business, traveling widely in Russia and Central Asia.[35]

In this chapter, I will address Brik's promotion of photography as the modern medium *par excellence* and the standard against which he measured other art forms and sign systems. Here, I will discuss the critic's writings on photography and on film in terms of their emphasis on overcoming the range of human vision unassisted by technology and thereby expanding its limits. In my discussion, I will analyze Brik's tendency to promote photography at the expense of film, when Brik repeatedly skirted the specificity of the film medium by ignoring its ability to represent movement. My argument will hold that when Brik discussed photography in such a comparative manner, he presented it not as an image possessing what Gilles Deleuze called "a pre-verbal intelligible content,"[36] but as a model of a communicative device, a language. Brik's articles in the 1929 collection *Literature of Fact* provide a telling example of this tendency.

V. 1. Photography as Text

Brik's article "Against 'Creative' Personality," first published in 1928 in *Novyi LEF* and later reprinted in the collection *Literature of Fact* was dedicated to a debate with

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[34] Harry Alan Potamkin, "*Storm over Asia* and *Lincoln*" (October 1930), in Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, c1977), 474-476.
[35] Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik,* 8-9.
[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema-1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix.

LEF's literary enemies, the editors of rival journals Aleksandr Voronskii and Viacheslav Polonskii.[37] In this article, Brik used photography as an illustration for his argument for the necessity to submit to the ideology of the collective and not to dwell on the development of a writer's "creative individuality." In the text, Brik described the ontological paradox of photography, its perennial hesitation between "fact" and "fiction": "From the time of the invention of photography, the following expression became habitual: 'this is not simple photographing, it is creative interpreting.' By this is meant that a certain writer or artist does not only 'reflect' a real fact, but reinterprets it in his own manner." Brik did not argue with this widespread opinion -- in fact, he readily agreed with it: "It is indisputable that a man relates facts from his own point of view. It is indisputable that a man should not be a mechanical transmitter of facts and events." However, he made one crucial distinction between the interpretation of events from a personal point of view and their social significance: "But it is absolutely wrong to conclude from this that a man must modify [*pereinachit'*] facts and events in his own manner." He concluded the article with a disparaging critique of Voronskii's and Polonskii's insistence on the necessity of "altering facts through the prism of the artist's soul."[38]

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[37] Aleksandr Voronskii and Viacheslav Polonskii were editors of *Red Virgin Soil* and *Press and Revolution*, respectively. In opposition to the LEF group and to promoters of proletarian art, they defended classless and timeless criteria in art, such as the "artistic cognition of life." For more information on this issue, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[38] "Со времени изобретения фотографии вошло в обиход выражение: «это не просто фотографирование, а творческое претворение. Этим хотят сказать, что тот или иной писатель или художник не просто «отображает» реальный факт, а по-своему его переиначивает… Бесспорно, что человек не может не пересказывать факты со своей особой точки зрения. Бесспорно, что человек не должен быть механическим передатчиком фактов и событий. Но совершенно неверно делать отсюда вывод, что человек должен по-своему переиначивать факты и события. Буржуазно-интеллигенстская теория творчества, «марксистски обработанная» Воронским и Полонским, говорит о том, что основной задачей творчества является передача фактов и событий «преломленных сквозь призму души художника». … Мы считаем, что переход вождей ВАППа на позицию Воронских и Полонских грозит повернуть пролетарскую писательскую молодёжь на

To summarize, in "Against Creative Personality," Brik defined both literature and photography as transmitting devices for a particular set of commonly held values, an ideology. In this approach to photography as language, Brik presaged Roland Barthes' analysis of the medium made in "The Photographic Message," in which Barthes looked at a press photograph as a communicative device, considering it from the point of view of the message it conveyed. Starting from his famous characteristic of such a message as composed of a "source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a medium of reception," Barthes argued that whereas the first and the last parts of this trio belonged to the domain of sociology, the photographic image itself had to be analyzed as a unique type of representation, an analog of reality, a "message without a code." At the same time, this apparent lack of a code was deceptive, because veiled connotative associations inscribed the image within the particular culture of its production and reception. The photographic analog itself was coded by various auxiliary means – "selection, technical treatment, cropping, layout" – thus reducing the denotative message to shock, or what Barthes calls "strictly traumatic images."[39]

Of all the associative cultural codes analyzed by Barthes – perceptual, cognitive, and ideological – Brik's interest lay with the latter. For Barthes, the ideological was a "strong connotation, which required a greatly elaborated signifier of an established, widely recognizable system of convention: an encounter of personages…, a development of attitudes, a constellation of objects…"[40] -- in other words, the ideological connotation

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ложный и гибельный путь…" (Osip Brik, "Protiv tvorcheskoi lichnosti," in Nikolai Chuzhak, ed., *Literatura fakta : Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov Lefa* [Moscow : Federatsiia, 1929], 75-76. Originally, this article appeared in *Novyi LEF* no. 2 [1928]: 12-14).

[39] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" (1961) in his *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation,* trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 19.

[40] Ibid., 18.

required an insertion of the photograph into a readily understood context that would explain photographic forms. This is why a photograph was frequently accompanied by a textual explanation. Brik was interested precisely in the ideological aspect of a connotative photographic image. Apart from publishing photographs in *Novyi LEF* as part of the message of the journal, Brik also wrote articles for *Ogonek,* illustrated with photographs, thereby promoting a journalistic relationship to reality, in which the text encroached upon and overtook the image.[41]

We observe the intrusion of text upon image in Brik's article "The School of Constructivism," which appeared in *Ogonek* No. 20 in 1923. In this piece, dedicated to the work of the Constructivists at VKhUTEMAS, Brik laid out the general principles of Rodchenko's studio – the manufacture of things/objects that were used in everyday life -- "a folding bed, a bed-chair, an expanding table, a movable kiosk, etc." Six photographs of these objects accompanied the article (Fig. V – 1a-e). In the text, Brik did not describe these objects individually. Instead, he briefly related the history of VKhUTEMAS and noted that the goal of Rodchenko's students was to produce objects for everyday life that were "maximally suited to their purpose."[42] Because the photographic credits were missing, it was not clear who took the pictures, but the objects were all frontally displayed, looking transparent in the obviousness of their folding-unfolding mechanism. We can follow the sequence and guess the mechanics of the workings of the kiosks, beds, and chairs, as if we were looking in a "how-to" manual. Construing a photograph as a

[41] According to Valiuzhenich's bibliography, Brik published five articles in *Ogonek* over the period of 13 years: "Se chelovek" (This is what a man is) and "Shkola konstruktivizma" (The school of constructivism) in nos. 19 and 20 (1923); "Khudozhnik-konstruktor Liubov' Sergeevna Popova" (Artist-constructor Liubov' Popova) in no. 25 (1924); "Kamarinskii muzhik" (Peasant from Kamarino) in no. 22, (1933); and "O Maiakovskom" (About Maiakovskii) in no. 10 (1936).
[42] Brik, "Shkola konstruktivizma," *Ogonek,* no. 20 (1923): 6.

coded device and not as an opaque, mysterious image, in "Against 'Creative' Personality" Brik used photography as an example to illustrate his point regarding ideological struggles in literature.

As was made clear in its preface, *Literature of Fact* offered a collective statement made by the LEF group in defense of documentary literature, against learning from the classics and against fantasy [*vydumka*], which was equated with "artistry," characteristic of *belles-lettres*.[43] Taking this goal at its face value, the book was a reaction against a growing tendency in Russian literature to shape proletarian ideology through the novel, either historical or belletristic. In her history of the Soviet novel, Katerina Clark remarked on this tendency and on the inherent fitness of some texts written in Russia between the turn of the century and the later 1920s for the canon of Soviet Socialist Realism. A selected set of novels – twelve by Clark's count – furnished such devices as the structure of the plot and the development of characters for all of Soviet literature. These canonical works carried cultural codes, which they incorporated into the master plot and thereby contributed to a construction of a peculiar literary and cultural ritual. Ultimately, this tendency culminated in the cult of a strong personality and of the unification of literature under the aegis of Socialist Realism.[44] The *LEF* writers used methods ranging from historico-dialectical overviews (Chuzhak) and expository writing (Tretiakov) to criticism of particular works (Brik); all fought the tendency to ritualize and monumentalize literature. They wanted to tip the balance in favor of the "ephemeral" factors in literary representation, such as the particulars of time and place, thus

[43] Lef, "Ob etoi knige i ob nas (predislovie)" (About this Book and about us [Preface]) (1929), in *Literatura fakta*, 5.
[44] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3-24.

counteracting the thrust toward imaginative plot construction with an emphasis on the particularity of a moment.

Of the canonical works-to-be of Socialist Realism,[45] Brik singled out for criticism two novels written under the aegis of RAPP, Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* and Aleksandr Fadeev's *Rout.* Of the two, Gladkov's *Cement*, published in 1925, would become a model of plot and character construction for generations of Soviet writers.[46] It told a story of a civil war hero, Gleb Chumalov, who returned to his native town only to be disappointed by a ruinous condition of the cement factory where he worked before the war. Determined to rebuild the factory, Gleb overcame the apathy of the ruling bureaucracy and summoned a general meeting of workers. With the support of a few politically conscious workers and some help from the Cheka, the factory finally reopened.

In his critique, Brik objected to Gladkov's cavalier representation of the difficulties encountered by Gleb in his struggle to reopen the factory:

> Gleb is rebuilding the factory. On his path stand various obstacles: the irresponsibility of the workers, the laxity of political organization, the bureaucracy of the upper crust of the party, the sabotage of specialists, the raids of white armies. However, Gleb overcomes all difficulties with unusual ease, and the factory gets rebuilt.
>
> We know how factories were rebuilt in reality. How difficult it was and what a war of arguments for and against it caused. We can learn about this from reports and protocols of any economic meetings.

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[45] On April 23, 1932 the Central Committee of the Communist party made a decision to abolish a variety of literary groups and replace them with the Union of Soviet writers. Socialist Realism was an official aesthetic doctrine of this Union, introduced on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* on May 23, 1932 and enthusiastically accepted by the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. The doctrine held that the nineteenth-century classics of realist writing, novels in particular, were the aesthetic standard for all writing in the Soviet Union. As Gleb Struve reported, the statute of the Union of Soviet Writers defined the doctrine of Socialist Realism as "the creation of the works of high artistic significance, saturated with the heroic struggle of the world proletariat and with the grandeur of the victory of Socialism, and reflecting the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist party…" See Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin*, 256.

[46] Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 69 ff.

> Gladkov does not represent the very process of the struggle nor of the effort. Obstacles appear like barriers in a race. Hop! – He jumped over one. Hop! – He jumped over another one. [The novel turns into] a race with obstacles, and not the mastery of a difficult task….
>
> The heroic style is a literary device that ascribes to one person (the hero) a sum of actions (achievements) that in reality are a result of work of many people….[47]

Thus, the difficulty with Gleb's behavior was his unbelievable distance from real facts and real people, his elevation into the status of a hero. In this anti-heroic attitude that emphasized the rank-and-file of the working masses rather than their outstanding representatives, Brik was very much in line with the general rhetoric during the Five-Year Plan. As Clark observed, the period between 1928 and 1931 was characterized by a thrust within literature to glorify the deeds of "little men," which made them feel like "big men" – an attitude that became was reversed later in the 1930s, when the cult of personality became established. The LEF group took the leading role in promoting the late 1920s-early 1930s trend, chiefly through their slogan of the "literature of fact," oriented toward journalism and a faithful reporting of ordinary events.[48]

Apart from disparaging Gladkov for his heroic representation of the deeds of one man and ignoring the support network that helped him achieve his goals, Brik also criticized the ideological failings of the novel in its portrayal of the personal relationship

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[47] "Глеб восстанавливает завод. На его пути всевозможные препятствия: несознательность рабочих, расхлябанность ячейки, бюрократизм партийных верхов, саботаж спецов, набеги белых. Но Глеб преодолевает все эти трудностис необыкновенной лёгкостью, и завод восстановлен. Мы знаем, как в действительности восстанавливались заводы. Какие были трудности и какая шла борьба доводов за и против. Об этом говорят докладные записки и протоколы любых экономических совещаний. У Гладкова нет самого хода борьбы, нет усилья. Препятствия даны, как барьеры на скачках. Гоп! – и перепрыгнул. Гоп! – и ещё раз перепрыгнул. Скачка с препятствиями, а не действительное преодоление тяжёлого пути… Героика – это литературный приём, при помощи которого одному человеку (герою) приписывается сумма деяний (подвигов), являющихся в действительности результатом работы целого ряда людей…" (Osip Brik, "Pochemu ponravilsia *Tsement*" [Why did (people) like *Cement*], *Literatura fakta*, 85. Originally, this article was published in the journal *Na literaturnom postu* no. 2 [1926]: 30-32).

[48] On prevailing literary attitudes during the Five-Year plan, see Katerina Clark, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the Five-Year Plan," in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 189-206.

between Gleb and his wife, Dasha. After Gleb's return, Dasha refused to live with him. Instead, she joined the party and decided to dedicate herself fully to the task of Communist construction. In the process, she became involved with a high-powered party functionary, Bad'in, who raped her at a culminating point of the narrative. In his review, Brik strongly objected to Dasha's seemingly unmotivated desire to break up with Gleb:

> In *Cement* we have two themes: 1) Gleb is building a factory, and 2) Dasha is building the new *byt.* These two themes do not have anything that connects them to each other, except for a little word "building" and the fact that Dasha is married to Gleb.
>
> There can be several connections. Gleb is building a factory and, simultaneously, his private life is being built. There is none of this. The factory is built, but the wife abandons him. Or: Gleb is taken so much by the rebuilding of the factory that he did not notice the disintegration of his family. There is none of this either. Dasha participates ardently in Gleb's work. Or: the building of the factory and the building of private life are incommensurate with each other. There is none of that either. As the business improves, the relationship between Gleb and Dasha seems to improve as well. … And so we have it: while Gleb was building the factory, his wife left him.[49]

Brik made it clear that he did not like the characters' lack of ideological motivation only in so far as it was presented in the form of a novel that presupposed the setting up of a hypothetical situation, which, by definition, was not based on real facts:

> Of course, in life there are plenty of cases such as this one. And if *Cement* was a biography of a real Gleb, then we could not object to anything. It is necessary to retell everything as it was. However, *Cement* is not a biography, but a literary fantasy, and this is why it is appropriate to ask, why was it necessary to include in

[49] "В «Цементе» две темы: 1) Глеб строит завод, и 2) Даша строит новый быт. Обе эти темы друг с другом ничем не связаны, если не считать общего словечка «строит» и того, что Даша – венчанная жена Глеба. Связь могла бы быть разная. Глеб строит завод, и вместе с этим строится и его личная жизнь. Этого нет. Завод достроен, а жена от него уходит. Или: Глеб так увлёкся строительством завода, что не заметил, как разрушилась его семья. И этого нет. Даша принимает самое горячее участие в работе Глеба. Или: строительство завода и строительство личной жизни – вещи несовместимые. Тоже нет. По мере успеха дела, отношения супругов как будто бы улучшаются…. Получается: пока Глеб строил завод, от него ушла жена. И всё" (Osip Brik, "Pochemu ponravilsia *Tsement*," *Literatura fakta,* 84. Originally, this article appeared in *Na literaturnom postu* no. 2 [1926] – see note 35.)

> this novel two invented disparate facts? To develop two absolutely unrelated themes? The reader will necessarily want to uncover this connection. However, there is none.[50]

In his review of Fadeev's *Rout,* which he had also criticized for ideologically incongruous characters, Brik clarified his position further. Here, Brik argued that the author portrayed partisan leaders not through their actions – battling the enemies of the Bolsheviks – but through their inner world – their thoughts and reflections on life and the people around them. Brik accused Fadeev of misusing this device, which resulted in the bizarre characterization of partisans that reminded the reader not of valiant warriors, but of the impotent heroes of nineteenth-century Russian literature, Chekhov in particular:

> The main theme of Chekhov's stories is the encounter between two types of people – people who are coarse, strong, ready for everything, courageous, but dull, and people who are weak, who lack will, wanting, but not being able to do things [*khotiashchie no ne mogushchie*]. …The meaning of this theme is that there are people who are adjusted to life and those who are not adjusted. However, adjustment is bought by lowering intelligence. In order to adjust to life one has to be ruder, duller, more straightforward. Usually, Chekhov does not show us the inner world of those people who are adjusted to life, presenting them as an external force, but those people who are ill-adjusted and intellectual he presents to us with all the details of their inner life. Chekhov paints with particular diligence and care the most minuscule movements of the souls of these people who want [to do things], but cannot, who become timid, hesitant, shameful, suffering, realizing their powerlessness.
>
> The outer stylistic devices of this painting are the following figures of speech: "and it seemed to him," "and he remembered," "he wanted," "he became ashamed," "I do not know why," "I do not know where from," etc. All these stylistic devices were supposed to create an impression of something very ill-defined, unconscious, vague and by this to introduce the subject of a weak intellectual, lacking in will.

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[50] "Конечно, в жизни таких случаев сколько угодно. И если бы «Цемент» был биографией реально существовавшего Глеба, то ничего не скажешь. Надо рассказывать так, как было. Но «Цемент» не биография, а литературный вымысел, и поэтому уместно спросить, зачем понадобилось в одну повесть включать два вымышленных, ничем между собой не связанных факта? Развивать две, совершенно не имеющих друг к другу никакого отношения темы? Читатель непременно начнёт эту связь разыскивать. А её, оказывается, вовсе и нет" (ibid., 85).

> Chekhov presents this limp, weak-willed intellectual type as a sweet but extinct creature. He presents him as doomed but touching. With this concept, the entire sum of Chekhov's artistic devices is understandable and justified. However, when Fadeev transposes this artistic device in order to paint [*zhivopisat'*] partisans, he ends up with nonsense.[51]

In this passage from Brik's critique of Fadeev, two words are insistently repeated: "weak-willed" [*bezvol'snyi*] and "to paint" [*zhivopisat'*]. Brik used "weak-willed" several times to describe a type of person who in his opinion was not suited to be a fighter for Communism or a builder of the new state. This reference to someone's "will" [*volia*] sends us back to Nietzsche and his philosophy. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche has a passage that recalls Brik's major objections to the "weak-willed" ruminating characters of Fadeev. According to Nietzsche, "willing" alone is not sufficient for action, if it is conceived as a conscious desire to do something, because "willing" is an action, an unconscious drive to do things -- the two cannot be separated from each other. The ego, therefore, is a harmful objectification of the personal self, which is to blame for obscuring the duality of unconscious processes of commanding and

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[51] "Основная тема чеховских рассказов и повестей – это столкновение между двумя типами людей: люди грубые, сильные, готовые на всё, но тупые, и люди безвольные, слабые, хотящие но не могущие. … Смысл этой темы в том, что есть люди приспособленные к жизни, и люди неприспособленные. Но приспособленность покупается ценою понижения интеллектуальности. Для того, чтобы приспособиться к жизни, нужно быть грубее, тупее, прямолинейней. Обыкновенно Чехов не показывает нам внутреннюю сторону этих, приспособленных к жизни людей, давая их как внешнюю силу, зато людей неприспособленных, интеллектуальных он даёт нам со всеми подробностями их внутренней жизни. Чехов с особым усердием и тщательностью живописует мельчайшие душевные движения этих людей, которые хотят, но не могут, робеют, колебаются, стыдятся, страдают, сознавая своё бессилие. Внешними стилистическими приёмами этого живописания являются такого рода обороты речи: «и казалось ему», «и припомнилось ему», «хотелось ему», «стало стыдно», «почему-то», «откуда-то», «странным образом» и др. Все эти стилистические приёмы должны вызвать представление о чём-то весьма неопределённом, бессознательном, смутном и тем самым раскрыть тему безвольного, слабого интеллигента. Чехов даёт эту расслабленную, безвольную интеллигенцию как милое, но погибшее создание. Он даёт его обречённым, но трогательным. При такой концепции вся сумма художественных приёмов Чехова понятна и оправдана. Но когда Фадеев переносит весь этот художественный приём на живописание партизан – получается ерунда" (Osip Brik, "Razgrom Fadeeva" [The Rout of Fadeev] *Literatura fakta*, 90-91. Originally, this article was published in *Novyi LEF* no. 5 [1928], 1-5.)

obeying and thus presenting a false view of the disunity of will and action.[52] In the same passage, Nietzsche also specified will as a force which functions within the confines of a social structure, shaped and molded by the demands of society.[53] Brik's conception of a writer's task, subordinated to the will of the collective and the building up of a new form from differential constitutive elements, correlated with Nietzsche's view of the process of willing itself as differential, rejecting a unified ego and composed of the two conflicting but complementary forces of action and reaction, commanding and obeying. These forces made sense only in terms of their relationship to each other and not as pre-linguistic images -- hence Brik's disparaging use of the word *zhivopisat'* when describing Fadeev's style.

Brik elaborated his thoughts on the matter in two expository pieces that also appeared in *Literature of Fact*. In "To Teach the Writers," originally published in *Novyi LEF* in 1927, he explained how a writer's personal ideology could not be automatically transferred to an ideology of his work, because a piece of writing only combined

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[52] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19: "But now let us notice what is strangest about the will – this manifold thing for which the people have only one word: inasmuch as in the given circumstances we are at the same time the commanding *and* the obeying parties, and as the obeying party we know the sensations of constraint, impulsion, pressure, resistance, and motion, which usually begin immediately after the act of will; inasmuch as, on the other hand, we are accustomed to disregard this duality, and to deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept 'I,' a whole series of erroneous conclusions, and consequently of false conclusions of the will itself, has become attached to the act of willing – to such a degree that he who wills believes sincerely that willing *suffices* for action… In short, he who wills believes with a fair amount of certainty that will and action are somehow one; he ascribes the success, the carrying out of the willing, to the will itself, and thereby enjoys an increase of the sensation of power which accompanies all success" (*Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann, with an introduction by Peter Gay [New York: The Modern Library, 2000], 216). According to Deleuze, if we are to grasp Nietzsche's concept of the will, we have to understand it precisely as a force that constantly battles with other forces. It is that which commands an action and demands obeying, but, at the same time, is a force that is "creative and giving," which acquires power not because of the conscious desire to be powerful, but almost in spite of itself, as a byproduct of its creative energy. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 6-8, 49-52, 84-87.

[53] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19: "In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis… of a social structure composed of many souls. Hence a philosopher should claim the right to include willing as such within the sphere of morals – morals being understood as the doctrine of the relations of supremacy under which the phenomenon of 'life' comes to be" (*Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 217).

"disparate elements of artistic creation" that existed "apart from him and in spite of him." In order to compose a piece, a writer had to distill these elements from a real-life environment. In line with Nietzsche's idea of willing, Brik insisted that a writer could not want or would not want to work on a particular subject, but he might or might not know how to do so. Soviet writers, in Brik's opinion, did not know how to address the burning topics of the day, because of a lack of literary prototypes about the dictatorship of proletarians – therefore they had to be taught to write on new subjects.

Brik stopped short of offering a concrete example of successful distillation of a contemporary fact from real life and its use as a structural element in a literary construction. He only noted the necessity of such "technical attempts" [*tekhnicheskie popytki*] and "literary schemes" [*literaturnyi chertezhi*].[54] In "Breaking Down of the Subject," the only article written specifically for the book, published in 1929, and not reprinted from earlier pubications, Brik suggested that the tendency to abandon subject-oriented prose, such as a novel, in favor of a subject-less amalgamation of facts, such as memoirs, biographies, diaries and journalistic essays, represented a valid change in literary construction. The sole purpose of having a subject was to create unity – an anachronistic and a downright retrograde device. Therefore, foregrounding of bare "facts" (or "material") of literary construction was a justifiable tendency in contemporary prose.[55]

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[54] Osip Brik, "Uchit' pisatelei" (To teach writers) *Literatura fakta*, 180-185. First appeared in *Novyi LEF* no. 10 (1927): 1-2.

[55] Osip Brik, "Razlozhenie siuzheta" (Disintegration of the subject) (1929) *Literatura fakta*, 219-222. Shklovskii introduced the trend of short journalistic prose as early as 1926, when he published his collection of "anecdotes" or short stories, *Third Factory*. See Viktor Shklovskii, *Tret'ia fabrika* (Moscow: Krug, 1926. Reprint, Letchworth-Herts, England: Prideaux Press, 1978).

V. 2. Perspectivism

Knowing Brik's dependence on language when thinking about images and photography in particular, how did his anti-visual differentiation of signs affect his use of photographs? As becomes clear by leafing through the issues of *Novyi LEF*, published in 1927 and 1928, photography had assumed a leading position in that journal, by comparison to its predecessor, *LEF,* which came out from 1923 until 1925. Many issues of the two-year run of the later publication were prefaced by Rodchenko's photographs on the cover. Inside we find more photographs – again, by Rodchenko,[56] but also by *Novyi LEF* writers and associates such as Tretiakov,[57] Zhemchuzhnyi',[58] Evgeniia Sokolova,[59] and by unknown and anonymous photographers.[60] The styles of the photographs diverged widely, ranging from Rodchenko's perspectival shots from above or below (Figs. V – 2a and b) to his "belly-button" pictures glorifying soldiers of the Red Army (Figs. V - 3a and b) to the ethnographic explorations of Tretiakov (Fig. V - 4) and the medium-conscious shots of Sokolova (Fig. V - 5).

The sheer number and variety of photographs in *Novyi LEF* indicated the prominent place that photography was gaining simultaneously with the inauguration of

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[56] *Novyi LEF* no. 2 (1927), insert pp. 16-17; no. 4 (1927): 32-33; no. 5 (1927): 16-17; no. 6 (1927): 16-17, 32-33; no. 7 (1927): 16-17, 32-33; no. 10 (1927): 8-9; no. 1 (1928): 16-17, 32-33; no. 2 (1928): 40-41; no. 3 (1928): 16-17; 32-33; no. 5 (1928): 32-33; no. 6 (1928): 16-17, 32-33; no. 7 (1928): 16-17, 32-33; no. 9 (1928): 16-17, 32-33; no. 11 (1928): 32-33; no. 12 (1928): 16-17, 32-33.

[57] *Novyi LEF* no. 5 (1927), insert pp. 32-33; nos. 11-12 (1927): 32-33;

[58] *Novyi LEF* no. 4 (1927), insert pp. 16-17; no. 4 (1928): 16-17.

[59] Brik dated Evgeniia Sokolova, previously married to the theater and film director Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi, from 1926 onward. *Novyi LEF* published one photograph by Sokolova – in no. 9 (1928), insert pp. 16-17. Apart from people directly connected to the journal, the editors published images by artists who did not belong to the group but who conformed to its credo of the interdependence of aesthetics and ideology, such as documentary filmmaker Roman Karmen (*Novyi LEF* no. 10 [1927], insert pp. 8-9), and a German photographer Umbo (*Novyi LEF* no. 10 [1928], insert pp. 32-33).

[60] Several anonymous photographs were from Rodchenko's personal archive. They were published in *Novyi LEF* nos. 8-9 (1927), insert pp. 16-17, 32-33; no. 4 (1928): 32-33; no. 5 (1928): 16-17. There were also several photographs from photographers little known to scholars: E. Nekrasov (no. 2 [1928], insert pp. 40-41), A. Teleshov (no. 4 [1928]: 16-17), A. Alekseev (no. 10 [1928]: 16-17), and Auslender (nos. 11-12 [1927]: 16-17).

the Five-Year Plan. The attention to the "little man" and his ordinary deeds favored this medium, which, in Walter Benjamin's words, stripped from the traditional notion of the work of art its aura, its sense of sacredness.[61] During the two-year run of *Novyi LEF* in 1927 and 1928, Brik published only one article on photography in its pages, entitled "From Picture to Photograph."[62] By far the most prominently displayed photographer and most prolific writer on photography in *Novyi LEF* was Rodchenko. His most famous pictures -- those taken from above and below -- were displayed on the covers of several issues. These images taken from unusual perspectives caused a heated controversy among some *LEF* affiliates for being "aestheticizing."

The controversy unfolded as follows. In the sixth issue of *Novyi LEF* for 1928, Rodchenko published a reply to an accusation, which appeared in *Sovetskoe foto*, that he had plagiarized ideas from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and other Western photographers.[63] In his retort, Rodchenko emphasized the importance of making images of things taken from varying angles in order to "widen [our] understanding about an ordinary object." He also stressed that it was impossible to own this method, because it belonged to a strong tendency within contemporary photography and not to one particular individual.[64] Two issues later, *Novyi LEF* published Kushner's response to Rodchenko's defense, admitting his total incomprehension of Rodchenko's reasoning that advocated taking pictures from unusual points of view. Radically deviating from his earlier promotion of the artist as an engineer of reality and a producer of culture, delivered in 1922 in a series of lectures

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[61] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 219-253.
[62] Brik, "Ot kartiny k foto," *Novyi LEF* no. 3 (1928): 29-33.
[63] On Rodchenko's place within the landscape of modern photography in Europe, see Peter Galassi, "Rodchenko and Photography's Revolution," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 100-137.
[64] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Krupnaia bezgramotnost' ili melkaia gadost'?" (Outstanding illiteracy or petty trick?) *Novyi LEF* no. 6 (1928): 42-44.

delivered at INKhUK,[65] in 1928 Kushner derided any "distortion" of the object resulting from a shift of perspectives as "not bringing anyone any good," in particular in relation to such objects as radio-towers, which could be used to demonstrate the might of Soviet technology but which ended up looking like "wire bread baskets."[66] In his reply to Kushner, Rodchenko ardently defended extreme perspectives and argued that it was time to break "routine" habits of perception, supported by centuries of painterly tradition, in order to employ a hitherto unused method of looking at things from varying angles and to display not one, but a series of photographic views in order to give the viewer a fuller sense of the real object.[67]

The debate reached its apogee in the eleventh issue of the journal, where Rodchenko accused "certain comrades from Lef" of taking a stance against experimentation, "fetishizing the fact" and "falling into the aesthetics of asceticism and philistinism." In his opinion, there was no revolution in replacing a portrait of a general with its photographic equivalent depicting a workers' leader. Instead, it was necessary to use contemporary technology in order to "reflect" [*otobrazhat'*] contemporary reality in visually striking and advantageous ways.[68] In the following (and final) issue, Kushner attacked Rodchenko for his faulty ideology in comparing a revolutionary leader to a pre-revolutionary general. In Kushner's opinion, the meaning of the Revolution lay precisely in this substitution and thus in new facts that "defined" [*opredelili*] this great social transformation.[69]

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[65] On Kushner's lecture, see chapter 3 of this dissertation, pp. 152-154.
[66] Boris Kushner, "Otkrytoe pis'mo" (Open letter) *Novyi LEF* no. 8 (1928): 38-40.
[67] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Puti sovremennoi fotografii" (Paths of contemporary photography) *Novyi LEF* no. 9 (1928): 31-39.
[68] Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Predosterezhenie" (Warning) *Novyi LEF* no. 11 (1928): 36-37.
[69] Boris Kushner, "Ispolnenie pros'by" (Complying with a request) *Novyi LEF* no. 12 (1928): 40-41.

In this war of opinions about the absolute value of either aesthetics or ideology, the editors, including Brik, took a relativist approach. The editorial statement that prefaced Rodchenko's article in the eleventh issue expressed disagreement with the author who "replaced the utilitarian-productionist principles that interest LEF in the new photography with his struggle for the 'new aesthetics.'" Yet another editors' statement following Kushner's article condemned both sides for falling into the opposing extremes of either aesthetization or fetishization of fact. According to the second statement, in the struggle between the "how" and the "what" the warring factions forgot about the "why" – that the point of view of a photograph had to be determined by its concrete utilitarian social task. A workers' leader should be represented differently from a tsarist general not because of a novel aesthetic effect, but in order to avoid unintentional parody. [70]

Although by the end of 1928 Brik was not on the editorial board of the journal, having left together with Maiakovskii after the seventh issue, in the structure of the argument the second statement followed closely Brik's language, as expressed, for example, in his 1923 article "Obliging Aesthete," discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. Also, consistent with his views, the statement treded a thin line between aesthetics and politics, between perspective in art and in life. Margarita Tupitsyn proposed that the statement was authored by Tretiakov[71] – a suggestion that seems plausible given the closeness of views and the friendship between the two men. Although Tretiakov was usually more insistent than Brik on subordinating aesthetic requirements to faithfulness to a documentary "fact," he must have been influenced by Brik's views on photography, given his friend's theoretical prominence. In their understanding of the

[70] "Ot redaktsii" (From the editors), *Novyi LEF* no. 12 (1928): 41-42.
[71] See Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 41, notes 25 and 26.

importance of perspective and its "nomadic" interchangeability between artistic and social events, Brik and Tretiakov once again betrayed the influence of Nietzsche, who introduced what Nietzsche's scholars call "perspectivism" into modern philosophy and who discussed it as both an aesthetic and an ideological phenomenon.[72]

In a nutshell, Nietzsche's "perspectivism" consisted in postulating a multiplicity of moral valuations of any event or occurrence. According to Jean Granier, Nietzsche considered our thought process – our "ideas" -- as part and parcel of the material reality around us. This reality was not unified under one God, but was multifarious, chaotic, and fundamentally pagan. Thus, this thinking was not something subjective, which came from the "inside" of our "soul," but something that we were inscribed into, before any consciousness arose in us, from the moment we were born. These unconscious and impersonal roots of consciousness and the great variety of "gods" that reigned over them resulted in innumerable perspectives -- epistemological and ideological interpretations of reality. Therefore, mere appearance without depth became a manifestation of Being, and as such, a perfectly valid interpretation of reality. Because such appearance was an aspect of visual perception, "perspectivism" could and should be applied to an analysis of a work of art. In ideological terms, "perspectivism" was transposed into interpretation, which was realized by means of language -- that is, through the text. Unlike the representation of things from different perspectives, which was analytic in essence, interpretation presupposed a synthetic function, which presented facts from the point of

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[72] Apart from Jean Granier, whose article is cited below, other scholars who wrote on Nietzsche's "perspectivism" include Sarah Kofman, Robert Solomon, and Walter Kaufmann. See Kofman, *Nietsche and Metaphor,* passim; Robert C. Solomon, "Nietzsche *ad hominem*: Perspectivism, Personality, and Ressentiment Revisited," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180-222; and Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 264.

view of a particular personal and social value: "…interpretation represents a certain way of arranging reality according to the needs and demands of a particular kind of life…"[73]

For Brik, the technologically coded but ontologically direct medium of photography, and Rodchenko's experiments in particular, offered a perfect analogy for his texts, laden with ideology that resonated with the values of the party in power. His texts on photography bear witness to this connection. Out of his four articles on photography, all published between 1926 and 1928, two discussed this medium in its relation to film and two in its relation to painting. In the first of these articles, "What the Eye Does Not See," Brik for the first time in the Soviet press promoted the "perspectivism" of vision achieved with the help of technology. He lauded Dziga Vertov's experiments in film and Rodchenko's in photography that "fixated what the human eye normally does not see." He also equated the film- and photo cameras in their capacity to "show things from an unusual point of view, in an unusual configuration" and thus to "widen the ordinary horizon of the human eye."[74]

In "Photography in Film," which also appeared in *Sovetskoe kino* shortly after "What the Eye Does Not See," Brik expanded on his earlier comparison of the two media and asserted the primacy of the former: "The basis of film is photography. There is no film without photography." Acting, directing, and even "libretto" – the script – were secondary aspects by comparison to camera-work, because "it is possible to imagine a film made only by a camera-man, but it is impossible to envision one made by a director, an actor, or a script-writer." Therefore, all film workers had to understand the primacy of

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[73] Jean Granier, "Perspectivism and Interpretation," in David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985), 190-199.
[74] Osip Brik, "Chego ne vidit glaz," *Sovetskoe kino* no. 2 (1926): 22-23, reprinted in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, 219-220.

the photographic effect and adjust their work in such a way that it recognized this dominance. Scriptwriters, in particular, had to fit their work to the photographic aspect of filmmaking – i.e., a series of film-stills -- and not to the literary intrigue concentrated within the subject matter. Brik concluded the article by asserting the power of "superficial" visuality over "deep" essence: "The art of the camera man and the essence of cinema consist in achieving the maximum visual effect."[75]

In his photography articles published in *Sovetskoe foto* and *Novyi LEF*, Brik also compared it to film and insisted on the importance of surface visuality imparted by the former onto the latter, although in less explicit terms. As Tupitsyn observed, in "Photo-Still Versus Picture," published in *Sovetskoe foto* in the beginning of 1926, Brik chose to refer to a photograph as a photo-still [*fotokadr*] by analogy to a film still, which testified to his thinking about film and photography in the same terms.[76] Here, Brik argued that photography was forcing out painting as a legitimate modern medium, because it was "more precise, quicker to make, and less expensive." Tracing the history of photography from its inception, Brik argued that from the mid-nineteenth century onward, painting and photography had two distinct tasks – the former was concerned with "making pictures" and the latter with "fixating life." He criticized contemporary painters and photographers for their desire to imitate each other's mediums without understanding the specificity of each particular representational mode and called for photographers "to proceed from the principle of the precise fixating of nature to create objects, photo-stills, which would have as strong an effect upon a viewer as any painter's pictures. The

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[75] "Уметь заснять – значит дать кадр, который произведёт максимум зрелищного эффекта" Osip Brik, "Foto v kino" *Sovetskoe kino* nos. 4/5 (1926): 23.
[76] Margarita Tupitsyn, "Fragmentation versus Totality: The Politics of (De)Framing," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde: 1915-1932* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 485-486.

photographer must show that what is impressive is not only life rebuilt according to aesthetic principles, but also real life, when it is fixated by a technically perfect photo-still."[77] In the battle that Rodchenko conducted against the painting-oriented proletarian photographers of ROPF (The Revolutionary Society of Proletarian Photographers), Brik took the side of his colleague in defending a representation of totality that was "fragmented," i.e., that consisted of a series of photo-stills taken from different perspectives, rather than a totally unified picture taken from a single "belly-button" point of view.[78]

In his last article on the subject, "From Picture to Photograph," which appeared in the third issue of *Novyi LEF* in 1928, Brik summarized his effort to present photography as the ultimate modern medium, which overcame painting via technology and laid the foundation for the development of film. To be certain, after reiterating the argument from "Photo-Still against Picture" about the necessity for photography to come into its own as a medium, Brik did mention film as "a new method… to fixate an object not only in its static condition, but also in movement." However, while writing about the supremacy of photography in representing movement, Brik did not compare it to film, but to painting. The advantage of photography was that of technology, which allowed the

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[77] "Фотограф должен, исходя из основного принципа своего ремесла, из принципа точной фиксации натуры, создать вещи, фото-кадры, которые бы по силе своего воздействия на зрителя не уступали действию картин любого живописца. Фотограф должен показать, что впечатлеет не только перестроенная по эстетическим законам жизнь, но сама живая, реальная жизнь, зафиксированная в технически совершенном фотокадре" (Osip Brik, "Foto-kadr protiv kartiny," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 2 [1926]: 40-42).

[78] In 1929, a ROPF photographer Aleksandr Shaikhet in the article "The Competition of the Photojournalists Unfolds" accused Rodchenko of taking photographs from incomprehensible points of view: extreme close-ups or distorted by 'tilts' and 'falls.'" Instead, he propagated those photographs, in which "all the events are fitted into absolutely concrete and intelligible forms for the reader." Rodchenko responded to this accusation by insisting on the necessity to photograph not the product, but the process of work "from the most effective point of view." For a discussion of this debate and of photography during the Five-Year Plan, see Tupitsyn, "Fragmentation versus Totality: The Politics of (De)Framing," *The Great Utopia*, 483-496 and her *The Soviet Photograph*, especially chapter 3.

artist to "fixate" a moving object, whereas the painter was forced to work from a "maximally immobile object." This meant that if a painter and a photographer tried to represent a busy city scene, the painter necessarily had to "stop its movement," i.e., alter the placement of and the relationship between figures, buildings, and objects in accordance with numerous compositional demands of the painting, often emphasizing one "central object, isolated from its surroundings."[79]

In other words, when praising his favorite medium, Brik extolled the virtues of a snapshot over time exposure – the very quality of photography associated with documentary reportage, leaving aside the representation of movement as a specifically cinematic device. In Thierry de Duve's words, Brik accepted photography as an "event" and not as a "picture." For de Duve, an event was a snapshot, which demonstrated the photographer's ability to "capture the moment," happening "here" and "now." A "picture," on the other hand, was produced using time exposure. Unlike the snapshot, time exposure transposed the focus from the present and a specific location onto the past and an unspecified psychological space of remembrance.[80]

Both Brik and de Duve characterized the snapshot not only in terms of time, but also in terms of its ability to capture movement, albeit from opposing perspectives. For Brik, this ability demonstrated one of the primary advantages of photography over painting, which "captures [movement] in its flight, and if it cannot convey it [adequately], it can refer [*nameknut'*] to it."[81] De Duve, on the other hand, dwelled on the inadequacy of photography to perform this task, which, instead of "signifying natural movement"

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[79] Osip Brik, "Ot kartiny k foto," *Novyi LEF* no. 3 (1928): 29-33, reprinted in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, 227-233.
[80] Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," *October* no. 5 (Summer 1978): 113-125.
[81] Brik, "Ot kartiny k foto," *Novyi LEF* no. 3 (1928): 31.

merely "produces a petrified analogue of it." Referring to Eadweard Muybridge's experiments, de Duve noted the "true" albeit "impossible" postures of the horse frozen in its tracks and the photographic "paradox of an unperformed movement."[82] Brik's willingness to ignore this contradictory quality of instantaneous photography can help us evaluate his curious reduction of film to photography and his obliviousness to the specificity of film as a medium.

V. 3. Brik and Film

Habitually, most people favor film over photography when comparing the two in terms of the representation of movement. It is remarkable that the title of Brik's article "From Picture to Photograph" did not mention film, because in this text Brik chose to concentrate on one aspect of reality that became a defining feature of cinema since its inception –namely, movement. Film is the medium that is characterized by the "movement-image," which, in Deleuze's famous formulation, defined the entire pre-war cinema. This cinematic movement-image is fundamentally distinct from a photographic still, because, as in Zeno's paradox, it represents movement that cannot be identified with the space covered, a movement that is continuous and indivisible into fragments, impossible to measure in categories of space and time – all of this despite the fact that a film reel is composed of still fragments that are set in motion at a certain speed. As Deleuze sees it, cinematic movement does not reside in a film still, but in an "intermediate image, to which movement is not appended or added," but "belongs as immediate given."[83] The photograph lacks such an "intermediate image." All it can offer

[82] De Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot," 114-115.
[83] Deleuze, *Cinema-1: The Movement-Image*, 1-2.

in terms of representation of movement is a photographic still, a moment frozen in space and time, marked by blurs and distortions of pictured objects.

In 1927, a year after Brik's favorable comparison of film to photography and a year before his discussion of movement in painting and photography and his willful silence about film, a group of Formalist critics, including Boris Eikhenbaum and Iurii Tynianov, conducted thorough theoretical studies of film as an independent art form in the collection *Poetics of Film*. Several of the articles in this book compared film to photography. Eikhenbaum in particular named the ability to represent movement as film's most advantageous artistic feature and called photography's inability adequately to do so a drawback, which prevented the latter from "assuming an independent position among the arts."[84] In other words, Eikhenbaum considered movement the primary element of artistic expression in film and photography as film's "practical" handmaiden. Deleuze's "intermediate movement" is made clear by Eikhenbaum's article in explaining the fundamental difference between an "abstract" photographic still, which formed part of the film reel, and the "montage still," "a separate piece of film, from cut to cut, taken with the same camera angle and in the same dimension," which actually appeared in the screen.[85]

Because Brik preferred to ignore the inherently filmic property of movement, it is not surprising that on a par with photographs, the pages of *Novyi LEF* featured film stills, all from recently made Soviet films by Dziga Vertov (Fig. V – 6a and b),[86] Sergei Eisenstein

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[84] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problemy kino-stilistiki" (Problems of cinema stylistics), in Boris Eikhenbaum, ed., *Poetika kino* (Moscow and Leningrad: Kinopechat', 1927), 15.
[85] Ibid., 38-39.
[86] *Novyi LEF* no. 1 (1927), insert pp. 16-17 from *The Sixth's Part of the World*; nos. 8-9 (1927), 64-65, no. 10, (1927), 40-41 and no. 1(1928), 32-33 from *The Eleventh*; nos. 8, 10, and 11 (1928), 16-17 from *The Man With the Movie Camera*.

(Fig. V – 7a and b),[87] Mikhail Kaufman (Fig. V - 8),[88] Esfir' Shub (Fig. V - 9),[89] Lev Kuleshov (Fig. V - 10),[90] and others.[91] The film stills do, indeed, look very much like photographs – in fact, reproduced on the grainy paper of the journal, they are indistinguishable from them. If the explanatory text accompanying the stills was missing, we could have mistaken them for Rodchenko's (or someone else's) documentary shots, with the same interest in contemporary subjects – the city of Moscow, daily Soviet life, industries, villages, the Soviet military – and the same innovative way of choosing unusual points of view, shooting from above or below, choosing extreme close-ups or transforming recognizable objects into strange-looking ones through the creative use of shading or "frozen" movement. Judging from the look of illustrations in *Novyi LEF,* then, Brik appears to be right – film was nothing more than an "improved photograph," the improvement residing in film's ability to show fictitious movement and reflect a "false" passage of time.

Despite his dismissive attitude to film, Brik actively participated in the cinematic culture of the period. Although such culture in Russia had flowered before the revolution and his colleague Shklovskii published a book on film in 1923 (not to mention his close friend Maiakovskii who made films and wrote for film journals as early as 1913), Brik joined the ranks of film critics relatively late, when it became impossible to ignore the most popular art in the country, one, moreover, that was gaining the attention of powerful

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[87] *Novyi LEF* no. 1 (1927), 16-17, no. 2 (1927), 32-33, and no. 3 (1927), 32-33 from *The General Line*.
[88] *Novyi LEF* no. 2 (1927), 16-17 and no. 3 (1927), 32-33 from *Moscow*.
[89] *Novyi LEF* no.4 (1927), 16-17 from *The Fall of Romanov Dynasty* and nos. 8-9 (1927), 48-49 from *The Great Path*.
[90] *Novyi LEF* no. 10 (1927), 40-41 and nos. 11-12 (1927), 16-17 from *Locomotive B-1000*.
[91] Other stills were taken from Lavinskii's *Radio* (*Novyi LEF* nos. 8-9 [1927], 32-33); Barnet's *Moscow in October* (nos. 8-9 [1927], 48-49), P. Urechin and Kapalin's *Fight for the Harvest* (no. 10 [1927], 40-41; no. 5 [1928], 32-33; no. 11 [1928], 16-17).

politicians.[92] By 1925, when Brik developed an interest in film, Aleksei Gan's journal *Kino-fot* had already existed for four years, *LEF* had published Vertov's theoretical writings and Sergei Eisenstein's "theory of attraction," theaters had been screening *Cinema-Truth* since 1922, Lev Kuleshov had finished his *Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* and Eisenstein was about to complete his first film *Strike*.

Brik's first piece of writing on film was exemplary as an outline of his views on the medium. He discussed film's imaginary nature and warned about dangers that it wrought on the unsuspecting public. Entitled "A Man Beats another Man," the article argued against the type of films that made a spectacle out of human failings, such as baseness, cruelty, violence, etc. Brik argued that the films that reveled in the display of base human passions forced the viewer to assume a passive position in relation to the action on the screen by not being able to intervene in the action. This attitude affected the spectator in a morally reprehensible way: "[If a man beats another man], this is a fact to which any living and active man must react with action. It is necessary either to help to beat him up or to save him from being beaten. It depends to which side one takes. However, it is absolutely wrong to make from this fact a spectacle." The potential moral reprehensibility of cinema lay in its ability to transpose this "spectatorial" attitude from screen to reality and to make from active citizens passive viewers. Therefore, cinema should be celebrated for its technological advances, but not for its spectatorial possibilities.[93]

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[92] On the history of Russian and early Soviet cinema, see Leyda, *Kino* and Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988). On Maiakovskii's beginnings in film, see Leyda, *Kino,* 61-62. On Lenin's and Stalin's support of film, see Leyda, *Kino,* 158-161 and passim.

[93] "Человек бъёт человека. Факт, на который всякий живой, активный человек должен реагировать действием. Либо надо помочь добить, либо спасти от избиения. В зависимости от того, на чью

Brik's subsequent articles on film written in 1925 and 1926 developed the same subject of moral responsibility, directly connected to active participation in the political process of building Communism, but in different ways. "Fact against Anecdote," "Are They Open?" and "There is Nothing and Nothing is Known" extolled the virtues of documentaries, those by Vertov in particular, while denigrating the indulgence of human emotions on screen.[94] "Contest under the Slogan 'Soviet Film on the Soviet Screen'" condemned the domination of foreign-made films in Soviet Russia.[95] "Pissi Puk" ridiculed the stylishness and exaggerated emotionalism of traditional acting in foreign and Soviet films.[96] "Films that Are Not Shown to Us" argued that foreign film exports into Russia were distinguished by their particularly bad quality, despite a number of good films made abroad, which lacked "big names" but offered the "richest visual material."[97] Of the articles written in 1925 and 1926, "Against Cinema-Drama" and "Commercial Calculation" veered away somewhat from Brik's prescriptive polemics and opened up passages that help explain the author's preference for documentaries in a more reflective manner. As its title suggests, "Against Cinema-Drama" opposed dramatic scenarios in film and fought for documentaries and comedies, because "drama always possesses psychological qualities, impossible to show, but only to tell." In other words, tragedy and drama were essentially literary methods of representation, unlike comedy and documentaries, which could be represented visually, particularly in film. Unlike in "A Man Beats another Man," in "Against Cinema-Drama" Brik spoke about cinematic

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сторону стать. Но устраивать из этого факта зрелища никак нельзя" (Brik, "Chelovek b'et cheloveka," *Kino,* no. 27 [September 22, 1925], 2).

[94] Osip Brik, "Fakt protiv anekdota,"*Vecherniaia Moskva*, October 14, 1925, 3; "Nastezh li?" *Kino,* November 24, 1925, 2; "Net i neizvestno," *Kino,* April 6, 1926, 3.

[95] Osip Brik, "Konkurs pod lozungom 'Sovetskaia fil'ma na sovetskom ekrane'" *Kino,* no. 26 (June 29, 1926), 2.

[96] Osip Brik, "Pissi Puk," *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 26 (June 29, 1926), 2.

[97] Osip Brik, "Kartiny kotorye nam ne pokazyvaiut" *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 2 (1926): 9.

genres and not attitudes to real violence. However, he also traced a parallel to the psychology of a real-life person by asserting: "Cinema-drama corrupts. Open pornography is a thousand times healthier than erotic understatements in novels."[98] In this article, we are surprised to learn about the impossibility of showing drama, because for us, drama is essentially a theatrical genre that involves an actor (or actors), a spectator and a stage. In his polemical fervor, Brik chose to ignore this essential aspect of the dramatic, thus making the opposition between literature and film absolute. In the 1927 book *Poetics of Film,* the film and theater critic Adrian Piotrovskii explained the intentional lacunae left by Brik.[99] For Piotrovskii, theater and film were fundamentally different in their representation of space, time, and, "more importantly, a specifically will-filled action" [*i, chto vazhnee vsego, spetsificheski volevym napolneniem deistviia*].[100] This "will-filled action" of a live person that took place in the physical space and time close to the spectator was the keystone of any theater and lacking in film, because of the latter's technical mediation of the action by the technological apparatus, its separation of the space and time of the actor from those of the spectator and their consequent transposition into a purely visual sphere, i.e., the domain of the dream, fantasy and the imagined, subjugating the real itself to the order of the imaginary. Evidently, Brik was against this propensity of film to create imaginary, dream-like spaces, even if they incited spectators to ideologically correct actions.

In "Commercial Calculation," Brik addressed the question of self-reflection and the construction of a positive Soviet identity. Writing about the commercial strategy of Soviet movie theaters, Brik criticized their orientation toward financial gain, as a result of

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[98] Osip Brik, "Protiv kino-dramy (chastnoe mnenie),"*Kino* no. 32 (October 27, 1925), 2.
[99] More on Piotrovskii, see Babitsky and Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry,* 76.
[100] Adrian Piotrovskii, "K teorii kino-zhanrov," *Poetika Kino*, 147.

which theaters would show only those films that could bring in the most money, i.e., films (foreign or Soviet) that would be popular with a bourgeois public. This attitude was fundamentally wrong, argued Brik, because it did not build a healthy cultural foundation for the formation of a new Soviet identity, and could result in both cultural and financial bankruptcy. In order to build such a new identity, it was imperative to "refuse all entertaining "picturesque" films [*kino-kartinok*] … that do not have any cultural value. Instead, [we should show] documentaries, scientific, productivist [*proizvodstvennye*]…, ethnographic [films], foreign and, first of all, ours, because to get to know ourselves is the most vital cultural need."[101]

Although *Novyi LEF*'s predecessor, *LEF*, began publishing articles on film as early as 1923, when the Soviet film industry was just emerging from the ruins of the Civil War, its scope at the time did not go beyond Vertov's manifestoes and stills from his films. Apart from film stills, *Novyi LEF* published a number of texts that reflected intense debates on film and that render more complicated the disagreement between Brik and Shklovskii on the relative values of photography and film. *Novyi LEF* articles on film unfolded a complex process of the formation of Soviet cinema, providing feedback from influential critics who could not "make or break" a film but who could contribute to a framework for its ideological and aesthetic acceptance. The central ideological question, the purview of Brik, centered on the discussion of documentary [*neigrovoi*] versus a fiction-based "played" [*igrovoi*] film. Shklovskii was more comfortable discussing the aesthetic point of view, namely, the creation of a specifically cinematic language.

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[101] "Прежде всего, надо отказаться от всех развлекательных кино-картинок и заграничного и своего производства как не имеющих никакой культурной ценности. Вместо них – хронику, научные, производственные,… этнографические и заграничные и в первую очередь свои, ибо познать самих себя – насущнейшая культурная потребность" (Osip Brik, "Kommercheskii raschet," *Kino,* August 24, 1926, 3).

Articles on film in *Novyi LEF* outnumbered those on photography – a fact that, considered alone, weighed in Shklovskii's favor. However, the debate on the merits of documentary versus the played film dominated the pages of the journal, and Shklovskii's voice was somewhat lonely in the chorus of his more ideologically-minded colleagues.

The first article of film criticism in *Novyi LEF* was by Brik.[102] Entitled "A Cinematic Antidote," it reiterated an argument from his earlier writings about the indiscriminate showings of films, which promoted bourgeois ideology foreign to the interests of the Soviet people. This time Brik brought forth Lenin's authority in arguing his case. Referring to Lenin's praise of cinema as "one of the most important arts," Brik insisted that the meaning of these words was distorted by the Nepmen mentality: "Lenin's entire cultural program indicates that his first concern was bringing forth in the masses the correct, real attitude to actuality. Speaking about cinema, he meant that this technical apparatus can transmit the most necessary facts of this actuality in a very short time and to a maximum number of people." Instead, lamented Brik, the Soviet movie-going public preferred the passive emotionalism of decadent bourgeois films to educationally valuable material based on the factual representation of reality. The chief culprit of this regrettable situation, according to Brik, was the penchant for "psychological emotionalism" on the part of the public and the makers of the films. "It is necessary to throw away once and for all from the [motion] picture all its romanticism, all psychological emotion. It is necessary to state with absolute candor that in film we are

[102] Brik's article was the first critical piece of writing on film in the journal. Immediately preceding it, was Maiakovskii's satirical description of his attempts to overcome the bureaucracy of a Moscow film studio and the publication of one of his scripts, see Maiakovskii, "Karaul" (Help) and "Kak pozhivaete" (How do you do) in *Novyi LEF* no. 2 (1927): 23-27. Maiakovskii's writing was satirical, not critical in nature. Also, Sergei Tretiakov discussed documentary film positively, if briefly, in his "B'em trevogu" (The state of alarm) in the same issue, which explained the political strategy of the journal. See *Novyi LEF* no. 2 (1927): 1-5. The first of Maiakovskii's articles was commented upon and translated in Leyda, *Kino,* 227-230.

not going to incite joy or sorrow, but want to show only the necessary facts and events."[103]

This article set up the juxtaposition of a fiction-based "played" film versus the documentary "unplayed" one, which unfolded in a number of critical reviews of recent films by Shklovskii, Tretiakov, and Pertsov and in a discussion published in the last issue of *Novyi LEF* in 1927. [104] According to these publications in *Novyi LEF* and the materials of the conference, three major positions evolved. Shklovskii praised Eisenstein for his proclivity for the "played" film,[105] Shub for "the authenticity" [*podlinnost'*] of her films,[106] and Pudovkin for the quality of the montage.[107] He did not like making the distinction between the "played" and "unplayed" films, insisting that the line separating the two was blurry and that elements from the latter were frequently used in the former for either informational purposes or to convey authenticity, while some parts of documentaries were clearly staged.[108] He also demonstrated that Eisenstein, Shub, and Pudovkin could all be considered directors of played films, because even Shub made films in which people became conscious of being on camera and adjusted their behavior

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[103] "Из всей культурной установки Ленина следует, что первой его заботой было воспитание в массах правильного реального отношения к действительности. Говоря о кинематографе, он имел в виду, что этот технический аппарат может передать в кратчайший срок и и наибольшему количеству людей нужнейшие факты этой действительности…. Нужно раз и навсегда выкинуть из картины всю её романтику, всю её психологическую эмоциональность. Нужно совершенно откровенно говорить, что в кинофильме мы не собираемся возбуждать ни радость, ни печаль, что мы хотим только показать нужные факты и события" (Brik, "Protivokinoiadie," *Novyi LEF,* no. 2 [1927]: 27-30).

[104] "Lef i kino: stenogramma soveshchaniia" (LEF and film: minutes of a meeting) *Novyi LEF,* nos. 11-12 (1927): 50-70. This material was translated into English by Ben Brewster in his "Documents from *Novyi Lef*" in *Screen Reader 1: Cinema, Ideology, Politics* (London: The Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977), 305-311. In translating *LEF* terminology of *igrovaia* and *neigrovaia fil'ma*, I use Brewster's verson of "played film" and "unplayed film."

[105] Viktor Shklovskii, "Sergei Eisenstein i neigrovaia fil'ma" (Sergei Eisenstein and unplayed film), *Novyi LEF,* no. 4 (1927): 34-35.

[106] Viktor Shklovskii, "Po povodu kartiny Esfir' Shub (Velikii Put')" (About a picture by Esfir' Shub [Velikii Put']), *Novyi LEF,* nos. 8-9 (1927): 52-54.

[107] Shklovskii, "Oshibki i izobreteniia" (Mistakes and inventions), *Novyi LEF,* nos. 11-12 (1927): 29-33.

[108] Shklovskii, "Sergei Eisenstein i neigrovaia fil'ma," 34-35.

to its presence. On the other hand, cinematic and literary works of fiction constantly and abundantly used documentary material. Therefore, according to Shklovskii, film workers should discuss priorities in the use of material, decide what is important to film now and not speculate about a somewhat arbitrary division into "played" and "unplayed."

Tretiakov wanted to maintain this division. He defended the merits of both "unplayed" documentaries by Shub and ideologically correct, albeit "played" films by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, objecting to the exclusive focus on documentary films and insisting on the validity of having an "agitational" Eisenstein along with the "informational" Vertov as the two main film directors featured in *LEF*. Tretiakov also underscored the fact that there was no "pure" documentary, even in Esfir' Shub's work, because even when she was working with documentary footage, she interpreted facts and put them together according to her understanding of filmed events. Speaking against Brik but without mentioning him, Tretiakov stressed the importance of evoking emotion in a viewer, not through titillating subjects, but through the expert filming of historical material. In order to classify the play films versus documentaries, Tretiakov proposed a complicated system of the "gradation of falsification of the material," according to which Vertov would represent the tendency for its least distortion, Eisenstein would be in the middle, because of his use of actors for historical figures and his staging of historical events, and the extreme would be a conventional fictional film, which used professional actors and was adapted from a literary work. [109]

Brik considered that the important question was not "how to film" [*kak snimat'*] by determining the degree of falsification of the material (because the process of filming as an apparatus, technology, and a representational means already inherently distorted

[109] Sergei Tretiakov, "Kino k iubileiu," *Novyi LEF* no. 10 (1927): 27-31.

reality), but deciding "what to film" [*chto snimat'*] and "what aim to pursue when filming" [*s kakoi tsel'iu snimat'*]. Straightforwardly, he admitted that "filming the truth" [*snimat' pravdu*] was not the aim of LEF as he envisioned it, if this truth was out of line with accepted ideology: "Allow me to introduce an example, *The Poet and the Tsar*. Shklovskii and I attacked Guzman: 'It is a dirty trick, because it presents a distorted and vulgar Pushkin.' He [Guzman] said: 'It is possible, but our task is to make Pushkin a point of interest for the many millions of viewers, to make them love him.' And he is right, because if we are facing this task, then it would be absurd to show Pushkin as Shklovskii proposed: as a man sick with venereal illnesses and prostrating himself before Nicholas's feet."[110]

Brik concurred with Tretiakov on the importance of changing public's taste – of making it like documentaries and experience an emotional high "from real facts and not inventions." He insisted that the tastes of the bourgeois must be transformed, and it was the task of LEF to find methods that would secure the victory of factual material over the charm of pretty actresses. In this respect, Brik juxtaposed the films of Iakov Protazanov, a pre-revolutionary director who fled Russia during the Civil War and returned during NEP to continue making sentimental cinematic dramas, to those by Esfir' Shub. Brik considered Shub's *Fall of the Romanov's Dynasty* the ultimate success, because it set up the terms of competition with Protazanov by presenting the possibility of a high-quality film made entirely out of documentary footage, put together by montage.[111]

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[110] "Позвольте привести пример: «Поэт и царь». Мы с Шкловским накинулись на Гусмана: «Это гадость, потому что даёт искажённого, пошлого Пушкина». Он говорит: «Возможно, но наша задача многомиллионное население заинтересовать Пушкиным, чтобы оно полюбило Пушкина. И он прав, потому что если стоит такая задача, то показать такого Пушкина, как предлагал Шкловский, человека больного венерическими болезнями и припадающим к стопам Николая, было бы нелепо" ("Lef i kino: stenogramma soveshchaniia," *Novyi LEF* nos. 11-12 [1927]: 63).
[111] Ibid.

Although he usually did not write on behalf of or against individual filmmakers -- Shub was an exception -- Brik did participate in the discussion of the relative merits and drawbacks of Vertov's *The Eleventh* and Eisenstein's *October*, which was published in *Novyi LEF* in April 1928 and which concluded forums on films in the pages of the journal. In addition to Brik, Pertsov and Shklovskii took part in the debate, dedicated mostly to the perceived failure of *October*. This was Eisenstein's second release and his first public letdown after the enormously successful *Battleship Potemkin.*[112] As in *Battleship Potemkin*, in *October* Eisenstein applied his trademark method of "montage of attractions," which he outlined on the pages of *LEF* as early as 1923 when he was still directing the theater of Moscow Proletkult. According to this method, the "formation of the spectator" [*oformlenie zritelia*] with a particular agitational objective was the ultimate goal of any spectacle. To achieve this goal, an empirical and "mathematically calculated" "aggressive moment" of "attraction" had to be used upon the spectator, which would influence him "sensually or psychologically" in a particular ideological direction.[113] These "aggressive moments" of "attraction" were none other than violent and shocking visual scenes that overpowered the senses on a visceral level and could not leave any spectator uninvolved emotionally.

As the enormous success of *Battleship Potemkin* proved, Eisenstein's "attractions" worked well for film. However, in *October* this method failed in many critics' opinion. According to Brik, in this film Eisenstein attempted to "jump higher

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[112] *October* and *General Line* (a.k.a. *The Old and the New*) were released in 1928 and 1929 respectively, i.e., three and four years after *Battleship Potemkin.* According to Jacques Aumont, both *October* and *General Line* were attacked for "coldness," "artificiality," and "lack of realism." See Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 51.
[113] Eisenstein, "Montazh attraktsionov," *LEF,* no. 3 (1927): 70-75.

than his head" by tackling a subject that was too widely conceived and lacked a focus.[114] By comparison to *Battleship Potemkin*, which was structurally subdivided into three related parts, and therefore unified in treatment of its leading theme – a revolutionary mutiny on a tsarist ship by sailors who refused to eat rotten meat – *October* did not unite around a single action, but was dispersed into many such actions, emotionally charged scenes of various important events that led to the victory of Bolsheviks. As a result, the film was much longer and more difficult to understand.

Whereas Pertsov and Shkovskii were relatively mild in their criticism – Shklovskii in particular suggested that the "letdown" [*neudacha*] of the film may be the beginnings of a "new form," – Brik took the opportunity of Eisenstein's stumble to fault his method of relying on invention, "fantasy," and subjective emotionalism: "We, the LEF people, think that the October revolution is such a big historical fact that any playing with this fact is unthinkable. We think that any minute deviation from historical truth in the representation of October events must anger even a barely educated person. This is why we thought that the very task posed by Eisenstein – to give not the truth about the October events, but a cinematic poem, a cinematic fantasy – was doomed to failure before the beginning… " Specifically, Brik criticized Eisenstein's decision to employ an actor who "looked like Lenin to play Lenin" instead of using documentary footage. This, according to him, was a major mistake, which resulted in "disgraceful forgery" [*bezobraznaia fal'shivka*].[115] The gravity of the mistake laid in its fetishizing order – it

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[114] Osip Brik, "*Oktiabr*' Eisenshteina" (*October* by Eisenstein) *Novyi LEF,* no. 4 (1928): 30-33.

[115] "Мы, лефовцы, полагаем, что Октябрьская революция настолько крупный исторический факт, что никакая игра этим фактом немыслима. Мы полагаем, что мельчайшее отклонение от исторической правды в изображении октябрьских событий должно возмущать мало-мальски культурного человека. Вот почему мы считали, что сама задача, поставленная Эйзенштейну – дать не киноправду об октябрьских событиях, а кинопоэму, кинофантазию, заранее обречена на неудачу" (ibid., 30).

used a mere physical resemblance, a category that belonged to image-making, as the basis for showing a character who was so great that he simply could not be represented on such a superficial level.

Another fault of *October* that mystified the viewer and led him away from "real" facts and events was Eisenstein's imaginative use of metaphors. Such "things" as peacocks and a statue of Napoleon, for example, which were metaphorically juxtaposed with shots of Kerenskii, were never "shown in their real, non-metaphorical" setting, as part of the furnishings of the Winter palace. Also, Brik insisted that the "piquant" details of marionette theater, such as the hair sliding along the bridge or the horse hanging from it, should have been left out, along with the striking, but historically false events such as the beating of a Bolshevik by women with umbrellas and the sailors' rout of the tsarist wine cellars: "Everyone knows that the fight for the wine cellars immediately after the coup was one of the most dark episodes of October and that the sailors not only failed to smash the cellars, but attempted to drink them and refused to shoot those who came to take the wine. If Eisenstein could find such a symbolic representation of this situation that, so-to-speak, the proletarian consciousness had finally been able to overcome this wine, then this episode could be somewhat justified. However, when a real sailor breaks real bottles as a matter of fact, then we have not a symbol, not a poster, but a lie."[116]

Of the three critics who participated in the discussion, Brik was the only one who chose to discuss Vertov's cinematography, perhaps because he preferred Vertov's

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[116] "Всем известно, что борьба за винные погреба сейчас же после переворота – один из мрачных эпизодов Октября – и что матросы не только не разбивали погребов, а норовили их распить и отказывались стрелять в тех, кто за этим вином приходили. Если бы Эйзенштейн сумел найти такое символическое изображение этого дела, что, дескать, пролетарское сознание в конце концов с этим вином справилось, то этот эпизод мог бы быть кое-как оправдан. Но когда реальный матрос деловито разбивает реальные бутылки, получается не символ, не плакат, а ложь" (ibid., 33).

method to Eisenstein's. Vertov made *The Eleventh Year* as an experienced filmmaker, after the newsreels *Cinema-Eye* and *Cinema-Truth*, the 1926 films *One Sixth of the World* and *Stride, Soviet!* and a year before his famous *Man with a Movie Camera*. In *The Eleventh Year*, he experimented with all the "camera acrobatics" that he perfected in *Man with a Movie Camera*: extreme close-ups and panoramic shots, filming from various angles, at different speeds, and, of course, various explorations of cinematic editing. In this film, Vertov put into practice his so-called "theory of the intervals," which emphasized the change of movement between sequences of frames, and which, according to Vertov, comprised the very essence of filmic motion.[117] Brik praised Vertov's exposure of the technological possibilities of the camera, displayed through intricate camerawork, but criticized one of the film's most trenchant aspects – the montage technique or, in other words, the theory of intervals. For Brik, filmic movement could not replace a crucial component of any film -- the script -- which would tie together the disparate visual pieces and impart a logical sense to them:

> Vertov takes separate frames from a whole shooting sequence, combines them with frames from other shooting sequences and ties it all together with a common intertitle, thinking that this common intertitle will fuse the disparate semantics of the frames into a new one. In reality, these frames come unraveled, drawn toward their initial shooting sequence, and the intertitle is hanging over them, without uniting them in any way.[118]

As we can see, Brik criticized Vertov's use of intertitles from the point of view that emphasized the symbolic meaning that was encoded in the image and lay outside the printed word: "Vertov is attempting to substitute intertitles for the film script. He is

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[117] See Annette Michelson, "The Man with a Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* 10:7 (March 1972), 59-72.

[118] "Вертов берёт от целого съёмочного куска отдельные кадры, комбинирует их с кадрами от других съёмочных кусков и связывает всё это общею надписью, думая, что эта общая надпись сольёт различную семантику кадров в одну новую. В действительности же эти кадры расползаются, тянутся к основным съёмочным кускам, и надпись болтается над ними, никак их не объединяя" (Brik, "*Odinnadtsatyi* Vertova," *Novyi LEF* no. 4 [1928]: 27).

attempting to convey the semantics through the word, but nothing comes from this. Semantics cannot be applied to the film frame from outside it; it has to be contained within the frame. If the frame does not have it [semantics, meaning], then none of the word inscriptions can replace it."[119] To counteract Vertov's emphasis on the visual overflow of information, Brik once again offered Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* as a model of the documentary genre: it combined real facts – original documentary footage – and a cogent montage – with a method of presentation that made up a coherent story told in an ideologically correct way. Perhaps in response to Brik's stringent criticism, Vertov subtitled his next work, *The Man with the Movie Camera*, a "film without intertitles," refusing, however, to alter his montage methods.

It is interesting to note that six years prior to Brik's article, in the fall of 1922, the critic's protégé Rodchenko designed intertitles for Vertov's newsreel *Cinema-Truth*. In August of 1922, another theoretician of Constructivism, Aleksei Gan, launched the first journal dedicated to film in Bolshevik Russia, in which he praised this work by Rodchenko as the creation of "cinematographic language" that fused text and image.[120] In her article on Rodchenko's contribution to *Kino-fot,* Lodder remarked on the indelible connection between montage in film and photography, noting that the practice of filmmakers such as Vertov and Kuleshov influenced Rodchenko's first photomontages published in *Kino-fot* beginning with the first issue. Lodder suggested that multiple perspectives in Rodchenko's photography were influenced by Vertov's dazzling visuality,

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[119] "Вертов пытается заменить сценарий надписями. Пробует дать кадрами семантику через слово, но от этого толка никакого не получается. Семантика не может быть извне приложена к кино-кадру, семантика заключена в самом кадре. Если её в кадре нет, то никакими словесными надписями её дать невозможно" (ibid.)

[120] Aleksei Gan, "Kino-pravda. Trinadtsatyi opyt" (Cinema-truth: thirteenth take), *Kino-fot* 5 (December 10, 1922), 6-7, quoted in Christina Lodder, "Promoting Constructivism: *Kino-fot* and Rodchenko's Move into Photography," *History of Photography*, 24, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 294.

calling them in the practice of both masters as "the mobile viewpoint," which allowed the artist and the viewer to examine an object from all sides to receive a more complete sense of the object.[121]

As we can see, in 1922 Brik's ally Gan praised intertitles for Vertov's *Cinema-Truth* newsreels, and Brik trenchantly criticized them in *The Eleventh* six years later. Undoubtedly, the changed political atmosphere contributed to Brik's change of mind on the relative merits of the printed word versus images in Vertov's films. In 1922, the period of relative artistic freedom, artists were experimenting with the word as a conceptual means of expression, one that required a certain skill -- elemental literacy – in order to be understood. In 1928, the year of the launching of the First Five-Year Plan, the task of propaganda required maximum emotional impact on the viewer with the least amount of intellectual intervention. To comply with the new political demands, images with their symbolic power replaced verbal messages as the preferred method of communication with the masses.

The use of language in early Soviet films was analyzed in numerous studies, beginning with Eisenstein's own writings.[122] As film historians have discussed, Kuleshov, Vertov, and Eisenstein used creative montage techniques – shot-countershot, reverse-angle cutting, metaphoric juxtapositions – as cinematic devices, that allowed them to introduce new film semantics and experiment with novel ways of constructing filmic meaning. Sitney provided a vivid example of the creation of such a meaning by

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[121] Ibid., 298.

[122] Here I refer to collections to Eisenstein's writings *Film Form* and *Film Sense*, in which he unambiguously constructed a parallel between filmmaking and language. In particular, see chapters "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" (originally published as "Outside the Frame," an afterword to Nikolai Kaufman's *Japanese Cinema* [1929]) and "Film Language" in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1949), 28-44 and "Word and Image" (originally published as "Montage" in *Iskusstvo Kino* no. 6 [1939]) in Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1970), 3-65.

comparing Eisenstein's and Vertov's versions of a violent scene -- the slaughter of a bull. According to Sitney, in *Strike*, Eisenstein intercut frames of the slaughter with those of the killing of workers, thus introducing a metaphor and unambiguously suggesting that both events were similar in kind. Vertov, on the other hand, presented the slaughter in reverse motion, showing the butchered bull being brought back to life, thus investing technology with miraculous powers and at the same time revealing its illusionism.[123]

Writing about Vertov and Eisenstein, Annette Michelson likened the difference in their respective uses of montage to that between the dialectics of music and the metaphysics of mathematics. Both relied on the notion of filmic movement, which they theorized in terms of a concept of intervals, linked to the Einsteinian concept of a fourth dimension. Michelson argued that Eisenstein applied this notion to his montage technique by explicitly comparing it to a musical interval, which, in his interpretation, was directly connected to subjectivity of human feeling. Vertov, by contrast, comprehended the fourth dimension in film in its mathematical sense, eschewing the humanistic context of Eisensein's understanding of the term and emphasizing instead its link to science, technology, and the ability to manipulate time. Whereas Eisenstein conceived of the "interval" or filmic movement within montage as directly connected to human imagination, Vertov "insistently rationalized every stage of production," expanding the notion of montage into every aspect of his films.[124]

In his criticism of the two filmmakers, Brik attacked Eisenstein's reliance on effective visual details that would give free reign to a viewer's imagination, but he

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[123] Sitney, *Modernist Montage*, 41-42.
[124] Annette Michelson, "The Wings of Hypothesis: On Montage and the Theory of Interval," in *Montage and Modern Life, 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1992), 72-73 and passim.

supported his "ideogrammatic" use of montage, meaning Eisenstein's signature technique of the "montage of attractions," which prescribed "exercising emotional influence over the masses" by "influencing the audience in the desired direction through a series of calculated pressures on its psyche."[125] In Vertov's case, Brik praised the documentary basis of his films, but faulted his visual pyrotechnics as a misuse of montage. In his critique of Eisenstein, Brik did not say anything negative about the montage, but only about this director's filming methods, because they relied too much on hyperbole, metaphor, and simile – rhetorical devices that were fine to use in analytic arts, such as poetry, but which acquired a dangerously deceptive quality when applied indiscriminately to the visual mode. With all his support of the technical enhancement of visuality and all his political savvy, Brik mistrusted the illusionism of cinema, its mirror-like nature, which threatened the analytical abilities of the viewer, his power to get beyond the symbol, the image, and the violence of the real to the analysis of the basic elements of the sign system.

Brik, of course, was one of the first critics in Russia to support montage in photography, placing an article about it in *LEF* toward the end of 1923 and writing about it in September of the next year in the newspaper *Dawn of the East.* Both articles pointed to an inherent advantage of the photographic apparatus over manual representation in its ability to "fixate" [*fiksirovat'*] a fact with extreme precision, that would endow the representation with a superior documentary quality.[126] In these articles on photomontage, Brik devoted a lot of attention to photography, but almost ignored the montage aspect of the practice, specifically, the effect of simultaneously placing two or more images in one

[125] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions" (1924), in Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works,* ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 39.
[126] See chapter 3 of this dissertation.

representational space. The *LEF* article described photomontage merely as the "use of a photograph as a representational device" that combined photographic facts in order to have the maximum effect on the viewer.[127] In the *Dawn of the East* article, Brik defined photomontage in a similarly terse manner: "A photograph is a fact. Photomontage combines these facts in order to influence the viewer in a certain way."[128] There was no talk of the "interval" signifying the undefined space between the photographs in the montage as something that could be filled with a hypothetical time, past or future. Perhaps this elision of the aesthetic properties of photomontage occurred because Brik in his unabashed empiricism was unwilling to discuss subjects that did not pertain to an immediate visual experience or because his ideal montage would have no space left between the images, concentrating on conveying its message with an overwhelming force and leaving no room for the play of fantasy (Fig. V -- 11).

As we have seen, Brik's major criticism of Vertov was the latter's lack of respect for scripts establishing a logical conceptual whole. We can surmise that apart from Brik's belief in the importance of ideological integrity, this censure of Vertov's writing was spurred by a professional concern: in 1926 and 1927, Brik wrote a series of articles that called for a "regime of economy" in film production. In "100 Percent Defective," he described a typical scriptwriting competition, in which, out of 256 scripts, none won any prizes. However, Brik noted, even if there were a script that gained the recognition from the jury, the film made following this script would not end up any better than average. Brik concluded that the competitions were useless, because they conceived of a script as a piece of literature, whereas it was a fundamentally different literary form, intimately

[127] "Fotomontazh," *LEF* no. 4 (August-December 1923), 41.
[128] Brik, "Fotomontazh," *Zaria Vostoka*, September 21, 1924, 4.

connected to the process of film production.[129] In "Masters about Scripts," Brik clarified this statement by asserting that "The script should be written not before the filming, but after. A script is not an order to film, but a method of organization of the filmed material. This is why we should ask not 'what kind of screenplay to make,' but 'what must be filmed.' The treatment [*obrabotka*] of the material as a script is the secondary stage of work."[130]

In 1927, Brik summarized his views on the subject in a lengthy article, tellingly entitled "On the Essence of the Scenario Crisis." Here, Brik focused on the ideology of film production and requirements toward individual scriptwriters. In discussing ideology, he compared Western [*zapadnye*] and Soviet scripts: whereas in the West the scriptwriter's only obligation was to present "a motive for the filmed material," in Soviet Russia he must provide the "ideological and cultural-agitational" basis for the entire film. In order to achieve this goal, scriptwriters are expected to produce literary works of the first caliber, a totally unrealistic and unnecessary goal in the present conditions of film production. In order to produce usable film scripts, it would be wise to take a lesson from the West – to write scripts after and not before the actual filming -- but modify this method for the Soviet political environment. All the ideological weight that was put on the script now had to be transferred to the filmed material itself. If this material was light and fluffy, then even the best script could not transform it into an ideologically charged film.[131]

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[129] Osip Brik, "100% braka," *Sovetskii ekran* no. 25 (1926): 3.
[130] "Сценарий надо писать не до съёмки, а после. Сценарий не приказ снять, а метод организации уже снятого. Поэтому надо спрашивать не 'каким должен быть сценарий,' а 'что должно быть заснято.' Сценарная обработка материала – уже последующая стадия работы." (Osip Brik, "Mastera o stsenarii," *Kino-Front* no. 9/10 [1926], 12).
[131] Brik, "Po sushchestvu stsenarnogo krizisa," *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 8/9 (1927): 11-12.

Writing about individual scriptwriters, Brik insisted on the necessity of their professionalism: "All the talk about the uselessness of permanent scriptwriters in film production is senseless." Film studios could not hire professional writers on an *ad hoc* basis, because "a fiction writer … has to deal with the linguistic material… A scriptwriter deals not with the linguistic material, but with photographic material that requires different methods for its treatment. These methods cannot be deduced immediately from the activity of writing, but must be understood and adopted in production." A professional writer could suggest an idea, as could any more or less educated person, but the actual business of scriptwriting must be done by a professional, surmised Brik. This professional must "listen to all the possible film tasks," "choose the ones that appear most useful for realization and proceed to realize his specific tasks as a scriptwriter."[132]

V. 4. *The Heir to Genghis-Khan*

The "regime of economy" in film production, promulgated by Brik, did not begin and end with the writing of the scripts. This notion comprised the entire process of making of a film, where the writing of scripts would be confined only to one "section" [*tsekh*] of a "film factory," among a number of other "sections," dedicated to different aspects of film production. Perhaps because of the popularity of *The Heir to Genghis-Khan*, we have ample material that documents the process of the writing of the script and the making of the film. Brik related the story of the conception of the film as follows:

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[132] "Бессмысленны разговоры о том, что можно обойтись без постоянных сценаристов на кино-производстве. … И беллетрист и писатель имеют дело в конце концов со словесным материалом, разница в методах его обработки. Сценарист имеет дело не со словесным материалом, а с фото-материалом, который требует иных методов обработки. Эти иные методы обработки не могут быть непосредственно выведены из писательской деятельности, а должны быть поняты и усвоены на производстве… Роль сценарного цеха заключается в том, чтобы … прислушиваясь к возможным кино-заданиям, выбрать те, которые кажутся наиболее пригодными к реализации и в дальнейшем приступить к выполнению своих специально сценарных заданий" (ibid.)

> I ran into Comrade Novokshonov at the Writers' Club. I knew that he had been to the Far East during the Civil War and that he could no doubt recall a store of interesting facts and incidents.
>
> I put the question to him. He thought for a moment and then said: "There was an incident of this kind. The British occupational forces captured a Mongolian lad who had fought with our partisans. When they searched him they found an amulet containing an inscription in Mongolian to the effect that its possessor was the heir to Genghis-khan. The British wanted to blow the thing up into a whole affair and proclaim the lad Emperor of Mongolia. But it seems nothing came of it."
>
> I shook his hand and said: "Thanks, that's a splendid theme for a script." Novokshonov gave me a guarded look and said: "Yes, of course. I am writing a story about it. If you turn it into a script, you should say that it's 'from a story by Novokshonov.'" I agreed, of course, but Novokshonov never did write a story.[133]

Pudovkin recalled having received the proposal to make the film "from the side… at a tea table at Aleinikov's house."[134] In other words, whereas his previous successful films at Mezhrabpom Rus' and Mezhrabpom Fil'm,[135] such as *The Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg*, were conceived by himself in collaboration with the scriptwriter Natan Zarkhi, *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* was a different matter. Pudovkin did not name the person who suggested the project to him, but because Brik was the one who had the idea for the film, it is quite possible that he had also made the proposal.

While working on *Mother*, Pudovkin developed his signature style: long, Griffith-like shots and the development of a psychological intrigue based upon Stanislavskii's method. Pudovkin's films display bare spaces and focus on scarce, but telling details that reveal something about the filmic narrative: the passage of time or the

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[133] Osip Brik, "Iz teorii i praktiki stsenarista" in *Kak my rabotaem nad kinostsenariem* (How do we work on a film script) (Moscow: Kinofotoizdat, 1936), 48-49. Translated into English by Diana Matias as "From the Theory and Practice of a Script Writer" in *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 99-100.

[134] For Pudovkin's reminiscences on the making of *The Heir to Genghis-Khan,* see I. Rostovtsev, "Pudovkin on his Early Films" in Peter Dart, *Pudovkin's Films and Film Theory* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 65.

[135] In 1928, Mezhrabpom Rus' changed its name to Mezhrabpom Fil'm, which in 1930 was reorganized into a studio for children's films Detfil'm. See Ekaterina Khokhlova, "L'histoire," in *Le Studio Mejrabpom*, 29 and 31.

development of characters. Zarkhi matched Pudovkin in his view of film as a synthetic art that combined elements of literature and theater and as such focused on the psychological development of characters, which required, in turn, an apposite choice of actors. *The End of St. Petersburg*, another collaboration by Pudovkin and Zarkhi, resembled *The Mother* in its focus on a transformation of consciousness in a character: it was based on a story of a peasant lad who came to the capital to earn money and ended up joining the revolutionary workers.

Brik's story for *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* did not fit the psychological mold of Pudovkin's previous films very well, because it was more about a man's playing a role and putting on a mask rather than the awakening of his consciousness. Zarkhi called it "merely an anecdote" and refused to work on the script.[136] Consequently, Brik took the challenge and proceeded from the following premises:

> When I began work on transforming the episode recounted to me into a script, I first established what the basic idea of the projected film should be. I formulated it as follows: the occupational forces cook up a political bluff, speculating on the nationalist feelings of the local population, so as to strengthen their hold over the occupied country. But the affair comes unstuck because the local population and the subject of the bluff himself loathe the invaders and ally themselves with the Red partisans who bring them real, not sham, liberation.
>
> The entire narrative line of the script emerged in response to this formulation. First, I needed to show the relationship of the Mongolian population and particularly the central figure – the young Mongolian – to the invaders. I had to present a typical confrontation. To achieve this, I chose a ruse widespread in trading practice – the crude cheating of the natives by enlightened European merchants, buying up valuable raw materials for next to nothing. [137]

Brik went on to describe how the script "crystallized itself" by enumerating actions following from his initial idea: Sulim (Bair in Brik's script) goes into town to sell a silver fox fur; a British merchant takes away the fur from him without paying enough

[136] Dart, *Pudovkin's Films and Film Theory,* 19 and 66.
[137] Brik, "From the Theory and Practice of a Script Writer" (1936), *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 100.

and the enraged Sulim tries to kill the merchant. By this initial development of action, Brik achieves the initial conflict. After that, the narrative unfolds in such a way as to widen this conflict into a confrontation between the invaders and the native population: the British attempt to catch Sulim, but he runs away and joins the Bolshevik partisans. In his ideologically correct way, Brik presents the Mongolian's decision to join the Bolsheviks as a matter of natural choice:

> In its further development, the narrative had to link the Mongolian with the Red partisans. I had to find an extremely simple and expressive episode which would allow the sympathies of the young Mongolian to be revealed. To this end I made the young Mongolian the chance witness of a skirmish between a brigade of partisans and a brigade of invaders.
>
> Quite near him on the edge of a ravine a partisan and a British officer are engaged in hand to hand combat. The partisan is on the point of being killed. At that point, the Mongolian, for whom the sight of the British officer is already closely associated with theft, deceit and violence, flings himself into the fray and helps the partisan to throw the officer into the ravine.
>
> The incident established a tie between the Mongolian and the Red partisans. But it had to be further strengthened. I therefore introduced an episode in which the Mongolian is present at a dying partisan leader's farewell to his men. The profound grief of the partisans and the calm words of the dying man in which the word "Moscow" is frequently heard, makes a strong impression on the Mongolian and lends emotional force to his ties with the partisan force.[138]

In the first episode, therefore, Brik introduces the main character of the story and outlines the antagonistic forces of the struggle between the haves and have-nots. Next, the screenwriter develops the tension in the plot by having the British capture Sulim. In Brik's words, he faces the challenge of presenting the "discovery of the amulet" as "disrupting the natural flow of events" and preventing the invaders' "bluff" from being carried through. Brik proposes the following solution for this problem: his hero is condemned to be shot by the British, but the soldier chosen to carry out the execution is

[138] Ibid., 100-101.

uncomfortable with his bloody task and instead of killing him, merely wounds his victim. Again, Brik finds not only narrative, but also ideological reason for this turn of events: "This whole scene is essential firstly in order to differentiate between the occupying force and show that the active bearers of imperialism are the officers, not the rank and file soldiers; and secondly, to heighten the dramatic turn of fate which takes the Mongolian from the firing squad to the throne."[139]

Alternatively with the execution scene, we are shown the deciphering of the inscription on the ancient amulet by the British. As soon as this task is completed, they have the idea of presenting the captured Mongolian as the heir of Genghis-khan and crowning him as the puppet ruler of the land. The same soldier who wounded Sulim, brings him back bleeding, but alive. The captors patch up Sulim, dress him up in nice clothes, wine and dine him. However, Sulim is not comfortable in his new role; he does not quite understand his situation. In order to emphasize his hero's confusion and the lack of understanding between him and his captors, Brik inserts a scene in which Sulim confronts the same merchant who stole his silver fox fur and whom Sulim tried to kill.

> The merchant comes to command headquarters. He brings his fiancée a splendid silver fox fur. She puts it on and accompanies the merchant to a soirée held in honor of the future Mongolian emperor. The Mongolian sees the fur on the lovely lady's neck. He stretches out his hand and seizes the fur as his own property. A scandal breaks out. The merchant demands to be avenged for the insult, but this time the politics are different. The merchant is led aside, reasoned with and given to understand that there are important political considerations at stake.[140]

The end of the bluff – and the denouement of the action -- arrives during the preparation of the crowning of Sulim as the Mongolian emperor. To bring the story to its climax, Brik repeated the scene of the capture, flight, and execution of a Mongolian

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[139] Ibid., 101.
[140] Ibid., 102.

prisoner, which Sulim witnesses this time as an ally of the invaders. As soon as the soon-to-be emperor sees the captured Mongolian killed by the British, he tears off his ceremonial clothes and in a truly heroic fashion tramples upon his captors and escapes into the steppes.

As we can see, from the very beginning, Brik chose an ideologically correct political conflict not between individual people, but between three countries – England, Mongolia, and Russia -- as the central theme of his script, in which two powerful countries fight for influence over a less developed one. From this central core, he distilled the conflict somewhat by separating the central character – Bair in the film and Sulim in Brik's original script -- who proceeded to choose his political identity based on his direct experience of either exploitation and persecution from the British or fair treatment and respect from the Communist Russians. As an expected result of this black-and-white dilemma, Sulim/Bair threw in his lot with the latter.

According to Pudovkin, Brik put together the script in a week. Pudovkin, however, did not deem it sufficient – he called it "a very stiff skeleton of a scenario" – and proceeded to adapt it into a shooting script directly on the spot, in Mongolia. The eventual filmed version retained the "skeleton" of Brik's intrigue, but with substantial alterations made, one would assume, by Pudovkin. To begin with, the finished film had eight parts to it, as opposed to six in the original script. The added scenes deal with Bair's recovery and his mummy-like state throughout his illness during which he allowed the British to manipulate him into submission and almost be crowned the empire's puppet ruler. Pudovkin might have deemed it necessary to add these scenes in order to introduce his favored method of psychological transformation – to emphasize Bair's illness and the

resulting lack of physical and mental fitness to resist the onslaught of the enemy – to juxtapose it with his recovery, during which he fights off the British. [141]

Apart from this episode, Pudovkin had also increased the number of elements displaying the influence of the local Buddhist religion on the Mongolian population, such as the introduction of a praying lama in Bair father's house at the beginning of the film and making this lama (and not Bair's father as per the original script) an initial carrier of the sacred amulet that identified its owner as an heir to Genghis-khan. Other significant alterations to the first version of the script included an episode of cattle requisition by the occupational forces, shown in tandem with the scene of the visit to the temple by the British. This allowed Pudovkin to display the occupants' hypocrisy in relation to the natives and explain their hurried flight from religious celebration. And, of course, Pudovkin changed Brik's ending. In Brik's ideologically correct version, the film should have ended with Sulim (Bair) escaping from the British and galloping on his horse toward a mirage of Moscow, which appeared in front of him in the steppe. Instead, Pudovkin made the final scene that of a storm, both a literal storm in the steppe that unearths boulders and trees and a metaphoric one of a Mongol horde that sweeps away the British occupiers from their land. The film received criticism because of this ending, and Brik made it clear that he objected to its ideological fuzziness.[142]

Overall, the film won praise both from the Soviet critics for its thorough documentation of the life of the indigenous Mongolian population and for its emphasis on action, not drama. Even before its premiere on November 11, 1928,[143] the Soviet film

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[141] The original version of the script for *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* appears in Valiuzhenich, 63-73.
[142] Brik, "From the Theory and Practice of a Script Writer," (1936), *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 102-103.
[143] *Izvestiia,* November 11, 1928.

press delighted in the ethnological peculiarity of the film. The journal *Sovetskii ekran,* for example, printed several articles as early as the summer, which described the crew's adventures in the Mongolian steppes and the obstacles that it had to overcome in order to record the sacred ceremony of initiation of a reincarnated lama at a local temple.[144] Brik, no doubt, was an instigator of the documentary aspect of the film. As Leyda reported, he took the job on the condition that he traveled to the site to learn Mongolian customs.[145]

After the release of the film, it received a glowing review in the central newspaper *Izvestiia.* The critic Nikolai Osinskii praised it as a "perfect artwork" [*sovershennoe khudozhestvennoe proizvedenie*] and also made positive remarks about its unblemished "proletarian" ideology. Osinskii preferred this film to Pudovkin's earlier efforts, such as *The Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg,* because here "the tone is brighter… [there are] more comic and satirical scenes." Among the film's drawbacks, this critic named the ending, which he found captivating but ideologically flawed. Osinskii suggested that Pudovkin's ending could lead the spectator to believe that the Mongol people joined their leader only because he was an heir of their folk hero and not a faithful ally of Red Moscow.[146]

The film won extensive praise abroad, except from the British, who were offended by Pudovkin's annihilating satire of its empire's colonial ambitions.[147] In the United States, Harry Alan Potamkin wrote an enthusiastic review of the film**,** emphasizing the collaboration of the director and scenarist and categorizing the film

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[144] See "Iz monastyria lam 'Datsana'," in *Sovetskii ekran* no. 29 (July 17, 1928): 5; "Potomok Chingiz-khana," in *Sovetskii ekran* no. 31 (July 31, 1928): 5; and Valerii Inkizhinov, "Bair i ia," in *Sovetskii ekran* no. 33 (1928): 8-9.
[145] Leyda, *Kino,* 248.
[146] N. Osinskii, "O lente Pudovkina 'Potomok Chengis-khana,'" *Izvestiia* November 16, 1928.
[147] Leyda, *Kino,* 250.

within the confines of American cinema by making explicit its connections to D. W. Griffith and the Western. For Potamkin, *The Heir to Genghis-Khan* was "the culmination of the romantic technique of the Griffith-Western period," which overtook and surpassed its American counterparts.[148] Potamkin lauded Pudovkin for his mastery in making an "exciting" picture, but reprimanded him for giving in to Brik's emphasis on "performance" and the "antics" of authentic Mongolian customs, rather than choosing to adhere more faithfully to his usual line of a psychological transformation of his hero. [149]

On the basis of *The Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg,* Potamkin noted Pudovkin's proclivity for dialectics in the portrayal of his characters, when "the individual represents, as accumulant, the social movement: first (Thesis) as the apathetic of the order, second (Antithesis) as the collection of the antagonism, third (Synthesis) as the positive explosion of the new."[150] In *The Heir to Genghis-Khan*, this scheme worked as well, but on a superficial level, overshadowed by the dynamics of the action shaped into an "exciting" narrative by sophisticated montage: "In *Mother* and *St. Petersburg*, Pudovkin was still being supplied with social, human data from his own memory, a memory as close to the current society as the events of the films themselves. … This is why he set the example for the mass-individual in the Soviet film. But when he came to *Storm over Asia*, a material distant in its evidences, he gave over a large portion of the film to an ethnographic record of a ritual not built into the dramatic film, because the

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[148] Potamkin, "*Storm over Asia* and *Lincoln*" (October 1930) in *The Compound Cinema*, 474-476.
[149] Potamkin, "Pudovkin and the Revolutionary Film," *Hound and Horn* (April 1933), reprinted in *The Compound Cinema*, 422-434.
[150] Potamkin, "Populism and Dialectics," *Experimental Cinema* (June 1930), reprinted in *The Compound Cinema,* 176-178.

ritual was one thing tangible in the material. The film is constructed by an impresario."[151] The "impresario" was, of course, Brik.

As Potamkin's astute critique confirms, in *Heir to Genghis-Khan,* Pudovkin's dialectics were pitted against Brik's ideological expediency, his reluctance to give reign to imagination and the play of fantasy, encouraged by specificity of film's space and time. This attitude, I think, can be grasped best in terms of Nietzsche's metaphysical stance, his critique of dialectics in the emphasis on the relative stasis of being rather than the absolute movement of becoming, his preference for the *plurality* of life's forms and not for their *opposition*. Like Nietzsche, Brik was concerned with the empirical "here" and "now," with an act in the process of performance, and with the real-life multiplicity of such acts, rather than with the abstract development from negation to affirmation to a higher sphere of existence and on to an indefinite beyond. In this vein, Brik laid emphasis not on the special character of a filmic image that creates a "fourth dimension," its own world and therefore its own mythology, but on photographic empiricism.

[151] Potamkin, "Pudovkin and the Revolutionary Film," 427-428.

CONCLUSION

Throughout his multifaceted career, Brik had skillfully maintained a seemingly impossible balance between being a discrete private citizen and an outspoken public figure, a loved and loving husband and a promoter of free love, a spokesman for the artistic avant-garde and a collaborator of a repressive regime. If upon becoming familiar with the life of the critic we do not find ourselves dumbfounded by his lack of ideals, we search for answers either in the fin-de-siècle atmosphere, in which he grew up or in the circumstances of political turmoil and instability that formed the background for most of his life. Both provide relevant material for explaining Brik's paradoxical lifestyle: in his youth, Brik was immersed in art and interested in philosophy, politics, and social justice. Through these channels, Symbolist art and poetry, Nietzsche, and Marx formed his thinking. Infatuation with Maiakovskii opened up a particular version of Futurism for Brik, which allowed him to preserve those elements of his background that were pertinent, while he adapted to a new political situation.

Whereas the teachings of Marx formed a necessary foundation for the political action in Russia at the turn of the century, it is from Nietzsche that Brik took the notion of the will to power as a metaphysical force contained within an individual and not as an abstract struggle against someone else. This philosopher influenced Brik's appreciation of aesthetics, which, despite his preoccupation with politics, guided his career choices from the very beginning. There is little doubt that it was Maiakovskii's tragic sensibility in addition to his poetic skill that won over Brik's heart and mind, in line with Nietzsche's glorification of the tragic genre, expressed most eloquently in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Also, the trademark defiance of the Futurists, and of Maiakovskii in particular,

had its precedent in the teachings of this philosopher. Brik's foray into the analytic study of poetry accentuated the empiric and nihilistic aspect of his thinking about versification in his refusal to reference the emotive aspects of the verse.

Politics entered Brik's life in earnest during the February and October revolutions of 1917, when it was impossible to refrain from taking a political stance without appearing supportive of the old regime. Before the Bolshevik revolution, Brik engaged only in artistic organizations, negotiating on behalf of left artists with other groups and party officials. After the Bolsheviks' hold on power was assured, he joined the art department of their Commissariat of Enlightenment, became a founder and editor of the newspaper of the art department, a member of the party, and a major commissioner of art on behalf of the government. In his role as a Bolshevik art expert, Brik fought against the popular notion of proletarian art as made by workers only and argued for the necessity of professional training in the arts. Brik's commitment to cooperating with Bolsheviks reached its apogee when he joined their secret police, the Cheka, in the capacity of a "legal advisor." Brik's work for the Cheka has indelibly marked him in the view of many as a devilish figure, willing to go to extremes in order to assure his grasp on power. However, Brik's stay in this organization lasted only long enough to mark him as politically committed in the opinion of powers-that-be. After initiation into the bloody works of the organization, Brik found a way to leave it without incurring the wrath of his comrades-in-arms. In his dealings with politicians, Brik proved to be an uninspiring and un-utopian pragmatic, taking the path of the least resistance in order to assure the stability of his political position.

Brik's political savvy allowed him to play a leading role in the hierarchy of the power structure within the Art Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, whereby he successively became the head of the Petrograd subdivision of Artistic Labor, head of the Moscow section of the Art Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, and, even if only for a brief time, head of the entire Art Department. However, bureaucratic promotion within the ranks of the Art Department was not the aim in itself for Brik -- he did it to further his agenda in the area of art education, which, he believed, should be oriented toward industrial production. Apart from an active involvement in the reorganization of the educational system in the arts, Brik became the leading force behind a group of writers who publicized their ideas on the convergence of art and production in a booklet *Art in Production,* which gave the name to the theory of Productivism. Despite the Productivists' eloquence and Brik's political panache, the extent of their success in the introduction of their ideas into practice was limited, mostly because of the lack of support, financial and otherwise, on the part of the managers of industry and the larger strata of the population.

To shift the focus of their attention from global industrial tasks onto a smaller scale, in 1923 Brik, Maiakovskii, and their supporters founded a group LEF and its journal, which became a mouthpiece for propagating the marriage between experimental art and the ideas of the ruling Communist party. Because of their dedication to artistic innovation, the journal encountered resistance to its aesthetic stance from the party and its acolytes, who belonged to various organizations supporting art based on prototypes of the nineteenth-century realism. After *LEF*'s closure in 1925 and its reemergence two years later as *Novyi LEF,* the journal shifted its attention to propagating "literature of fact,"

photography, and film. This turn toward a faithful, albeit technologically enhanced representation of reality, challenged the Constructivists' earlier experimentation with abstraction and reflected an attempt to adjust to an increasingly rigid political structure, where Stalin became an unchallenged totalitarian ruler. In these circumstances, Brik turned to photography as the primary means of aesthetic expression, because of its capacity to momentarily "fixate" an ephemeral "fact." In his quest to construct an ideologically compliant art, Brik clearly preferred photography to film, because it was easier to convey a clear ideological message in a photographic still rather than in a moving image. In film, the cinematic movement added the "fourth dimension" into the viewer's orbit,[1] which was prone to ignite his fantasy and imagination -- a dangerous chance in the circumstances of a political censorship. In accordance with his credo of political conformism, Brik favored the documentary genre for both film and photography, which conveyed a clear and politically acceptable ideological message.

After Maiakovskii's suicide, Brik continued to write scripts for films, this time in collaboration with a scriptwriter Oleg Leonidov.[2] From 1930 until 1935, he also wrote librettos for several operas, reviews of film, literature, and art, and a few articles about Maiakovskii. In November 24, 1935, Lilia wrote a letter to Stalin, complaining of the neglect of Maiakovskii and his legacy and of the difficulties she had to face to preserve them.[3] Stalin responded by a famous resolution, calling Maiakovskii "the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch." After Stalin's verdict appeared in *Pravda* on December 5, interest in Maiakovskii's work reached unprecedented heights – his name

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[1] See chapter 5 of this dissertation.
[2] Brik, "Poet proletarskoi revoliutsii," *Pioner* 14 (1930): 15-16, quoted in Valiuzhenich, *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 34-35.
[3] The text of the letter in Russian is published in Katanian, *Lilia Brik, Vladimir Maiakovskii, i drugie muzhchiny*, 104-105.

was on everyone's lips; all newspapers, journals, and magazines wanted to publish articles about him; people who knew the poet wrote and published their memoirs. From this time until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 21, 1941, Brik dedicated almost all his time to writing and speaking about Maiakovskii.[4] During the war, he was evacuated to Perm' – a city in the Ural Mountains – where he worked as a journalist in two local newspapers, *Zvezda* (The Star) and *Stalinskaia putevka* (Stalin's Pass). Upon his return to Moscow in January of 1943 and until his death of a heart attack on February 22, 1945, Brik worked as a writer and as the head of the literary department for a propaganda agency *Okna TASS* (Windows of the Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union) that published posters with satirical verses ridiculing the Nazis and glorifying the Red Army.

Even though throughout his life Brik was closely associated with left art, he was not a utopian in the usual sense of the word. Etymologically, utopia means "no place" in Greek. Invented by Sir Thomas More in 1516 as a title for his famous book, it described a harmonious and well-functioning society, based on laws introduced by human efforts and located on an island. However, this island had no specific locale except in the imagination of the reader. As such, apart from its literary incarnation, it presented itself as a phantom, a spirit, and at times even as a delirium of a disembodied mind. Although Malevich, Kandinsky, and even Maiakovskii laid claims to proclaim universal truths through their art, Brik never suffered from cosmopolitanism – this is why he held fast to writing and the word, in the Russian language in particular, as an area of his dedication and expertise. Despite his knowledge of German, he never ventured beyond the borders of a specific system he knew well to assert any general laws about humanity that could be

[4] Valiuzhenich, "Bibliografiia," in *Osip Maksimovich Brik*, 265-343.

applied anywhere. He always evaluated his strong and weak points in a particular situation, which arose at a particular time in a particular circumstance, and he attempted to turn the situation to his advantage. There was little utopianism in this attitude, but a lot of pragmatism. Although Brik himself was convinced of his ideological grounding, from our perspective his pragmatism appears at times to overshadow the ideals it claimed to serve, as in the case of Brik's work for the Cheka. It is from this point of view that Susan Buck-Morss' call for more utopia in our lives makes sense, for the concept allows us to counteract the sometimes unwitting, but more often deliberate exploitation of the weak by the strong, a position that receives tacit approval of reactionary politicians.

In this light, the subject of this dissertation appears decidedly un- and even anti-utopian – Brik as a thoroughly pragmatic man who not only fought against belief in spiritualism and "inner truth," impossible to be described in words, but also conveniently reinterpreted Nietzsche in political terms, considering politicians on a par with artists as creative *Übermenschen* who made the realm of the everyday the arena for exercising their "will to power." To be fair, it was difficult to survive the Stalinist terror without extreme political compliance. Many an artist and a critic perished during the purges, only a few survived -- mostly those who at one time or another proved their allegiance to the regime by unquestioningly obeying the orders of the party and/or glorifying its deeds, no matter how inhumane or contradictory. Despite their political compliance under totalitarian dictatorship, in the circumstances of relative creative freedom, these left-wing artists created works that expressed the modernist belief in humanity and utopia and that demonstrated concern for the well-being of an average man. Brik was an impresario who sided with radical left artists from the very beginning of his professional journey and

whose cynicism in political matters did not overshadow a major role he played in protecting these radical and innovative artists from their detractors. This was an ungrateful task, because in the sometimes murky watershed between aesthetics and politics Brik ultimately sided with the latter and, which left him on an uncertain ground of an open collaboration with a reactionary regime. To Brik's discredit, he performed this task well, sometimes so well that even his friends began to doubt his integrity.

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Illustrations on pp. 341-417 are not included
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