



'Productivism and Constructivism:
A Study in the History
of Aesthetics and Art-theory'

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**Russian Constructivism
and Productivism:
A Study in the History
of Aesthetics and Art Theory**

AN INQUIRY INTO THE HISTORY OF AESTHETICS

CONSTITUTION OF OPTICAL DECEPTION

THE FUTURE OF ART
THEORY OF THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE OF LITERATURE
THEORY OF ART AND NOVELS
1917-1921

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION
THEORY OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

The body of this paper is broken into three sections. The first section attempts to outline the specific usage of the term 'Constructivism' at the time of its inception, and to further indicate the problematic and contradictory usages of this term and its related terms 'Productivism' and 'Production-art' by various art historians.

The second section attempts to trace some pertinent developments in nineteenth century art-theory and aesthetic thought in order to set a broad historical context.

It is in relation to these developments that the post-revolutionary debate on art and culture in Russia (which precipitated these terms) is described in the third section.

INTRODUCTION

In Camilla Grey's introduction to the Arts Council of Great Britain's Exhibition Catalog she states:

'This exhibition was conceived several years ago as an attempt to define one of the most important of modern art movements — Constructivism. We felt that this had become a much cited name but although Constructivism was recognised as a major contribution to twentieth-century art history, only a vague idea existed as to what the term actually meant. Although cited so often and so enthusiastically, particularly in the last ten years, contradictory and historically false ideas have become increasingly associated with it... The fact that it is ideas, primarily, that the Constructivists contributed to the modern movement makes their presentation in an exhibition a problem and challenge.'[1]

In this paper it is proposed to deal with 'Constructivism' in the context of a history of ideas, specifically ideas as to the social role of art. It is hoped that it will become clear that the primary problem, with the attempt to present 'Constructivism' through the format of an art exhibition, is that this necessarily obscures the rejection of the conventional 'art' / 'non-art' categorical distinction, that is a distinctive feature of Constructivist theory. For this reason, this treatment of the subject is undertaken in terms of a general history of ideas.

However, it is nowhere argued that the sole or even primary determinant on the nature and appearance of those objects variously designated 'Constructivist', is to be located in the realm of theory. There is therefore throughout this paper an artificial though necessary isolation of theory from practice. This is because the very nature of the discourse around Constructivist practice, i.e. art history, does not allow of proper access to the ideas evolved in relation to that practice. Thus the adamantly declared rejection of 'art' by the Constructivists is immediately dismissed by placing their products as objects appropriate to the field of a discourse which serves to reproduce the category they were ostensibly rejecting. This is to say that

making them the objects primarily or solely of art-historical discourse (and presenting this as unproblematical) inevitably obscures and invalidates the theoretical framework which informed their production. It becomes possible in this way to cite the 'anti-art' platform and simultaneously negate and erase it. This is precisely what Bowlt does in the introductory phase of his discussion of

Constructivist textile and clothing design:

'Constructivism did not regard itself as a school of permanent works of art. If , in the remote past , the work of art was created as a sacred act and as a metaphor for eternity , the Constructivist design and, indeed , much of the art related to it ...was produced as a momentary gesture , an intended transience ...No doubt the leading Constructivists ...would be appalled to learn that their various projects and sketches were being perpetuated in frames , in scholarly symposia and museum catalogs. The question of impermanence and the Constructivist esthetic is a fascinating one and undoubtedly distinguishes this boldly Twentieth century movement from previous styles and artistic systems.' [2]

In response to this art-historical approach , this paper employs an analysis which in form is modeled on Kristeller's work (1952-53). [3] Therefore the approach adopted here should be considered a provisional and partial treatment of Constructivism , seeking to highlight that system's anti-art stance and to identify this in relation to developments in Art-theory during the Nineteenth Century. It is expected that eventually this type of study will be superseded by the constitution of a more generalised and broad-ranging discourse. A discourse which provides a theoretical framework allowing of the description , analysis and interpretation of material productive labour , it's products and it's history , without inevitably or uncritically reproducing the category 'art' as one of it's *a priori* constructs. In the meantime however, it is appropriate to attempt to locate the emergence of Constructivist theory within the loose framework of the history of aesthetics and art-theory, so that the conventional art-historical accounts of the subject may be somehow counterbalanced and complemented.

CHAPTER 1

QUESTIONS OF ORIGINAL DEFINITION

The term 'Constructivism' first appears in a publicly printed form in Moscow, in January 1922. [2] It appears in an exhibition catalogue entitled, *The Constructivists: K.K. Medunetski, V.A. Stanberg, G.A. Stanberg*. The catalogue affirms that all artists should now 'go into the factory where the real body of life is made' and claimed that 'this route is called Constructivism'. [3] Further the catalogue states: 'The Constructivists declare art and its objects to be useless'.

The catalogue is preceded in date by a document circulated within the group during March 1921, which defines the term 'Constructivism' in similar terms and with which Medunetski and the Stanbergs were identified. The document in question is the 'Programme of the First Working Group of Constructivists of Moscow' (Appendix).

As well as Medunetski and the Stanbergs this group consisted of Aleks. G. Alexandrov, Rodchenko, Vasilye, Shtrom, and Karl Jorgensen. This programme stated:

'The future tasks for the group are as follows:

1. Ideologically:

(a) 'The task is to show by word and deed the incompatibility of artistic activity and intellectual production.'

(b) 'The real participation of intellectual production as an essential element, in building up revolutionary culture.'

'This Productivist group of artists within a couple of years came to adopt the term Constructivism to cover their aims and ideas. The precise origin of the name and its first use by these artists has not yet been established, but from 1920 onwards one finds it being used more and more in statements by this group, headed by Tatlin.' [1]

The term 'Constructivism' first appears in a publicly printed form in Moscow, in January 1922. [2] It appears in an exhibition catalogue entitled, *The Constructivists: K.K. Medunetskii, V.A. Stenberg, G.A. Stenberg*. The catalogue affirms that all artists should now 'go into the factory where the real body of life is made' and claimed that 'this route is called Constructivism'. [3] Further the catalogue states: 'The Constructivists declare art and its priests to be outlaws'.

The catalogue is preceded in date by a document circulated within Inkhuk [4], during March 1921, which defines the term 'Constructivism' in similar terms and with which Medunetskii and the Stenbergs were identified. The document in question is the '*Programme of the First Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk*.'

(Appendix)

As well as Medunetskii and the Stenbergs this group consisted of Aleksii Gan, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Karl Ioganson. This 'programme' states

'The future tasks for the group are as follows:

1. Ideologically:

(a) Proving by word and deed the incompatibility of artistic activity and intellectual production.

(b) The real participation of intellectual production as an equivalent element, in building up communist culture.'

Constructivists are pursuing only agitational aims: to contribute objects they have made and thereby to participate in the demonstrative discussion between the new groups and associations that have arisen within a proletarian society. This does not mean that we are turning back to art, or that we are retreating from those positions that the First Working Group of Constructivists occupied when, as early as 1920, they shouted forth the slogan "We declare implacable war on art".

The Constructivists' rationalization of artistic labor has nothing in common with the travails of art makers who are striving, as it were, to "socialize" the flowering branches of art and to compel the latter to apply itself to contemporary social reality. In rationalizing artistic labor, the Constructivists put into practice - not in verbal, but in concrete terms - the real qualifications of the object: they are raising its quality, establishing its social role, and organizing its forms in an organic relationship with its utilitarian meaning and objective.

The Constructivists are putting into practice this rationalization of artistic labor by means of material labor - that labor in which the workers themselves are directly involved.

The Constructivists are convinced that, with the growing influence of the materialist world view, the so-called "spiritual" life of society, the emotional qualities of people can no longer be cemented by abstract categories of metaphysical beauty and by the mystical intrigues of a spirit soaring above society.'
(Appendix B)

A great deal of emphasis is being placed here on locating the exact nature of the term 'Constructivism', as understood at its inception by those who initially identified themselves with it. There are several reasons for doing this, but the central and most pressing one is that the subsequent usage of the term by art-historians, catalogue writers, and museum curators, has given rise to much contradiction, and even the misrepresentation of its original meaning and intention. In doing this a valuable and informative development in the history of aesthetic thought has been partially, and on occasion completely, obscured from view.

It is relatively easy to establish the specific usage of the term 'Constructivism' at the time of its constitution, as a point of reference within a broad-ranging debate on the role of art in post-Revolutionary society. However, the related term 'Productivist' proves more problematical. Research has as yet not provided a conclusive date or

site for the term's inception. It does seem clear though that 'Productivism' emerges in tandem with the term 'Production-art', sometimes rendered as 'Productional-art'. As early as 1918 on the first page of the first issue of 'Iskusstvo Kommuny' [5], Osip Brik, a leading theoretician of 'Production-art', declared: 'Factories, industrial plants, workshops, are waiting for artists to come to them, to give them designs for new unprecedented objects.' [6]

It required an important re-orientation of art- theory to promote 'Production-art' proper, which is the use of industrial production as the medium of creativity with a utilitarian object as the end product. Thus 'Production-art' connotes a more integrated creative involvement with the processes of industrial production than merely providing designs and plans. The 'Productivist' worker would have a determining input into each facet of the industrial process. However, the concept in general remains somewhat ambiguous and indefinite allowing 'applied-art' conventions to come within its orbit, despised by the 'Productivist' theoreticians.[7]

From 1919 onwards there were various attempts to more clearly formalise and even actualise this notion of 'Production-art'. It is at this time that the term 'Productivist' more commonly appears in the course of debate. Before defining the usage of this term for the purposes of this paper, it is informative to contrast the following usages of 'Productivist'.

Dawn Ades speaking of an editorial by El Lizzitsky in 'Veshch' [8] states that its position is 'obviously very different from the position of Rodchenko and other artists associated with the "Productivist" wing of Constructivism.'

Naum Gabo [9] translated a 1922 version of 'The Programme of the First Working Group of Constructivists' and it appeared under the title 'The Programme of the Productivist Group'. [10]

Nikolai Chuzhak [11] writing in 'LEF' [12] in 1923 juxtaposed 'Constructivism' and 'Productivism' in the following manner:

'Constructivists are the only theoreticians from practical work, at the work bench and the plough (the Productivists are not an example to themthey tried to go from philosophy).'

Elena Chernevich discussing the emergence of a 'new concept' in 1919 'under the name of Production-art' states:

'Broadly similar "Productivist" ideas of bridge building to the world of industry infected the more conventional artistic spheres of cinema, literature, and theatre, but production art proper - the notion that artists had a role in shaping industrially produced goods for the masses - was the most powerful of such movements.' [13]

John Willett, in his discussion of politics and art in the Weimar period states that after Kandinsky departed

'... the theoretical argument within Inkhuk continued intensively throughout the second half of 1921, till by November that body could agree that since "the last picture has been painted" it was the duty of its members to go over to what Brik termed "productivism", in other words utilitarian graphics and industrial design.' [14]

Christina Lodder in her discussion of the work of Arvatov [15] states that for 'the theorists of production-art in LEF, the Constructivists were not Productivists' but rather an intermediary stage in the development towards fully fledged 'production-art'. Furthermore she asserts that in 'strict terms the only "Productivists" were theoreticians'. By this she intends such writers for 'LEF' and 'Furnace' [16] such as Arvatov, Tarabukin, Brik, and Kushner. However, it is never made exactly clear what distinguishes once and for all the terms 'Constructivist' and 'Productivist' from one another.

One final example of the disparate usages of the term 'Productivist' is taken from Margaret A. Rose's book 'Marx's Lost Aesthetic'. In the introduction she speaks of 'the lesser discussed theoretical bases of Soviet "Productivist" art' and 'Marx's "lost" Productivist aesthetic'. It is significant here that the term 'Productivist' comes to

designate a generalised type of 'aesthetic' and is not restricted to the post-Revolutionary context. It is clear from the arguments of this particular work that so defining the term is based more on the desire to show the relatedness of ideas from Saint-Simonism to both Marxist and post-1917 theoretical frameworks than reflecting any generally recognised aesthetic category. [17]

There is no clear necessary hard and fast line drawn consistently between 'Constructivism' and 'Productivism'. It is clear though that for Gabo, Chuzhak, and Brik in the past, and for Rose and Lodder more recently, one makes, or fails to make, a clear distinction consistently between the two according to the particular viewpoint or argument with which one is working. Thus as a very simple example, Gabo attempting to appropriate the term 'Constructivism' to his own practice, which is conventionally 'aesthetic' (i.e. fine art), qualifies the originators of the term as the 'Productivists' and associates them (properly) with utilitarian anti-aesthetic aspirations but drains (improperly) the term 'Constructivism' of its original utilitarian and anti-art content.

Several writers [18] identify Brik, specifically in relation to his article 'A Drain for Art', as the seminal contributor to the theory of 'Productivism'. Other theoreticians who are consistently presented as 'Productivists' are Arvatov, Tarabukin, Tretyakov, Kushner, and Chuzhak. All these thinkers contributed greatly to the formulation of the 'Constructivist' stance, though not all of them identified themselves wholly with that platform. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper 'Constructivism' is presented as being a specific instance of a 'Productivist' theory. While 'Productivism' is used to designate the general body of work by the theoreticians listed above. The term 'Productivist' is not used to designate any system constituted before 1917. That is to say, it will not be used to characterize any ideas to be found in Marx and Engels, or in the work of the Saint-Simonists. This is to avoid promoting an identification which is not properly historically established, and which obscures certain distinctions,

between Socialist and Marxist thought of the Nineteenth Century and that of the 'Productivists'. These distinctions, which will become clear in the course of this paper, pertain to questions of the universality of the category 'art'.

These terms 'Productivism', 'Production-art' and 'Constructivism' emerged in the course of a debate sustained under conditions of civil war, famine, and economic reconstruction (N. E. P.). It is consistent with this context that great emphasis should be placed on the question of the utility of art as a social formation, and not just which style was 'Historical Materialist' or 'Communist'. Furthermore, given that every aspect of the old social order was up for radical revision, it is unlikely that the fine arts could have been allowed to go unscrutinised. Lenin, Trotsky, Bogdanov, and Lunacharsky, all had contributions to make to this debate, as well as representatives from a number of temporary coalitions of artists and writers. The main need for debate was the absence of a clearly worked out aesthetic theory in the work of Marx and Engels. This in itself is a remarkable fact, and something that has not often been properly addressed by those who reflect 'Marxist' beliefs, or indeed by those who detract from them. [19]

Subsequent writers have elaborated detailed and comprehensive theories of art on the basis of Historical Materialism. Of particular importance for these writers are the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' [20] and 'The German Ideology' [21]. However neither of these two manuscripts was published until 1932. Paul Woods, discrediting Lodder's assertion that in certain aspects of 'Constructivism' there is 'evidence of an interpretation of Marx and the passages in "The German Ideology" where he put forward his most utopian interpretation of what the nature of art would be following the ultimate establishment of communism' [22], points to the 1932 publishing date. He goes on to point out that

'....few had access to Marx's early unpublished writings in the 1920's. Further, although Hungarian artists appear to have been closer than most to the Russian Constructivists, I have never seen evidence

that they were acquainted with the writings of Lukács, one of the few who was then developing Hegelian elements in the early Marx.' [23]

Marxist thought entered into this debate through the individual interpretations of his then published works by such figures as Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lenin, Lunacharsky, and Bogdanov. This is also true of Gan, Brik, Arvatov, and Kushner, among others. There were many related strands of thought at play in the intellectual life of pre-Revolutionary Russia which also informed the post-Revolutionary attempts to resolve the problematic: Art's Role in Society.

It is necessary to see the debates of Proletkult, Iskusstvo Kommuny, IZO, and Inkhuk, in a particular line of descent from certain Nineteenth Century engagements with the same problematic. There are two principle reasons for this. Firstly, in the course of the Nineteenth Century the parameters of subsequent 'aesthetic' debate were fixed with certain central themes, identifiable early on in that century, and even earlier in the mid-Eighteenth Century, being reproduced relatively consistently through to the present day. The post-Revolutionary debates become more intelligible and make 'historical' sense when looked at in relation to these earlier developments. Secondly, and perhaps paradoxically, it is as a rupture with Nineteenth Century conceptions that the ideas which emerged as 'Constructivism' and 'Productivism' take on their full significance.

This approach is different from conventional art-historical treatments of these subjects, which locate the importance of (a questionable interpretation of) 'Constructivism' in its relationship to subsequent Western European and American developments. The next chapter of this paper attempts to establish an overview of certain Nineteenth Century tendencies in art-theory, which prefigure the theoretical conflicts that occur in Russia after 1917. It is proposed in this way to set the subject in a general historical, context and identify specific contributory developments and ideas.

CHAPTER 2

NINETEENTH CENTURY AESTHETIC THEORY: THE BACKGROUND

Traditional aesthetic theory, which emerged in the Eighteenth Century, primarily from the work of Shaftesbury [1], Kant [2], and Schiller [3]. Since then, it has been treated as a discipline within philosophy, which has been seen as either a branch of analytic philosophy. It is of course possible to go back further than the Eighteenth Century to discover the aesthetic theories of say Aristotle, Plato or Longinus. However it is only historically recently that aesthetics was constituted as a separate discipline focused almost solely on art, its objects and its evaluative criteria. Furthermore, it is of significance that within philosophy aesthetics is set up in such a way as to divorce the realm of art from other areas of enquiry such as morality or politics.

This proceeds from a change in the general character of the theories posited. Those that emerge in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries tend to make Beauty (as a concept having a particular relevance to art) a matter of taste (i.e. a matter of how individuals are disposed. Thus Beauty is not discussed in terms of truth (i.e. the extent to which the work of art reflects or represents a particular social order) but is thought of in terms of the presence or absence of a psychological response, often identified in these theories as pleasure. Hence the 'beaux-arts' are often described by the term, 'art-agreable'.

However in the work of Schiller the particular psychological response envisaged takes on a socially integrative aspect. In his 'Lectures on the Aesthetic Education of Man' he asks the question: what is the ultimate role of art in human life and culture? In order to answer this question he combined his own 'Kantian' conception of the cognitive faculties [4], his interpretation of the history of civilization (particularly the classical world) and his strong perception that his culture was in a state of crisis and disorder. He was writing at the time of the French Revolution. He speaks of 'State and Church, law and custom' being 'torn asunder' and of 'anarchy' appearing.

Traditional aesthetics originated in the mid-Eighteenth Century, primarily from the work of German writers and philosophers such as Baumgarten [1], Kant [2], and Schiller [3]. Since then aesthetics has been consistently reproduced as a discipline within philosophy, variously treated as ontology, epistemology or analytic philosophy. It is of course possible to go back further than the Eighteenth Century to discover the aesthetic theories of say Aristotle, Plato or Longinus. However it is only historically recently that aesthetics was constituted as a separate discipline focused almost solely on art, its objects and its evaluative criteria. Furthermore, it is of significance that within philosophy aesthetics is set up in such a way as to divorce the realm of art from other areas of enquiry such as morality or politics.

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from labour'. As a consequence of this he says that:

'Man himself grew to be only a fragment ...and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, of his science'. [5]

In order that this fragmentation, both of the self and of society, be overcome he proposed as 'the instrument, which will keep pure and clear throughout every political corruption, the Fine arts.' According to Schiller, in the fine arts man is to find an experience which will reintegrate his fragmented world. Most importantly though, he argues:

'Though need may drive Man into society, Reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a social character. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide a man ...only the perception of the Beautiful makes something whole of him ...' [6]

In this way, Schiller responded to the problematic of art's possible social value, in 1790. He posits the aesthetic experience, of the fine arts, as the necessary psychologically integrative experience to make the individual whole and most importantly to 'confer on him a social character'. This is possibly the most exalted claim that can be made for the fine arts. In making it he established a keynote that reverberates throughout subsequent aesthetic thought; art as agent of social cohesion and construction.

It is the subsequent elaboration of this notion by Nineteenth Century thinkers, particularly in France, that eventually feeds into the early Twentieth Century Russian debates on the social purpose of art. One line of descent brings Utopian Socialist thought directly, and through the Decembrists, into the work of Chernyshevsky and Dobroluibov, the Realist literary critics of the 1860s and 1870s and ultimately into the work of Plekhanov. A second line of descent, brings Schiller's ideas through Hegel, contributing to the work of Marx and Engels, (who appear to have been also

influenced by the Saint-Simonists) and in this way, into the work of Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, etc.

Beardsley in his survey history of aesthetics argues:

'Nineteenth century thinkers under the double impact of revolutionary political developments and the emergence of a truly scientific social science took up a theme that had not been given such serious attention between Plato and Schiller: the role of art in human society.'[7]

In pointing out these two factors, political revolution and the advance of the social sciences, he is omitting a third element that promoted the examination of art for its possible social 'operation.' That is, the relative newness of the constitution of the fine arts as a separate, and specialised, discourse and practice. The separation of the 'beaux-arts' from the 'arts-mecanique', and their incorporation into a schema that related them to the liberal arts was only accomplished in the late Eighteenth Century. As Mainardi points out

'The term "beaux-arts" made its first appearance in 1640 but did not officially enter French language until 1798.'

While Misssook Song asserts

'The term "beaux-arts" was first used by Abbe Dubos in 1719 in "Reflections Critique sur la Poésie et la Peinture": and this term was made official by the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1793 in reference to the three plastic arts, painting, sculpture, and architecture.'[9]

The general point here however, despite this contradiction, is that the constitution of the fine arts as a distinct and distinguished field of activity, having a high cultural profile, is historically recent. In France the contest between the medieval system of classification, so that painting and sculpture are grouped as 'arts-mecanique', and the modern system, so that these are seen as 'beaux-arts', a category related to the liberal arts, can be traced in the conflict, (1648-1776) between the guild of painters and sculptors (the Communaute des Maitres Peintres

et Sculpteurs de Paris later the Academie de Saint-Luc) and the Academie Royale

de Peinture et de Sculpture:

'By the late eighteenth century, blame for the stagnating economy was being placed on the guild system which was accused of preventing all progress. Louis XVI abolished it altogether in 1776; within a few months, pressure from court and Parlement had forced its reinstatement. The next year he issued a Declaration clarifying the relationship the Academie royale and the Academie de Saint-Luc, for as he explained, "the arts of painting and sculpture must never be confused with the mechanical arts." He decreed that anyone who dealt in art or art materials had to join the guild, while all painters and sculptors would be forced to join the Academie royale which would henceforth operate the only legal art school. This decree not only outlawed the Academie de Saint-Luc, but it also completed the split between art and metier in France. Until 1777 there had always been artists of unquestioned eminence such as Vincent and Vigee-Lebrun, who by their presence in the Academie de Saint-Luc, lent prestige to an alternate system of art. From this date on, however, there was to be only one system for the fine arts. This was further clarified by a later decree specifically excluding from the Academy any artist involved in commercial dealings in art. This was the real artistic legacy by Louis XVI, and the Revolution did nothing to undo it.'[10]

The recent historical emergence of the fine arts as a separate field of practice forced early nineteenth century thinkers to consider the social utility of this formation, particularly given the expediencies of revolution and economic instability. Furthermore, from 1798 until 1849 there was an ongoing attempt to raise the industrial arts in status, comparable to the fine arts, by means of 'exposition' (this was a central issue in the conflict between guild and academy; the right of exhibition). In this manner the 'arts-mecanique', now a pejorative, were characterised as the 'arts utiles', thus qualifying the fine arts / 'arts d'agrement' as non-utilitarian. Thus theoreticians of art who did not wish to embrace the 'l'art pour l'art' conception of art were forced to examine the possible social potential of the new system. It is in this context that the work of the Utopian Socialists and reformers, Saint-Simon, Comte, Fouriere, and Proudhon must be considered.

These writers projected systematic plans for a rational society, and in doing so, also projected on the proper role of art in society.

In his writings Saint-Simon posits that in the social-order purged of feudalism and ecclesiasticism, the artist would take his place along with the artisan and the scholar, or scientist as a contributor to progress and general social welfare:

'Scientists, artists, and all those of you who devote your power and resources to the progress of enlightenment: you are the section of humanity with the greatest intellectual energy, the section most able to appreciate a new idea and most directly interested in the subscription's success. It is up to you to defeat the force of inertia. So mathematicians; as you are the vanguard, begin!' [11]

(M.A.Rose points to this as the early emergence of the idea of the Avant-Garde.[12]) Later in 1828 Saint-Simon argues

'Artists should also be considered as industrialists, as they are producers in many respects and among them they contribute greatly to the prosperity of our manufacturers by the designs and models with which they furnish the artisans.'[13]

This represents as Rose points out , an 'echoing' of 'the Smithian, even Mercantilist ideas of the eighteenth century, which had seen art justified as having commercial possibilities in terms of both its monetary exchange value and its value in improving the design and marketing of other commercial goods.'[14]

In Saint-Simon's work there is a twining of two important perceptions of the value of art. Firstly there is a legacy of the old 'guild' conception of painting and sculpture as varieties of conventional labour producing material values, yielding marketable products. Secondly there is the newly emergent sense of social utility in the artist's role, with its aspect of leadership. The Schillerian Idealist conception, art as an agent of social organisation, is integrated with an emphasis on the economic value of artistic labour, transposing it into a more 'materialist' framework. For the Saint-Simonists art is projected in the ideal society as an aspect of

socio-organisational and 'industrielle' labour. This idea was subsequently developed by Comte and Barrault within a quasi-religious framework, characterising the artist as a 'Priest'.

Auguste Comte, was Saint-Simon's secretary for some years and went on to elaborate his own Saint-Simonist ideas in 'Discours sur l'ensemble du Positivisme' (1848). In this he criticises the cultivation of art for its own sake, and its separation from the rest of life, as a self-defeating tendency reflecting the fact that 'Reason has been divorced for a long time from Feeling and Imagination.' In the Comtean society the arts would be the basis of education and would unite with industry to produce new human satisfactions. He argues that art is 'an ideal representation of Fact; and its object is to cultivate our sense of perfection' [15] by strengthening those sympathies with one another, those bonds of mutual love that are the true basis of social order. He and also Barrault, brings to Saint-Simonist thought notions of 'civil religion' and the artist as 'Priest'.

Brief mention should be made here of the work of Proudhon and Fourier. The political-economist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon included a reference to social purpose in his Comtean definition of art as 'an idealised representation of nature and of ourselves, its end being the physical and moral perfection of our species' (Du Principe de L'art et de sa destination Sociale', 1865). He describes 'L'art pour l'art' as accompanying from the 'decadence of the state'. Fourier in 'Cites Ouvrieres' (1849) describes art and beauty as being essential to a healthy social and economic system. [16]

Saint-Simonian thought entered Russia by 1829 by way of journals and books, as well as through a visit by some French Saint-Simonists in that year, a second visit in 1830 was refused entry. This second group was led by Barrault whose treatise on the artist as priest had considerable influence in Russia. Interest in Saint-Simonian ideas was further augmented by the Polish Revolution (1830-31).

Socialist thinkers such as Herzen and Ogarev promoted French ideas in Russia. Herzen is described as having not only 'pioneered the positivist and scientific mentality of nineteenth century Europe and of socialism in Russia' but also as having 'translated Saint-Simon's programme for a new technologically advanced society into one for a socialist agrarian Russia'.^[17] Other Russian contacts with these ideas can be cited in the case of the Decembrists.^[18] Michael Lunin met Saint-Simon in Paris. The 'esthetics of the Decembrist poets'(specifically Kondraty Ryleyev and Wilhelm Kiuchelbecker) 'imposed on the artist the obligation to contribute to human progress through his art'^[19].

'According to Ryleyev, the mark of genuine poetry was not its classification into 'romantic' and 'classical' but the degree of its educational enlightenment, its response to, and reflection of, "the spirit of the age", the aspiration towards freedom and the struggle against political tyranny. Ryleyev implicitly assigned moral and educational ends to poetry: and the poet was to serve as a prophet, a beacon who provides moral direction to society... Ryleyev consciously enlisted the poet as an active agent in the Decembrist struggle against tyranny and slavery because "all the physical and moral circumstances of the new world determine in both politics and poetry a much broader pursuit of activity"'[20]

Saint-Simonian ideas of social involvement and moral guidance through art are being intermixed here with related German Romanticism so that the 'materialist' productive aspects of artistic activity are being overshadowed by more 'high-minded' 'Idealist' conceptions of art. It is noteworthy that politics and art are being consciously united in the theory of these poets and this is being communicated directly into their work and into the work of the painter, e.g. Ivanov. (A century later the writers Mayakovsky and Brik would stand in the same relationship with the Constructivists.)

It is in the work of the literary critics primarily that the social involvement of art is most keenly articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century in Russia. In

1839 Belinsky was literary critic of the St. Petersburg National Times, when his formerly Idealist conceptions of the aesthetic function began to take on an increasingly 'materialistic' and socialistic aspect. It was at this time that he moved from a Hegelian aesthetic to a more strictly historical study of culture and literature, but also towards an interest in Saint-Simon, Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux, and Proudhon. Later he read Marx and Engels. In his article 'A Glance at Russian Literature'(1847), Belinsky wrote;

'The highest and most sacred interest of society is its own well being, equally distributed among its members. The road to this well being is consciousness, and art can help consciousness as much as science. Science and art are equally necessary:'[21]

For Belinsky art can only make this contribution to the development of consciousness when 'it passes judgment on the phenomena of life'. Belinsky influenced both Chernyshevsky and later Plekhanov. Chernyshevsky asserted that works of art may 'have the significance of a judgment on the phenomena of life', thus repeating Belinsky's viewpoint [22]. Chernyshevsky in 'The Aesthetic Relations of Art and Reality'(1855), established a critical social function for literature, suggesting that literature could be a mirror for real social relations. Thus for Chernyshevsky, art was to reflect rather than to truly lead society, that art was of greater significance than this for Belinsky, is lost. Similarly, Dobroluibov, Chernyshevsky's disciple, reproduces this 'realist' conception of art's social function. This represents a decline in the Saint-Simonian emphasis on art as an active agent in the construction of society, as opposed to being merely an index of its established social relations, and order.

At the very end of the nineteenth century in Russia there emerges from this background a most important though exceptional treatise, Leo Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'. Beardsley describes Tolstoy as having 'carried through the concept of the

social responsibility of art in the most thorough and uncompromising way'[23].

While Diffey in his treatment of Tolstoy's book indicates that no close attention has been paid to it by modern aestheticians because of 'the belief that there is no need to take seriously a theory of art which denies that most works of art in the European tradition since Shakespeare and Dante are not works of art'.[24] Tolstoy's work is a return to first principles and it represents a partial break with the tradition of

aesthetic theory thus far with its Aristotelian definitional approach.

'If we say that the aim of any activity is merely our pleasure and define it solely by that pleasure, our definition will evidently be a false one.....Everyone understands that the satisfaction of our taste cannot serve as a basis for our definition of the merits of food...

In the same way ,beauty or that which pleases us , can in no sense serve as a basis for the definition of art.....'[25]

Tolstoy consciously and deliberately breaks with traditional aesthetics, moving away from the psychological models of the philosophers of art and focusing on the objects of art as products with a function beyond mere pleasure. Beardsley presents the following synopsis of Tolstoy's central argument:

'If artistic production is an activity , its products are to be defined in terms of the function they serve....:hence to get a correct definition we must consider, not how much people like or dislike them (anymore than we would raise this question in defining "shoe" or "typewriter") but how they connect up causally, with other things, what effects they have , in what way they are "conditions of human life"(p.170). But this is decided, we have at hand the information we require for introducing normative considerations, for we can ask which works of art serve this purpose best.....

What, then, is the real function of art? "Viewing it in this way we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man".....Hence Tolstoy's proposed definition:

"Art is a human activity consisting in this ,that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."[25A]

Tolstoy concludes that good art is indispensable, for it is the means 'of the movement of humanity forward towards perfection'. Therefore 'the task of art is enormous' for only by its help can affection and trust replace the vast apparatus of police, courts, war, and force that now makes up the structure of society.

This work is important for the following reasons.

- 1) It marks a return to first principles.
- 2) It clearly indicates the existence of a class bias, inherited from history, as the exemplary works of merit in the fine arts.
- 3) It is the re-emergence, within a modified framework, of Schiller's exalted claim for the socially integrative function of the fine arts.

Absent from this work, however, is the strictly 'materialist' identification of artistic production as equivalent with all other forms of production, which is articulated in the post-Revolutionary context by the 'Productionists'. Before considering the post-Revolutionary debates on the social role of art, it is appropriate to consider the aesthetic ideas present in the work of Marx and Engels, and in the work of the important Russian theoretician Plekhanov. The absence of a well worked out theory of art in Marx and Engels was remarked earlier:

'Because of the early subordination of their aesthetic proclivities to the requirements of a revolutionary movement and to the more pressing need to devote themselves to the investigation of history and political economy, Marx and Engels left no formal aesthetic system, no single extended work on the theory of art, nor even a major analysis of an individual artist or art work....Marxism accordingly does not begin with a theory of art. There is no "original" Marxist aesthetics for later Marxists to apply. The history of Marxist aesthetics has been the history of the unfolding of the possible application of Marxist ideas and categories to the arts and the theory of art.'[26]

Another anthologist speaks of 'the fundamental absence of a theory of art in Marx's work, pointing out that:

'Marx and Engels situated art among the activities of the "superstructure" which maintained a "relative autonomy" from the economic base of society, yet were "in the last instance", determined by it. Isolated hints and occasional comments dealt with aspects of literature as such, some of which....later formed the basis of particular Marxist theories.'[27]

Within the body of work of Marx and Engels (particularly that restricted body of work available to the Russian intelligentsia before 1930) there is only articulated an ambivalent relationship between art as a semi-autonomous aspect of the superstructure and the economic base which is open to disparate interpretation. However there is within this a discernible legacy of German Idealism, and its suggestion of art as a lofty 'spiritualised' activity, universalised and reproduced as an unquestioned value. The argument being made here is that despite the ostensible rejection of, and modification of Schillerian and Hegelian aesthetics (Rose speaks of 'Marx's reinterpretations of and refunctionings of Idealist aesthetics..., where both Hegel and Schiller are refashioned for a materialist aesthetic of artistic production') Marx reproduces the category 'art' as a universal and ahistorical construct. It is important here to note the progression of ideas from Schiller to Hegel, and, as I will argue, from them into Marx, ultimately to find manifestation, in a thoroughly unselfconscious and unproblematised manner, in Lenin and Trotsky.

Anthony Saville describes the progression of ideas from Schiller to Hegel as follows;

'...in his letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man Schiller proposes that we elucidate the beautiful in terms of images which when internalised bring us closer to an a priori human life ideal...Significantly here the beautiful and the true are for the first time implicitly brought together in the image of the world that the artist presents to us...

Twenty years or so later on, in the Introduction to his Lectures on Aesthetics... Hegel is full of praise for Schiller, and wants only that his thought be clad in proper system ...For him, beauty, which is now definitionally what art aims at is explicitly characterised

in terms of truth: ...and the particular truths Hegel has in mind are those that make for active self-understanding. "The absolute and universal need from which art springs has its origins in the fact man is thinking consciousness, that he constructs himself, and indeed everything that there is, from within and for himself."...beauty will, as in Schiller's version, articulate ways of understanding ourselves and our surroundings... we are to look to the arts for truth...' [28]

Hegel explicitly conceives of art emanating from an 'absolute and universal need' rooted in the fact of human 'consciousness'. Furthermore art is considered a site at which pronouncements on the world may be made.

Marx in his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) designates art as one of the sites of ideological conflict (essentially a matter of conflicting pronouncements on the world);

'Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.....it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production,.....and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic - in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.' [29]

Marx seems to be precluding the possibility that the distinction between what is artistic and non-artistic i.e. the distinction itself as a categorical fact, and not just the criteria of such a distinction, might be an ideological construct, in and of itself, of recent historical constitution. For this reason, else where, in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts Marx can make a statement such as; 'Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty' (importantly this occurs in a discussion of primal distinctions between human and animal production). The 'laws of beauty' is a typically ahistorical, societally non-specific, universalising, construct, worthy of the eighteenth century German aestheticians. It must be remembered that Marx emerges from the same tradition of philosophical thought as Schiller and Hegel, in the consideration of the various aesthetic ideas present in his work.

'As students and until 1844, Karl Marx....and Freidrich Engels....worked strictly within the domain of German classical philosophy, where art and philosophy were intimately bound up with the movement of history as a whole.'[30] Rose states;

'In line with Marx's materialist reinterpretation of Idealist aesthetics, Hegel's comments on the end of the ancient epic in the course of the progress of Spirit towards greater self-consciousness of itself in world history thus becomes the basis - at the beginning of Marx's introduction (Grundrisse) - for an analysis of the material reasons for its demise.' [31]

She then quotes Marx

'It is even recognised that certain forms of art, e.g. the epic, can no longer be produced in their world epoch-making, classical stature as soon as the production of art, as such, begins; that is, that certain significant forms within the realm of the arts are possible only at an undeveloped stage of artistic development.'[32]

Marx here is only locating a specific form, and more precisely that form's uninterrogated, a priori, aesthetic value, in relation to a specific period of production. He does not address himself to the recent historical constitution of that value (Winckleman) and the exact nature of the appropriation of Greek culture into the categories of modern theoretical constructs, i.e. the establishment of an identity between the fine art tradition and modern literature, and ancient Greek cultural products (i.e. the Epic) as instances of the same broad category of 'artistic production'. In this respect he reproduces a central conceptual system, art, in an uncritical, though not ostensibly so, manner in the same fashion as Hegel and Schiller.

Rose describes the existence of a Saint-Simonian derived aesthetic, which she terms 'Productivist', in Marx's work. However what she presents as such is the uneasy co-existence of two partially contradictory strands of thought which are ultimately related in that they both assume the modern system of the arts

necessarily contingences on an aspect of human nature as opposed to reflecting a specific, 'interested', social construction of 'human nature'. The Saint-Simonian conception of the arts is contingent on the same Schillerian notion of art as a universal formation having a socially integrative function. Further, the Saint-Simonian identification of the artist as societal leader, or member of the 'Vanguard', is also contingent on the elevated status historically constructed around the activities of painting and sculpture. There is some significance however in their attempts to present artistic production as being also the production of material values, but this is generally overshadowed and undermined by the consistent reproduction of the category art. Furthermore it is precisely the non-socially specific and ahistoric, sense of art somehow being a universal that pervades the work of Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lenin, etc.

Plekhanov is described as 'the foremost Russian Marxist prior to Lenin, upon whom his work had a profound influence and has often been called 'the father of Russian Marxism'.^[33] Originally a member of the Narodnik movement, he became a Marxist after some years in enforced exile from 1880 onwards. He returned to Russia, like so many other exiles in 1917. He was acquainted with Engels, Kautsky, and major leaders of the international socialist movement. He was a founding member of The Emancipation of Labour Group. Undoubtedly his most important text in this area was 'Art and Social Life'(1912) which Solomon describes as having 'heavily influenced an entire generation of Russian Marxists for whom it constituted the fundamental Marxist text on art'.^[34] In it, Plekhanov deals with the conflict between the 'art for art's sake' view of artistic production and the so-called 'utilitarian' approach. Most writers trace this issue in Russian thought back to Chernyshevsky. However the particular 'utilitarian' conception of the arts in his work is a reduced version of the original Saint-Simonist and Decembrist conception of the artist's role as social visionary and leader, essentially an organisational and

political role, since for the Realist literary critics the artist may only reflect on the present, the given as opposed to determining the nature of the future.

In 'Art and Social Life'[35] Plekhanov does not outrightly adopt either stance but remains ambiguously disposed to the 'utilitarian' perspective. He asks the questions:

'What are the principal social conditions in whichthe tendency to "art for art's sake" arises and is strengthened?'

'What are the principal social conditions in which ...there arises and is strengthened the so-called "utilitarian" conception of art, that is the tendency accord to works of art "the significance of judgments on the phenomena of life"?''

Plekhanov answers these two questions after discussing Pushkin in relation to both the policies of Alexander III and Nicholas I, the French Romantics (Theophile Gautier) in relation to the 'bourgeoisie' and also David in relation to pre-Revolutionary France(1789). He then answers;'The tendency of artists....towards art for art's sake, arises when they are in hopeless disaccord with the social environment in which they live.' Furthermore he answers that 'the so-called "utilitarian" view of art,.....and its constant accompaniment of glad readiness to participate in social struggles arises.....wherever a mutual sympathy exists between the individuals more or less actively interested in artistic creation and some considerable part of society.' He then proceeds to make one often cited observation;

'I will add that any given political power, in so far as it is interested in art at all, always favors the utilitarian view of art.....And since political power, which is sometimes revolutionary, is more often conservative or even reactionary, it would be a mistake to assume that the utilitarian view of art is peculiar to revolutionaries, or to people with advanced ideas.'

Here can be seen the essence of the problem facing post-1917 art-theoreticians.

Plekhanov is suggesting that 'revolutionary' power fosters a utilitarian view inevitably, though not uniquely. Yet he offers no hint of how it shall utilise art, seeming only to vaguely suggest that artists themselves determine their direction and the revolutionary power will come to the support of those who promote a set of values and social judgments consistent with its own. However this in itself is undermined by the qualifying phrase, 'in as much as it is interested in art', which seems to allow that art might not be subject to any directive input by revolutionary authority whatsoever since he presents no argument to necessitate this. Most pressing of all is the absence of any programmatic basis for revolutionary art, or for the assessment of value in such work. Plekhanov is however setting a precedent for a sociological analysis of artistic activity and art-theory, which is evident in Arvatov and Kushner.

Having outlined the development of the 'art and society' problematic from the genesis of the modern system of the arts and the constitution of aesthetics as a discipline within philosophy, it is appropriate now to proceed to a consideration of the post 1917 debates on art's role in society. This discussion will focus on the institutional context (Narkompros) and the emergence of the Constructivist's programme.

CHAPTER 3

THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY DEBATE ON ART AND SOCIETY 1917 - 1921

НАКОНЕЦ

The Bolshevik Party proclaimed the establishment of a Socialist State in Russia, on the Seventh of November 1917. The implementation of Soviet power gave immediate rise to a whole new array of administrative institutions in line with the Marxist paradigm of the new social order. One of these newly constituted bodies was the Peoples Commissariat of Enlightenment, hereafter called 'Narkompros', under the directorship of Lunacharsky. The overall function of the new Commissariats was the creation of an entirely new economic, social, political, and cultural order. The primary difficulty facing these bodies was the disruption caused by the Civil War and the almost complete collapse of the economy.

IZO was the Visual Art Section of Narkompros established in Petrograd in early 1918. The February Revolution had resulted in the founding of the Union of Art Workers, a grouping across all disciplines, from the World of Art group to the so-called 'Futurists' [2]. This group concentrated on breaking the hegemony of the Academy of Arts. (The Petrograd Free studio's opened in October 1918 to replace The Academy of Fine Art. Anyone over 16 years of age could attend however this was to prove unworkable and was later revised in 1920 [3]). The administrative elements within the Union of Art Workers refused to co-operate with Lunacharsky unless he guaranteed autonomy for IZO from the principal administrative organ of the state (i.e. the Soviet of Workers, Peasant and Soldier Deputies). Thus IZO was constituted as a relatively independent body but even so, many academic and

It is the purpose of this chapter to outline the theoretical debate which occurred in Russia between 1917 and 1922 [1] and which resulted in the emergence of the terms and ideas described in chapter one. It is intended to locate this debate in relation to the historical developments within aesthetics and art-theory, identified in chapter two.

NAKOMPROS

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conservative artists remained wary of political control. These either joined the independent body within Narkompros that had responsibility for museums, established collections and antiquities or they remained outside the new organisational structures. In this way the 'Futurists' though not completely unopposed were initially placed in a very strong administrative position.

In Petrograd, the Arts Board which ran IZO consisted of among others Al'tman (a Futurist), Punin (an apologist for the futurists), and later Mayakovskii and Brik (a committed Markist and futurist). The other members of the board tended to be relatively more conservative. However, a department of IZO was also set up in Moscow which had a greater proportion of members from the more experimental and extreme sections of the futurists e.g. Malevich, Kandinsky, Rodchenko, Rozanova, Tatlin, Udal'tsova and Shevchenko.

James McClelland, discussing the Bolshevik efforts to introduce social and cultural change during the period 1917 - 1925 makes two basic observations:

'....the existence of wide disagreements and debates among the Bolsheviks themselves concerning what kind of measures were most urgent and desirable, and the unreality or inapplicability of virtually all of their conflicting plans in view of the harrowing political, social, economic and cultural conditions of the time in Soviet Russia'.[4]

He goes on to speak of 'a bi-polar clustering of opinion on several related matters' in the debates around the proposed restructuring of society.

'One set of opinions which I shall call "utopianism", held that the most urgent task facing the new Government was to implement measures that would immediately benefit the people in whose name the Revolution was being fought, that would develop a proletarian class-consciousness within the population and that would enlist the active participation of the masses themselves in the revolutionary process...'[ib]

In opposition to this he posits a second outlook which

'...maintained that a drastic advancement of the industrial economy was the most urgent need and that such a campaign must precede, not follow or

accompany efforts to produce a new political and cultural outlook on the part of the masses. Tied to the ethos of war communism, this view insisted that in order to attain the socialist goal, militaristic methods must be used in the social-economic sphere...'[ib]

He then proceeds to identify the 'leading stronghold of utopianism' as 'Lunacharsky's Commisariat of Enlightenment' and the opposing school of thought is identified with 'Trotsky's Red Army:

'In terms of program, the two positions were diametrically opposed, and the year 1920 witnessed increasingly intense debates between the representatives of each. On one point, however, they were quite similar...characterized by fervent radicalism , extremist hopes and reckless impatience' [ib]

(Listed as one of the issues which 'exemplify the pattern of debate' is 'the question of proletarian culture'.) This writer then concludes that:

'.....during the first two years after the Revolution Lunacharsky and his Narkompros colleagues formulated their ambitious reforms generally without reference to either the military conflict or the economic disintegration that were devastating so much of the country and preoccupying the attention of their Bolshevik leaders. The result was a Narkompros reform program that was drawn up and promulgated without the participation of other Soviet agencies and that was to prove strikingly out of touch with prevailing political, social, and economic realities.' [ib]

This is the essential basis of the traditional Western academic's description of cultural debate in Russia after the revolution. The absolute emphasis is on the unreality and inapplicability of the Narkompros programme it is said that the engagement with 'theory' was completely oblivious of the real material disintegration of the period. As such it forms the general historical model for art-historians dealing with the period and thus lends credence to the notion of politically naive utopianist artists setting obscure, rarefied and unachievable aesthetic goals for a society in utter turmoil, who are eventually nailed by a repressive authoritarian regime.

However, this version of history, proves unreliable, for several reasons, when we consider the debates on proletarian art and culture that produced the paradigm of Constructivism. Firstly, there was a third force at work in these debates, the Proletkult, and it represents a conception of cultural transformation on the basis of proletarian art production i.e. facilitating the actual production of works of art by the 'workers', the proletariat, themselves. Secondly, within Narkompros there existed a complexity of divergent perspectives all of which jostled for dominance and none of which, Lunacharsky was prepared to give sole support to:

'As far as questions of form are concerned, the taste of the People's Commissar and all other representatives of authority must be set aside. All persons and groups in art must be given freedom of development. No one movement... must be allowed to suppress another.'[6]

Note also that while Osip Brik was calling for 'A Drain for Art', denouncing the products of Bourgeois culture, the meuseum department of Narkompros was busily organising the newly constituted state art collections in the museums of Moscow and the Hermitage in Petrograd. (Willhelm Trew points out that 'the 11,000 Pictures of the Hermitage were increased by 4,000 from private collections, besides many thousands of ikons,').

Thirdly, there is no reason to believe that the personel of Narkompros were out of touch with political, social, and economic realities since the emergence of a utilitarian imperative and the emphasis on industrialisation and mass production, which appear in the discussions in Inkhuk and IZO, are appropriate to the exigencies of the period. Furthermore, Paul Wood states that by 1921, 'Moscow had lost half its prpulation and Petrograd, the crucible of the revolution,.... had been denuded of about three-fifths of its population.' [7] Thus it is rather inconceivable that anyone could be unaffected by the upheaval of the time. That they were necessarily unrealistic by being optimistic and hopeful in relation to a projected future, is debatable but more importantly this is really a dismissal that represents an

imposed interpretation and value judgement rather than a piece of unambiguous historical data.

Fourthly, it should be remembered that Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin among others, all made specific criticisms of both Proletkult and the various groupings within Narkompros, and related independent bodies such as 'Komfut', as well as making their own contributions to the debate on the nature of future artistic production in post-Revolutionary society. The futurists within IZO, were subject to constant attacks from within Proletkult, so much so that David Shterenberg, the head of IZO, specifically addressed himself to "The Critics From Proletkult", (1919). This highly charged atmosphere of criticism and counter-criticism did not allow of the isolated idiosyncratic idealism suggested by this account of Narkompros. It should also be noted that the primary activities of the IZO artists, at this time, were agitation and propaganda, thus they had some experience of political expediency.

Furthermore as Siegel points out:

'almost as remarkable in its way as Trotsky's military accomplishments is the fact that, as he was speeding from one front to another in his famous armoured train, he was reading recently published French novels.' [8]

It is well known that at this time Trotsky was working on his book 'Literature and Revolution'. This makes it clear that the whole 'proletarian culture and art' debate was by no means a marginal disconnected projection of ambitious reforms promulgated by deluded idealists, it was a vital concern, actively participated in by all those wishing to contribute to the new order.

It is necessary here to return to the first gap in the traditional version of this piece of history, and to consider the Proletkult and its contribution to the post-Revolutionary debates on art and culture.

PROLETKULT

'Proletkult' is an abbreviation for Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organisations, which was founded in October 1917 at a conference in Petrograd. This conference of cultural-educational bodies was held under Lunacharsky and represents one of the major developments of the Social-Democratic movement. Willett describes the Proletkult movement as 'an important arts organisation which had originated, like the new Communist Party itself, in the prewar Social Democratic movement which aimed for a time to be the party's cultural counterpart.' [9] Its open programme was basically the establishment of studios and workshops all over the country to train young men and women of proletarian origin in literature and the arts. The theoretical basis for Proletkult had been laid around the turn of the century partly by Lunacharsky but mostly by his brother-in-law Bogdanov. Willett states:

'Partly conceived as a workers' educational organisation with a strong arts bias, like others founded in Western Europe following the examples of Ruskin and Morris, the Proletkult was also intended to become a third force in the revolutionary state, balancing the political element (the party) and the industrial element (the trade unions) and ultimately serving to create a new working-class culture to replace that of the bourgeoisie

After the foundational meeting in Petrograd, a Moscow meeting followed in February 1918 under Bogdanov, resulting in the 'First All-Russian congress of Proletkult' which occurred in September 1918. Bogdanov proposed the following resolution, which presents a succinct statement of Proletkult policy, at the congress.

'1. Art organises social experiences by means of living images with regard both to cognition and to feelings and aspirations. Consequently art is the most powerful weapon for organising collective forces in a class society-class forces.

2. To organise his forces in his social work, his struggle and construction, the proletarian needs anew class art. The spirit of this art is collectivism of labor: it assimilates and reflects the world from the viewpoint of the labor collective, it expresses the relevance of its

feelings, of its fighting spirit, and of its creative will.

3. The treasures of the old art should not be accepted passively; in those days they would have educated the working class in the cultural spirit of the ruling class and thereby in the spirit of subordination to their regime. The proletarian should accept the treasures of the old art in the light of his own criticism, and his new interpretation will reveal their hidden collective principles and their organisational meaning. Then they will prove to be a valuable legacy for the proletarian, a weapon in his struggle against the same old world that created them and a weapon in his organisation of the new world. The transference of this legacy must be carried out by proletarian critics.

4. All organisations, all institutions, dedicated to developing the cause of the new art and the new criticism must be based on close collaboration, one that will educate their workers in the direction of the Socialist ideal'[10]

It is clear from this that Proletkult represents an extensive development upon the stances variously presented by Belinsky, Cherneshevsky, Tolstoy and Plekhanov. In tune with Belinsky and Cherneshevsky, Bogdanov identifies art as an organisational element in collective life but goes further than these by proposing that all workers should have the occasion and facility to produce art. In the tradition of Tolstoy, Bogdanov calls for a re-examination of the accepted store of culture received from bourgeois and aristocratic society but Bogdanov is proposing that the proletariat itself constructs the new interpretation, on criteria more overtly politicised than the psychologistic conceptions of Tolstoy. Where Plekhanov failed to provide a basis for revolutionary artistic intervention, Proletkult proposes to facilitate the literal expression of the masses by de-specialising the artistic-producer (however the idea of artistic production remains within the pre-established framework of art as essential category and positive value). It is important to note here that the programme of the Proletkult presented artistic production no longer as the isolated sole activity of a specialist. The production of art was to co-exist somehow with the everyday labour of the proletariat and somehow to complement the labor-collective's other activities.

In terms of art-theory then Proletkult represents a re-engagement with a theme of Utopian Socialist thought of the Nineteenth Century; art as an instrument of social organisation. However, the attempt to make the ordinary worker simultaneously the producer of artistic culture is a new element in this thinking, in a sense it may be seen as a revision or inversion of the Saint-Simonian argument that the artist should also be seen as a 'producteur', since Proletkult was actively promoting the labourers of industry, the 'producteurs' as the proper artists of the new society.

Equally important here is that the Proletkult strove to be fiercely independent of the party (and was subject to attack from Lenin and others, who sought to control an organisation that rivaled the party in size). It distinguished itself from Narkompros in that it did not advocate that cultural production be determined from above by an organisation of authorities (particularly authority that was legitimised by pre-Revolutionary structures, as in the case of the futurists who were seen as 'Bourgeois' artists). Proletkult is a partial attempt to create the ideal of self-determination by the labour force in the production of artistic value. However, Proletkult continues to reproduce the identification of artistic labour as somehow essentially different and more 'spiritualised' than conventional labour. At the same time however it undermines that special status since it allows and energetically promotes that the ordinary labourer in the factory or elsewhere may also be an artistic producer. Thus it is opposing the bourgeois specialist, 'artist', so important to the conventional social formation of the fine-arts.

Proletkult was subject to criticisms from all directions but most importantly it was attacked by Trotsky and Lenin. Trotsky has several declared reasons for criticising Proletkult but the essential divergence between Trotsky and Bogdanov is that Trotsky in the tradition of Marx and Engels, and the German Idealists, conceives of artistic production as a universal category, as activity of an inherently different order

than everyday activity, and subject to its own laws which seem to exist outside the flow of determinations between base and superstructure, whereas the Proletkult initiative is clearly corrosive of this conception (though related to it in certain aspects). Let it not be thought here, that the other elements in Marx and Engels work, whereby art is located as 'in the last instance' determined by the base, are being dismissed totally. Rather the emphasis is being placed on the Idealist strain of thought, precisely because it is often obscured behind the 'double' talk of 'base and superstructure', and is the point of conflict between Bogdanov and Trotsky (and also Lenin).

Trotsky states that the "field of art is not one in which the party is called on to command" [11] and as such he is in tune with Bukharin and Lunacharsky. At the same time he argues that the party 'must give the additional credit of its confidence to various art groups, which are striving sincerely to approach the Revolution and so help an artistic formulation of the Revolution.' But he also undercuts the 'populists' and their argument for 'art with a tendency' opposing them to those who call for 'pure' art and then saying

'The Marxist point of view is far removed from these tendencies, which were historically necessary, but which have become historically passe.' [ib]

Though Trotsky is equally capable of a purist sentiment in demanding that any work of art 'should in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, the law of art'. [ib] He says that the 'artistic work of man is continuous' and that 'each new rising class places itself on the shoulders of its preceding one.' This is in response to the demands of Proletkult and others that the art of the past be rejected on the basis of its class bias in its reflection on reality. Laing in his 'Marxist Aesthetics' presents the following account of Trotsky's criticism of the proponents of 'proletarian culture':

'He argued that a proletarian art "in the incomparably more weighty sense that we speak of

bourgeois literature" was not possible for two reasons. First the general cultural level of the class was too low to provide a day-to-day milieu which would supply "all the inspiration he [the artist] needs while at the same time mastering the procedures of his craft"....Secondly Trotsky argued that , in theory, the notion of a specific "proletarian culture" was incorrect. Under socialism, the role of the proletariat was to work towards the classless society, in which it would disappear along with the other classes inherited from capitalism. Only then would a 'new, real culture' develop' [12]

These two arguments are of course unsound. Firstly, the argument that the proletariat is culturally backward and therefore cannot produce the circumstances necessary to inspire art is really the identification of bourgeois 'art' (or in this specific instance bourgeois literature) as the absolute paradigm and point of reference for the establishment of artistic value. (Note also that the Proletkult movement was necessarily promoting literacy in tandem with its promotion of proletarian literary production something that Lenin and Trotsky neglect to mention or discuss). Secondly, the argument that, a specific proletarian culture is an incorrect theoretical construct, is uninspired. The classless society was not yet at hand and in the interim period the ascendancy of the proletariat in all things must, presumably, necessarily proceed apace. Trotsky, however, was not willing to condone self-determination by the proletariat in the construction of cultural values because he vaguely apprehended that it might not be consistent or compatible, with the 'high' art / 'fine-art' tradition of which he was clearly a devotee. Furthermore, the 'proletarian culture' construct of Bogdanov and Proletkult was not a static monolithic conception, rather it represented a dynamic potentiation of the proletariat to be self-determining in some measure, in the area of artistic production, and thus was consonant with the ideal evolution towards the classless society.

Lenin's response to Proletkult is described by Willett:

'For Lenin, who anyway saw the workers' first task in a time of shortage as basic organization rather than the practice of art, the idea of any large movement parallel to the Party was intolerable, all the more so since it echoed the kind of utopian humanism for which he had previously attacked Bogdanov and Lunacharsky in his "Materialism and Empiriocriticism". He told Lunacharsky therefore to make it clear to its first national ('All-Union') conference in October 1920 that the Proletkult would in future have to be subordinate to the ministry, and specifically to a strong Chief Committee for Political Education which would take over from the ministry's own adult education department. When Lunacharsky failed to do this the Politburo ordered the conference to subordinate itself, which it reluctantly did. There after Bogdanov was pushed out of the Proletkult and the ministry itself was reorganised in a spirit clearly critical of Lunacharsky.'[13]

However the Proletkult movement was by no means vanquished as can be seen by Lenin's further criticisms in 1923:

'At a time when we hold forth on proletarian culture and the relation in which it stands to bourgeois culture, facts and figures reveal that we are in a very bad way even as far as bourgeois culture is concerned. As might have been expected, it appears that we are still a very long way from attaining universal literacy, and that even compared with Tsarist times (1897) our progress has been far too slow. This should serve as a stern warning and reproach to those empyrean heights of 'proletarian culture.'[14]

Interwoven with the Proletkult debate on 'proletarian culture' were the ongoing discussions of IZO and its attempts to establish a programme for artistic activity in the new society. The journal of IZO, *Iskusstvo Kommuny*, published in Petrograd from December 1918 to April 1919 was a focal point for debate (as was the Proletkult journal, *Proletarian Culture*). Despite the reluctance of Proletkult to have anything to do with the 'bourgeois' futurists they nevertheless presented each others arguments in their respective publications. Furthermore within IZO there were Proletkult members.

ISKUSSTVO KOMMUNY

The first issue of Iskusstvo Kommuny contained an article by Osip Brik entitled 'A Drain for Art'. In this piece he urges artists to abandon Bourgeois art, with its false connotations of spirituality and transcendency, and instead to focus on the production of material objects

"Do not distort, but create. Not idealistic vapours but material objects ... we do not need your ideas... art is like any other means of production".[15]

Brik repeats this identification of artistic production with any other form of production.

'Art-this is simply work: Knowledge, craft, skill.'[ib]

He goes on to argue that the artist is:

'now only a constructor and technician, only a supervisor and a foreman.' This article is important as it represents a very early emergence of a tentative formation of the construct 'production-art'.[ib]

Later in the seventh issue of Iskuzstvo Kommuny Brik argues

'The divided existence of Art and production is not an established law. We see in this division a survival of bourgeois structures.'[16]

Lodder quotes Chuzak in her discussion of Iskuzstvo Kommuny:

'.....by instinct and in disunity, in a fantastically eclectic milieu...all the most important words, used later, were employed in Art of the commune (Iskuzstvo Kommuny) ...but half were issued by accident ...Not only the practice of the paper, but also the whole practice of Futurism at this time was almost entirely, based on the "agitational poster."'[17]

Thus Lodder points out that Brik's first article 'is almost certainly the first use of the word "constructor" in print in connection with art'. It's use being 'probably purely accidental and based on the use of the term in the building industry, juxtaposing the traditional concept of the artist to that of the constructor, the man who actually built objects.' (It should be noted however that the term

'Construction' had been used in 1916 by L. Klyun and in 1917 by L. Bruni to describe three-dimensional metal and glass objects built as sculptures. Naum Gabo termed his 1915 piece 'Construction', the term was also used variously by Gabo, Rodchenko and Tatlin among others.)

Besides Brik, there were other exponents of the new ideas, that were emerging as 'Production-art', such as Boris Kushner, Nikolai Punin and later there was Arvatov, Tarabukin, and Tretyakov.

Punin, attempting to differentiate between 'applied art' and the then formative notion of 'Production art' says

'It is not a matter of decoration but of the creation of a new artistic objects Art for the proletariat is not a sacred temple for lazy contemplation but work, a factory, producing completely artistic objects'.[18]

It is important to register here that the impetus to 'Production-art', on a theoretical level, lay in the identification of the traditional constitution of artistic practices and discourses as a bogus religion which served to mediate bourgeois 'ideology'. Thus Kushner in Issue No.9 of *Iskusstvo Kommuny*, makes an all out attack on 'The Divine Work of Art'.

'They used to think art was beauty. They defined art as divination. Revelation, incarnation, transubstantiation. Art ensconced itself like a great, unshakeable god in their heads, empty and bemused. It was served by the trivial godlings of ecstasy, intuition, and inspiration. During the whole historical process endured by mankind, when the power of violence and oppression was being transferred constantly from one kind of democracy, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie to another, nobody dreamed of assuming that art was simply work: Know-how, craft, and skill.'[19]

Kushner proceeds to identify the bourgeois conception of artistic activity as an attempt to render 'nature' into a commodity.

'The bourgeoisie acquired everything that became its property bowed to it. But suddenly on its gabulous plath of adavance, it came across a certain obstacle. It could not buy nature, the invisible world, the world in its immensity. the sky, the stars,eternlity. They are not

available for personal possession; they are nontransferable into private property. ...Refreshing illusion was required. They thought of a surrogate, of their own creation of genius, of their favourite *Wunderkind* of industrial ingenuity.

...They decided to prepare a surrogate for the universe. And so, to this end, a very chic and remarkable theory was made and elaborated that saw the real and the unreal worlds, the visible and the invisible worlds, as incarnated in the divine work of art

... They asserted and professed conscientiously: "The eternal harmony of the builder of the universe is reflected in the eternal beauty of artistic forms. Works of art reflect the world, the outer, material, inner, spiritual, and ideal nature of things, the essence and latent meaning of things. This splendid theory was elaborated beautifully by the great experts." [ib]

Bowlt in his introduction to this translation states:

'Kushner's rejection of the subjective and idealist interpretation of art was shared by many critics and artists just after the Revolution and was an attitude identifiable particularly with *Iskusstvo Kommuny*; Moreover, Kushner's conclusion (reiterated in many articles in the journal) that the work of art was no more than an object produced by a rational process prepared the ground for the formal advocacy of industrial constructivism in 1921/22.' (Bowlt specifies "industrial" constructivism to indicate constructivism as defined at the time of the term's invention. This is necessitated by Bowlt's usage of that term [constructivism] to designate a tendency in the fine-arts as well as in stage-design, graphic-design and architecture.) Bowlt also points out that Kushner's 'tone' betrays his keen support for the general ideas of 'Komfut'. [20]

January, 1919, saw the formal organisation in Petrograd of Komfut (an abbreviation of communists and Futurists) as an act of opposition to the Italian futurists, who were associating themselves with fascism. All members had to belong to the Bolshevik party and had to master the principles of the 'cultural Communist ideology' as elaborated and articulated in the society's own school. (Members included Brik, Kushner, Mayakovsky, Al'tman and Schterenberg).

Komfut was essentially very close to Proletkult in its stance however the latter's totally proletarian policy excluded the formation of a united front. The following is

extracted from Komfuts declared programme.

'A communist regime demands a Communist consciousness. All forms of life, morality, philosophy, and art must be recreated according to communist principles. Without this the subsequent development of the communist Revolution is impossible. In their activities the cultural-educational organs of the Soviet government show a complete misunderstanding of the revolutionary task entrusted to them ...Under the guise of immutable truths, the masses are being presented with the pseudo teachings of the gentry ...Under the guise of the eternal laws of beauty — the depraved taste of the oppressors ...it is essential — in all cultural fields, as well as in art- to reject emphatically all the democratic illusions that pervade the vestiges and prejudices of the bourgeoisie. It is essential to summon the masses to creative activity.'[21]

Clearly the system of Marx and Engels is being interpreted in a very specific way by Brik, Kushner and others, so that they are in opposition to Lenin, Lunacharsky and Trotsky. Furthermore, the Proletkult stance is being reiterated, but with a much more negative or critical tone the emphasis being on the rejection of the old world as opposed to the creation of the new, though this is finally articulated, significantly in calling 'the masses to creative activity', which is the whole Proletkult line.

This thorough going rejection of the past is of course in the tradition of pre-Revolutionary futurism with its efforts to outrage public morality and its iconoclasm. However the urge to utilitarian production must be seen as a serious attempt to embrace the revolution and engage with the pragmatic necessities of a disintegrated economy, and not merely superficial posturing. The most important contribution of pre-Revolutionary futurism to these debates was the development of the 'non-representational' three dimensional construction (as developed by Tatlin, Rodchenko et al.) For a discussion of these developments see (Lodder, 1983), (Milner, 1988) and (Dabrowski, 1980)

For the purposes of this paper it is important to note that the emergence of a

utilitarian imperative and the cult of Industry was precipitated in part by the emergence of these 'constructions'. In presenting the appearance of objects produced by technically advanced and industrialized society they merely highlighted the non-utilitarian and non-machine like qualities of artistic products in line with traditional aesthetic categories, even though these objects initially seemed to be the significant break with the fine-art tradition. Furthermore, the emergence of this 'culture of materials' allowed of the identification of the artist as merely another producer and so the elevated status of 'artistic' activities could be interrogated leading the way to the analyses presented by Brik and Kushner of art as pseudo religion.

It is worth noting here Tatlin's remark, as recorded in the 'protokoly' of the March 24th. 1922 meeting of Inkhuk

"Tatlin-with reference to his counter-reliefs stated that they were utterly useless objects. which he would no longer make"[22]

Art-historical treatments of this period almost always obscure the nature of constructivist theory by employing the term 'constructivist' to describe such objects as Tatlin's counter-reliefs (or related objects) which clearly stand in opposition to the designs and products of the self-declared constructivists of 1921, with reference to the respective discourses which produced these objects. That is not to say that the constructivists interpretation of their own activity is the only valid description but clearly their professed self-conception is an essential element of the historical record and must be explicated by any attempt to analyse this period. It is precisely this that the art-historians fail to do. In this attempt to outline the theoretical developments of the period 1917-22, the conventional progression from a discussion of Tatlin's counter-reliefs, to a discussion of Tatlin's tower and on to a discussion of Tatlin's designs for industry in the 1920s (or an equivalent line of development) is not been used. Since it necessarily places these manifestly

different endeavours within the same parameters of discourse and thus argues for the existence of an equivalence relation or parity between these projects which did not exist within the context of their construction (and constitutes a misrepresentation which this paper seeks to address).

Therefore having observed the theoretical developments consequent on the emergence of these constructions it is appropriate now to proceed to an account of the development of the programme of the First Working Group of Constructivists out of the discussions of Inkhuk.

INKHUK;THE CONSTRUCTIVIST PROGRAMME

Inkhuk was established in March 1920 within IZO Narkompros, It is worth noting the genesis of this institution, as it can be seen as representing a line of development in the progressive politicisation of the Futurist's conception of art. As noted earlier in March 1917 the Union of Art Workers was established as a coalition of artists from different political and artistic tendencies who sought to defend the status of the artist in general, which was perceived as under threat from the political and social upheaval of the February revolt and the machinations of the Provisional Government.

The Provisional Government had proposed the establishment of a Ministry of Fine Arts to replace the Imperial Palace Ministry, which controlled the Imperial theatres, the Academy of the Arts and the Royal Palaces. The artists active at this time perceived this as an attempt to take control of the arts away from them and accordingly responded by establishing the Union of Art Workers. Later this became the Union of Professional Artists and painters of the New Art, and in February 1919 it was further transformed into the All-Russian Union of Painters and Artists of the New Art, which was commonly known as the Council of Masters. This was ultimately restructured and revised, becoming Inkhuk in early 1920.

The development of the Union through successive transformations was

essentially the progressive takeover by the futurists who had committed themselves to the Revolution. Thus the futurists at the time of the formation of the first Union in March 1917, in common with all other artistic factions, were opposed to the state or other political control of art, converted with the successive transformations of the Union to an enthusiastic involvement with the State organisation of the arts through Lunacharsky's Narkompros, and cultivated a strong politicisation of their conception of art, not just in its specific products but also in its overall social formation.

Mayakovsky, a leading spokesman for the futurists declared in March 1917

'...The constituent Assembly will be prepared and when our friends come back from the front it will decide how to administer Russian art. I am against a ministry etc. I regard it as essential that art not be concentrated and that everybody is -long live the Political life of Russia and long live art free from politics.' [23]

But by November 1918 he could articulate a complete commitment to the thoroughgoing politicisation of art and its primary function of social utility on the pages of the journal of IZO, the Art Section of Lunarcharsky's Ministry, later as editor of LEF.

The council of Masters held only four general assemblies (from January to March 1920). In the course of these meetings it became clear that the new organisation as constituted was untenable. There was no consensus established in relation to any issues raised at these assemblies, save one, the draft of a letter to Lunacharsky. (Appendix C) In the light of this and their own desires to direct the organisation in a definite (and very contentious) way Kandinsky and Rodchenko established Inkhuk as a dramatic restructuring of The Council Of Masters. This left the futurist faction in uncontested control of the organisation, however within this faction definite conflicts and tensions were emerging.

The development of Inkhuk is separable into three distinct phases

characterised by specific theoretical orientations. The first phase from March 1920 to November 1920 is characterised by Kandinsky's Psychological perspective, the second phase, from November 1920 until April 1921 is dominated by the objective Analysis method and the third phase, from April 1921 until 1924 and the breakup of the institute, is the period of ascendancy for the 'Production-art' view. This is

clearly outlined in the following Inkhuk report on its own development:

'Kandinsky collaborated directly in its organisation. However it soon became evident that a profound divergence of views existed between him and the other members of the Institute. Believing in the psychological approach, Kandinsky sharply disagreed with the opinion of those who defended the material 'object' as the substance embodying the value of creative work. He left the group, while Rodchenko, Stepanova, Babichev and Bryusova became members of the administrative board.

Thereafter the Institute continued its activities with the group of Object Analysis, in accordance with a plan and programme worked out by Babichev. Research was performed in two directions:

1) Theoretical: analysis of works of art, definition of fundamental problems of the fine arts (colour, texture, material, construction, etc.). This work was done in direct contact with the products of art involved, mostly in the museums.

2) In the laboratory: the themes treated by the members of the group were individual or collective (for instance, each member wrote a study on composition and construction).

By the spring of 1921 the characteristic conception of this phase in the Institute's activities have taken shape. The single word, "object", expresses its essence....

From the very moment of its inception, however, this ideology provoked a reaction among the members of the Institute which was directed "counter the object", "against pure art". This anti-object movement became known as Constructivism.' [24]

The initial programme for Inkhuk was based on a tacit acceptance of the artistic experimentation of the previous decade and an explicit conception that 'artistic value' was objectively defineable. The first papers, questionnaires and experiments of Inkhuk produced by Kandinsky, Korolev and Rozanova, were essentially attempts towards formulating and systematising an

analytical-psychological-aesthetic theory based on practical experiment. The overall approach was modeled on scientific empiricism but lacked sufficient rigour and objectivity to constitute a real science. (There is an echo here of Baumgarten's call for 'a science of the beautiful'.). This work was oriented around the traditional conceptions of philosophical aesthetics, identifying the significance of the art-work in terms of subjectively perceived psychological states or responses. Furthermore this work is conducted with the implicit assumption that art represents the greatest possible good.

Kandinsky's programme was abandoned in the autumn of 1920. The subjective psychological preoccupations of previous months were replaced by the attempt at a more objective approach by the General Working Group of Objective Analysis. By early 1921 Rodchenko, Stepanova, Babichev and Bryusova took over the administration of Inkhuk and Kandinsky left the organisation.

The programme of the newly formed group was as cited above

"1. Theoretical: the analysis of the work of art, the conscious definition of the basic problems of art (colour, texture, material , construction etc) This work was conducted with paintings, frequently in galleries.

2: Laboratory: group according to independent initiative or according to a task (for example all members were presented with work on the theme 'composition and construction)'.[Opcit.]

It is clear then that this group was primarily concerned with employing an objective methodology for analysing the art-object. There are two things to note here. Firstly, the terms of this programme and the subsequent discussions undertaken on its basis, a preoccupation with 'science' and 'scientific method'. Though the legitimacy of such claims for objectivity is questionable, it is significant that there is an attempt to treat the art-object as a laboratory "datum".

One of the aims of revolutionary thinking was to integrate socio-political transformation with technological and scientific advance. Marxist revolutionary theory and practice were consistently presented as a rational, and scientific, analysis and programme for societal evolution. In simple terms then the emergent value system prized objectivity above subjectivity, and the collective above the individual. So that this contributed to an already advanced shift in the orientation of art-theory away from 'psychologism' (traditional aesthetics) and towards sociological (as prefigured by Plekhanov) and historical perspectives. Furthermore it contributed to an approach based on 'First principles' (in the tradition of Tolstoy and particular strands of Marxism) which promoted a questioning of not just inherited values but the inherited categories of value.

However there are three important correspondences between the 'Objective Analysis' approach and the general conceptions of philosophical aesthetics.

1. Both were constructed around the category 'work of art' and conceived of 'art' as something which inhered in the object, and that it was somehow intrinsic to it.

2. Both presented the construct 'artist', as the creator of the 'work of art', whose sole function was that specialised production.

3. Both present artistic activity as a specialised production with an intrinsic value, fundamentally different from conventional economic production.

One may understand these similarities as follows. Philosophical aesthetics as established in the mid-Eighteenth Century was part of a broad theoretical revision which sought to constitute 'art' as the spiritualized category of activity it has become in the modern world. The debates of IZO and Inkhuk were attempts to re-constitute that category without the importation of bourgeois values and 'ideologies', while at the same time retaining the idea of 'art' as a formation of

extreme social utility and organisational value (an idea inherited from the German Idealists and the Saint-Simonists) and promoted by the self-interest of the artist.

The differences that exist between these two discourses pertain to institutional context and political orientation. The institutional context of philosophical aesthetics was the university and the scholarly journal where questions of art were approached independent of overt political and social considerations, while IZO and Inkhuk were beauraucratic arms of government with a loudly proclaimed revolutionary ethos. Indeed this debate is pervaded by a deeply self-conscious engagement with politics. The Marxist restructuring of culture facilitated or at least precipitated the formulation of a critique of the *a priori* assumption of 'art' as a universal, which conventional aesthetics produced by its incorporation into the categories of philosophy.

In the course of an attempt to objectively define the terms 'Composition' and 'Construction' as fundamental elements of the art-object, a further split in the Working Group of Objective Analysis (in effect the whole of Inkhuk) emerged. The split emerged with the Constructivists programme and its rejection of the art-object and the full adoption of the productivist paradigm. The formation of the constructivist group revolved around the commitment to 'utilitarian imperative' as the primary determinant in the forming of material culture, and was clearly rooted in the work of Brik, Kushner, Tarabukin and Arvatov. After the foundation of the Constructivist group there ensued a reorganisation of the administration of Inkhuk, so that Brik became president and Arvatov and Kushner were brought into the Institute (Tarabukin was already a member).

The development of this debate on 'Composition' and 'Construction' has been described by (Lodder, 1983) and (Khan-Megadomev, 1988) and (Karginov, 1979). It emerges from these accounts that the primary point of dispute was the identification

of 'Construction' as necessarily involving a utilitarian objective, and a rejection of the art-object as being totally useless (therefore, not capable of exhibiting genuine 'Construction'). Thus the development of the social commitment of art had led a number of individuals to the abandonment of art in favour of socially and industrially oriented design projects. On the 24'th of November 1921 Osip Brik as President of Inkhuk suggested to the members of the Institute that they abandon their artistic activities and go over to production. In response 25 people formerly engaged in art committed themselves to the projects of Soviet industry.

CONCLUSION

This has largely been an uncritical presentation of Productivist and Constructivist ideas within the context of a critical history. This must be explained. It is not that these ideas are held in such veneration as to be above criticism, far from it. It seems that the nature of these ideas requires a specialised critical discourse. In the introduction, the need for a discourse which could describe, analyze and interpret material production without inevitably reproducing the category 'art'. It is now appropriate to prescribe a further aspect of this projected discourse.

It is possible that, in placing the above ideas within the context of a history of aesthetics, the same problems precipitated by the art-historical treatments of this subject may inadvertently arise. Having outlined the historical emergence of these ideas, it will become feasible to specify further the qualities of an appropriate critical discourse to be constructed around them. The central feature of such a discourse must be that its a priori assumptions do not stand in direct opposition to the critical tenets of these systems of thought i.e: the discourse must not serve to uncritically reproduce the category 'art', as is the case with art history. The basic problem is one of methodological concepts and intention.

It is common-place of modern thought to cite the 'interestedness' of knowledge and systems of knowledge. Paul Woods argues:

A the same time as accepting that a full understanding of Constructivism needs to be politically and theoretically articulate as well as factually detailed, one needs to be careful not to lose sight of a further dimension: the reason for looking at the material in the first place.

This seems a reasonable statement but let us consider its basic assumption. It becomes clear that his reason for looking at the material is related to an ostensible commitment to 'Revolutionary politics' (Marxism). He is arguing that this field of study is interesting because of 'what can be learned and applied about culture and revolution'. He then points to Rodchenko's statement of 1925:

'One is either a capitalist or a communist. There is no third way.'

Woods concludes by declaring this 'is still true'.

This is one of those typical of Marxist academicism. Having spent several thousand words of erudite discussion of his topic, and its treatment by other writers, he is reduced to making an act of faith, a declaration of self-verification and presenting it as a vital dimension of discourse. How can one substantiate the basis assertion that one's treatment of the material is either communist or Capitalist except by appeal to Communist belief and consequent system, an aspect of that belief being that communism represents the antithesis of Capitalism.

The idea that one can somehow achieve a better quality of knowledge by being self-conscious, that is, aware of what it is you already believe (more probably, believe yourself to believe) is extremely questionable. It assumes that the purpose of such theoretical activity is the appropriation of 'truth' (in one sense or other). This is an enlightenment idea which conceives of theoretical activity, such as history, philosophy etc. as systematic appropriations of 'reality'. The Marxist preoccupation with ideology is a re-hashing of this notion, incorporating uneasily the notion that the social construction of reality while still clinging to the notion that it, Marxism, can 'appropriate reality by revealing the 'interestedness' of bourgeois systems of knowledge, it still seeks to establish its own theory as being somehow 'correct' or 'true', It may not be content to describe but wish also to change it. However, in order to wish to change something from one form to another, one must perceive its form, one must begin with a description; theoretical activity.

Theoretical activity, is of course a complex construct, artificially separated from material production. That which is deemed theoretical is really a constituent field of material production. This is to say that the conception of an academic, intellectual activity, such as writing history, or writing this paper, being somehow different from real practical production is again historically and socially specific. It is in this last

instance a matter of improvised categories.

Thus our projected 'ultimate' discourse would necessarily predicate its statements on the theoretical as an aspect of general production. It would remain to it to go beyond describing why we present and interpret things the way we do: to ask the question 'Why do we present describe, interpret, and analyze things at all.

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FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- [1] ARTS COUNCIL, London, 1971, p.9
- [2] Bowlt, 'Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design', in Gleason, Kenez, and Stites, 1985, p.204-5
- [3] P.O.Kristeller, Journal of the History of Ideas, Oct. 1951, pp.469-527, Jan.1952, pp.17-46

CHAPTER ONE

- [1] ARTS COUNCIL, London, 1971, p.9
- [2] For discussion of original usage of the term 'Constructivism' see Lodder, 1983, Introduction.
- [3] Quoted in Lodder, 1983, p.2
- [4] Inkhuk, abbreviation for Institute for Artistic Culture, section of Narkompros (the Commissariat of Enlightenment).
- [5] Iskusstvo Kommuny, ('tran.s as art of the commune') the journal of IZO, visual art section of Narkompros, 19 Vol.s published 1918-9
- [6] Osip Brik, 'A Drain for Art', Iskusstvo Kommuny, Nov. 1918, p.1 quoted in Chernevich's Intro. to Anikst, 1987.
- [7] N.Punin made an early attempt to distinguish the old concept of 'applied art' from the emergent framework of 'Production-art', see Lodder, 1983, p.77
- [8] Veshch. Gegenstand. Object, Berlin journal produced by El Lizzitsky, Skyther, and Ehrenburg, first appeared April 1922. It was a Tri-lingual magazine. Its declared intentions were
 - '1) To acquaint creative workers in Russia with the latest Western art.
 - 2) To inform Western Europe about Russian art and literature.'see Willet, 1978, pp.75-78 and Lodder, 1983, p.81
Lodder quotes No.1, p.2,
'But we do not wish to limit the production of artists to utilitarian objects.' This corresponds to Inkhuk ideas of Nov, 1920 - March, 1921
- [9] It is worth noting Gabo's declaration of 1948:
'My art is commonly known as the art of Constructivism. Actually the word Constructivism is a misnomer. The word Constructivism has been appropriated by one group...in the

1920s who demanded that art should liquidate itself.
 ...they could not see in a work of art anything else but
 a pleasurable occupation cherished in a decadent
 capitalistic society and totally useless, and even harm-
 ful in the new society of communism.'
 Quoted in Lodder, 1983, p.39

- [10] This terminological confusion is prevalent in British publications, see Benton, Benton, and Sharp, 1975
- [11] Chuzhak, from LEF 1923, p.31, quoted in Lodder, 1983, p.108. He was a member of the Bolshevik party (arrested and exiled c.1914) He adopted the term 'life-building' in place of 'Production-art'.
- [12] LEF, the journal of the Left Front of the Arts, Moscow, 1923-5. Eds. Arvatov, Brik, Kushner, Mayakovsky, Tretyakov and Chuzhak. Often identified as a 'Constructivist' journal, however this was contested by Gan (Bowl, 1988, p.242 and by Chuzhak (Lodder, 1983, p.241) see also Lawton, 1988
- [13] Anikst, 1987, p.15, Chernevich's Intro.
- [14] Willet, 1978, p.74
- [15] Lodder, 1983, pp.107-8
- [16] Furnace, was a Proletkult publication, first appeared 1918, re-commenced in 1922 having adopted a 'Productivist' platform. It was not primarily an artistic journal but dealt with every aspect of Proletkult activity.
- [17] Bernard Smyth in his 1986 article 'Marx and Aesthetic Value' uses the term 'Productivist aesthetic', it seems he uses it after Rose, whom he cites in his footnotes.
- [18] See (Lodder, 1983, pp. 98-108) (Anikst, 1987, pp.15-8) and (Khan-Megomedov, 1986, pp.72-4)
- [19] However see Taylor, 1978.
- [20] Marx, 1844: pub.1932.
- [21] Marx, 1844: pub. 1932.
- [22] Lodder, 1983, p.95
- [23] Wood, 'Art and Politics in a Workers State', Art History Vol.8, No.1, pp.115-6

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CHAPTER TWO

- [1] Baumgarten's work Aesthetica, 1750 is responsible for introducing the term 'aesthetics' and for establishing the subject as a discipline in philosophy. His other important contribution in this field was Reflections on Poetry 1735. 'Baumgarten attempted an aesthetic theory...based upon Cartesian principles and using the rationalist deductive method; with formal definitions and derivations...; the object of aesthetics [he said]...is to investigate the kind of perfection proper to perception, which is a lower level of cognition, but autonomous and possessed of its own laws.' Beardsley, 1966, pp.156-7
- [2] Kant is described by Beardsley (p.210) as 'the first modern philosopher to make an aesthetic theory an integral part of a philosophic system'. His two important contributions are Observations on the Feeling of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1764) and the first part of his Critique of Judgement (1790). In the latter he describes an aesthetic judgement as being one 'whose determining ground can be no other than subjective'. (tran.s Bernard, 1914, p.45)
- [3] In general Schiller's work has not been considered as influential as Kant's. However, in relation to the social function of art, he is the formative writer. Therefore his work is taken as the point of departure in this discussion
- [4] Beardsley, 1966, p.225
- [5] Schiller, 1793-5, tran.s Snell, 1954, p.40, quoted in Beardsley 1966, p.226
- [6] Schiller, 1793-5, tran.s Snell, 1954, p.138, quoted in Beardsley, 1966, p.230
- [7] Beardsley, 1966, pp.298-9
- [8] Mainardi, 1985, p.8
- [9] Song, 1986
- [10] Mainardi, 1985, p.11
- [11] Saint-Simon, 1802, quoted in Rose, 1984, p.11
- [12] She is in contradiction with Poggioli, 1968 who identifies 'a little known Fourieriste, Gabriel-Desire Laverdant' in De la mission de l'art et du role des artistes, 1845, as being one of the earliest examples of the Avant-Garde idea i.e. the doctrine of art as an instrument for social action

and reform and as a means for 'revolutionary, propaganda and agitation'. (p.9) She argues 'not only was Laverdant more typical of his time than exceptional, in using the term in this sense...but the history of the concept cannot be restricted to its 'political' or 'unpolitical' usage..' Rose, 1984, pp.124-5

- [13] Saint-Simon, 1819 quoted in Rose, 1984, p.12
- [14] *ibid.*
- [15] Comte, 1848, ch.5, quoted in Beardsley, 1966, p.300
- [16] Cited in *ibid.*
- [17] D.S.Mirsky, History of Russian Literature, 1926, ed. Francis J.Whitfield, London, 1964, pp.130 and 210-1
- [18] Cited in Rose, 1984, p.99
- [19] Barooshian, 1985
- [20] Barooshian, 1985
- [21] Solomon, 1979, p.129
- [22] *Ibid.*
- [23] Beardsley, 1966, p.308
- [24] Diffey, 1985, p.1
- [25] A Beardsley, 1966, p.310
- [26] Solomon, 1979, p.5
- [27] Laing, D., 1978, Intro., vii
- [28] Saville in 'Beauty and Truth.The Apotheosis of an Idea', in Shusterman, 1989.
- [29] Marx,Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy 1859, quoted in Smyth, 1986, Op. cit.
- [30] Laing, D., 1978, p.3
- [31] Rose, 1984, p.86
- [32] Marx, Grandrisse 1857-8
quoted in Rose 1984, p.86
- [33] Laing, D., 1978, p.15
- [34] Solomon, 1979, p.121

[35] Plekhanov, 1912, in Solomon, 1979, pp.128-140

CHAPTER THREE

- [1] This debate of course continued beyond these dates, however it is this phase that is of concern as it forms the immediate context of the Constructivist Programme (Appendix A)
- [2] The term 'futurist' was used generally to cover anyone outside the World of Art Group or the Academy
- [3] In 1920 the VKHUTEMAS (the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops) were established. See Lodder 1983, pp.109-143
- [4] Gleason, Kenez and Stites, 1985.
- [5] Op. cit
- [6] Treue, 1960, p.253
- [7] Wood, Art History, Vol. 8, No. 1, p.118
- [8] Siegel, 1970, p.1
- [9] Willet, 1978, p.41
- [10] Willet, 1978, p.41-2
- [11] Op. cit
- [12] Laing, D., 1978, p.27
- [13] Willet, 1978, p.42
- [14] Laing, D., 1978, p25
- [15] Brik Op. cit
- [16] Quoted in Lodder, 1983, p. 76-7
- [17] ibid.
- [18] ibid
- [19] Trans. in Bowlit, 1988, pp.167-170
- [20] ibid.
- [21] Bowlit, 1988, p164-6
- [22] Lodder, 1983, p

[23] quoted in Enzensberger, Screen, Vol. 5, No. 3, p.42

[24] Karginov, 1979

APPENDIX A

14 Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk (text corresponding to the first draft)

The Working Group of Constructivists sets itself the task of expressing the Communist idea in physical installations.

Wishing to tackle this task scientifically, even if only as a hypothesis, the group insists on the need for a synthesis between ideology and form so that laboratory experiments can be realized on the practical plane.

For this reason, the group's programme aims from the outset to make clear from the ideological point of view that:

1. scientific Communism, built on the theory of historical materialism, is the sole ideological presupposition for us;

2. theoretical considerations and the necessary investigation of the Soviet building industry should lead the group to move on from the experimental phase 'outside life' to the real experiment;

3. the specific elements of reality, i.e. tectonics, construction and *faktura*, applied to the physical elements of industrial culture — volume, surface, colour, space and light — justified on an ideological level, worked out on a theoretical plane and reinforced by experience, are the basis for expressing the Communist idea in physical installations.

The three paragraphs of an ideological character constitute the organic link with the formal part.

Tectonics or the tectonic style emerges and derives from the characteristics of Communism itself on the one hand, and from the functional use of industrial material on the other.

Construction is organization. It starts out from Communism and adapts itself tectonically to the material. Construction should be seen as a co-ordinating function between the elements and in turn as an expression of the functionality of tectonics.

The conscious choice of material and its appropriate utilization without interrupting the dynamics of construction and limiting its tectonics is defined by the group as *faktura*.

These are the three basic elements that come to play a part in the whole of intellectual and material production.

The group considers to be material elements:

1. The material in its totality.

Analysis of original components, its industrial processing or use in manufacture. Its qualities, its utilization.

The intellectual materials are:

2. Light. 3. Space. 4. Volume. 5. Surface. 6. Colour.

The Constructivists treat intellectual materials on a par with the materials of solid bodies.

Further tasks of the group

I. In the ideological field:

Demonstrating through action and words the incompatibility of artistic activity with the functionality of intellectual—material production.

The real participation of intellectual—material production in building Communist culture.

II. In the practical field:

Publishing a bulletin.

Weekly publication of the organ *VIP, Vestnik intellektual'nogo proizvodstva* (*The herald of intellectual—material production*).

Publication of brochures and leaflets on problems connected with the group's activities.

Constructive realization of projects.

Organization of exhibitions.

Establishing a link with all the Central Committees in charge of production and with the centres that actually put into practice and realize Communist forms of life.

III. In the field of propaganda:

1. The group declares open war on art in general.

2. It stresses the inadequacy of the artistic culture of the past for producing the Constructivist installations of the new Communist form of life.

The Inkhuk Archives.

The First Working Group of Constructivists

1. By taking part in this exhibition, the Constructivists are not rejecting the basic tenets of revolutionary constructivism, which defends the *factual rationalization of artistic labor* as opposed to the now dominant cultivation of the artistic creation of idealistic art.

By appearing in this instance beneath the slogan "*Associations of Active Revolutionary Art*," the Constructivists are pursuing only agitational aims: to contribute objects they have made and thereby to participate in the demonstrative discussion between the new groups and associations that have arisen within a proletarian society.

This does not mean that we are turning back to art, or that we are retreating from those positions that the First Working Group of Constructivists occupied when, as early as 1920, they shouted forth the slogan "*We declare implacable war on art.*"

2. The Constructivists' rationalization of artistic labor has nothing in common with the travails of art makers who are striving, as it were, to "socialize" the flowering branches of art and to compel the latter *to apply itself* to contemporary social reality.

In rationalizing artistic labor, the Constructivists put into practice—not in verbal, but in concrete terms—the real qualifications of the *object*: they are raising its quality, establishing its social role, and organizing its forms in an organic relationship with its utilitarian meaning and objective.

The Constructivists are putting into practice this rationalization of artistic labor by means of material labor—that labor in which the workers themselves are directly involved.

The Constructivists are convinced that, with the growing influence of the

APPENDIX B

materialist world view, the so-called "spiritual" life of society, the emotional qualities of people can no longer be cemented by abstract categories of metaphysical beauty and by the mystical intrigues of a spirit soaring above society.

The Constructivists assert that all art makers without exception are engaged in these intrigues, and no matter what vestments of realistic or naturalistic art they are invested in, they cannot escape essentially from the magic circle of aesthetic conjuring tricks.

But by applying conscious reason to life, our new young proletarian society lives also by the only concrete values of social construction and by clear objectives.

While constructing, while pursuing these aims *not only for itself, but also through itself*, our society can advance only by concretizing, only by realizing the vital acts of our modern day.

And this is our reality, our life. Ideologically, as it were, consciously, we have extirpated yesterday, but in practical and formal terms we have not yet mastered today's reality.

We do not sentimentalize objects; that is why we do not sing about objects in poetry. But we have the will to construct objects; that is why we are developing and training our ability to make objects.

3. At the "First Discussional Exhibition of Associations of New Groups of Artistic Labor," the Constructivists are showing only certain aspects of their production:

- I. Typographical construction of the printed surface
- II. Volumetrical objects (the construction of an armature for everyday life)
- III. Industrial and special clothing
- IV. Children's books

The First Working Group of Constructivists consists of a number of productional cells.

Of those not represented, mention should be made of the productional cell Kinophot (cinematography and photography), the productional cell of material constructions, and the productional cell Mass Action.

The First Working Group of Constructivists states that all other groups that call themselves constructivists, such as the "Constructivist Poets,"¹ the "Constructivists of the Chamber Theater,"² the "Constructivists of the Meierkhold Theater,"³ the "Lef Constructivists," the "TsIT Constructivists,"⁴ etc., are, from this group's point of view, pseudo constructivists and are engaged in merely making art.

THE FIRST WORKING GROUP OF CONSTRUCTIVISTS

- a. The FWGC *productional cell for an armature for everyday life*:
Grigorii Miller, L. Sanina, and Aleksei Gan
 - b. The FWGC *productional cell for children's books*:
Olga and Galina Chichagova and N. G. Smimov
 - c. The FWGC *productional cell for industrial and special clothing*:
A. Mirolubova, L. Sanina, and Grigorii Miller
 - d. The FWGC *productional cell for typographical production*:
Aleksei Gan and Gr. Miller
-

APPENDIX C

- 5 To the People's Commissar for Education, Comrade A.V. Lunacharsky
- ...The activity of the Section of Figurative Arts (Izo) of the NKP, which has serious problems of a financial order, has involved nothing but buying the works of artists, thereby neglecting an absolutely essential factor for a further development of art, the creation, that is, of living conditions, however modest, such as to ensure a continual output of new works.
- ...The artists, associated in the Council of Masters of Painting, apply to you, People's Commissar for Education, with the following requests:
1. To grant... to artists the right to the allowance for the Red Army, for the artist himself, for his wife and for his children...
 5. To grant to artists the right to have free of charge a studio, electric lighting, heating and the materials required for his own creative work, as well as linen, shoes, clothes and overcoats.
- The Inkhuk Archives.

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