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Art criticism: authority and argument	Donald Brook	66
The seventies: post-object art	Donald C. Karshan	69
Barnett Newman	Patrick Heron	70
Correspondence		70
News and Notes		71
Technology and art 17	Jonathan Benthall	71
Constructivism and the objective world	John Elderfield	73
Notes on Venice	Robert Kudielka Paul Overy	81
Four sculptors (part 3): Matisse	William Tucker	82
Letter from Prague	Jindřich Chalupecký	88
Four pages—Joseph Beuys		90
Ian Breakwell and John Hilliard		94
Roland Brener and Peter Hide: A written discussion		96
Commentary	Timothy Hilton	98

**Multiples supplement**

A discussion on multiples by Paul Overy, Rory McEwen, Joe Studholme and David Leverett 103: New and recent multiples 107: Directory of dealers in multiples 111.

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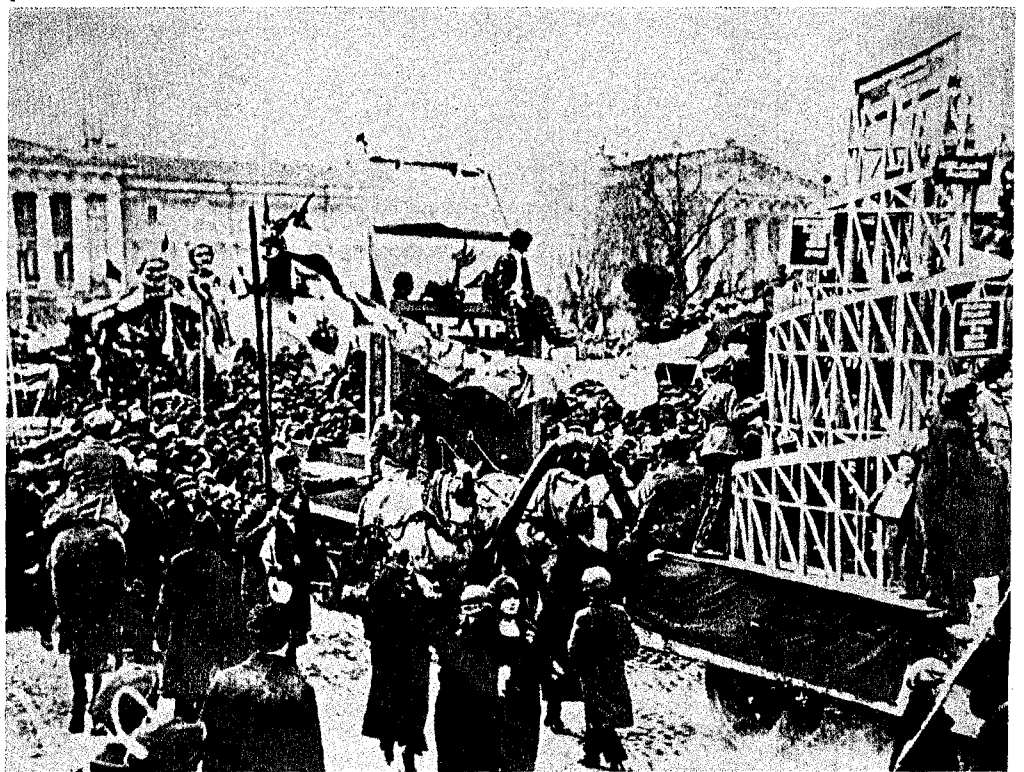
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# Constructivism and the objective world: an essay on production art and proletarian culture

John Elderfield



<sup>1</sup> The revolutionary monument; a simplified version of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* carried through the streets of Leningrad

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.

The term 'Constructivism' is now used to define so vague an area of art, both historically and thematically, as to be virtually meaningless; but in Russia of the early twenties its meaning was relatively clear. In his editorial manifesto to *Veshch*, El Lissitzky explained the 'life' connections of the word: 'Art which is constructive, which will not decorate life, but organize it...not distracting people from life, but helping them to organize it.' Although 'beyond' art itself, Constructivism was directed not towards anti-art but to non-art and thus represents, in post-revolutionary Russia, an attempt to achieve a genuine socially useful aesthetic, an attempt to answer Marx's call for a philosophy aimed not at interpretation but actually doing something.<sup>1</sup>

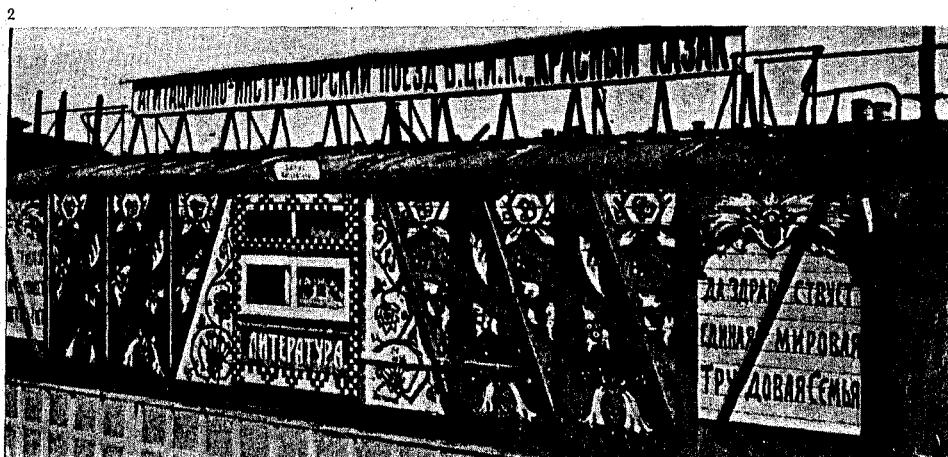
I

The term *Konstruktivism* was first used by Tatlin and his associates in 1920, and meant, basically, 'art is dead'. It referred not simply or necessarily to an art of construction-type principles, but beyond art to an involvement in social and technological ideals, through the materials of its society; and Tatlin's stand for these principles occasioned the schism of leftist artists, dividing those concerned with art-autonomy, the 'Suprematists' and 'Realists',<sup>2</sup> and those who from respect for the state established felt it their duty to make a usefully-orientated kind of object. Although the abandonment of pure art by Tatlin and his

connection coincided with the establishment of Lenin's 'New Economic Policy', which effected a 'normalization' of social organization, it would be wrong to assume that the compulsion for change towards the utilitarian employment of artistic labour was the result of political pressure from a hostile state: Tatlin, Rodchenko, Vesnin, Mayakovsky, Meyerhold, Eisenstein and others did not 'sell-out' to the state but gave their services freely in the hope of achieving a new society as much as a new art. Of the pure artists, nearly all by 1922 had left the country, retired to less prominent positions, or had joined the ranks of the Constructivists. Constructivism thus marks the end of the period of free artistic experiment, but the beginning of the attempts to transfer the foundations of art into daily life.

The great seducers of the human race, the aesthetes and artists, have demolished the bridges...and through a haze of mawkish narcosis they have offered art and beauty in exchange. Man's brains, the essence of the world, are being wasted and dissipated to swell the morass of aestheticism. Having weighed the facts on the balance of their honest relationship to the world's inhabitants, we declare art and its bosses to be outside the law.<sup>3</sup>

Reading like a Dada manifesto, this pamphlet of the *Obmokhu* Constructivists (Society of Young Artists) reveals their intense and violent opposition to anything other than what one of their members, Yoganson, called 'direct usefulness'. It is 'the factory where the real body of life is fashioned', and the shortest route there 'is called Constructivism, the highest springboard into universal human



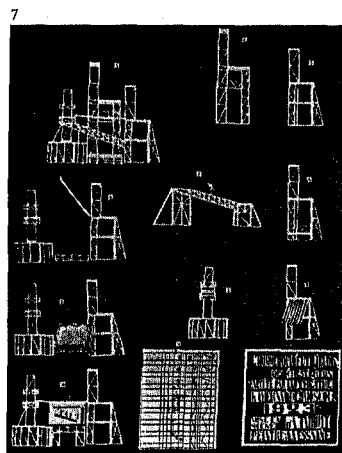
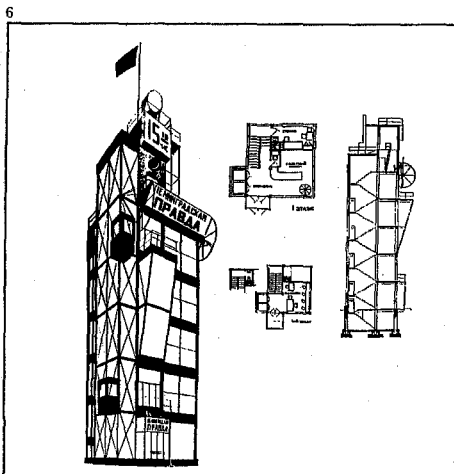
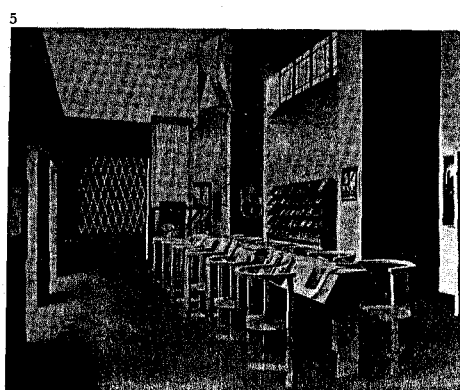
2 The Red Cossack, an *Agit-prop* (agitation-propaganda) train of the Revolutionary period

3 Production Art: Tatlin with home-made oven and suit in 1924

4 Rodchenko, Cover design for *Lef*, the Constructivist journal, 1923

5 Rodchenko, Design for Workers' Club, 1925

6 & 7 Constructivism in the city and the theatre: Vesnin's project for the Leningrad *Pravda* building and designs for the Kamerny Theatre production of Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday*, both 1923



culture'. That is to say, production-art is the key to proletarian culture; and the constructivist faction did indeed come to dominate the activities of the *Proletkult* (Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organization), which thus championed industrial collaboration with the artist not as decorator but as designer: 'It is not the task of the painter to embellish things already created, but he should take part himself in bringing them into existence.' The photograph of Tatlin with his home-made oven and suit which was published in 1924 shows how far from art and embellishment the Constructivists wished to go. But the disorganization of Russian industry, the lack of money and raw materials, the lack of official support, meant that they were 'left in an intermediate space between studio and factory', a space occupied by such activities that could be organized by the artist himself using such 'industrial' techniques as typography, photography, the film and poster. It was in such areas that constructivist art enjoyed its greatest triumphs.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, constructivist theory continued to assert that only in a true industrial collaboration could the production art which would be the true expression of the proletariat be developed. Hence the enthusiasm for constructivist ideas within the Proletkult, evidenced, for example, by Kushner:

The art-product and the product of industry are: 1, spatial; 2, conceived in time; and 3, serve a function. It is the job of the new artist-engineer to unite art and industry: the artist with his intuitive understanding of materials and visual forms must learn to master the modern machine-tools in order to create products for the organization of everyday life.

The Proletkult sponsored much environmentally-relevant art from the time of the Revolution—street decorations, posters, exhibitions, concerts and the like; but the most determined approach towards the factory ideal itself took place within the Moscow *Vkhutemas* or 'Higher Artistic Technical Studios', which had incorporated from 1918 the reorganized Moscow Art School and the Stroganov Institute of Applied Art (from

which the *Obmokhu* group emerged). Although the excessive freedom of the studios eventually caused their closure (each student chose his own teacher under whom he worked without any special restraint or examination), while they lasted they went far towards the ideal of eliminating the distinction between artist and artisan and emphasizing the 'materialistic' basis of their work (albeit in the somewhat unreal condition of state subsidy and sponsorship), thus prefiguring Gropius's Weimar School, even to the Constructivists' objections to 'style', as expressed in this manifesto from the first number of *Lef*, the official constructivist organ:

The material formation of the object is to be substituted for its aesthetic combination. The object is to be treated as a whole, and thus will be of no discernible 'style', but simply a product of an industrial order like a car, a plane, etc. Constructivism is purely mastery and organization of materials according to three principles: a, tectonic (act of creation); b, factura (manner of creation); c, construction.

Although Constructivism depends upon construction-type principles it is more basically a functional time-art,<sup>5</sup> concerned with the creation of objects in a world of objects, to which it has closer affinities than to the illusionist act of painting. Nicolai Tarabukin's 1923 publication, *From easel painting to the machine*, is not only a manifesto but also history. But this 'from... to' approach to theoretical writing, to become useful later to Moholy-Nagy,<sup>6</sup> suggests that some values connected with art are transposed into the new machinist activity. This is supported by Alexei Gann's *Konstruktivism*, written in 1920 but not published until two years later: 'Art is dead', he writes, 'Let us cease our speculative activity (pictures) to take over the healthy bases of art—colour, line, materials, and forms—into the field of reality, or practical construction'. But the point was that they hadn't killed off art at all; rather extended their aesthetic principles ('the healthy bases...') into a non-art field with their objectivist preoccupations, thus supporting their opponents' charge that Constructivism was mechanistic fetishism.

But from the artistic point of view this machine-romanticism was important in that, as Lissitzky put it, 'it cut a way into the old idea of art, thereby launching the operation for the conquest of art'. 'It was the economy of the age which created the machine. The machine showed us movement, showed us circulation. It showed us life and how it vibrates and palpates from the forces that flow through it...' The machine, it is implied, gave to artists a clue to the workings of the life-force. And although they 'reached a kind of material-fetishism and forgot the necessity of creating a new plan', 'the merit of Tatlin and his colleagues lies in the fact that they accustomed the painter to working in actual space and on contemporary materials. They approached constructive art'. (In another place, Lissitzky talks of Tatlin's synthesis of *Technischen* and *Kunstlerischen*.)<sup>7</sup> The implications of technological theory are thus present not only in the work of true Constructivists but also in that of such artists as Gabo and Pevsner whose European activities gave it broad artistic currency. Moreover, the machine formed a common ground for both artists and architects and permitted the introduction of specifically aesthetic concepts into later architectural theory, for which the machine-idea itself was more catalyst than content. As Mumford has said, 'the control of the machine liberated the architects of this school (the International Style) from the canons of architecture and enabled them to superimpose on their compositions the canons of painting'.<sup>8</sup>

Within Soviet architecture, the Ladovskian *ASNOVA* group (Association of New Architects) of 1923, concerned with speculative formalism, gave way in 1928 to the constructivist grouping of Ginsburg, Melnikov, Kornfeld, the Vesnin brothers and others, who later took the name of *SASS* (Section of Architects of Socialist Construction), defining Constructivism in the quasi-functionalist sense of the derivation of a building from an objective formulation of each of its parts.<sup>9</sup> But this was as dangerous to vested interest as the formalist romanticism of their predecessors: since the concept of content was here

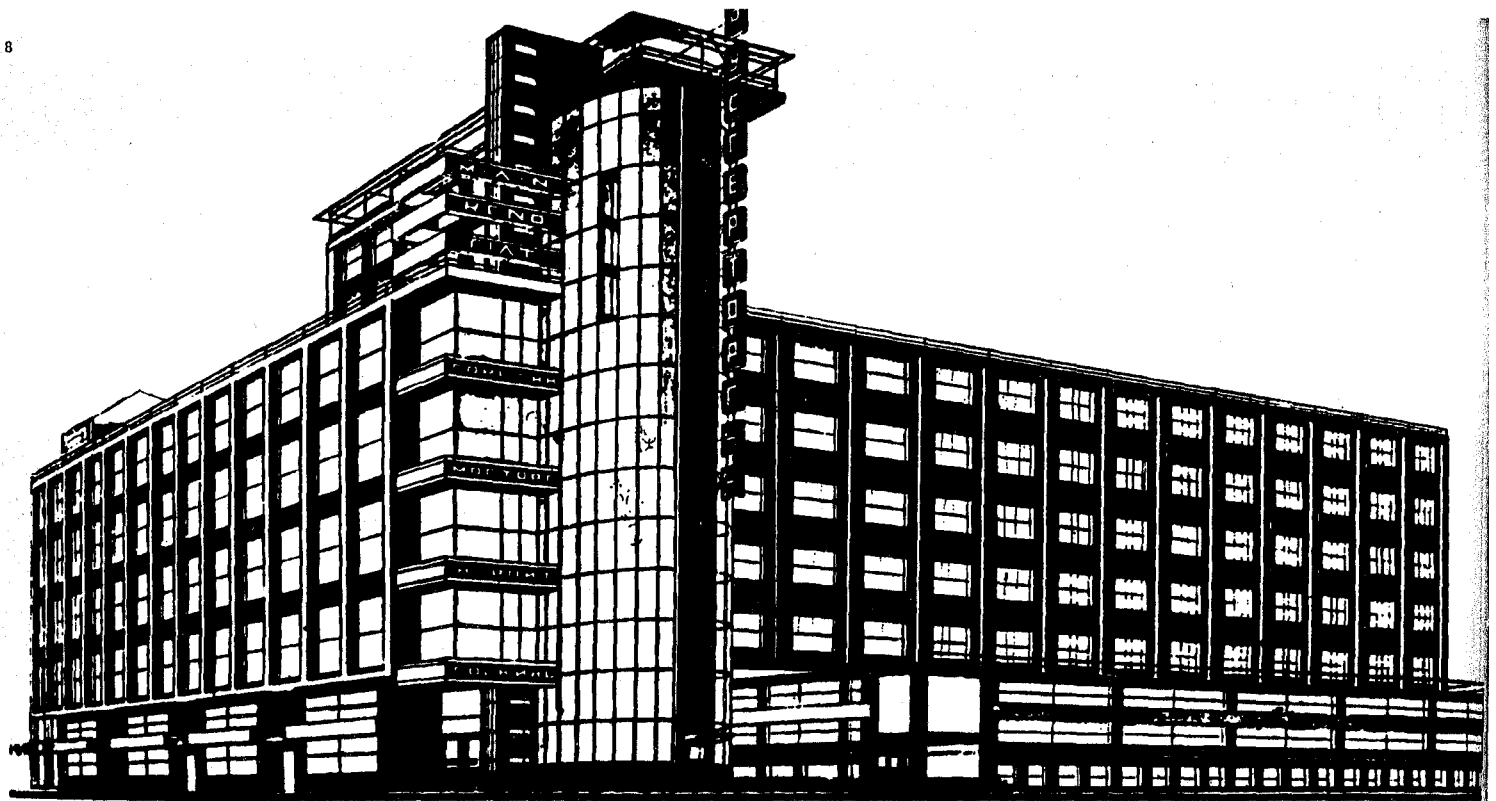
replaced by that of 'function' it placed their work further from the possibility of holding a Marxist meaning system. Functionalism was thus disgraced. But well before this, the autonomy of artistic groupings had been successfully challenged, proved heretical, and isolated by the state. What happened to the *Proletkult* well illustrates the authoritarian reaction to unofficial 'reformism'.

## II

The heyday for the *Proletkult*, as for all the advanced groups, had been the years immediately following the Revolution. From 1917–18 it had opened study groups and studios for workers, students and the armed forces, pursuing its objectives towards proletarian culture in such fields as theatre, films, publishing and the fine arts. It operated within the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Education, through the good offices of its Minister, Lunacharsky, whose policy of non-interference in artistic affairs, however, while welcomed by the *Proletkult*, met strong party opposition. But since the artists were now supported by and ideologically responsible to the state, once it had time to consider the social role of the artist from its own standpoint changes were likely to occur.

Although the Revolution had been the great opportunity for the *Proletkult* to put its ideas into practice, it had been formed as early as 1906; and in its early years the philosophical notions of its ideological leader, A. A. Malinovsky, called Bogdanov, had come under sharp attack from Lenin. This dispute deserves mention here for the light it throws on some basic principles of Russian revolutionary aesthetics, as well as for the later history of the *Proletkult* itself.<sup>10</sup>

The year prior to Lenin's foundation of the Communist party in 1903,<sup>11</sup> his *What is to be done?* described his ambitions for the party as the 'vanguard of the revolutionary forces of our time' (using, incidentally, the Russian word *avangard*),<sup>12</sup> insisting on narrow centralized control and opposing 'spontaneity'. The schism of Anarchists and Marxists at the Hague Congress of the 1st International had already been caused by similar problems: one



of the dilemmas of Marxist theory had been that while Marx was concerned to effect an equilibrium between voluntarism and determinism, consciousness and existence, his insistence on the foundation of his system on so-called scientific principles led to an over-emphasis on a kind of fatalism irreconcilable with either voluntarism or with the idea of sensible experience. In the introduction to *Capital* he wrote: 'The ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into terms of thought'. Until 1904, when he joined the Mensheviks, Plekhanov had been Lenin's ideological adviser, and Plekhanov had refuted this idea of a passive reflection of reality, suggesting instead that received sensations are symbols to be decoded and activated in the mind. Lenin, however, came to oppose this, following the orthodoxy that sensation provides 'mirror-reflections of things', while on the organizational front similarly opposing Plekhanov's activist, voluntarist, emphasis. At this time, however, when he desperately needed support, Lenin enrolled a small group of intellectuals led by Bogdanov and influenced by the phenomenalist ideas of Ernst Mach.<sup>18</sup> But Bogdanov's acceptance from Machism of the monistic notion that the physical does not exist except in sensible experience, and the publication of these views in 1908, incensed Lenin, who recognized a threat to materialism. His reply (*Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, 1909) identified reality to matter. Refuting the more 'dynamic' notions of the phenomenologists he warned that to admit the mental coordination of experience was to open the way to the heresy of idealism. Moreover, the publication of factious opinion was incompatible with Lenin's

theory of a vanguard party and any diversion from party doctrine a threat to its 'democratic centralism', as it came later to be called.

Two points are thus involved: the degree of willing subordination to centralized control and the relationship to dogmatic materialism. In the history of the avantgarde before the First World War, most artists, not surprisingly, avoided centralization like the plague for its links with academics and governments, and, when politically inclined, veered towards the anarchist ideal which, while positing social ambitions, allowed far more room for individualist freedom and self-expression, its spontaneous and romanticist objectives for 'revolt' rather than 'revolution' finding sympathy in the self-centered attitudes of artists revelling in the activist and antagonist aspects of social change rather than in its specific creeds.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it probably isn't too strong to suggest, as Jeff Nuttall has done, that Anarchism is 'the only firm political ground for art'. While the dynamism of the Russian revolutionary movement enrolled the leftist artists to its cause it is only with difficulty that they can, as a body, be described as true communist artists. In the matter of submission to centralized control, no such requirements were demanded in the early years of the revolution, and when they were made the artists tried, as we shall see, to stave off this interference as long as possible—for in his interpretation of a state aesthetic Lenin came to follow, as did Stalin after him, the Saint-Simonian/ Marxist line that a socially relevant art is one that is usefully didactic, and comprehensible to the masses—i.e. realism, rather than anarchist-voluntarist principles of free expression favoured by the artists (incidentally, the anarchist Kropotkin

said in 1885 that realism was inadequate for expressing revolutionary ideas in art). But the Constructivists did come close to one Marxist idea in their wish to dissolve art itself. 'With a communist organization of society', wrote Marx (in his critique of the anarchist Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*), 'the artist is not confined by the local and national seclusion which ensues solely from the division of labour, nor is the individual confined to one specific art... In a communist society, there are no painters, but at most men who, among other things, also paint.' This is mirrored, for example, in Lissitzky's question 'whether art is a self-contained, independent domain, or a part of the whole remaining pattern of life'. He answered:

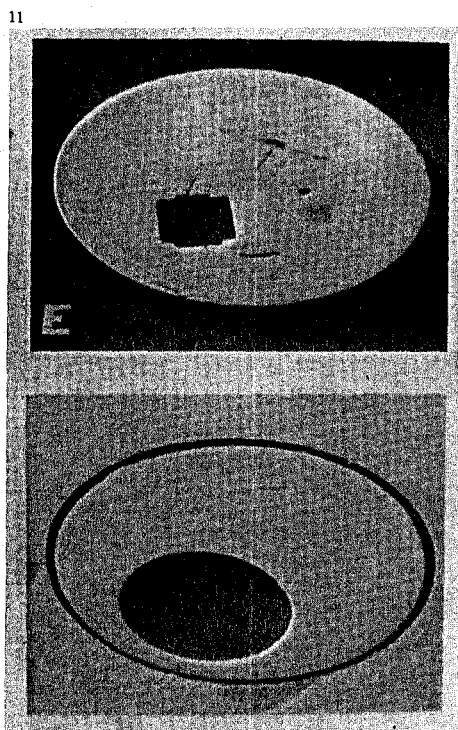
In the new order of society, in which work will cease to be slavery, in which there will no longer be small groups producing luxuries for a restricted stratum of society, but where work is being done *by everyone for everyone*, in such a society work is given free scope and everything which is produced is art. Thus the conception of art as something with its own separate existence is abolished.

And yet, this seems closer to Morris than to Marx, and related to the emotional mythicism of contemporary artistic utopianist thought: to Van Doesburg's 'modern' artist and Huelsenbeck's *neue Mensch* where art in its freedom reflects rather than submits to advanced social tendencies.

So far as materialism is concerned, of the Constructivists, Tatlin seems most obviously a 'materialist' artist by allowing form to be dictated by content-holding material, thus creating a determinist system equally applicable to revolutionary art and revolutionary



society. And, in opposition to those Constructivists who went into decoration and graphic art, Tatlin asserted that material should not be subordinated to simply formal tasks but rather ally itself to what he called 'concentration', namely the technological refinement which extends the simplistic use of material forms towards new complicated relationships determined by technological rather than aesthetic economy. Only with this collaboration 'a form necessary for life emerges'. He thus 'proceeded from material constructions of simple forms to more complicated: clothes, articles of utility in the environment'. And with the emergence of new cultural institutions what was needed was not so much 'a feeling for the superficially decorative but above all for things which fit the new existence and its dialectic'.<sup>15</sup> These objections to a formalist-orientated 'culture of materials' are echoed, but from the opposite direction, by Malevich who believed it to be 'about the beauty of the organism's feathers instead of producing the image through the utilitarian perfection of economic necessity'.<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested that Malevich was not so much an anti-materialist as an *artist* wishing to refute narrowly conceived materialist conceptions,<sup>17</sup> and there is probably much truth in this. His *God is not cast down* was not an attempt to discredit materialism (though his contemporaries took it as such) but an artist's attempt to reconcile his spiritual beliefs and his social conscience. Yet this was done through solipsism, by suggesting that both church and factory represent a struggle for spiritual perfection.<sup>18</sup> Malevich's social ideal is of Heraclitean flux rather than of dialectical forward Marxist movement. 'Man is also a Cosmos or Hercules', he wrote, 'around which

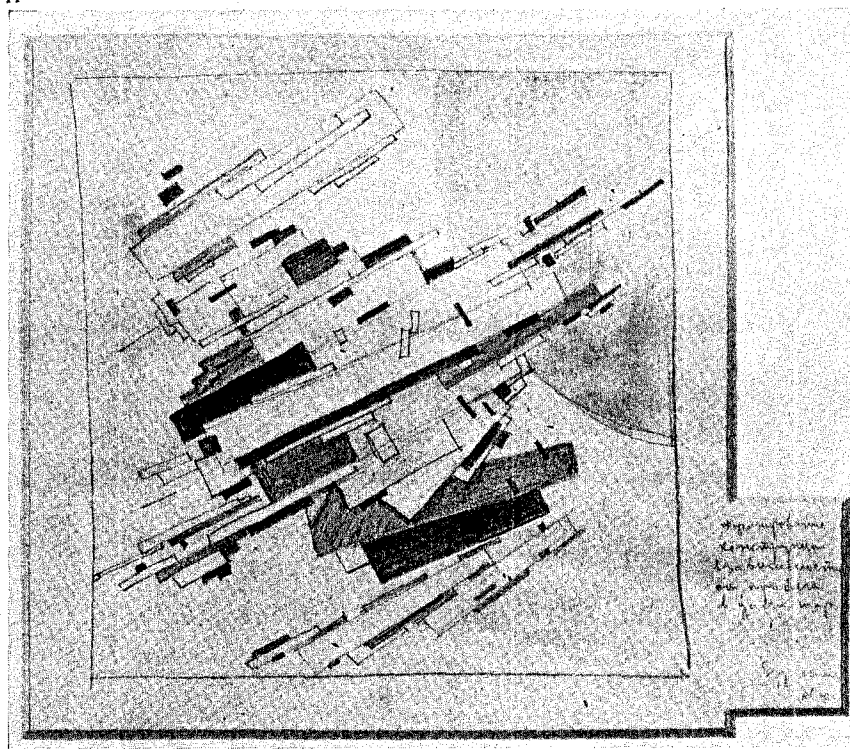
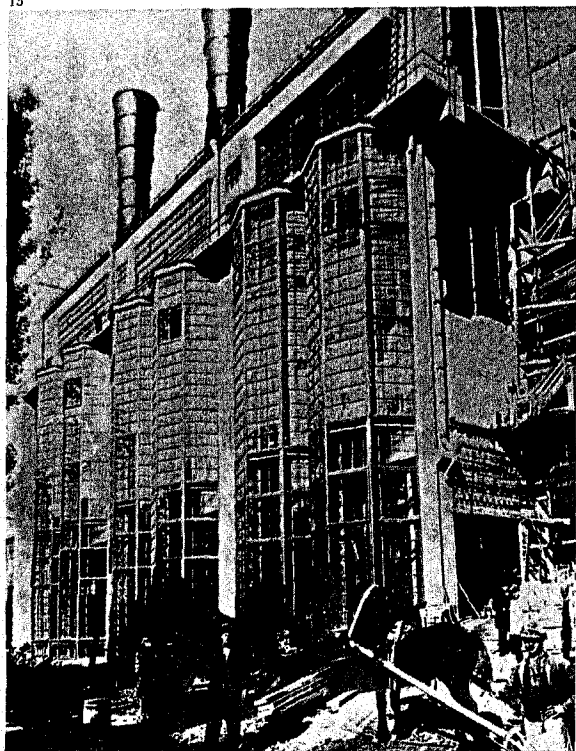


8 Golosov, Project for a commercial centre, Moscow 1926

9 Constructivist theatre costumes by Vesnin (*top left and bottom right*), Exter (*top right*) and Rodchenko (*bottom left*)

10 Book title-pages by Iliyn (*top right*), Ouchakov-Poskotschine (*top right*), Rhodosevich (*bottom left*) and Pojarsky (*bottom right*)

11 & 12 Leftist and official design: Suerin's 'Suprematist' plates of 1920 and plates produced by the state factory at Leningrad in 1924



rotate suns and their systems.' We still don't know enough about Malevich's philosophical position, but this sounds very reminiscent of the Proudhonian affirmation of 'incessant metamorphosis'. And it was Malevich who wrote: 'the ensign of anarchy is the ensign of our "ego"'.<sup>19</sup>

But, as with authoritarianism in general, it was the threat to organizational control as much as to theory which prompted action against the autonomy of artists' organizations. Lenin had objected to an independent role for the trade unions, why should he allow it for the arts?

In the August of 1920 Lenin's enquiry of Professor M. N. Pokrovsky, Deputy Commissar for Education, concerning the jurisdictional status of the *Proletkult* was occasioned by his fears that its autonomy was damaging to the 'democratic centralism' formally established that month in the famous 21st Article of the conditions of admission to the *Comintern*. The admission of the Commissariat that it subsidized the *Proletkult* led to action. Its 'special ideas', Lenin felt, were a diversion from Marxism, as was its wish to foster a national proletarian culture despite, as Louis Fischer puts it, 'the non-proletarian nature of the majority and the non-cultured condition of the proletariat'. What was needed was 'not the invention of a new proletarian culture but the development of the best forms, traditions, and results of existing culture from the viewpoint of the philosophy of Marxism and the living conditions and struggle of the Proletariat in the period of its dictatorship'. This was, in fact, a denunciation of the idea of a revolutionary art for a revolutionary state. Although the *Proletkult*, aided by Lunacharsky and by

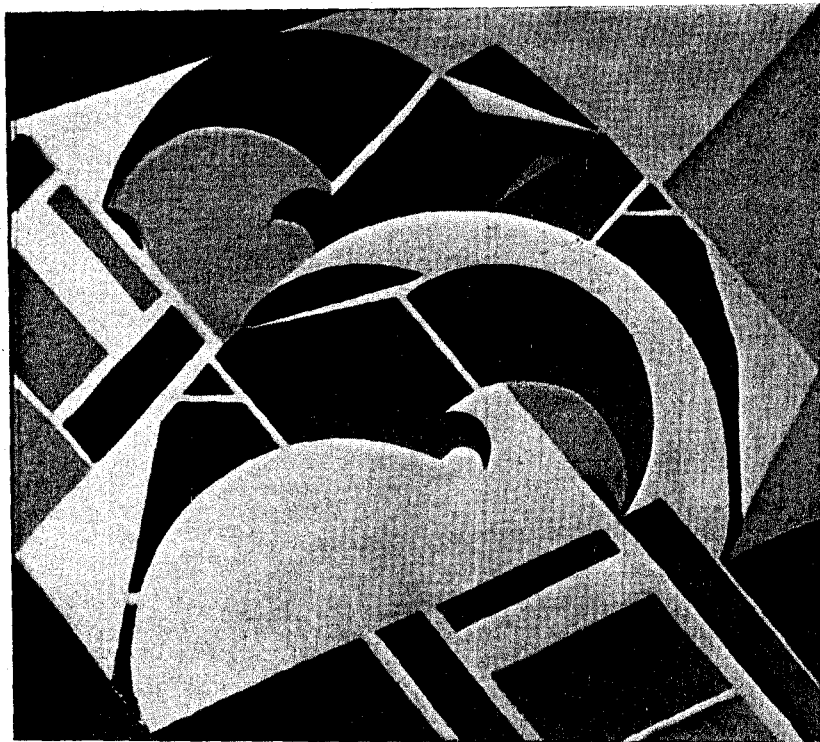
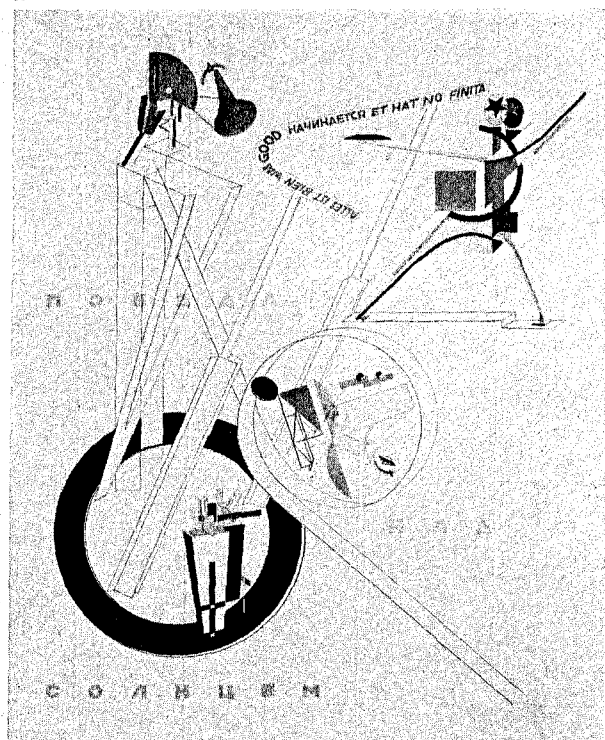
Bukharin, the editor of *Pravda*, continued to resist Lenin's wishes for another two years, in 1923 the organization was finally dissolved.

### III

It was from this period that developed the official alternatives to the *Proletkult*'s 'rightful' leadership of artistic affairs; and also the new official styles of Socialist Realism in painting and monumentalist classicism in architecture. In 1922 some 'previously leftist' pupils of Tatlin and Malevich stated their dissatisfaction with 'further analytical scholastic wanderings' in their first exhibition of the 'New Society of Painters' (*Nozh*); and in the same year the revived pro-realist *Peredvizhniki* group gave the impetus to the foundation of the 'Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia' (*A.K.H.R.R.*), within which painters like Brodsky developed a Socialist Realism, whose ideological premises came to be not dissimilar to those later developed in Nazi Germany. 'Art belongs to the people', said Lenin, 'it must be intelligible to the masses and loved by them'.<sup>20</sup> By 1929, all artists and architects were organized into a single co-operative, the *Vsekokhudozhnik*; and the April 1932 resolution 'On Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organizations' specified that no independent or unofficial groups were permitted and that the party had the rights of artistic direction. Lunacharsky, who had switched his support to the right in 1924, commented: 'All the aims of the Soviet State and of the Soviet State alone are creative aims, emancipative and constructive aims in the widest sense of the word... To point out the direction in which the artistic forces, the artistic attention, the artistic talents should be

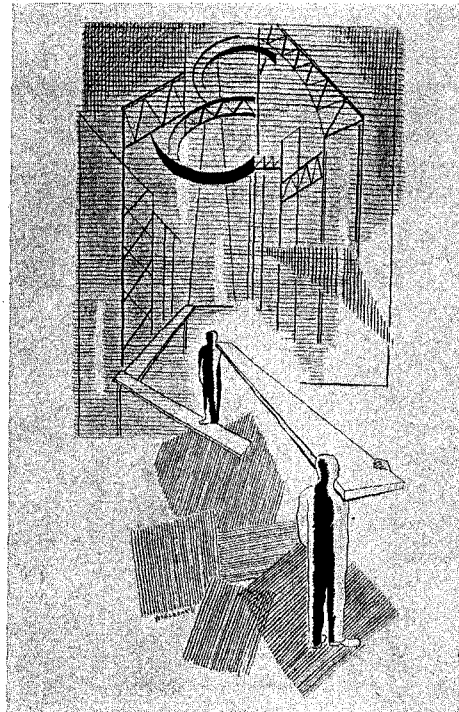
directed is a natural conclusion from our entire system of planning'.<sup>21</sup>

In architecture the same pattern appeared. The 1929 'All-Russian Society of Proletarian Architects' (*W.O.P.R.A.*) criticized leftist groups for replacing content by function, and began the move towards heavy, monumental design. The 1930 meeting of the Party Central Committee endorsed their actions, commenting that the 'harmful and utopian schemes' of the left 'which take into account neither the material resources of the country nor the degree of preparedness of the population, would inevitably have led to an enormous waste of means and to the complete discrediting of the very idea of the Socialist reorganization of life'. But even at this late stage there seemed some hope: the projects of Leonidov and Chernikov significantly extended earlier formalist spatial conceptions, and the 1930 publication (in Vienna) of Lissitzky's *Russland* encouraged such foreign architects as May and Taut to come to Russia (though, of course, they were disappointed),<sup>22</sup> and probably helped to elicit the large foreign entry to the Palace of the Soviets Competition.<sup>23</sup> And the Soviet press insisted that the new Palace 'must not look like the works of the past, must be specifically proletarian'. But the selection panel by-passed the submissions of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Lubetkin, Mendelsohn, Perret, Poelzig and others, settling eventually for the 'megalomaniac mode of scraped classicism' of B. M. Iofan, whose project was, however, elaborated up until 1937, when it looked like 'a telescopic wedding cake'. Lunacharsky commented: 'The proletarians also have the right to colonnades'. Thus the activist vanguardism of revolu-

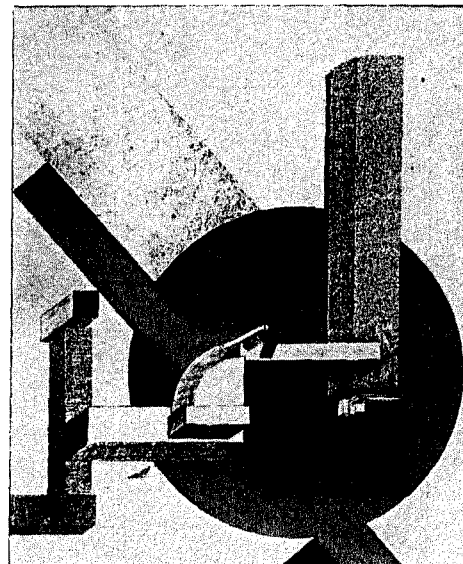


tionary art was ended. Answering Marx's challenge to alter the world, the production artists attempted to tear down the old ego-centric systems for new sociocentric ones. An art 'modern' by intent rather than by result, the present as something defined not just reflected, environment viewed socially not phenomenologically—the association of art and ideology and the interaction of artistic and social radicalism: all these questions were thrown up by the art of the Russian Revolution. Possibly the most significant was the idea of art transcending the strictly aesthetic to effect social or behavioural results: a new interpretation of the scope and function of art, ultimately 'beyond' objects, successively 'democratizing' and downgrading its autonomy until 'everything which is produced is art'. That this was not to last was, however, somehow implicit in the whole system. As Malevich wrote: 'We must recognize "short duration" as being the sharp distinction between our epoch and the past—the moment of creative impetus, the speedy displacement of forms; there is no stagnation—only tempestuous movement'.<sup>24</sup> □

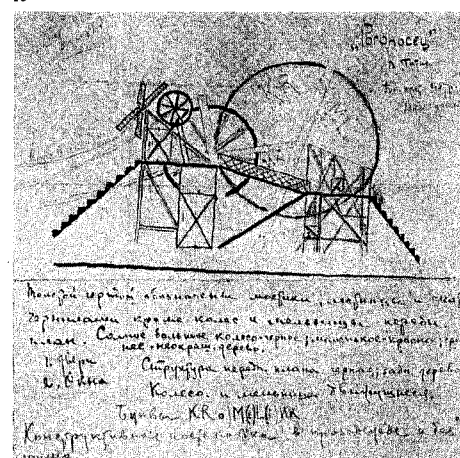
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<sup>13</sup> The old and the new, Moscow 1927 (architecture by Zoltovsky)

<sup>14</sup> Malevich, *Supremus 18*, 1916/17. Courtesy Grosvenor Gallery, London

<sup>15</sup> El Lissitzky, *Sieg über die Sonne* lithograph, 1923. Courtesy Grosvenor Gallery, London

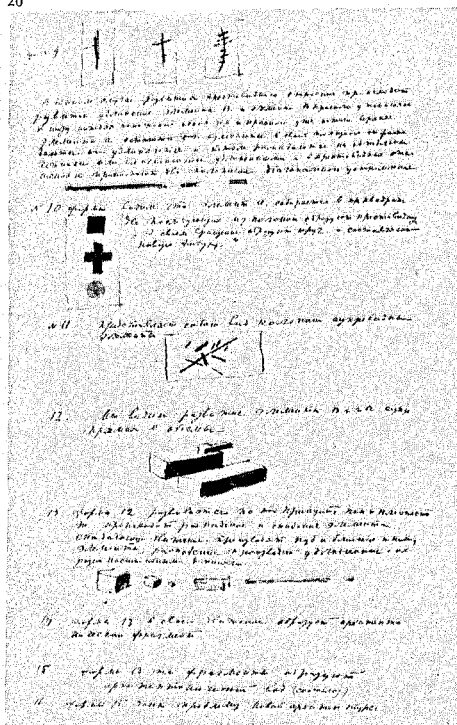
<sup>16</sup> Rodchenko, *Untitled*, 1920. Courtesy Annelly Juda Fine Art, London

<sup>17</sup> Andreenko, *Constructivist Composition*, c. 1920. Courtesy Annelly Juda Fine Art, London

<sup>18</sup> Lissitzky, *Proun 1 D*, lithograph 1921. Courtesy Annelly Juda Fine Art, London

<sup>19</sup> Popova, *Study for the stage set for The Magnificent Cuckold (Meyerhold Theatre)*, 1922. Courtesy Annelly Juda Fine Art, London





20  
The transition of Suprematism into architecture:  
Page from Malevich's manuscript, *Painting and the  
Problems of Architecture (The New Classical System of  
Architecture)*, 1927. Courtesy Anneli Juda Fine Art,  
London

<sup>1</sup> This article expands some points raised in my discussion of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (*Studio International*, November 1969, 162–167), and considers developments beyond the schism in Russian art of 1920. For this reason, Tatlin's tower is not mentioned here though it is, of course, highly relevant to the Constructivist theme.

<sup>2</sup> The latter being the signatories of Gabo's 'Realistic Manifesto'. Cf. Camilla Gray's review (of George Rickey's *Constructivism*) in *Studio International*, March 1968, 164–165, for an explanation of the etymological aspects of the words 'Realistic' and 'Constructivist'. Gray's article, 'Alexander Rodchenko: a Constructivist designer', *Typographica*, 11, June 1965, gives a useful indication of the range of Constructivist activity.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from El Lissitzky's 'Neue russische Kunst' (1922), *El Lissitzky*, Dresden, 1967. Other quotations from Lissitzky are from this source, except where indicated.

<sup>4</sup> Tatlin, however, objected to what he considered the 'decorative' application of Constructivist principles. See below.

<sup>5</sup> I.e. depending on real usefulness on the one hand and the current state of society on the other. It mightn't be too extreme to suggest the connection with recent 'real-time' concepts since Constructivism likewise abolished the ideal-time status of art.

<sup>6</sup> Moholy's *Von Material zu Architektur* was originally promised as *Von Kunst zu Leben*.

<sup>7</sup> *Russland*, Vienna, 1930.

<sup>8</sup> 'Monumentalism, Symbolism and Style', *Architectural Review*, April 1949.

<sup>9</sup> For Soviet architectural groups: V. de Feo, *U.R.S.S. Architettura 1917–36*, Rome, 1963; Anatole Kopp, *Ville et Révolution. Architecture et Urbanisme Soviétiques des Années Vingt*, Paris, 1967; Berthold Lubetkin, 'The Builders', *Architectural Review*, May 1932, and 'Soviet Architecture', *Architectural Association Journal*, May 1956.

<sup>10</sup> A succinct account of Lenin's relationship to the Proletkult is in Louis Fischer's *The Life of Lenin*, London, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> The party was in fact officially established as the

Russian Social Democratic Labour Party at Minsk in 1898, but its real foundation was the famous and stormy 2nd Congress of 1903 when Lenin's insistence on a 'narrow' party split it into bolshevik and menshevik factions. It was at this stage Lenin began moving towards the idea of totally centralized control (finally codified in 1920). In 'Party Organization and Party Literature' of 1905 he wrote that literature must become a 'part' of the great proletarian cause, the 'wheel and the screw' of a single great social-democratic system.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Donald D. Egbert, 'The idea of *avantgarde* in art and politics', *The American Historical Review*, LXXIII, 2, December 1967 (recently reprinted in *Leonardo* 3, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Mach (1838–1916), Austrian physicist and philosopher. Lunacharsky was also a Machist; but the influence of such ideas seems to have been stronger before the Revolution, and I don't wish to suggest that Lenin's 1920 opposition to the Proletkult was just based on philosophical differences (see below). Bogdanov himself left politics with the Revolution and became the director of the Moscow Institute of Blood Transfusion, where he died mysteriously as the result of one of his own experiments.

<sup>14</sup> For Anarchism generally, George Woodcock's *Anarchism*, Harmondsworth, 1963, is an impressive survey. The Neo-Impressionists, Futurists (via Sorel) and some of the Cubists held anarchist social views. Hence Malevich's statement that 'Cubism and Futurism were revolutionary movements, anticipating the revolution in economic and political life of 1917' ('On New Systems in Art', 1919, in Troels Andersen, ed., *K. S. Malevich. Essays on Art 1915–33*, 2 vols., London, 1969) has a genuine enough foundation. For nineteenth-century anarchism and the arts: R. L. & E. W. Herbert, 'Artists and Anarchism', *Burlington Magazine*, November and December 1960. The individualistic and anti-authoritarian attraction of anarchism to artists is well shown in Max Stirner's distinguishing of 'rebellion' and 'revolution': 'The Revolution aims at new arrangements; rebellion leads us to no longer let ourselves be arranged...my object is not the overthrow of an established order but my elevation above it, my purpose and deeds are not political and social, but egoistic. The revolution commands one to make arrangements; rebellion demands that one rise or exalt oneself' (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 1845).

<sup>15</sup> Tatlin's 'Art out into Technology' (1932), reprinted in Troels Andersen's excellent catalogue, *Vladimir Tatlin*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1968, 75–76.

<sup>16</sup> 'Suprematism. 34 Drawings' (1920). *Essays*, I, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Andersen, Introduction to *Essays*, I, 13–14.

<sup>18</sup> 'God is not cast down' (1922). *Essays*, I, 188–223.

<sup>19</sup> 'To the New Limit' (1918). *Essays*, I, 55. Malevich contributed to the Moscow anarchist paper, *Anarkija*, until it was closed down by the bolsheviks in April 1918; but he attacked only bourgeois, not bolshevik, elements in his writings. Andersen suggests that Malevich's connection with *Anarkija* 'was not so much a political engagement as an attack upon the conservative forces of the artists' union' (*Essays*, I, 244).

<sup>20</sup> It was Stalin, of course, who fostered the socialist-realist style (some say he invented the term at Maxim Gorky's *dacha* in 1932). Like German official art of the 1930s, Socialist Realism operated (and operates) within prescribed ideological concepts: *partynost* (party character), *ideinost* (socialist content) and *narodnost* (national roots), all of which are to be expressed in the art. For summaries of the development from 'unofficial' to 'official' art: Paul Sjeklocha & Igor Mead, *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967; Stuart Lawrence, 'Russian Unofficial Art', *Form*, 6, Cambridge, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> 'The role of the proletarian state in proletarian culture', 1934.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rudolf Wolters, *Spezialist in Sibirien*, Berlin, 1933.

<sup>23</sup> A wide range of the projects was illustrated in a special issue of *Architectural Review*, May 1932.

<sup>24</sup> 'On the Museum' (1919). *Essays*, I, 68.