SLAVISTISCHE BEITRÄGE

BEGRÜNDET VON

ALOIS SCHMAUS

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON

JOHANNES HOLTHUSEN · HEINRICH KUNSTMANN

PETER REHDER · JOSEF SCHRENK

REDAKTION

PETER REHDER

Band 142

VERLAG OTTO SAGNER
MÜNCHEN

HALINA STEPHAN

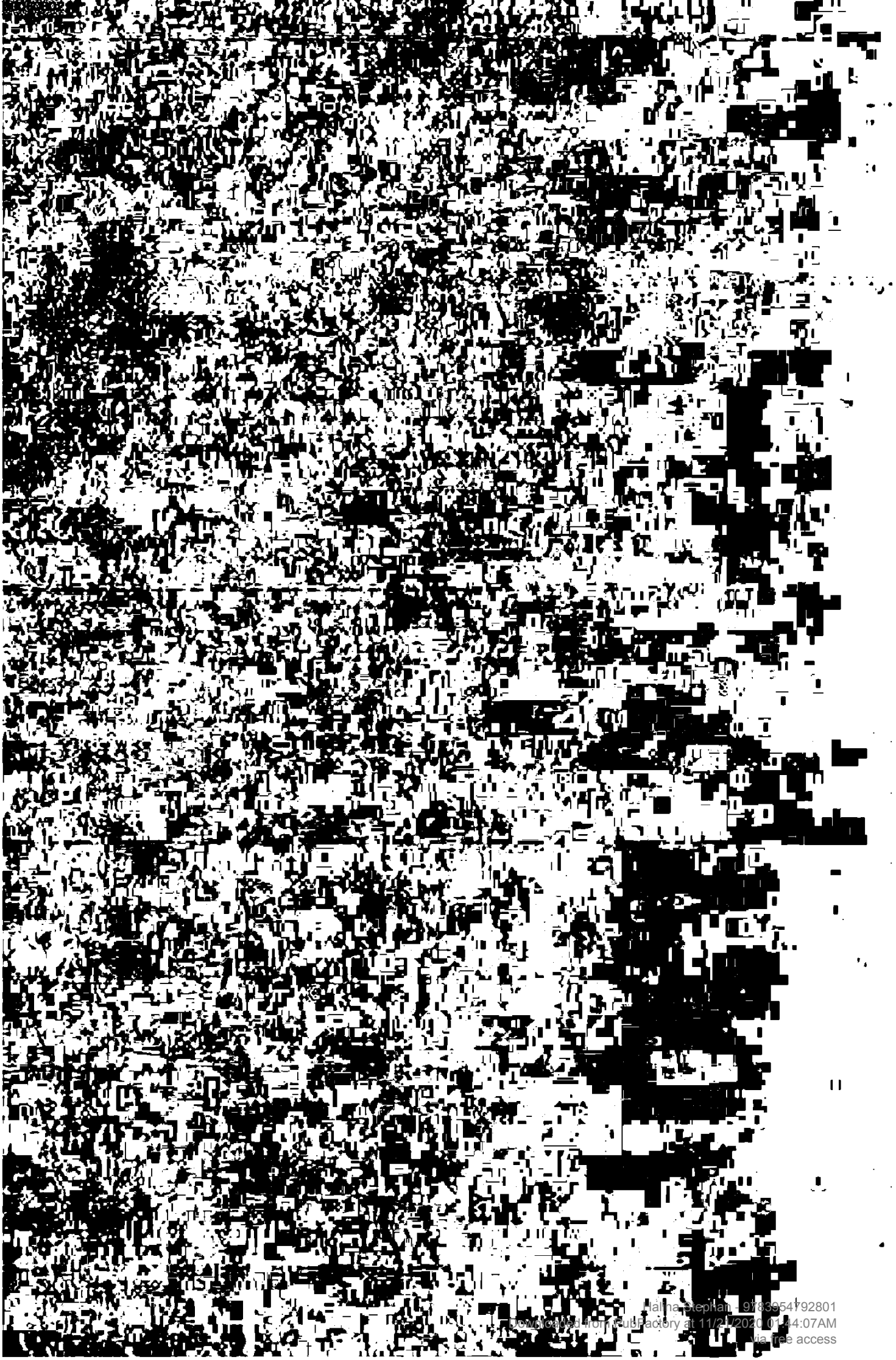
„LEF" AND THE LEFT FRONT OF THE ARTS

VERLAG OTTO SAGNER · MÜNCHEN
1981

ISBN 3-87690-186-3

Abteilung der Firma Kubon & Sagner, München
Druck: Alexander Grossmann
Fäustlestr. 1, D-8000 München 2

To Axel



CONTENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes the artistic theory and practice of the Left Front of the Arts (Levyi front iskusstv—Lef) with a special focus on the journal *Lef* (1923-1925). Two themes are central to this account: the organizational activities of the Lef group directed toward making Futurism a formative force within the Soviet culture and the artistic proposals published in *Lef* that had the same goal.

Although the core of the Lef group consisted of the former Futurist poets, the term "Futurism" after the Revolution became synonymous with modern art in general. As the Futurists sought to expand their role in Soviet culture, Futurism encompassed all avant-garde art, regardless of the medium. In effect, the journal *Lef*, designed according to this broad interpretation of Futurism, was envisaged as an organ that would bring together all the experimental art of the early Soviet period.

As a result of these efforts, *Lef* provides a unique synchronic view of the early Soviet avant-garde. In addition to Vladimir Mayakovsky, who was the main editor of the journal, numerous Soviet artists, writers, and critics of the 1920s who eventually achieved international recognition worked within the orbit of the Left Front of the Arts. Among those who published in *Lef* were the Formalist critics Yurii Tynyanov and Viktor Shklovsky, the poets Velimir Khlebnikov and Boris Pasternak, the prose writer Isaak Babel, the then-theater director Sergei Eisenstein, the moviemaker Dziga Vertov, and the artist Aleksandr Rodchenko. Some of them became involved with the Lef group because they sympathized with Lef's attempt to design an entirely new kind of functional art that would shape the society as no art had done before. Others did not believe in the Lef version of politicized arts, but they were brought into Lef because the Lef group planned to act as advocate for all the avant-garde artists of the early Soviet period.

The Soviet Futurists began with the hope that the Communist Revolution, which they believed had established the most progressive of world political systems, would establish an era of correspondingly modern, nontraditional art. As the best foundation for this future art, they proposed the esthetics of Futurism. While they continued the path of formal experimentation that they had begun in the earlier stage of the Futurist movement, they now introduced a new concept of the artist. The artist

was to become a specialist in the creation of new artistic forms, a professional whose formal experimentation promised to be directly functional in fulfilling the needs of the new society.

By proposing this new social identity for the artist, the Lef group made an attempt to establish Futurism as a major movement in the Soviet state. The Futurist effort met with almost uniform resistance from the leftist proletarians, from moderate intellectuals, and from the Soviet cultural administration, all of whom were antagonized by the intense anti-traditionalism of Lef and its utilitarian view of art. The Lef group soon found that it would not have the opportunity to act as a pressure group to defend the interest of the avant-garde, and, in fact, that its efforts to do so would receive no outside support.

Even though *Lef* was devoted to developing the theory of avant-garde, or left arts, it remained primarily a literary journal, run by the former Futurist poets and focused mainly on adapting Futurist poetics to the needs of the new social system. The Futurist poets intended to make their poetry functional in the Soviet context by using it to raise the general consciousness of language use and devising new poetic forms to find the most adequate ways of expressing the concerns of the new times. In tune with the utopian technicism of the early Soviet period, one-time Futurists saw themselves as "verbal engineers," as modernizers of the language and therefore modernizers of mass consciousness. Yet within this new, utilitarian definition of poetry, the role of a "verbal engineer" allowed the Futurists to keep open the path of experimentation as they pursued it before the Revolution and to regard the interest in the verbal texture of poetry as a manifestation of the social consciousness of the poet.

Prose, a medium of lesser interest to the Futurists, showed in *Lef* a more tentative formal character with the dominant features of individual prose pieces ranging from a focus on style to a focus on plot or on material taken from immediate reality. *Lef* printed a variety of prose pieces that tentatively set up various models of new Soviet prose, including special types of ornamental prose, adventure stories with political overtones, and the literature of fact. In this distribution of prose types published in the journal, *Lef* covers almost the entire spectrum of prose models explored in the literature of the first half of the 1920s, with the notable exception of realism.

The discontinuation of *Lef* in 1925 did not end the activities of the Left Front of the Arts. In the years 1927 and 1928, the group published

a sequel to *Lef* that was called *New Lef* (*Novyi Lef*). Yet it was in *Lef* that Russian Futurism, a poetic movement devoted to experimentation with words and rhythm, had come to an end.

By 1925 the Lef group no longer called itself Futurist, because the prerevolutionary reputation of Futurism as a Bohemian movement had proven too difficult to live down in the Soviet period. These ex-Futurists now began to abandon the medium of poetry, which was the medium of Futurism, and to turn to prose written according to a new program of "literature of fact" (*literatura fakta*). The most important difference that set this literature apart from the original Futurism was the fact that it no longer existed simply as an esthetic experiment offering a new way of looking at words and images. Despite the assurances of commitment to verbal experimentation, by 1925 the works written by the former Futurists began to serve a cause; they were produced to convey a message. In *New Lef*, experimentation with form became clearly subservient to the higher goal of shaping the social experience through literature that now responded to "social commission" (*sotsyalnyi zakaz*). With this development the original Futurism came to an end.

Although we may find it difficult to resist the vitality and wit of the Soviet Futurists that is demonstrated in the *Lef* journal, we are also reminded of the dangers of their militant, single-minded pursuit of a path in art that rejected all former conventions in an attempt to make art truly utilitarian. The Lef Futurists were one of the first, if not the first, to introduce dogmatism and intolerance into Soviet cultural life. The Lef group consistently supported the militant proletarians in their efforts to exclude "fellow-traveler" writers and poets from Soviet literature. Lef was equally determined in its attacks on the Soviet cultural administration at a time when Soviet officials were trying to pursue a middle-of-the road policy in the formation of Soviet culture. Ironically, only after the demise of the Lef group in 1930 did the Soviet cultural administration make use of the avant-garde ideal of the writer as a state employee, but it did so in the context of Socialist Realism, which rejected the avant-garde.

In contradiction to popular belief in the flourishing of the avant-garde in the early Soviet period, it is obvious that the repeated failure of the Futurist attempts to gain access to the public as a group must be seen as a concrete indicator of their position within Soviet culture. In particular,

the Futurists persistently attempted, but never managed to establish a printing firm that could serve as a focal point from which the literary avant-garde could disseminate ideas.

As an avant-garde movement, Futurism—by the very nature of its art—lacked popular support and was always in need of patronage. With their prerevolutionary patrons gone, the Soviet Futurists tried to persuade the Soviet administration to offer that patronage and support their publishing. They did so by advocating the concept of the artist as a socially functional professional and by insisting on the utilitarian character of their art. Yet as early as 1919 it became obvious that Futurism would never have a chance to obtain willing support from the Soviet state. The postrevolutionary Futurists soon realized that if they gained access to a printing press, they could do so only as individuals, not as a movement. The best illustration of such problems is the publishing history of the journal *Lef;* this history shows the ultimately insurmountable difficulties that Futurists experienced as they sought to preserve their image as a movement.

In tracing the difficulties the avant-garde had in finding access to print, it becomes questionable whether the avant-garde really had unlimited enthusiasm for the Soviet system. It appears rather that this enthusiasm was a response to the Revolution itself and that it was esthetic rather than political in nature. The Futurists supported the Revolution because it promised them a new system of culture. They could not hold to this belief for very long. In 1919, Lenin condemned the Futurist program for the first time; by 1923, when the Commissar of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky called for a return to the artistic traditions of the nineteenth century, it had become evident that there would be no symbiotic relationship between Futurism and Communism. The Futurists may have been radical in their attempt to blend art and politics, but they were extreme not in their commitment to the political system, but in their determination to use that system to create a new type of art. They were willing to go to great lengths to eliminate the conservative competition which, ironically, had the support of the new Soviet state. They were vocal in championing the cause of modern art, but the new system for which they designed their art did not correspond to the Soviet reality.

A further irony lies in the fact that while the Soviet government's refusal to support the Futurist program as the basis for all of Soviet culture led to the ultimate demise of Futurism, the revolution that brought that government to power appears to have given the Futurists a chance

to prolong their movement a few years longer than would have been possible without that revolution. Once the postrevolutionary Futurists committed themselves to the image of the artist as professional, they used the context in which they were working to renovate and innovate Futurist esthetics, which had reached an apparent stalemate by 1917. In effect, the Revolution gave the Futurists a new lease on life, for, despite all the difficulties and frustrations of trying to gain access to the public, the Soviet system stimulated the Futurists into developing new reasons and new ways to continue their art.

In this discussion of the *Lef* journal, one question remains unanswered for lack of adequate materials. It concerns the extent to which Mayakovsky acted as the editor of *Lef* and *New Lef.* He was the "responsible editor" (*otvetstvennyi redaktor*) of both journals, yet it is questionable whether he was personally involved in the actual publishing. Lef and Mayakovsky were synonymous throughout the 1920s, but whether Mayakovsky in fact spent his time tending to the affairs of the journal is not that certain, and perhaps—in the final account—not that important. *Lef* was the journal of a most authentic artistic collective, a collective of which Mayakovsky was the most outstanding member, one who would do most to assure publicity for the group. Mayakovsky certainly solicited contributions for *Lef* and signed proclamations, but it is also clear that he was a practitioner and not a theoretician of the new arts.

Lef, however, had as its primary objective the development of the theory of the new arts and the establishment of the avant-garde as a valid and paramount cultural force in the Soviet state. If *Lef* indeed had a leader, he probably was Osip Brik, a man with special interest in artistic theories and a remarkable cultural politician. His very close personal relationship with Mayakovsky makes it impossible to establish exactly how the actual editorial and promotional functions in *Lef* were distributed. Investigation of this problem is made even more difficult by the fact that after 1934 Brik was very cautious about revealing the details of his own artistic involvements in the 1920s.

Although in this study it is *Lef* and not Mayakovsky that is the focal point, this question still awaits an answer. Perhaps the answer will never be obtained, because anyone studying the Soviet avant-garde must recognize that collectivism is a natural feature of any avant-garde movement.

I am very grateful to Deming Brown and Assya Humesky for their encouragement and valuable suggestions in preparing the initial version

of this study. I would also like to thank Marla Knudsen for her editorial help. My thanks go also to the University of Southern California for supporting this project with a grant. Finally, with gratitude I acknowledge assistance of my husband Alexander and my son Michael, who helped me in innumerable ways.

Parts of this study corresponding to part 3 of chapter 4, chapter 5, and the epilogue respectively appeared in *Russian Language Journal*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, and *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*. I thank the editors of these journals for the permission to reprint my contributions.

CHAPTER ONE

FUTURISTS IN SEARCH OF SOVIET LEGITIMACY

1. TOWARD A FUTURIST DICTATORSHIP OF THE ARTS

Following the 1917 February Revolution, the Formalist critic Osip Brik and his friend the Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky became involved in the earliest efforts to revive the cultural life. At the time they had not yet changed their orientation from prerevolutionary antiestablishment Futurism to the Futurism that was to appear for a brief time as the cultural ideology of the Soviet state and that was to become the label for the politically engaged avant-garde. Instead, Brik and Mayakovsky were interested in protecting the interests of the avant-garde against the threat from the increasingly vocal cultural right. In the early spring of 1917, they joined the Union of Art Workers (Soyuz deyatelei iskusstv), the first cultural organization formed under the Provisional Government.[1] Within the Union of Art Workers, they identified themselves with the left wing, the group "Freedom for Art." This group insisted on the apolitical character of art and on the total independence of art from the state, while also demanding that the government grant artists unconditional material support.

Brik and Mayakovsky evidently realized that the destruction of Russian cultural life brought by the Revolution of 1917 presented a particular threat to the avant-garde. Even though the experimental artists had desired the destruction of the old culture promised by the Revolution, they now had to deal with the threat that the Revolution brought to their own existence. The limited middle class audience that had supported the Futurist poets and the Cubist, Suprematist, or Primitivist painters disappeared with the Revolution, and the avant-garde could not reasonably expect much material support in the worker-peasant state, because its impact on the Russian mass culture had been negligible.

After the Bolshevik seizure of power on October 25, 1917, the Union of Art Workers as a whole rejected the idea of any cooperation with Anatoly Lunacharsky, People's Commissar of Education and the representative of the Soviet cultural administration. Brik and Mayakovsky, however,

soon modified their own insistence on the separation of art and politics. They became convinced that it was necessary to mobilize the experimental artists in order to bring them into the cultural life of the new Soviet state.

In place of the former middle-class patrons who had supported occasional avant-garde ventures, the Futurists saw the possibility that the new state itself could offer them patronage. The vacuum in Russian cultural life brought by the Revolution had allowed the left artists, as they came to call themselves, to become highly visible despite their lack of popularity. Well before any competitors entered the field, the Futurists, determined to modernize Russian life according to their own prescription, sought an administrative and artistic monopoly of the emerging Soviet culture.

The earliest and most dramatic episode in the history of postrevolutionary Futurism was the Futurist attempt to advance the avant-garde program as the new cultural ideology of Communist society. In 1918, the Futurists proclaimed that there was a natural kinship between Communism and Futurism: while Communism had wiped out the antiquated and oppressive tsarist system, Futurism was on its way to eradicating the bourgeois mentality and the conventional art of the former establishment. The Futurists insisted that, whereas Communism offered a new political and economic framework, Futurism would shape the culture of the new state and the consciousness of its citizens.

In reality, the partnership of Communism and Futurism that they envisioned did not follow automatically from the Futurist tenets. Instead, the suggestion of such a partnership actually seemed like a somewhat pragmatic gesture on the part of the Futurists, who evidently realized the critical state of the arts after the Revolution. Prior to the Revolution, the Futurists had shown no desire for political involvement. At the time of the Revolution, though they welcomed the upheaval, they were more interested in the final breakdown of the cultural tradition than in the change of the political system.

And yet from the set of artistic values aimed at the destruction of the old artistic status quo that characterized prerevolutionary Futurism, the avant-garde developed a new esthetic system that presented Futurist art as a forerunner of the new Communist culture. They came to believe that the Revolution had created a *tabula rasa*, cleared so that a modern culture based on avant-garde principles could be formed. Their new program, which they continued to designate as Futurism, was no longer to be con-

fined to an artistic style, but represented a set of propositions defining the function of art in the formation of the entire culture of the new state.

Always eager to gain a forum for their ideas, the Futurists issued their first revolutionary proclamations with the printing of the sole issue of *The Futurist Gazette* (*Gazeta futuristov*).[2] The issue—prepared by the former Cubo-Futurist poets Vladimir Mayakovsky, David Burlyuk, and Vasily Kamensky—appeared on March 15, 1918, as a collection of proclamations and poems rather than as a newspaper. Obviously concerned about the survival of Futurism in the postrevolutionary chaos, the poets announced a grandiose plan to reorient literary Futurism according to the precepts of "proletarian" art. The word "proletarian" had as yet little to do with the program of the powerful Proletkult (Proletarskaya kultura —organization for proletarian culture), but its use helped the Futurists to gain much-needed respectability.[3] *The Futurist Gazette* showed the Futurists to be true revolutionaries, as Futurism was declared to be "the revolution of the spirit" (*revolyutsiya dukha*). Mayakovsky insisted that the Communist revolution was a revolution of content, and that therefore it must be supplemented by a corresponding revolution of form led by the Futurists.[4] To set the stage for such a revolution, *The Futurist Gazette* repeated the usual Futurist appeal for the disinheritance of the old-fashioned cultural tradition: "Those looking backward face the future with an eyeless back!"

It soon became obvious that proclamations alone could not assure the survival of Futurism and that the avant-garde needed institutional patronage. At the same time, the new Soviet cultural administration was meeting with a hostile reception in literary and artistic circles and was therefore willing to make considerable concessions to get the support of any of the artistic groups.[5]

Brik and Mayakovsky were also aware that the survival of Futurism after the Revolution was mainly dependent on access to a printing press. Yet they had trouble obtaining that access. The difficulties that Mayakovsky and his group encountered in publishing their works after the Revolution were not just politically contrived; they had objective causes: the publishing business, almost destroyed by the Civil War and plagued by a shortage of paper and printing presses, had to respond first to the rising demand for political literature.[6] Belles-lettres, especially in the extreme, avant-garde version, had low priority. Under these circumstances, the left artists' demonstrations of acceptance of Soviet power and

of enthusiasm for political slogans had a pragmatic side. Brik and Mayakovsky's conversion from their initial apolitical postiion within the Union of Art Workers to actual involvement in Soviet cultural politics through the Commissariat of Education (Narodnyi kommissaryat prosveshcheniya —Narkompros) had the practical benefit of giving the Futurists first access to a printing press.

At this stage, Narkompros regarded the cooperation of the Futurists as important for the revival of Russian cultural life under Soviet auspices. Lunacharsky was tolerant, occasionally even sympathetic, toward left art, but most of all he realized that the Futurists were the only established group that was expressing prorevolutionary sentiments and that could therefore help to legitimize the Soviet cultural administration.

In the summer of 1918, at Lunacharsky's suggestion, David Shterenberg, a painter and a friend of Lunacharsky, and Nikolai Punin, a former art critic from the journal *Apollon*, approached Brik and Mayakovsky and invited them to join the Division of Fine Arts (Otdel izobrazitelnykh iskusstv—IZO) of Narkompros.[7] Along with the invitation, Shterenberg and Punin also indicated that Narkompros would support a Futurist publishing enterprise. Such an enterprise already existed, because at the beginning of 1918 Osip Brik had organized "a literary society" he called "Art of the Young" (Iskusstvo molodykh—IMO). Although not registered as an official group, Brik's "IMO" had as its goal the propagation of left art through the organization of exhibits, meetings of interested artists, and literary evenings called "live journals" where literary works would be read.[8] Until the Narkompros offer, however, the group had not actually been able to publish books. Now, Brik and Mayakovsky's willingness to join Narkompros allowed them to print books through "IMO" with a subsidy from Narkompros. Subsequently their membership in IZO also gave them a chance to propagate Futurism through Narkompros' newspaper, *Art of the Commune* (*Iskusstvo kommuny*), which would become identified with the Futurist movement.

On July 27, 1918, the Petrograd board of Narkompros confirmed the proposal for the publishing enterprise "IMO" and agreed to subsidize twelve Futurist publications per year. The "IMO" statute shows that Brik planned to expand the activities of the original society for the propagation of left art, a society that in reality propagated Futurist poetry and Formalist criticism:

1. The publishing house "IMO" is an association of left writers devoted to creating, issuing, and propagandizing books that cannot be issued by any other publishing firm because of their revolutionary orientation, their breaking away from all deep-rooted literary traditions.
2. Our means:
   a. publication of books (pure word and theory of word);
   b. staging of a "live journal" (replacing paper by the city square and stage);
   c. publication of posters and leaflets (fragments of works and criticism);
   d. organization of meetings and lectures (about books that are expected to provoke an esthetic explosion).
3. The publishing house unites the following members:

Pure word	Theory of word
1. Aseev, N.	1. Brik, O.
2. Burlyuk, D.	2. Kushner, B.
3. Kamensky, V.	3. Polivanov, D.
4. Kruchonykh, A.	4. Eikhenbaum, B.
5. Mayakovsky, V.	5. Yakubinsky, N.
6. Pasternak, B.	6. Shklovsky, V.
7. Khlebnikov, V.	7. Yakobson, R.[9]

The above list indicates that the publishing venture was to be a joint Futurist (in the original, narrow sense)-Formalist enterprise. The editorial board—Brik, Mayakovsky and Shklovsky, with Roman Jakobson as a secretary—reflected this orientation.

In 1918, in half a year, "IMO" managed to put out the Futurist miscellany *The Rusty Word* (*Rzhanoe slovo*), the Formalist collection *Poetics (Poetika)*, and four items by Mayakovsky, for a total production of 70,000 copies. The first volume, *The Rusty Word*, carried an introduction by the Commissar of Education Lunacharsky. Mindful of the Bohemian reputation of the Futurists, Lunacharsky tried to justify the Narkompros support of their publication by repeating the Futurist argument that the revolution of artistic form corresponded to the spirit of the political revolution.[10] The Central Publishing House (Tsentropechat)—the main Soviet publishing firm led by Boris Malkin, who was a supporter of Mayakovsky—did its share by buying a large part of the books issued by "IMO," thus assuring the Futurists of financial success.

When Brik and Mayakovsky joined IZO, they found themselves in the

company of other supporters of modern art. In addition to Nikolai Punin and David Shterenberg, they met Boris Kushner, a former Cubo-Futurist poet, Nikolai Altman, a painter, and a host of other avant-garde artists, including the painters Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Puni, and Marc Chagal.[11]

In this group, Brik, who from the beginning had insisted that IZO should have at its disposal not only a publishing enterprise but also a newspaper, found collaborators for a second project, the newspaper *Art of the Commune*. The newspaper made its appearance on December 7, 1918, as an organ of IZO, but its publication was a clandestine affair that assured that the point of view represented in the newspaper would be the position of the avant-garde. The publication of *Art of the Commune* was intended as the first step toward mobilizing the avant-garde forces in the struggle to assure the dominance of Futurism, now known also as left art, in Soviet cultural institutions.

Prior to the appearance of this newspaper, during a Narkompros debate on November 28, 1918, Lunacharsky himself had publicly supported the idea of a Narkompros journal, but he had envisaged a joint publication put out by the Theatrical, Musical, Museum, and Fine Arts Division. At the time, Mayakovsky and Punin had argued that the Fine Arts Division needed its own paper devoted to its own specific organizational problems.[12] Only a week after this exchange, the first number of *Art of the Commune* suddenly materialized in an edition of ten thousand copies, ready for free distribution. The Futurists tried to play down the surprise nature of this manner of publishing, blaming their action on the unwillingness of some IZO members to cooperate and promising to be more collective-minded in the future.

Such explanations notwithstanding, the weekly newspaper *Art of the Commune* was the brainchild of only four individuals—Brik, Mayakovsky, Shtalberg and Punin—who had decided, in Mayakovsky's words, "to face the board [in charge of IZO] with the fact that this newspaper had appeared, with the intention to encourage the entire board to take part in the further editing of the paper."[13] Although the Futurists, confronted by Narkompros after the appearance of the newspaper, initially indeed agreed to involve the members of other Narkompros divisions in the publication of future issues of *Art of the Commune*, they managed to install an editorial board made up only of IZO members who were Futurists: Brik, Punin, and Altman. With these avowed propagators of modern art

in charge, *Art of the Commune* presented absolute unity in its philosophy of art.

Narkompros had to admit that the newspaper did indeed address itself to the organizational problems of the fine arts, problems such as the economic plight of the artists, the organization of art museums, the nationalization of private art collections, the administration of granite quarries, and the placement of unemployed icon painters. But these administrative issues were soon subordinated to the central problem of the formation of the new culture on an avant-garde basis.

Because in 1918–1919 only a few prerevolutionary artists were willing to cooperate with the Soviet government, the Futurists from *Art of the Commune* were unchallenged when they embarked on a program of propagandizing avant-garde art as a model for the art of the Soviet society. They insisted not only that the Revolution had brought an administrative reorganization, but also that such a political change demanded a total reorientation of the purpose of the arts. According to Brik, who emerged as the main spokesman of the postrevolutionary avant-garde, artists had to replace the traditional artistic models inherited from Realism and Symbolism with a new version of art, especially designed for the new society and constantly revised in accordance with changing social needs. Brik believed that only such a dynamic art as Futurism could convey the modern experience, reach the contemporary audience and, ultimately, provide a guide for the future Soviet culture.[14]

In search of ways to legitimize Futurism under Soviet rule, Brik found a model for the new relationship between the artist and the state in the medieval system of trade guilds. Like the medieval stonemasons and church painters, who made no distinction between the artist and the craftsman, the avant-garde had to respond to the material needs of the new state and its proletarian citizens. Brik insisted that the artists should become participants in the industrialization and modernization of the country by using their formal skills in the creation of models appropriate for industrial production and by developing new forms and new approaches to materials. He optimistically noted that "factories and workshops [were] waiting to be approached by artists who could give them models of new, yet unseen things."[15]

In his proposal for artistic involvement in production, Brik refused to compromise the avant-garde by accepting intelligibility (*ponyatnost*)

and accessibility (*dostupnost*) as prerequisites for proletarian art. In Brik's opinion, the artist demonstrated sufficient proletarian consciousness by creating his work for the new society; the artist did not need to simplify his art for a conservative consumer. An artistic creation was socially functional if it showed a new way of handling materials, or pointed—even indirectly—toward a functional object. Brik insisted that through the creation of new forms an artist would fulfill his social role. The work of an artist would be as significant as that of an industrial worker, and he should be rewarded with an identical financial compensation for his societal contribution.

The belief that Futurism was organically fit to serve as the formative force in the development of Communist culture led its proponents to seek an eventual monopoly of the avant-garde in Soviet cultural life. The Futurists wanted not only to shape industrial production, but also to leave their mark on daily surroundings. For example, one correspondent of *Art of the Commune*, annoyed by the tasteless decoration of the provincial cultural centers known as "houses of culture," advocated Futurist dictatorship in the formation of public taste:

> Without losing a moment, it is necessary to take all measures to strengthen this living art [Futurism] and inject it in large doses into the organism of the country, by dictatorial means if necessary.[16]

This cry for Futurist control of the arts acquired political dimensions when the Futurists proclaimed that their approach was a *Weltanschauung* ultimately superior to Communism:

> Futurism is not only an artistic movement; it is an entire world view, which has its basis in Communism, but which in effect *leaves Communism as a culture behind* [my emphasis—HS]. Futurism is a movement that deepens and widens the cultural base of Communism, introducing into it a new element: a dynamic sense of time.[17]

The Futurists believed that their monopoly of Soviet culture would be a legitimate consequence of the modernizing, collectivist, and functional quality of avant-garde art. As an anonymous author stated in *Art of the Commune:*

> Only that art can be called the art of the present that anticipates its future, that art in which is felt the pulse beat of the future. Only that which brings us nearer to this art has the right to real existence. One

> must therefore conclude that also in art it is necessary to install a dictatorship, a dictatorship inspired by a desire to achieve the ultimate end of art according to the understanding of new artists: this end being the victory over matter in the sense of achieving perfect mastery of it, of achieving the most perfect forms of expressing the human spirit in matter.[18]

The newspaper *Art of the Commune* in its propagation of Futurism focused mainly on the fine arts. Yet from the newspaper's beginning Brik, Punin, and Mayakovsky equated Futurism in the fine arts with modern artistic thinking in general.[19] As they defined it, Futurism became a world view that encompassed all artistic activity and was aimed at the creation of the new culture in the spirit of the avant-garde. Mayakovsky's participation insured that the newspaper would also undertake the cause of giving avant-garde direction to the literature and literary theory of the future. The first issue of the newspaper carried an appeal, "Let's Organize Divisions of Verbal Art!", which apparently represented an attempt to set up an avant-garde Division of Verbal Art (Otdel slovesnogo iskusstva) within Narkompros that would parallel the Fine Arts Division. In this appeal, *Art of the Commune* proposed that the new literary life be organized under the auspices of the Futurists and the Formalists, because only these groups were sufficiently "left" to create the basis for future literature and criticism. The appeal urged Lunacharsky to help in the publication of more Futurist and Formalist works and in the organization of the new literature. Still, only a few titles by Futurists and Formalists were mentioned as proof of this revolutionary orientation:

> During all this time, nothing from the worthwhile pieces created despite [the critical publishing situation] by contemporary literature has been introduced to the working masses. This situation is most absurd, because there are remarkable poetic works such as "War and Peace" by Mayakovsky, poems by Khlebnikov, verses by Kamensky, [remarkable critical works such as the work of] the masters of the word and the propagandists of the new (a group of young scholars united by the "Collections on the Theory of Poetical Language"). But one thing is lacking: an organization that knows how to gather separate wheels into one mechanism.[20]

Brik and Mayakovsky may have originally hoped that the Formalist-Futurist publishing enterprise "IMO," sponsored by Narkompros, could

be developed into an organizational center for future Soviet literary life, but such a plan received no support from Narkompros.

Actually, Narkompros did attempt to organize a literary section to complement the other art sections already established, but the attempt met with little initial success.[21] Mayakovsky, who was supposed to attend the preparatory meetings, always believed that the organizers had deliberately misinformed him about the places and times of meeting in an effort to prevent his participation.[22] Evidently what the more traditional writers perceived as the threat of an avant-garde monopoly propagated by IZO made it difficult for Narkompros to approach the literary world. Eventually, after a year of efforts, LITO, the Literary Department of Narkompros, was organized on December 11, 1919, with Lunacharsky as president and the Symbolist poet Bryusov as deputy president.[23] Brik, the sole representative of the Futurists to LITO, became a candidate member, but the avant-garde in general had no impact on the affairs of LITO.

With the Futurists publishing in "IMO" and championing the cause of Futurism as a basis for the emerging new culture in *Art of the Commune*, Lunacharsky found himself in the awkward position of sponsoring a radical left program when his orginal policy had been based on the idea of appeasing all cultural groups. The Futurists did not help Lunacharsky's situation when they declared in *Art of the Commune* that they were indebted to him for all they had accomplished in popularizing literary Futurism:

> Until now all that we have achieved in the area of verbal art has been that which Comrade Lunacharsky has supported. If he were to be incapacitated with the flu for four weeks, then the development of poetry in Russia would come to a standstill for exactly four weeks.[24]

Although Lunacharsky was in fact sympathetic to the avant-garde, he could not allow the Futurist program to be seen as originating from Narkompros. Although initially he chose to ignore the Futurist claims to monopoly, Lunacharsky was soon forced to reprimand the Futurists for their indiscriminate rejection of prerevolutionary artistic traditions. The second number of *Art of the Commune*, which carried Mayakovsky's poetic editorial "Too Early to Rejoice" ("Radovatsya rano"), forced Lunacharsky to take a stand and to issue a printed rejoinder in *Art of the Commune*.

Lunacharsky was provoked into intervening by the lines of the poem

in which Mayakovsky called for the final eradication of the vestiges of the artistic past:

> А Рафаэля забыли?
> Забыли Растрелли вы?
> Время
> пулям
> по стенкам музеев тенькать.
> Стодюймовками глоток старье растреливай![25]

Mayakovsky's poem was a Futurist statement on the necessity of separating the new art from former artistic traditions. On another level, it also reflected the ongoing controversies within Narkompros over the selection of the prerevolutionary artistic monuments that were to come under the protection of the Soviet government. In view of the vandalism, looting, and senseless breaking down of all vestiges of the past that were occurring as a result of the Revolution, Mayakovsky's call for the destruction of the old art had more than a theoretical meaning.[26] The Soviet cultural administration, sensitive about its international reputation, could hardly dismiss Mayakovsky's statement as a poetic metaphor. Apparently Lenin himself instigated Lunacharsky's intervention. According to the memoirs of Lunacharsky's wife, Lunacharsky's article "A Spoonful of Antitoxin" ("Lozhka protivoyadiya") "appeared as a result of a conversation between Lenin and Lunacharsky [in which] Lenin proposed to halt all the attackes against the classical heritage."[27]

In the article "A Spoonful of Antitoxin," Lunacharsky restated Narkompros' commitment to the protection of artistic treasures and emphasized the need to preserve the national cultural heritage. He also appealed to the Futurists to show a more tolerant attitude toward non-Futurist groups, and he assured all groups that Narkompros intended to create an atmosphere of justice and free competition for all artistic circles. Bearing in mind the Futurists' efforts to establish a monopoly, Lunacharsky acknowledged their contributions to postrevolutionary cultural life, but he cautioned the Futurists not to regard themselves as the representatives of the official art:

> . . . it would be a tragedy if the artists-innovators ultimately imagined themselves as the state school of art, as proponents of the official art which, even if revolutionary, is dictated from above. And so two features are somewhat frightening in the young face of this newspaper

> . . . : the destructive tendencies with respect to the past and the tendency to claim to be speaking the name of the cultural administration while actually speaking only for a specific school.[28]

Lunacharsky's warning did not deter the Futurists from intensifying their campaign for the control of Soviet arts. The Futurists now saw that their chance to create a truly modern culture could be undermined by the representatives of prerevolutionary art who had already acquired influence in Soviet cultural institutions.

The Futurists were demanding a mandate for their art because they believed that only they combined the professionalism of true artists with the consciousness of true proletarians. Like the members of Proletkult, the Futurists believed in the necessity of developing the culture of the Revolution immediately, before the revolutionary mood became corrupted by the conservative spirit of the intelligentsia. Yet, in contrast to Proletkult, the Futurists wanted the new culture not to reflect the proletarian mentality, but to offer an active program aimed at modernizing the daily esthetic experience of the new Soviet citizen. The new Soviet man was to be surrounded by functional objects designed by modern artists. He was to be exposed to literature and theater that stimulated his analytic capacities and modernized his consciousness. Through their art, the Futurists expected to help in the formation of a modern mentality that would match the uniqueness of the political system under which Soviet man lived.

In their search for a mandate, the Futurists soon moved beyond the newspaper *Art of the Commune*, which was championing the cause of Futurism within Narkompros. They decided to form an organization specifically devoted to the formation of a new Soviet cultural ideology.

It appears that the idea for such an organization grew out of the poetry readings for workers audiences that Mayakovsky conducted in December 1918 with the assistance of Osip Brik.[29] The readings received an especially warm response in Vyborg, a city north of Petrograd, so Mayakovsky and Brik decided to base there an organization of "Communists-Futurists" ("Kommunisty-futuristy") which they called "Kom-fut."

The "Kom-fut" organization was formally constituted in January 1919. *Art of the Commune* printed its organizational proclamation, the statute, and the program of projected activities. The "Kom-fut" proclamation directly attacked the Soviet cultural administration for allegedly compromising Communist ideals:

> The Communist system requires Communist consciousness. All forms of life, morality, philosophy, and art must be revamped according to Communist principles. Without this awareness, any further development of the Communist revolution is impossible. Cultural and educational organs of the Soviet power display a complete incomprehension of the revolutionary task placed upon them. . . . Their social-democratic ideology lacks the power to withstand the centuries-old experience of bourgeois ideologists, who exploit cultural and educational organizations in their own interest.[30]

"Kom-fut" demanded instead a definitive, immediate program aimed at the creation of a new culture based on a clearly dictatorial uniformity:

> It is necessary to proceed quickly to the creation of our own Communist ideology.
> It is necessary to carry on a merciless fight with all false ideologies of the bourgeois past.
> It is necessary to place Soviet cultural and educational organs under the command of the new, still developing, cultural Communist ideology.
> It is necessary, in all cultural fields, including art, to shed completely all democratic illusions, [illusions] that in fact conceal bourgeois remnants and prejudices.
> It is necessary to call the masses to artistic activity.[31]

The structure proposed for "Kom-fut" followed the model of the Party cell, and the Futurists subsequently sought incorporation into the Communist Party as an independent organization specializing in cultural policy-making. Because they intended to maintain a consistent profile as a Communist organization, they planned to draw members only from within the Party. This decision excluded Mayakovsky from membership in "Kom-fut," because he did not belong to the Party. Boris Kushner became the chairman of the Futurist organization, whereas Osip Brik held a crucial post as organizer and eventual director of the planned "Kom-fut" Party school.

Because the Party apparently showed little interest in the immediate development of the Communist cultural ideology, "Kom-fut" planned to develop the blueprints for the new culture in its own Party school. The activities of the school were to be inaugurated with a series of lectures surveying the ideologies of various artistic groups and culminating in the presentation of the ideology of Futurism and its next stage, "Kom-fut."

Finally, mindful of the problems the Futurists had experienced in

publishing their works, "Kom-fut" intended to establish its own publishing enterprise. This enterprise would give special coverage to the development of "revolutionary tactics" in cultural matters in order to offset the alleged "White" orientation of the Soviet cultural administration.

The Futurists had planned to establish their organizational center in Vyborg and to organize affiliated sections throughout the country. The test of political validity for "Kom-fut" came when the group applied for incorporation into a local Party organization within the Vyborg district. The local Party committee, confronted with the "Kom-fut" request for a separate status within Party ranks, did not hesitate to reject the proposal. Officially, the committee stated that the admission of an organization like "Kom-fut" had no legal precedent within the Party charter and that such an organization could not be accommodated for fear of future factionalism. This decision was probably made not in the local committee but on a higher Party level, most likely with Lunacharsky's approval.[32]

"Kom-fut" chose to regard the setback as temporary and proclaimed: "The Vyborg Party committee will hardly be able to insist on this position, which corresponds so little to the spirit of Communism and to the best Party traditions."[33] Yet following this statement in January 1919, the month in which it had been formed, the "Kom-fut" group disappeared from public view.

The January 1919 failure of the attempt to establish the "Kom-fut" organization prefigured the discontinuation of the newspaper *Art of the Commune* in April 1919. Because *Art of the Commune* was monopolized by the Futurists and was dictatorial in tone, it failed to gain the support of the Soviet cultural administration or that of the equally powerful Proletkult. Although most of the objections voiced by the opponents of *Art of the Commune* were directed toward the political tactics of the Futurists, the core of the Futurist philosophy—the belief that the new content of life required new forms—was also questioned. The objection against this belief came from the Formalists. The fact that the Formalists disagreed with them was admittedly disappointing to the Futurists, who had hoped that the Formalists, their close associates before the Revolution, would identify themselves with the position of *Art of the Commune.*

Viktor Shklovsky, a leading Formalist critic, wrote an essay in *Art of the Commune* that voiced the Formalist objections. Titled "About Art and Revolution" ("Ob iskusstve i revolyutsii"), Shklovsky's essay represented the first esthetic criticism of the Futurist program to appear in

Art of the Commune. Shklovsky rejected the basis of the left arts movement, its belief in the intrinsic connection between the change of artistic forms and the revolution occurring in government and society. True to the prerevolutionary Formalist position, Shklovsky identified the formal evolution as an independent process that received its impulse only from the realm of art: "New forms in literature appear not in order to express a new content, but in order to replace old forms that have lost their artistry." Shklovsky saw the new involvement of Futurism in cultural politics as a debasement of the original Futurism and asked whether the "rustling tail made from the newspaper editorial which is now being attached" to Futurism does not simply "hurt the eyes." Finally Shklovsky insisted, in a phrase he was to regret only a few years later, that "art has always been free of life, and its color has never reflected the color of the flag flying over the town walls."[34]

The theoretical controversy between the Formalists and the neo-Futurists did not develop further because *Art of the Commune* was abruptly discontinued after a brief existence of only five months.

Soon after the end of *Art of the Commune*, "IMO," the Futurist publishing enterprise, lost its subsidy and in effect was terminated. In May 1919 the publishing affairs of Narkompros, and therefore of "IMO," were taken over by the newly formed Gosizdat (Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo —State Publishing Firm). Lunacharsky came under attack for supporting the Futurists, and he was no longer able to subsidize them. Although Lunacharsky still wanted to help the Futurists, Gosizdat decided on July 24, 1919: "The state publishing house finds it impossible to subsidize the publishing firm "IMO" from state funds."[35]

Although Brik claimed that Gosizdat made the continuation of "IMO" contingent upon the delivery of paper, it soon became clear that the reasons were far more serious. By the summer of 1919 "IMO" entirely ceased its activities.

2. THE FUTURISTS AND THE SOVIET CULTURAL POLICY

The demise of the Futurists in the summer of 1919 was practically inevitable. The Futurists had been under attack since they had started publishing the newspaper *Art of the Commune.* The anti-Futurist sentiments had gained in intensity in the spring of 1919, when Vladimir

Friche, an old academician and an influential member of the Education Department of Moscow Narkompros (Moskovskii otdel narodnogo obrazovaniya—MONO), initiated a press campaign against the Futurists.[36] In April 1919 *Pravda* had published a resolution of the Union of Workers of Science, Art, and Literature (Soyuz rabotnikov nauki, iskusstva i literatury) that had pointed out the alien character of Futurism and its damaging influence within Narkompros:

> Taking into consideration that Futurism and Cubism appear mainly as the representatives of the corrupting bourgeois art, it is suggested that the Commissariat of Education pay attention to the limitless domination of Futurism, Cubism, Imaginism, etc., in the Soviet Socialist Republic, and that instead the Commissariat take all possible measures to promote and support the works of all those other artists who attempt to create true proletarian art in perfect compliance with Communism.[37]

The disappearance of *Art of the Commune* and the inactivity of "IMO" put a stop to the enthusiastic propagation of Futurism as the base for the new Soviet culture. Such Futurist plans ultimately ended when it became obvious that the Party too was antagonized by the radical tone of the Futurist pronouncements and by Futurist claims to cultural superiority. Lenin himself had never been sympathetic toward the avant-garde and on numerous occasions had chided Lunacharsky for Narkompros' support of the Futurists. Besides holding basically conservative views about art, Lenin opposed in principle any efforts to create a special proletarian culture, considering them a leftist heresy unhealthy for the Communist system. As a result, Lenin was unwilling to tolerate the claims of either the Futurists or the Proletkult.[38] In May 1919 Lenin publicly criticized Futurist art, saying ". . . quite often the most nonsensical grimaces have been presented as something new, whereas anything unnatural and foolish has passed for purely proletarian art and proletarian culture."[39]

In the fall of 1920 others were also given an opportunity to criticize the official support given to the left artists. The opportunity for this criticism was created when Vsevolod Meyerhold staged an experimental performance of Verhaeren's play *Les Aubes* (*Zori*). In November 1920 Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, attacked this performance in *Pravda*, directing her criticism at Narkompros in general and at Lunacharsky in particular for supporting Meyerhold's theater. The appearance of Krup-

skaya's article was interpreted as "an authoritative political challenge and a sign that Futurism was on political trial."[40]

Lunacharsky found himself attacked from two sides. While Lenin and Krupskaya criticized him for his cooperation with the Futurists, the Futurists in turn attacked him for withdrawing support from their group. On November 20, 1920, Mayakovsky took part in a debate on the principles that should govern official support of the arts; during this debate, Mayakovsky even accused Lunacharsky of persecuting the Futurists. On November 30 Mayakovsky published "An Open Letter to A. V. Lunacharsky" ("Otkrytoe pismo A. V. Lunacharskomu") in which he defended Meyerhold and summarized the accomplishments of the left artists.[41] At the same time he noted that the cultural administration was no longer interested in supporting the avant-garde, but preferred to propagate traditional art.

The governmental attack on experimental arts reached a high point on December 1, 1920, when *Pravda* published a letter, "About Proletkults" ("O proletkultakh"), from the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The Central Committee sharply criticized the political and artistic activities of Proletkult, explicitly condemned the Futurist influence in the Proletkult studios, and reprimanded Narkompros for supporting left arts. The statement, drafted by Grigory Zinovev, head of the Party organization in Petrograd and opponent of Lunacharsky, reflected the position of Lenin, who distrusted Proletkult and objected to the leftist influence there.[42] The letter of the Central Committee did not directly attack the institution of Proletkult, but it did single out the individuals within both Proletkult and Narkompros who had propagated theories unacceptable to the state, charging that

> Futurists, decadents, supporters of the idealistic philosophy hostile to Marxism and, finally, simply the failures, coming from the ranks of bourgeois journalism and philosophy, here and there have begun to control the entire affairs of Proletkult. Under the guise of proletarian culture, they have presented the workers with bourgeois views (Machism). And in the field of art, they have offered absurd, perverted views (Futurism) . . . the Central Committee further recognizes that up to this time Narkompros itself, in the artistic sphere, has displayed the same intellectual trends that have had a corrupting influence on Proletkult. Therefore the Central Committee intends to get rid of these bourgeois tendencies in Narkompros as well . . .[43]

The administrative changes ordered by the Central Committee subjugated the previously independent Proletkult to Narkompros, but the Futurists still continued to work in the Proletkult studios and enjoy considerable popularity among the youth. They managed to print an occasional article in the journals *All-Russian Proletkult* (*Vserossiiskii Proletkult*) and *Proletkult* (*Proletkult*), even though their chances for publishing a greater amount of Futurist literature now appeared quite remote.

The Futurist propensity for self-aggrandizement occasionally reasserted itself with unfortunate results. Such an incident occurred in 1921, when after a year of struggle, Mayakovsky persuaded Gosizdat to publish his revolutionary *poema* "150 000 000." This rare opportunity to be published represented the culmination of one of the numerous Futurist struggles for access to a printing press. It also offered a chance to call attention to the reemergence of "Kom-fut," which apparently had been reestablished in January 1921.[44] This time "Kom-fut" had a practical purpose: to arrange for a theatrical performance of Mayakovsky's *The Mystery Bouffe* (*Misteriya-buff*). *The Mystery Bouffe* reached the stage later in 1921, but only after much debate and great difficulties with the cultural administration.

When Mayakovsky's "150 000 000" appeared in print, the Futurists decided to offer a copy to Lenin, inscribed with "Kom-fut greetings" and signed by Mayakovsky, Lilya and Osip Brik, Kushner, Malkin, Shterenberg, and Altman. Predictably, the gift provoked Lenin to scold Lunacharsky and to send a scathing memorandum to Pokrovsky, the head of Gosizdat, insisting that the Futurist literary efforts be printed no more than twice a year in editions not exceeding 1500 copies. Lenin also suggested the Gosizdat should find and support some promising "anti-Futurists."[45]

Meanwhile, during these difficult years, the Moscow Futurists found collaborators for their program in the Russian Far East. Nikolai Aseev, a prerevolutionary Futurist poet who had lived in Vladivostok since 1917, propagated Futurism there, and in June 1920—with the assistance of the Futurist poets Sergei Tretyakov and David Burlyuk and a journalist Nikolai Chuzhak—organized a Futurist group, "Creative Work" (Tvorchestvo) in Vladivostok.[46] The group published a journal, *Creative Work* (*Tvorchestvo*), that willingly printed the works of Moscow Futurists and enthusiastically supported Mayakovsky as a model socialist poet. The

journal *Creative Work* found a surprisingly positive response among the local Communists. It appeared in editions as large as 7,000 copies, an enormous number of copies considering the provincial conditions of the Russian Far East, where the most popular daily had editions of only 5,000.

From Vladivostok, the "Creative Work" group moved to Chita, the new administrative center of the Soviet Far East. There the Far East Futurists published the seventh and last number of the journal *Creative Work*, most of which was devoted to Mayakovsky. In that number, Nikolai Chuzhak also included an editorial protesting the Party's treatment of Futurism titled "Our Ignorance: Commentary on the Letter of the Central Committee About the Proletkults" ("Nashe bezkulture. Po povodu pisma TsK RKP [b] o proletkultakh"). After the discontinuation of the journal *Creative Work*, Nikolai Chuzhak became editor of a Chita newspaper, *Far-East Telegraph* (*Dalnevostochnyi telegraf*), in which he continued to propagate Futurism. This display of sympathy for the artistic proposals and administrative predicaments of the Moscow Futurists led to the eventual cooperation of the Far East Futurists in the organization of the Left Front of the Arts. In 1923, almost the entire "Creative Work" group would appear on the editorial board of the journal *Lef*.

In the years 1920-21, however, the Far East Futurists could in no way have an impact on the movement localized in Moscow; in reality they could offer little more than spiritual support for the Moscow Futurists, who experienced continuous publishing difficulties.

Fortunately the publishing situation changed dramatically with the New Economic Policy (NEP) that Lenin introduced in his speech during the Tenth Party Congress on March 8-16, 1921. As a result, on November 28, 1921, Sovnarkom (Sovet narodnykh kommissarov—Council of People's Commissars) permitted the opening of private and cooperative publishing enterprises, which would exist without governmental subsidies, under the competitive conditions of a free market. Gosizdat, the governmental publishing house, was to concentrate on political and scientific literature and to delegate the printing of belles-lettres, art books, children's literature, and the like, to private publishers.[47]

On the very same day that Sovnarkom permitted the opening of private publishing firms, Brik and Mayakovsky appealed to Lunacharsky for support of a Futurist publishing enterprise:

> We are currently organizing a publishing firm of left art, "MAF" (Moscow—in the future International—Association of Futurists). The purpose of our firm is the publication of a journal, collections, monographs, collected works, textbooks, and similar items devoted to propagandizing the foundations of the future Communist art and to demonstrating what has already been achieved along this path.[48]

Evidently Brik and Mayakovsky felt that the illustrated art journal *MAF* should have a high priority for the Futurists: *MAF* figured as the first item on the list of suggested publications that they submitted to Lunacharsky. Mayakovsky and Brik were listed as the main editors of *MAF;* projected contributors included Aseev, Arvatov, Pasternak, Kushner, Chuzhak, and unnamed others.[49] The printing of this journal and of other books was supposed to be done abroad, in Riga, Latvia, where Lilya Brik had found a publisher who was willing to put out Futurist works. Mayakovsky did obtain permission from Lunacharsky to print in Latvia and to import books back to the USSR. Yet despite the tentative approval of the new Futurist publishing firm by the Soviet cultural administration, the project fell through. Neither the art journal *MAF* nor the individual volumes appeared, and the Futurists remained without real access to a printing press.

In 1922, after some involved attempts on Mayakovsky's part to publish in Berlin, the fortunes of the Futurists finally turned.[50] The Soviet cultural administration felt compelled to counteract the success that the NEP (private) publishers were having with the Soviet public. The introduction of NEP and the subsequent growth of pro-bourgeois sentiments among the people soon necessitated administrative intervention into literary affairs in support of pro-Communist forces.

During 1922 alone, two hundred private and cooperative publishers registered, seventy of which were actually active on the book market.[51] The result was a flood of books, some of them unsympathetic to the Soviet political line and others appealing to a low-brow audience in search of popular literature (*bulvarnaya literatura*). Although, with the exception of certain censorship limitations, the Party remained officially aloof from the artistic debates until the Resolution on Literature in 1925, several administrative measures fostering cultural activities congenial to the government were taken as early as 1922. The initial intervention took the form of promoting activities of selected writer groups that were given an opportunity to publish in Gosizdat. At the beginning of February 1922,

the head of Gosizdat, Meshcheryakov, delivered to the Central Committee a report on the critical situation of the book market, which was flooded by popular—often anti-Soviet—literature. In response to the report, Voronsky, the editor of *Red Virgin Soil* (*Krasnaya nov*), proposed that the government should act to unify writers and groups sympathizing with the Communist ideology in the hope that these writers would counteract the flood of bourgeois, frequently trivial literature. The resulting decisions of the Agitprop (Department for Agitation and Propaganda within the Central Committee of the Party) showed that the government was willing to make concessions to a variety of writers' groups by subsidizing their publications in order to prepare the grounds for a pro-Soviet writers' organization. As the first step Agitprop decided:

> Concerning the measures aimed at unifying and improving publishing by groups close to us:
> 9. To recognize that Gosizdat should support the following:
> a. The group of proletarian writers,
> b. The publishing firm "The Serapion Brothers" on the condition that they do not participate in such reactionary publications as the journal *The Petersburg Miscellany* (*Peterburgskii sbornik*),
> c. Bobrov's group,
> d. Mayakovsky's group.
> 10. To assign to the Literary Department of Narkompros (LITO), to Proletkult, and to the House of Publishing (Dom pechati) the task of organizing the groups of writers near to us, of assuring their material support, of helping with literary meetings, etc. To call a conference of these organizations . . .
> 11. In the immediate future, not to intervene against journal publications of the "Change of Landmarks" group (Smenovekhovtsy), because this group conducts a struggle with the counterrevolutionary moods of the highest circles of Russian intelligentsia.[52]

The Central Committee confirmed the Agitprop proposal in similar wording on February 27, 1922. A month later, a decree from the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party, which concerned itself mainly with the need for intensification of Soviet propaganda, stated that artists who declared themselves Communist could no longer use the facilities of private publishers: "The Congress recognizes that the Communists can

participate in private publishing firms only in exceptional situations, with the permission of a corresponding Party committee."[53]

All these changes worked in favor of the left artists, because the government now seemed willing to seek their support. On March 5, 1922, Mayakovsky's poem "Lost in Conference" (Prozasedavshiesya") appeared in *Izvestiya*, marking the first time that a Futurist was able to publish in an official newspaper. On the next day, during a congress of metal workers, Lenin, whose dislike of Mayakovsky was widely known, made an approving comment about the subject matter of the poem:

> Yesterday I happened to read in *Izvestiya* Mayakovsky's poem on a political theme. I am not one of those who admire his poetic talent, although I fully recognize my own incompetence in such matters. But from my political and administrative perspective, I haven't felt such satisfaction and pleasure in a long time. In this poem, he absolutely derides conferences and makes a mockery of our Communists who continually hold conferences and more conferences. I'm not sure of the poetic aspect, but politically I guarantee you that it's wholly correct.[54]

The timing of Lenin's positive comment about Mayakovsky, at the moment when the cultural administration had just agreed to offer some support to the Futurists, could hardly have been a coincidence. From that point on, Lenin's guarded approval of "Lost in Conference" provided a basis for the official acceptance of Mayakovsky as a Soviet poet. Mayakovsky's poems now began appearing in other official papers and became a regular feature in *Izvestiya*.[55]

Certain arrangements were also made to publish books by the left artists, using the printing facilities of Vkhutemas (Vysshie khudozhestvenno-tekhicheskie masterskie—the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops). Unlike the earlier project of the Futurist publishing firm "MAF," the Vkhutemas arrangement at no time included the mention of a journal. Although the Futurists managed to print four books through Vkhutemas, all of them by Mayakovsky and all appearing as publications of "MAF," no "MAF" publisher formally materialized.[56] The books actually appeared through an arrangement with and a subsidy from Gosizdat. In spite of this success at obtaining access to a printing press, the Futurists were not satisfied by the conditions at Vkhutemas. Mayakovsky first signed an arrangement for publishing his collected works, but withdrew from it in

October 1922, claiming that Vkhutemas showed "total lack of concern" for the conditions of the agreement.

After offering publishing assistance to writers sympathetic to Communism, the cultural administration advanced to the next step—that of the unification of writers. On June 6, 1922, the Politburo set up a commission for the organization of an independent writers' union. The commission—led by Yakovlev and consisting of Voronsky, Meshcheryakov, and Lebedev-Polyansky—decided to use the group of writers already associated with the well-established journal *Red Virgin Soil* and to attract others to such a nonpolitical organization. They found the following groups desirable as potential members of the writers' union:

a) Older writers, who had joined in the early period of the Revolution (Bryusov, Gorodetsky, Gorky, etc.);
b) Proletarian writers (Association of Proletarian Writers—Petrograd and Moscow Proletkult);
c) Futurists (Mayakovsky, Aseev, Bobrov, etc.);
d) Imaginists (Marienhof, Esenin, Shershenevich, Kusikov, etc.);
e) Serapion Brothers (Vsevolod Ivanov, Shaginian, Nikitin, Tikhonov, Polonskaya, etc.);
f) a group of hesitating, politically undeclared talented youth (A. Tolstoy, Adryanov, etc.).[57]

When drawing the detailed plans for the writers' union, Voronsky evidently counted most on the cooperation of the Futurists, for he suggested Aseev as the president and put Mayakovsky first on the list of proposed members. The Politburo approved the project. Then, as another step toward the formation of the writers' union, Voronsky, with the help of Gosizdat, organized the publishing enterprise "Krug." "Krug," existing in conjunction with the journal *Red Virgin Soil* and supported by the Party, was envisaged at that point as a unifying center for the various literary groups that would eventually unite themselves in a pro-Soviet writers' union. It soon became obvious, however, that "Krug" could not fulfill the objectives of unifying such very diverse literary groups: it was attacked from all sides for its failure to publish materials from all groups. Prerevolutionary writers published several of their works in "Krug," but the proletarians felt neglected. Eventually Lunacharsky intervened, reminding Voronsky of the need to attract more promising proletarian youth; Voronsky tried to conform, but without general approval.

The relationship of "Krug" to the Futurists was unsatisfying. After several appeals, Mayakovsky had his poetry collection accepted in "Krug" in October 1922, but judging from the general discontent, few of the left artists managed to accomplish much with "Krug."

All of the writers' discontent with "Krug" prompted the cultural administration to make further concessions to allow various literary groups larger access to the literary market. The left artists persisted in their attempts to organize their own independent publishing enterprise, and they finally received a positive answer from Agitprop.

The decision of the 11th Party Congress, the publicized statement of Lenin's approval of Mayakovsky, and the relative unpopularity of "Krug" allowed the cultural left to reappear again as an organized group with the old program, but with a new name, "The Left Front of the Arts" (Lef). This time the existence of the Futurist group was to be acknowledged formally with a permission to publish a journal that they called *Lef*. In the same period, other small literary groups also obtained their own journals: in 1922 the Imaginists began the periodical *An Inn for Travellers in the Land of Beauty (Gostinitsa dlya puteshestvuyushchikh v prekrasnom)* and the Octobrists, a recently organized group of proletarian writers, were permitted to put out the journal *On Guard* (*Na postu*). The Futurists, however, were interested in obtaining more than a journal. Their journal *Lef* appeared as a by-product of the Futurist campaign to establish a publishing enterprise for their new organization, the Left Front of the Arts.

3. THE PUBLISHING FIRM "LEF"

The very first record of the existence of the Lef organization comes from the January 16, 1923 Agitprop meeting concerning the establishment of a publishing enterprise for the Left Front of the Arts. The arrangement discussed at the meeting was reminiscent of the unsuccessful "MAF" plan of 1921 in which the left artists, with the approval of Lunacharsky, had planned to put out a journal and books on Futurism.[58] In the 1923 meeting, the Lef group insisted on the printing of books as first priority, with a journal planned as a publicity organ for those books. This time Agitprop agreed:

a) to recognize as purposeful and desirable the support of the publishing firm of the Left Front of the Arts;
b) to include the firm "Lef" in the accounts of Gosizdat;
c) to propose to Gosizdat to begin a publication of the journal *Lef* (with the guarantee of a monthly issue for the first six months) and to assist with the publication of books of this orientation.[59]

Gosizdat accepted the proposal "in principle," so Mayakovsky and the poet Sergei Tretyakov, now a secretary of the *Lef* journal, presented a detailed proposal for the legal relationship between the *Lef* journal and Gosizdat in which the publishing firm "Lef" was treated as a part of the arrangement.[60]

Gosizdat, however, was less than enthusiastic about the publication of a journal of the Left Front of the Arts. On February 7, 1923, a decision was made by an employee of Gosizdat: "On a trial basis, I have no objection [to the publication of the journal] for three months (even though I regard as more correct the publication of more or less regular almanacs rather than a periodical)."[61]

After submitting the materials for the first number of *Lef* on March 23, 1923, Mayakovsky obtained permission to print the journal. At the same time, following up on the idea of a publishing enterprise, the Futurists submitted a list of four books that they intended to issue under the name of the publishing firm "Lef." Two of them, Mayakovsky's *About That (Pro eto)* and Brik's *She Is Not a Fellow-Traveller (Ne poputchitsa)*, were published almost immediately, but the representative of Gosizdat announced that the other two, Arvatov's *About Mayakovsky (O Mayakovskom)* and Chuzhak's *Toward the Dialectics of Art (K dialektike iskusstva)*, were "editorially unacceptable."

It soon became obvious that the Gosizdat support for the Lef group was quite limited. Gosizdat confirmed the expense account of the journal *Lef* for only two months, agreed to the publication of only four books per year instead of the forty proposed by the Left Front of the Arts, and kept delaying any formal decision about the publishing enterprise "Lef."

On April 5, 1923, after the appearance of the first issue of the journal, Mayakovsky and Tretyakov addressed a letter to Gosizdat in which they indicated that they were not satisfied by the appearance of the journal, but still insisted on the necessity of printing books on the subject of left art. Mayakovsky and Tretyakov argued that the price of the journal was

set too high to be afforded by the young workers' audience that the Lef group wanted to reach. They suggested that the income from books published could be used to lower the price of the journal, whereas the advertising in the journal *Lef* could increase the market for the books on the subject of left art, about which "almost no publications appear and the work of which is mainly carried out on the open tribunes."[62]

Even though the actual support was limited, apparently the news about Gosizdat's willingness to support the Futurists at all caused concern among other artistic groups. Meshcheryakov, the representative of Gosizdat, was forced to explain to a correspondent of *Izvestiya VCIK* that the support granted to the Futurists did not represent a special favor, but a fulfillment of Gosizdat's obligation "to reflect all artistic directions in our literature that do not reject the Soviet power."[63]

In spite of Gosizdat's willingness to offer limited support to the journal, the problem of extended publishing of Futurist books remained unsolved until May 25, 1923, when Gosizdat unexpectedly decided to give the Futurists publishing independence. Specifically, Gosizdat decided: "To remove the trademark of Gosizdat from the publications of the Lef group and to create the possibility for the Lef group to organize an independent publishing firm that would be financed by Gosizdat according to a suitable agreement."[64]

When Gosizdat granted the Futurists the right to an independent publishing firm, it also terminated its support for printing the journal *Lef*, which was now to appear as the product of the independent publishing firm. The prospect of independent publishing, although appealing, meant that sooner or later the Futurists' finances would be totally dependent on the sale of their own books, because the Gosizdat subsidy of the publishing firm was intended to last only during the firm's initial stages. On July 17, 1923, the publishing firm "Lef" was formally registered, but Gosizdat remained in no hurry to finalize the agreement concerning the finances.

Meanwhile, the journal *Lef* showed no promise of becoming a commercial success. Although *Lef* printed small editions, it still accumulated a large number of unsold copies. The book editions of *About That* and *She Is Not a Fellow-Traveller* also sold very slowly. It was becoming apparent that the publishing enterprise of the Left Front could hardly hope for financial self-sufficiency.

On September 14, 1923, Gosizdat again took up the printing of *Lef*

and decided "to transfer the publication of the journal *Lef* to a self-sufficient account within Gosizdat, so that the size of Gosizdat subsidies, reduced to a minimum, can be lessened gradually until No. 6, after which any subsidies will be totally stopped."[65]

With this decision, the hope for a separate publishing enterprise "Lef" ended. From this point on, Futurist manuscripts were submitted directly to Gosizdat and published at its discretion. The publishing firm "Lef," which might have assured the continuation of the unified left art movement in the Soviet Union, never became a reality. Its death ended the Futurists' persistent attempts to carve a place for themselves in the literary market.

CHAPTER TWO

LEF: HISTORY

Из этой умудренной дали
Не видишь пошлых мелочей.
Забылся трафарет речей
И время сгладило детали.
А мелочи преобладали.

Борис Пастернак,
"Высокая болезнь"(1924)

1. THE EDITORIAL BOARD AND ITS ACTIVITIES

While the publishing firm "Lef," founded in 1923, failed to put out a single Futurist volume, the journal *Lef*, founded the same year, made a lasting imprint on Soviet literary life and cultural politics. The existence of such a journal provided a mouthpiece for the avant-garde groups that were active in Soviet cultural life but could not hope for any impact without a published declaration of their position. Yet the Futurists realized that permission to put out a journal represented only a very limited success, an unspectacular culmination of their plans for an avant-garde culture, plans that had found little support among political revolutionaries.[1]

Although the *Lef* journal has always been identified with the figure of Mayakovsky, its main editor, there is little doubt that an equally important force behind *Lef* was Osip Brik. History views Brik only as a friend of Mayakovsky and a minor Formalist, whereas actually Brik was a key theoretician and organizer of left arts. Throughout the 1920s, Brik was continuously involved in the attempts to incorporate avant-garde art as an intrinsic part of Soviet culture. The idea of the *Lef* journal as an organ of Soviet experimental arts developed as a logical continuation of Brik's organizational activities. These activities reflected Brik's determination to synthesize the artistic principles of various media for the purpose of creating the *Weltanschauung* of the Soviet avant-garde.[2]

Even before the Revolution, Brik had already shown his organizational talents. His sense of novelty and his proclivity for analytic thinking had

first led to his involvement with the Formalists, a group initially brought together by Brik himself. Brik was also instrumental in publishing *Collections on Poetic Language* (*Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka*, 1916, 1917, 1919), which won the Formalists recognition as a movement. Victor Erlich, in his history of Formalism, even refers to Brik as an "astute Formalist impresario."[3] At that time, Brik was already acting as a mentor and publisher of the Futurists, among whom Mayakovsky was his special friend.

After the Revolution, Brik's primary interest was the institutional legitimization of the avant-garde. He began from the organization of "IMO." Then in 1918–1919, during his involvement in IZO Brik had become one of the three main editors of *Art of the Commune*, the newspaper that propagated the idea of a Futurist monopoly in the formation of Communist culture. Along with his activities in *Art of the Commune*, Brik had also attempted to organize an Institute of Material Work (Institut materialnogo truda), which was planned as a proletarian academy of arts devoted to the development of new artistic techniques. His participation in the newspaper *Art of the Commune* had led Brik to the idea of founding the "Kom-fut" organization, where he had obtained the critical post of director of the proposed "Kom-fut" party school charged with the development of plans for the new Soviet culture. Following the failure of the first "Kom-fut" in 1919, Brik had organized, in 1920–1921, the second "Kom-fut" in an effort to rally the avant-garde forces around a program for the propagation of modern arts. In 1922, Brik had been elected chairman of Inkhuk (Institut khudozhestvennoi kultury—the Institute of Artistic Culture), amidst a controversy in which Kandinsky had been ousted from the chairmanship. Within Inkhuk, Brik had supported an artistic program aimed at the development of the new "material" culture that would involve artists in industrial production.

Finally, in 1923, Brik together with Mayakovsky established the journal *Lef*, which acted as an organ of the Left Front of the Arts. The Left Front of Arts, in turn, began its unification of the avant-garde by trying to bring together the groups with which Brik had deep personal involvement: the Futurists, the Formalists, and the "industrial" artists.

With the assistance of Sergei Tretyakov, Brik drafted the proposal for the *Lef* journal, a proposal that was submitted, apparently by Mayakovsky, to the Agitotdel of the Central Committee at the end of 1922. The draft shows that Brik was to become the main editor and that the

Lef journal was to be an "artistic-ideological organ" of the Formalist Opoyaz (Obshchestvo izucheniya poeticheskogo yazyka—the Society for the Study of Poetic Language), Inkhuk, Gitis (Gosudarstvennyi teatralnyi institut—State Theatrical Institute) led by Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Artistic Council of Moscow Proletkult, MAF, and Vkhutemas.[4] Ideally the journal *Lef*, under Brik's leadership, would have been instrumental in helping these groups to form an artistic federation that would foster independent but coordinated programs for left art. Clearly Brik, along with other left artists, expected that such an organization would finally assure institutional recognition of avant-garde art and would protect the interests of the avant-garde during the formative stage of Soviet culture.

The draft of the proposal submitted to the Agitotdel also shows further distribution of editorial duties within *Lef*. Brik, as the main editor, was to be assisted by Tretyakov, as the secretary who would also be responsible for chronicling the organizational activities of the Left Front of the Arts. The theory section was entrusted to Nikolai Chuzhak, Boris Kushner, and Boris Arvatov, who also shared the responsibility for polemics and criticism with Nikolai Aseev. Most surprisingly, the draft shows that Mayakovsky was initially given responsibility only over "the practice of art," an area that obviously had lower priority than the creation of the theory of the new arts. In fact, even this limited responsibility was added to the draft—in pencil—by Mayakovsky himself.

Yet subsequently Brik always maintained that it was Mayakovsky who formally applied in his own name to Agitprop for permission to publish *Lef*. Indeed, when the first number of *Lef* appeared at the end of March 1923, it was Mayakovsky, and not Brik, who officially became the chief editor.

Knowing the degree of Mayakovsky's leadership is not, in fact, crucial to the understanding of the organizational activities of the Lef group.

It must be noted that the Left Front of the Arts was formally constituted only at the time when the appeal for the journal was put forth. Despite its aggressive pronouncements, at no stage did the Lef group develop into a cohesive organization; instead, it remained a casual association consisting of no more than fifteen members, poets, artists, and critics who sought to make a place for modern art within the new socialist culture. Mayakovsky's editorship was essential to give the journal prestige, but his actual participation in the publication of *Lef*—in whatever degree it was manifested—did not impose a unified editorial stance upon *Lef* or its contributors.

Admittedly, both the journal and Lef group needed Mayakovsky as a figurehead. In his memoirs, the writer Valentin Kataev, who had been active in *New Lef*, plausibly suggests that Mayakovsky's associates needed the poet's name to legitimize their organ, to provide a front for their proposals.[5] After all, the support Gosizdat had offered the Futurists from 1922 on was intended for "Mayakovsky's group." His name carried more weight than Brik's, who was first proposed as editor. Unlike Brik, Mayakovsky had had no official function in any of the previous cultural institutions, so nominating Mayakovsky as editor prevented the identification of *Lef* with "Kom-fut," Inkhuk, or any other organization. In addition, Mayakovsky's popularity and his extensive contacts with publishing enterprises and within the cultural administration made him invaluable in promoting the interests of the Lef group and in overcoming the numerous technical and political obstacles that the journal encountered. Indeed, throughout most of the 1920s, Mayakovsky did show unconditional commitment to the Lef group. He constantly intervened in Gosizdat on behalf of the group, and he promoted both journals, first *Lef* and then *New Lef*, through discussions on art and through his public appearances in Russia and abroad.[6]

The extent of Mayakovsky's participation in editing the *Lef* journal seems to be one of the guarded secrets in the history of the avant-garde. Apparently, although throughout the 1930s Brik himself and Soviet literary historians along with him have painstakingly obscured Brik's activity in *Lef*, they have also been hesitant about documenting Mayakovsky's physical involvement in the publication of the journal. To admit such an involvement would imply that Mayakovsky in his role as the leading Soviet poet was not free from the leftist deviationism of Lef's theories of avant-garde art for the masses.

Actually, Mayakovsky's biography shows that he had only limited opportunity to participate in the initial organization of *Lef*. He was away on an extended trip abroad until December 15, 1922; yet according to Osip Brik, toward the end of the same month, no exact date given, Mayakovsky applied to Agitprop for permission to put out a journal and enclosed the plan of the journal.[7] The plan, however, had been drafted not by Mayakovsky, but by Brik with Tretyakov's assistance. Later, in the period between the application for permission to publish a journal and the appearance of the first issue of *Lef* in March 1923, Mayakovsky had withdrawn almost completely from public or social life because of a serious psychological depression. His disagreements with Lilya Brik, who was his

mistress, over the nature of their love affair, and the resulting two-month separation—January and February 1923—that she demanded, drove Mayakovsky to the brink of suicide. During this time, Mayakovsky was mainly involved in writing the *poema* "About That" ("Pro eto"). The preparation of a journal *Lef* to appear late in March and the groundwork for the establishment of the Left Front of the Arts required a determination and a commitment that Mayakovsky could hardly have provided at that time.[8]

There are other hints that in 1923 Mayakovsky did not act fully in the capacity of main editor of *Lef*. Chuzhak, a member of the editorial board of *Lef* who opposed Mayakovsky, already in 1923 accused Mayakovsky in *Pravda* of "nominal" editorship.[9] Later, Petr Neznamov, the secretary of *Lef* after Tretyakov's departure for China, mentioned in his memoirs that Brik was frequently present in the editorial office, whereas Mayakovsky rarely came there.[10] Most convincingly, numerous excerpts from Mayakovsky's letters written from abroad during 1924–1925 indicate that he had little information about the situation of the journal and was mainly concerned about the placement of his own poems.[11]

The leadership question was not crucial to the Lef group, because the editorial board of the journal *Lef* had a common platform in the original, poetic Futurism. Along with Brik and Mayakovsky, the other members of the editorial board of *Lef*—Kushner, Aseev, and Tretyakov—shared a Futurist background.[12] Although the *Lef* journal used the term "Futurist" to include all avant-garde artists, these editors had come to Lef from prerevolutionary literary Futurism. Mayakovsky had been a recognized leader of the Cubo-Futurist movement. Brik, a Futurist sympathizer and a participant in the Formalist Society for the Study of Poetic Language, had been Mayakovsky's mentor and publishers. Boris Kushner had begun his literary work in the Futurist group Centrifuge, had also been associated with the Cubo-Futurists, and later had participated in the Formalist group known as the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Aseev had also been associated with Centrifuge and then had participated in Futurist activities in the Far East. Sergei Tretyakov, initially an Ego-Futurist, later had become a follower and imitator of Mayakovsky. The remaining two members of the editorial board, Nikolai Chuzhak and Boris Arvatov, although not active Futurists, sympathized with and supported the Futurist movement. Chuzhak, a Party activist from the Russian Far East, had develped his own version of Marxist art theory in which the Futurists

figured as the forerunners of new socialist art. Arvatov, a young Proletkult theoretician, had attempted to create a theoretical bridge between Futurism and proletarian art.

Among all these editors of *Lef*, only Osip Brik and Boris Kusher participated in all stages of the organizational development of postrevolutionary Futurism: from *Art of the Commune*, through both "Kom-futs," to *Lef* and later to *New Lef*. Mayakovsky's name was also associated with the movement throughout, although he was excluded from the first "Kom-fut" because he did not belong to the Party.

In the months prior to the first appearance of the journal *Lef*, its future editors had either been connected with Proletkult or had been active in Inkhuk and Vkhutemas. Arvatov, an influential member of the Proletkult, had drafted a plan for the year's activities that had been adopted by the All-Russian Plenum of Proletkult in the spring of 1923. Arvatov had published frequently in the major Proletkult journal *Furnace* (*Gorn*), where he had promoted the concept of utilitarian arts and advocated a blend of formal and sociological approaches to literary criticism. In 1923, Arvatov also was involved in Inkhuk, the organization that had taken over the activities of the former IZO section of Narkompros and was at the time chaired by Osip Brik.[13] It was through Brik's influence that the Inkhuk Constructivists Rodchenko, Stepanova, Popova, and Lavinsky eventually became contributors to *Lef*, forming the graphic side of the journal. Boris Kushner, like Osip Brik a former editor of *Art of the Commune* and the leader of "Kom-fut," had worked within Inkhuk and had frequently lectured in Vkhutemas, which at the time remained under strong avant-garde influence. Sergei Tretyakov, also active in Vkhutemas, had been in charge of the Literary Section of Moscow Proletkult, working in the area of literary propaganda and journalism. Tretyakov from 1922 onward was mainly interested in theater: he worked first with Meyerhold, then with Eisenstein, and it was within the Proletkult studios that Tretyakov developed the ideas of theater for which he later became best known.[14]

When, at the end of December 1922, the Futurists applied for permission to put out a journal, they argued that contemporary revolutionary art had no organ of its own and had only limited access to other journals. The Futurists charged that the official organs, such as *Red Virgin Soil* and *Press and Revolution* (*Pechat i revolyutsiya*), covered many fields

in addition to arts and literature, and that in general the editorial policy of the existing "thick" journals was unfavorable to left art.[15] This claim hinted at the tension that existed between the iconoclastic left artists and the editors of *Red Virgin Soil* and *Press and Revolution*, Voronsky and Polonsky, who represented a moderate line in cultural politics. Thus already in 1922, the journals that enjoyed official support were destined to be the future antagonists of *Lef*. The rift between the avant-garde and the moderate Soviet cultural politicians would eventually expand, only to end with the victory of a third party, the militant proletarians from the October group who were gathered around the journal *On Guard*.

The proposal of the journal *Lef* submitted to the Central Committee was also intended as a rehabilitation statement of the avant-garde, a statement much needed in view of the previous negative attitude of the Party toward the left arts. The writers of the proposal announced that they intended an ideological correction of the avant-garde movement, and that *Lef* would guard the Communist orientation of the modern arts. In fact, they announced that the purpose of their journal would be to find "a Communist path for all art," and for this reason they promised:

> —to review the ideology and the practice of the so-called left art, getting rid of all its individualistic grimaces and developing its valuable sides;
> —to conduct persistent agitation among the workers of art for the acceptance of the Communist path and ideology.[16]

Brik and Mayakovsky, the leaders of the group, made an explicit commitment to the Communist ideology, but at the same time they continued to show the same antitraditional orientation that had been characteristic of early Futurism. Their antitraditionalism immediately cast doubt on the extent of their allegiance to a Communist art that would emerge under the auspices of the Soviet cultural administration. When Brik and Mayakovsky announced that the Lef group intended to fight antiquated artistic trends that substituted Communist ideology in art for "worn-out phrases about absolute values and eternal beauties," they, in fact, criticized Voronsky's stand in *Red Virgin Soil*. In opposition to such an estheticized concept of art, Brik and Mayakovsky promised that their journal *Lef* would blend the new art with the new Communist life; it would be devoted to the development of artistic methods applicable to industrial production or to sociopolitical agitation. This utilitarian orien-

tation of the journal would be reflected in its concentration on the sociology, technology, and practice of the new arts.

In response to the Futurist application for permission to publish a journal, Gosizdat issued approval, but limited *Lef* to the publication of two numbers. The first issue of *Lef* appeared in March 1923, a printing of 5,000 copies. The second issue was scheduled for the May Day celebration, but it encountered a minor delay, so the section containing the Futurist May poems appeared first, followed later by the complete journal. At this point, the Gosizdat commitment expired, just as the first reviews of *Lef* were appearing in the press. The initial reactions of *Red Virgin Soil, Press and Revolution, Pravda, Izvestiya,* and the minor journals ranged from qualified approval to outright sarcastic comments.[17] None demonstrated support for the program of the Left Front of the Arts.

With the first two numbers of *Lef* already in print, Mayakovsky and Tretyakov renewed their request for a publishing firm "Lef." They submitted to Gosizdat an estimate of expenses for the next ten months, along with a sample budget and a request for an allotment of thirty printer's sheets per month (480 pages) for a publishing firm "Lef"—their ultimate objective—for the next four months.[18] At this point, Gosizdat did agree to establish an independent "Lef" firm. Yet instead of improving the situation of the Left Front of the Arts, this approval actually endangered the journal, because Gosizdat was now unwilling to commit itself to a regular subsidy. The third number of *Lef,* which came out in July 1923 and was listed as the June-July issue, used "The Publishing Firm 'Lef' " instead of the previous Gosizdat trademark. At the same time, the size of the printing decreased from the initial 5,000 to 3,000 copies.

By September 1923, Gosizdat agreed to subsidize the publishing of the next three members of *Lef* on the condition that the journal would become self-sufficient within that period. This decision was followed by a prolonged silence on the part of Gosizdat, during which the journal *Lef* failed to materialize. In November 1923 the Lef group sought the support of MAPP (Moskovskaya assotsiyatsiya proletarskikh pisatelei—Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers) in its campaign against the lack of cooperation on the part of the publishers sponsored by the Soviet cultural administration. This agreement concluded between Lef and MAPP may have been influential in the reemergence of the journal *Lef* in 1924, after

a half-year absence. This fourth issue was dated August-September 1923, but it actually appeared in January 1924.

Despite promises of help from Gosizdat, *Lef*'s situation underwent no improvement in 1924. The delays between the preparation and the release of each issue of the journal grew so long that *Lef* no longer indicated a month of issue on the cover. The fifth issue appeared some time in the middle of 1924. At the time the Futurists must have concluded a new agreement with Gosizdat, because the cover of *Lef* carried a subscription advertisement promising six more issues, of some 160 pages each, still to be released in 1924. Predictably enough, despite that advertisement, only one more number of *Lef*, the sixth, appeared that year, and the printing now decreased to 2,000 copies.

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent the publishing ups and downs could be foreseen by the editors. Mayakovsky was the main editor, but his letters to Lilya Brik suggest that the was strangely unaware of the complications accompanying the publishing of the journal. In December 1924, when Maykovsky was away in Paris and planning a longer trip to America, he seemed surprised by *Lef*'s difficulties: "What nonsense is that with Lef? Did at least the number with the first part of 'Vladimir Ilich Lenin' appear? If it is necessary for Lef, I will immediately return to Moscow and will not go to America." Lilya Brik replied: "Lef is already almost shut down—even the number presently typeset is already under a ban. Tomorrow Osya is going to try to get an approval from Ionov [in charge of Gosizdat]."[19] Brik's intervention proved unsuccessful. Only after Mayakovsky's return from abroad was he able to announce, during the January 1925 Lef convention, that the Central Committee was going to consider further publication of the journal *Lef* and that an interim decision was positive.[20] Indeed, a seventh issue of *Lef*, containing materials that had been submitted in August 1924, came out at the end of January 1925.

It is not clear exactly when it became obvious that this seventh issue would be *Lef*'s final one, nor is it clear which decisions led to the discontinuation of the journal. Pavel Neznamov, the secretary of *Lef*, indicated in his memoirs that one more number of *Lef* was prepared for publication, although with the expectation that the journal had little future:

> Practically speaking, I alone prepared it for the printers. According to an agreement, we had to submit the journal to Gosizdat, but every-

body had already left Moscow. Only Viktor Shklovsky, who had come to the Lef group a year earlier, stopped by from time to time.[21]

That eighth issue of *Lef*, which had been ready for publication in January 1925, was never released.

In March 1925 Mayakovsky took part in a meeting of the Literary Commission of the Central Committee during which M. V. Frunze, the chairman of the commission, was mildly critical of the left art movement, but rather positive about *Lef*.[22] Apparently at this point the decision to discontinue the journal still had not been made, so the Futurists regarded their difficulties as temporary. After numerous interventions with the cultural administration, Mayakovsky even managed to improve relations with Gosizdat to the point that he and Aseev were given approval to publish their collected works. In addition, on April 29, 1925, Gosizdat agreed to put out a Lef almanac, and some promise had most likely been given regarding the continuation of *Lef*.[23]

Immediately afterward Mayakovsky left for a six-month trip to France, Mexico, and the United States, but in his letters to Lilya Brik he continued to inquire about the fate of his collected works and about *Lef*. In the middle of July 1925, Mayakovsky asked: "How's Osya? How's Lef? How are the collected works? . . . Give 'The Discovery of America' to Lef . . . Don't take any money from Lef."[24] On September 3, 1925, Lilya Brik answered: "Everything seems to be in order with Lef." Meanwhile Gosizdat had withdrawn from the agreement to publish Mayakovsky's collected works and had refused to honor the Lef almanac arrangement. The eighth issue of *Lef* also failed to materialize, leaving the January 1925 number as the final issue of the *Lef* journal.

2. THE LEFT FRONT OF THE ARTS

Although the Lef organization never succeeded in formally incorporating the various avant-garde groups, the existence of the *Lef* journal did provide an opportunity to publicize a spectrum of ultra-left tendencies in art. In January 1925, during a convention of members, associates, and potential associates of Lef, Mayakovsky compiled a list of groups that had worked together in the Lef organization, a list that somewhat exaggerated the number of groups and the extent of their participation

in Lef, as well as the effect Lef had on their individual orientation. This overstatement was intentional, because Mayakovsky was presenting the membership list to justify a federation format for the Left Front of the Arts. At the same time, it became obvious that the organization of the Left Front of the Arts did not in fact extend beyond the group directly involved in the publication of the journal. Mayakovsky chose to present individual appearances in the journal as group cooperation in the Lef organization and one-time appearances in *Lef* as steady contributions. Yet he could not avoid demonstrating whose interests *Lef* had actually tried to promote. Mayakovsky listed as active contributors and participants in the Left Front of the Arts the following groups:

1. Transrational poets (*zaumniki*)—those interested in working on verbal matter. Under the influence of the Lef organization, they had allegedly given their experiments a clearer utilitarian orientation.
2. Industrial artists (*proizvodstvenniki*)—those involved in advertisement and agitational propaganda. Here Mayakovsky counted himelf, Aseev, and others whom he did not name.
3. Constructivists—those who had initially been alien to the Lef group because of their "mystical" handling of industrial themes, but who had eventually identified themselves with the goals of Lef. Here the poets Zelinsky and Selvinsky were mentioned.
4. Futurists—those led by the poet Kamensky. Mayakovsky explained that they had initially regarded poetry as independent of politics, but now they occasionally participated in agitational work.
5. Formalists—those critics under the leadership of Shklovsky who had been interested only in the formal aspects of literature, ignoring the connections between ideas and society. Lef supposedly had managed to convince some of them that such an approach was inadequate. Their new attitude was reflected in the investigation of Lenin's language that they had published in *Lef*.
6. Newspaper workers—those interested in practical language in its newspaper version. Here Vinokur was the exemplary case.
7. Drama writers (*dramshchiki*)—those concentrating on verbal work with agitational purposes. As an example, Mayakovsky gave Tretyakov's work in the drama *Gas Masks* (*Protivogazy*).
8. Theoreticians of literature—those interested in literary technique rather than in developing new methods of literary criticism. Brik was listed as the sole representative in this category.

9. Special authors published by *Lef*. Here Mayakovsky listed Pasternak and Petrovsky, whose poetry had been commonly regarded as pure lyric. But Mayakovsky claimed that their poetry was in fact work on the construction of a phrase and on the creation of a new syntax. The goal of this poetry, as seen from the utilitarian perspective of the Lef group, was the development of more condensed language.
10. Contributors from nonliterary areas, especially film and theater. The major names were Eisenstein, who at the time had been a stage director, and Dziga Vertov, an experimental filmmaker.[25]

Mayakovsky's list omitted the Constructivists active in visual arts—Rodchenko, Stepanova, Popova, and Lavinsky—who had formed the graphic side of the journal and who were the main representatives of the industrial arts originally developed in Inkhuk under the leadership of Osip Brik.

Mayakovsky's list indicates that in publishing *Lef*, he and Brik remained faithful to their original intention of creating a forum that would publicize a wide spectrum of Soviet avant-garde art. Yet despite their efforts, they did not succeed in creating a unified avant-garde consciousness that would have helped the survival of the avant-garde as a cultural force in Soviet life.

The limited character of their organizational success is more obvious when it is compared to the original intention of the Lef group, who had intended that their journal would develop into the organ of the worldwide avant-garde. In the initial proposal of the journal, Brik had declared that because the platform of the Lef group represented an amalgam of Proletkult, Futurist, and Formalist theories that had been received with interest in Western Europe, *Lef* would be able to maintain wide international contacts. In these contacts, *Lef* would serve not only as the organ of avant-garde Russian art, but also as the organ of the world avant-garde.[26] Such an internationalistic attitude fitted the political situation of the Soviet Union of 1922–1923, which still expected an imminent world revolution.

Brik was not exaggerating when he maintained that the Futurist organ *Lef* had a chance to develop into an effective international journal. The Soviet avant-garde had already become a model for many Western left-oriented artists. The artistic and political orientation of Lef had numerous parallels in the avant-garde programs in Poland, Czechoslovakia, France,

and Germany. Furthermore, the frequent travels of Lef members and their many contacts with Russians living abroad also could have helped to publicize the Lef movement.

The journal *Lef* even had a precedent in the international Constructivist journal *Veshch-Object-Gegenstand* that Ilya Ehrenburg and El Lissitsky had put out earlier in 1922 in Berlin. In *Veshch-Object-Gegenstand*, Mayakovsky had printed his programmatic poem "Order No. 2 to the Army of Arts" ("Prikaz No. 2 armii iskusstv"), which followed his "Order to the Army of Arts" ("Prikaz po armii iskusstva") originally published in *Art of the Commune*. Although Ehrenburg and Lissitsky discontinued their trilingual (Russian, French, German) journal after three issues, the neo-Futurist *Lef*, with its claim to be the authentic representative of the young Soviet art, could have used the connections they had already established with the Western avant-garde.

Once *Lef* appeared, Mayakovsky and Brik intended to devoted a section of each issue to foreign contributions. Brik, familiar with the newest artistic trends in the West, proposed the following foreign contributors: Grosz, Gasbarra, Einstein, and Schuller from Germany; Tzara and Leger from France; Loeb from England; and Jakobson from Czechoslovakia.[27] Although such a foreign section never materialized in the journal, *Lef* at least initially did attempt to maintain an international profile. The first issue published a drama by the German writer Karl August Wittfogel, "A Run-Away: Tragedy in Seven Telephone Conversations" ("Beglets, tragediya v semi telefonnykh razgovorakh"), which was translated by Lilya Brik. The second issue, prepared for May Day, included excerpts from *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis, under a tendentious title "Mr. Babbitt—the American" ("Mister Bebbit—amerikanets"). It also carried a modernistic prose piece by Malcolm Cowley, an American critic and poet, as well as reviews of revolutionary poetry in Spanish by Chilean and Spanish poets.

More significantly, in the May Day issue *Lef* began a direct campaign to organize the international avant-garde under the auspices of the Left Front of the Arts. The Lef group announced its intention to act as a center for a unified international Left Front of the Arts called Red Iskintern (Krasnyi Iskintern—Red Artistic International) and appealed for an international response, to be sent directly to *Lef*'s editorial office. The trilingual appeal to left artists abroad who were addressed in Russian, English, and German as "the so-called directors," "the so-called artists,"

and "the so-called poets," called for a total rejection of the traditional arts and for participation in art that organized life.[28] The ultimate objective of Red Iskintern was to be the development of international art of the proletarian revolution under the leadership of the Lef group.

After the second issue of *Lef*, however, the international ambitions of the Futurists came to an abrupt end. Red Iskintern was never mentioned again; no more foreign contributions appeared in the journal. Instead, the editors concentrated on "the distribution of Lef's ideas in the Soviet Union," but with limited success.

In the provinces of the Soviet Union, the impact of Lef was meager, as shown in the limited correspondence printed in the journal. Because the Futurists were always eager to publicize their influence, it may be assumed that this printed correspondence represented the total extent of their formal contacts. There were only five items: a note from Transcaucasian Lef (Lef Zakavkazya, formerly known as the Dadaistic group 41°, which had been formed by the poets Aleksei Kruchonykh and Ilya Zhdanevich);[29] two letters from Ivanovo-Voznesensk reporting some activities of the local Lef sympathizers conducted in conjunction with the program of the city Proletkult; a message from the Russian Far East expressing hope for the broadening of Futurist influence; and, finally, news about the formation of a real Lef section in the South.[30]

This new group in the South, YugoLef (Lef of the South), was organized in Odessa in the middle of April 1924 by the poet Semyon Kirsanov and his friends Nedolya, Bondarin, Sokolov, and Danilov. YugoLef listed some thirty members, forty percent of whom were said to belong to the Party. The propagation of left art by YugoLef seems to have led to the formation of a Podolian, a Moldavian, and a Jewish subsection of the Lef organization. In September 1924 the Odessa group published a newspaper, *YugoLef*, and promised to continue it as an occasional publication, with twenty pages per issue. Half a year later, during the Lef convention in January 1925, the YugoLef group would bring about a confrontation on the character of Lef organization, a confrontation in which Lef would become fragmented and, in effect, would stop functioning.

Brik and Mayakovsky had originally envisaged that *Lef* would be put out by a casual association of avant-garde artists united by a common vision of the new culture. Yet the realities of cultural politics had led the Lef group to conclude two formal alliances with outside groups: in 1923

with MAPP, and in 1924 with the Constructivists (Literaturnyi tsentr konstruktivistov—Literary Center of the Constructivists).

The ultimate target of the Lef-MAPP alliance were the "fellow-travelers," politically noncommitted writers of middle-class origin. The avant-garde artists from Lef did not share the formal concept of literature held by the militant proletarians from MAPP, but both groups were united in their insistence on the Communist character of the new art. Their leftist orientation provided a common ground from which both groups decided to fight the prominence of "fellow-travelers" in Soviet cultural life. Lef and MAPP saw their alliance as the first step in the consolidation of leftist forces against all "alleged fellow-traveler groups" (*mnimo-poputnicheskie gruppirovki*), as a nucleus to which other anti-"fellow-traveler" groups could be attracted.[31]

The Lef group had more in common with MAPP than appeared at first glance. From their establishment to their termination, the journal *Lef* and the MAPP journal *On Guard* (*Na postu*, 1923–1925) shared similar histories. Prior to the appearance of *On Guard*, the editorial group had been connected with the journal for proletarian youth, *Young Guard* (*Molodaya gvardiya*), issued under the auspices of the Central Committee and Komsomol. Like the Lef group, MAPP obtained permission to publish an independent journal in January 1923.[32] Both journals appeared as a result of the decision of the 11th Party Congress (1922) to intensify propaganda efforts against the influences of NEP and to appease pro-Communist groups disillusioned by NEP. Unlike the older journals such as *Red Virgin Soil* and *Press and Revolution*, designed as "thick" journals for a wide audience, *Lef* and *On Guard* offered definite, even militant, programs.

Like *Lef*, *On Guard* was planned as a monthly publication, but during its two-year existence, *On Guard* managed to put out only six issues, whereas *Lef* produced seven. The size of each *On Guard* edition paralleled that of *Lef*'s, but this similarity was by no means indicative of their respective influences. The publication of *On Guard* was the public debut of a mass organization, which went on to dominate Soviet cultural life in the second half of the 1920s. The appearance of *Lef*, on the other hand, was one episode in the generally unsuccessful campaign of the Futurists for recognition as a cultural force in the Soviet state.

The problems that the *Lef* editors encountered in putting out individual numbers of the journal were similar to those encountered by the editors of *On Guard*. In the summer of 1923, after the first two issues of

Lef, the group was confronted with a negative, even hostile, response from the major newspapers and journals. Even *On Guard* devoted a considerable part of its first number (June 1923) to an attack on the program of left arts.[33] But the militant Octobrists, in turn, antagonized the moderate Communists in charge of the major papers: Voronsky of *Red Virgin Soil*, Sosnovsky of *Pravda*, and Polonsky of *Press and Revolution*. The general drift to the right in cultural politics that preceded the Party Resolution on Literature of 1925 made it difficult for both *Lef* and *On Guard* to advance extreme leftist programs.

Despite the Octobrists' initial attack on the *Lef* journal, both groups shared a similar enough platform to conclude an agreement in October 1923. The direct reason for their agreement was the alleged lack of support from the Soviet cultural administration, which both groups demanded but neither obtained. Under these conditions, Lef and MAPP saw their alliance as a tactically sound maneuver that would help them gain a more influential position in cultural decision-making and give them broader access to publishing means. Ultimately, the Lef-MAPP alliance intended to do no less than work out the principles of correct, class-conscious, cultural politics.

In the formulation of the Lef-MAPP agreement, the Lef group was represented by Brik, Mayakovsky, and Tretyakov. On the proletarian side were Averbakh, Libedinsky, Zonin, Doronin, Rodov, and Lelevich. In publishing the agreement in *Lef*, the Futurists preceded it with an editorial in which they explicity confirmed the common political identity of Lef and MAPP, but subtly criticized MAPP's formal traditionalism. The *Lef* editorial declared that their alliance would protect MAPP, the leader of proletarian literature, against the influence of the antiquated cultural tradition sponsored by the official institutions:

> We note that proletarian literature is threatened by those who have too soon grown weary, those who have settled down too quickly, those who without protest have embraced the sorry 'foreign residents' (*zagranichniki*), masters of sweet talk and smooth words. We will offer organized resistance against this yearning for the past . . . We emphasize that literature is not a mirror reflecting the historical struggle, but a weapon in this struggle.[34]

The actual text of the Lef-MAPP agreement was written in the ponderous language of MAPP. The agreement called attention to the social and political imbalance resulting from the introduction of NEP and went on

to demand a curtailment of the bourgeois influence in cultural politics. Lef and MAPP considered the situation critical, because apparently the ex-nobility and bourgeois writers were well organized and had easy access to the Soviet publishing houses, which were giving only limited support to the proletarians and the avant-garde. From the point of view of the cultural left, such a situation represented an obvious misunderstanding of the Revolution by the Soviet cultural administration. To combat this official tendency, Lef and MAPP agreed to avoid polemics against each other and to concentrate on the following urgent project:

> Exposing the socioliterary physiognomy of publishing firms, printing organs, and literary associations, and, in accordance with the results, designing and executing definitive practical measures with regard to the above-mentioned organizations.[35]

The concrete target of the Lef-MAPP was Voronsky, the editor of the Party-sponsored *Red Virgin Soil.* Lef and MAPP attacked him on two counts: his theory of art as a reflection of life and his policy of support for the "fellow-travelers" through the publishing enterprise "Krug." In effect, Lef and MAPP formed their alliance against the current Party policy on cultural administration and directed the main force of their attack on Voronsky, the Party's major representative in the realm of literature. An underlying but unpublicized objective of the alliance was a boycott of the Voronsky-directed publishing firm "Krug," which had originally been envisaged by the cultural administration as a unifying point for all writers of pro-Communist sympathies.[36] MAPP had rejected the idea of coexistence with the "fellow-travelers" and was trying to force a Party decision that would benefit proletarian writers. At the same time, the Lef group, which was being attacked for the Bohemian and the Futurist character of its program, attempted to hitch itself to a politically left radical group and to claim allegiance to ideological purity.

As a side benefit from the alliance, the Lef group expected to gain access to the proletarian youth united in MAPP. According to the reminiscences of Dmitry Furmanov, one of the MAPP leaders at the time, the Lef members even proposed to split the areas of competence with MAPP, offering to let MAPP control the political and organizational aspects of proletarian literature, while the Lef group intended to concentrate on the artistic education of the youth.[37] Although MAPP refused this division of authority, some Lef members were occasionally invited to lecture in

the MAPP literary studios; apparently Brik led a seminar on the analysis of literary texts that enjoyed some popularity.

The Lef-MAPP agreement did not actually result in a lasting collaboration of the left artists with the Octobrists, but it marked an intensification of the attacks on Voronsky to which *On Guard* had devoted most of its first issue. The Lef-MAPP alliance marked the beginning of Voronsky's demise as a protector and moderator of the developing Soviet literature. The alliance also signaled the opening of MAPP's drive for the consolidation of literature on an ideologically monolithic basis and indirectly instigated the debate on the principles of the official support of the arts that culminated in the 1925 Party Resolution on Literature.

In general, in 1923-1924, the cultural administration wanted to strike a balance between left and right, so it had little sympathy for the militancy of Lef and MAPP. Still, their alliance did appear to have an immediate practical effect: at the end of 1923 Dmitry Furmanov, one of the leading MAPP members, became the main editor in Gosizdat, thus giving MAPP leverage in publishing affairs.

The MAPP victory, however, was only temporary. In May 1924 the Party issued a resolution, "About Press" ("O pechati"), that expressed support and sympathy for the "fellow-travelers" who were being attacked and ostracized by the left-wing groups.[38] Subsequently, the left-wing groups found themselves in disfavor. In the summer of 1924, both journals, *Lef* and *On Guard*, experienced publishing difficulties. *Lef* put out its final two issues in the middle of 1924 and in January 1925; the final issues of *On Guard* appeared in May 1924 and June 1925. Just as *Lef* disappeared at the time when the convention of the Left Front of the Arts was being organized, *On Guard* was not published during the six months preceding the convention of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers in January 1925. This loss of their publishing organs prevented the radical Lef and MAPP from consolidating their positions prior to their organizational meetings and more or less silenced them during the critical debates that preceded the Party Resolution on Literature, issued on June 1, 1925.

The Resolution of 1925, the culmination of the debate on the governmental support of the arts, gave the long-sought Party commitment to preletarian literature that MAPP had struggled for since its beginnings, but also forced the proletarians to accept the Party policy of temporary leniency toward "fellow-travelers."

The Lef group and its journal, on the other hand, were less successful. The Futurists failed to secure Communist legitimacy either through Party support of its own artistic declarations or through its alliance with MAPP. Their status as a Communist group was not recognized, despite all efforts to become the primary representative of the new Soviet arts. At the May 9, 1924 meeting of the publishing section of the Central Committee, Voronsky, who had been attacked earlier by Lef and MAPP on the "fellow-traveler" issue, responded by calling Mayakovsky a "fellow-traveler."[39] Such a charge obviously contradicted Lef's declarations and Mayakovsky's own, yet the label of "fellow-traveler" put on the leading Lef member met no opposition from the others present at the meeting. This name-calling during the crucial time when the issue of "fellow-travelers" was central in literary debates and when the Lef group was attempting to identify itself with the proletarians, indicated that the Left Front of the Arts could hope only for official tolerance but not support for its program. Mayakovsky later mentioned with some bitterness that after this incident, he came to be "regarded as a fellow-traveler."[40] On April 6, 1925, during a debate on "Disagreements in Literary Politics" ("Raznoglasiya v literaturnoi politike"), Mayakovsky officially protested "against including the group Lef among the fellow-travelers,"[41] but by that time the Left Front of the Arts had been forced to accept a peripheral role in Soviet cultural politics.

Whereas the cooperation of the Lef group with MAPP grew out of common political interests, the alliance that Lef concluded with the group of poets known as the Constructivists was based on common esthetic objectives.[42] The Lef-Constructivist alliance developed both as a natural outgrowth of similar artistic aims and as part of an organizational drive for the unification of avant-garde artists. The Constructivist group—originally formed in Moscow in the spring of 1922 by the poets Kornei Zelinsky, Ilya Selvinsky, and Aleksei Chicherin—concentrated on formal aspects of literature, such as finding literary equivalents for Constructivist devices first developed in the fine arts. Despite the similarity of their interests in the problems of form, the postrevolutionary Futurists regarded the Constructivists' views, especially those of Chicherin, as "metaphysical, mystical."[43] The Constructivists, in turn, disagreed with the Futurist interpretation of art as the formal engineering of life and remained disinterested in any program that sought a maximum involvement between art and life. The Lef group, in the general appeal to various Soviet

artistic circles that appeared in the first number of *Lef*, also admonished the nonpoliticized Constructivists:

> Beware of becoming still another little school of esthetics. Constructivism of art only is a zero. The question concerns the very existence of art. Constructivism should become the highest formal engineering of the whole of life. Constructivism in the performance of pastoral idylls is simply nonsense.[44]

In the fall of 1923 Mayakovsky invited Zelinsky to join the Lef group, but it was not until the Constructivists had excluded Chicherin from their group and had organized into the Literary Center of Constructivists that they decided to join the Lef organization.[45] In August 1924 the Constructivists worked out a new declaration of their program and informed the Lef group of their intention to join the already formed Lef-MAPP alliance:

> The group of poets Constructivists, ideologically and politically siding with the platform of Lef's agreement with MAPP, announces hereby its organizational entry into Lef for the purpose of establishing a single front of the workers of new culture.[46]

As a result of the Constructivist addition to the alliance, the seventh number of *Lef* carried Constructivist contributions: the declaration of the Literary Center of the Constructivists, Zelinsky's important essay "Ideology and Tasks of Soviet Architecture" ("Ideologiya i zadachi sovetskoi arkhitektury"), and his article on the problems of literary reception, "The Book, the Market, and the Reader" ("Kniga, rynok i chitatel"). The *Lef* editors also intended to include a fragment from Selvinsky's *poema* "Ulyalayev's Band" ("Ulyalyaevshchina") and from his poem "Motka Malkhamoves," but neither passed Gosizdat censorship.

That issue of *Lef* turned out to be the last, but the Futurists and the Constructivists had already made plans to publish another journal together. The newspaper *Evening Moscow* (*Vechernyaya Moskva*) of December 16, 1924, carried an announcement about the planned appearance of the journal *Left Reconnaissance* (*Levaya razvedka*), listing among the participants Brik, Shklovsky, Zelinsky, Selvinsky, Aseev, and Kataev.[47] Mayakovsky, who was in Paris at the time, was not included on the list. Unfortunately neither the continuation of *Lef* nor the initial edition of *Left Reconnaissance* ever appeared.

The belated alliance of the Constructivists with the Lef group did not

continue beyond the last number of *Lef*. In the spring of 1928 the Constructivists published their collection *A State Plan for Literature* (*Gosplan literatury*), in which Zelinsky announce that Constructivism would replace Futurism, which had been outgrown, and would take over Lef's role as organizer of the experimental arts:

> The constant polemicism of the Lef group represented an extension of its opposition to bourgeois art. Yet now, under new conditions, Lef has preserved the same line . . . Now, when a *positive* reworking of the organizational problems of the new life is needed . . . Constructivism has been called upon to fulfill the mission as the organizer of new art.[48]

Apparently, instead of bringing the Futurists and the Constructivists together, the alliance had exacerbated the antagonism.

In the summer of 1925 the Literary Center of Constructivists planned to prepare a summary of their basic theoretical differences with the Lef group. The Constructivists were also considering a new alliance with MAPP, this time to limit the influence of the Lef group.[49] In effect, throughout the second half of the 1920s, polemics and antagonism between the Constructivists and the Left Front of the Arts continued until the dissolution of both groups in 1930.

It is evident from the problems that the Lef group encountered in its alliance with MAPP and the Constructivists that the original vision of a casual front of left-oriented artists was rather utopian. In addition, the Lef group found itself polarized internally. The ongoing problem of a suitable organizational structure for the Left Front of the Arts became more acute with the creation of the group YugoLef in 1925. Specifically, the formation of YugoLef changed the balance of power within the Lef group.[50]

The original loose format envisaged for the Lef organization by its original founders had allowed for a variety of artistic interests and a spectrum of political positions. This loose format, however, lacked the support of the entire editorial board. Nikolai Chuzhak, the former leader of the Far East group "Creative Work," was convinced that the avant-garde could make an impact on Soviet cultural life only through a monolithic organization with a single cultural-political platform. At the end of 1924, in the newly formed section YugoLef, Chuzhak found reinforcement

for his position, which had been consistently rejected by the remaining editors of *Lef*.

The controversy dated back to the times prior to the appearance of the *Lef* journal. The major point of contention between Chuzhak and the rest of the Lef group had always been the question of the ultimate goal of the Lef organization. The majority of the editors wanted to concentrate on adapting modern arts to the Soviet system and on developing corresponding artistic theories. Chuzhak, on the other hand, envisaged an avant-garde equivalent of the proletarian October movement, a mass organization unified by a single, binding program of avant-garde art. Even before the appearance of the journal *Lef* in 1923, Chuzhak had considered the possibility of creating another periodical to champion the cause of Communist art, in case the Lef group would not agree to a uniform organizational stand. At the time, the Communist Party was yet uncommitted to any artistic trend, so before any competitive groups could enter Soviet literary politics, Chuzhak attempted to seek recognition for left art as the mass art of the Communist society.

The other members of the Lef group showed much less interest in ideological unity and Party-like discipline. Mayakovsky's letter to Chuzhak of January 23, 1923, reveals exasperation at the discord within the Left Front of the Arts, evident before the journal had even appeared:

> Please bring some order into your objections and state them clearly, with concrete demands. But remember that the aim of our alliance is *Communist art* . . . a sphere that does not yet lend itself to precise defining or theorizing; a sphere where practice and intuition are way ahead of the most imaginative theoretician.[51]

Despite Mayakovsky's rebuttal, Chuzhak continued to disagree with the other Lef members, protesting the publication in *Lef* of Mayakovsky's "About That" ("Pro eto") and Brik's "She Is Not A Fellow-Traveler" ("Ne poputchitsa"), both of which he considered inconsistent with the Lef concept of agitational arts. Finally, in the fourth number of *Lef*, Chuzhak announced his departure from the editorial board "because of differences in opinion on matters of theory and organization with the majority of the editorial board of *Lef*."[52]

His departure did not end his involvement in the affairs of the Lef organization. In the fall of 1924 Chuzhak found support for his position in the YugoLef group, and that group forced the Lef organization to call

a meeting of all its members: the First Meeting of the Workers of Left Art ("Pervoe soveshchanie rabotnikov levogo iskusstva"), on January 16–17, 1925.

It should be noted that in early 1925 the problem of Lef's organizational self-definition was especially acute, because it was known that in the near future the Communist Party intended to issue a policy statement on literature. At the time both Lef and MAPP attempted to expand and to consolidate the left forces in order to exert more pressure on the Party, and thus obtain further concessions prior to the publication of the Party Resolution of June 18, 1925. On January 6–12, 1925, just a few days before the Lef convention, MAPP had also organized the first All-Union Convention of Proletarian Writers. During the convention, MAPP pressed for the unification and centralization of VAPP (Vserossiiskaya assotsatsiya proletarskikh pisatelei—All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), a unification based on a program of "rock-hard ideological consistency."[53] Similarly, the Lef meeting four days later, in which many VAPP members participated, also centered on the organizational definition of the left arts, which would help the movement to develop a unified political line.

The showdown between the original Lef group and Chuzhak concerning the character of the Lef organization occurred during the January meeting of the Lef organization. Chuzhak—supported by YugoLef—repeated his earlier demand for a unified Left Front of the Arts, and even accused the *Lef* editors of a laxity in editorial policy that supposedly had led to the situation in which the journal "was closed down because of pornography" (*zakryli za pornografiyu*).[54]

Osip Brik later recalled that during the Lef convention in 1925 the non-Moscow forces tried to pressure the Moscow group into acting as the center of left art movement, which would operate on a tight organizational basis similar to that which the October group had realized in the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers.[55] On one side, Chuzhak continued to demand a tightly knit organization run on the principle of a political party. On the other, his opponents, Brik and Mayakovsky, defended the model of a loose federation, allowing for a variety of programs for a number of small groups. A consensus could not be reached.

Mayakovsky argued that a unified program for the Left Front of Arts would damage the quality of artistic work and that a forcible unification

would result in bureaucracy, in an attempt to classify all members according to certain "leftist" categories. Instead of a monolithic organization for the avant-garde, Mayakovsky proposed that the Moscow group, the original core of Lef, serve as a technical center, sending out materials and administering organizational finances.[56] But Mayakovsky's position did not reflect the sentiments of the majority of the members, and after the first day of the convention Mayakovsky refused to participate in the convention proceedings. He accused the other participants of trying to substitute the Lef theory for "a modernized Nadsonovism of Chuzhak" and announced: "I have and intend to have nothing to do with any results of this meeting."[57]

Mayakovsky tried to resist this drive toward monolithic unity because he believed that such unity would sacrifice artistic plurality to the idea of political expediency. But the differences within the newly expanded Lef were insurmountable. Admittedly, Chuzhak was equally unsuccessful in his attempts to promote a unified organization. He confessed:

> Lef turned out to be a too multifaceted segment of contemporary art to . . . devise a common language . . . The platform proposed by the undersigned was accepted only as a basis for initial orientation . . . There are still fewer results with regard to the organization.[58]

The Lef conference set up two commissions to continue working on the organizational problems of the Left Front of the Arts after the meeting. In May 1925, a closed gathering of the group that discussed Viktor Pertsov's analysis "The Revision of Lef" ("Reviziya Lefa") apparently agreed that "the revolution of artistic form [was] inconceivable without the fulfillment of a definitive social commission and without a direct tie between artist and the constructive work of the young [proletarian] class."[59] Further discussions brought no consensus; it became apparent that "a broad left front of arts is simply nowhere in sight."[60]

At this point the original organizers of Lef, the former Futurists and the members of the avant-garde, were confronted witih the fact that they could no longer limit their role in Soviet culture to formal shaping of the new experiences. As of 1925, it became imperative to recognize that art would be viewed in terms of political issues and that the content of art would gain supremacy over its form.

3. CRITICAL RESPONSE

The discontinuation of the journal *Lef* in 1925 marked the end of Russian Futurism as a viable movement. The journal had developed as an outgrowth of this movement: in its aggressive antitraditionalist orientation *Lef* had continued the sentiments of the Cubo-Futurists; in its poetry it had relied on the Futurist experiments; and, most importantly, in the minds of its critics *Lef* had remained identified with the Futurist Bohème.

In 1924 Leon Trotsky, in his study *Literature and Revolution* (*Literatura i revolyutsiya*), astutely analyzed the Futurist movement and voiced many official reservations with regard to the Lef group. Trotsky pointed out that the neo-Futurist program grew out of the narrow confines of the intelligentsia milieu, and that the Futurists themselves had no exposure to the revolutionary tradition. Consequently, in Trotsky's opinion, the Futurists misinterpreted the Revolution, seeing it as a radical break with the past rather than as a continuation of an organic development. With regard to the Lef program, Trotsky singled out the experimentation with language as its strongest point, but he dismissed the Futurist claim that verbal experimentation could find application in daily life. In general, Trotsky affirmed the validity of the issues raised by *Lef*, issues such as the relationship of art and industry, the formative influence of art on rational living habits, and the problems of language culture. At the same time, he rejected the esthetics of the Lef group as "utopian sectarianism" claiming that because the Lef members had rejected the inner life as the subject of art, left art could hardly aim at the reorganization of the human psyche. Although Trotsky was willing to recognize the significance of neo-Futurist artistic experiments, he saw no possibility that the Party would accept the avant-garde art of the Lef members as the art of the Communist society:

> The Party cannot do that which is persistently recommended, and canonize the "Lef" or even a definite wing of it, as "Communist Art." It is as impossible to canonize seekings as it is impossible to arm an army with an unrealized invention . . . As far as the political use of art is concerned, or the impossibility of allowing such use by our enemies, the Party has sufficient experience, insight, decision, and resources. But the actual development of art and its struggle for new forms are not part of the Party's tasks, nor are they its concern.[61]

In 1924 Trotsky could categorically insist that the Party would not interfere in artistic matters, but he also made it clear that the Lef group was not qualified to appear as a Communist movement. He noted a discrepancy in the theory and the practice of Lef:

> We have no reason to doubt that the "Lef" group is striving seriously to work in the interest of Socialism, that it is profoundly interested in the problems of art, and that it wants to be guided by a Marxist criterion . . . However, the Futurist poets have not mastered the elements of the Communist point of view and world-attitude sufficiently to find organic expression for them in words; these beliefs have not entered, so to speak, into their blood. That is why they are frequently subject to artistic and psychological defeats; that is why they frequently produce stilted forms and make much noise about nothing. In its most revolutionary and compelling works, Futurism becomes stylization.[62]

A year later, in 1925, Lunacharsky, a one-time supporter of the left arts, criticized the Lef movement still more sharply. Even before the official discontinuation of the journal, he dismissed the Lef group as a complete anachronism. In his speech "The Cornerstones of the New Culture" ("Pervye kamni novoi kultury"), which opened a cultural debate on February 9, 1925, Lunacharsky addressed Mayakovsky, the representative of the Lef group:

> . . . Lef is already an almost obsolete thing. I apologize to Comrade Mayakovsky, but as long as Comrade Mayakovsky continues to be a Lef member, he remains an obsolete type . . . Nowadays Lef stays behind; it has lost the tempo of life . . . Comrade Mayakovsky and his friends came out of an esthetic culture, a culture of the satiated bourgeois, who sought new graces, new caprices, and unusual eccentricities. They have retained this position. Very many of Mayakovsky's comrades have remained there, stuck in the bourgeois camp.[63]

Even though in 1924 Trotsky considered Party intervention in literary affairs unlikely, in June 1925 the Central Committee issued its Resolution on Literature. The Resolution made it clear that members of a group like Lef could lay no claim to Communist legitimacy and would play only an episodic role in Soviet culture, at best as contributors to agitational art. The 1925 Resolution gave the proletarian writers assurance of their eventual domination of Soviet literature, and at the same time it indicated that the Party would not endorse any literary style. The Party's refusal

to support a particular literary style did not apply to the Association of Proletarian Writers, which had no special interest in formal matters and sought mainly ideological and material support for proletarian literature. This rebuttal was rather directed at the Left Front of the Arts, which throughout its existence had sought Party confirmation for its formal experimentation.

Because of its cautious wording, both left- and right-wing writers received the 1925 Resolution with mixed feeling. The Resolution assured the eventual proletarian character of Soviet literature, but at the same time it put off this development until some unspecified future. Although by June 1925 *Lef* was no longer in print, Osip Brik made a comment on the Resolution in the name of the Left Front of the Arts, which was published along with other literary responses in the journal *The Journalist* (*Zhurnalist*). Brik voiced approval of the Resolution, but confined his remarks to those points that he could interpret as supportive of the position held by the Lef group: that there was a need to turn away from literary polemics toward literary work, to decide formal questions in literature not through resolutions but through actual literary production. In general, Brik declared that "the Resolution is good not because it does not decide anything, but because it proposes to treat literary matters not in an off-hand manner, not in 'spare time,' but with seriousness. For this, we, the Lef group, are always ready."[64]

Finally, by 1925 the changing trends in cultural politics made it necessary for the left art movement to separate itself from Futurism with its Bohemian temperament and its history of postrevolutionary monopolistic efforts. On October 5, 1925, in New York, Mayakovsky, who had criticized Futurism a few times before, made an explicit effort to sever the Lef group from its past. Mayakovsky rejected "Americanism," which together with "Taylorism" had been the slogan of the early 1920s, and went on to criticize Futurism, which was at the time popular in the United States:

> In the enthusiastic praise that America has for Futurism one sees the essential mistake of Futurism—the praise of technique as such, technique for the sake of technique. Futurism had its place and has immortalized itself in the history of literature, but in the Soviet Union it has already outplayed its role. The aspiration and work of the Soviet Union find their reflection not in Futurism, but in Lef, which glorifies not chaotic technology, but wise organization. Futurism and the Soviet

> construction . . . cannot go hand-in-hand. From this time on . . . I am against Futurism; from this time on I will struggle against it.[65]

Such disclaimers may have helped the official image of the group. By the middle of 1926, Gosizdat again was considering the publication of Mayakovsky's collected works. At the end of August or the beginning of September 1926, the Lef group applied for permission to publish the journal *New Lef* and received a positive reply from the Central Committee. Gosizdat agreed to print two special numbers of *New Lef* before putting out the first regular number on December 1. These special numbers did not materialize, but the regular *New Lef* numbers began to appear in January 1927 and continued to appear monthly between January 1927 and December 1928, in editions of 1,500 copies, each issue consisting of three printer's sheets (forty-eight pages).

From 1925 on, the Lef group largely abandoned the original Futurist-Constructivist program and devoted the journal *New Lef* to the promotion of a new theory of "literature of fact" (*literatura fakta*). This new trend proved to have much wider influence in Soviet and Western European literature than had the earlier model proposed by *Lef*. *New Lef* suggested that writers abandon traditional fictional literature and replace it with new writing based on facts taken from the immediate social and political reality. Among prose genres, *New Lef* propagated sketches (*ocherki*), travel notes, and diaries. Poetry received much smaller coverage, limited now to poems of feuilletonistic character that presented immediate, so-called "relevant" issues. As a correlative to this essentially journalistic trend in literature, *New Lef* chose to promote film, which now represented the epitome of the new, fact-oriented art. The graphic side of the new journal was considerably more subdued than it had been in *Lef;* the text appeared now in standard print without any special attention-catching devices. Instead of the emphasis on graphic design shown by *Lef*, the new visual effects in *New Lef* were confined to photography, which provided an effective graphic coefficient to the new theory of "literature of fact."

Unlike *Lef*, *New Lef* proved very consistent in sustaining the connection between its artistic theory and practice. Yet the consistency of its program meant that the broad, unifying role initially envisaged for the Left Front of the Arts had to be replaced by a uniformity of views shared mainly by the small circle of its editors. Mayakovsky, who again acted

as the main editor of the journal, apparently disagreed with the new character of the group and, finally, in the eighth number of *New Lef*, announced his departure from the journal. The immediate reason given was the trip he was to take abroad, but in reality, Mayakovsky found the new program too exclusive, too confining, and, because of its orientation toward factual prose, damaging to him as a poet.

Brik, Aseev, and Rodchenko left *New Lef* together with Mayakovsky, but *New Lef* continued in print until the end of 1928, with Tretyakov and Chuzhak in charge. In the summer of 1928 Mayakovsky and Brik attempted to organize a new group called Ref (Revolyutsionnyi front iskusstv —Revolutionary Front of the Arts.[66] The Ref organization never got beyond the planning stage. The plans eventually collapsed when Mayakovsky and his associates abandoned the idea of a separate avant-garde path for Soviet literature and in February 1930 entered RAPP (Rossiiskaya assotsiatsiya proletarskikh pisatelei—Russian Association of Proletarian Writers).

CHAPTER THREE

LEF: THEORY

А сзади, в зареве легенд
Идиот, герой, интеллигент
Печатал и писал плакаты
Про радость своего заката.
Над драмой реял красный флаг.

Борис Пастернак, "Высокая болезнь"

1. FROM PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FUTURISM TO THE SOVIET LEFT ARTS

In postrevolutionary Russia, the left artists were the only group that could claim a continuity of artistic tradition dating from as far back as the publication of the Futurist collection *A Trap for Judges* (*Sadok sudei*) in 1910. A Czech literary historian, Miroslav Drozda, in his analysis of Lef esthetics, points out that the left art movement not only acknowledged literary Cubo-Futurism as its predecessor, but also took over the essential features of early Futurism: its antipsychologism, its antiphilosophism, and its demand for the constant innovation of artistic forms.[1] Although in the 1920s the antipsychologism and anti-philosophism of the Futurists appeared as a manifestation of their Marxist materialist world view and of their commitment to the socialist collective, these beliefs actually had originated in the literary polemics among the modernist groups. In these debates, the early Futurists had scorned philosophy and psychology in a deliberate overstatement of their opposition to their predecessors, the Symbolists.

Symbolist art, which had dominated Russian culture in the early years of the century, was an expression of philosophical system based on a belief in the division between the artist and the world. To the Symbolists, art functioned as a path that allowed the individual to transcend temporal reality and to move into a superior, spiritual realm of existence. Within the Symbolist system, the realities of the temporal world appeared as inferior, partial reflections of a higher reality.

As antagonists of the Symbolists, the Futurists rejected this dual vision of the world and the hierarchical view of reality that characterized the

Symbolist perspective. Instead, as M. Drozda points out, the Futurists focused on the mundane surroundings, on the world of things, which they saw as a random conglomeration of unrelated objects juxtaposed to each other. In this world where people and things were interchangeable, Futurist art concentrated on the analysis of objects and situations through juxtapositions: by placing disparate objects side by side, the artist removed them from their customary settings and allowed the rediscovery of each object's unique features and the revelation of the previously invisible tensions or correspondences between these objects.

Unlike the Symbolists, the Futurists sought not to reveal unseen harmonies, but to create "things," artistic objects that took their places in the existent world of things. The Futurists saw the artistic quality of the new artifacts in the "effectiveness" with which these objects contributed to a new perception of the world. Correspondingly, they elevated the command of an artistic method that would result in a maximum of such "effectiveness" to the highest goal of art. In opposition to the Symbolists, who saw themselves as unique individuals with an access to higher reality, the Futurists regarded themselves as craftsmen whose command of an artistic method alone assured the esthetic value of their art.

The Futurists sought to rediscover the immediate world by breaking the relationships in which the perception of objects, words, or sounds had become automatized. Their approach, which fit the Formalist category of "laying bare of the device" (*obnazhenie priyoma*), was essential to Futurist art because it presented objects free from their familiar association. A similar revelation of the uniqueness of things was also achieved through interchange: when one object was substituted for another the unique features of each object became more pronounced.

Miroslav Drozda, in his analysis of Futurism, notes that whereas the Symbolists subjugated their art to a philosophical perspective (*filosofichnost*), the method-oriented, rationistic Futurists elevated progress to the ultimate objective of art. The Futurist commitment to formal innovation led to what Drozda calls a "hypertrophy of progress," a belief that attributed the highest value to any change, be it literary, social, or political.[2] Consequently, in the Futurist system the change wrought by the Revolution appeared as the ultimate destruction of all hierarchies, as a turning point signifying a break with all traditions. Yet at the same time, when Futurist art, originally dedicated to the destruction of all traditions,

was faced with the actual revolution, it had to develop a new, constructive, positive system. From this point on, with the reorientation of Futurism toward the positive goals that had been originally alien to Futurism, the movement no longer existed in a pure form.

The new element that shaped postrevolutionary Futurism was utilitarianism. In their argument for the utilitarian nature of avant-garde art, the group that organized the *Lef* journal was indebted to the ideas that had originated within Proletkult. Like Proletkult, the Lef group also believed in the inevitability of a proletarian culture, collectivist in nature, that would replace individualistic culture of the bourgeois period. For the specific character of their program for the new culture, the Lef group relied on the ideas developed by the leading theoretician of Proletkult, Aleksandr Bogdanov, a scientist and philosopher. Bogdanov influenced both Proletkult and the Lef group by his research on systems that he saw as underlying all human activities.

Bogdanov rejected the cognitive function of art in favor of its "organizational effect." In Bogdanov's interpretation, art was based on systems, and its creation could be seen as "an organization of living images" (*organizatsiya zhivykh obrazov*) in which the content of the individual picture was less important than the organizational principles controlling the effect of the art work.[3] Bogdanov further believed that if the organizational principle of an artistic work could be revealed, the recognition of this principle would induce the audience to adopt a more rational, organized approach to *all* areas of life, especially those areas associated with industrial production.

Bogdanov's views gave a new impetus to preoccupation with artistic *method*, because art now appeared to have a validity comparable to that of technology and science. Under the influence of Bogdanov's organizational theory, the neo-Futurists found new justification for their original refusal to reflect life through art. They saw a new purpose for Futurist art; it would involve the audience in the active process of analyzing the construction of the work of art. The making of the artifact, the construction of an art work by the artist, had to be matched by the reconstruction performed by the reader or listener. The recipient had to be drawn into an activity that would model his psychological reaction in correspondence to the artistic structure he was analyzing. In such a way, art could form the psyche of its audience. In particular, within the Soviet context, the

avant-garde insisted that the recipient of art would acquire analytic habits and methods that would carry over into the everyday activities of the new modern life created by the Revolution.

The neo-Futurists argued that in order to promote these analytic skills among the audience, an art work had to draw attention to its structure. All art of the avant-garde reflected this preoccupation with the fragmentation and the juxtaposition of images that together formed an artificial construct with no equivalent in reality. Such a preoccupation with construction manifested itself in the fragmentary structure of Futurist poems, in the montage of disconnected film fragments practiced by Dziga Vertov, in the piecing together of a theatrical performance from minute "attractions" (*attraktsiony*) proposed by Sergei Eisenstein in his theatrical experiments, and in the construction of a photographic collage arranged by Aleksandr Rodchenko. In all of these experiments, the fragmented and juxtaposed images suggested a certain logical totality, but the final act of synthesis, of deciphering this intellectual cohesion, was left to the recipient of avant-garde art.

When the postrevolutionary Futurists accepted Bogdanov's organizational theory, their original antipsychologism acquired an ideological motivation. Antipsychologism became a concomitant of the collectivist spirit that permeated early Soviet cultural life, a concomitant of the belief that the individual existed only as a contributor to the needs of the collective. Like Proletkult, the Futurists now regarded the psychological complexity of an individual life as a manifestation of the disorganized, nondirected bourgeois society. The Futurists, who saw their art as the art of the transition to the collective society, felt that the individual experiences of men must necessarily be deemphasized to facilitate the creation of the standard, modern personality fit for the future Soviet citizen. The formation of the new Soviet citizen for whom art would blend with the production process became in fact the ultimate objective of both the left artists and the left wing of Proletkult. The Futurists believed that such a personality, designed for the programmed society of the future, could be created only by conscious involvement in the production process or by a similar organizing experience created by the reception of an avant-garde work of art.

In this context Sergei Tretyakov, one of the leading theoreticians of the Lef group, could score a point for Futurism by reminding his oppo-

nents that the figure of the "New Man," a leitmotif of the modernist movements, had prefigured the Communist ideal citizen. In an article published in the first number of *Lef*, Tretyakov recalled that in early Futurism

> the Futurist works had as their sole content the propagation of the formation of a new man. Outside of this guiding idea, the Futurists invariably turned into verbal equilibrists . . . Since its infancy, Futurism has oriented itself not toward the creation of new paintings, poetry and prose, but toward the making of the new man, using art as one of the means of this creation.[4]

Tretyakov further explained that the seemingly Bohemian attempts of the early Futurists to shock the bourgeois were in fact manifestations of an artistic method that sought to force the recipient into an active reception of the arts. He pointed out that even in early Futurism the use of this method was motivated by a desire to change the human psyche toward greater flexibility and creativity. For example, Tretyakov interpreted the Futurist attacks on Pushkin, Tolstoy, and other prominent literary figures as attempts to get rid of the mechanized perception of art based on the ahistorical belief in the permanence of artistic standards.

Tretyakov admitted that the utopianism of the prerevolutionary Futurists may have had an anarchic character, but he noted that the Revolution had provided Futurism with a new objective of organizing the psyche of the masses for the pursuit of new sociopolitical goals. In Tretyakov's opinion, in the postrevolutionary period, the "New Man" needed to acquire the specific features needed by the new society: "We should create a man-worker, energetic, inventive, committed, disciplined, conscious of the wishes of the class that formed him; one who, without delay, gives all his production for the collective use."[5] This "New Man," as Tretyakov saw him, would have a system of esthetic values that reflected his modern, industrial background:

> The basic hatred felt by the new type should be the hatred of everything unorganized, inert, elemental. It will be difficult for him to love nature with the love felt previously by the landscape painter, the tourist, or the pantheist. He will consider repulsive the sleeping forest, the wild steppes, unused waterfalls that do not fall where they are ordered, rains and snows, avalanches, caves, and mountains. Beautiful will be all that shows the sign of the organizing hand of man;

> marvelous will be every product of man's labor that is directed toward overcoming, subjugating, and mastering the elements and inert matter.[6]

With this new constructive objective in mind, Tretyakov insisted that the earlier formalist and "metaphysical" approach to art must be replaced by "the study of art as the means of exerting emotionally organizing influence upon the psyche in connection with the objective of the class struggle."[7] In the new critical approach, the analysis of the old dichotomy between form and content must be replaced by an analysis of the planned objective of the artistic product, an analysis of the method of making it and of the method of its appreciation.

To help cultivate such values, Tretyakov projected a new direction for literature. In his opinion, old literary genres that promoted the passive reception of art needed to be replaced by genres capable of activating the reader: lyrical poetry was to be replaced by goal-oriented work on verbal matter; the psychologically oriented *belle lettres* would be replaced by the adventure short story; the "pure art" of contemplative literature would make way for the newspaper feuilleton and agitational verse (*agitka*); bourgois drama would be superseded by tragedy and farce. Yet Tretyakov recognized that in the year 1923 no prescription existed that would specify the features of artistic products capable of organizing emotions. Because art that could have such direct impact had not yet been developed, Tretyakov maintained that the Futurists must begin to change popular taste by propagating the materialistic instead of the idealistic view of arts.

For this reason, the members of the Lef group supplemented the combination of Futurism with Bogdanov's theory of the organizational nature of art, with one other aspect: the theory of art as a creation of useful objects known as the theory of "industrial art" (*proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo*). This theory, the major proponent of which was Osip Brik, held that art in the postrevolutionary society was threatened by extinction unless it blended with life and became an auxiliary force in the collective production of useful objects.[8] As the avant-garde artists saw it, in the future the esthetic aspect of production would become a part of the industrial process on the same level as the technical.

Art as the production of objects, represented by the development of industrial arts, offered a correct solution for the transition to Commun-

ism, in which the artist would become a craftsman. Tretyakov explained in his *Lef* article:

> The essence of the theory of industrial arts consists in the belief that the creativity of an artist should be applied not solely for the purpose of all kinds of decorations, but to all industrial processes. The masterly making of useful and purposeful things represents the calling of an artist, who by his activity will fall out of the caste of creators and find his way into the most appropriate labor union.[9]

Another Lef theoretician, Boris Arvatov, explained that, depending on the media in which they worked, the artists would apply their formal skills for the shaping of the daily socialist life:

> The 'verbal' worker will give an agitational construction, a slogan, an inscription for a poster; the visual artist will move toward the direct production of objects—toward posters and photomontage, into the printing and the textile industries; the theater worker will organize onstage action, infecting with it the will of the masses; the movie worker will offer life as it is—pieces of an organized film chronicle.[10]

The Futurists assumed that all such products would contain an innovative element that would force a gradual change of artistic taste and eventually a change in the psychological makeup of man. The development of industrial arts would finally culminate in a blend of art and life and the disappearance of art as a separate area of human endeavor.

Although the emerging Soviet industry was unprepared for the announced intervention of artists in the industrial process, the Futurist proposal came at a time when the Party had sought the help of bourgeois specialists to revive Russian industry. The Futurists felt, then, that they could cast themselves in the role of specialists in the esthetic shaping of industrial products. Seen from the artistic rather than the political perspective, this industrial orientation of the postrevolutionary Futurists reflected their fascination with the possibility of the planned construction of a new, rational way of life. The Lef group admitted that the program of "industrial art" might still seem far-fetched, but insisted that its maximalist orientation was necessary. A commentator, I. Grossman-Roshchin, explained in *Lef* that "within the industrial arts there is and there must be an element of utopianism." Like the other Lef artists, he demanded that "in contrast to the art that is directly utilitarian, industrial

art should express a moment of the *desired* perfection that the current level of material production has not yet reached, but toward which it strives."[11]

From the historical perspective, A. Mazaev, the author of a current Soviet study of "industrial art" in the context of the Lef group and the Proletkult organization, evaluates the movement as follows:

> "Industrial esthetics" was not technicism in the basic sense of the word, although it contained particular attributes of technicism, such as the cult of the machine, of the thing (*veshch*), etc. It . . . was a form—rather contradictory—of comprehending the October Revolution; its effect upon the fate of the artistic culture and its connection with the new social reality. These esthetics grew at the crossroads of real contradictions between the ideal and the practical life, between freedom and necessity, between professional art and mass esthetic consciousness. Appearing as a peculiar pastiche from these real antinomies, "industrial esthetics" aspired to be the Communist "prophecy," and at the same time tried to become a pragmatic system, a guide for practical activity. Here utopianism in a most innocent way blended with utilitarianism.[12]

2. PROGRAM FOR THE NEW ART

When the *Lef* journal first appeared in 1923, its initial number opened with three declarations in which the neo-Futurists set forth the political commitments, formal principles, and organizational plans for the Left Front of the Arts. The Futurist declarations were directed toward one purpose: to prove the revolutionary legitimacy of the avant-garde movement, its natural kinship with Communism.

The first declaration, "For What Does the Lef Struggle?" ("Za chto boretsya Lef?"), signed by the entire editorial board, established the historical roots of the left art movement, pointing out the parallel between the activities of the early Futurists in the realm of esthetics and the program of the revolutionary parties in politics. The *Lef* editors argued that the apparent anarchic orientation of the early Futurists had been the result of their determination to destroy the old *byt*, and that as early as the First World War the Futurists had developed a political awareness that could be documented in the poetry they had written in opposition to the war. The *Lef* editors went on to review the Futurists' involvement

in the Revolution, pointing out that the Futurists had responded immediately to Communism and had willingly cooperated in revolutionary causes. Admittedly, the manifesto discreetly ignored most of the conflicts that had occurred between the Futurists and the Soviet cultural administration. Instead, the *Lef* editors credited the avant-garde with the creation of the first art of the Revolution: Tatlin's monument to the Third International, Kamensky's poem "Stenka Razin," and Mayakovsky's play *The Mystery Bouffe* in Meyerhold's staging. For the period in which they were writing, the Lef editors painted a gray picture of literary life against which the left artists appeared as the only true revolutionaries. They noted that in their opinion, Proletkult had been fragmented into a collection of writing bureaucrats, followers of ex-Symbolist academicians, and a small group of writers who might still be susceptible to the avant-garde influence. They saw that the officially sponsored literature lacked a program and simply reflected the popularity of the writer in the marketplace. They also observed that the "new" literature, represented by Boris Pilnyak and the group of Serapion Brothers, unsuccessfully combined avant-garde devices with Symbolist ideas and adapted them all to the popular tastes of the NEP audience. Most disappointing of all, in the opinion of the Lef group, was the fact that the former bourgeois writers from the emigrant "Change of Landmarks" (Smena vekh) group had allegedly threatened to establish themselves within Soviet literary life with the full support of the Soviet cultural administration. Confronted with what the *Lef* editors saw as the directionless character of current literature, the *Lef* journal declared its intention to bring together all the leftist artistic forces in Soviet culture for the purpose of "agitating art with the ideas of the commune" and "agitating the masses with [avant-garde] art."[13]

Following this review of the historical development of the left art movement, the *Lef* journal presented its second declaration, "Whom Does Lef Bite Into?" ("V kogo vgryzaetsya Lef?"). The group set forth the struggle with the remains of the bourgeois artistic mentality in Soviet society as the main purpose of the Left Front of the Arts. More specifically, this declaration addressed the ongoing controversy about the position of the prerevolutionary cultural heritage in the revolutionary society. Brik and Mayakovsky restated the essential principle of avant-garde art: the absolute and unconditional rejection of any attempts to reintroduce nineteenth-century realist art as a model for the art of the Soviet period. Their rejection had a theoretical basis: the Futurists felt that realistic

art provided the audience with only passive exposure to a descriptive example and could therefore exert no formative impact on the new society. Although the Soviet cultural administration was not mentioned explicitly, the *Lef* attack was in fact a rejection of its policies. Without naming anyone, the Futurists condemned Lunacharsky's recent slogan "Back to the Classics!" ("Nazad k klassikam!"), which curtailed avant-garde experimentation in theater, and Voronsky's support of conservative, "fellow-traveler" literature through the publishing firm "Krug" and the journal *Red Virgin Soil.* The Futurists grudgingly offered to tolerate the use of the "classics" as learning material for yesterday's illiterates, but they insisted that the official commitment to traditional literature contradicted Communist ideology. Behind the revival of the nineteenth-century classics as models for the new art they saw an un-Marxist belief in art as a timeless esthetic experience, beyond class in its origin and universal in its appeal, a view that obviously ignored the dialectics of historical development. In their condemnation of the conservatives who favored realist art as accessible to the masses, the editors of *Lef* also hinted at the idea of an artistic dictatorship of the avant-garde that had been suggested by the newspaper *Art of the Commune:* "We will strike . . . at those who substitute the unavoidable dictatorship of taste for the . . . slogan of general elementary comprehensibility."[14]

In the last declaration, titled "Whom Does Lef Warn?" ("Kogo predostergaet Lef?"), the editors of *Lef* addressed the groups they hoped to recruit into the Left Front of the Arts. They named the Futurists, the Constructivists, the industrial artists (*proizvodstvenniki*), the Formalists, and the "innovation-oriented youth" as the "comrades in Lef" (*tovarishchi po Lefu*), and promised that the Lef collective would work to raise the political awareness of these groups.[15]

The three introductory declarations defined the historical background, the programmatic orientation, and the organizational role the Left Front of the Arts hoped to play, but their slogan-like formulations contained little indication of their actual artistic theory. The declarations did, however, hint at the ultimate objective of Lef: the creation of a Marxist theory of art. Indeed, among all of the postrevolutionary artistic groups, the Lef group was the first to articulate the need to develop a uniform, Marxist theory of art.

Needless to say, the Lef group felt that the avant-garde artistic pro-

posals represented a true Marxist approach to art. Boris Arvatov explained in the journal:

> At the present time, Marxism generally has no theory of art . . . "definitive sociological definition" is not to be found. Friche, Kogan, Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, Gauzenshtein, Pereverzev, Chuzhak . . . differ from one another . . . All in all, *Lef* is the only, or almost the only, journal in search of the methods of the Marxist approach to art.[16]

The Lef vision of the new art and the new Communist culture clearly followed Marxist logic in its view of the interdependence of art and politics. The Lef group was both the first and the most consistent in its insistence on the correspondence between social and artistic change. Lef proceeded from the argument that if the Marxist principle recognized that the economic relationship and the forms of production of a given society determined the character of the superstructure—which included, among other elements, culture and politics—it must then be assumed that culture changed in response to a change of the entire system. If one agreed that Soviet society was quantitatively different from all the former societies, then one must also recognize that such a society must develop its very own culture. In this argument the Futurists not only insisted on the necessity of a radically new culture, but also presented their avant-garde model as the artistic expression of Marxist philosophy.

Nikolai Chuzhak, an old Bolshevik and a Futurist sympathizer, took it upon himself to formulate the Marxist orientation of Futurism. Chuzhak's article "Under the Sign of Life-Building: An Attempt to Define the Art of the Day" ("Pod znakom zhiznestroeniya [opyt osoznaniya iskusstva dnya]"), was printed in the first issue of *Lef*, following the three manifestoes. From the prominence given to Chuzhak's article, it was obvious that the editors expected Chuzhak to establish the ultimate Soviet respectability of Futurism by connecting it to Marxism. In this attempt, the Futurists even disregarded the fact that Chuzhak, despite his Bolshevik background, had little sensitivity on artistic matters and did not fit well into the Lef group.

In this article, Chuzhak developed the concept of "ultrarealism," which he regarded as an expression of Marxist dialectics in art. "Ultrarealism," a concept that Chuzhak had introduced in 1913, was alleged to be the first definition of the potential of art to act as a force shaping life, rather than as a mirror reflecting it. Unlike all other artistic trends,

including realism, Chuzhak's "ultrarealism" sought to exert an influence on life by providing a dialectical revelation of the elements of the future that are dormant in the present situation. The early Futurism, according to Chuzhak, had expressed this dialectical tendency most explicitly, and therefore could be regarded as "ultrarealism" because it offered a "cynically merciless . . . reflection of the contradictions of the present in the light of the future."[17]

Chuzhak believed that Futurism best reflected the Marxist view that every existing reality, in the affirmation of its existence, also contains the concept of its rejection, of its ultimate disappearance. Futurist art, in its constant struggle against the establishment, concentrated on this antithesis, and by revealing these conflicts, it accelerated the process of change.

"Ultrarealism," in Chuzhak's view, prefigured the new revolutionary concept of art as a life-building force (*iskusstvo-stroenie zhizni*) devoted to building the models for tomorrow. Although "life-building" represented the highest goal of art in the socialist society, for the transitional period, Chuzhak was willing to accept the program of industrial arts. He regarded industrial arts as a useful temporary program, but found it limited by too close a connection to the immediate demands of the consumer. Instead, Chuzhak was more inclined to stress the modelling function of art: art should not be too closely connected to the production process, but should rather aim at the "creation of ideas" that would then act as models for future things.

But in spite of such attempts to connect the avant-garde with the new society, the hows and whats of the new socialist culture for which Futurism was to provide the model became secondary concerns in view of the basic incompatibility between the Futurist proposals and the position of the Soviet cultural administration. The Futurists, in their insistence on the Marxist character of their art, moved too close to the Party's area of competence, whereas their proposals were diametrically opposed to the official cultural policy.[18] Although the Soviet government pursued radical policies in politics and economics, it was conservative where art and literature were concerned. Part of the reason for this conservativism was simply the personal taste of the Communist leaders, who had been raised on the Russian realistic literature and art of the nineteenth century and who thus shied away from radical modernism. For example, Lenin himself disliked modernism, and it was easy for him to find official

justifications for his belief in the unsuitability of Futurism for the Soviet society. Commenting on his own artistic preferences, Lenin said:

> I . . . dare to call myself a "barbarian." I cannot force myself to consider the works of Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, and similar "isms" as the highest manifestations of the artistic genius. I do not understand them. I do not experience any joy from them.[19]

However, the causes of the Party's unwillingness to recognize the validity of Futurist theories went deeper than the personal preferences of political leaders. The conflict between the Futurists and the cultural administration stemmed essentially from the general insecurity about assigning a correct role to art and literature in the Soviet society. Whereas the Futurists insisted that culture, as a part of the superstructure, was a dynamic process that changed along with the society, the Soviet cultural politicians saw culture as an accumulation of special human experiences, which should be absorbed and appreciated for their transmission of absolute timeless human values. Lenin himself insisted that "you can become a Communist only when you have enriched your memory with the knowledge of all the riches created by mankind."[20] Consequently, the Soviet cultural administration insisted on the absorption of the cultural heritage as an educational experience, elevating and refining human sensibilities. In the eyes of the Futurists, however, this insistence on the absorption of the heritage not only relegated culture to a passive experience, but also was ahistorical in the Marxist sense, because it assumed the existence of absolute values that could be transferred to the new sociopolitical situation.

The Futurists rejected the official notion of culture and insisted that culture was a product of a particular time and place and not an unchangeable set of collected experiences. For the Futurists, culture by itself had no special permanent value; it had to be made into an instrument that would shape the new society. In this way, art would not simply refine or decorate a new life, but would become an inseparable, instrumental part of that life. The official attempt to reestablish the continuity of the cultural tradition was, in their opinion, un-Marxist and even antirevolutionary. Rather than assigning to art and literature the contemplative function in the new society, the Futurists insisted that art, even more than politics, had to play a formative role. They argued that instead of transferring the familiar worn-out patterns from the past into the present

for the purpose of passive contemplation, the new art must actively involve the audience in order to shape the modern mentality and give form to the daily experience of the new man. In this role, art appeared as superior to politics because only art assured that the Communist content of the new society would manifest itself in ways as modern and innovative as the Communist ideas themselves.[21]

Even though the ideas of the Futurists had an unmistakenly Marxist sound, they actually came from an ex-Bohemian group that had been known for flashy and shocking proclamations taunting the ideas of the establishment. To the Soviet cultural administrators, the radicalism of the Left group, whether or not it was Marxist, had a prerevolutionary ring, and the Soviet leaders did not hesitate to remind the left artists of their Bohemian past.

As early as 1920 Lunacharsky, apologetic about the excesses of the radical *Art of the Commune,* blamed them all on the Bohemian habits of the Futurists:

> . . . "leftism" in art was a product of the unhealthy atmosphere of the boulevards of bourgeois Paris and coffee houses of bourgeois Munich. Futurism, with its preaching of pure formalism, with its grimaces and its jumping of one artist over the heads of others, all accompanied by a monotony of devices . . . is a product of the decaying bourgeois culture.[22]

The Futurist movement was too disreputable to lay claim to the establishment of a Marxist esthetics. Even though in the early 1920s the Futurist proposals sounded appropriately Marxist, they essentially offered a rereading of the old Futurism as a model for the art of the new era. Despite its revolutionary tone, the Lef program managed to preserve the essentials of the Futurist esthetics. It is not surprising, then, that in the eyes of the Soviet cultural administration, Marxist esthetics in the yellow Futurist blouse had an unlikely chance for Soviet legitimacy.

3. FORMALISM AND MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

In their efforts to form a broad Left Front of the Arts, the neo-Futurists appealed most persistently to the Formalists. In the orignal project of the journal and in the initial declaration published in *Lef,* Formalist

critics were singled out as desirable contributors and potential members of the Left Front of the Arts. But the symbiotic relationship that had existed between Futurism and Formalism in the earlier stages of both movements was not to be continued after the Revolution.[23] Some of the Formalists did indeed find places in *Lef:* Osip Brik and Grigory Vinokur were originally active in Opoyaz; Boris Kushner had been one of the founders of the Moscow Linguistic Circle; and Viktor Shklovsky, a leading Formalist, had joined the Lef group in the middle of 1924. But the actual Formalist contributions to *Lef* were few: Shklovsky published an article, "The Technique of the Mystery Novel" ("Tekhnika romana tain"), and brief essays on Babel and Pilnyak; Tynyanov printed his important theoretical article "About the Literary Fact" ("O literaturnom fakte"); and, finally, *Lef* brought out the well-known collection of Formalist articles, "The Language of Lenin" ("Yazyk Lenina"), with contributions by Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov, Kazansky, and Tomashevsky. Despite their occasional cooperation with *Lef,* major Formalists, such as Yurii Tynyanov and Boris Eikhenbaum, showed little interest, at least up to 1925, in the sociopolitical aspect of literature that was so important to the Lef group. In fact, they were apparently antagonized by Lef's utilitarianism. Only later, when the Formalists found themselves somewhat ostracized in the oppressive cultural climate of the late 1920s, did they make more frequent appearances in the sequel to *Lef,* known as *New Lef,* but they never came to feel at home with the politically engaged Lef group.

Yet the Lef group saw that Formalism could provide the left artists with a theoretical framework, a codified method covering the formal aspects of avant-garde experimentation. Whereas Bogdanov's theory of the organizational nature of art had provided the Lef theoreticians with the ultimate purpose of artistic experimentation, the Formalist analysis of the technical aspects of the literary process could define the means of creating the new art. The spokesman for this utilitarian interpretation of Formalism was Osip Brik, who—as usual—understood the needs of the moment.

In the first number of *Lef,* Brik published his programmatic article titled "The So-Called Formalist Method" ("T.n. formalnyi metod") in which he unconditionally supported Formalism, but developed his arguments with a unique Lef slant. Commenting on Brik's article, Victor Erlich has written in his history of Formalism: "It is no accident that

this statement came from the pen of one for whom formalism was primarily a theoretical rationale for futurist poetry."[24] To put it more precisely, by 1923 Brik had found in Formalism a rationale for the Lef group, a system on which he could base Lef's claim to literary "professionalism" (*spetsovstvo*). Brik formulated the principles of Formalist criticism in such a way that they echoed the antipsychologism, collectivism, and professionalism of the Lef program for literature. In the article "The So-Called Formalist Method," Brik argued:

> Opoyaz assumes that *there are not poets and writers—but only poetry and literature.* Everything the poet writes is significant as a part of his work for the common cause and is totally meaningless as a revelation of his individuality . . . A poet is a master of his craft and nothing more. In order to be a good craftsman, he must know the needs of those for whom he works, he must live one life with them . . . The social contributions of the poet cannot be understood from the analysis of his individual qualities and habits. *What is necessary is a mass study of the devices used in the poetic craft,* of their distinction from similar areas of human labor, and of the laws of their historical development.[25]

Brik believed that only Formalism offered the professional approach to literary creation needed by the new artists, because the Formalists studied "the laws of literary production." Clearly, in Brik's opinion the practical value of Formalist studies was not to be questioned. As the proletarians attempted to create their own literature, Formalism could become "the best educator of the proletarian youth" because it was able to reveal literary laws. Only the Formalists could help the proletarian writers to develop a consistent, "scientific" system for literature and a means for the "social" evaluation of literary personalities. Only with Formalist training could the proletarian writers finally create literature fit for the proletarian state.

In his praise of the practical nature of Formalist studies, Brik managed to avoid a crucial issue that was the subject of debate in the early 1920s: the inevitable creation of a Marxist theory of literature. By reducing Formalism to an analytical method, Brik did not need to argue that Formalism was pro-Marxist in nature, but could announce apodictically that in view of the utilitarian value of Formalism any opposition to it would be groundless. Formalism as Brik presented it appeared as a critical trend that concentrated on literary method, disregarding extra-

literary factors of literary production, and made the revelation of that method functional as a learning device.

Although the Formalists disagreed with Brik's interpretation, they abstained from any direct polemics. They did, however, respond indirectly. For example, Yurii Tynyanov, annoyed by such a pragmatic interpretations of Formalism, complained:

> Much has been said about the Formal method and now everybody is more or less a Formalist. Very many understand the study of forms as the study of "the Formalist treatment of the subject." Some are even inclined to "condemn" or to revamp Formalism, because the Formalists recognize in poetry "only the sounds," etc., etc. All of this is, of course, incorrect.[26]

The "some" to whom Tynyanov referred may have been the neo-Futurists, who in one of the *Lef* declarations had expressed their approval of Formalism by pointing out that "the Formal method is the key to the study of literature. Every flea-rhyme should be accounted for." At the same time they had suggested to the Formalists that "only along with the sociological study of art will your work become not just interesting but needed."[27]

A still more explicit rebuttal to Brik's proposal appeared in an article by Boris Eikhenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method" ("Teoriya formalnogo metoda"). Eikhenbaum, who wrote the article for the 1924 debate on Formalism conducted in the journal *Press and Revolution,* opened with a defense against the widespread misrepresentation of Formalism:

> We are hedged round with eclectics and epigones who have turned the Formal method into some sort of rigid system, a "Formalism" that stands them in good stead for manufacturing terms, schemes, and classifications. This system is very handy for criticism but it is not at all characteristic of the Formal method. We did not, and do not, possess any such ready-made system.[28]

Eikhenbaum also rejected any speculations on the didactic potential of the Formalist method. He insisted that the Formalists had not developed any "system of interpretation," and maintained that "it is not the *methods* of studying literature but rather literature as the object of study that is of prime concern to the Formalists" (italics added).[29]

Although the Formalists did not find common ground with the neo-Futurists in the early 1920s, certain indications of a rapprochement

became visible when Tynyanov published in 1924 his article "About the Literary Fact" in one of the last numbers of *Lef.*[30] By the middle of the decade, both Lef and the Formalists had begun to pay more attention to the problem of literary evolution than to the aspects of literary mechanics. The Lef group was interested in developing a new theory of genres; the Formalists were analyzing the dynamics of genre change. In his article, Tynyanov extended the concept of literature by pointing out the fluidity of the boundaries that determined the "literariness" of prose and poetry in any given period. He analyzed the changing perception of genres during various stages of "literary evolution," showing how the marginal types of writing were adopted into the genre system of the literary mainstream, and how writing that had been perceived as nonliterary acquired an artistic value with the change in the literary system.

The Formalists perceived Tynyanov's essay as the opening of a new era in literary theory in which the relationship between literature and society would be studied. For the Lef group, Tynyanov's observations suggested a theoretical framework for the subsequent development of Lef literature into the "literature of fact" in the late 1920s. The term invented by the Lef group suggested a generic relation to Tynyanov's concept, because Lef's theory of "literature of fact" implied that writing previously considered journalistic and nonliterary, writing that focused on real life and dealt with authentic events, would reach the status of literature because of the development of a new genre system, of a new set of criteria defining "literary facts" for this period.[31]

Although in the first half of the 1920s the Formalists avoided political engagement, they left an interesting document resulting from their cooperation with *Lef:* a collection of articles titled "The Language of Lenin" ("Yazyk Lenina"), apparently written at the request of Mayakovsky.[32] In requesting such a contribution from the Formalists, Mayakovsky, as a representative of the Lef group, was apparently pursuing the Lef program of attempting to secure Soviet legitimacy for the avant-garde by connecting literary studies to the Soviet political experience. Subsequently Mayakovsky quoted this collection as an illustration of the functional application of Formalist studies, and in so doing, he defended the Formalists' place in Soviet literature.[33] It may be recalled that at the time this collection was published, Mayakovsky himself was involved in the writing of the poem "Vladimir Ilich Lenin," a poem that signified his

final transition from Futurist to Soviet poet. The choice of a political subject for a Formalist collection that would contain contributions from all the major Formalists was probably intended to provide a counter-argument against the attacks on Formalist estheticism and its anti-Marxist character. But in reality, the analysis of the devices characteristic of Lenin's rhetoric gave the Formalists another chance to explain their theories.

The preparation of this collection during the first half of 1924 preceded the much-publicized debate on the significance of Formalism that began in the journal *Press and Revolution* in June 1924.[34] Still, the collection "The Language of Lenin" did not really help the political reputation of the Formalists. The Leninist aura could not sufficiently protect the unorthodox Formalism. From the start of the debate it was obvious that Formalism would be under attack from the Marxist side, and the debate in fact marked the beginning of the Formalist demise in the Soviet Union.

The Lef group made still another attempt to make a place for Formalism in Soviet culture. In the first half of the 1920s, the well-established and influential Formalism found itself confronted by the newly developing Marxist criticism. In this controversy, the Lef group took an explicit pro-Formalist stand, while also expressing reserved approval for Marxist criticism. In the *Lef* journal, a critic, A. Tseitlin, and a linguist, G. Vinokur, tried to reconcile Formalism with the emerging Marxist criticism. Tseitlin and Vinokur both agreed on the importance and probable dominance of Marxist criticism, but they pointed out that any literary theory must begin by focusing on the features peculiar to literature, those features that distinguish literature from other arts or sciences. In their opinion, only Formalism was capable of determining those significant literary features on which other, subsequent types of interpretations, philosophical or sociological, could be built.

A. Tseitlin's article "The Marxists and the Formal Method" ("Marksisty i formalnyi metod") showed how the Lef group could argue the validity of Formalism within Marxist literary theory. In his article, Tseitlin presented an interesting review of Marxist criticism in the early 1920s as shown in the literary studies by Pereverzev, Friche, and Lvov-Rogachevsky, and he concluded that no cohesive Marxist view of literature had yet been formulated. In fact, Tseitlin observed that at that time any view of literature that presented literature as a part of a superstructure based

on the means of production was considered Marxist. Tseitlin argued that even though many had attempted to link a work of art, the technique of the artist, and the reaction of the art recipients to the means of production or the economic circumstances of a given historical period, no Marxist critic had yet found the ways in which economic development translated itself into a literary work.

For this reason, Tseitlin believed that the arguments for the comparative merits of Formalism and Marxist criticism appeared as yet to be groundless. In analyzing the Marxist approach of Friche and Lvov-Rogachevsky, Tseitlin noted that neither one had been able to connect a literary style to socioeconomic conditions or even to prove the dependence of literary style on economic conditions. Tseitlin did, however, single out Pereverzev as a critic who had seemed to demonstrate a certain degree of success in his analysis of Gogol's stories. As a Marxist critic, Pereverzev had tried

> to give a clear and exact presentation of the features characterizing the esthetic form created by Gogol in its sociological and psychological aspect, and to illuminate this form in connection with the social milieu, showing it as an artistic reflection of the specific features inherent in this milieu.[35]

Tseitlin found Pereverzev reasonably correct in his analysis, because Pereverzev had built his interpretations on the analysis of Gogol's style previously performed by the Formalists. Because Pereverzev had granted primacy to Formalism as establishing significant literary facts, he was then able to proceed with a sociological and psychological interpretation. Pereverzev thus had avoided, in Tseitlin's opinion, the major mistake of all other Marxist criticism, a mistake that occurred when stylistic and sociological interpretations were performed at the same time. Tseitlin insisted that style required an analytic approach, since no system existed by which only select features could be extracted. Sociological interpretation, on the other hand, consisted in a synthesis of facts that had been obtained earlier in the analysis of a literary text. This meant, in Tseitlin's opinion, that the Marxist method of literary criticism could develop only on the basis of a successful formal analysis that would first establish significant literary facts.

In Tseitlin's interpretation, Formalism remained the key to literature, but Tseitlin also agreed with other Lef members that Formalism provided

only the first step to a new literary theory. As to the nature of the second step, that of the Marxist synthesis, the Lef group had no answers.[36]

4. FUTURIST "LANGUAGE ENGINEERING"

Within its program of developing a model for the new arts, *Lef* devoted special attention to the modernization of the language. The Futurist poets found themselves in a new social role as contributors to the formation of a new "language culture" (*kultura yazyka*). The term *kultura yazyka*, commonly used in Slavic but not easily translated into English, represents "activity directed toward the perfecting of a language and toward the developing of the ability to use it in a correct and effective manner."[37] In the context of the neo-Futurist *Lef*, *kultura yazyka* meant the conscious manipulation of the language in order to modernize it in accordance with the spirit and the needs of postrevolutionary society. Just as the Futurists believed that literature must develop new forms to convey the new revolutionary content, they also saw a need to create a new language. This view allowed the neo-Futurists to argue for the special social validity of Futurist poetics in creating the language of the modern era, a language that would be free from antiquated vocabulary, from automatized idioms that had lost their meaning, and from complex sentence structures unsuitable for modern communication.

In postrevolutionary Russia, the Lef group was not alone in its interest in remodeling the language. *Kultura yazyka* became a subject of linguistic discussions in the 1920s and the early 1930s. These discussions grew out of a practical concern for assuring the intelligibility of the spoken and written word for the masses of the newly literate Soviet people. On the ideological level, the general interest in remodeling the language was reinforced by the fact that prerevolutionary Russian appeared as a part of the bourgeois heritage, and as such was considered by many to be in need of change.[38]

The Futurists, who had always been interested in language experimentation in the context of Futurist poetics, attempted to argue the new social importance of the Futurist poets as "language engineers," as contributors to the development of a new linguistic culture. *Lef*, which propagated the concept of professionalism in the arts, argued that language experimentation as practiced by the Futurists would become the starting

point of the avant-garde social program: within the socialist division of labor, a poet would act as a language specialist working toward greater effectiveness in all areas of verbal communication.

Grigorii Vinokur, a former member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, was the major proponent of the Futurists' involvement in the development of a linguistic culture. Vinokur argued that "culture in general is possible only through language" and that "the general development of [the Soviet] culture is impossible without the development of the linquistic culture."[39] In this context, Vinokur found the Futurist "laboratory approach" to the creation of the new culture perfectly suited to the development of what he called "applied linguistics" (*prikladnoe yazykoznanie*). By "applied linguistics" Vinokur understood "sort of a 'linguistic technology' that on the basis of scientific knowledge could decide practical issues of the so-called social speech 'conduct'."[40]

Vinokur, who published several articles in *Lef* dealing with the problem of *kultura yazyka*, began his discussion of "linguistic engineering" from the most extreme aspect of Futurist poetics: the experimentation with the transrational language (*zaum*). Because *Lef* willingly printed poetry by such proponents of transrational language as Khlebnikov, Kruchonykh, and Kamensky while at the same time advocating a strictly utilitarian program for the arts, Vinokur took it upon himself to prove the utilitarian value of such poetry in the context of *kultura yazyka*. It is interesting to note that in 1923, *Lef* was still so determined to establish the relevance of the entire Futurist program for Soviet society that a Lef member was prepared to argue the social significance of an aspect of Futurist poetics that had largely been a part of the early Futurism. Yet the argument was not without validity, for the experiments with transrational language had always had a certain social coloring.

As Krystyna Pomorska has pointed out, the interest in the social aspect of transrational languages was already present in prerevolutionary Futurism.[41] The major experimenters with transrational language, Klebnikov and Kruchonykh, regarded their proposals not as poetic exercises but as preparations for the development of a universal language. In fact, they hoped to contribute to the creation of "a world-wide poetic language which [would be] born organically and not artificially like Esperanto."[42]

Khlebnikov and Kruchonykh, however, saw two different paths to the creation of this universal language through the experimentation with *zaum*. Khlebnikov's transrational language had no communicative func-

tion, but it was based on a recognizable language system. In his *zaum* proposals, Khlebnikov had considered both "the existing language material" and "the historic aspect of the language."[43] The structure of the actual language that underlay his poetic creations gave Khlebnikov's *zaum* an evocative effect: although incomprehensible, his language appealed to the imagination and the emotions of the reader. Khlebnikov used his *zaum* poetry to advocate "the revival of an automatized language in order to reestablish the lost contact between sign and referent."[44]

On the other hand, the transrational language as practiced by Kruchonykh, as well as by Vasily Kamensky and Ilya Zhdanevich, was not based on actual language structure, but focused instead on sound experimentation, on manipulating the physical aspects of sounds.[45] Through sound play, these poets attempted to reflect emotions or to evoke the physical presence of the subject they were representing. These Futurists made no allusions to commonly understood meanings, to familiar grammatical constructions, or to word structures that resembled familiar words.

In his *Lef* articles, Vinokur made no claims for the Futurist *zaum* as a universal language, but he tried to justify its presence in the poetry published by *Lef*, claiming that *zaum* was an important device in the general scheme of verbal experimentation with a utilitarian purpose. Because Vinokur was interested in Futurist poetry from the perspective of the cultural-historical state of the language, he rejected Roman Jakobson's Formalist view of poetic language as a separate type of discourse, as "an utterance oriented toward the mode of expression" (*vyskazanie s ustanovkoi na vyrazhenie*),[46] and emphasized instead the connection between the Futurist use of the language and the actual *kultura yazyka*. The premise of Vinokur's argument, a premise that underlay the entire Lef theory, was the belief that "like every social fact . . . language is subject to cultural transformation;" that, in other words, in accordance with the Marxist perspective, change in the language corresponded to change in the social structure.[47] In particular, Vinokur saw that the postrevolutionary cultural transition occurring in the language must be given a firmer direction and that the language should become an object of programmed manipulation in order to achieve preestablished goals.

Among all who worked with the language, Vinokur found the Futurists best qualified to undertake this "language engineering." He noted that even in their early attempts to create "the language of the streets" in their

poetry, the Futurists had played a role similar to the one which Pushkin had played in forming the Russian literary language at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Vinokur insisted that the social roles played by Pushkin and the Futurists were similar despite the difference in their actual methods of creating a new language: whereas Pushkin had established his Russian language midway between the eighteenth-century poetic dialect of Derzhavin and the nineteenth-century vernacular of the lower classes, the Futurists had created an entire new language by finding new relationships between the familiar elements of the existent language. As an example of the Futurist technique, Vinokur used the famous transrational poem by Khlebnikov, "The Laughnicks" ("Smekhachi"), in which the familiar structure of the language carried suggestive meaning although the words themselves contained no communicable message. Vinokur further pointed out how Khlebnikov had created new words using grammatical and syntactical analogies to extant words. With regard to the other version of transrational language, that proposed by Kruchonykh, Vinokur was less optimistic, because he did not believe that pure sound experimentation could be functional in daily life.

In his eagerness to find concrete social application for transrational language, Vinokur proposed that the suggestive aspect of such language be exploited in the "nominative" role: Futurist neologisms could be used as brand names for cigarettes and movie theaters. Vinokur reasoned that because brand names retained little of their original meaning and because they always had a transrational effect, they could be chosen directly from the transrational language of the Futurists. Futurist poetry would then find an immediate practical application; in fact, one could already

> . . . regard "transrational verses" as results of laboratory work leading to the creation of a new system of name-giving (*sotsyalnoe naimenovanie*). From this point of view, a transrational creation acquired a very particular and significant purpose. Sounds applied toward the fulfillment of the nominative work—not only can, but should be meaningless.[48]

Although Vinokur argued convincingly for the role that the Futurists could play in the renovation of the language, his concrete example for the use of the transrational language was nothing less than utopian. One could hardly see how using the transrational language to name industrial products would assure the Soviet legitimacy of Futurism.

Because Vinokur had carried a good argument to an absurdly narrow

conclusion, another theoretician of the Lef group, Boris Arvatov, attempted to extend the definition of *zaum* to show that *zaum* had general, rather than particular, applicability. In an article titled "Speech Creation (About Transrational Poetry)" ("Rechetvorstvo [po povodu 'zaumnoi poezii']"), published in *Lef* in 1923, Arvatov gave examples of the presence of *zaum* in everyday life: in personal names which had lost their communicative function, in children's rhymes, in the incantations of the religious sects. With regard to literature, he concurred with Jakobson's argument that all poetry could be considered essentially transrational because it focused not on content but on syntactic and morphological innovations. *Zaum*, as Arvatov defined it, involved not only the creation of new words. He claimed that

> any emphasis on form, on the quality of the language, on its style, any verbal experiment carries in itself the features of transrationalism. The "transrational" is all that which has been added to the general mass of customary devices—it is present in devices which have been newly created and which have no exact communicative function.[49]

Arvatov proposed that *zaum*, a polemical concept of the early Futurists, be replaced by a new term, "speech creation" (*rechetvorstvo*), which would cover many types of language experimentation. Arvatov believed that the real importance of verbal experimentation lay not in its immediate application, but in the fact that it involved the artist in the process of conscious speech construction and that it encouraged a flexible language capable of responding to changes in social goals. Arvatov even saw the Futurist poetic experimentation as a part of social evolution, saying:

> this epoch is characterized by the fact that mankind, on the basis of the growing collectivization of the productive social forces, passes from the *systematic approach in the acquisition of knowledge* (in this case, theoretical linguistics) to the systematic approach to practical matters, to organization (formation of language).[50]

In the immediate future, Arvatov envisaged that the knowledge acquired through poetic experimentation could be used to increase the effectiveness of newspaper language and to develop exact and clear professional languages. As a step toward this goal, Arvatov noted that current poetry had tended toward more functional orientation and that already the solutions once reserved for poetry had begun to appear in the vernacular.

The discussion of the functionality of the transrational language and—indirectly—the argument for the functional role of Futurist poetics continued only throughout the first two numbers of *Lef*. The critics of the journal were not convinced by Vinokur and Arvatov, seeing their arguments as unsuccessful defenses of a purely verbal experimentation that had no practical value. Subsequently, Sergei Tretyakov had the last word on the controversial topic of the transrational language in *Lef:*

> Transrational works, which may make the impression on some people of esthetically self-contained exercises, are published by *Lef* in order to show the laboratory work on the elements of the language—on phonetics, on rhythmic patterns, and on semantics. *Lef* notes with satisfaction that the transrational poets are moving from the isolated laboratory to the construction of socially significant things.[51]

Subsequently, as the original idea of creating a new culture through programmed "laboratory experiments" lost support, *Lef* also ceased advocating the direct utilitarian application of literary experiments. Instead, *Lef* focused on the broader aspects of language culture: on the need to raise popular awareness of effective use of language, and on the need to develop special language for use in propaganda and journalistic work. In 1923-1924, Vinokur published three interesting articles in *Lef*—"About the Revolutionary Phraseology" ("O revolyutsionnoi frazeologii"), "About Purism" ("O purizme"), and "The Language of Our Newspaper" ("Yazyk nashei gazety")—in which he modified his earlier position and admitted that although the concept of language engineering might be valid, he still could not prove that the evolution of the vernacular could in fact be directed. This, however, did not detract Vinokur from regarding language as the key to the formation of modern culture. He now insisted on the necessity of developing popular interest in linguistic culture through discussions of practical stylistics. The raising of popular awareness about the use of the language became a prerequisite for what he called the "politics of the language" (*yazykovaya politika*), which consisted of a planned, scientifically sound "intervention of the social will in the structure and the development of the language."[52]

With the change of orientation from that which regarded Futurist poetry as the "laboratory" of the new language to that which regarded poetry as a contribution to the general linguistic culture, *Lef* undermined its argument for the social legitimacy of Futurist poetic experimentation. Without an argument in support of the concrete value of liter-

ary experimentation, the poetry of the Lef group lost its theoretical validity and the Lef members lost a basis for their literary professionalism.

The Futurists now found themselves faced with the need to make a political commitment not through the modern form of their poetry, as they had originally intended, but through the introduction of a new, political content into literature. They eventually reached a semblance of compromise between the emphasis on form and the emphasis on content in the theory of "social commission" (*sotsialnyi zakaz*), which they developed in the middle of the 1920s. The theory of "social commission" required that literature take its themes from the immediate sociopolitical setting and that the author, in his professional capacity, use his skills to shape the social experience. This theory allowed the Futurists to preserve the perfection of the innovative form as the major criterion of literature, as they had done in the earlier stage of the movement, but at the same time they now expected the artist to make a direct connection with the new life through the content of his art.

The concept of "social commission" was eventually realized in the late 1920s in the new genre system of "literature of fact" that the avant-garde elaborated in *New Lef*. The earlier proposal for shaping the Soviet language by means of Futurist poetics advanced by *Lef* remained as a testimony to the utopian vision of art in the new world inspired by the Revolution.

5. INDUSTRIAL ART, THEATER AND FILM

Although the neo-Futurist *Lef* was primarily a literary journal, the editors made a considerable effort to show the various facets of the avant-garde program for the new culture. For this reason, they published experimental programs for film, theater, and fine arts that fitted the general framework of *Lef* and that also gave validity to the concept of the multimedia Left Front of the Arts.

Designed as an illustrated journal, *Lef*, in its program for visual arts, supported the trend known as "industrial art" (*proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo*). This trend had been officially inaugurated on November 19, 1922, when a group of twenty-five artists from Inkhuk announced their break from "non-representative Constructivism" (*bezpredmetnichestvo*) and declared themselves industrial artists.[53] The industrial artists rejected the traditional decorative function of art and decided instead to devote themselves to the design of useful objects suitable for mass production by industrial

enterprises. Their insistence on the functionality of the arts led to a heated debate between the supporters of traditional easel painting and the new industrial artists, a debate that eventually led to the decline of Inkhuk. Osip Brik, who at the time was the chairman of Inkhuk and a propagator of utilitarianism in art and literature, emphatically supported the new utilitarian group.[54] Through Brik, the major industrial artists—Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Lyubov Popova, and Aleksandr Lavinsky—found their way to the journal *Lef*, and they began to represent Lef's position in the visual arts.

Lef joined the debate between the Inkhuk traditionalists and the industrial artists in an article by Osip Brik, "From a Painting to Printed Cotton" ("Ot kartiny k sittsu"). In his article, Brik rejected easel painting and advocated instead the artistic design of printed cotton as the epitome of functional arts. Brik rejected easel painting because it was directed only toward the esthetic pleasing of the eye; it performed no social function. In Brik's opinion, even if an easel painting had a propagandistic theme, it could not have an agitational appeal because an easel painting by its nature was designed for a timeless, lasting effect rather than for an immediate impact. Brik prophesied emphatically that a nonfunctional easel painting was doomed to extinction, and he predicted that such a painting would be replaced by the poster, which combined the esthetic and the functional roles of art.[55]

Among the industrial artists, *Lef* particularly favored Aleksandr Rodchenko, who became the principal graphic designer of *Lef*, creating the covers and forming the layout of the journal. In the first issue of *Lef*, Osip Brik singled out Rodchenko as an artist emblematic of the new, industrial movement. In an article "Into the Industry!" ("V proizvodstvo!"), Brik sketched Rodchenko's exemplary transition from nonrepresentational artist to Constructivist and ultimately to industrial artist. Brik pointed out that Rodchenko had learned to organize visual experience into a system applicable to industrial production: Rodchenko did not merely decorate industrial products, but concentrated on the purposeful organization of form and color with the objective of increasing the functionality of the object. As examples of such work, Brik pointed to the book covers designed by Rodchenko and to his projects of ***auto-kino***, travelling propaganda movie theaters, in which the advertising impact was based on letter shapes and their distribution.[56]

Like Rodchenko, other industrial artists worked mainly in design.

At the time, they regarded their projects as part of a transitory phase before they achieved actual participation in the industrial process. *Lef* printed their advertising posters for the electric bulb, fireproof gloves, and children's pacifiers—for which Mayakovsky himself wrote advertising slogans. In *Lef,* the industrial artists also showed stage designs, a project of a book kiosk, and sketches of sport clothes, brand labels, and furniture. Admittedly, despite their commitment to utilitarianism, these artists never progressed beyond the project stage: in the single instance when they were invited to participate directly in the work of a textile factory, the designs for printed cotton that they prepared never found their way to the production line.

Although the left artists focused their interest primarily on the design of functional objects, they also developed a unique medium that fitted well into the general program of the postrevolutionary avant-garde. This medium was the photomontage, in which fragments of photographs were combined in a graphic design. The individual elements, each reflecting a segment of reality, added up to a collage that did not reflect reality but purposefully "organized visual impressions" in accordance with a preset advertising or agitational purpose.[57] The popularity of photomontage, which used the elements of reality to create an artifact with no parallel in real life, preceded the rise of photography as an independent artistic medium in the second half of the 1920s. At the time when the left artists gradually deemphasized the organizational nature of art, photography with its documentary and yet stylized character developed in the *New Lef* as a perfect correlative to the new "literature of fact."

Among its associates, the Left Front of the Arts also included Sergei Eisenstein, who later became a major Soviet film director. At the time of his participation in the Lef group, Eisenstein was in charge of the theatrical section of Moscow Proletkult, where he worked together with Lef members Tretyakov and Arvatov. In the Proletkult studio, Eisenstein experimented with a new concept of theater: he rejected the former actor- or director-centered approach to a theatrical performance and proposed instead an audience-oriented theater. Through this theater, Eisenstein, who, like the other left artists, followed Bogdanov's theory of the organizational nature of art, attempted to influence and activate the audience "in order to raise the consciousness of the masses with regard to the efficiency of their work and daily living."[58]

Eisenstein described the principles of the new theater in a programmatic article titled "Montage of Attractions" ("Montazh atraktsionov") which he published in the *Lef* journal. As an illustration, Eisenstein used his Proletkult performance of the nineteenth-century play *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man* (*Na kazhdogo mudretsa dovolno prostoty*) written by Aleksandr Ostrovsky, a Realist playwright and a founder of Russian national drama. Eisenstein's choice of a nineteenth-century Realist play for his avant-garde performance was deliberately provocative, intended as an ironic commentary on Lunacharsky's appeal "Back to Ostrovsky!" which in 1923 inaugurated a campaign to reintroduce Realism and thus to abandon the avant-garde experimentation that had been practiced in the early Soviet theater.[59]

In his performance, Eisenstein presented Ostrovsky's play not for its literary or social significance, as suggested by Lunacharsky, but as a text from which he, as a director, could extract elements that he considered unique for the theater. Eisenstein called such elements "attractions" (*attraktsiony*) and defined them as follows:

> *Attraktsion* (in the area of theater)—[is defined as] every aggressive moment in the theater, that is, as every element that subjects the viewer to an emotional or psychological influence. Such influence is precisely adjusted and mathematically calculated to evoke a definitive emotional reaction in the viewer, and—in its totality—to create a perfect condition for accepting the intellectual side of that which is demonstrated, of accepting a clearly ideological conclusion.[60]

Eisenstein's method of staging Ostrovsky's drama meant that the performance would have none of its original thematic unity, but the drama would provide a skeleton for a sequence of *attraktsiony*, minute fragments that were extracted from the text itself or adapted from the circus, film, and music-hall. In his *Lef* article, Eisenstein illustrated his fragmentary approach by describing how he had divided a small section of the epilogue from Ostrovsky's play into twenty-five *attraktsiony*, which included: a film fragment, a clown performance, the appearance of a live horse, agitational songs (*agit-kuplety*) on the subjects of current importance, acrobatic performances, dances, scenes in the spirit of commedia dell'arte, slapstick humor, and a salvo from a cannon.

By combining these disparate fragments into a montage, Eisenstein attempted to create a new reality that had no parallel in real life, but that

would "organize emotions." As an avant-garde artist, Eisenstein believed that if he confined himself to merely reflecting reality, his audience would be affected only in the unlikely event that a stage illusion repeated itself in real life. On the other hand, the use of a montage in which individual elements were selected according to the minute emotions they could evoke had the possibility of producing a direct, calculated impact on the audience. Whereas the elements used in the montage added to a common thematic effect, any resemblance of a plot in the performance was accidental, because the impact of the performance was based on the emotional effects derived from the individual *attraktsiony.*

Eisenstein assigned the same key role to an *attraktsion* that Aleksandr Rodchenko had given to an *element* in his photographic collages and that Dziga Vertov would assign to a "film-phrase" (*kino-fraza*). From minute fragments taken from reality the artist created a new world, an artistic vision precisely calculated to induce the recipient of art to an active transformation of his own life and the life of his society.

Among other subsequently famous contributors in the nonliterary areas, the Lef group counted Dziga Vertov, the experimental film director who in 1923 published his manifesto "The Cinemamen. A Coup" ("Kinoki. Perevorot") in the *Lef* journal.[61]

Vertov's manifesto announced a radical reorientation of the entire concept of movie-making. The text of his declaration was reinforced by its graphic layout, as the principles of the new approach to film were dramatized by the changing typefaces, the setting off of important phrases in frames, and the piecing together of fragments of arguments without transitions. As a result, the appearance of Vertov's manifesto illustrated the principles of contrast and discontinuity that were essential to Vertov's approach to filmmaking.

In his declaration, Vertov rejected the fabular film, which he saw as a literary story with appropriate illustrations. Vertov insisted that the fabular film failed to exploit the technical possibilities of the film medium, possibilities that were contained in the more conscious use of the movie camera. Instead of a static fabular film, Vertov proposed a chronicle that would reveal objects and events in the process of movement and change. The new film would register the scenes with special visual "energy" through the means of the "camera eye" (*kino-glaz*). Such scenes, selected for their visual intensity, would then be combined in a montage, but the

resulting form would in no way resemble a documentary chronicle. Rather, the addition and juxtaposition of the scenes in the montage would result in the formation of elementary film units, called "film-phrases," which would in turn be combined into a "visual etude" (*zritelnyi etyud*). Such a film would not reflect existent reality, but would create a new reality accessible only through the "camera-eye."

Although Vertov attached much significance to the process of montage, he was primarily interested in the actions of the movie camera and its technical possibilities, which defined the nature of the new film. In Vertov's film, human creativity was deliberately reduced, because man functioned only as an extension of the camera:

> The machine-eye is helped by the camera-pilot, who directs the movements of the camera, but also gives the camera freedom in the experimentation with space. In the future, the camera-pilot will become a cinema-engineer, directing the cameras from a distance.[62]

Vertov regarded the mechanical "camera-eye" as superior to human vision because the perspective of the camera was not confined by a particular angle or by the relative immobility of the human eye. The camera registered action and setting without the usual selection and organization of images that are performed by the human brain. The impact of such film, however, was more direct and goal-oriented than the impact of traditional cinema. The new way in which the camera recorded action led to standardized impressions and forced the entire audience to see a scene from a collective point of view, presented without the spatial or temporal limitations of the individual human observer.

In his theory of the "camera-eye" Vertov effectively realized the general principles that underlay the notion of avant-garde art propagated by the Left Front of the Arts. Like other left artists, Vertov in his films created a new reality that had no equivalent in real life. In reshaping reality into a film artifact, Vertov, like all other left artists, attempted to exploit the full technical potential of the medium in which he worked. Like the Futurists and Formalists, who concentrated on the "literariness" in literature, Vertov exploited the "visual energy" of motion and change, which for him represented the essence of the film medium. This "visual energy," in turn, could be conveyed only through the mechanical eye of the camera, which in its technical perfection was far superior to human vision. The unusual angle of perception obtained only through the use of the camera revealed the familiar in a new light, and thus created in film

the same "estrangement" (*ostranenie*) effect that is familiar from literature. Vertov's glorification of the technical aspect of filmmaking and his antipsychological stance were further visible in his insistence that man plays only a supportive role in movie-making. Finally, Vertov's deliberate avoidance of fabular continuity, shown by his emphasis on individual "film-phrases" rather than on total effect, bore witness to his desire to force the film audience into an active role in which each member would need to create his own synthesis on the basis of the analytic vision presented in the film.

CHAPTER FOUR

LEF: POETRY

Благими намереньями вымощен ад.
Установился взгляд,
Что если вымостить ими стихи—
Простятся все грехи.

Борис Пастернак, "Высокая болезнь"

1. POETRY AS A "VERBAL LABORATORY"

The range of subjects discussed in *Lef* obscured the fact that the journal was created by the poets who had organized the Left Front of the Arts as a framework for the propagation of Futurist poetry. In *Lef*, these poets, who came out of the prerevolutionary Futurist movement, made an ingenious attempt to put into practice and to gain a sociopolitical recognition for the key concept of Russian post-Symbolist poetry: the notion of the poet as a craftsman.

The concept of poetry as craft had originated in the early 1910s, at the time when the Russian poets abandoned the mystical, philosophical notion of poetry that had been introduced by the Symbolists and focused their poetry on the immediate reality. The new poetic movements that appeared between 1910 and 1925 professed a primary interest in poetic technique, which they equated with craft; accordingly, they defined the value of poetry in terms of the poet's verbal competence and command of form.

The prerevolutionary Futurists were one of the first, but not the first, to equate poetry with poetic technique. The first rebels against the philosophical notion of poetry established by the Symbolists were the Acmeists, who in 1911 had announced the formation of a new poetic movement to supersede Symbolism. In contrast to the philosophically oriented Symbolists, the Acmeists introduced the idea of poetry as craft by calling themselves "The Guild of Poets" ("Tsekh poetov"). As the name of their group indicates, the members of "The Guild" insisted on a rational approach to poetry, stressing craftsmanship instead of inspiration, the exactness of images, and precision in the use of words.[1] In 1914, a group of Futurist

poets formulated a similarly technical view of poetry with the help of Viktor Shklovsky. In a lecture titled "Resurrection of the Word" ("Voskreshenie slova"), Shklovsky declared that the objective of Futurist poetry was to create new verbal forms and to distort the language with the purpose of rediscovering the "inner form" of words that had become too habitual to convey new images.[2] The focus on words, on poetic texture, and on the sound structure of poetry became a trademark of the Futurist movement, especially of the Cubo-Futurist group that some ten years later was to reappear in *Lef*.

By 1919, after the third major new group of poets, the Imaginists, had issued their formal declaration, it was evident that poetry was now viewed chiefly as a demonstration of verbal technique. The Imaginists regarded theme, content, and subject matter as side issues in poetry and insisted that a poem should contain no extrapoetic statements. Like the Acmeists and the Futurists before them, the Imaginists also declared themselves to be craftsmen:

> We—who are the true craftsmen of art, we—who polish the image, we—who clean the form from the dust of content better than a shoeshine boy polishes a shoe, we announce that the sole law of art, the sole and incomparable method, is the revelation of life through the image and the rhythm of images.[3]

Whereas the Imaginists with their declaration echoed the modernistic view of art as an expression of the technique commanded by the artist, the postrevolutionary Futurists modified their original program by adding a social dimension to the idea of artistic craftsmanship. They now insisted that poetry, if treated as a verbal craft, was capable of a functional contribution to the formation of Soviet life through its effect on the Soviet vernacular.

It appears that the Futurists became both vocal and specific in the propagation of the utilitarian value of poetry soon after March 1922, when—thanks to Lenin's approval of Mayakovsky's poem "Lost in Conference"—they saw a new chance to legitimize the avant-garde movement within the Soviet system. In 1922, half a year before the appearance of *Lef*, the Futurists compiled a list of their new poetic objectives. Whereas they had earlier advanced such abstract slogans as the "Revolution of the Spirit" to be accomplished through Futurist esthetics, this time their formal experimentation was presented as a strictly utilitarian activity

with concrete goals. The 1922 list, the authorship of which is ascribed to Mayakovsky, set the following objectives for Futurism:

1. To affirm verbal art as a craftsmanship of words, not as an esthetic stylization, but as an ability to solve any assignment verbally.
2. To answer any demand put forth by contemporary life; and in addressing that demand:
   a) to conduct work on vocabulary (renovation of words, sound instrumentation, etc.);
   b) to substitute the polyrhythmics of the language itself for the artificial metrics of iambs and trochees;
   c) to revolutionize the syntax (simplify the forms of set expressions, use unusual words effectively);
   d) to renovate the semantics of words and set expressions;
   e) to create examples of intriguing plot construction;
   f) to reveal the poster-like quality of words.

   The achievement of the above listed verbal objectives will present possibilities for satisfying needs in many areas of verbal formation (application form, article, telegram, poem, feuilleton, announcement, proclamation, advertisement, etc.).[4]

This determination to find a utilitarian justification for Futurist poetry came in part as a result of the democratization of Russian life after the revolution. The Revolution undermined the traditional middle-class belief in the relevance of art and drastically changed the makeup of what Mayakovsky called the "producers" (*proizvoditeli*) and the "consumers" (*potrebiteli*) of poetry.[5]

In the new Soviet society, the masses, 80 percent of whom were illiterate at the time of the revolution, were receiving their first exposure to literary culture. At the same time, many prerevolutionary poets who had made a brief attempt at literary activity in the new state disappeared from cultural life, shocked by changing values and unable to find acceptance in the new world. For poets such as Bunin, Tsvetaeva, Khodasevich, Balmont, Ivanov, Gippius, Merezhkovsky, and Minsky emigration represented the only solution. Others, among them Blok, Bely, Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Voloshin, Kuzmin, Gumilev, and Sologub, were instantly turned into vestiges of a past epoch.[6]

Amidst this fragmentation and disorientation of cultural life, the Futurists were the only prerevolutionary literary group determined to survive as a movement. Consequently, they felt forced to consolidate and

to sharpen their program in an effort to assure the continuation of their art in the new Soviet culture. A tone of urgency in the Futurist pronouncements reminded of the fact that the survival of the group could be assured mainly through access to the scarce publishing outlets or through government-sanctioned public poetry readings, for which they needed broad support. The support, however, was not easy to obtain and when it was granted, it represented a favor, a concession, but not a right.

Although the Futurists no longer needed to compete for public attention with the Symbolists or the Acmeists, who either emigrated or became silent, they now had to respond to a new literary phenomenon of proletarian poetry. The successive groups of Proletkult poets, the Smithies, and the On-Guardists possessed a natural proletarian consciousness, expressed authentic proletarian sentiments, and reflected the collectivist mentality of the revolutionary masses. These proletarian poets who came on the literary scene at the time when poetry was declining as a philosophical medium revived the original Symbolist notion of expressing a philosophical system through a poetic point of view. Poetry became for them a vehicle for expressing the new proletarian consciousness and the future perspectives of the Communist society. Even though the influential *Red Virgin Soil*, which represented the Soviet cultural establishment in the first half of the 1920s, still tended to favor the peasant poets rather than the proletarians, there could be little doubt that the time of the proletarians was coming.

Yet notwithstanding their revolutionary legitimacy, the proletarians lacked poetic culture. They were hopelessly imitative, as they struggled to absorb poetic traditions going back to Pushkin, Lermontov, and Nekrasov. They could not help the epigonic quality of their verse, but at the same time they made an effort to give true proletarian tonality to their assimilations of the cultural tradition. Writing poetry took them beyond the immediate drudgery of the reconstruction period and allowed them to verbalize the myth of the Revolution. For example, Vladimir Kirillov, one of the most successful Proletkult poets, described his involvement in poetry in the following manner:

> As a secretary of the district Party Committee, I would get up before dawn, and in the foggy blizzards, I would rush to the district office, thinking on the way about my "Iron Messias," "The Sailors," "We," and other poems. With my own eyes, I seemed to see "The Iron Messias" marching above the multitude of factories, radiant in the

> light of electric suns, and on coming back home at night, or sometimes while spending the night in the office, I would write my poetry.[7]

The Futurists knew that such proletarian authenticity in poetry was not to be challenged. Consequently, the Futurist poetry published in *Lef* did not develop its own political tonality, but echoed the tone of the Proletkult poets. Thematically many Lef poems showed Cosmist influence in their glorification of the machine, fascination with the future technological utopia, and hope for the emergence of the new man. At the same time, because the Lef group viewed theme as a consequence of form, Lef theorists could scorn the proletarians for their backwardness of style, a backwardness that Lef claimed led to the falsification of the revolutionary content. In responding to the proletarian movement, the Futurists stressed their own competence in verbal matters and therefore renewed their earlier commitment to the primacy of technique in poetry, and with it they now offered a new promise that the Futurist experiments in form would have an immediate functional application. Their own Lef program demanded modern poetry fit for the modern society, poetry that could convey modern themes through a strictly urban vocabulary and innovative rhythmic pattern helpful in shaping the language of the modern times.

The argument for the primacy of technique in poetry also represented for the Futurists the key that could gain for them a recognition of Futurism as a Soviet movement. If the Futurists lacked a natural proletarian consciousness in their perspective on the subject matter, they were obviously superior in the area of poetic technique. Furthermore, their militant preoccupation with the development of new poetic methods, their concentration on technique, suited the political spirit of NEP Russia as the Communist administrators, in need of help in rebuilding the devasted country, resigned themselves to accepting the help of bourgeois engineers and technicians. These so-called *spetsy* were respected and recognized, if treated with some apprehension. Although the Futurists preferred not to identify themselves with the bourgeois origin of the technical *spetsy*, they did cast themselves in the parallel role of specialists who would bring the new Soviet poetry to heights of modernity in correspondence with the innovative character of the Communist way of life.

In effect, between the two dominant groups of the Futurists and the proletarians, the earliest Soviet poetry developed between the polar notions of poetry as craft and poetry as myth, both adapted from the

prerevolutionary literature. The avant-garde focused on literary craftsmanship, whereas the proletarian poets sought to voice new Soviet myths. More generally, these views of poetry were also representative of alternative paths to the creation of the new Soviet culture: the Futurists, the most aggressive supporters of the notion of poetry as craft, were insisting on art that would modernize life through formal innovation, whereas the proletarians were seeking to use art to express the proletarian mentality basic to the new society. Notably, both of these views of art required that poetry could no longer be valued solely for its own merits, as an esthetic experience. The poets now argued for the validity of their art by claiming its functionality in the areas that had not been commonly associated with poetry.

Admittedly, the view of poetry as craft did not prevent the neo-Futurists from using the old myths to create a new mythology of revolution and industrialization. Yet if Mayakovsky in his Soviet poetry sought to express the Soviet ethos in mythological terms, myth for him was a function of certain poetic imagination, a coefficient of a certain literary form. Unlike in the treatment of myths by the Proletkult poets, in the neo-Futurist poetry myths became means of creating the Soviet consciousness rather than expressions of it.

Although the program with which the Futurist poets responded to the Revolution appeared to be politically motivated, in fact it represented an esthetic response entirely natural for this stage of the Futurist movement. The Formalist critic Tynyanov, in a 1924 essay on the state of early Soviet poetry titled "The Interval" ("Promezhutok"), observed: "When the canon begins to burden the poet, the poet escapes with his craftsmanship into daily life (*byt*)."[8] Indeed, at the point when the Futurists, who had existed for almost a decade as a movement, needed to change the voice, the Revolution has given them the initial impulse for this change. They saw in the Revolution a force destroying the conservative establishment, a force promising them a modern culture that would elevate the esthetics of the avant-garde to a societal standard. This promise of the new culture meant also that the Futurist poetry with its exclusive emphasis on form could now be legitimately presented as an illustration of a method for shaping the Soviet experience. The Futurists specifically turned to the new *byt* through the concept of poetry as "language engineering," which they introduced in the early 1920s and which promised to give Futurist poetics a new lease on life.

In effect, Futurism—threatened with the deterioration into mannerisms characteristic of declining movements, could make a virtue of its decline by legitimately turning into a codified system that could be used for mass imitation. In the context of their new utilitarian program, the pragmatic sense of the Futurists, who were struggling for access to print, should not be underestimated. Osip Brik, who shaped much of avant-garde thinking, was not only a remarkable literary intellect but also a shrewd cultural politician who followed, foresaw, or even manipulated official attitudes toward the avant-garde in an effort to legitimize modern art in the Soviet state.

From the artistic point of view, many were skeptical that the program of poetry as "language engineering" would have any intrinsic value for poetry itself. It is indicative of such an attitude that Tynyanov in his essay "The Interval" surveyed the state of Soviet poetry in 1924 without making any reference to the vocal Lef with which the Formalists were well familiar. In fact, Tynyanov noted that poetic group activities promised little success and that only a few individual poets gave an indication of developing a new poetic voice.

Seen historically, the poetic program of the Lef group has the questionable distinction of being the first Soviet predecessor of the later Socialist Realism. The Lef blend of technicism, utopianism, and utilitarianism was matched in its dogmatism and its universality only by Socialist Realism. Even though these two movements were antithetical in their treatment of artistic forms, the Soviet Futurists were the first to reduce art and literature to a method of shaping a world view in which the vision of utopia combined with astute politics.

Although *Lef* appeared as a multimedia publication, Futurist poetry was the medium with which all seven members of the editorial board of *Lef* had been involved prior to the appearance of the journal. Four had participated in the original, prerevolutionary Futurism: Mayakovsky, Aseev, Tretyakov, and Kushner. Two others were avant-garde theoreticians interested in poetry: Brik, a publisher of Mayakovsky's early poems and a Formalist concerned with structural problems of poetry, and Arvatov, a former member of the Proletkult, interested in the development of a socioformal approach to the analysis of poetry. The sole editor not engaged in writing poetry or in theorizing about the poetic craft was Chuzhak, but even he had originally insisted on the social impact of

Futurist poetry and had attempted to popularize Futurism as the new direction for Russian culture.

Between 1923 and 1925 *Lef* printed poetry by its Futurist editors and counted among its contributors some of the better poetic talents of the time, almost all of whom had been associated with the prerevolutionary Futurism.[9] *Lef* printed poetry by Velimir Khlebnikov, the most outstanding poet among the Futurist verbal innovators, by the transrational poets (*zaumniki*) Vasily Kamensky, Aleksei Kruchonykh, and Ilya Zhdanevich, as well as by the conservative Futurist Boris Pasternak. Among the lesser known contributors to *Lef* poetry were Petr Neznamov, the secretary of *Lef;* Dimitry Petrovsky, a friend and imitator of Khlebnikov; and Semyon Kirsanov, a member of YugoLef who made his poetic debut in *Lef* and later went on to become an important Soviet poet.

In effect, although the Lef group planned to gather all avant-garde artists, *Lef* continued to be run exclusively by the Futurist poets and critics of poetry. Even though the Lef organization had a very casual character, *Lef* sought to foster a group mentality in the same way as did the prerevolutionary Futurist publications. Now the identity of the Futurist poet was defined in terms of his commitment to the Lef ideas and his individual poems were regarded as variants of solutions to the artistic problems set by the group at large. Specifically, it meant that beyond the original Futurist focus on the texture of the poem, the poets would now purge their poetry of the lyrical "I" or, at least, subjugate the lyrical content to formal experimentation.

The antilyricism of the Lef group had both a formal and an ideological basis. On one hand, the Lef group was influenced in its antiindividualistic and antipsychological orientation by the Formalists, who regarded the emotional content of literature in terms of device. On the other hand, Lef followed the political mood at the time, because in the early 1920s the lyrical perspective seemed incompatible with the desired social character of poetry. The rejection of lyrical poetry or, more generally, of art as an expression of private feelings, was one element that characterized the theory of all participants in the leftist artistic movements. The Lef group shared this antilyrical orientation with the members of Proletkult, with the Smithies, and with the On-Guardists. A contemporary Soviet critic, A. V. Kulinich, explains in his account of early Soviet poetry:

> At the time of the fascination with the heroism of the collective movement, it was natural to doubt the propriety of reflecting reality through

> the medium of the private "I." Poetry was filled with the pathos of "multitudes," and shied away from the individual . . . in the name of glorifying the class, the masses, individuality was considered a remnant of the old times.[10]

The Lef group shared the collectivist spirit of the early Soviet period, but at the same time was prepared to treat all topics and themes as if they were incidental to poetry. As part of the initial Lef program, in which writing poetry was treated as a "laboratory experiment" in the creation of new verbal forms, any poem first and foremost aimed at remodelling the language through renovating the vocabulary, condensing the syntax, and heightening the sound expressiveness. Admittedly, despite the Futurist insistence that this verbal experimentation would have eventual utility, the concept of poetry as a "laboratory experiment" actually gave the Futurists a free license for experimentation with form such as they had practiced in the prerevolutionary period: any subject matter, be it private or political, remained outside the area of critical interest.

That the sole interest of the postrevolutionary Futurists lay in the verbal stratum of poetry is evident from Mayakovsky's and Brik's introduction to the poetry section in the first number of *Lef:*

> We do not want to make a distinction between poetry, prose, and the practical language. We know only the verbal material with which we are currently working. We work on the organization of the sounds of the language, on the polyphony of rhythm, on the simplification of verbal constructions, on verbal expressions, on the creation of new thematic devices. All this *work represents for us not an esthetic goal-in-itself, but a laboratory for the best articulation of contemporary facts.*[11]

Individual poems appearing in the first issue of *Lef* were introduced as exercises in solving formal problems related to rhythm, syntax, or vocabulary, but without an indication how such experimentation could have a utilitarian value. The authors of the poems were listed together with their individual "assignments," which remained in the realm of esthetics rather than that of applied art:

Aseev.	Experiment in verbal flight into the future.
Kamensky.	Play with words in all their sound effectiveness.
Kruchonykh.	Experiment with the use of a jargon phonetics for the purpose of giving form to antireligious and political themes.

Pasternak.	Application of a dynamic syntax to a revolutionary assignment.
Tretyakov.	Experiment with a march-like structure in order to organize the revolutionary turmoil.
Khlebnikov.	Achievement of maximal expressiveness using a colloquial language purified from all former poeticisms.
Mayakovsky.	Experiment with polyphonic rhythm in a *poema* with wide sociocultural dimensions.[12]

The last commentary, meant as an introduction to Mayakovsky's *poema* "About That" ("Pro eto"), is indicative of the technological commitment of the Lef group, which required that this intimate, intensely tragic poem be reduced to a rhythmic exercise. Despite this introduction, it could not be hidden that the publication of "About That" in the first number of *Lef* immediately contradicted the element of Lef theory that demanded the removal of the private "I" from poetry. This inconsistency was not lost on Nikolai Chuzhak, who published in *Lef* a challenge to Mayakovsky by reminding him of his earlier "Second Order to the Army of Arts" (1922), where Mayakovsky had ridiculed lyrical poetry:

Кому это интересно
Что "ах-вот, бедненький.
Как он любил
И каким он был несчастным!"[13]

Although at the time Chuzhak's dogmatism was rather embarrassing to the Lef group, Chuzhak turned out to be right in regarding "About That" as an anachronism. "About That," with its love theme, proved to be Mayakovsky's final statement using the persona of the poet as lyrical hero. From this time on, with the help of Lef ideas, Mayakovsky was to assume the role of poet as a public figure. His poetry would now turn away from the private experience and toward matters of immediate sociopolitical concern for the Soviet audience.

In the years 1923-1925, however, *Lef* would not yet do entirely away with lyrical poetry. Although the Futurists were somewhat apologetic about the subject matter and the lyrical point of view of Mayakovsky's *poema*, in the subsequent issues *Lef* also printed two other poems that, like Mayakovsky's "About That," combined the lyric and the epic element: Pasternak's *poema* "The Lofty Ailment" ("Vysokaya bolezn") and Aseev's *poema* "A Lyrical Digression" ("Lyricheskoe otstuplenie") The elegiac mood of Pasternak's "The Lofty Ailment" contradicted the

program of the Lef group, but since Pasternak was more a "fellow-traveler" of Lef than an active member, his *poema* could exist outside of the framework designed by the editors of the journal. In the case of Aseev, who belonged to the core of Lef, his "Lyrical Digression" made its appearance as a consciously polemical statement against the antilyrical canon of the Lef group. Even then, in the context of Lef's "laboratory" for verbal experiments, the lyrical perspectives of such poems did not diminish their validity because, like all neo-Futurist poetry regardless of content, they aimed at the modernization of the vernacular in accordance with the spirit of the new times.

The journal *Lef* published no direct commentaries on the Futurists' own poetic technique, because such statements threatened to reveal a continuation of the original Bohemian Futurism. Instead, the Lef group insisted on the flexibility of formal experimentation, which would lead to new means of expression, to greater verbal effectiveness and precision. Beyond the insistence on the dynamic search for new forms, no official delineation of a poetic theory was necessary. However, in order to validate the Futurist verbal experimentation in the Soviet setting and to fight the traditionalism that became increasingly apparent in the Soviet culture, the Futurists chose to attack the adherence to the rigid, antiquated poetic codes that they saw in the work of the proletarians and in the poetry of Valery Bryusov. The proletarians were the natural competitors of the Futurists for the domination of Soviet poetry, and the Futurists hoped to find them susceptible to the avant-garde view of art. Bryusov, a former Symbolist poet and now a venerable academician who was willing to Sovieticize his art, enjoyed popularity with the proletarians and the support of Soviet cultural administration.

In 1923 Boris Arvatov, a theoretician of the Lef group and an active member of Proletkult, published a critique in *Lef* of Bryusov's poetry, a critique that he titled "The Counter-Revolution of Form" ("Kontrrevolyutsiya formy").[14] In his article, Arvatov analyzed several of Bryusov's texts and pointed out Bryusov's use of traditional meters, cliché rhymes, and common epithets, all of which furthered verbal stereotypes (*yazykovoi shablon*). Then Arvatov went on to compile lists of Bryusov's classical allusions, Church Slavisms, and structural patterns dating back to the eighteenth-century language of Lonomosov, all of which Arvatov considered incompatible with modern consciousness. On the basis of this verbal

evidence, Arvatov accused Bryusov of acting as a canonizer of the bourgeois tradition and of promoting poetry alien to the spirit of the modern times. Such an accusation made it clear not only that Arvatov considered Bryusov's poetry an unsuitable literary model for the proletarian poets, but also that Bryusov's unsuitability had serious political implications.

In the same year, V. Sillov, another Lef commentator, published a study in *Lef* in which he similarly analyzed the vocabulary of several proletarian poets, with the purpose of showing that the proletarian spirit in their poetry had not yet found an appropriate form.[15] Like Arvatov, Sillov used a socioformal approach that consisted of evaluating the appropriateness of verbal matter for the sociopolitical situation. He demonstrated the nonurban, nonproletarian character of the poems written by the proletarian poets by showing that they were built around traditional formulas derived from rural life, religion, and mythology. Like Arvatov, Sillov also compiled lists of similes in which religious, fairy tale, and folkloristic references allegedly obscured the intended proletarian character of the presented ideas. Instead, in the spirit of the Lef group, Sillov recommended that a truly modern proletarian needed poetry related to his urban setting, to his industrially oriented life, and to his modern mentality.

Poetry reviews such as those showed that the politically conscious Lef members attempted to exert influence on the proletarian poets who, in their eyes, clearly represented the future mainstream literature. But in the formative stage of Soviet culture, it was not yet clear whether the patterns for the future proletarian culture would be set by the traditionalists or by the modernists, by the Epigones or by the Novators, as Pasternak called them.[16] In this situation, the antitraditionalism of the neo-Futurist statements differed from their former, prerevolutionary Futurist attacks on the classics. Originally, in the 1910s, such attacks had been esthetically motivated and directed against the refinements of the Symbolists' poetic culture. In the 1920s, the ongoing proletarian rediscovery of the Russian cultural tradition, supported by the Soviet cultural administration, threatened to invalidate the basis of Futurist poetics: their belief that perpetual innovation allowing for freshness of perception must underlie any art.

Whereas the Futurists missed no opportunity to criticize most of proletarian poetry as tradition-bound, they also singled out a proletarian, Aleksei Gastev, as a pioneer of the new culture and their emblematic poet.[17] Gastev had made his literary debut in 1918 with the volume

Shock-Work Poetry (*Poeziya rabochego udara*). The romantic and hyperbolic tonality of Gastev's poetry was reminiscent of Mayakovsky, whereas his technological orientation, even obsession with technology, far surpassed that of the Lef group. Gastev's attempts to glorify the modern man, whom he saw as a creature totally in tune with the world of the machine, earned the admiration of the Lef members. As a matter of fact, *Lef* even published an enthusiastic review of Gastev's collection *A Packet of Orders* (*Pachka orderov*), a collection reflecting the constructivist spirit of the left wing of the Proletkult, a spirit that was akin to Lef's.[18] The Lef members also attempted to bring Gastev into the Left Front of the Arts, but consistent with his technicism, Gastev soon abandoned literary work and devoted himself to a study of efficient labor technology in the Central Institute of Labor, which he himself headed.

Beyond a broad approval of formal innovation, which the Futurists saw as the sole criterion of poetic success, and beyond a demand for a nonlyrical, urban vocabulary, *Lef* published no commentaries outlining a specific Lef approach to poetry. Yet it did suggest such an approach indirectly in 1923 when the Futurists published an examplary poetic exercise, a product of a "laboratory experiment" in which most of the Lef poets participated. The project had a "laboratory" quality: all poets were assigned a socially significant topic, the Soviet May Day, which had to be presented in the spirit of the new times using the methods of avant-garde poetics. The series of poems published on this occasion included the "products" of Mayakovsky, Aseev, Pasternak, Kruchonykh, Kamensky, Neznamov, Tretyakov, and Terentev, each of whom found an individual poetic solution for presenting the May Day theme.[19]

Mayakovsky, in his poem, titled like all other poems "The 1st of May" ("1-oe maya"), presented May Day as the day of poetic decanonization. On May Day, the poet celebrates the left revolution in poetry, a revolution that has destroyed the poetic clichés associated with May and spring. To show the discarded past, Mayakovsky compiles an inventory of the poetic May stock, listing traditional epithets, nouns, and poetic images. Then in a revolutionary gesture, he proposes the abandonment of meters and rhymes and suggests that poets celebrate the will-strengthening cold of December instead of the gentleness of May. In an oratorical pitch, he sets forth new slogans demanding an engineering, constructivist treatment of nature:

Долой безрассудную пышность земли!
Долой случайность весен!
Да здравствует калькуляция силенок мира!
Да здравствует ум!

The finale of Mayakovsky's poem equates May Day with the dynamic process of creating new artifacts:

Да здравствует делание мая—
Искусственный май футуристов!

Underlying Mayakovsky's text is the polyphonic treatment of meters, which at that time Mayakovsky regarded as the prime objective of his "laboratory experimentation," and which he had practiced most extensively in the *poema* "About That." The dominant meter within this polyphonic structure is *frazovik*, with its lines of varying length, which allows for an intensification of the intonational expressiveness of the language. *Frazovik* breaks up sentences or emphasizes individual words for maximum colloquial expressiveness, and thus blends the poetic dialect with the vernacular.

Whereas Mayakovsky was the most extreme in equating the revolutionary spirit of May Day with the artistic revolution of the avant-garde, the second major poet of the Lef group, Aseev, managed to merge art and politics in his May poem. In fourteen quatrains, Aseev's poem celebrates international May Day, which Aseev sees as an inauguration of the future expansion of the political and artistic revolution to Germany, France, America, Africa, and India. Aseev apostrophizes the international youth who are struggling against the political establishment, but at the same time he speaks of liberation from the status quo through the esthetic "tearing of the masks," which would disclose the May Day:

Это—с мира слетевшая маска
Вдруг откроет его, и она
Не задушит нигде—
Первомайский интернационал!

Like Mayakovsky, Aseev expresses concern for the verbal texture of revolutionary poetry and calls for the "construction" of May by utilizing images taken from industry and city life instead from nature. For example, he associates the sound of spring with the bells of a tram car and with the factory whistle, which he calls "the steel nightingale" (*stalnoi solovei*),

using an image later repeated in his poetry. Aseev generally shows himself less radical in both content and form than Mayakovsky. In the May poem Aseev's rhymes are assonantal, but the quatrains follow the traditional "abab" scheme. Intonational patterns and caesuras are marked through the use of hyphens. The involved system of sound repetitions that usually characterizes Aseev's Lef poetry is visible only occasionally in phrases like: *Bryzgnuv iskrami groz iz Rossii,* or *Na rasy rosy lyut groma.*

Tretyakov, another participant in the May Day exercise and the Lef poet most conscious of the ideological significance of literature, focused his poem on several current political slogans: union of the city and the village, opposition to the international capitalism, and the need for a common front among international workers. Tretyakov's poem has a clear agitational purpose conveyed rhythmically through the quatrain structure, which imitates a march movement in a four-foot *taktovik*, and then through a *brakhikolon* listing the general program for the future Commune:

Мы хотим, чтоб мир стал наш.
минус
Лень
минус
Хнык
минус
Брех
минус
Дрянь—
Это—путь
Октября.

Echoing Klebnikov's poetics, which had been imitated within the Lef group, Tretyakov often constructs his images using sound rather than semantic associations. He updates the poetic dialect by introducing colloquialisms and new Soviet abbreviations (Don-bass, Rabfak, RKP). Such vocabulary reinforces the agitational quality of the new poetry, which in Tretyakov's version approaches political rhetoric with its extensive use of apostrophes, exclamations, repetition, and parallel constructions.

Whereas in their poems Mayakovsky, Aseev, and Tretyakov balanced accessible agitational content with formal experimentation, the transrational poets Kamensky, Kruchonykh, and Terentev had little natural inclination toward political agitation. The Soviet Revolution had not noticeably changed the transrational poets: they still cultivated Bohemian

Futurism. Kruchonykh with Terentev even formed a poetic group with Dadaistic leanings called "40°" that was active in the propagation of transrational poetry in the early Soviet period.[20] Their participation in the May Day "laboratory experiment" was not preceded by any involvement in the theoretic speculations of Lef and so represented their timid cry for Communist legitimacy, a legitimacy that the transrational poets hardly expected to gain.

Kamensky, usually quite extreme in his experimentation, contributed five quatrains that are surprisingly conservative in form and imagery. Each quatrain contains a poetic definition of May consisting of a metaphor built on political associations with May. Although Kamensky manages without the May clichés condemned by Mayakovsky, he seems to struggle for respectability:

Май—настоящее наших дней
Вершина учения Ленина-Маркса
Откуда с высоты видней
Вся нескончаемая масса.

Only occasionally, as in the above quatrain, does Kamensky use assonantal rhymes, and he remains pedestrian and surprisingly rural in his images, which present May in terms of "a silk ribbon," "a legend," "the poppy-red color of the valley," or "a winged bird."

For his May poem, Kruchonykh dipped into the Cosmist imagery to describe May as extending from the earth to the sun. The Lef collective is also included in Kruchonykh's picture of the cosmic May:

Земля завертелась . . . красный Гольфстрем—
Не остановят все инженеры Америк.
Земля заплыла, жарче чем Кремль,
Все клокочут на левый берег!
Тут и мы—
Лефы—
Бросаем канат!
Хватайся,
кто ловок и хват! . . .

Beyond a thematic statement, Kruchonykh's poem makes an attempt at what could be classified as agitational *zaum*. *Brakhikolon* verse breaks the continuity of thought and emphasizes the sound of individual words. Recognizable words are distorted into neologisms that allow the

reader to rediscover the essential meaning in the customary vocabulary, as in the following:

В синь
Зень
Ясь
Трель Интернационала
Иди
Рассияй
Шире улыбки первых жар
Рабоченравствие
Наш
Меж-нар-май! . . .

Some of Kruchonykh's neologisms are reminiscent of those created by Khlebnikov: *Mai teplyar* or *Zvuchi/Zvuchar*. The use of Soviet abbreviations, later popular in satirical poetry, acquires a *zaum* quality in this poem.

The third transrational poet, Terentev, less notorious but as experimental as Kruchonykh, made an attempt in his May poem to imbue customary colloquial phrases with new proletarian content. Terentev's poem is a monologue in which a worker addresses his companion. In its laconic quality, the text idealizes the machine-like spirit of the new proletariat. Although authentic phrases from the vernacular are recognizable, the structure of Terentev's poem, an extended *brakhikolon*, gives individual words a *zaum* quality similar to that seen in Kruchonykh's May Day contribution:

Вудь
май
со мной
Май
с тобой
Жмай
руку
Давай
покурим

Terentev's poem ends with the appeal: *dai rub / na mai*. Surprisingly, of all the May poems it was this colloquial appeal from Terentev that provoked the sharpest criticism from the outside. The *Pravda* commen-

tator Sosnovsky singled out Terentev's poem for attack, claiming that the underlying colloquialism *dai rub na chai* degraded the revolutionary topic, and on this basis tried to make a case against Lef's attempts at Communist poetics.[21]

Among all the Futurist poets, the most unusual contributor to Lef's May Day "laboratory exercise" was Boris Pasternak. Pasternak had come to the Lef group because of his strong personal ties to its members, especially to Mayakovsky. Still, he never felt at home with the Lef theories. Characteristically for Pasternak, his May Day poem lacks entirely the programmatic, agitational, and, to be sure, simplistic quality of the other May Day poetic exercises. In his poem, Pasternak draws a complex, static vision of the city at daybreak of the First of May. This vision is presented as an apotheosis of the mystery of the city:

О город! О сборник задач без ответов,
О ширь без решения и шифр без ключа!

In this mystery of the city the poet seeks to find the humanistic utopia, a renaissance of life. The ending of Pasternak's poem, which echoes the hymn of the Communist International, blends tradition and revolution, the intellectuals and the proletarians:

Что ты не отчасти и не между прочим
Сегодня с рабочим, - что всею гурьбой
Мы в боги свое человечество прочим,
То будет последний решительный бой.

Whereas Pasternak's poem differs from the poems of other Lef members in its distance from political concerns and in its sense of tradition, it is similar to the Lef poems in the deliberate complexity of its images and sound relations:

Пусть взапуски с зябкостью запертых лавок
Бежит, в рубежах дребезжа, синева
И, бредя исчезнувшим снегом, вдобавок
Разносит над грязью без связи слова.

Still, despite the obvious resemblances between Pasternak's poetics and the poetics of the Lef members, this participation in the May Day exercise remained for Pasternak's poetic life a unique attempt at blending politics with art in the context of a literary collective.

The May Day "laboratory project" illustrated the desire of the Lef group to legitimize Futurist poetics by applying them to political content in a way that allowed the association of May and the revolution with not only political but also artistic change. May Day provided them with an occasion for an overview of Futurist techniques. At the same time, this overview also showed the manneristic tendency developing the stage of Futurism when the poets attempted to present Futurism as a method to be emulated by the developing Soviet poetry.

In their perspective on the subject matter, the Futurist May Day poems followed the abstract, collectivist approach familiar from the Cosmist poetry of the early Soviet period, which the Futurists used to illustrate the international and global range of the revolution. The lyrical figure of the poet was absent from these poems: the poetry existed as a statement expressing collective consciousness. Most of the images in these poems were drawn from the urban setting; nature images appeared as the exception. The word choices reflected the commitment of the Lef poets to modernizing the vernacular through poetic experimentation: the vocabulary was consistently prosaic, with some effort to make it deliberately proletarian. Neologisms appeared rather infrequently, but the poetic vocabulary began to include new Soviet abbreviations of concepts and organizations, a device that was consonant with the desire of the Lef group to create a modern, condensed speech. Yet their efforts to politicize poetic vocabulary did not result in a purely propagandistic poetry, because the prominent emphasis on sound pattern and sound play submerged the common meaning of the words by putting stress on the form rather than content of poetry.

The trademark of Lef poetics was an extensive system of sound repetitions, especially the repetition of consonantal clusters. The Lef group continued the Futurist tradition of sound play, which had earlier reached its most complex stage with Khlebnikov. In Lef poetry, verbal constructs were based on poetic etymology; phonetic shifts (*sdvigi*) were used to unite disparate concepts; and the rhyme scheme employed a variety of types, such as deep rhyme, assonantal and dissonantal rhyme, and pun rhyme. In this context, it should also be noted that Osip Brik, as a Formalist critic, was the main theoretician interested in the sound structure of poetry, and that he did much to sharpen the poets' awareness of this aspect of poetics. Brik coined the term "sound repetitions" (*zvukovye povtory*) and devised a complex classification system for sound patterns.

He also wrote an important study, "Rhythm and Syntax," ("Ritm i sintaksis"), in which he echoed the preoccupation of the Futurists with the polyrhythmic patterns that would reinforce the meaning of verbal constructions.[22]

In the May Day exercise of the Lef poets, the most frequent metric pattern was the *taktovik*, which gave intonational expressiveness to the language. This pattern suited the agitational character of the new poetry, which tended toward the rhetorical devices of apostrophe and parallel constructions. If a poem used the more traditional structure of the quatrain, then a system of pauses and enjambements was used to reinforce the spoken intonation. On the other hand, the *taktovik* line could be reduced to a single word (*brakhikolon*) in an attempt to destroy the customary meaning and to return the focus of the poetry to its verbal texture. This device was especially characteristic of the poetry by *zaum*-oriented Kruchonykh and Terentev, who most consistently subjugated the topic of May Day to the sound play characteristic of the earlier Futurist poetics. The more message-conscious poets such as Tretyakov attempted to blend content and form by enhancing the agitational objective of the poem through its rhythmic structure. For this agitational purpose, Tretyakov, like other Lef poets and the later Constructivists, favored especially the four-foot *taktovik*, which emulated the rhythm of the march.

The collective exercise of the Futurists on the May theme was intended to show that Futurist poetics, their artistic shaping of a theme, could be indiscriminately applied to a required subject. The extraliterary implications of the subject matter were of secondary importance: the dynamism of literary forms determined the presentation of the content.

Although the May Day project presented Futurism in its new politicized Lef version, the experiment was actually an attempt to validate the original Futurist preoccupation with the verbal stratum of poetry by tying the issue of poetic language to the new political *byt*. Yet the idea of poetry as a "laboratory experiment" in designing new means of expression, proposed in the initial numbers of *Lef*, found no more such collective embodiments. It soon became obvious that the Futurists, who insisted on a connection between their poetics and the Soviet *byt*, did not yet design practical ways of translating their proposals into poetry. The poetry they actually published in *Lef* displayed little of the uniformity implied by the Lef theories and only some of the mechanistic spirit expressed by the Lef group.

As they committed themselves to the idea of "language engineering" through poetry, the Lef members found that the evolution of Soviet literature presented them with a new set of problems. First, as Tynyanov noted in his essay "The Interval," by 1924 prose and not poetry represented the dominant literary medium.[23] The problems of poetry were no longer very important within the general cultural panorama. Second, the concern with language that had been typical of the literature of the earlier modernist period was superseded by the interest in the problems of genre. In fact, the most interesting literary development of the early Soviet period was a move away from modernist fragmentation and toward the reestablishment of a strict genre framework. In an attempt to find a direction for Soviet literature that would combine both tradition and innovation, the writers and poets tried to update familiar genres. In line with this trend also the Lef poets, despite their professed antitraditionalism, printed their poems in *Lef* with titles or subtitles indicating a genre, or commented on a genre within the text of their poems. Aseev subtitled his *poema* "A Lyrical Digression" "a diary in verse" (*dnevnik v stikhakh*) and also wrote a ballad, "The Black Prince" ("Chernyi prints"). Mayakovsky identified his *poema* "About That" as a ballad; his poems "To the Workers of Kursk" ("Rabochim Kurska") and "Jubilee Year" ("Yubileinoe") could be classified as an ode and an epistle (*poslanie*).[24] Pasternak in "The Lofty Ailment" experimented with an epos; Kamensky called the poem he published in *Lef* a hymn: Kruchonykh wrote a *lubok* narrative (*lubochnaya povest*) in verse; Kirsanov and Petrovsky published songs (*pesni*). In these poems, the use of subtitles or the references to a genre within the text pointed toward a possible genre, rather than defining actual form. Despite this consciousness of the genre, the Lef group was so committed to the experiments in verbal texture that it would show no theoretical interest in the problems of genre until the second half of the 1920s, when *New Lef* would develop a new genre system of "literature of fact."

The best poetry published in *Lef*, although it hinted at genres, lacked specific genre markings and appeared under the heading *poema*. The designation *poema* enjoyed popularity in the early Soviet period because it suited the prevailing interest in creating the monumental art of the Revolution; the length of a *poema* allowed for the possibility of making the Soviet epos. The three major *poemy* published in *Lef*, however, did little to realize the proletarian vision of a historical epos and also violated the principle of antilyricism to which the Lef group was theoretically

committed. Mayakovsky's "About That," Aseev's "A Lyrical Digression," and Pasternak's "The Lofty Ailment" each reflected the poet's private response to the changing times and combined the lyric and epic elements, as each poet spoke "about the times and about himself" (*o vremeni i o sebe*). These poems lacked the tone of progressive optimism that would have been expected of a monumental art in the spirit of the Revolution. Instead, with elegiac regret over the loss of private and artistic individuality, they showed the lyric persona as an observer, emotionally destroyed and unable to come to terms with the changing world. In the context of *Lef*, the elegiac mood of these poems also made a statement about the coming end of Futurism, which had presented not only verbal experiments, but also a new poetic hero in the person of the modern artist as an outsider, a rebel in the world of habits and conformity.

All written in 1923 and unified by the presence of the lyrical hero, the *poemy* "About That," "A Lyrical Digression," and "The Lofty Ailment" also formally represented a transitional stage of Futurist poetry. Centered on a hero-narrator, they occupied a middle position between the earlier form-oriented, fragmentary, open-structured Futurist *poemy* in which continuity was assured mainly through leitmotifs and the later content-dominated epic *poemy*, which dealt with authentic historical or political subjects and presented them with an agitational purpose.

Lef still reflected all these stages of evolving Futurism. In addition to the middle stage represented by the three *poemy*, *Lef* also printed Khlebnikov's *poema* "Ladomir," closest to the early stage of Futurist poetry with its seemingly unfinished, fragmented text consisting of blocks of images juxtaposed to each other. The later, political-agitational direction of *poemy*, which developed in the middle of the 1920s, is introduced in *Lef* by Tretyakov's *Roar, China!* (*Rychi, Kitai!*), where fragments appear under political headings and the combined mosaic adds up to a political statement. *Lef* had also intended to print another *poema* that explored a similarly political perspective, Ilya Selvinsky's "Ulyalaevshchina," but it did not pass Gosizdat censorship. Tretyakov's *poema*, with its clear political orientation superimposed on a complex display of sound orchestration, prefigured the turn of Soviet literature to the new emphasis on content that the Futurists eventually recognized in the middle of the decade with their concept of literature as the fulfillment of "social commission" (*sotsialnyi zakaz*). Yet seen from the present perspective, between Khlebnikov's formal experiments and Tretyakov's poetry of political commitment, the lyrical-epic *poemy* of Mayakovsky, Aseev, and

Pasternak have most convincingly stood the test of time. They appeal today primarily because of the very lyrical individuality that the Lef group so persistently fought.

With the disappearance of *Lef* in 1925, the Futurists finally had to abandon their unconditional commitment to formal experimentation. And yet even though they were doomed to fail in their utopian proposal to act as "engineers" of the Soviet vernacular, the Lef Futurists had an impact on Russian poetry. In 1929 Aseev, looking back at the poetic accomplishments of the Left Front of the Arts, summarized their significance as follows:

> The poetic activity of V. Khlebnikov, V. Mayakovsky, A. Kruchonych, B. Pasternak, V. Kamensky, N. Aseev, and later also N. Tikhonov followed to various extents and in various ways the same main goal: breaking down the canonical strophe, converting the entire pattern of Russian verse from the petrified rhythmic and strophic boundaries into the general rhythmic pattern of intonational speech. The main unifying law of this intonational speech was its sound construction, which was divided into phrases and periods that corresponded to the logical accents of the text. These phrases and periods, in turn, defined the strophical construction of the verse.[25]

Notwithstanding the contributions of the Futurists to Soviet poetry, the Lef group did not manage to legitimize Futurism as a Soviet movement. The Soviet critics refused to accept the Lef program of language engienering. The Lef promise that Futurist poetry would some day effect the language of daily communication could not quite redeem the pure verbal play characteristic of Futurist poetics. When the idea of "verbal engineering" that had been inaugurated in the initial Lef program proved unconvincing as a poetic response to the Soviet *byt*, the Futurists were faced with the problem of content of the new poetry. They now recognized that they had to make a place in their literature for the new Soviet life. In their journal *Lef* the Futurists had not yet resolved this problem; they found the answer only in the second half of the 1920s, with the idea that literature should be an expression of "social commission."[26] Although this theory of "social commission" was formulated only in *New Lef*, Mayakovsky and Brik had introduced the term in the first number of *Lef* when they declared: "We are not priests-creators, but the craftsmen who fulfill the 'social commission'." The concept of "social commission" provided the Futurists with an answer to the accusations that they were exclusively preoccupied with form because it allowed them to treat the

subject matter as the material that the society had commissioned them to shape. Mayakovsky elaborated this concept for poetry in the 1926 essay "How Are Verses Made?" ("Kak delat stikhi?"), explaining how he adapted for his poems subjects from the current issues generated by the society. Then, in *New Lef*, the left artists came to regard "social commission" as the basic impulse for all art, and further maintained that the subject matter in literature had always emerged in response to social demand and that the society had always determined both the topic and the ideological slant of literature. Despite the sociopolitical jargon surrounding this concept, the eventual attacks on the formalist nature of "social commission" were not entirely groundless, because according to this theory the poet or writer in a craftsman-like way fulfilled a request, but assumed no responsibility for the themes and ideologies expressed in his work. In fact, just as in the earlier Futurism, the poet continued to devote himself to finding a technical solution, to creating a literary expression of a subject which now had been selected for him by the society.

Still, the concept of "social commission" finally put an end to Russian Futurism. The new literature differed from the original Futurism in the fact that an artistic creation no longer existed as an independent artifact, as an artificial construct that regrouped elements of reality for the sole purpose of restoring the freshness of perception. Instead, in a literary work the artist performed an obligatory role of shaping social experience, forming it in such a way as to incite a mass response to a significant sociopolitical problem. This new literature of "social commission" propagated in *New Lef* represented an avant-garde answer to the criticism that *Lef* had shown excessive preoccupation with form. Yet this new theory about the production of literature also changed the nature of the avant-garde movement. Futurism as a literary current came to an end when poetic technique was officially committed to serve a social message.

Between the initial idea of poetry as "language engineering" that the Futurists proposed in the early 1920s and the later concept of poetry as the fulfillment of social commission, which developed in the second half of the 1920s, *Lef* documented the finale of Russian Futurism. In *Lef* one notes the gradual disappearance of *zaum*, a return to a strict genre system, a turn to plot and fact, and finally a move away from poetry toward prose. By 1927 even Mayakovsky received messages from Osip Brik that briefly thanked him for the poetry Mayakovsky had contributed to *New Lef*, but urged him to send prose.[27]

Following the discontinuation of *Lef* in 1925, its successor, *New Lef*,

had less to say on the subject of poetry. In the late 1920s the need to appeal to the masses and to present factual, political subjects caused considerable difficulty for the poets still trying to find a balance between form and content. Mayakovsky himself, in his later poem "To the Proletarian Poets" ("Poslanie proletarskim poetam"), shared with his proletarian followers and critics his fears about compromising innovation in form in search of easy accessibility:

Одного боюсь—
        за вас и сам—
чтоб не облелели
        наши души,
чтоб мы
        не возвели
                в коммунистический сан
плоскость раешников
                и ерунду частушек.[28]

Although Mayakovsky did not live to have these fears confirmed by Socialist Realism, the Lef group was not without guilt in its advocacy of artistic uniformity. The May Day exercise, the Futurist "laboratory experiment" in the service of the new society had prefigured many subsequent political homages that celebrated contemporary political causes on a mass scale. More generally, the Lef group, with its dogmatic enthusiasm, inaugurated the Socialist Realist belief that art is a craft to be used in the fulfillment of political goals.

2. KHLEBNIKOV

With the publication of *Lef* in 1923, the Futurists in search of Soviet legitimacy made an attempt at codifying the Futurist tradition. Part of this program involved the promotion of poetry written by Velimir Khlebnikov, who now appeared as a precursor of the Lef program of poetry as a "verbal laboratory." Khlebnikov, who explored the sound structures of words and word relationships in a poetry with toned-down semantics, best personified the "scientific" approach to poetry proposed by the Lef members. Actually, Khlebnikov was only loosely associated with the Futurists during his lifetime, and he died in 1922, half a year before the formation of the Lef group. The nature of his relationship to Futurism

was complex and much debated among the literary historians. For *Lef*, Khlebnikov fulfilled the need for a figure who would give the Lef program a stamp of tradition through his own focus on the "renovation of the word" and who would lend the Lef poets a certain romantic aura through the image of the poet that he represented. In their promotion of Khlebnikov, the Lef Futurists made no attempt to present him as a supporter of utilitarianism in the arts, but preferred to use the figure of Khlebnikov to enhance Lef's ideal of a poet devoted to language innovation.

In his study of Khlebnikov's poetry Vladimir Markov has noted that Khlebnikov combined the qualities associated with the timeless image of the poet as "seer" with a modern technological orientation:

> Falling somewhere between the literary salons of the past and the prosaic propaganda art of the immediate future, he seemed close to the "eternal" poetic archetype. At the same time, technological and empirical features inherent in his creed and his experiments made him a model for new poetic movements.[29]

Khlebnikov became such a model, one of the major poetic influences of the 1920s, despite the fact that during his lifetime he had been known only to a small circle of poets and Futurist admirers and had published his poetry only in almanacs with other Futurists or in very small editions. However, as Tynyanov noted in his essay "The Interval," Khlebnikov's colorful Bohemian life and his dramatic death as a starving poet wandering in the Russian countryside made him a figure whose biography alone could command the attention of readers.[30] More recently, Markov has listed the following literary reasons for Khlebnikov's appeal among both the traditionalists and the innovators:

—Khlebnikov's innovative approach endeared him to the revolutionary-minded intelligentsia;
—his contacts with the provincial life, his non-"ivory tower" personality illustrated his Russianness;
—his utopian ideal of "world health" (*mirovoe zdorovie*) contrasted with the decadent currents;
—he was interested, and at the same time not involved, in the political events of the revolutionary period;
—the difficulty in understanding much of his poetry gave him exclusive appeal.[31]

The postrevolutionary Futurists recognized both Khlebnikov's poetic

originality and his potential public appeal. Even before Khlebnikov's death they undertook their first attempt to popularize him by obtaining permission in 1921 to publish a volume of his collected works through IMO. Much to Khlebnikov's chagrin, the actual publication failed to materialize.[32] In March 1922, when the Futurists managed to place Mayakovsky's poem "Lost in Conference" in *Izvestiya*, they also printed Khlebnikov's poem "Hey, Merchants-Good Lads" (Ej, molodchiki-kupchiki"), a poem in which Khlebnikov protested the commercialization of life under NEP.[33] Yet following the appearance of both poems in *Izvestiya*, Lenin chose to acknowledge only Mayakovsky's poem with a positive comment. As a result, the subsequent official rehabilitation of the Futurists was officially tied to Mayakovsky rather than to Khlebnikov.

With the appearance of *Lef* in 1923, the Futurists persisted in their attempts to gain recognition for Khlebnikov. Indeed, the very first poem printed in the initial issue of *Lef* honored Khlebnikov as the guiding force of the Lef movement. In the poem "Across the World—A Step" ("Cherez mir—shag"), Nikolai Aseev described the flight of the left artists, referred to as "we with Osya" (*my s Osei*—Osip Brik), into the utopia, where they would be welcomed by their mentor Khlebnikov:

И вдруг—
неизвестной звезды
засиял
Нам путь, половея в пяти километрах.
Брови сажей движенья вычернив,
Протянувши багры лучей,
Мы пристали к пристани вычурной
Перевитых как сталь речей.
Там—стихов прикрутивши трап
Велемир ожидал с утра
И, кожу согнав с засиявшего лба,
Он прыснул и молвил навстречу: "Судьба!"
Бросились в свалке
Как с дерева векши—
Мы с Осей маленькие
Нам легше.
И бешеной бомбой кружились слова
И губ не хватало его целовать.[34]

Along with its initial program of poetry as a "verbal laboratory," in

the first three numbers of *Lef* the journal continued to promote Khlebnikov as the forerunner of the Lef movement. *Lef* printed Khlebnikov's *poemy*, "Razin's Barque ("Ustrug Razina"), and "Harmonious World" ("Ladomir"), as well as his poems, "The Picture of an Uprising" ("Obraz vosstaniya"), "Iranian Song" ("Iranskaya pesnya"), and "The New Year of Labor" ("Navruz truda"). The selection of these works was successful for both literary and extraliterary reasons. Tynyanov, commenting on the development of Khlebnikov's poetic technique, recognized that formally "the last works of Khlebnikov, printed in *Lef*—'Ladomir' and 'Razin's Barque'—presented, as it were, a summary of his poetry."[35] Also, from the point of view of content, all of the poems echoed some political motifs, thus helping to form the image of Khlebnikov that the Lef group was trying to create. "Razin's Barque" focused on the theme of the seventeenth-century peasant rebellion led by Stepan Razin, a theme that was popular with the early Soviet poets; "Ladomir," as V. Markov has noted, contained "an encyclopedia of Khlebnikov's ideas and dreams about the future of mankind."[36] It was a particular favorite of *Lef* because it spelled out the special modern image of the poet, an image that the Lef group saw as "a prophecy about the new man."[37] The shorter poems could also be considered political: "The New Year of Labor" could be seen in the context of the liberation of the Russian Far East, and the title of "The Picture of an Uprising" spelled out its revolutionary character. Through this selection of poems, *Lef* did succeed in making Khlebnikov acceptable for later Soviet literature. Significantly, in the years to come, "Ladomir" and "Razin's Barque," as well as "Iranian Song," have remained on the Soviet list of "mentionable" poetry by Khlebnikov.[38]

Along with Khlebnikov's poetry, in the very first issue of *Lef* the Futurists printed extensive "Memoirs about Khlebnikov" ("Vospominaniya o Khlebnikove"), written by Dmitry Petrovsky, a friend of Khlebnikov and a member of the Lef group.[39] In his reminiscences, Petrovsky stylized the image of Khlebnikov into a "legend," showing Khlebnikov's utopianism, his "scientific" orientation, and his sympathy for the Soviet Revolution.

Petrovsky tied Khlebnikov to the prerevolutionary precursors of the Lef group by opening his narrative in 1916 with the scene of a party held by the Briks on the occasion of the publication of the Futurist almanac *Took* (*Vzyal*, 1916), during which Khlebnikov was crowned "the King of the Poets." Throughout his narrative of Khlebnikov's life, Petrovsky continued to stress those factors that related Khlebnikov to the utopian

and technical direction of Lef. He devoted much attention to Khlebnikov's number theories and Khlebnikov's utopian "Society of the Representatives of the Globe" (Obshchestvo predstavitelei zemnogo shara), and went on to tell about Khlebnikov's wanderings and his experiences in the army. Petrovsky, who shared the avant-garde belief in the need for authenticity in art, attached special importance to these travels, because he found that "in general, the works of Khlebnikov are a mosaic created from his biography."[40]

Petrovsky was also interested in stressing Khlebnikov's pro-Soviet attitude. In his account, he quoted excerpts from Khlebnikov's poetic prose that showed Khlebnikov's negative reaction to the Provisional Government of Kerensky and Khlebnikov's interest in the Soviet revolution. Petrovsky noted that when the Soviet cultural institutions were forming, Khlebnikov had even contributed suggestions to Lunacharsky by sending him a "Declaration of Creators" ("Deklaratsiya tvortsov"). In this declaration, Khlebnikov proposed that

> All creators—poets, artists, inventors—should be recognized as being outside the nation, state, and usual laws. On the basis of special documents, they should be given the right of free and undisturbed travel and the right to move beyond the boundaries of the Republic into all countries of the entire world. Poets should wander and sing.[41]

Petrovsky also emphasized Khlebnikov's emotional identification with the Soviet power, noting that Khlebnikov "was very interested in my participation in the Revolution, and asked me about the life of the guerrillas . . . And he himself dreamt of taking an active part in the Revolution. I knew, of course, that it would never happen. He was too absent-minded, contemplative, and focused on himself."[42]

In concluding his narrative, Petrovsky introduced the unlikely idea that Khlebnikov's poetry could appeal to the masses. Petrovsky himself had observed how the soldiers had reacted to Khlebnikov when he was in the army, and he claimed that he had been struck by the instinctual understanding that the soldiers had shown for Khlebnikov's poetry:

> I remember how surprised I was when I once got into a conversation with his comrades in the detachment. As I explained to them what value this gray, stooping man represented for Russia, I saw that they had waited for this opportunity to say aloud what they had already understood about him for a long time. I talked with them the whole night, and I now regret very much that I did not write down those rare,

> simple, and at the same time irreplaceable definitions of Khlebnikov that I heard from several dozens of his military comrades in Tsaritsyn . . . That Khlebnikov was close to the people is indeed surprising. But the common people are the most authentic mirrors of the true value of each individual.
> Without enumerating all the examples, I confirm that all of this did actually happen, and it was so important for me that it helped me in the moments of hesitation not to leave or to lose faith in Velemir.[43]

Petrovsky obviously realized the difficulty of convincing his readers of Khlebnikov's popular following, but his memoirs succeeded in connecting Khlebnikov to the Soviet culture and in pointing out his inherent "leftist" features.

Although they used Khlebnikov's poetic appeal to enhance the Lef program of verbal experimentation, the Lef members were genuinely determined to preserve his poetry for Russian literature. To this end, in 1923 the Lef members Aseev and Vinokur intended to publish Khlebnikov's collected works under the Lef editorship.[44] Later, in 1927, several Lef members—Aseev, Brik, Kirsanov, Olesha, Kruchonykh, Pasternak, Selvinsky, and Shklovsky—formed the "Society of Khlebnikov's Friends" and put out thirty issues of a pamphlet called *Unpublished Khlebnikov* (*Neizdannyi Khlebnikov*).[45]

The Lef members began by regarding themselves as the true guardians and continuators of Khlebnikov's tradition, but they met with considerable opposition. Although the group remained interested in Khlebnikov's poetry, *Lef* subsequently abandoned the promotion of Khlebnikov when the Lef idea of poetry as a "verbal laboratory" met with outside disapproval. But with their initial promotion of Khlebnikov they inaugurated a controversy that continued throughout the 1920s. In this controversy over the nature of Khlebnikov's relation to Futurism, the opponents of the Futurists claimed that the Futurists had deliberately distorted Khlebnikov's poetry and had disseminated misinformation about him.

Already in 1923, when *Lef* announced the planned publication of Khlebnikov's collected works, Khlebnikov's sister and some of his friends published a volume of his poetry, *Poems* (*Stikhi*) with an introduction by the Symbolist poet Vyacheslav Ivanov, whose concept of poetry was antithetical to that of the Lef group. In 1926 a book edition of Khlebnikov's *poema The Present* (*Nastoyashchee*) contained a veiled attack on Khlebnikov's Futurist associates, implying that they had exploited Khlebnikov while he was alive and misused his manuscripts after his death.

In 1927 the editors of another Khlebnikov volume criticized the Lef members, in particular Mayakovsky and Aseev, for misinterpreting Khlebnikov and for misappropriating "his inventions and his merits."[46]

When the first volume of Khlebnikov's five-volume edition of collected works finally appeared in 1928, the Futurists had no part in its publication. The editor was Nikolai Stepanov, assisted by Yurii Tynyanov. Both Tynyanov's opening essay and Stepanov's introduction to the first volume attempted to dissociate Khlebnikov from the concept of Futurism, which they found too confining for Khlebnikov's poetry. Stepanov attempted to dispel the myth of a "mad poet" that the Lef group had helped to create. He ignored Khlebnikov's connection to Futurism, which the Lef group had sought to publicize, and elaborated instead on Khlebnikov's ties to the Symbolists and the Acmeists. In addition, Stepanov was explicit in his criticism of Lef's use of Khlebnikov's poetry, saying that "the companions and comrades of Khlebnikov—the Futurists—promoted only those aspects of his work that were historically useful for them, adapting Khlebnikov according to their point of view."[47] Stepanov noted that in editing Khlebnikov's work the Futurists had deemphasized the organizational coherence of the poems in order to stress the "laboratory quality" of Khlebnikov's verse. Ultimately, Stepanov believed that the Futurists did not truly understand Khlebnikov: "For Mayakovsky and the Futurists, Khlebnikov has been important in his destructive role, important as a disorganizer of the tradition. For this reason, Futurism has ignored the major, finished works of Khlebnikov."[48]

If in the late 1920s Stepanov attempted to separate Khlebnikov from the much-criticized Futurism, the Lef group also found it useful to dissociate itself officially from Khlebnikov. In the literary life dominated by the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), the left art group could no longer use Khlebnikov as a programmatic figure. The interest in the verbal texture of poetry that had originally attracted Lef to Khlebnikov became a minor concern as the attention of writers and poets shifted from questions of form to the problem of the relationship between art and ideology. In December 1928, during a meeting of the Federation of the Unions of Soviet Writers, Mayakovsky declared that Khlebnikov should no longer be singled out as an examplary poet and admitted that the efforts of Lef to do so ended with failure. Instead, Mayakovsky announced: "We should be the writers of the masses."[49]

Despite Mayakovsky's belated disclaimer, *Lef* had accomplished a

historical function in making a place for Khlebnikov in Russian literature. It is questionable whether he would have obtained such recognition without the efforts of the Lef members. They succeeded in discovering Khlebnikov's work, in opening a discussion on his poetic role, in helping to form a legendary aura around his person, and in politicizing his reputation.

But even though the Lef group had originally claimed to find a model for its poetics in Khlebnikov's work, they in fact adopted only some of his devices. It must be noted that Khlebnikov's experiments essentially differed from the Lef program in that they were not directed toward specific goals. In the best case, they were unabashedly utopian, like Khlebnikov's *zaum*, but they were never intended for immediate practical application, like those proposed by Lef. It should also be remembered that the thematic-ideological framework that *Lef* imposed on Khlebnikov by selective printing of his poems was an attempt to fit Khlebnikov into a leftist political outlook despite his obvious anarchist and archaic features.

G. Vinokur, himself a participant in the Left Front of the Arts, discounted the impression the Lef group had tried to give of continuing Khlebnikov's path of verbal experimentation into Soviet literature. In an article titled "Khlebnikov," which appeared in 1924 in *Russian Contemporary* (*Russkii sovremennik*), Vinokur explained:

> The opinion that Khlebnikov is the source of new poetry—which is so readily supported by his admirers—is based on an obvious exaggeration and undoubtedly deforms the historical perspective. Khlebnikov did not create a tradition. The tradition of Russian Futurism is obviously a tradition of Mayakovsky and not of Khlebnikov. It is true that Mayakovsky considers himself indebted to his "brilliant teacher"; in reality, however, having adopted some of Khlebnikov's devices, Mayakovsky very soon left the confines set up for the poetic word by the work of Khlebnikov. The verbal culture never represented for Mayakovsky an absolute goal . . . The "renovation of the word" is a by-product of his poetry. Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov are related to each other, but as antipodes.[50]

3. MAYAKOVSKY

Even though *Lef* first cast Khlebnikov as the emblematic poet for the Lef program of verbal experimentation, it was Mayakovsky who eventually emerged as the major poet of the Lef group. Mayakovsky found himself

in this role not only because he officially headed the editorial board and was the best-known member of the Left Front of the Arts, but also because he represented a "moderate" avant-garde orientation that better answered the needs of cultural politics.[51] Among the postrevolutionary Futurists, Mayakovsky was most consistent in his attempts to create new poetry that would renovate the Futurist poetic dialect and at the same time carry a message to the new Soviet audience. Mayakovsky succeeded in combining both objectives, although eventually the political immediacy of the content overshadowed the verbal innovation in his poetry.

In the postrevolutionary period, Mayakovsky sought to renovate Futurist poetics along a path that differed from that pursued by Khlebnikov. Whereas Khlebnikov regarded a direct interaction with the audience as irrelevant to his poetry, Mayakovsky always engaged in a dialogue with his readers and listeners. Even though Mayakovsky acknowledged the exemplary character of Khlebnikov's sound experimentation, he also noted Khlebnikov's restricted appeal, saying "Khlebnikov is not a poet for a consumer. He is a poet for a producer."[52] In his own postrevolutionary poetry, Mayakovsky attempted to write for both the audience of "consumers" and the audience of "producers." He succeeded in reaching the mass of Soviet readers through the poetic editorials he printed in newspapers and journals; he also acquired a large following among the Soviet poets, especially those connected with the proletarian movement. The broad response to his poetry did not, however, mean uniform approval. In his new poems, Mayakovsky no longer appeared as his own lyrical hero; instead he spoke as the orator who was fulfilling a "social commission." With this change, he lost his prerevolutionary audience of readers and critics, who had valued the individuality and sensitivity of his poetic perspective and who now resented the political function of the new poetry.

Mayakovsky had begun to change his poetic dialect in 1918–1919, during the time he was affiliated with the newspaper *Art of the Commune*. It was in that publication that he first assumed the identity of newspaper poet, issuing regular poetic editorials that commented on matters of current interest in cultural politics. Although the subject matter of these editorials was art itself, the poetic form was subordinated to the message. The purely communicative value of poetry became most important, and the medium of poetry began to further the objectives of the newspaper.

The poetry that Mayakovsky published in *Art of the Commune* inaugurated the Futurist turn to *byt*. Mayakovsky announced this new

orientation in 1919 in "An Order to the Army of Arts" ("Prikaz armii iskusstva"), where he called for the democratization of art, for the merger of art and life: *Na ulitsy, futuristy/barabanshchiki i poety!* He followed this call in 1922 with "The Second Order to the Army of Arts" printed in Ilya Erenburg's Constructivist journal *Veshch-Object-Gegenstand.* In this poem Mayakovsky presented a more specific program, urging *futuristiki, imazhinistiki, akmeistiki, proletkultsy* to abandon contemplative poetry and to use their poems to serve the modernization of the country through formal innovation: *Daite nam novye formy!/ nesetsya vopl po veshcham!*[53] This appeal echoed the program of industrial arts currently developing in Inkhuk under the guidance of Osip Brik, which Mayakovsky now applied to poetry, seeking functional ways of using poetic craft.

Mayakovsky himself immediately put his slogans calling for the merger of art and life into practice. He made his first attempt to apply poetic techniques for communication with the new Soviet audience in 1919–1921, when he worked for Rosta (Russkoe telegraficheskoe obshchestvo—Russian Telegraph Agency). For Rosta, he wrote political jingles (*agitki*) aimed at fostering the political consciousness of the masses during the Civil War. Then, in 1923–1925, with the encouragement of Osip Brik who was employed by the department store Mosselprom, Mayakovsky created advertising slogans for the Soviet goods sold in the store. Both the Rosta and the Mosselprom experience taught Mayakovsky to democratize his poetic dialect and made him aware of the need to intensify the communicative power of the language.

Among all the Futurists, Mayakovsky moved most consistently in the direction of creating a new, popular type of poetry on a Futurist basis. If he had any precedent for much of his postrevolutionary poetry, that precedent was cabaret verse. Indeed, Mayakovsky's association with the stage had always shaped his verse: from his Cubo-Futurists tournées, through his work in a coffee house during the Revolution, to his later public poetry readings in Russia and in the West.. In his postrevolutionary poetry, the need to interact with the audience was raised to a theoretical principle; the immediacy and the intimacy of cabaret verse were broadened to enable the same sort of interaction with the whole of Russian society.

Like cabaret verse, Mayakovsky's new poetry presumed a homogeneous audience that could respond to the hints, names, and facts that made

up Soviet daily life. As in cabaret verse, the ultimate purpose of his poems was moralistic: either satirical or laudatory. Mayakovsky's poetry repeated anecdotes, gave accounts of personal experiences, and spoke of current events; in all of these situations the poet no longer appeared as a lyric hero, but as a public figure whose personal life and private experience provided material for social commentary. Finally, the quality of Mayakovsky's verse was reminiscent of the cabaret stage because it required oral delivery and operated with a complex set of rhymes that were intended to surprise or to amuse through unexpected associations.

Soviet critics have pointed out the declamatory quality (*estradnost*) of Mayakovsky's poetry, but they undoubtedly have felt that an association with the cabaret would demean Mayakovsky's Communist verses.[54] Among Western critics, Mark Slonim has suggested this relationship, saying

> In Paris, the chansonniers and diseuses of Montmartre, Montparnasse, and the Latin Quarter do approximately the same thing in cabaret and little theaters, and Mexico has its show booths of topical satire: Mayakovsky's stage was Russian literature and the Communist Revolution . . .[55]

It should also be added that the audience for Mayakovsky's cabaret was the entire Soviet society and his verses commented on all aspects of the Soviet *byt*.

The resemblance between Mayakovsky's postrevolutionary poetry and cabaret verse was neither accidental nor exceptional at this stage in the development of Russian literature. Writers who attempted to make contact with the new Soviet audience often resorted to introducing elements of prerevolutionary popular literature and culture into mainstream literature. With the help of devices familiar to the new audience, they hoped to bring in the Soviet message.

The Formalist critics, who also noted this ongoing process of adapting elements from popular literature, explained it in terms intrinsic to literature. Shklovsky argued in his theory of literary evolution that when a literary system becomes invalid, it tends to be replaced by a system that enters from the periphery of literature and gradually achieves respectability in the mainstream. This process was particularly visible in the first two decades of the 1900s. For example, the Formalists observed that Blok, a lyrical poet of great emotional intensity, adapted the figure of the

lyrical hero as well as the emotional intonation of their poetry from the gypsy romance popular in the 1910s.[56] Similarly, the prose writers of the early Soviet period, moving away from modernism and in the direction of plot-oriented literature, explored the models of adventure prose that had been popular in the 1910s. So, too, the postrevolutionary Mayakovsky echoed the cabaret, the popular entertainment of the 1910s, as a precedent for his new poetry of "social commission."

Yet Mayakovsky and his Lef associates did not intend to create a cabaret of the Revolution. They wanted the avant-garde to be recognized as a lasting, definitive literary mainstream. Much of Mayakovsky's political poetry, which was written for Soviet daily newspapers, may have had its roots in popular cabaret tradition, but at the same time, his constant emphasis on technique, on craft, on the verbal texture of poetry reflected his concern to find the perfect literary form for the political message.

Mayakovsky's transformation of Futurism into poetry of "social commission" followed the general path of the new international wave of constructivist art, which introduced utilitarianism, or rather functionality, as an esthetic category. The new art centered esthetic value not on the inner experience of the artist but on the perfection of artistic technique, which was demonstrated in the solution to a given artistic problem. Such art required that the form neither dominate nor complement the message, but become an intrinsic, inseparable part of that message. The poems Mayakovsky wrote in the 1920s paralleled the avant-garde experimentation in film, theater, and the fine arts, all of them united by the general framework of the constructivist theory of industrial arts. Within this framework, the most striking change in Mayakovsky's poetry was his final abandonment of lyric verse, which had dominated his prerevolutionary poetry.[57] Mayakovsky abandoned such poetry because he agreed with other left artists that an art that was to promote the modern, technological culture had to dispose of the individualistic, contemplative, lyrical point of view. Instead, he declared his willingness to serve the current needs of society by finding the most adequate form for expressing matters of common concern.

This change to poetry as a fulfillment of "social commission" did not occur immediately. The poetry Mayakovsky printed in *Lef*, all of which was written in 1923 and 1924, reflects the crucial stage in his poetic development, the stage in which he ended writing lyric poetry, briefly attempted to strengthen the dwindling cultural importance of poetry by

assigning to the poet the role of renovator of the language and modernizer of esthetic consciousness, and finally turned to the emphasis on socio-political content, to focusing on the best ways to convey the message, in the poetry of "social commission."

In *Lef* Mayakovsky published the following poetry: the lyric *poema* "About That" ("Pro eto," 1923); the poems "First of May" ("1-oe maya," 1923), which appeared as a part of *Lef's* May Day "laboratory experiment"; "To the Workers of Kursk" ("Rabochim Kurska," 1924), "Aleksandr Sergeevich—Allow Me to Introduce Myself," known also as "For the Jubilee" ("Aleksandr Sergeevich—razreshite predstavitsya," or "Yubileinoe," 1924), and finally the first part of the *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin" (1924).

The publication of "About That" in *Lef* in 1923 marked the end of Mayakovsky's period of lyric-epic poems in which the poet appeared as a tragic hero. In this poem Mayakovsky explored the love theme, the same theme he had earlier presented in "A Cloud in Pants" ("Oblako v shtanakh," 1914/1915), "The Backbone Flute" ("Fleita-pozvonochnik," 1915), "Man" ("Chelovek," 1916/1917), and "I Love You" ("Lyublyu," 1922). It is no wonder that because the subject matter of the poem was the tormenting love affair of the poet, the leftist critics regarded "About That" as a step backward from the program of activizing art to which Mayakovsky had committed himself earlier in *Art of the Commune.*[58] Conversely, the influential, and more conservative, representatives of the Soviet cultural establishment, Voronsky and Lunacharsky, strongly praised "About That" for its sincere and forceful individuality, which was so embarrassing to the Lef group.[59] *Lef* tried to fit the *poema* in the context of the Lef program by introducing "About That" as an exercise in metric polyphony that befitted the technological orientation of the Lef group.[60] Mayakovsky, in turn, in his own comments on "About That," tended to stress the social context of the poem, saying that "the crucial thing in the poem is *byt.* And by that I mean a way of life that had not changed at all and that is our greatest enemy, turning us into philistines."[61] Later in 1928, in line with his work in *New Lef,* Mayakovsky began to interpret his love poem in the light of "literature of fact," explaining that he had written "About That" "about our way of life in general, but based on personal materials."[62] In effect, the subsequent standard interpretation of "About That" apologetically regards the love tragedy of Mayakovsky, the Soviet poet, as a result of the frustrations of the NEP period that were caused by the clash of old and new value systems. The official biographer of Mayakovsky,

Viktor Pertsov, even suggests that "Pro eto" should be regarded in the context of the postrevolutionary newspaper debates about private life in the revolutionary society.

Admittedly, few of Mayakovsky's readers would agree that the eternal theme of poet versus *byt* gained by being explored as a sociopolitical issue.[63] Yet the Lef insistence on the recognition of the "wide social context" of "About That" introduced the idea that the poem would be officially interpreted as a fragment of a social panorama of the NEP period rather than as another confession of the prevolutionary Mayakovsky, the tragic hero of his own poetry.

The two Mayakovsky poems that followed "About That," "To the Workers of Kursk" and "For the Jubilee," further elevated the significance of subject matter in poetry. Both poems used current events as starting points for the propagation of avant-garde art. In both poems, *byt* still encompasses mainly the artistic predicaments. the ongoing struggle, between the conservatives and the innovators. The production of the first iron ore in the mines of Kursk and the official celebration of the 125th anniversary of Pushkin's birth in 1924 each gave Mayakovsky an occasion to speculate on the nature of poetry and on the need for the formally innovative, life-shaping art proposed by the Lef group.

In the poem "To the Workers of Kursk" Mayakovsky glorifies the achievement of proletarian labor to create a modern background against which the concept of left art could be presented most convincingly. In the poem, Mayakovsky argues that the official government program of industrialization must be complemented by the modernization of literary forms in such a way that art will meet the needs of the industrial world and of the new industrial man. The poem, dedicated—as many of his poems were—to Lilya Brik, identifies the goals of the Lef program with the goals of industrialization as they are represented by the achievement of Kursk:

Лучше всяких Лефов
на смерть ранив
русского
ленивый вкус
музыкой
в миллион под'емных кранов
цокает,
защелкивает Курск.[64]

Yet the ultimate purpose of the poem is polemical. The triumph of modern industry is contrasted with the current conservatism of the cultural administration, which sponsors the rediscovery of the classics instead of helping in the creation of modern culture. More directly, Mayakovsky disputes Lunacharsky's slogan "Back to Ostrovsky!," a slogan that inaugurated a conservative wave in the cultural administration. Mayakovsky argues that traditional art is inappropriate for the new workers' audience:

Вас
не будут звать:—
"железо бросьте,
выверните,
на спину
глаза,
возвращайтесь
вспять
к слоновой кости
к мамонту
к Островскому
назад."[65]

In his next poem, "For the Jubilee," Mayakovsky responded to the widely celebrated 125th anniversary of Pushkin's birth, one of the many public celebrations sponsored by the cultural administration to acquaint the proletarian audience with the Russian cultural heritage. For writers and literary theorists, the issue of Pushkin's heritage in modern poetry represented one of the most debated subjects in the early 1920s. Various groups seeking a place for themselves in Soviet literature attempted to interpret Pushkin within their own artistic framework and thus show their kinship with the great poet. In particular, the Imaginists claimed to be the bearers of the Pushkin tradition and blamed Mayakovsky for polluting poetry with "Pisarov-like publicistics" that, they believed, had ruined the poetic line established by Pushkin.[66] Of course the original Futurists had been avowed enemies of Pushkin since the 1911 declaration in which they proposed throwing Pushkin "off the ship of modernity." By 1924, however, the increasingly conservative tendency in cultural politics had forced the Futurists to take a more balanced stand concerning the place of prerevolutionary tradition and the significance of Pushkin for Soviet poetry. Consequently, in "For the Jubilee," Mayakovsky responded to the current debate by showing his true emotional and formal affinity with Pushkin.

The poem is a monologue, presented as a fragment of a conversation during a walk on Tversky Boulevard that Mayakovsky, the poet, takes with the monument of Pushkin. In the text, Mayakovsky surprises the reader with his elegiac quality. Instead of using either a laudatory tone or clever irony in his comments on Pushkin, Mayakovsky bemoans the end of his own love affair and the end of poetry in the new Soviet state. He makes clear that he is turning to Pushkin because the tonality of Pushkin's poetry allows him to sublimate his own suffering, caused by the irrevocable end of a love affair:

Дайте руку!
Вот грудная клетка.
Слушайте
уже не стук,
а стон,
тревожусь я о нем
в щенка смиренном львенке.[67]

The last line hints that the suffering may result not only from the emotional crisis, but also from the need to sublimate his individuality, to dispose of his lyric identity in the service of the Lef program. The reference in the poem to *shchenok* reminds one of the fact that in real life Mayakovsky applied this name to himself, signing his letters to Lilya Brik with *Shchen* (Puppy), which was also the name of his dog. *Lvyonok*, on the other hand, is a dimunitive of *lev* (lion) and related to *lef*, used as a designation for the individual members of the Left Front of the Arts. Despite his current theoretical commitments to the Lef program, Mayakovsky admits that he cannot rid his poetry of the lyrical impulse:

Нами
лирика
в штыки
неоднократно атакована,
ищем речи
точной
и нагой.
Но поэзия
пресволочнейшая штуковина:
сушествует
и ни в зуб ногой.

Mayakovsky finds an affinity with Pushkin because of his own much-criticized preoccupation with the love theme, a preoccupation that has clashed with his postrevolutionary view of the poet's role. He realizes that Pushkin's verse helps him to transcend his own private heartbreak:

Может
я
один
действительно жалею,
что сегодня
нету вас в живых.

Ignoring his earlier youthful attacks on Pushkin, Mayakovsky declares that after his own death he would like to find a place in Russian literature next to Pushkin. In the alphabetically ordered literary gallery, between the letters M and P, between himself and Pushkin, Mayakovsky hopes to find only the nineteenth-century civic poet Nekrasov, and not the pathetic Nadson, a nineteenth-century romantic-epigone poet whose mass popularity extended into the early Soviet period. Pushkin becomes especially dear to Mayakovsky in view of the loneliness that Mayakovsky is experiencing as a Soviet poet. For the poetry of his contemporaries Mayakovsky has nothing but condemnation. He finds the proletarian poets boring:

От зевоты
скулы
разворачивает аж!
Дорогойченко,
Герасимов,
Кириллов,
Родов—
Какой
однаробразный пейзаж!

Along with the proletarian poets, he singles out Esenin, the most popular lyrical poet of the early Soviet period, as a "balalaika player" (*balalaechnik*). Only "Aseev Kolka" is spared from general condemnation, on the basis of his poetic affinity with Mayakovsky: *Etot mozhet./Khvatka u nego/moya.*

Having annihilated the poetic talents of his contemporaries, Mayakovsky abruptly refers to the Lef group in a context that is by no means flattering, as he hints at the pragmatic reasons for his participation in *Lef:*

Но ведь надо
заработать сколько!
Маленькая,
но семья.
Были-б живы—
стали бы
по Лефу соредактор.
Я бы
и агитки
вам доверить мог.

In the finale of the poem, Mayakovsky changes to a collective point of view that contrasts with the lyrical loneliness of the first part of his monologue. He returns to the framework of the Lef group, as he insists on the need for the artistic revolution. At the same time, he seems still unable to disconnect the general concept of poetry from the lyrics of Pushkin. Mayakovsky's final note on the future of Soviet poetry is rather gloomy, but it concurs, somewhat ironically, with the Lef thesis about the eventual disappearance of the arts:

Хорошо у нас
в стране Советов.
Можно жить,
работать можно дружно,
только вот
поэтов,
к сожаленью, нету,
впрочем
может
это и не нужно.

"For the Jubilee," like the other poems Mayakovsky published in the years 1923-1924 in *Lef*, shows Mayakovsky's poetic identity in transition. In the immediate postrevolutionary period, Mayakovsky had briefly tried to combine the role of poet as lyric hero and poet as agitator, but the "revolution of form" propagated by the Lef group and celebrated in "To the Workers of Kursk" required him to abandon the lyrical perspective. Yet the role of propagator of the artistic revolution that Mayakovsky assumed in *Lef* became outdated even before the discontinuation of the journal in 1925. Mayakovsky came to feel that he had to make a direct transition to the Communist revolution, to the "revolution of content," as the Futurists had called it in *Art of the Commune*. Now he, together

with other Lef members, realized that the Communist revolution could no longer be used as an excuse for the artistic revolution, as it had in the initial years of the Soviet state, but required a direct and unconditional political commitment.

The declaration of Mayakovsky's new identity as Communist poet was his *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin," written following Lenin's death and published in *Lef* in 1924. Aside from the personal affinity Mayakovsky felt for Lenin, the subject matter of the poem, if properly presented, could gain the Futurists an extension of their poetic license into the Communist period. That *Lef* used the figure of Lenin to legitimize its artistic orientation had already become evident when Mayakovsky, in the name of the Lef group, had induced the Formalists to write a study of Lenin's language. That collection, published in *Lef* in 1924, appeared in a belated effort to give the Formalists Soviet respectability in view of the impending debate on Formalism that was to take place in the journal *Press and Revolution* in the same year. Mayakovsky was apparently seeking the same legitimization a few months later when he published the *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin."

As usual, Brik's assistance was important in the preparation of the poem. Earlier, while Mayakovsky had been writing "For the Jubilee," Brik had read him Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin;* now Brik subjected Mayakovsky to a program of political education. In a book based on the recollections of Lilya Brik, Ann and Samuel Charters write:

> Before Mayakovsky began the long poem, Brik gave him a crash course on Lenin, and made him read selections from Lenin's speeches and passages from Marx. Brik picked out what he considered particularly important texts and kept the books on his desk for Mayakovsky. Nothing was allowed to interfere with Brik's conversations with Mayakovsky. During the times that Mayakovsky read passages of the new poem aloud to the Briks, the phone was switched off, the door locked and Annushka [the maid] told not to let anyone interrupt.[68]

There was little doubt that the turn to subject matter of such gravity would mean that for the first time the formal side of the poem would be entirely subjugated to the message. The transition to purely political subject matter did not come easily for Mayakovsky. His close friend Aseev wrote in his memoirs:

> . . . until then I had not yet seen Vladimir Vladimirovich gloomy and

> sullen to such a degree. It seemed that even his face had darkened. Although he usually was lively and reacted quickly to all impressions, during those days he almost did not talk. It seemed as if he had gathered himself into one lump of muscles, into one bunch of nerves . . .[69]

There is no doubt that for the first time correctness of tone and authenticity of ideology weighed heavily on Mayakovsky's fate as a Soviet poet. The role of newspaper poet in the service of the Communist cause that Mayakovsky now chose to accept required that modernist poetics be completely committed to the new political content.

As the Charters have pointed out, the *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin" was an unconditional declaration of loyalty to the Party. In place of the dedications to Lilya that had begun Mayakovsky's earlier poems, this poem carried a dedication to the Communist Party. Yet if Mayakovsky's political loyalty was clear, the nature of the new poetry of content he was planning to write was less so. Mayakovsky himself foresaw the attacks of the critics, which soon came:

Знаю,—
лирик
скривится горько,
критик
ринется
хлыстиком выстегать,
а где-ж душа? . . .
да это-ж—риторика;
поэзия где-ж?—
Одна публицистика! . . .[70]

In his autobiography Mayakovsky commented: "I was very afraid of this *poema;* it was so easy to lower oneself to a simple political narrative."[71] During a discussion with the readers in which he was attacked for writing "a political textbook in verse" (*politgramota v stikhakh*), Mayakovsky tried to explain: ". . . while writing, I was all the time concerned about not falling into simple didacticism. Poetry is poetry. I wrote this *poema* while remaining a poet. It was very difficult, comrades . . ."[72] In general, the *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin" met with a very hesitant reception. The difficulty Mayakovsky had in making the transition to the proletarian line suggests that there was indeed some poignant truth behind his seemingly melodramatic claim that he was "stepping on the throat of his own

song." Recently a Soviet critic, V. Rogovin, noted that Mayakovsky's contemporaries observed a similar difficulty in other writers:

> A conscious recreation of Communist ideology in an artistic work . . . represented a most difficult task, "often connected with a deep, occasionally mortal, crisis" in a writer. Accordingly, one believed, for example, that Mayakovsky's turn to the proletarian line "resulted in the severest rationalist failure" because "while proceeding logically, he left behind his real artistic basis."[73]

Indeed, Mayakovsky's reaction to his official assumption of the new role as civic poet was ambivalent. He saw that although he continued to insist on the primacy of craft in poetry, he was being increasingly judged on the basis of content. In 1924, a few days after the first public reading of his Lenin poem in the Moscow Press Club, he left for abroad to continue his compulsive program of travel that was stopped, forcibly, just before his death. The compulsiveness of his travels, travels during which he often wrote about his restlessness and confusion, may indicate a certain attempt to escape his official identity, to lose himself through a change of setting.

In 1926, a year after the discontinuation of *Lef*, Mayakovsky, who had consistently propagated the notion of art as *proizvodstvo*, finally formulated his ideas about the relationship of poetic form and content in a witty, popular essay, "How Are Verses Made?" ("Kak delat stikhi?"), which was published in the journal *New World* (*Novyi mir*). This essay offers a summary of Mayakovsky's ideas on the nature and form of the arts. Besides its significance for Mayakovsky's development and the development of Lef esthetics, "How Are Verses Made?" should also be seen as the swan song of Futurism because it was the last Futurist theoretical statement on poetry before the Lef group turned its attention to prose with the new program of "literature of fact." Despite its importance for the Futurist postrevolutionary poetics, this essay has been overshadowed by biographical associations, because a section of it deals with Mayakovsky's reaction to Esenin's suicide and so provides an ironic commentary on Mayakovsky's own death. Mayakovsky's contemporaries, on the other hand, clearly saw the essay as a theoretical statement originating from the Lef group. The editors of *New World*, where "How Are Verses Made?" first appeared, introduced it with the following commentary:

> The editors of *New World* do not share some of the opinions and judgments expressed by Comrade Mayakovsky. But in recognition of the great interest in this article, the editors have given it a place on the pages of *New World*, especially because the literary group in whose name Comrade Mayakovsky speaks currently has no publishing organ of its own.[74]

Although in the essay Mayakovsky avoided speaking directly in the name of the Lef group, he did acknowledge that his statements reflected the Lef notion of art:

> We, the "lefs," have never said that we are the sole keepers of the secrets of poetic art. But we are the only ones who want to reveal these secrets, the only ones who do not in a speculative fashion want to surround art with religious worship. My essay is the weak attempt of an individual who only applies the theoretical studies done by my comrades, the verbal workers.[75]

The title "How Are Verses Made?" sought to connect Mayakovsky's position to the Formalist view of literature, for it resembled the titles of the analytic studies published by Shklovsky and Eikhenbaum. At the same time, Mayakovsky's title was also characteristic of the atmosphere of the middle 1920s, which was marked by the development of mass culture with NEP overtones. At the time, the opening of private publishing houses facilitated a wave of "How to . . ." manuals that gave advice on topics ranging from table manners to literary techniques. Among the latter was a small book by G. A. Shengeli, *How to Write Articles, Poems, and Shorts Stories* (*Kak pisat stati, stikhi i rasskazy,* 1926), that contained popular descriptions of standard literary devices. Mayakovsky saw this book as a manifestation of the literary attitude he had been fighting from the earliest Futurist days. He believed that Shengeli's book encouraged the continued use of antiquated, rigid poetic systems that were inappropriate for the contemporary experience and exposed the Soviet audience to an unacceptable, static vision of art. In an attempt to liberate poetry from such fetters of prescribed rhymes and rhythms, Mayakovsky set out to describe his own poetic workshop and to summarize his own attitudes toward poetry.

"How Are Verses Made?" was a manifesto that brought together the concept of "industrial arts," the formally innovative art of the Revolution introduced in 1919 in the newspaper *Art of the Commune,* with the

notion of poetry as a product of "social commission" that had been developed by the Lef group in the middle 1920s. Mayakovsky's essay called for art that would perfectly shape the themes of social importance by the use of the avant-garde form: the idea of "social commission" resolved the problem of acceptable content, whereas the formal side of poetry was defined by the concept of "industrial arts."

In the essay "How Are Verses Made?" Mayakovsky set forth his beliefs about poetry by describing the process of writing the poem "To Sergei Esenin" ("Sergeyu Yeseninu"), which he wrote in response to Esenin's suicide. There is little doubt that Esenin's death had touched Mayakovsky personally. He competed with Esenin for popularity in the Soviet period and made fun of the emotional tonality of Esenin's poetry. Now, in his role of poet as a public spokesman, Mayakovsky decided to respond to the death in a form that would diffuse the impact of Esenin's tragedy on Esenin's innumerable admirers. The suicide of Esenin culminated the tormented existence of a lyrical poet who, while dying, still wrote a last poem with his own blood. Esenin's death represented the ultimate act in a romantic myth, a myth that certainly did not fit the constructive Soviet framework. Mayakovsky's response to this myth was a poem that had the "up to the minute" (*siyuminutnaya*) validity considered essential for the new audience-oriented art: Mayakovsky's poem appeared as his contribution to the current official campaign against the atmosphere of "despondency" (*upadochnichestvo*) among proletarian youth following the suicide of their beloved poet. Mayakovsky's poem was unabashedly tendentious; he intended to remake an event, to shape it according to the needs of his society.

For Mayakovsky the creation of the poem in the service of a higher cause represented the fulfillment of "social command." His essay "How Are Verses Made?" was a theoretical explanation of this change of voice from the lyrical to the oratorical or the cabaretistic that began to appear in Mayakovsky's own poetry a few years earlier. In setting out to destroy the romantic myth surrounding Esenin through an ironic play with romantic stereotypes, Mayakovsky rejected his own earlier persona as lyrical hero. He now acknowledged that the new poet needed to suppress private torments because they were unfit for the poetry of the new era. The poem written in fulfillment of the "social commission" abandoned the private viewpoint and took its general theme from society; its purpose was to influence the formation of new social values.

At the same time, while writing poetry of "social commission," Mayakovsky insisted on the supreme importance of poetic technique. He believed that once the poet responded to the subject matter generated by society and determined the socially desired impact of his poem, the subsequent process of creating the poem consisted only of the sensitive application of the best poetic skills. The poem "To Sergei Esenin" was not a simple versification of a socially significant topic. In fact, in writing the poem, aside from providing the initial impulse, Esenin's death had little importance until the final stage of writing in which the poet sought the correct intonation, an appropriate emotional coloring for the poem.

Mayakovsky diminished the importance of subject matter by designing the rhythmic structure of the poem as the main formative force appearing prior to the creation of the text. For Mayakovsky, it was the rhythm that determined the choice of verbal matter. Then, after the appearance of the rhythmic pattern, the next stage of writing a poem involved work on rhymes. The key words that would set the intonation of the poem were placed at the ends of the lines and were reinforced by the rhymes repeating the same consonantal pattern. What remained was further work on modifying the intonation of the poem through a sensitive selection of words for their originality and exactness.

For Mayakovsky the effectiveness of the poem was determined by the freshness in handling the material, by the poet's ability to show the familiar in a new light, thus changing the customary, automatized dimensions of the subject matter. In the context of his Esenin poem, Mayakosky maintained that because Esenin's suicide had acquired the stylized quality of what the Formalists called a "literary fact" (*literaturnyi fakt*), poetry offered the only effective instrument that could demythologize the figure of Esenin.

Mayakovsky also used his essay "How Are Verses Made?" to plead for a professional approach to poetry, as opposed to the early Soviet vogue of supporting untrained proletarian talents. His plea reflected the belief of the Lef group that the poet was a professional specialist in the creation of more effective forms of communication. Mayakovsky insisted that the professionalism reflected in the adherence to the notion of poetry as *proizvodstvo* required not merely occasional spurts of creativity, but systematic daily work in which the poet exercised his skills. The process of learning to be a poet required not just an exposure to definitive, completed systems, but also the study of methods of poetic work and work

habits that would enable the poet to create still newer methods. In Mayakovsky's opinion, innovation and novelty of material and device were obligatory for all poetry.

As a corrollary to this view of poetry as a professional activity, Mayakovsky reiterated the idea—first expressed in *Art of the Commune*—that the state should legitimize the role of the avant-garde artist as a creator of new forms by providing him with appropriate material support. Only such official recognition of the functional nature of artistic work could assure the full realization of the idea of "social commission."

Although Mayakovsky claimed that the concept of "social commission," with its commitment to content, destroyed the charge that avant-garde experimentation was not political, in reality he still saw the political content of art as merely an impulse for a dynamic search for new, radically fresh means of expression. By assigning major importance to technique and relegating the subject matter of the poem to the position of serving merely as an initial impulse, Mayakovsky remained faithful to the concept of poetry as craft that had been advanced in *Lef*.

In 1926, as in the earlier Futurism, the politicization of art still meant that the artist must struggle against the influence of the bourgeois culture, an influence that Mayakovsky and his group saw manifested in the adherence to outdated artistic canons. Although Mayakovsky intended to draw the themes of his new poetry from current sociopolitical and cultural concerns, he also continued to insist that the use of poetry must be restricted to topics that would allow the poetic form to become a functional, intrinsic, and irreplaceable part of the message. Political objectives notwithstanding, Mayakovsky continued to believe that, in the final analysis, it was art and not politics that was the essence of the new poetry.

Although the idea of "social commission" solved the problem of the subject matter for the avant-garde, it did not actually lessen the original Futurist insistence that technical competence was the essence of poetry. No wonder that the critics of the avant-garde were quick to point out that the Futurist politicizing of art was only superficial. Aside from a general commitment to Soviet political objectives, the Futurist stance involved no value judgment about the ideas presented in the poetry. The only criterion was that the poem be effective in fulfilling a given political objective. A propaganda poem remained a "thing well made," as it had been in the earlier Lef stage, and in the collectivist spirit of the time, the poet assumed no responsibility for the ethical aspect of the ideas he presented.

Admittedly Mayakovsky refused to acknowledge the danger that the immediacy of the subject matter he had taken from current Soviet life would so strongly color the reception of his verses that in the eyes of his audience the subject matter would gain primacy over formal issues. Although Mayakovsky remained committed to the ideas of the avant-garde until his death in 1930, he found it increasingly difficult to convince his audience that in the new poetry of "social commission" propaganda was first and foremost an art. He had hoped to teach the poetic recipient to acknowledge the medium behind the message, to show that good poetry does not allow the message to exist outside of the medium. Yet the subsequent cultural developments gave an unquestionable primacy to subject matter and colored the critical perception of Mayakovsky's postrevolutionary verses. The innovative notion of an avant-garde art directed toward activating the audience through the artistic form was shelved, together with many other utopian dreams that had been evoked by the Revolution.

Not only the cultural politicians and the proletarian critics, but in fact most of Mayakovsky's contemporaries were unprepared to accept the idea of limiting the role of poetry to the development of the most efficient forms that could do justice to the Communist content. Osip Mandelshtam, a poet admittedly antithetical to Mayakovsky, whose highly philosophical poetry was steeped in Hellenistic culture, saw absolutely no possibility of renovating poetry along the path of mass appeal that was pursued by Mayakovsky. He observed:

> Mayakovsky attempts to solve a basic and crucial problem of "poetry for all and not only for the select few." The extensive broadening of the base under poetry occurs, understandably, at the expense of intensity, depth, and poetic culture. While developing his "poetry for all," Mayakovsky, who is excellently informed about the richness and complexity of international poetry, has had to get rid of all that which is incomprehensible, all that which expects from the reader the simplest preparation . . . Poetry, freed from all culture, will altogether cease to be poetry.[76]

Like Mandelshtam, the Formalists, who had earlier been connected with the Futurists, saw no particular promise in the new experiments. In 1924, Tynyanov in his essay "The Interval" made a few disapproving comments about Mayakovsky's poetry, which showed the influence of Lef esthetics. Tynyanov noted that the new prominence given to theme,

which now meant a socially relevant topic, had impoverished Mayakovsky's verse. Tynyanov maintained that the original complexity of Mayakovsky's poetry, which had been created by the tension between the tragic and the comic, had been replaced by the strict division of poetry into separate genres: the tragic, or the high element, found expression in the ode, whereas the comic was confined to satirical verse. To leave no doubt about his reaction to this development, Tynyanov decried the fact that Mayakovsky's previously complex poetry had declined into primitive satire à la Demyan Bedny or into occasional verses (*shinelnye stikhi*) that paid homage to those in power. Tynyanov saw this change toward topical verse as a temporary groping for a new poetic code to reenvigorate Futurism; he refused to acknowledge it as a manifestation of an existing literary trend.[77]

If the political developments in the 1920s had not stifled Soviet cultural life, the Formalists might perhaps have had time to find Mayakovsky's work more congenial. The Formalist Roman Jakobson, writing from abroad in reaction to Mayakovsky's death in 1930, showed a new, positive reaction toward Mayakovsky's postrevolutionary poetics. He said:

> Mayakovsky had completed the path of the elegiac *poema* in 1923. His newspaper verses were a poetic preparation, exercises in the adaptation of new material, in the development of the rarely tried genres. To my skeptical remarks about this poetry, Mayakovsky answered: "Eventually you will also understand those." And when the plays *The Bedbug* (*Klop*) and *The Bathhouse* (*Banya*) appeared, it became clear that Mayakovsky's poetry of the last years was a massive laboratory of work on word and theme. It became clear how masterfully he could use this work in his first efforts in the area of theatrical prose, and what unlimited possibilities of development were contained in it.[78]

One must note that Jakobson was still quite reluctant to praise Mayakovsky's later works too highly. Although he accepted the idea of poetry as a "verbal laboratory" proposed by the Soviet Futurists, he did not recognize the later stage of poetry as the fulfillment of "social commission." After all, not only the Formalists, but in fact most of Mayakovsky's literary contemporaries, had found his later poetry blatantly topical and unimaginative. Yet from Mayakovsky's point of view, although the *poema* "Vladimir Ilich Lenin" officially confirmed the public role he had begun to assume since the revolution, his commitment to political content was never to be equated with the abandonment of his belief that the poet must be a craftsman rather than an ideologist.

4. ASEEV

Mayakovsky was not the only one among the Lef poets to face the dilemma of the lyric poet trying to acquire the new poetic identity advocated by the Lef group. Nikolai Aseev, Mayakovsky's friend and one of the major contributors to *Lef*, experienced this dilemma even more acutely than Mayakovsky. Aseev, who before the Revolution belonged to the conservative Futurist group "Centrifuge," had always been more a lyrical than an oratorical poet. Despite his friendship with Mayakovsky, he felt more attracted to the poetics of Khlebnikov than to Mayakovsky's. Aseev's poems were characterized by a complex system of sound repetitions, the musical quality of their rhythm, an emotional intensity bordering on pathos, and a predilection for such lyrical topics as nature, the heart, and the soul.

During the Lef period, Aseev attempted to follow the general tendency away from lyric poetry toward experimentation in the "laboratory of forms." At the time, his poetry shared common features with that of Mayakovsky and other Lef poets. Like the poetry of the other Lef Futurists, the poems Aseev published in Lef were marked by

—freedom of rhythmic structure;
—a deliberately modern vocabulary that included new technical and political terms as well as occasional neologisms;
—condensation of syntax and frequent use of inversions;
—division into lines that singled out words and phrases central to the message of the poem;
—use of slogan-like formulations;
—tendency toward oratorical tone.[79]

Although Aseev subscribed to the program of poetic innovation propagated by *Lef*, like other poets he found it difficult to solve the problem of the subject matter of the new poetry. In *Lef*, he began with "laboratory exercises" and ended by returning to lyrical poetry. He published these five shorter poems and two longer works, a *poema* "A Lyrical Digression" ("Liricheskoe otstuplenie") and a ballad "The Black Prince" ("Chernyi prints"). The shorter poems, written as "laboratory exercises," focused mainly on sound structures. Their theme—the flight into utopia—is reminiscent of the Cosmist visions presented by the Proletkult poets. The longer poems are Aseev's contributions to the ongoing efforts to create monumental Soviet art, to develop long forms for both prose and

poetry. His ballad "The Black Prince" is a formal experiment: it offers an avant-garde version of a genre that was enjoying great popularity in the early 1920s. The *poema* "A Lyrical Digression," on the other hand, not only probes the formal aspects of the epic genre but also addresses itself to the problem of the content of the new art. In "A Lyrical Digression" Aseev questions both the nature of the new poetry as propagated by the Lef group and the nature of the new Soviet life as formed by the experience of NEP. His poem makes a statement on the basic importance of individual experience and private perspective in art.

Characteristic of Aseev's initial attempts to write within the laboratory framework of Lef is his poem "Across the World—A Step" ("Cherez mir —shag"), which opened the poetry section in the first number of *Lef*. Brik and Mayakovsky, as editors of *Lef*, introduced Aseev's poem as "an attempt at a verbal flight into the future" (*opyt slovesnogo leta v budushchee*).[80] Indeed, the central image is that of the preparation and take-off for a flight into space. The image of the flight is also reflected in the rhythmic structure of the poem. The first part of the poem begins with short, abruptly scanned lines, which Tynyanov called "word lumps" (*slovesnye sgustki*).[81] The brachycolon verse, consisting of single-word lines and for this reason favored by the word-oriented Futurists, is unified by elaborate sound relationships that call attention to the texture of the poem:

Грузно,
Вдаздробь
Крой
Кровельный строй,
Рой
Грохота—
Стой![82]

In the second part of the poem the rhythm becomes more flowing, as the poet crystallizes the cosmic vision of the radiant future. The flight to utopia turns out to be not a political metaphor, but a metaphor for an esthetic experience of the avant-garde. In Aseev's poem, concrete characters whose names are taken from real life—Lilya (Brik), Osya (Brik), and Oksana (Aseev's wife)—together with the narrator and unnamed others, are reunited in space with Velemir (Khlebnikov), who has preceded them on a flight into the future. The reunion culminates in a grandiose finale that encompasses all of mankind:

Люди вольтовой светят дугой,
Люди радугой вспенились в мир,
Небо стало сиять людьми,
Прежде—мышью по жизни шурша—
Нынче— людской через мир шаг.

"Across the World—A Step" was followed by Aseev's poem "Intervention of Centuries" ("Interventsiya vekov"), which culminated in the same vision of the radiant avant-garde future, but did so with a subdued lyrical tonality reminiscent of Aseev's earlier writings. The theme of this poem is the tension between the officially sponsored rediscovery of prerevolutionary cultural traditions and the avant-garde vision of the new art. The poet-narrator, forced to fit his art into unsuitable patterns, finds himself in a creative impasse from which he finally breaks free:

Меня уложили на ложе Прокрустово
В каком то безвыходном сонном краю:
Я смирно лежал и тихонько похрустывал
И—больше не в силах—встаю и пою![83]

Aseev's poem then develops into a communal celebration of spring, the image of which stands for both the artistic and the social rebirth. The avant-garde collective appears as the bearer of spring, as the artists resist the revival of antiquated artistic traditions:

И ветер весны поднимаем мы заново.
И жить нам светло и бороться легко,
И мы не преклоним зрачка партизаньего
Перед интервенцией прошлых веков.

The traditional pattern of images is reinforced by the form of the poem, which is written in quatrains with the regular amphibrachic meter. Such a structure approximates the structure of a song; in fact, amphibrach is a ballad meter. The poet appears here in the first person, in the role of singing bard: *Vstayu i poyu!* At the same time, the traditional structure and pattern of images in this poem contrast with Aseev's use of the elaborate system of sound repetitions that generally characterized Lef poetry. In this way, the tension between form and content illustrates the theme of the poem: the conflict of artistic standards underlying the developing Soviet literature.

Spring-revolution and the avant-garde utopia thematically dominate

Aseev's laboratory exercises. His third poem printed in *Lef* connects these concepts by using a popular image of the early 1920s taken from H. G. Wells' science-fiction novel *The Time Machine.* In the poem, titled "The Time Machine" ("Mashina vremeni"), Aseev uses the device of the time machine as a vehicle that accelerates the progress toward utopia. As before, Aseev's poem opens with the picture of spring, which evokes the usual hopes of a new life. The movement toward the utopian future requires an abrupt departure from the familiar earth, a closing of doors on the past and on past traditions: *Khlopnet v byloe glukhaya dver!* The time machine sends the world on a flight that culminates in the apocalyptic revelation of the beauty of creative work: *Otkryvaet i chuet eto:/ Tsvetnogradnyi svobodnyi trud.* Aseev's vision ends with a return to the Soviet republic, to the future-oriented present:

Бровь рассекши о земную сферу
Воротимся к Р.С.Ф.С.Р.
Здравствуй, временем плывущая страна.
Будущему бросившая огненный канат![84]

"Laboratory" poems such as these, written in response to the technocratic ideology of the Lef group, provided an interesting study of the lexical and sound structures of poetry, but they could hardly generate enough interest to survive the period in which they were created. Their collectivist point of view and the ultimate limitations of their content assured that these poems would remain what they were intended to be—"laboratory exercises."

In contrast to these "exercises," Aseev's longer poems, "The Black Prince" (1923) and "The Lyrical Digression" (1924), which departed from the Lef-Proletkult thematic framework and allowed Aseev to develop his poetic individuality, have made more of an impact on the Soviet poetic scene. In both, Aseev explored traditional genres as he sought to create a literature of the new times in which the monumentality of form would correspond to the gravity of the new experiences.

"The Black Prince," listed in the table of contents of *Lef* as a *poema,* was subtitled "A Ballad About English Gold Drowned in 1854 at the Entrance to the Bay of Balaklava" ("Ballada ob angliiskom zolote, zatonuvshem v 1854 godu u vkhoda v bukhtu Balaklavy"). The detailed subtitle refers to a historical episode from the Crimean War and thus suggests the factual quality of the narrative. This quality is, however, entirely absent in the text. The device of suggesting a factual basis for

a highly stylized narrative creates the illusion of authenticity, whereas the artist actually refashions reality into a subjective creation, into an artifact. The same orientation is visible also in prose published in *Lef*, which is similarly positioned somewhere between the polarities of authenticity and literariness.

As a ballad, Aseev's "The Black Prince" was an avant-garde answer to the postrevolutionary revival of the ballad. This revival is usually dated from 1922, when Nikolai Tikhonov began to write his plot-oriented, revoutionary-romantic ballads extolling the heroism of the revolutionary period. In contrast to Tikhonov's popular story-telling ballads, Aseev's avant-garde ballad deemphasizes the events, using them only as a background. Tynyanov in his essay "The Interval" noted that Aseev developed a theme "outside the narrative structure" (*vne syuzheta*),[85] a technique typical of the avant-garde poetry of the 1920s, while concentrating mainly on the sound structure of the poem. The theme of the sea battle allowed Aseev to group words on the basis of their sound similarity. These groupings of related consonantal patterns reflect the military drama without referring to the action itself:

Белые бивни
бьют
ют.
В шумную пену
бушприт
врыт.
Вы говорите,
шторм—
вздор?—
Некогда длить
спор![86]

Tynyanov saw the musical quality of "The Black Prince" as its dominant feature and called the ballad "song-like" (*pesevnaya*).[87] The historical theme of the ballad, as defined in the subtitle, gives a vague continuity to the individual strophes, which alternate between nine and eleven lines. These strophes change in rhythm and tonality and create a polyphonic structure similar to that of Mayakovsky's *poema* "About That," but without that poem's tragic forcefulness.

It may be recalled that in 1923 Mayakovsky, in search of a genre definition that would fit his "About That," also called his *poema* a ballad, thus seeking poetic license for lyricism:

Не молод очень лад баллад,—
но если слова болят
и слова говорят про то что болят
молодеет и лад баллад.[88]

In the opening passage of "About That," the poet as a lyrical hero had shown himself to be imprisoned by the love theme. Mayakovsky's apology for the prominence of the theme, inappropriate in the "laboratory" context of Lef, was the subject of his long introduction to the *poema*. Whereas Mayakovsky's *romantic* ballad represented one adaptation of the traditional genre to avant-garde poetics, Aseev's *dramatic* ballad, in which the subject matter was subservient to form, was another such adaptation, one that fit the poetic precepts of the Lef group more closely.

Because Aseev had been attempting to conform to the precepts of the Lef group, his next *poema*, "A Lyrical Digression," published in 1924 in *Lef*, came as a surprise. The title "A Lyrical Digression" is taken from a term for a stylistic device that allows the author to avoid direct narration of a major theme by inserting personal observations indirectly connected with this theme. The title metaphorically indicates Aseev's departure from the Lef context, because Lef had banned the personal element from poetry. "A Lyrical Digression" was an effort to assert the poet's own individuality against the collectivist code of the group. Ironically, it was in opposition to, rather than in reflection of, Lef theories that Aseev wrote this poem, which he later came to consider his best.

Critics have found in "A Lyrical Digression" a strong resemblance to Mayakovsky's "About That." This resemblance is visible in the dual leitmotifs of love and *byt*, which are presented against the background of NEP changes and the restraints of Soviet cultural politics. Yet in its social dimension, the overall tonality of "A Lyrical Digression" is more tragic in its mood of hopeless resignation than the tonality of "About That."

In a deliberate echo of the Romantic tradition, Aseev subtitled his poem "a diary in verse" (*dnevnik v stikhakh*) and opened it with an epigraph from Heine that set the tone for the emotional intensity and bittersweet resignation that permeate the poem:

Denk nicht, daß ich mich erschieße
Wie schlimm auch die Sachen stehn:
Das alles meine Süße
Ist mir schon einmal geschehn.

Aseev's *poema* develops the themes of the difficulty of private love, the ineffectiveness of a program aimed at changing the world through poetry, and the general decline of ideological enthusiasm. The strophe that subsequently provoked most criticism asks:

Как я стану твоим поэтом
Коммунизма племя,
Если крашено
рыжим цветом,
А не красным —
время!?[89]

The answer to the current disillusionment appears in the return of the suppressed and betrayed "soul" (*dusha*), which alone assures the meaning of life and poetry:

В ряд с тобою был так благороден
Так прозрачен и виден на свет
Даже серый, тупой оборотень,
Изменяющий в непогодь цвет.
. . .
Ты, измятый изломанный кодак,
Так называемая—
душа . . .

Although Aseev's lyric *poema* sounded an unusual note in the context of Lef proclamations, its appearance fit the general tendency within early Soviet literature. The genre of the lyric *poema* achieved popularity at a time when the Cosmist enthusiasm of the immediate postrevolutionary period had worn off. By 1924 the poets began to return to the eternal themes of art—love, hate, suffering, heroism, tragedies of the soul—and, in general, to the exploration of human emotions and of the internal world of man.

Even the Lef Futurists, although theoretically opposed to this kind of literature, which was especially propagated by *Red Virgin Soil*, could not resist the new wave of lyricism. The major poems published in *Lef*—Mayakovsky's "About That," Pasternak's "The Lofty Ailment," and Aseev's "A Lyrical Digression"—were all dominated by a lyric persona who offered a bitter private view of the changing times. "The so-called soul" (*tak nazyvaemaya dusha*), banned in Lef's official proclamations, emerged to dominate the spirit of the new poetry.

The growing significance of the lyric element in Soviet poetry meant a crisis for the Lef program. Postrevolutionary Futurism had prided itself on its extreme sensitivity to the formal problems of poetry, but the Futurists became trapped by the narrow circle of themes they had adopted from the Proletkult poets. The utilitarian-industrial theme had lost its attractiveness already with the advent of NEP, and the exclusive focus on form advocated by the Lef group, accompanied by the repetitiveness of ideas, reduced Futurist poetry to a manneristic exercise.

The reappearance of the poet as a lyric hero in *Lef* turned out to be only a short episode in the history of Soviet Futurism. The Lef group did not acknowledge it as a new development. Instead, the official program of poetry as a "laboratory of forms" promulgated in *Lef* in the early 1920s was replaced by the new program of poetry of "social commission." The idea of "social commission," if loosely interpreted, expanded the circle of acceptable avant-garde themes, even though they now had to be based on concrete facts taken from immediate social reality. Although *New Lef* offered a new solution to the problem of the subject matter acceptable to the avant-garde, it also assured that the ban—which the Lef group had originally imposed on art expressing the lyrical individuality of its creator—would be preserved.

5. KAMENSKY AND KRUCHONYKH

In its initial issues, *Lef* also published the poetry of the original Cubo-Futurists, Kamensky and Kruchonykh, whose work in the context of the journal represented the purest stage of laboratory of forms. Kamensky and Kruchonykh remained committed to the experimentation with transrational language that had characterized their earlier poetry. Unlike Khlebnikov, who had envisaged transrational language as a step toward a universal language, Kamensky and Kruchonykh sought in their experiments mainly the rediscovery of the texture of words. Their transrational language was directed toward sound play and was not intended to have a communicative function.

The very first poem containing the elements of transrational language published in *Lef* in 1923, "The Juggler" ("Zhongler") by Kamensky, provoked controversy. Brik and Mayakovsky introduced the poem as "a play with words in all of their sound potential" (*Igra slovom vo vsei*

ego zvukalnosti).[90] In this poem, Kamensky tried to convey the process of creating poetry by describing the actions of a juggler. He interpreted the nature of art as nonobjective and focused primarily on a play with forms:

Искусство мира—карусель—
Блистайность над глиором
И словозванная бесцель,
И надо быть жонглером.
. . .
И всяк поймет, что словоцель
В играйне блеска-диска,
Искусство мира—карусель—
В зарайне золотиска.[91]

In Kamensky's poem, meaningful phrases alternate with the strophes of sound imitations, revealing the bare rhythm of the poem and the word-building process basic to Futurist poetics. The poem contains an abundance of neologisms and rhythmic nonsense patterns imitating the movements of the juggler-poet:

Згара-амба
Згара-амба
Згара-амба
Згара-амба
Амб.

The appearance of transrational poetry in *Lef* required the delineation of the limits of Lef's commitment to formal experimentation. In response to outside criticism of the first issue of *Lef,* N. Gorlov, one of the members of the Lef group, felt obliged to explain the objectives of Kamensky's transrational poem as they fit within the laboratory framework of *Lef:*

> Art is work not only of its creator, but also of its recipient . . . Because he [Sosnovsky, a critic from *Pravda*] understands art in a petty bourgeois *passive* fashion, he does not comprehend Kamensky's poem, which expresses a fully definable *active* emotion—the joy of capturing the sound, of surmounting the difficulties presented by the material, the joy well-known to every worker who conquers the material in work, to every child who conquers the material in play . . . The poet, like a juggler, throws word-sound pictures, words that like sparkling metallic disks flitter in front of your eyes:

—Bros—disk
—Dai disk . . .
In the rhythm of his verse, the poet in a masterly fashion conveys the movement of the juggler's hands and the interruptions in this movement . . . All together they [the words] express the sunny joy of a man creating word-sounds, of a man intoxicated by the flowing play of these sounds. All together they [the words] do have a definite meaning: this is a victory over material, an overcoming of the inertia of form; this is the revolutionary—because it boldly overcomes inertia—power over the word; this is the strength, dexterity, seething energy of life, pouring—child-like—into verbal play.[92]

Kamensky's second, but also last, poem published in *Lef*, "A Hymn to the 40-Year Old Youth" ("Gimn 40-letnim yunosham"), reflected the same joy in artistic creation, but the pure verbal play familiar from the first poem was supplemented by a logically developed manifesto. In his hymn, Kamensky associated his verbal exuberance and his child-like treatment of the language with the Constructivist framework:

Мы все еще
Тра-та-та-та
В сияющем расцвете
Цветем три четверти
На конструктивных небесах.[93]

In his poem, Kamensky recalls the youthful years of the Futurist movement with its attacks on the cultural establishment, and suggests a connection between the Futurist verbal experiment and the revolutionary change in Russia. Progressing to the present, the forty-year-old poet sees the same youthful enthusiasm and poetic irreverence in the movement of the current poetry into Constructivism: ***Ty vstretish vperedi takikh zhe—/ U kogo konstruktsii na glazakh.***

As in the earlier poem, Kamensky illustrates the physical joy of the creative act by reverting to *zaum:*

А наши языки поют такие бой-брацам
Жизнь за которые отдашь!
Эль-ля, эль-ле!
Бриантa ормч рамурда,
Завзы, навзы,
И ормч, и чамардашм.
Эрга, эрза, зовурда.
Ббашм и ббашм. Эгэч-ч-ч!

Although Kamensky made no attempt to politicize his transrational language, his colleague Kruchonykh found a way to write agitational *zaum*. Kruchonykh's poems, published in the first number of *Lef*, represented an attempt to fit the most extreme version of avant-garde poetics into the revolutionary content. The elements of his poetry, such as the use of a strong march rhythm, the very brief lines consisting of one to four words, the condensation of poetic images, and the extensive use of sound associations, all were characteristic of the poetry published in the early stage of *Lef*. *Zaum*, however, was practiced at the time only by Kamensky and Kruchonykh and made only episodic appearances in the journal.

Kruchonykh's first poem to be published in *Lef* was introduced by Brik and Mayakovsky as "an attempt to apply jargon phonetics to the shaping of an antireligious and political theme."[94] Titled "Freezing of the Gods" ("Morozhenitsa bogov"), Kruchonykh's poem used pure sound play, with dialect and neologisms, in the service of an antireligious message:

—Прихо-о-жане!
Кто пожертвует свои ноги на дрова?
Жир—для божиих свеч?
В воздая-я-ние
Получит высший сорт небесного маслица! . . .
Приход—глух,
На амбоне клуб,
Гимнаст комсомол—на библии скачет,
Дым чадит в мундштуках . . . . . .[95]

In addition to "Freezing of the Gods," Kruchonykh published two interesting poems, "Mourning Ruhr" ("Traurnyi Rur") and "Joyful Ruhr" ("Rur radostnyi"), which commemorated the 1923 Communist uprising in the Ruhr district in Germany. These poems offer good illustrations of verbal innovation with a political objective. Very laconic, rhythmic phrases play with the exotic sound of the word "Rur," build up verbal associations on the basis of sound similarity, and combine them into a picture of an industrial district and its oppressed inhabitants:

. . . Тревоги гудок
Горы ревут . . .
Шахты гудят . . .
В трауре Рур![96]

Kruchonykh also uses consonantal orchestration for oratorical purposes:

Ру-у-у-ур! Рупор побед! . . .
Рур!
Дортмунд!

The awaited victory of the proletariat is reflected through pure sound play:

Рур, ура!
Ура Руру!
. . .
Рур
Ура-ра-ра-ру
Ру-бка!

Recognizing the general movement of Russian literature toward a longer form, toward *fabula* and fact, the transrational poets also tried to make the necessary adjustment. Kruchonykh, in one of the last numbers of *Lef*, published a poem that marked a new direction—toward the *fabula* taken from popular literature. Kruchonykh's poem, "The Robber Vanka Kain and Sonka the Manicuress" ("Razboinik Vanka Kain i Sonka Manikyurshchitsa"), was a stylized contribution to the city folklore (*gorodskoi folklor*) of the NEP period. Based on the eighteenth-century *lubochnaya povest* about a popular hero Vanka Kain, Kruchonykh's version modernized the story by adding references to the NEP subculture.

The poem tells a story about the romance of the beautiful Sonka, alias Mercedes, the wife of a director of Saratov prison, with Vanka Kain, a robber, who for ten years has been imprisoned in Saratov. When Sonka-Mercedes comes at night to visit Vanka Kain, he tells her about his desire to escape from prison in order to join his friends and their women in a wild and carefree life. Mercedes, impressed by Vanka's story, promises to free him. Yet after spending the night with him, she refuses to let him go. Threatened by her passion, which again separates him from freedom, Vanka kills Mercedes and finally escapes *na Vo-o-olgu*, carrying her corpse.

The unrhymed narration is told in deliberately low language with cliches from *gorodskie romansy*. The poem, written in the blank verse (*belyi stikh*) characteristic of folk ballads, makes extensive use of dialectical expressions to create a timeless rowdy setting. At the same time,

the text includes intentional incongruities in the NEP touches, added to the old tale: *prekrasnaya Mercedes/. . ./ porivistee chem avto; Moya britva v khodu/ lish pri o-s-o-b-e-n-n-o-m vzmakhe—/ patent!; v tanguchem transe.*[97]

Although both Kamensky and Kruchonykh had belonged to the core of the Futurist movement prior to the Revolution, the appearance of their poetry in *Lef* in 1923 called attention to the fact that the character of the original Futurist poetics no longer fit the general development of literature. In the eyes of the critics, the attempt of the Lef group to introduce into Soviet literature purely formal experimentation with language undermined the usefulness of the avant-garde program for Soviet culture. Although the transrational poets Kamensky and Kruchonykh remained "fellow travelers" of the Lef group, they proved to be too controversial, too Bohemian, and too form-oriented, even within the laboratory framework of *Lef*.

6. PASTERNAK

Next to Mayakovsky, the most remarkable poet to appear in *Lef* was Boris Pasternak. Pasternak's participation in the activities of the Lef group represents a curious episode in Pasternak's artistic life, an episode out of tune with the rest of Pasternak's artistic biography. Pasternak was an intensely private poet, deeply versed in artistic culture and essentially lyrical in his conception of the world. Yet he associated himself for some five years with a militant, politicized group that fought for the separation of the new art and literature from the former cultural tradition and for the utilitarian restructuring of the arts.

Despite this contrast, Pasternak's affinity for the Lef group was both personal and artistic. Prior to the Revolution, Pasternak had been associated with the Futurist group "Centrifuge," where Nikolai Aseev had also been a member. In 1923, when Pasternak joined the Lef group, he found himself among old Futurist acquaintances who were seeking to legitimize nontraditional art in the new Soviet society. Like the Formalist Shklovsky, who had joined the Lef group upon his return from Berlin, Pasternak had just returned from a prolonged stay abroad during which he had considered permanent emigration. For Pasternak, his association with the Lef group of former Futurists eased his transition into the new kind of literary

life. Most of all, though, the fact that Mayakovsky was also involved in the activities of Lef drew Pasternak into the group.

The relationship of Pasternak and Mayakovsky, the two greatest and yet the two most antithetical modern Russian poets, was a very intense and complex one on both the personal and theoretical levels. In his autobiography, *Safe Conduct* (*Okhrannaya gramota*, 1931), Pasternak wrote about the time of his association with the prerevolutionary Futurists, during which he uncritically admired Mayakovsky: "When I was invited to say something about myself, I would start talking about Mayakovsky. There was no mistake about it. I was deifying him. I personified him in my spiritual horizons."[98] And yet after the Revolution, when Mayakovsky began to cast himself in the role of Soviet civic poet, their paths diverged. Pasternak recalled his reaction to Mayakovsky's poetry in 1921:

> He [Mayakovsky] read '150,000,000' to his own intimate circle. And for the first time I had nothing to say to him. Many years went by. We met in Russia and abroad; we tried to continue our intimacy; we tried to work together, and I found myself understanding him less and less. Others will tell of this period, for during these years I came up against the limits of my understanding, and these, so it seems, were not to be enlarged.[99]

Pasternak, however, did not immediately break away from Mayakovsky's spell. His attempt to work with Mayakovsky in *Lef* resulted in *Lef*'s publication of three of Pasternak's poems, "Kreml in the Snowstorm at the End of 1918" ("Kreml v buran kontsa 1918 goda"), "The First of May" ("1-oe maya"), and the *poema* "The Lofty Ailment" ("Vysokaya bolezn"). The first two poems were obviously Pasternak's attempts at a certain politicizing of his poetry. Still, apart from the political implication of their titles, they offered only private visions of urban landscapes colored by the violent atmosphere of upheaval and change. Their somber mood is quite atypical of the enthusiastic and optimistic poetry of the early Lef period. These two poems represent Pasternak's only attempts to write political poetry in his entire poetic life, and even in these attempts he was not able to suppress his private, lyrical "I."

The *poema* "The Lofty Ailment," on the other hand, written in 1924 at the time of an increased interest in developing large forms for Soviet literature, returns openly to Pasternak's own private perspective in an epic context. In "The Lofty Ailment" Pasternak attempts to write an epos

portraying the end of one era and the beginning of another. Like Mayakovsky's "About That" and Aseev's "A Lyrical Digression," Pasternak's *poema* follows the principle of poetry "about the times and about oneself." The narrative reflects the experiences of the intelligentsia in the period following the Revolution as they are described by the narrator, who casts himself as the spokesman for the vanishing class.

Pasternak's "The Lofty Ailment" remains one of the most impressive yet little noticed *poemy* of the early Soviet period. Maykovsky's "About That" enjoys greater popularity, but seen from a historical perspective, the poem merely closed the chapter on prerevolutionary Futurism. Pasternak, on the other hand, attempted in "The Lofty Ailment" to create an epos of the new times in which a new poetic dialect would connect the old order of the intelligentsia with the turbulent, destructive present and the mysterious world of the future. In ways similar but superior to Aseev's *poema* "A Lyrical Digression," Pasternak's poem summarizes the Russian poetic tradition and offers a uniquely private view of the end of prerevolutionary Russian culture and of the attempts of the intelligentsia to come to terms with the new, incomprehensible present.

Tynyanov, who valued it quite highly, noted that in this *poema* Pasternak tried to create a new poetic dialect by updating the Pushkin tradition. Written in the traditional iambic tetrameter, Pasternak's *poema* developed the theme of the end of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia by putting together a collage of images reminiscent of Pushkin and pictures of contemporary Russia. All these images are united through the voice of the narrator, who in an elegiac tonality tells about the fate of his class and its traditions:

Мы были музыкой во льду.
Я говорю про всю среду,
С которой я имел в виду
Сойти со сцены, и сойду.

Здесь места нет стыду.[100]

Although *Lef* printed "The Lofty Ailment," there is no doubt that the thematic content of Pasternak's poem did not fit the framework of the journal. To justify their publication of "The Lofty Ailment," the Lef members felt that they had to separate themselves from Pasternak's private viewpoint and emphasize instead the quality of his verse. Commenting on Pasternak's participation in *Lef*, Mayakovsky insisted:

> Of course, what is interesting for us are not those lyrical outpourings that Comrade Pasternak gives us in his works, not the thematic side of his work, but the work on the construction of the phrase and the working out of the new syntax. Leaving out individual words leads to the creation of a more compact mass, which an experienced worker can then apply to journalistic language.[101]

Although the crude utilitarianism suggested by Mayakovsky was foreign to Pasternak, the formal side of Pasternak's poetry, the texture of his verse, fit well within the general framework of the postrevolutionary Futurist poetry. Krystyna Pomorska has convincingly pointed out that, even though studies of Pasternak's poetry rarely relate him to the artistic movements of his time, nevertheless, after the Revolution, "while retaining his originality, Pasternak was . . . within the orbit of Futurism, and some measure of its inspiration was as necessary for him as for many others close to it, the skirmishes and displays of resentment notwithstanding."[102]

Pasternak, however, refused to act the part of a Lef member and to speculate on the eventual practical effects of his verbal experimentation. The impersonal pragmatism of the Lef group contradicted Pasternak's artistic philosophy. For Pasternak, the individual retained his central position in poetry and the individual perspective could not be relinquished to the point of view of the masses. As Miroslav Drozda has observed:

> In Pasternak's work, the principle of poetic individuality not only became a usual literary attribute of verse and prose, but also turned into an all-absorbing attitude that was based on his world view, into the norm of social and private conduct, which subjected to itself all other norms, including the political ones.[103]

Both Pasternak's insistence on his personal lyrical experience and his awareness of cultural traditions contradicted the Lef program. Most of Pasternak's poetry, like the *poema* "The Lofty Ailment," recalled the entire cultural heritage, and although it transformed the older poetic dialect, it also remained inseparable from it. Pasternak appreciated the poetry of his contemporaries, yet in his historical awareness he also echoed the language of Pushkin. Although he shared the interest of the Lef members in the problems of poetic craft, he found their antitraditionalism and antiestheticism alien to his own poetic beliefs.

Even on the verbal level, in his system of images, Pasternak remained

distant from the urban-oriented Lef because he always considered nature his major system of reference. This reference framework of nature, which Pasternak regarded as uniquely coherent in its totality, meant that his world view was not as fragmented as that of the other members of the avant-garde. The literary critic A. Lezhnev, a contemporary of Lef, commented on Pasternak's peculiar position within the Lef group:

> One could call Pasternak a "leftist" only with great stretching of the point. His connection with Futurism has always been loose and indirect. Motifs unusual for Futurism sounded in Pasternak's poetry; his art, deeply conscious of culture, preserved all the threads of continuation and tradition. In their subsequent development, the paths of Lef and Pasternak continued to diverge further and further.[104]

CHAPTER FIVE

LEF: PROSE

1. IN SEARCH OF A MODEL FOR SOVIET PROSE

What gave a distinct tonality to Russian prose of the early 1920s was the search for a new literary system. The fragmentary, multileveled lyric prose of the modernists had finally reached a stage in which verbal innovations had lost effectiveness.[1] The sense of crisis in literary form was intensified by the instability of the general cultural climate. The emerging Soviet literature could not remain unaffected by such factors as the impact of the new Marxist sociopolitical values, the legitimization of the new middle- and low-brow audience, the great popularity of film and, finally, the commercial pressures arising from the profit-oriented book market that functioned from 1921 as part of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Under these circumstances, prose pieces written "in anticipation of literature" (*v ozhidanii literatury*) and "in search of genre" (*v poiskakh zhanra*) had a nobility of purpose that compensated for their literary shortcomings.[2]

The wide spectrum of forms and styles in the early 1920s illustrates the fact that individual prose pieces were intended by the authors, and also received by the audience, as indicators of possible future trends in Soviet prose.[3] The apparent confusion of literary tendencies reflects the very rapid evolution or prose, an evolution that during half a decade changed the focus of prose writing from style to plot structure and, ultimately, to the material taken from the new Soviet reality.

In the earliest Soviet literature, written in the immediate postmodernist stage, the dominant feature of prose was its diction, which reflected a continuing interaction between prose and poetry. In the next stage, this focus on the verbal fabric was superseded by an emphasis on plot as the organizing factor in prose, with special interest in plot construction adapted from the mystery or adventure story and brought into the mainstream from popular literature. The evolution of prose culminated in the middle of the 1920s with an ultimate focus on *material.* This material was introduced into literature either as an account of a psychological reaction to the new Soviet *byt* or as an unembellished description of a social and

political fact taken from the new reality and presented as "literature of fact." Although from the historical perspective these changes undoubtedly represented a progression, during the short period in which they occurred, the various shifts appeared to be oscillations among literary alternatives.

This oscillation of early Soviet prose among the three *dominanta* of style, plot, and material is particularly visible in *Lef*. In the "laboratory" context of the militant Lef group, otherwise unremarkable prose pieces acquired a programmatic character and a theoretical support from the framework of the avant-garde journal. In *Lef*, the alternatives to modern prose evolved along three basic lines:

1. new variations of poetic prose, which focused on style;
2. the political adventure story, which focused on plot;
3. "literature of fact," which focused on material from the new Soviet reality.

Although the Lef group did not arrive at its theory of modern prose until the second half of the decade when it developed the theory of "literature of fact," these experiments in the early 1920s reflected the Futurist sensitivity to the formal predicaments of Soviet prose as well as to the cultural currents of the time.

This reorientation of prose from style to plot and then to the material came ostensibly as a response to the preference of the new reader, the new audience created by the Revolution. In particular, the left-wing writers, the avant-garde Lef as well as the proletarians, attempted to anticipate the direction of Soviet literature from the preferences of the new audience. Despite their opposing concepts of art form and its social effect, both the Lef group and the proletarians regarded themselves as the favorites of the new reader; and this figure of the reader loomed as an abstract presence in whose name their literary battles were fought.

Actually, throughout the first half of the 1920s, the most persistent motif in critical evaluations of the literary scene was the concern about the reader's lack of interest in native literature and his clear preference for popular, action-filled stories, translated mainly from English.[4] The search for literary models for Soviet literature took on such an intense character because it became obvious that none of the Russian literary groups had managed to establish a connection with the new audience.

Symptomatic of this loss of contact with the reader were the difficulties with publishing and the low sales of the new native literature. Under the

mandate of NEP, the profit-oriented literary market functioned relatively unhampered by concerns about esthetic values or by ethical notions about the role of literature that had been held by the prerevolutionary intelligentsia. The NEP publishers experienced little pressure toward the sort of didactic conformity that later restricted Soviet literature, so they could, in effect, easily follow the demands of the reader.[5] The profile of the NEP literary market made it evident that the prerevolutionary subculture of the 1910s, the popular culture of the middle and lower classes, claimed legitimacy in the new social order.[6] The prerevolutionary literary favorites continued to enjoy popularity; sentimental romances by A. A. Verbitskaya, innumerable detective serials about Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton, and the adventures of Tarzan—all stole the limelight from the new Soviet literature. Tynyanov, the Formalist critic, commented on the situation of the Russian literary market in the following manner:

> Everyone sees the writer who writes; some see the publisher who publishes, but it seems that no one sees the reader who reads. He maliciously approaches every new book and ask "what is next?" And when he is told what is "next," he contends that it has already been done. As a result of these leap-frogs by the reader, the publisher has left the game. He publishes Tarzan, Tarzan's son, Tarzan's wife, his ox and donkey—and . . . has already almost convinced the reader that Tarzan is, in fact, Russian literature.[7]

On a higher literary level, the same wave of popularity of action-oriented prose gave prominence to such foreign story tellers as Jack London and O. Henry and to foreign science-fiction writers like H. G. Wells, Edward Bellamy, and the author of popular Martian tales and the original creator of the Tarzan cycle, Edgar Rice Burroughs. It is indicative of the sudden importance of popular literature that even a tradition-oriented writer like Aleksei Tolstoy, when he wanted to return to the Soviet Union after he had emigrated to France, rehabilitated himself for the Soviet literary public with a science-fiction adventure tale, *Aelita* (*Aelita. Zakat Marsa*, 1922), which he then followed with a science-fiction detective story, *Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin (Giperboloid inzhenera Garina*, 1925). Such books acknowledged the fact that the Soviet mass audience sought the occasional diversion of a good plot and an exotic setting rather than the intellectual experience cherished by the traditional prerevolutionary intelligentsia reader.

Still, the lack of a broad response to the new Soviet literature could

not be blamed only on the democraticizing of the literary audience. Literature itself was plagued by an internal disorientation, by a formal crisis. Unlike the Lef members and the proletarian writers, the Formalists regarded the postrevolutionary reorientation of prose from the *dominanta* of style to plot and then to the "raw material" (*syroi materyal*) as a concomitant of the literary evolution in which the interest of the reader offered only apparent justification for what was actually a purely literary process. Yurii Tynyanov commented:

> When literature has difficulties, one begins to talk about the reader. When it is necessary to retune the voice, one talks about resonance. This path is sometimes successful—the reader, brought into literature, turns out to be exactly the literary force that was lacking to move the word from a dead point. He becomes, as it were, a 'motivation' for the way out of the deadlock . . . such an internal orientation on the reader helps in a period of crisis.[8]

In the early 1920s, after more than a decade of various modernist trends that had dominated the literary scene, formal experimentation lost its novelty. The attempt to renovate style by introducing the spoken dialect of the new audience proved to be only a temporary solution: the *skaz* narratives of ornamental literature, even when they reflected the major theme of the confrontation of the old and the new in Soviet Russia, were tiresome in their lack of a perspective on the subject matter. At the same time, the popularity of translated literature and the overwhelming impact of film, both of which used simple plots and simple motivations, called attention to the appeal that the story-telling quality of art had for the Soviet audience.

When *Lef* first appeared at the beginning of 1923, the options for Soviet prose were still wide open. At that stage, ornamentalism coexisted with plot-oriented literature, although critics increasingly stressed the necessity to redirect the focus of literature toward content, toward new material, toward facts. Writing in 1924, the Formalist critic Boris Eikhenbaum noticed that "hopes for the plot turn out to be unjustified, and nothing more is to be said about the old psychological and milieu novel. What is needed is a new combination of constructive elements; what is needed is new material."[9] As a promising direction for Soviet literature, Eikhenbaum pointed to the short stories by Babel and Leonov, to the semiautobiographical stories of Gorky, and to the prose of Shklovsky. In them he saw a "new epos" in which detail, anecdotes, and puns gained

a new significance. These authors did not "invent" plots and situations; instead, they told their observations of contemporary life. Such literature, Eikhenbaum believed, finally introduced "fresh, unused literary material."[10]

It was only natural that the search for a new prose with a special focus on material taken from the new Soviet reality and with the goal of affecting the new recipient of art would be pursued in the neo-Futurist journal *Lef*. The prerevolutionary Futurists had originally entered literature under the banner of the democratization of the arts. In the early stage of Futurism, they scorned the refinements of the Symbolists, professed an orientation toward and a contact with the common reader, and sought inspiration in "city folklore." Later the Futurist intention to create a modern, postrevolutionary culture, combined with their strong ties to the Formalists and to the film industry, led to expectations that their journal *Lef* would show interesting solutions to the problems of modern prose.

With varying degrees of success, *Lef* explored alternatives to the realistic tradition, alternatives that could—at least theoretically—affect the new postrevolutionary reader. Admittedly, the prose corpus presented in *Lef* is relatively small, and in absolute artistic terms, the pieces represent no special literary achievement. The writing of prose presented a new challenge for the Futurist group, which had a far stronger tradition in poetry and a better sense of direction in verbal experimentation. Indeed, the Futurists' relative lack of impact in the first half of the 1920s resulted at least partially from the fact that the Lef group still wrote and emphasized poetry at a time when the literary interests of the audience had turned to prose. In prose, *Lef* offered experiments, but no unified program that could carry the day. Only in the second half of the 1920s, in the journal *New Lef*, did the group develop a theory of "literature of fact," which was mainly applied to prose. At that time, however, the avant-garde program could no longer counteract the reinstatement of the realistic novel, which eventually set the pattern for Socialist Realism.

Still, theoretical pronouncements on the nature of the new art issued by *Lef* colored the perception of prose published in the journal. The context of the journal gave the formal experiments a pragmatic connotation, a tone of social commitment that was not necessarily present in the individual works.

Viewed individually, prose pieces published in *Lef* offered a treatment of literary forms that clearly resembled the writings of the Serapion

Brothers, a decidedly nonpolitical group of young experimental writers who attempted to modernize Russian literature in the early Soviet period. The similarity between the prose of the Lef members and that of the Serapions was not accidental; it grew out of the common background of both groups. In his study of the Serapion Brothers, Gary Kern explains that "in their origins, the Serapion Brothers were closely connected with the left art movement."[11] He points out that the Revolution had divided the avant-garde movement into two factions: political radicals who became active in postrevolutionary Futurism and those who, like the Formalists and the Serapions, preserved their belief in the autonomy of art. Yet despite the incompatibility between the theoretical insistence of the Lef group that the purpose of art was to form life and the Serapions' refusal to recognize extraliterary impulses behind artistic production, both groups shared an interest in developing new literature. In this search both groups were indebted to the Formalists, particularly to Shklovsky, for their theories.

Viktor Shklovsky was the main link between the three groups with his consecutive participation in the Formalist group, in the activities of the Serapion Brothers, and then in the Lef group. As a Formalist critic, Shklovsky had originally been unsympathetic to the idea of mobilizing art for the purpose of modernizing the society. In 1919 he had polemicized against the left artists in *Art of the Commune*, deriding their attempts to connect sociopolitical issues with artistic problems and insisting that the nature of art is to be nonpolitical. Later, in 1922, during his association with the Serapion Brothers, Shklovsky still shared with the Serapions the same Formalist belief in the "self-value of art."

Soon, however, his political involvement in an anti-Soviet organization brought him into difficulties. He left Russia, lived in Berlin between March 1923 and September 1924, and returned only as a result of an amnesty obtained with Gorky's help.[12] These problems, combined with the limited support that the avant-garde and the Formalists found in the Soviet state, probably necessitated a rethinking of his belief in the separation of art and politics. Upon his return, Shklovsky joined the Lef group. Being a member of the Lef group enabled him to pursue his Formalist path, whereas the ultra-left orientation of the Lef program must have helped in his political rehabilitation.

Underlying the literary perspective of both the Serapions and the Lef group was Shklovsky's belief that the special quality of literature is based

on the total effect of its devices. D.G.B. Piper explained this in the following manner in his book on the Serapion Kaverin:

> [The] function [of the devices] is to distort materials provided by life into something qualitatively different from what they are in their natural state. Art is the means of experiencing the making of a work . . . life may never enter art unless estranged; the cognitive function of art is largely irrelevant . . . To experience the making of a work . . . presupposes an orientation on both the reader's and the writer's part from the illusion toward the device, from 'what' toward 'how'.[13]

Beyond this point, the views of literature held by the Serapions and by the Lef group diverged. Whereas the Seapions saw the transformation of reality, the simple deautomatization of the perspective, as the ultimate goal of art, the Lef group regarded the acquisition of this new perspective as an exercise in the formation of the modern mentality. In spite of this difference in perception of their goals, however, both groups moved along similar lines in their attempts to establish a new path for Russian literature.

In the first number of *Lef*, the Lef group programmatically refused to draw distinction between poetry and prose. Mayakovsky and Brik, who co-authored the introduction to the section containing examples of avant-garde "practice" in the first number of *Lef*, equated all literature with verbal experimentation:

> We do not want to distinguish among poetry, prose, and practical language . . . We work on the organization of the sounds of the language, on the polyphony of rhythm, on the simplification of speech patterns, on increased expressiveness, on the creation of new thematic devices. We do not treat this work as an esthetic end in itself, but as a laboratory for finding the best way of expressing the facts of contemporary life.[14]

The Lef group was also clear about the types of prose the avant-garde found unacceptable. In the same declaration, Brik and Mayakovsky ridiculed contemporary trends:

> Prose [has the following canons]:
>
> peculiarly stilted heroes
>
> novelists = he + she + lover;
>
> writers of everyday life (*bytoviki*) = intellectual + girl + policeman;
>
> Symbolists = Someone in Gray + Unknown Woman + Christ

and

their literary style

1. "the sun was setting behind the hill" + "loved or killed" = "behind the window rustle the poplars;"
2. "let me tell you, Vanyatka" + "chairman of the orphan council drank vodka" = "we will still see the sky in diamonds,"
3. "how strange, Adelaida Ivanovna" + "the terrible secret spread" = "in a white wreath of roses."[15]

In its search for alternatives to the established styles of Russian prose, in the seven numbers of *Lef*, the group published some twenty prose pieces, among them two translations from American prose pieces by Malcolm Cowley and Sinclair Lewis. Rather than original proposals, the Lef prose experiments reflected the avant-garde attempt to maximize the effectiveness of the existing tendencies within early Soviet prose.[16] Nikolai Aseev, a poet closely associated with the Lef group, and Artem Vesely, a follower of the Pilnyak prose school, sought new directions for ornamental, or poetic, prose: one through Expressionism, the other through the use of dialect and phonetic distortions of the language that occasionally resembled the Dadaistic experiments of Kruchonykh. Boris Kushner, Viktor Shklovsky, and Osip Brik, all associated with the Formalists, experimented with special emphasis on plot construction. Sergei Tretyakov, a major theoretician of left arts and a poet, introduced in *Lef* a model of "literature of fact" in the form of travel notes, a model that eventually came to dominate *New Lef*. Finally Isaac Babel, at the time a press correspondent and a fledgling writer, publishing in *Lef* excerpts from *Red Cavalry* (*Konarmiya*) and *Odessa Tales* (*Odesskie rasskazy*), which in the context of the journal offered a curious synthesis of ornament, adventure, and fact. In Babel's stories, his contemporaries at last saw a possible indication of the future direction of Soviet literature, but this promise remained unrealized.[17] Babel failed to establish a trend; he never managed to develop and surpass the literary model he had first presented in his *Lef* stories.

Although *Lef* did not articulate a concise theoretical framework for its prose, such a framework was implicit in the individual prose pieces. The three trends of ornamental prose, adventure story, and "literature of fact" shared the illusion of authenticity and the quality of literariness, of a deliberate artificiality of form. Stylization for authenticity, which gave a sense of historical validity to the new prose, was achieved through the

inclusion of documentary material in the form of letters, chronicles, and newspaper excerpts; of historical data; of geographic detail such as the descriptions of local customs and street names; or through the use of linguistic features proper to certain social or national groups. Although such stylization had been generally practiced in early Soviet literature, in *Lef* the core information in a prose work was actually supposed to be connected with verifiable facts. Such emphasis on authenticity specifically answered the theoretical demand of the Lef group that art be socially relevant and demonstrably connected with life.

At the same time, the effect of literariness revealed the structures and conventions that underlay a prose work and thus created a distance from the subject matter. In spite of the factual content of the prose, the "laying bare of device" (*obnazhenie priyoma*) destroyed the illusion that the literature necessarily offered a realistic image of the world, or that the narrator—commonly used in the literature of this time—was a trustworthy witness of the described events. The narrator's point of view was usually subjective, ironic, or ambiguous. This literary play with the conventions of prose was meant to stimulate the analytic capacities of the reader. A "deliberately impeded form" (*zatrudnennaya forma*) in literature performed the same function as the design of a theatrical performance from minute fragments, called *attraktsiony*, a practice common in the early experiments of Eisenstein, or the design of the Constructivist collages by Rodchenko. Underlying these formal experiments was the avant-garde belief that a complex form that demanded the intellectual involvement of the audience for its understanding would force the recipient to develop his analytic capacities and to become a more rational, better organized member of the new society.

The view of literature as a field for verbal experimentation in which little distinction was drawn between poetry and prose allowed the Lef group to accept a variety of styles so long as the style avoided realism and psychological reflections.

2. POETIC PROSE

In 1923, the concept of poetic prose was hardly a novelty. Nevertheless it fitted well into the neo-Futuristic framework because of its preoccupation with verbal texture and because of its perspective, which refashioned reality into an artifact, into a verbal construct. With the idea of prose

writing as a verbal laboratory, the Lef group undertook a somewhat belated attempt to renovate the ornamentalism that had been popular in the immediate postrevolutionary period. These efforts are visible in the Expressionistic prose pieces by Nikolai Aseev and in the stylized phonetic transcriptions of the revolutionary turmoil by Artem Vesyoly.

Aseev's prose piece "Tomorrow" ("Zavtra") opened the literary section in the first number of *Lef* and accordingly, in the form of a science-fiction story, it offered a metaphorical illustration of the concept of left art. Aseev's story describes the final minutes in the life of a poet dying of a heart attack. The moment of the poet's death provides a frame for the poet's dream about a future inventor who restructures traditional patterns of human existence. In the dream, the inventor, known for successful experiments that change human habits through a change of environment, begins his greatest project—an experiment with a flying city. But during the project, heart trouble forces the inventor to have an operation in which his old human heart is replaced by an artificial apparatus made from rubber and silver. After the operation, he continues his project until a mistake in the design causes the specially constructed city to be smashed into rubble and its population killed. Despite this misfortune, the inventor remains unperplexed. He looks forward to the continuation of his tests, since he knows that this artificial heart assures him virtual immortality.

The dream ends on this note and the poet wakes up, only to die immediately from a heart attack. For the poet the dream has offered a wish-fulfillment: whereas the poet's survival has depended on physiological processes, the malfunctions of which can stop his creative work, the inventor in his dream (who is living ca. 1961) has experienced no pain, has had his heart replaced, and can proceed with this projects.

In Aseev's story, the scientific inventor who remodels the human psyche appears as the embodiment of the future role of the artist in modern society. The Lef group believed that, like the inventor in the story, the poet pursues his goals through an art that, in accordance with Lef ideas, emphasizes flexibility, progress, and the constant renovation of life. The poet in the story also shares the Lef belief that the purpose of art is to create new, activating forms through constant "laying bare of device." He explains his concept of art in the following way:

> Art is the seismograph of volitional aspirations of mankind . . . Ultimately, the sole art—which exists in reality—is the art of change, of

> shedding, of changing the skin, of an incessantly renewing consciousness. Otherwise the sensations of reality would become dim, their forms would become obliterated, smothered down to a deadening indifference. A difference in sensitivity is a difference in the aptitude for living.[18]

But the inventor from the poet's futuristic dream lives in a society in which the poet's art has already failed to promote "the aptitude for living" (*zhiznesposobnost*): "Apathy and indifference became the most dreadful epidemics on earth." In contrast to the poet, who has not been successful in changing life through the changing of artistic forms, the inventor must radically, even brutally, try to restructure the world through scientific experiment to assure its survival.

In addition to his fictional presentation of Lef's belief in the obligatory social effectiveness of literary forms, Aseev also found a place in his narrative for transrational language, then much discussed in *Lef*. Aseev uses transrational language for the first time in the frame story, when the poet's pain becomes so great that the poem he is writing becomes incomprehensible. Although certain words of this poem approximate real language, no meaning can be deciphered from the text. *Zaum* is used for the second time in the poet's dream, when after the heart operation, an operating professor and his assistant exchange impressions in a language

> sonorous and expressive, in which, however, there was not a shadow of dependency on the human dialects that had once existed. The fact is that, after the stage of mechanical languages, the way in which people exchanged opinions had come to be based on the meaningful categories of roots, which left the emotional expressiveness of sounds to the will of each individual.[19]

Aseev's presentation of *zaum* as the language of the future highly technological society reflected the ongoing theoretical discussions in the Lef group about the utilitarian effects of poetic experimentation. It echoed the theoretical speculations that Vinokur and Arvatov had published in *Lef*, and it was directly derived from Kruchonykh's utopian prognosis for the eventual use of transrational language.

Yet it is only on the surface that Aseev's story appears clearly programmatic. By focusing on the predicament of the poet with a heart problem, Aseev moved into an allegorical realm. As the poet dies from a heart attack, the story becomes an epitaph for lyrical poetry, the poetry of

private feelings and experiences. The inventor-engineer of the future who appears in the poet's dream is equipped with a mechanical, artificial heart, so he can reorganize human existence with total disregard for the destruction of human life that may result from his experiments. As he develops the idea of the flying city, he is not hampered by human feelings of compassion or regret when the experiment fails. Aseev in fact suggests that, whereas the world of the poet is hopelessly bound by human inadequacies, the world of the inventor is frightening in its absence of feelings.

More interesting than the ambiguous message of the story is the new formal framework for prose that Aseev apparently adapted from Expressionism.[20] Although Expressionism was a key movement in modern European art and literature, it surfaced only briefly in Russian prose and poetry. Yet although Aseev cannot rightly be called an Expressionist, his prose pieces incorporate features visible in the Western European Expressionist current. Historically, the publication of Aseev's prose coincides with the popularity of Expressionism in Russia.[21] Expressionistic tendencies within the Lef group must have also been evident to contemporaries, because Lunacharsky, well-versed in European literature, applied the term to Mayakovsky, Kamensky, Aseev, and Tretyakov, who made up the poetic core of Lef. Admittedly, Aseev made no statements in *Lef* to suggest that he was connected with or interested in Expresionism; still his esthetic perspective is uncommon for the Soviet literature of this time.

By focusing his story on the moment of death, Aseev, in a typically Expressionist fashion, telescopes the experience of his hero into a brief moment of intense, highly concentrated vision. As is characteristic for Expressionism, the poet's physical pain leads him to a state of higher awareness that allows him to see life abstractly, to be simultaneously in the present and in the future through the experience of the dream. The entire story crystallizes in a violent moment, a moment of death, portraying a soul-state not of a specific individual, but of an abstract representative of the collective artistic consciousness.

As in Expressionism, and rather uncharacteristically for Lef, the heightened state of awareness caused by pain allows the subconscious to come to the conscious surface; in fact, the words "consciousness" (*soznanie*) and "subconsciousness" (*podsoznanie*) appear several times within the story. Although such a perspective is familiar from Symbolism, the subconscious revealed here through the dream has little to do with the mystical level of existence that interested the Symbolists. For Aseev, as for

the Expressionists, the only truly definable level was the physiological, the biological dimension of man. At the same time, the surfacing of the subconscious translates the higher level of physiological awareness caused by pain into a new visual perspective. Stylistically, this perspective manifests itself in extended comparisons that develop into separate pictures:

> But the thoughts were totally alive. They moved about in his brain like an irritated skein of snakes: coiled up, standing on their tails, entwining with one another. Others were like ripe pears. On could not touch the pear branch. They dropped resonantly, falling off, juicy and overripe. But to gather them in the dark was impossible.[22]

Within his poetic descriptions, Aseev uses technical vocabulary that deliberately destroys the metaphysical implications of the story. In addition to the technical terms *turbina, vibratsiya, mikroskopicheskie prilivy,* he introduces such neologisms as *myshlemotory, ozonatory, vozdukhoemy, svetorazgovor, primagnetit.*

Although in "Tomorrow" Aseev used Expressionistic techniques to present Lef's notion of the role of art, providing the model for the future (utopian dream) within the present situation (the health problem of the poet), in general Aseev's formal turn to Expressionism did little more than introduce a new, visual quality into an ornamental narrative. Expressionism in Western Europe had not produced any remarkable prose, and its belated incorporation into Russian literature in the early 1920s could not solve the predicaments of Soviet prose because Expressionism merely offered another version of ornamentalism.

In his second story, "War with the Rats" ("Voina s krysami"), Aseev made his connection to Expressionism more explicit by dedicating the story to Georg Grosz, a German Expressionist painter who was involved in the German leftist art movement.[23] It is only at the end of this short, first-person narrative that one learns that one has witnessed the progressive madness of the narrator, a madness caused by a subconscious fear of death and decay. At the beginning of the narration, the reader trusts the narrator's judgment, because the narrator introduces himself as an entomologist, a scientist with a meticulous mind. The narrator hints, however, that he has tuberculosis. The fear of death lurking in his subconscious brings him to a high emotional pitch whenever he sees the rats, who represent death and decay to him. In the last paragraph of the story, the narrator finds himself in what is apparently a madhouse. Only

then does the abrupt and disjointed plot become cohesive, as the reader realizes that the narrator's emotional state has caused him to project rat-like features onto the people in his surroundings, and that the exaggerated plasticity of urban squalor presented in the narrative is the product of a disturbed mind.

Aseev's "War with the Rats" is written in rhythmic, orchestrated language. Figurative speech, sound repetitions, and parallel constructions intensify the emotional tone, which carries even into the description of objects:

> Как осмыслить, например, одну из продранных, вязанных перчаток, брошенных кем-то из жильцов навстречу весне; одну из них, с протертыми, растопыренными пальцами, обморочно распостертую на шестой ступеньке третьего этажа. Как осмыслить ее, бессильно простертую еще утром на сером цементе, при сером скудном свете, чуть одолевающем грязные слезы неумытых окон. Лежавшую еще сегодня, когда вы сходили с лестницы, бессознательно оттиснувшуюся в памяти своим желто грязным цветом и безнадежным видом: чуть согнутыми пальцами в угол затканный пыльной паутиной. И вдруг при нищем свете спички, ставшую на дыбы, крабом поползшую к вашим ногам.[24]

In the Expressionist manner, Aseev's comparisons tend to be deliberately unesthetic:

> В этом доме люди слипились, как холодные макароны, раздутые кипятком, когда-то обварившим их клокучей кипенью. Изредка события вилкой пронизывают их сплошную массу и вытягивают за поверхность кострюли.[25]

Aseev also makes extensive use of the favorite Futurist device of sound repetitions: "Ikh *g*rekh*o*t *g*romche t*o*p*o*ta sl*o*n*o*v" or "Bl*e*s*hch*u*shch*em *ch*opornostyu i *ch*inom."

The verbal texture of Aseev's narratives puts him within the dominant current of ornamental prose appropriate for the time when the Lef group was interested primarily in stylistic experimentation. The use of Expressionist psychological motivation for these stories—the surfacing of the subconscious in critical emotional states with a resulting grotesque distortion of reality—becomes irrelevant in the context of the antipsychological attitude of the Lef group. In the framework of the journal, the stories

appeared to be simple experiments in a new visual perspective, as the dedication to the painter Grosz suggested. Yet the experiments cannot be considered entirely successful, because if one disregards the psychological perspective—the fear of death as a motivation for the visual sensitivity—the logical structure of the stories is destroyed.

Whereas Aseev's ornamentalism was directed toward conveying the maximum of visual experience in a tightly constructed story that stressed the "estrangement" (*ostranienie*) effect, the prose by Artem Vesyoly had a primarily auditory quality. Creating a stylized narrative that appeared as spontaneous folk speech, Vesyoly incorporated phonetic distortions that resembled the Dadaistic experiments of Kruchonykh. Whereas Aseev's ornamental prose was presented in finished episodes that contain allegorical characters and a developed plot (*syuzhet*), the examples of ornamental writing that Vesyoly published in *Lef* are open-ended fragments. In these fragments, Vesyoly, nicknamed a "peasant Pilnyak," wrote about the Revolution and, in the Bely-Pilnyak tradition, presented it as a spontaneous mass uprising and a liberation of all the instincts. Although the Lef group did not support Pilnyak's type of modernism, it apparently found in Vesyoly a valuable contributor. Vesyoly was the only *Lef* author who had been an authentic proletarian before the Revolution, had become a writer after the Revolution, and had subscribed to experimental literature. Although throughout 1923–1926 Vesyoly was connected with the more moderate literary group "The Pass" (Pereval) that existed around Voronsky's *Red Virgin Soil*, he admitted that the Futurists Khlebnikov and Kruchonykh influenced his work, which focused on verbal experimentation.

In 1924, the same year that Pilnyak's *Materials for a Novel* (*Materialy k romanu*)—the most extreme of Soviet ornamental works—appeared, Vesyoly published two ornamental prose pieces in *Lef*: "The Freebooters ("Volnitsa") and "The Native Land" ("Strana rodnaya").

The story "The Freebooters" takes place in the spring of 1918, as sailors waiting in Novorossiisk for the arrival of guns pass their days in joyful debauchery. Vesyoly conveys the emotional essence of revolutionary events with no attempt to impose a rational system on the material. The narrator, one of the sailors, has no binding force. Instead, the story presents the masses as the collective hero and concentrates on the revolutionary, anarchic atmosphere, which is indicated by disorganized, fragmented, grammatically imprecise, and emotionally loaded speech, with folk style and vocabulary serving as its basis.

The fragmented character of the narration is amplified through the graphic layout of the story. A speech can be set off to emphasize the rhythmic element:

Успокой ты свое солдатское
сердце Христаради
Будь уверен
Оружья мы
тебе достанем
Слово олово
Действительно долой кислую
меншевицку власть.[26]

In more extreme cases, Vesyoly illustrates sounds visually, imitating, for example, a radio announcement:

В
сем
всемв
семсегод
днявечеро
мвгорсадуот
крытаясценана
вольномвоздухек[27]

Like Pilnyak, also indebted to Kruchonykh, Vesyoly conveys emotion through a play with the phonic power of words:

Kha kha kha
Gu gu gu

or: "BBBBBBAAAAAASSSSSTTTTTAAAA," or "eeekh bratishki."

In descriptive passages Vesyoly uses folk sentence structure in which the verb appears at the beginning or the end of the sentences instead of in the usual second position: *smeetsya Vanka otkrovennyi drug, ot Novorossiiska more nachinaetsya, plyunul delegat cherez komendanta na stenku.* Other sentences, short and abrupt, often contain no verb at all:

Команды на берегу. Двенадцать тысяч матросов на берегу. Сколько это шуму. Гостиницы и дома буржуйские ломятся. Чи Совет? Чи Ревком? Хоромы дворцы и так далее.[28]

In lyrical passages, Vesyoly resorts to the set expressions of a folk tale:

Обрадовался Авдоким. Так-то ли обрадовался—сало и хлеб на подоконнике забыл . . . Барахла понавалено барахла. Сюда повернется—чемондан, Туда—узел—двоим не поднять. . . . Вспомнили с Васькой как на ахтомобили мимо дороги чесали—випили. Про трубу вспомнили—еще выпили. И опосля того вывел Васька гостечка дорого через стеклянную дверь на тераску.[29]

Elements of the style of "The Freebooters" reappear in "The Native Land," but are more subdued. In "The Native Land" Vesyoly describes the peasants who have hoarded the grain and are having a spree in order to celebrate the arrival of spring and the abundance of food. "The Native Land" has a narrator who describes the setting; the speech of the characters is distinguishable, and a discernible plot revolves around the hoarding of the grain and its later consumption. The use of dialect, which to the reader appears exotic, is of key importance in both pieces. The identical topics of both stories—in either story a celebration—reveal the limited application of this style.

It is indicative of the evolution of Russian prose that the fragmentary structure of both pieces, typical of ornamental prose, in the context of *Lef* no longer appeared self-justified. With the search for a long, even monumental, form for Soviet literature, writers became preoccupied with the problems of the larger context, of a literary panorama. For this reason, Vesyoly subtitled the fragments published in *Lef* as "A Wing from a Novel" ("Krylo romana"). The subtitle was meant to justify their open form by suggesting that each fragment would eventually be given a logical place in a larger context. Yet although Vesyoly eventually did revise both "The Freebooters" and "The Native Land" several times, and although he placed these fragements within several other texts, he only vaguely integrated them into any plot. For example, the episode describing the wild spree of the sailors in Novorossiisk, which makes up the major part of "The Freebooters" printed in *Lef* in 1924, appeared in 1925 in the story "Bitter Blood" ("Gorkaya krov") and in 1931 in the story "A Great Holiday" ("Bolshoi prazdnik"). Finally, in 1931, under the title "The Carousing Victors" ("Piruyushchie pobediteli"), the episode became a chapter in the novel *Russia Washed in Blood* (*Rossiya krovyu umytaya*).[30] Similarly, a large part of the "The Native Land" can also be recognized in the last chapter of the same novel. The revisions that the episodes underwent in different versions gradually intensified the plot line and provided a clearer distinction between the narrator and the characters,

changing the style in accordance with the eventual reorientation of Soviet literature toward Socialist Realism.

Vesyoly's social background makes his descriptions of revolutionary times seem more authentic than those of other ornamentalists. Vesyoly came from a poor peasant family in the district he describes in "The Native Land"; and he was also a sailor in Novorossiisk. Yet because these fragments do not revolve around a plot and because the verisimilitude of the characters is undercut by the nonrealistic style, the illusion of authenticity required by the Lef group is produced solely through the use of nonstandard speech.

Neither Aseev's nor Vesyoly's ornamentalism was sufficiently innovative to reintroduce a concern for the verbal fabric as a *dominanta* of the new Soviet prose. Their experiments provided no vital models and in reality closed the chapter on Russian modernism.

3. THE POLITICAL ADVENTURE STORY

The subsequent impulse for establishing models for Soviet prose came from the revival of interest in the problems of plot construction. The interest in plot experimentation initially developed as part of the attempt to style the new prose after popular literature. In the early 1920s, it seemed obvious that an appeal to the new audience could be made if literature utilized such substandard, plot-oriented genres as the mystery, romance, or science fiction. With this formal solution, however, came the need to allocate a place within the new prose for the new political ideology. The official encouragement of Nikolai Bukharin, the main editor of *Pravda* and an influential Soviet politician who believed that popular literature had a legitimate place within the new culture, led to the creation of Sovietized versions of Western popular literature. In particular, science fiction as well as Soviet adventure and detective literature known as "Red Pinkerton" (*krasnyi Pinkerton* or *kompinkerton*) enjoyed broad appeal.[31] The actual trend-setter in Sovietized popular literature turned out to be Marietta Shaginian, who achieved considerable success with proletarian detective novels about Jim Dollar and Mess Mend, and with stories such as "Adventures of a Society Lady" ("Priklyucheniya damy iz obshchestva," 1923), which dealt with the unhappy love of an aristocrat for a party activist.[32] The scheme of such novels, with their linear plots built from a

string of adventure episodes, showed the influence of film. As an innovative element, such stories were intended as parodic treatments of popular literary clichés, with the expectation that the familiar frame of popular literature would bring out the Soviet ideological message.[33]

Despite such theoretical intentions, the prose written by Shaginian and her imitators offered little in the way of formal innovation. Such writing was nothing more than an adoption of the foreign models of popular literature with a thin Soviet veneer and a crude ideological message. The parodic intent was not perceived by the audience, so the objective of revealing the cliché mechanics of popular literature and therefore raising the audience to a higher level of literary awareness was not met. The attempts of numerous other authors to develop Soviet popular literature with a parodic bent also encountered the same problem. Eventually it became clear that the audience could not recognize the parodic intent and that the political message was trivialized by the framework of popular literature.

Within *Lef*, Shklovsky, who had always shown a remarkable sensitivity to the cultural trends of the time, promulgated the idea of modernizing literature through the introduction of the elements of popular culture into the mainstream writing. Commenting on the phenomenal popularity of the Tarzan adventures among the Soviet readers, he pointed out the need to pay attention to the interests of the new reader and to react to the cultural impact of the film and the newspaper. Shklovsky observed:

> On the street the janitors talk with the militiamen about Tarzan. In the bookstores it is reported that orders are coming from places in Siberia so remote that they have not been heard of for twenty years. Never, probably not since the time of young Gorky, has the country experienced such a mass fascination with a literary work. We have overlooked moving pictures; we do not study the newspaper; and, to tell the truth, we are interested only in one another. We can forget about Tarzan, and that will be traditional but foolish. We must study popular literature and the reasons for its success.[34]

Influenced by the tastes of the new audience and by the objectives of the left arts, Shklovsky advocated the use of devices from the adventure story, including the construction of a conflict around a mystery.[35] But by 1924 the adventure scheme had already become automatized in Russian fiction; so Shklovsky sought to innovate the genre according to the Lef notion that the new literature should show the features of authenticity

and literariness.[36] Therefore he insisted on the presence of both factual material within the adventure scheme (*shtamp*) and on an obvious play with literary conventions. In the introduction to "Yperite" ("Iperit"), a fragment of a story that he published in *Lef*, Shklovsky wrote:

> The purpose . . . was to fill out the adventure scheme not with conventional literary material, as in the stories of Jim Dollar (Marietta Shaginian), Valentin Kataev, etc., but with descriptions of a factual nature. It seems to me that the crisis of genre can be overcome only by introducing new material. We accept the stylized nature of the adventure novel. We play with stereotypes and imitate a translation. The esthetic effect is secondary and emerges only as a result of subsequent interpretation.[37]

Shklovsky's prose piece "Yperite" and a similar adventure story, "Unextinguished Vibrations" ("Nezatukhshie kolebaniya"), published in *Lef* by Boris Kushner, were both presented in *Lef* as fragments from novels.[38] They reflected the current theoretical interests of the Formalists in plot construction, for both were exercises in the construction of a mystery. Both contained only the plotting (*zavyazka*) of a conflict, without a resolution. The model for popular prose that emerged from Shklovsky's and Kushner's "laboratory experiments" was marked by the following features:

—The hero and the setting are foreign, preferably exotic. Shklovsky's hero is a South African Black living in London; Kushner's hero is a German whose activities take him to different parts of the globe.
—The plot is constructed using traditional devices from the adventure and mystery story, devices such as mistaken identities, ominous hints, unexpected appearances and disappearances, cloak-and-dagger confrontations, unidentified medallions that have an emotional effect on the hero, and strange phone calls that force him to act.
—The adventures are connected with the class struggle or with Communist party politics: Shklovsky's hero takes odd jobs in order to send generous contributions to the South African Communist Party; Kushner's hero is a worker-agitator in Berlin during the days immediately preceding the Communist uprising in Hamburg in 1923.
—Authentic information is given about the places of action. Shklovsky provides extensive date concerning topography, statistics, and social customs in London. Kushner gives detailed route descriptions with authentic Berlin street names.

Shklovsky opened his "Yperite" with an ideological overture establishing the sympathies of the narrator. The narrator of the story tells an anecdote about a multitude of dogs, isolated on an island part of Istanbul, who eventually devour each other. The anecdote ends with a moral that draws a parallel between the fate of the dogs and the future fate of the capitalists. The narrator follows this anecdote with a description of London in which he gives factual information, including the number of inhabitants, the mail turnover at the postoffice, the distribution of the population, and the extent of the smog problem. After giving these data for 1923-1924, the narrator moves to some unspecified yet not very distant future and, finally, focuses on the hero.

The hero, a Negro named James Holten, is seen only from the outside, and no information is given about his background. As the narrator leads Holten from one London location to another, he gradually reveals that the man holds three different jobs: Holton is a house servant in an elegant district of London, a bartender in a low-income section, and a performer in a port tavern.

The reader may wonder why this man with an unknown past and no obvious attachments has jobs that fill twenty-four hours of his day. The narrator implies that the man has a mysterious past, saying that occasionally Holten "looked absorbed by some distant thoughts. Often other servants saw him staring at somebody's portrait, which was hidden in a medallion attached to a bracelet." From time to time, someone calls Holten on the phone and demands something from him. Then "he suddenly seems to turn somewhat gray, somewhat thin," and leaves soon after each call for an unknown destination. The only hint about the mysterious behavior of James Holten comes from the information that an amount equal to his three salaries is sent every month to Johannesburg, where the Communist Negro Faction receives monthly dues signed "From a man, who is very guilty and very unhappy." At this point Shklovsky's story suddenly ends, with the plot line only vaguely delineated.

Because Shklovsky's talent was well suited to feuilletonistic accounts, his use of factual material provides an effective contrast to the mystery surrounding the hero. By using factual descriptions but presenting them in an associative way (*assotsiativnost*), Shklovsky gave his story credibility, yet he was able to avoid providing any psychological dimension.

Boris Kushner's "Unextinguished Vibrations" combines the same elements of fact, exotica, and political moral, but develops the plot in

a fragmentary, nonchronological sequence. Kushner's story is subtitled "a novel" (*roman*), which forces the reader to assume that although the fragments are connected neither in time nor in location, they all deal with the same hero. The "novel" can be reconstructed from these fragments as a narrative about a young German, Hans Rabe, who is a worker-agitator in Berlin in the days preceding the 1923 uprising in Hamburg. At some later time, the hero is apparently drafted into the army (future war?), deserts to the Russians, and is gravely wounded during his escape.

The actual story presents this plot in four fragments, three of which have no continuation or transition between them. In the first fragment, two soldiers escape from an army camp and try to float down a mountain river. One of them dies in the attempt. The other one arrives at the Russian camp but at the moment he arrives is hit by a bullet. No information is given about the time, place, or motivation for the escape or the shooting; neither about the identities of the characters, nor the effect of the bullet. The next fragment is precisely dated on August 5, 1911. The setting is an unidentified idyllic seashore somewhere in an exotic country. A traveler, Tony Lask, meets a local girl named El, with her servant, a "Patagonian" (*patagonets*). The traveler spends a charming evening with the girl, but neither of them reveals his identity. The next day the traveler is unable to find either the girl or her house, and he departs from the island. In the following fragment, the reader learns that the deserter from the very first fragment was not killed, but has only lapsed into unconsciousness, during which time he has a vision. In the vision, the deserter recalls his native Berlin, a girl Rosina, and their revolutionary activities prior to the arrival of his enemy, the capitalist agent and famous detective from Buffalo, Jonathan Drumm. In the final fragment, the one-time deserter has apparently recovered and returned to Berlin to continue his revolutionary activities. There he finds and kills his adversary, Jonathan Drumm.

The initial two fragments of Kushner's story are developed according to the romantic stereotype (*shtamp*). The first fragment focuses on the adventure of the escape to the total exclusion of characterization. The writer uses the usual paraphernalia of mountains, night, struggle for survival in the river rapids, and an apparent death at the moment when the deserter finally reaches his goal. The second fragment presents a marked contrast to the first: instead of the mountain, the setting is the seashore; instead of death, the topic is love. The characters again remain

unidentified, but in the Expressionist manner of Leonid Andreev, the Girl (*devushka*), the Traveler (*puteshestvennik*), and the Native Servant (*patagonets*) play their predictable roles, acting out a scene from an exotic romance.

The character of the next two fragments contrasts with the vague and mysterious nature of the opening two. These fragments concentrate on drama and danger in party politics, build toward a confrontation between the protagonist and an individualized antagonist, and end with the death of the enemy. As in Shklovsky's story, the setting in Kushner's narrative is given in much detail, complete with authentic street names and route descriptions, with foreign phrases adding to the local color. The background of the story is both contemporary and political, based on an unsuccessful German communist uprising in Hamburg in 1923.

In Kushner's story, the formal focus of the narrative centers on the composition. He uses the modernistic method, similar to the one Konstantin Fedin used in his well-known novel *Cities and Years* (*Goroda i gody*, 1924), where the constant time shifts build up the tension and reveal the hero in crucial moments of his life rather than in his overall development. Kushner's work shares a generic similarity with Fedin's novel, because Fedin also insisted that his main interest was in an "adventurous-romantic plot" (*avantyurno-romanticheskii syuzhet*) rather than in the hero.[39] For Kushner, as for Fedin, composition became the most active element in a prose work. Yet in "Unextinguished Vibrations" Kushner made his protagonist so mysterious that his presence fails to unify the stylistically and thematically disconnected fragments. In effect, Kushner's story succeeds neither as high- nor as low-brow literature.

A more consistent model for plot-oriented popular literature appears in Osip Brik's story "She Is Not a Fellow-Traveler" ("Ne poputchitsa"), which elevates the structure of the film scenario to the level of literature. The story was announced in *Lef* as "an experiment in laconic prose on a contemporary theme" (*opyt lakonicheskoi prozy na segodnyashnyuyu temu*).[40] Brik presented a socially relevant conflict: a love affair between a Communist functionary and a bourgeois woman. The plot is structured on a love triangle in which the hero abandons his Communist "cohabitant" (*sozhitelnitsa*) for the glamorous but unscrupulous wife of a NEP entrepreneur. The NEP temptress draws the unsuspecting hero into some suspicious financial deals until the story is resolved by the deus ex machina, as the Party intervenes from above. Justice triumphs as the

NEP entrepreneur is arrested; his wife is unmasked as an alien element; the protagonist is transferred to Siberia, and his "cohabitant" who out of jealousy had contributed to his downfall, loses her Party card.

This trivial love plot combined with a political message aimed at popular appeal. As in popular low-brow literature, Brik operated with stock characters and stock situations. The reader was expected to become involved in the predicament of a sympathetic hero who has to choose between two women. One is a simple girl, Sonya, the secretary, with the telling last name Bauer, meaning "peasant" in German. The other is a glamorous lady whose charm lies in her upper-class mode of life and whose name "Belyarskaya," from the Russian word for "white," associates her with the Whites, the opponents of the Soviets in the Civil War. Sonya, who attracts the sympathy of the reader, suffers at the end but manages to break the damaging relationship of the hero with the bourgeois woman, thus saving the hero from further bourgeois corruption.

Sonya's counterpart, the femme fatale Belyarskaya, is the most fully drawn character. She is very attractive and has had numerous lovers. Her mode of life requires a luxurious setting, including the presence of a maid, and all the other accoutrements of elegant life. Belyarskaya spends her days visiting the seamstress, taking walks, and going to the theatre—and requires that her husband provide for all her whims. The hero, who is enchanted by Belyarskaya's polish and femininity, justifies his involvement with her in the following manner:

> I am talking about the fact that there is nothing amusing in Communism and for this reason there are no real women, but only those who have long forgotten that they are women. This is why a Communist runs to the bourgeois ladies . . . and gradually becomes corrupted.[41]

This impression, not totally implausible in postrevolutionary Russia, is the fatal flaw of the otherwise honest and loyal Communist, and it leads to his downfall. The reader is assured, however, that after his transfer to Siberia, he will continue to work for the Party.

Within his popular plot, Brik was consciously innovative. He transcended the trivial *shtamp* to create nonrealistic literature that demands analytic and synthetic skills from the reader. Scenario-like, "She Is Not a Fellow-Traveler" is constructed from thirty brief dialogues suplemented with occasional narrative comments on movements or facial expressions. These rare narrative comments are given in a laconic style that resembles

acting directions. For example, an emotional scene develops as follows: "Sonya lowered her head. Then she quickly covered her face with her hands. Her shoulders shuddered. She let out a loud cry and fell in a hysterical fit."[42] A contemplative scene progresses in this way: "Belyarskaya walked aimlessly around the room. She took a book from the table and began to read. Then she fell on the pillows. 'The Primer of Communism' slid down on the floor."[43]

The use of scenario construction within the framework of the short story creates the impression of authenticity and directness because no one mediates between the reader and the world of the story. In a complete "laying bare of a device," the narrative is reduced to plot alone, to bare construction. At the same time, the lack of transitions between the dialogues forces the reader to provide a synthesis of the plot line, to supply the framework for the events.

Because Brik's use of this scenario-like technique destroyed the possibility of the emotional identification of the reader with the hero that is essential to popular literature, the reader must develop a detached, analytic perspective on the characters. He thus becomes a participant in a literary exercise intended to teach a reader to develop a rationalistic world view. But in spite of Brik's theoretical intentions, "She Is Not a Fellow-Traveler" remains a most interesting failure, in which the familiar triviality of the plot overshadows the experimental design.[44]

It must be said that neither the new ornamentalism nor the stylized political adventure story presented in *Lef* had an impact on the direction of Russian prose. Admittedly, neither of the trends received a theoretical confirmation in *Lef* as a satisfactory solution to the problems of prose. Ultimately it appeared that literature must be reoriented away from the narrow issues of form toward new material, toward facts, toward the new Soviet reality.

4. THE LITERATURE OF FACT

The beginning of this material-oriented literature appeared in *Lef* in the form of drama from the factory life and in the form of travel notes from a trip to China, both written by Sergei Tretyakov. Tretyakov identified himself with the political goals of the avant-garde more consistently than Mayakovsky, Brik, Shklovsky, or any other Lef member;

and he was most determined in his efforts to devise literature that would have an activating impact on the audience.[45]

When Tretyakov's drama *Gas Masks* (*Protivogazy*) appeared in *Lef* in 1924, he had already acquired considerable experience in theater from his cooperation with Sergei Eisenstein in Proletkult. On November 7, 1923, Eisenstein had staged *Hear, Moscow?!* (*Slyshish, Moskva?!*), an earlier agitational play that Tretyakov had written in response to the Communist uprising in Hamburg. Tretyakov's play *Gas Masks* was performed by the Proletkult theater on February 29, 1924, in an authentic factory setting, and was printed in *Lef* the same year. The commentary presented with the published play mentioned that the staging rights remained with the All-Russian Proletkult, thus indicating that *Gas Masks* had been written for a specific cast, a definite audience, and with a contemporary cause in mind.

Although only a few months separated Tretyakov's *Hear, Moscow?!* and *Gas Masks*, the difference in style shows the rapid progression of Soviet theater from form-oriented modernism to content-oriented literature of the later Soviet period. Unlike *Hear, Moscow?!*, which is an agitational play employing the caricature, satire, and allegory typical of the earliest Soviet theater, *Gas Masks* is subtitled "melodrama." This subtitle appears to link Tretyakov's play to the debate on Soviet melodrama that had occurred between 1919 and 1921. During this debate, Gorky, Blok, and Lunacharsky—independently of one another—pointed out the significance of melodrama as a romantic-heroic genre that would appeal to the contemporary Soviet audience. Gorky, especially, emphasized that tragedy and melodrama should be written with the intention of eliciting specific attitudes and emotions from the masses. Because melodrama operated with psychological simplifications and expressed the sympathies and antipathies of the author most explicitly, Gorky singled out this simplicity as its virtue: "This primitivism of heroic drama is in fact its strength, because it not only simplifies the complexity of the human soul, but also concentrates on basic desires of the soul."[46]

In his melodrama *Gas Masks*, Tretyakov developed this idea further: instead of presenting a fictional episode in a realistic way, he chose an authentic fact that could illustrate the mechanism of social change. Tretyakov believed that in such a melodrama the use of an authentic fact not only evokes emotions, but also can provide an opportunity for rational social criticism. Tretyakov viewed his play *Gas Masks*, with its factual

background, as an experiment probing new directions in the development of Soviet drama. He explained these directions in the following commentary which accompanied the play in *Lef:*

> Why was this work written? First, I was impressed by the subject taken from real life: seventy workers had saved the factory by working for three minutes each without gas masks, although they had come out poisoned by the toxic atmosphere. This subject has two essential aspects: first . . . it embodies the Revolution, which continues also during the time of NEP—not on the fronts and barricades, but in the thicket of daily production. Second . . . this real event is possible only where the worker, standing on the threshhold of the Revolution, begins to recognize himself as the ultimate master of production . . . On the other hand, as I worked, this play turned into an experiment in the construction of a melodrama of everyday life. It perhaps seems illogical to protest against reflecting life in literature while at the same time registering everyday life in a play. But the point is that the definite agitational tendency that underlies the play and, in the present transitional time, the great difficulty one has in shifting from the depiction of human *types* to the construction of the *standards* (exemplary models), in any case allow me to consider this play a basis from which one can move by destroying a purely reflexive depiction of life to the stage construction of the standard-man and standard-life.[47]

The main plot of *Gas Masks* centers on an authentic accident in a factory: a major gas pipe breaks, making it impossible to fill a recent large order. At the same time, the workers find out that the director has neglected to order the gas masks they have repeatedly requested. The director tries to persuade the workers to repair the pipe without any protection, but they refuse. Only the arrival of Dudin, a young worker-correspondent who argues that by cooperating the workers will best serve their own interest, persuades them to undertake the repair.

The real melodrama concerns the family affairs of the director. His only son, Petya, a seventeen-year-old member of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol), has joined the Komsomol and has begun to work in the factory against the wishes of his parents, who want to protect him from the reality of the worker's life. Petya has a weak heart, but he decides to participate in the repair of the gas pipe and eventually dies from gas poisoning. The melodrama is complicated by the fact that, unknown to the director, his secretary is actually Petya's wife and she is expecting Petya's child. The play ends with a reconciliation scene: the

neglectful director admits his guilt, and one of the workers, who has previously beaten up the worker-correspondent Dudin for his newspaper criticism of the factory workers, asks for forgiveness. The contrite worker is one of the victims of gas poisoning, and Dudin, in a reconciliatory gesture, carries him off to the hospital.

In its ideological aspect, the play consistently portrays the development of workers' solidarity and their matter-of-fact determination to serve their own cause. The promise of the younger generation is illustrated in the figure of Petya, who has crossed the boundary between the noncommitted intelligentsia and the politicized workers, and in the suggestion that his yet unborn child will become a real worker.

Gas Masks is an example of the audience-oriented literature propagated in *Lef.* It can be viewed as a theatrical success, for its skillful combination of factual and melodramatic devices was able to elicit the desired sociopolitical response. Despite the difference in genre, Tretyakov's approach and attitude in *Gas Masks* resemble the method and the devices used by Shklovsky, Kushner, and Brik in their plot-oriented prose fragments. Tretyakov, however, achieved a better result. Shklovsky still remained in the realm of "laboratory experiments" as he developed his "Yperite" into a sketchy narration about London and a brief introduction about the hero that was meant to show the building up of the mystery within a plot-oriented narrative. Kushner was too preoccupied with the structure of his story. Brik put the entire emphasis on the construction of the plot in "She Is Not a 'Fellow-Traveler.'" Tretyakov's drama, on the other hand, achieved a correct balance among the elements of plot, emotional appeal, and ideological significance.

In the last number of *Lef* in 1925, Tretyakov published the travel notes from his trip to Peking. These notes most clearly mark the beginning of the "literature of fact" that eventually developed in *New Lef,* with Tretyakov as its leading theoretician and practitioner.

In *Lef,* travel notes were not yet a recognized genre, as the subtitle "travel film" (*putfilma*) indicates. It can be assumed that in the early 1920s a film scenario was considered a more prestigious literary form than travel notes and also fit better into the utilitarian framework of the Lef group.

In the text, however, Tretyakov refers to this prose also as "travel notes" (*putevye zametki*), apparently of a new kind. In the introduction, he explains that these notes were written at the suggestion of Osip Brik,

who had advised Tretyakov to stress the visual quality of the setting instead of the personal reactions of the narrator:

> Thus spake Osya.
> —You are traveling to Peking. You must write travel notes. But make sure that they are not just notes for yourself. No, they must have a social meaning. Make a plan according to NOT [Nauchnaya organizatsiya truda—Scientific Organization of Labor]; with the alert eye of a master, register what you see. Show sharpness of perception. Let not one trifle be overlooked. You are on the train: note every stroke of landscape, every conversation. You are at the station: notice everything down to the posters washed by the rain.[48]

Instead of using the usual subjective, individual perspective of travel notes, Tretyakov operates with an illusion of a collective point of view. This point of view encompasses the narrator, his friend Osya (Brik), and the new Soviet reader, whom Tretyakov frequently addresses as sharing common interests and attitudes with the author and his friends. The intimate tone that Tretyakov develops serves to emphasize the existence of a uniform, consciously Soviet perspective from which the foreign setting is observed.

The influence of the scenario technique is visible in Tretyakov's laconic style, in the prominence of visual detail, and in the narrative structure of the travel notes, which presents individual scenes without transitions and without connections other than the connections implied by the chronological progress of the trip. Tretyakov surveys the setting and the people using a "movie camera" technique that registers the exotica of the landscape and the "otherness" of the non-Russians. The consciousness of the collective point of view, which Dziga Vertov was attempting to cultivate through his film chronicles, was accomplished here in prose.

5. PROSE OF AUTHENTICITY AND LITERARINESS

Despite the trend-setting orientation of *Lef*, the journal's only legitimate claim to recognition as a showcase for innovative prose between the years 1923 and 1925 came with the publication of Isaac Babel's fragments from *Red Cavalry* (*Konarmiya*) and from *Odessa Tales* (*Odesskie rasskazy*). Although Babel never became an official member of the Left Front of the Arts, his stories can be regarded as the culmination of the avant-garde tendencies in Soviet literature. This thesis has been advanced by

Miroslav Drozda and Jírí Franek, who have both observed that "Babel represents in prose the most exact manifestation of the Soviet literary avant-garde. Not without reason can he be compared to Mayakovsky, not without reason was he printed by *Lef.*"[49] Babel's stories, in fact, incorporate the dominant features of most of the pieces published by *Lef,* and offer a perfect blend of the authenticity and literariness that characterized avant-garde prose.

Lef was especially interested in reinforcing the illusion of authenticity in Babel's prose. The sole introductory comment the *Lef* editors added to the fragments of Babel's *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Tales* published in *Lef* concerned the credibility of the author and the genuineness of his heroes:

> Babel spent the revolutionary years in the south of Russia, part of the time in Odessa, part of the time in Budyonny's cavalry, and part of the time on the Caucasus. During this time, two books were written: "Red Cavalry" and "Odessa Tales." The life and military work of Budyonny's army served as the theme of the first book. The famous Odessa bandit, "Mishka the Japanese," who at one time stood at the head of the Jewish self-defense group, who fought together with the Red troops against the White armies, and who was subsequently executed, appears as the hero of the second book.[50]

Although this editorial comment created the impression that Babel's stories were on-the-spot coverage, they were actually written well after Babel's military experiences: *Red Cavalry* between 1923 and 1925 and *Odessa Tales* between 1921 and 1923. Babel himself supported the illusion of immediacy by dating *Red Cavalry* between June and September of 1920, but these dates referred to the dates of the notes in his diary and not to the time of the actual writing of the stories.[51] Equally misleading was *Lef*'s comment about the existence of the already written books *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Tales.* In reality, at the time when his prose was printed in *Lef,* Babel had written only some of the stories, but he always published them with the subtitle "From a Book" ("Iz knigi"), thus insisting on the existence of a larger context.[52] Also questionable is the statement of the *Lef* editors concerning the authenticity of the topics. The evocation of Mishka the Japanese, Jewish-Soviet patriot, provides a most obscure ancestry for Benya Krik, the decidedly nonpolitical hero of *Odessa Tales.* Finally, the *Lef* claim that Babel's stories offered a representation of the "life and military work of Budyonny's army" turned out to be most problematic of all.

Admittedly, Babel himself furthered the illusion of reportage in *Red Cavalry* by giving the narrator Lyutov the name Babel himself had used as a correspondent for ROSTA (Rossiiskoe telegrafnoe agentstvo—Russian Telegraphical Agency). Yet Babel's contemporary audience recognized that the expectation of reportage was not fulfilled. In fact, *Red Cavalry* raised a political controversy because of its unusual narrative angle, which did not reflect the actual events. In 1924 Vyacheslav Polonsky, the influential editor of the journal *Press and Revolution*, commented on these frustrated expectations:

> I am not surprised . . . by the harshness with which this book was condemned by the leader of the same division that Babel supposedly wanted to depict in his stories. Budyonny, like many others, was fooled by the misleading title: he expected to find a true reflection of that which had been, with an authentic distribution of light and shade that corresponded to reality. How great was his disappointment, surprise, and, ultimately, indignation, when in *Red Cavalry* he found something that only remotely resembled what had really happened.[53]

What destroys the authenticity of Babel's stories is their literariness. As in Tretyakov's travel notes or in Aseev's stories, the narrator combines authentic details to create images that are reflections of an extremely subjective mind. The intellectual Lyutov, a stranger amidst the exotic Cossack *volnitsa*, offers a romanticized view of the soldiers, who appear as colorful heroes of an adventure tale. Also, the setting as he sees it is romanticized and described hyperbolically. Because Babel's world is a world in revolutionary flux, a world that lacks realistic proportions, his narrator conveys this disorder through an inversion of tone: horrible, repulsive details are presented in a matter-of-fact way, as peripheral comments, whereas things of an incidental nature are celebrated or eulogized in an elevated manner. Such a stylistic orientation relates Babel to Expressionism, with its exaggerated sensibility and its focus on the shocking and the grotesque.

At the same time, in Babel's stories it is not the style but a well-developed dramatic *syuzhet* that emerges as the dominating feature. Babel's stories can be seen as miniature adventure tales, complete with exotic characters and foreign settings, and thus comparable to those proposed in *Lef* by Kushner and Shklovsky. Like Kushner and Shklovsky, Babel also supplemented his adventure narratives with a political moral by putting the sympathies of the narrator on the Soviet side.

Like other Lef writers, Babel created the illusion of the existence of a large, novel-like framework from which his stories were excerpted. He sought to force a thematic unity upon a number of stories—many of them unrelated, finished episodes—by presenting each with a subtitle "From the Book *Red Cavalry.*" Like Vesyoly, Shklovsky, and Kushner, he offered only fragments of the world, fragments that he accompanied with the promise that a panorama would emerge at the end.

But even when all the stories are completed, *Red Cavalry* still defies realistic conventions because it lacks a logical progression and contains only descriptions of disjointed, self-contained events. The larger context referred to in Babel's stories and in other *Lef* prose never exists, because the avant-garde demands the world in search of moral and literary values, a world of constant movement and change.

The Czech critic Miroslav Drozda has singled out Babel and Mayakovsky as two emblematic figures of the Soviet avant-garde:

> Babel's style, which combines authenticity and literariness, represents a tendency in prose analogous to that represented by Mayakovsky in poetry. They both tried to irritate their audience with plebian concretness and formal engineering; at the same time, they were both repeatedly dismissed from the ranks of the revolutionaries and classified among the unreliable *déclassé* and fellow-travelers. But they were the ones who best grasped and expressed the spirit of the youthful revolution, in which everything is disassembled and mixed up, but then a careful hand, not afraid to get dirty, can take it all and rearrange it according to the blueprints and the diagrams of a radically new system. Babel in prose—like Mayakovsky in poetry—represents an idiosyncratic condensation of all the formal schools of the period: he emphasized the narrator and the *fabula;* he switched back and forth between the lyrical and the prosaic; he used the adventure plot and introduced reportage, diaries, and letters into fiction; he laid bare the function of landscape and the relationships between naming and the objects named.[54]

In the context of *Lef,* Babel's prose combined all three directions for prose that were explored in the journal: the ornamental narrative with a heightened visual and aural sensitivity, the political adventure story, and the journalistic report. Not only the Lef group itself, but also its more conservative adversaries saw Babel's stories as possible cornerstones for Soviet literature.[55] Soviet critics found Babel's prose promising both for

its formal design and for an interesting psychological dimension that the Lef group, true to Futurist antipsychologism, refused to acknowledge.[56]

Despite such hopes, Babel failed to establish a new literary trend. What eventually succeeded as a model for Soviet prose were the insignificant travel notes introduced in *Lef* by Sergei Tretyakov. Tretyakov's travel notes inaugurated the later popular current of factographic prose. The proliferation of sketches, travel notes, memoirs, and reportages that eventually became popular in Soviet literature can largely be traced to the model of "literature of fact" that originated in *Lef* and received its later theoretical formulation in *New Lef*.

EPILOGUE: *LEF* IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The maximalist designs of the Lef group evoked a limited response at the time, mainly in the context of cultural politics. More recently, after some four decades of obscurity, Lef theories have become a subject of renewed historical interest and even of wide-scale, politically motivated enthusiasm. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, numerous historical and theoretical studies dealing with topics connected with the left art movement have appeared; but the program of *Lef*, disputed in the 1920s, also now continues to stir controversy.

The interplay of media as well as of personalities such as Mayakovsky, Brik, Shklovsky, Tretyakov, Eisenstein, Vertov, and Rodchenko within the movement accounts for some of the difficulties in defining the Soviet avant-garde esthetics. The international roots and the diffused impact of the Soviet avant-garde also obscure geographic and conceptual boundaries. In general, despite obvious bonds among the early Soviet experimental artists and writers, critical studies have viewed their experiments as parallel developments, rather than as part of the avant-garde current. The term "avant-garde" itself has gained popularity only within the last decade, and is used in English somewhat differently than in Russian and Eastern European criticism.[1]

Although the journals *Lef* and *New Lef* are excellent sources for studying the interplay of artistic models within the postrevolutionary Soviet avant-garde, the editorship held by Mayakovsky in these journals colors the perception of the Lef program in accordance with the various critical images of Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky acted as an official leader of the group, and his presence accounted for much of its appeal, yet defining the extent to which he was an originator of rather than a respondent to the avant-garde slogans presents one of the major problems for research on Mayakovsky.

Clearly Mayakovsky's postrevolutionary poetry and his theoretical pronouncements put him in the midst of the Lef movement.[2] Yet neither the Russian nor most of the Western studies show interest in viewing Mayakovsky's art from the perspective of left art theories. The West has

usually focused on Mayakovsky in his role as prerevolutionary Futurist poet and has showed less concern for his later professed desire to serve the postrevolutionary proletarian state. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, carefully guards the icon of Mayakovsky as Communist poet, free of leftist excesses and in tune with the interest of the state.[3] In either case, the esthetic program of the Lef group is regarded as confining, if not contradictory, to Mayakovsky's poetic practice.

A detailed study of Mayakovsky's involvement in the Left Front of the Art has not yet appeared, because the archival materials on the Lef group have not been made public. The most informed individual, who either originated or contributed to most of the theories—Osip Brik—remained in the background during the 1920s and then became involved in a careful stylization of Mayakovsky's image in which Lef was treated as a mistaken involvement.[4] Although the recent Soviet editions of writings of Shklovsky, Eisenstein, Meyerhold, and Tynyanov clearly indicate the existence of a common conceptual framework from which Mayakovsky cannot be separated, the common esthetic denominators within the Soviet avant-garde have not been fully established. Without a conclusive reassessment of Mayakovsky's association with the avant-garde, the left art group lacks a star and loses much of its appeal.

Judging from the historical patterns of Russian responses to the avant-garde, a critical renaissance of the Lef movement in the Soviet Union is not likely. The official Soviet reception of the left art movement, which started with qualified tolerance in the 1920s, has so far led to an unqualified rejection. In post-1934 Russian criticism the Lef group, along with the entire avant-garde of the 1920s, was evaluated negatively. Neither Lef nor the rest of the avant-garde has been fully legitimized in Soviet culture since that time. With the introduction of Socialist Realism, adherence to the politicized esthetics of left art or even a temporary association with the group came to be viewed as a detrimental factor in any artistic biography. Mayakovsky himself was officially declared the Soviet poet in 1935, but at the price of his separation from the avant-garde. Around 1940 a brief "thaw" made the Lef group mentionable, but this temporary acceptance did not change the apologetic attitude with which Mayakovsky's participation in the movement was treated. This official view of Mayakovsky has continued without any substantial modifications. As recently as 1977, a *Voprosy literatury* review of the sole Russian monograph devoted to an aspect of Lef esthetics, "industrial arts," commended the author, A. I. Mazaev, for a pioneering work in an unexplored area,

but at the same time admonished him for failure to emphasize the fact that Mayakovsky had been only superficially touched by the Lef esthetics and should therefore be excluded from the discussion of Lef theories.[5]

In general, obscurity has been the fate of both the Lef leaders and other left artists, many of whom were only episodically connected with the Lef group. Tretyakov, next to Mayakovsky the most influential member of the Lef literary collective and the proponent of "literature of fact," fell victim to the purges in the 1930s. Although some of his writings have been republished since the XXth Party Congress in 1956, a large part remain unknown to the Soviet reader.[6] Similarly, the theories of Nikolai Chuzhak, the proponent of the pre-Socialist Realist "life-building" through art, and the critical work of Boris Arvatov, the exponent of an approach to literature that blended Formalism and sociology, have been largely forgotten.[7] Artists like Tatlin and Rodchenko and filmmakers like Eisenstein and Vertov have received a complicated and selective reception.[8] At times an entire *oeuvre*, at times only aspects of the work that did not fit the mold of Socialist Realism, have been denied inclusion in Soviet libraries, museums, or history books. Occasionally Soviet publications would appear only after the Western rediscovery of an artist. Such was also the case with Mazaev's study of *proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo*, which was the first Russian response to the foreign rediscovery of the Lef movement in the late 1960s and 1970s.

This non-Russian rediscovery took the most intense form in countries where interest in the avant-garde was politically motivated: in Czechoslovakia and in East and West Germany. The Czech and the East German reception came as a result of liberal efforts directed toward the rediscovery of modernistic traditions within socialist culture. In West Germany, the country where the interpretations of the Lef movement took the most extreme path, the beginnings of interest in Lef coincided with the emergence of the European leftist student movement. There, the exploration of Lef esthetics by the New Left was motivated by the general attempts to create a contemporary radical cultural theory.

In the English-speaking countries, on the other hand, the reception of all early Soviet art and literature took a nonpolitical form, largely under the influence of Formalist criticism. The exploration of the avant-garde tended to focus on the actual products of the experimentation in art, film, and theater rather than on the esthetic and cultural framework these media shared.

The first publications on the esthetics of the left art movement that

came out of this rediscovery appeared in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. The Czechs were historically prepared to give a sensitive response to Soviet artistic experimentation because of the impact that their own leftist avant-garde, active during the 1920s and 1930s, had exerted on Czech culture. At that time, developments within Czech Poetism and the activities of the group "Devětsil" paralleled the program of the Left Front of the Arts and even continued it into the 1930s, after avant-garde had lost momentum in the Soviet Union.[9] A vivid example of the Czech affinity for the Soviet avant-garde is the fact that in 1930 a gathering of Czech writers of socialist persuasion even adopted the name "Leva fronta."

In the 1960s the general liberal atmosphere in Czechoslovakia, combined with the strength of the Czech avant-garde tradition, created conditions for the rediscovery of the Lef movement. The Czech revival of interest in the pre-Socialist Realist currents within socialist culture came as a part of a conscious break with the prescriptive Soviet cultural models. Although the primary motivation was unquestionably political, the approach was historical, because the rediscovery of Lef was the work of Czech specialists in Russian literature. In 1964, one of them, Zdenek Mathauser, published one of the best historical reappraisals of Mayakovsky in the context of Russian and European art movements.[10] Half of Mathauser's book is devoted to the postrevolutionary period. Elegantly written, his study combines excellent critical insight with a broad perspective on the European art scene. Another key publication is Miroslav Drozda's pioneering analysis of Lef esthetics, which appeared in 1968 as part of an interesting volume that also included the theories of RAPP and Pereval.[11] Admittedly, neither Mathauser's historical analysis, translated into Russian and into German but rarely available, nor the theoretical study by Drozda has received sufficient attention in the West to influence the image of Mayakovsky and Lef.

Much of Czech research on aspects of the "Lef" program and on the relations of writers such as Pasternak, Babel, and Gorky to Lef was also published in the journal *Československá rusistika.*[12] This exploration of the avant-garde eventually led to an international conference in Bratislava in 1965, the proceedings of which appeared in print.[13] Then, in the wake of the political disaster in 1968 and as a result of the subsequent difficulties some of the major Slavicists encountered, the entire Czech program of research on Soviet left art came to a halt. A sole exception, Vasil Choma's book *Od futurizmu k literature faktu* (1972), already shows the returning influence of the Soviet perspective on the left art movement.[14]

Like the Czechs, the East Germans were interested in the historical rediscovery of the 1920s. As in Czechoslovakia, the motives for the exploration were rooted in German-Russian contacts in the 1920s. At that time, German leftists and Communist writers closely folowed Soviet literary and artistic developments. They hoped that the young Soviet art could provide functional models for overcoming the intellectual malaise created by the decline of Expressionism, the failure of the leftist uprisings, and the general political disorientation. In view of this interest, in the 1920s numerous German publishers regularly brought out translations from Russian, and the daily and weekly press printed Soviet literature. Studios modeled on Proletkult opened in Berlin, Dresden, and Munich. Following the example of *Pravda*, attempts were made to organize circles of worker correspondents. The theater was exposed to the theories of Meyerhold and Tairov; film was influenced by Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov; and the local Agitprop groups imitated the performance of the group of "Blue Shirts" ("Sinee bluzy").[15]

In addition to the broad cultural contacts between Russia and Germany of the 1920s, members of the Lef group maintained personal contacts with the German avant-garde artists. Among these exchanges, the one with the most profound effects was the close relationship between Tretyakov and Brecht.[16] Tretyakov's view of art influenced Brecht's evolution from late Expressionist to author of political *Lehrstücke*, and finally to creator of the epic theater. Indirectly, through Brecht's adaptation, Lef proposals emerged in 1931–32 as the key artistic theorems in the German debates on realism and modernism conducted within the German Association of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers.[17] However, the subsequent fascist takeover in Germany and the Stalinization of Russia resulted in a quick loss of cultural contacts. During the following three-and-a-half decades, avant-garde art lost all of its critical and commercial appeal.

The revival of interest in the avant-garde occurred only in the 1960s, in a Germany now divided politically and culturally into the Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic. In this revival, the interpretations of the avant-garde were polarized along East-West lines.[18] In East Germany the critics were accustomed to echoing the Soviet treatment of the avant-garde, so they viewed the experimental currents of the 1920s through the prism of Socialist Realism. Yet more recent literary scholarship the 1970s, indirectly stimulated by the cultural debates within the West German New Left, has begun to explore the roots of East Germany's own socialist

art and literature.[19] For the East Germans, the figure of Brecht has provided a legitimate connection to the Soviet 1920s, although the subject of the avant-garde itself has never acquired political respectability.

The work of Fritz Mierau, who has practically monopolized East German research on early Soviet literature, has resulted in a careful evaluation of the 1920s in the East German scholarship. Among numerous other projects, Mierau has edited the works of Babel and Tynyanov, published a volume tracing currents in early Soviet poetry, and issued a collection of postrevolutionary posters.[20] More specifically, Mierau has specialized in the writings of Tretyakov. He has published a book containing two of Tretyakov's plays, *Roar, China!* (*Rychi, Kitai!*) and *I Want a Child* (*Khochu rebenka*), together with a selection of critical commentaries. He has edited a volume with Tretyakov's critical essays and excerpts from *Hear, Moscow?!* (*Slyshish, Moskva?!*), *Feldherren,* and *People of One Bonfire* (*Lyudi odnogo kostra*); the volume also includes Mierau's own extensive analysis of Tretyakov's esthetic position.[21] And finally, the high point of Mieurau's research came with the book *Invention and Correction* (*Efindung und Korrektur,* 1976), which discusses Tretyakov's "operative" esthetics.[22] The word "correction" in Mierau's title refers to Tretyakov's programmed flexibility toward his own theories. Although so much work on Tretyakov might suggest that Lef theories have now been completely accepted, it must also be noted that Mierau's book was originally announced as "Testimony and Invention" (*Zeugniss und Erfindung*), with reference to Tretyakov's avant-garde stylization of real sociopolitical facts. Mierau's choice of the new, somewhat ambiguous title hints at the fact that at present an East German analysis of alternate proposals for socialist art must still note that the avant-garde theories were corrected through Socialist Realism. In general, Mierau has been quite successful in verbalizing the contradictions and limitations of the East German approach to the Soviet avant-garde, and he continues to chart new directions for the study of Soviet experimental art and literature.[23]

By far the most enthusiastic and at the same time the most controversial reception of the Soviet avant-garde occurred in West Germany in the early 1970s. Unlike the Czech and East German research, which was directed toward the historical rediscovery of the 1920s, this exploration aimed at the discovery of the present-day significance of early Soviet artistic experimentation. The ongoing reevaluation of the German leftist esthetics of Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Bertolt Brecht, and

Walter Benjamin led to an interest in the early Soviet artistic developments that had originally influenced these German leftist thinkers and writers.

In this rediscovery, the Soviet avant-garde program was treated as a model that could revitalize art and literature commercialized by the bourgeois consumer societ. Leftist artists, critics, and cultural activists who were attempting to combine formal experimentation with a social message saw a special direction for their own work in the Russian artistic theories of the 1920s. The new growth of workers' literature in Western Europe led to the rediscovery of the Proletkult movement and Lef, which shared common theoretical grounds with present-day left artists. The New Left focused particularly on the Lef movement because it saw in the avant-garde theories a model for its own cultural orientation.[24] The interest in studying the various media used by early Soviet avant-garde extended also to the popular level, with exhibits of Russian art of the 1920s, discussions of avant-garde literature in newspapers and journals, theatrical performances of Mayakovsky's and Tretyakov's plays.[25]

In this new interpretation of Soviet art and literature, the attitudes of the sociocritically oriented New Left sharply differed from those held by the German cultural establishment in the 1970s. Once again—forty years after the demise of Lef, Litfront, and Constructivism—the same issues became ideologically and emotionally charged. With a view toward determining the present validity of earlier Soviet experimentation, West German discussions focused on such issues as the importance of artistic interaction with the masses and of the creation of art for a mass consumer, the relationship between the producer and the recipient of art, and the function of art as a reflection of reality or as an artifact representing the features typical of objects and situations.

One of the first signs of this West German interest was a 1969 anthology of documents dealing with proletarian culture and the program of the Proletkult.[26] Printed before the main wave of research in the avant-garde, the collection attracted little notice. The actual revival of interest in avant-garde esthetics in the following years should be credited to the collective associated with the journal *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, initially published by the Institute for Experimental Art and Esthetics in Frankfurt. The members of the collective included Heiner Boehncke, Hans Günther, Karla Hielscher, Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, and Renate Lachmann.[27]

The New Left orientation of this group set the tone for West German

research on Lef. Boehncke, in a note titled "Concerning Further Study of S. Tretyakov" ("Zur weiteren Beschäftigung mit S. Tret'iakov"), explained the rationale behind their preoccupation with the Soviet avant-garde:

> We study Tretyakov because we believe that in his theoretical and literary works he represented an esthetic and political position that can reveal the general and the essential contradictions underlying the struggles for the new art.[28]

Rather than try to establish historically how, for example, the Lef members had wanted to replace the psychological novel with newspaper and film, Boehncke claimed that a critical evaluation must concern itself with "the extent to which the esthetic working methods proposed by Tretyakov can address themselves to the existing economic structure and help to change it." In similar interpretations, the problem of the historical continuity of Soviet experimentation and its cultural context generally became less interesting than the appraisal of the artistic debates of the 1920s in terms of "their practical and theoretical significance for the political struggle"[29] in the 1970s.

As in the avant-garde research in East Germany, Tretyakov emerged as the key figure. Boehncke and the collective of *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* devoted an extensive volume, *The Work of a Writer* (*Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers*), to him.[30] Yet the volume is single-faceted; it contains only Tretyakov's theoretical essays and a few German portraits from *People of One Bonfire*. Little is said about his poetry and drama or about his relation to Futurism and Proletkult. Instead, the introduction stresses the functional orientation of Tretyakov's esthetic models and his commitment to social change:

> Esthetic activity that aims at "effectiveness," at a change in the relation of means of production, cannot leave its forms, methods, and means untested. If it aims at a change of social reality, it must first be worked out as a specific form of action.[31]

Similarly, a commentary to another volume of essays by Boris Arvatov, *Art and Industry* (*Kunst und Produktion*), explains that the editors were mainly concerned with the present revolutionary applications of the Soviet models:

> More and more of our artists begin to realize that art must find a way back to life, to society, from the ghetto where it has been pushed by

bourgeois society. Freeing art from this ghetto can only go hand in hand with freeing society from the capitalist system.[32]

Further publications on the avant-garde by Heinz Brüggemann, Karla Hielscher, and Hans G. Helms also tend to incorporate Lef esthetics into the debates within the New Left, rather than to focus on the specific Russian background of the Russian avant-garde experimentation.[33]

To these provocative interpretations of the Soviet left art movement by the New Left, the West German "establishment" newspapers responded with comments and book reviews. The media generally showed a nostalgic attitude toward the Soviet "roaring twenties," focused on the esthetic aspects of the avant-garde art, and elaborated on the timeless formal value of early Soviet experiments. At the same time, they also noted the utopian character of the Tretyakov revival and denied the possibility that such concepts as production art, bio-interview, or the activization of the recipient could be practically applied to contemporary life.[34]

In the aftermath of these controversies, Gerd Wilbert in 1976 finally published the first factual and theoretical account of the Lef movement from the time of the Revolution to the demise of the journal *Lef* in 1925.[35] Wilbert's analysis is mainly directed toward cultural history; he is interested in the reaction of the left-oriented artistic intelligentsia to the Revolution. He surveys the spectrum of theoretical positions within and around the Left Front of the Arts and describes outside reactions to these programs, but he does not deal with the artistic applications of Lef theories. Wilbert's study offers new information, particularly on the Futurists' activities in the Russian Far East prior to the organization of Lef, and gives a solid overview of the left art group in the first half of the 1920s. A great number of issues and individuals are covered in minute subchapters, resulting in a somewhat fragmented presentation. Nevertheless, for the first time the Lef theories and the circumstances surrounding the movement appear in a detailed historical perspective. With this approach, Wilbert apparently declares himself an independent in the present-day West German controversy about left art: he knowingly uses accessible printed materials but excludes recent West German sources from his bibliography.

The Soviet avant-garde has also been reviewed with interest in Scandinavia. A study by Bengt Jangfeldt devoted to *Art of the Commune* further details the historical overview of the Futurist activities in the first half of the 1920s.[36] Jangfeldt's objective and well-researched presentation of the

Futurist movement in the immediate postrevolutionary period covers the program of the newspaper of the left arts, the organizational activities of the Futurists, and the manifestations of the new artistic ideology in Mayakovsky's poetry. In addition to this volume, which appeared in English, Jangfeldt has also edited a collection in English and Russian that includes essays on Mayakovsky written by the poet's Russian associates and commentaries on his poetry by Swedish Slavicists. In Swedish, Jangfeldt has coedited a selection of translations from Mayakovsky's poetry, illustrated with rare photographs, that cover Mayakovsky's development prior to his organizational involvement in the left art movement. Among those who popularize Soviet experimental art in Scandinavia, one should also mention the Dane Troels Andersen, who edited numerous catalogues on Russian avant-garde art.[37] Besides Andersen's work, the left art movement is represented in Danish by a collection of early Soviet avant-garde literature in which Tretyakov occupies a prominent position.

English-language publications on twentieth-century Russian art and literature also reflect an increasing though hesitant interest in the Russian avant-garde. The term itself acquired popularity after the appearance of R. Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968). Since then the designation has been applied rather broadly to the art movements of the periods such as 1900-1930, 1902-1930, or 1905-1925, without limiting the trend to the postrevolutionary decade, as is usually done in East European criticism.[38] In English-language publications, the term "avant-garde" is applied much more convincingly to the fine arts than to literature, perhaps because this area has received most critical attention. Thanks to Camilla Gray and, more recently, to John E. Bowlt, English-language studies of modern Russian art have set the tone for the research in this area.[39] Bowlt, an extremely prolific and well-informed critic, has emerged as an indisputable authority, producing numerous articles, editions and an impressive collection of materials on the avant-garde painting and sculpture.

Not only the fine arts, but also film and theater associated with the left arts movement have received broad coverage in English. Eisenstein has always enjoyed considerable popularity.[40] More recently, Meyerhold's theater has also been rediscovered.[41] Several translations of foreign books on Soviet theater, film, and architecture attest to the general interest in the Soviet avant-garde experimentation.[42]

The key English-language publication that provides a panoramic view

of the avant-garde is a collection of essays on the major representatives of the movement (Lunacharsky, Meyerhold, Malevich, Tatlin, Eisenstein, and Mayakovsky) by Robert Williams titled *Artists in Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-Garde 1905–1925* (1977). This study, written from a most interesting philosophical and psychological perspective, discusses the avant-garde experience in terms of the leitmotifs of death and immortality. In the introduction, the author states that in the search for the common denominators of the experimentation in various media, he has come to question the usual belief in the political commitment of the avant-garde artists: "Most statements about the revolution, Russian tradition and the avant-garde turn out either to be unverifiable or to provide a mosaic of selected evidence whose titles can be arranged at will." Instead of focusing on the cultural politics or the esthetics of the avant-garde movement, Williams looks at the psychology of the artists and at the quality of their artistic experience as it was influenced by the "more concrete aspects of the period in the lives and work of individual artists: their provincial background, their education, Western influences, patronage, and generational change."[43] The common formative influences on the avant-garde artists are illustrated by an appendix with diagrams showing similarities in their birthplaces, years of birth, foreign travel (Paris or Munich), and their ages at the times of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions.

This controversial but very informative study tends to focus on the pre- rather than the postrevolutionary period. Consequently, the discussion of Mayakovsky's post- "About That" activities, which are considered by many critics to be the culmination of his avant-garde orientation, accounts for only one-seventh of the essay devoted to the poet. In accordance with the psychological perspective of his book, Williams does not assign any special value to Mayakovsky's relationship with the Lef group or to the impact of Lef esthetics on his postrevolutionary poetry. Despite Lef's extensive attempts to be recognized as the center of the avant-garde, Williams' book does not acknowledge the movement, mentioning it only four times in passing.

A certain reservation toward a movement like Lef in Anglo-American criticism is not without justification. Williams voices an ethical objection to Soviet avant-garde political thinking, an objection that applies in a great degree to the Lef group:

The Russian artists who turned their art to political use must also

> bear some responsibility for the destruction of art and life by the Russian Revolution in its later years. For their shared belief in the artistic and revolutionary immortality helped to provide the techniques and the philosophy that would support the right of the revolution to crush its enemies, including themselves.[44]

This distrust of the avant-garde political enthusiasm in the area of literature combines with another factor which may account for a relative lack of interest in the Left Front of Arts. The Anglo-American studies of the immediate pre- and postrevolutionary period have been influenced by the Russian Formalists, who generally maintained a reserved attitude toward the left art movement.

Perhaps for this reason, Anglo-American criticism generally tends to favor pre-1917 Mayakovsky. The most complete study, Edward Brown's *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (1972), attaches no importance to the poet's participation in Lef, although it contains much new material on Mayakovsky's personal interactions within the Lef circle. Lef itself is discussed in terms of the conflicts within the movement rather than as a positive program. The author considers the organization "doomed from the start to controversy both within itself and with other literary groups, since it harbored personalities, theories, and programs that could not live together in peace."[45] In contrast to Czech and German criticism, Brown does not interpret the poetry Mayakovsky wrote under the influence of Lef tenets as an attempt to renovate the modernist literary code or as an effort to develop a new set of esthetic values. Instead, Brown believes that Mayakovsky

> consciously and more or less consistently subordinated his poetic gift to social purposes, or, to put it more simply, he placed his unusual talents at the disposal of the Soviet state. Literary history offers few comparable examples of such absolute abnegation on the part of a major lyric poet.[46]

Admittedly, the negative attitude toward Lef and the disregard for the role this movement played in the 1920s is not shared by all Anglo-American critics. Lef as an esthetic movement receives a good share of critical attention in the book by Robert Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil* (1968).[47] The author shows the left art group as a radical contender, on a par with VAPP, against Voronsky's officially supported literary policy. Ma-

guire's analysis of the Lef theories developed in the first half of the 1920s is the best brief treatment of this subject in English.

A similarly interesting discussion of a narrower aspect of Lef esthetics, the Lef position on cultural heritage, is to be found in a book by Boris Thomson, *Lot's Wife and the Venus Milo* (1978). Thomson—who is usually very sensitive to cultural trends—in his other book, *The Premature Revolution* (1972), regrettably discusses Mayakovsky entirely outside the Lef context.[48]

The title of another book, *Russian Cubo-Futurism 1910-1930,* suggests that it presents an evaluation of Lef, but its author, Vahan D. Barooshian, does not address himself to this problem. His study sketches a continuation of Vladimir Markov's definitive history of prerevolutionary Futurism, but gives only a brief description of Lef. The discussion deals with the movement not as an esthetic program, but rather as "an attempt to solve literary problems, a forum or meeting ground for Futurist work on poetry and linguistic and literary study."[49] *New Lef* and *literatura fakta* are discussed here only in passing, although the author devotes an entire article to them in *Slavic and East European Journal.*

More recently, Vahan D. Barooshian has published a book that can be considered the major American contribution to the study of the Soviet avant-garde. His book, *Brik and Mayakovsky* (1978), convincingly shows the main role Osip Brik played both in the formation of the theory and in the organization activites of the postrevolutionary avant-garde.[50] Barooshian's book does a particularly good job of delineating Brik's extensive involvements in creating literary theories, in developing theories of fine arts, and in administering the organizational affairs of the avant-garde. Barooshian also touches upon Brik's theoretical impact on Mayakovsky and his crucial role in establishing Mayakovsky as an emblematic Soviet poet during the Stalinist period. Barooshian's study is essential to an understanding of the entire Soviet avant-garde phenomenon. Even if the author spends relatively little time on *Lef,* he convincingly shows how well the program of *Lef* fits into the organizational activities and artistic theories of Osip Brik.

The reception of the Lef movement in different countries presents a surprisingly wide spectrum of attitudes toward the Soviet avant-garde and suggests corresponding conflicting evaluations of its esthetics and its impact. Admittedly the picture of the avant-garde is not yet complete.

The historical facts and the cultural climate surrounding the left art movement have now been explored for the first half of the decade, mainly in the studies by Bengt Jangfeldt, Gerd Wilbert, and Vahan D. Barooshian, but the second half of the 1920s, the period of *New Lef* and "literature of fact," has not yet been a subject of any extended research. Furthermore, the total impact of Lef theories on the styles of artistic and literary production in the 1920s, as well as on Soviet art and literature in general, still needs to be evaluated.

NOTES

Chapter One

1. About Brik's and Majakovskij's activities in the Union of Art Workers see: E. A. Dinerštejn, "Majakovskij v fevrale-oktjabre 1917 g." in *Novoe o Majakovskom*, Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 65 (Moscow, 1958), pp. 543-550.

2. For a discussion of *Gazeta futuristov* see Bengt Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism, 1917-1921*, Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 5 (Stockholm, 1976), pp. 16-29.

3. Proletkult was a mass organization devoted to the development of proletarian culture. It was founded in 1917 by Aleksandr Bogdanov with the help of Lunačarskij and Gor'kij. Its purpose was to develop and cultivate distinctly proletarian forms of cultural activity and thus promote proletarian consciousness. Proletkult was eventually destroyed for political reasons by Lenin, who in 1921 brought Proletkult under the control of the Commissariat for Education. See Peter Gorsen and Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, eds., *Proletkult 1: System einer proletarischen Kultur. Dokumentation*, Problemata, 22.1 (Stuttgart, 1974) and by the same editors, *Proletkult 2: Zur Praxis und Theorie einer proletarischen Kulturrevolution in Sowjetrussland 1917-1925. Dokumentation*, Problemata, 22.2 (Stuttgart, 1975).

4. Vladimir Majakovskij, "Otkrytoe pis'mo rabočim," in V. M., *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij v trinadcati tomax*, XII (Moscow, 1958), 8-9. The subsequent references to Majakovskij's work follow this edition (PSS). The volume is given in Roman numerals, the page in Arabic numerals.

5. Lunačarsky approached the Union of Art Workers in November 1917 to invite its members to work within Narkompros. He met with a categorical rejection, but eventually found some cooperation among the left-wing group, which began to work within Narkompros in spring 1918. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky October 1917-1921* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 110-161.

6. Indicative of the decline of book publishing after the Revolution is the fact that whereas in 1913 some 26,000 book titles were published in Russia, between 1920 and 1921 the number fell to some 4,500 titles, a decline of some 85 percent. A. I. Nazarov, *Očerki sovetskogo knigoizdatel'stva* (Moscow, 1952), p. 103. The need to gain access to a printing press represented a major concern for all writers and poets, although nonproletarian authors experienced these problems more acutely. Still in 1921, a group of writers wrote a letter to Lunačarskij that pointed out that "in the hands of Russian writers there lay some thousand and a half ready-to-be-printed-manuscripts that are not turning into books" (*Vestnik literatury*, No. 3 [1921], p. 12). See also V. Nemirovič-Dančenko, "Kak živut i rabotajut russkie pisateli," in the same issue of *Vestnik literatury*.

7. Osip Brik, "IMO—Iskusstvo molodyx," *Majakovskomu. Sbornik vospominanij i stat'ej*, ed. Vs. Nazarov and S. Spasskij (Leningrad, 1940), p. 93.

8. E. A. Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost' V. V. Majakovskogo," *Kniga. Issledovanija i materialy*, XVII (Moscow, 1968), 158. Dinerštejn's article is a definitive source for Brik's and Majakovskij's publishing involvements between 1918 and 1925.

9. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," pp. 158-159.

10. Lunačarskij was by no means enthusiastic in his support. He explained that "it is better to make a mistake" in giving a proletarian reader a work for which he is not yet ready than to keep "under lock and key works . . . rich with the future." Lunačarskij's introduction to *Ržanoe slovo* is quoted by Osip Brik in "Majakovskij i literaturnoe dviženie 1917-1930 gg. (Materialy k literaturnoj biografii)" in V. Majakovskij, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, ed. L. Brik and I. Bespalov, XII (Moscow, 1937), 410-411. Concerning Lunačarskij's complex relationship with the Futurists see P. A. Bugaenko, *A. V. Lunačarskij i literaturnoe dviženie 20-x godov* (Saratov, 1957), esp ch. 3, "Ja nikogda ne byl futuristom," pp. 49-86.

11. On the Futurist involvement in IZO, see Jangfeldt, pp. 30-50.

12. V. Katanjan, *Majakovskij. Literaturnaja xronika*, 4th ed. (Moscow, 1961), p. 109.

13. PSS, XII, 220.

14. O. Brik, "Ucelevšij bog," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 29 Dec. 1918, p. 2.

15. O. Brik, "Drenaž iskusstvu," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 7 Dec. 1918, p. 1.

16. Vs. Dimitrov, "Provincial'nye vpečatlenia," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 12 Jan. 1919, p. 2.

17. N. Punin, "Kak moglo byt' inače?" *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 19 Jan. 1919, p. 1.

18. N. Punin, "Futrizm—gosudarstvennoc iskusstvo," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 29 Dec. 1918, p. 2; see also Vyolra [pseud.], "Svoboda i diktatura v iskusstve," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 29 Dec. 1918, p. 2.

19. See a statement by Nikolaj Al'tman: "I am using the word 'Futurism' in the usual sense, as covering all left currents in art," in "Futurizm i proletarskoe iskusstvo," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 15 Dec. 1918, p. 2. Also Osip Brik asked: "Since when . . . only poets are considered to be Futurists?" in "Nalet na futurizm," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 9 Feb. 1919, p. 3.

20. A Group of Left Poets, "Organizujte otdely slovesnogo iskusstva," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 7 Dec. 1918, p. 2.

21. Fitzpatrick, pp. 134-139.

22. Katanjan, p. 109.

23. Fitzpatrick, p. 136.

24. A Group of Left Poets, p. 2.

25. V. Majakovskij, "Radovat'sja rano," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 15 Dec. 1918, p. 1.

26. Critics usually ascribe a metaphorical meaning to Majakovskij's attacks. For a dissenting view that regards "Radovat'sja rano" in the context of the cultural climate of the time see Jerzy Tasarski, "Komfuty (Ideologiczne kompleksy awangardy w okresie wojennego komunizmu)," *Przegląd humanistyczny*, No. 4 (1968), p. 41-59.

27. Quoted in A.V. Kulinič, *Novatorstvo i tradicii v russkoj sovetskoj poezii 20-x godov* (Kiev, 1967), p. 88.

28. A. Lunačarskij, "Ložka protivojadija," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 29 Dec. 1918, p. 1. The newspaper printed only a shortened version of Lunačarskij's statement, deleting some of the more critical points that concerned Majakovskij. That part was published later in *Novoe o Majakovskom*, pp. 572-574.

29. See Jangfeldt, pp. 92-97.

30. "Kommunisty-futuristy," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 26 Jan. 1919, p. 2.

31. "Kommunisty-futuristy," p. 2.

32. Vahan D. Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, 301 (The Hague, 1978), p. 38.

33. "Kommunisty-futuristy," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 2 Feb. 1919, p. 2.

34. Viktor Šklovskij, "Ob iskusstve i revoljucii," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 30 March 1919, p. 2.

35. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," p. 162.

36. Jangfeldt, pp. 48-50.

37. Quoted in Bugaenko, p. 53.

38. On Lenin's attitude toward Futurism and left arts see E. 1. Naumov, "Lenin o Majakovskom (novye materialy)," in *Novoe o Majakovskom*, pp. 205-216; and A. I. Mazaev, *Koncepcija 'proizvodstvennogo iskusstva' 20-x godov. Istoriko-kritičeskij očerk* (Moscow, 1975), ch. "Oktjabr' i načalo stroitel'stva sovetskoj xudožestvennoj kul'tury ('proizvodstvenničestvo' v svete leninskoj kritiki futurizma i Proletkul'ta)," pp. 9-41.

39. Quoted in Bugaenko, p. 101.

40. Fitzpatrick, p. 155.

41. PSS, XII, 17-20.

42. V. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin i Proletkul't* (Moskow, 1974), p. 157.

43. "O proletkul'tax," *O partijnoj i sovetskoj pečati. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1954), pp. 220-222.

44. The existence of the second "Kom-fut," founded in January 1921, has become known only with the publication of Jangfeldt's book in 1976. Jangfeldt, pp. 103-108.

45. Naumov, "Lenin o Majakovskom," p. 210.

46. The group "Tvorčestvo" is most extensively discussed in Gerd Wilbert,

Entstehung und Entwicklung des Programms der "Linken" Kunst und der "Linken Front der Künste" (LEF) 1917-1925: Zum Verhältnis von Künstlerischer Intelligenz und sozialistischer Revolution in Sowjetrussland. Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas, 13 (Giessen, 1976), pp. 146-160.

47. N. L. Meščerjakov, "O rabote Gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva v novyx uslovijax," *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 1 (1922), p. 167.

48. PSS, XIII, 203.

49. PSS, XIII, 53.

50. About publishing in Germany see B. Čistova, "Vse, čto ja sdelal, vse eto vaše . . . (K istorii vzaimootnošenij Majakovskogo s nemeckimi literatorami)," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 6 (1960), p. 149. Also Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," pp. 168-172.

51. E. A. Dinerštejn, "Majakovskij v 'Kruge' i 'Krasnoj novi' (1922-1925)," in *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura. Stat'i, publikacii, materialy i soobščenija*, ed. Z. S. Papernyj (Moscow, 1964), p. 407.

52. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Majakovskij v 'Kruge'," p. 409.

53. Quoted in O. Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," *Literaturnyj kritik*, No. 4 (1936), p. 27.

54. *Isvestija*, 8 March 1922; quoted in Katanjan, p. 164.

55. For the 1922 change and a later distribution of Majakovskij's poems in newspapers and journals see A. V. Pevzner, "Tablica raboty Majakovskogo v gazetax i žurnalax," in *Vladimir Majakovskij. Sbornik I*, ed. A. Dymšic and O. Čexnovicer (Moscow, 1940), pp. 354-358.

56. Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," pp. 163-168.

57. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Majakovskij v 'Kruge'," p. 410.

58. MAF was a direct predecessor of Lef. Osip Brik explains that Majakovskij began to consider the possibility of organizing left artists at the end of 1921. Apparently Brik refers to the time when the possiblity of the publishing firm "MAF" was explored, because he says that such an organization was to be concerned "in the first place with the possibility of printing books by the members of the group." Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 125.

59. Katanjan, *Xronika*, p. 177.

60. Quoted in full in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," pp. 172-173. I rely on Dinerštejn for his account of the "Lef" publishing firm.

61. Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," p. 173.

62. PSS, XII, 205-206.

63. "Plany Gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva (Beseda s zam. zav. Gosizdatom N. L. Meščerjakovym)," *Izvestija*, 13 April 1923; quoted in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," p. 175.

64. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," p. 176.

65. Quoted in Dinerštejn, "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost'," p. 178. Dinerštejn

also includes a listing of printed, sold, and returned copies of the first five numbers of *Lef*. The list shows that between one third and one-fifth of the edition remained unsold.

Chapter Two

1. It should be noted that, although *Lef* was created at the time of a "soft" line in cultural policy, as Sheila Fitzpatrick notes, " 'soft' line was not liberal. It operated within a framework of ideological control through censorship, security police, state monopoly of the press, and restrictions of private publishing. There was room for difference of opinion among Communists on the proper scope of these institutions; and their conduct could be criticized by Communists. But this licence was not extended to non-Communist intelligentsia, since it was the object of control. According to the conventions of the 1920s, members of intelligentsia might petition for the redress of individual grievances, but in doing so they were appealing for favor and not invoking rights." Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The 'Soft' Line on Culture and Its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927, " *Slavic Review*, 2 (1974), 268.

2. On Osip Brik and his important role in the early cultural activities see Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*.

3. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (The Hague, 1969), p. 67.

4. The draft of the *Lef* proposal is printed in PSS, XIII, 404-405.

5. Valentin Kataev voices an unkind, but not a groundless opinion that Majakovskij was used by others, perhaps implying Brik, to provide a front for their programs: "For them— . . . Futurists in the past, and now the Lef members . . . —he [Majakovskij] was a lucky find, a most convenient leader, a man with great power in getting things done, a man behind whose wide back one could crawl without a ticket into the history of Russian literature. He was a haven for . . . mediocrities, for enterprising young men, who all together kept lowering him to their level." Valentin Kataev, *Trava zabvenija* (Moscow, 1967), p. 179. Similarly, Boris Pasternak in his autobiography speaks of "the pygmy projects of [Majakovskij's] fortuitous coterie, hastily gathered together and always indecently mediocre." According to Pasternak, Majakovskj's group consisted of "shallow dilettantes, men with fictitious reputations and false unwarranted pretentions." Boris Pasternak, "Safe Conduct: An Autobiography," trans. Beatrice Scott, in his *Safe Conduct: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 5th ed. (New York, 1958), p. 124.

6. For a well-documented publication on Majakovskij's commitment to *Lef* see Peter Bukowski, "Majakovskij and der LEF," in *Vladimir Vladimirovič Majakovskij gewidmet: Deutsche und russische Beiträge in zwei Bänden*, I, ed. Peter Bukowski and Günther Fischer, Hamburger Beiträge für Russischlehrer, 8 (Hamburg, 1977), pp. 13-24.

7. O. Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 128.

8. Aseev writes that "the two months [January and February] . . . Majakovskij spend almost entirely alone, literally without leaving his room." N. Aseev, *Začem i komu nužna poezija* (Moscow, 1961), p. 137. Katanjan indicates some activities for Majakovskij, among them one meeting of the future editorial board of *Lef* on 22 January, 1923 (p. 178).

9. N. Cužak, "V drakax za iskusstvo. Raznye podxody k Lefu." *Pravda*, 21 July 1923.

10. P. V. Neznamov, "Majakovskij v dvadcatyx godax," in *Majakovskij v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, ed. N. V. Reformatskaja (Moscow, 1963), p. 369.

11. See "Pis'ma Majakovskogo k L. Ju. Brik," *Novoe o Majakovskom*, esp. pp. 140, 144, 149.

12. On the Futurist background of these Lef members see Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Los Angeles and Berkely, 1968), *passim*.

13. On the Inkhuk Constructivists see Camilla Grey, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1921* (London, 1962), pp. 222-255.

14. On Tret'jakov see the excellent study by Fritz Mierau, *Efindung und Korrektur. Tretjakows Ästhetik der Operativität* (Berlin, 1976).

15. PSS, XIII, 204.

16. PSS, XIII, 204.

17. L. Sosnovskij, "Želtaja kofta iz sovetskogo sitca," *Pravda*, 24 May 1923, and by the same author, "Litxaltura," *Pravda*, 1 December 1923; V. Poljanskij, "O levom fronte," *Pod znamenem marksizma*, No. 4-5 (9123); B. Gimmel'farb, "Marksizm o psevdo-marksizme," *Izvestija*, 5 July 1923, and by the same author, "Literatura i revoljucija," *Izvestija*, 16 Dec. 1923; V. Polonskij, "Zametki o žurnalax," *Pečat' i revoljucija*, Nos. 4 and 5 (1923); P. Žukov, "Levyj front iskusstv," *Kniga i revoljucija*, No. 3 (1923) and by the same author, "Razval 'Lefa'," *Žizn' iskusstva*, No. 6 (1924); A. Sventickij, "Levyj front iskusstv i proletarjat," *Literaturnyj eženedel'nik*, Nos. 22, 26, 24 (1923).

18. PSS, XIII, 205-206.

19. "Pis'ma Majakovskogo," pp. 205-206.

20. PSS, XII, 279.

21. Neznamov, p. 372.

22. Frunze's speech is the sole statement available from the meeting that might have possibly dealt with the continuation of *Lef*. M.V. Frunze, "O xudožestvennoj literature," *Sobranie sočinenij*, III (Moscow, 1927), 154.

23. Katanjan, p. 229.

24. "Pis'ma Majakovskogo," pp. 149-150. An editorial comment is added: "We do not know exactly what was happening at that time with Lef in Moscow; nor do we know the content of the last planned issue" (p. 150).

25. PSS, XII, 280-282.

26. PSS, XIII, 204.

27. PSS, XIII, 405.

28. "Tovarišči—formovščiki žizni!" *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 3-8.

29. On the group "41°" see Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 338-363. Apparently also in New York, David Burljuk, together with other members of a publishing firm called "Hammer and Sickle," organized a group that called itself "American Lef" and in 1924 published three issues of a magazine *Kitovras*. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 319.

30. In his book *Novatorstvo i tradicii v russkoj sovetskoj poezii 20-x godov* (Kiev, 1967), A.V. Kulinič says that "Futurist and Lef-like [*lefovskie*] groups existed in Leningrad (Len-Lef), Jaroslavl', Kazan', Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Novosibirsk, Georgia ('Memarcxeneoba,' or 'Leftism'), Kiev (Panfuturist organization—Association of Kommun-kultists), Kharkov ('New Generation'), Odessa (Jugo-Lef)" (p. 93). Although Kulinič does not mention the period, he most likely refers to the time of *Novyj Lef* (1927-1928), because *Lef* refers only to the Ivanovo-Voznesensk and Odessa groups.

31. "Soglašenie Mosk. Associacii Prolet. Pisatelej MAPP i gruppy 'LEF'," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 5.

32. S. Šešukov, *Neistovye revniteli. Iz istorii literaturnoj bor'by 20-x godov* (Moscow, 1970), p. 29. On the history of *Na postu* see also Karl Eimermacher, "Nachwort," in *Na postu* (1923-1925; rpt. München, 1971), pp. 273-289.

33. See S. Rodov, "Kak Lef v poxod sobralsja," by the same author, "A korol' to gol" (about Aseev); and G. Lelevič, "Vladimir Majakovskij," all in *Na postu*, No. 1 (1923).

34. "Lef i MAPP," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 3. In this case the particular "foreign resident" (*zagraničnik*) was Aleksej Tolstoj, who had just returned from France and had no trouble publishing in "Krug" despite his questionable political record. Šešukov, p. 40.

35. "Soglašenie," p. 5.

36. Osip Brik explains that the Lef-MAPP agreement was "fully directed against the politics of Voronskij and *Krasnaja nov'*." Brik also mentions the existence of the secret agreement forbidding the left writers to publish in "Krug." (Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 125.) The Lef-MAPP alliance was also a self-defense measure on the part of the Lef group. D. Furmanov, at the time the secretary of MAPP, writes in his memoirs: "We agreed: Lef will go along with us hand in hand, like true comrades. In addition, we gave them a promise that in the case that *Lef* would be closed down (there were such rumors) —we will rise together with them against this 'act of violence'." D. Furmanov, *Sobranie sočinenij v 4-x tomax*, IV (Moscow, 1961), 337.

37. Furmanov, 337.

38. Thirteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, May 23-31, 1924,

"O pečati (Rezoljucija s'ezda)," *O partijnoj i sovetskoj pečati, radioveščanii i televidenii. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 109-116. Point 19 of the Resolution expresses qualified support for "fellow-travelers" and refuses to acknowledge the proletarians as the sole legitimate representatives of Soviet literature.

39. Voronskij's speech is printed in *K voprosu o politike RKP (b) v xudožestvennoj literature* (Moscow, 1924).

40. PSS, XII, 267.

41. Katanjan, p. 229.

42. The term "Constructivist" is used here in a narrow sense with reference to a literary group and not in its extended meaning, which is occasionally used also with regard to the Lef program. For an analysis of literary Constructivism see Jadwiga Szymczak, *Twórczość Ilji Sielwińskiego na tle teorii konstruktywizmu (1915-1930)*, PAN—Prace Komisji Słowianoznawstwa, 8 (Wrocław, 1965).

43. Quoted in S. A. Kovalenko, "Majakovskij i poety-konstruktivisty," in *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura*, p. 165.

44. "Kogo predostergaet LEF?" *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 10.

45. K. L. Zelinskij, *Legendy o Majakovskom* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 7-9. In his search for contributors Majkovskij also invited Esenin, but without inviting the Imaginists, and Esenin refused. V. F. Zemskov, "Vstreči Majakovskogo i Esenina," in *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura*. pp. 369-371.

46. Quoted in Kovalenko, p. 167.

47. Neznamov, p. 268.

48. *Gosplan literatury. Sbornik literaturnogo centra konstruktivistov* (Moscow, 1925), p. 47.

49. Kovalenko, p. 189.

50. Osip Brik quotes an almost parodic letter of May 27, 1924, from one of the enthusiastic organizers of JugoLef, which shows the militant proletarian character of this new group and the casual circumstances in which it was formed. Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 138.

51. PSS, XIII, 60-61.

52. N. Čužak, "Pis'mo v redakciju," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 213. Čužak also publicized his disagreements with the Lef group in *Pravda*. N. Čužak, "Na levom fronte (Pis'mo v redakciju)," *Pravda*, 11 Nov. 1923.

53. January 1925 was a critical period in Soviet politics. Stalin ousted Trockij from the War Commissariat and Voronskij was temporarily removed from the editorship of *Krasnaja nov'*. On the VAPP convention see Šešukov, pp. 78-86.

54. What Čužak had in mind were the difficulties with publishing Šklovskij's article "Texnika romana tain," when the censor deleted a part of the article supposedly because of indecency of some quoted folk riddles. PSS, XII, 617.

55. Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 139.

56. The main spokesman for the federation format for the Left Front of the Arts was Osip Brik. At the meeting, Majakovskij spoke in support of Brik's position. PSS, XII, 275-83, esp. 275.

57. PSS, XIII, 70-71.

58. N. Čužak, "O tom, čto na Lefe," *Žizn' iskusstva*, No. 22 (1925), p. 5.

59. V. Bljumenfel'd, "Na levom fronte. K ob'edineniju Lefa," *Žizn' iskusstva*, No. 22 (1925), p. 5. Percov's analysis of the Lef movement appeared as V. Percov, *Revizja Levogo fronta v sovremennom russkom iskusstve* (Moscow, 1925).

60. Čužak, "O tom, čto na Lefe," pp. 5-6.

61. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor, 1960), pp. 139-40. Fragments of Trockij's book first appeared at the end of 1924 as articles in *Pravda*.

62. Trotsky, pp. 140, 146.

63. "Vystuplenija na dispute' Pervye kamni novoj kul'tury 9 fevralja 1925 g'," *Novoe o Majakovskom*, p. 31.

64. O. Brik, "O rezoljucii," *Žurnalist*, No. 8-9 (1925), p. 33.

65. PSS, XII, 479.

66. The organizational meeting of Ref took place on September 14, 1929. Osip Brik became the secretary (*otvetstvennyj sekretar'*) of the new organization. Ref held an evening "Otkryvaetsja Ref" on October 8, 1929 and in January 1930 conducted a closed meeting of the Ref plenum, which then preceded the dissolution of the Ref group in February 1930. (Neznamov, pp. 380-391). A detailed account of Majakovskij's move from Ref to RAPP is found in V. P. Rakov, "Majakovskij i literaturnaja gruppa Lef," in *Sovetskaja literatura 20-x godov. Materialy mežuzovskoj naučnoj konferencii*, ed. V. P. Rakov (Čeljabinsk, 1966), pp. 192-98.

Chapter Three

1. M. Drozda, M. Hrala, *Dvacátá léta sovětské literární kritiky (LEF—RAPP —Perevал)*, Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica Monographia, 20 (Praha, 1968), pp. 24-28. See also V. Effenberger, "Revoluční psychoideologie sovětské avantgardy," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), 196-208.

2. Drozda, p. 16.

3. L. F. Denisova. "Problema dialektiki v sovetskoj estetike 20-x godov," in *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik statej*, ed. L. F. Denisova (Leningrad, 1967), p. 390. For a bibliographical listing of Bogdanov's statements on proletarian culture and the discussion on the proletarian culture see "Bibliografija. Glava tret'ja. A. A. Bogdanov i proletarskaja kul'tura," in V. Polonskij, *Očerki literaturnogo dviženija revoljucionnoj epoxi*. 2nd ed. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1929), pp. 301-305.

4. Sergej Tret'jakov, "Otkuda i kuda (Perspektivy futurizma)," *Lef*, No. 1

(1923), p. 197. The figure of the "New Man," although appearing in Russian prerevolutionary poetry, has not been as prominent as it was in Western European modernist movements, especially in German Expressionism.

5. Tret'jakov, "Otkuda," p. 201.

6. Tret'jakov, "Otkuda," pp. 201-202.

7. Tret'jakov, "Otkuda," p. 199.

8. In 1919 Osip Brik gave this explanation of the need for reorienting art toward the production of useful objects: "A shoemaker makes shoes, a carpenter —tables. And what does an artist do? He does not do anything; he 'creates.' Unclear and suspicious . . . If the artists do not want to share the fate of the parasitic elements, they must show their right to existence . . . They [must] do a fully definable, socially useful work." O. M. Brik, "Xudožnik i kommuna," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*, No. 1 (1919), p. 25.

9. Tret'jakov, "Otkuda," p. 195.

10. Boris Arvatov, "Iskusstvo v sisteme proletarskoj kul'tury," in *Na put'jax iskusstva*, ed. V. M. Bljumenfel'd, V. F. Pletnev, and N. F. Čužak (Moscow, 1926), p. 5.

11. I. Grossman-Roščin, "O prirode dejstvennogo slova," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), p. 95.

12. A. I. Mazaev, *Koncepcija "proizvodstvennogo iskusstva" 20-x godov. Istoriko-kritičeskij ocerk* (Moscow, 1975), p. 202.

13. "Za čto boretsja Lef?" *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 6-7.

14. "V kogo vgryzaetsja Lef?" *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 9.

15. "Kogo predostergaet Lef?" *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 10-11.

16. Boris Arvatov, "Tak polemizirovat' ne kul'turno," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 9. On March 13, 1925, during a literary debate in the House of the Unions, Majakovskij insisted in the name of the Lef group: "We were Marxists, we will be Marxists, and we want to be good Marxists." Quoted from archival materials by A. Metčenko in *Majakovskij. Očerk tvorčestva* (Moscow—Leningrad, 1924), p. 2. An interesting critical evaluation of the attempts on part of the Lef group to create Marxist esthetics is found in A. Ležnev, *Voprosy literatury i kritiki* (Moscow—Leningrad, 1924), ch. " 'Lef' i ego teoretičeskie obosnovanija," pp. 90-111, and ch. "Proletkul't i proletarskoe iskusstvo," pp. 112-150.

17. N. Čužak, "Pod znakom žiznestroenija (Opyt osoznanija iskusstva dnja)," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 18. For a general discussion of Čužak's theories, see Mazaev, pp. 178-188.

18. Following the appearance of the first two numbers of *Lef*, Lunačarskij presided over a debate on July 3, 1923, on "Lef and Marxism." The account of the debate, admittedly biased, was published in "Lef i marksism," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 213-216. From the debate it is obvious that the Marxist claims of the Lef group were rejected almost immediately by the Soviet cultural administration.

For a bibliography listing the major theoretical statements of the Lef group and the discussions on the esthetics of Lef see Part 3 of V. Rogovin, "Idejno-estetičeskie diskussii 20-x godov (Bibliografičeskie materialy)," in *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli*, pp. 509-512.

19. Quoted from the memoirs of Klara Cetkin. Bugaenko, p. 76.

20. V. I. Lenin, *O literature i iskusstve* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 383-384.

21. For a discussion of the Lef position within the debates on Marxist esthetics see Robert Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920's* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 189-204; Boris Thomson, *Lot's Wife and the Venus of Milo: Conlicting Attitudes to the Cultural Heritage in Modern Russia* (Cambridge, 1978), esp. ch. "The Redundancy of Art: Soviet and Marxist Views of Art in the 1920s," pp. 53-74.

22. A. V. Lunačarskij, "Moim oponentam," *Vestnik teatra*, No. 76-77 (1920), p. 5.

23. The earlier stage of the Futurist-Formalist relationship is described in the study by Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambiance* (The Hague, 1968).

24. Erlich, p. 81.

25. O. Brik, "T.n. formal'nyj metod," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 213.

26. From an answer to a questionnaire dated June 27, 1924. Quoted in Ju. Tynjanov, *Poetika. Istorija literatury. Kino*, ed. V. A. Kaverin and A. S. Mjasnikov (Moscow, 1977), pp. 507-508.

27. "Kogo predostergaet Lef?", p. 11.

28. B. Ejxenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method," trans. I. Titunik, in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, 1971), p. 3.

29. Ejxenbaum, p. 3.

30. Ju. Tynjanov, "O literaturnom fakte," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), pp. 101-116.

31. Tynjanov himself discounted the relationship between "literature of fact" and his concept of "literary fact," explaining that the focus on fact does away with *uslovnost'*, which is the essential feature of literature. "Kommentarii," in Tynjanov, *Poetika*, pp. 508-519.

32. O. Brik, "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," p. 136. At this time, Brik himself solicited any kind of contribution from Opojaz, as is evident from his letter of 13 February, 1924, quoted in "Komentarii," in Tynjanov, *Poetika*, p. 507.

33. Majakovskij claimed credit for the fact that Lef made Formalism functional, so now "the Formalist school appears only as a technical tool, only as means for studying the language as such." PPS, XII, 281.

34. The debate was published in *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 5 (1924) and contained contributions from such influential figures in literary life as Lunačarskij, Polonskij, and Kogan, who in general were not sympathetic to Formalism. For

a bibliography listing the discussions in the 1920s on Formalism and Lef see "Lefy i formalisty," in V. Polonskij, *Očerki literaturnogo dviženija revoljucionnoj epoxi* (Moscow, 1929), pp. 313-316.

35. A. Cejtlin, "Marksisty i formal'nyj metod," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 117. G. Vinokur's article, "Poetika. Linguistika. Sociologija (metodologičeskaja spravka)" preceded Cejtlin's article in the same number of *Lef*, pp. 104-113.

36. One of the possible variants was the formal-sociological method advanced by Boris Arvatov, who was a member of the editorial board of *Lef*. This method is often identified with *Lef*, but the journal published no articles dealing with this theory. Arvatov's views of the Lef period are best represented in his collection *Iskusstvo-proizvodstvo* (Moscow, 1926). Arvatov's *Sociologičeskaja poetika*, with an introduction by Osip Brik, appeared only in 1928. The most extensive analysis of Arvatov's theories is available in Mazaev, pp. 235-267.

37. Quoted from a Polish definition by Robert A. Rothstein, "*Kultura języka* in Twentieth-century Poland and Her Neighbors," in *Slavic Linguistics and Language Teaching*, ed. Thomas F. Magner (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 58-59. I am grateful to Professor Rothstein for calling my attention to this study.

38. Rothstein, pp. 63-67.

39. G. Vinokur, "Iz predislovija k I-mu izdaniju," in G.V., *Kul'tura jazyka*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1929), p. 8.

40. Vinokur, "Iz predislovija," p. 9.

41. Pomorska, *Formalist Theory*, p. 88.

42. Markov, *Futurism*, p. 346.

43. Pomorska, *Formalist Theory*, p. 95.

44. Pomorska, *Formalist Theory*, p. 47.

45. The distinction between Xlebnikov's and Kručenyx's types of *zaum* is made by Pomorska, *Formalist Theory*, p. 107.

46. Quoted in G. Vinokur, "Futuristy—stroiteli jazyka," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 204.

47. Vinokur, "Futuristy," p. 205.

48. Vinokur, "Futuristy," p. 212.

49. B. Arvatov, "Rečetvorstvo (po povodu 'zaumnoj' poezii)," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), p. 84. See also B. Arvatov, "Jazyk poetičeskij i jazyk praktičeskij. K metodologii iskusstvoznanija," *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 7 (1923), pp. 58-67.

50. Arvatov, "Rečetvorstvo," p. 91.

51. S. Tret'jakov, "Tribuna Lefa," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 164.

52. G. Vinokur, "O revoljucionnoj frazeologii (odin iz voprosov jazykovoj politiki)," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), p. 106. See also G. Vinokur, "Kul'tura jazyka. Zadači sovremennogo jazykoznanija," *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 5 (1923), pp. 100-111.

53. V. Polevoj, "Iz istorii vzgljadov na realizm v sovetskom iskusstvoznanii serediny 1920-x godov," in *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli*, p. 208.

54. On the Inkhuk episode see Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, ch. 2. Statements of the new "industrial" artists are available in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt (New York, 1976), ch. 5.

55. O. Brik, "Ot kartiny k sitcu," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), pp. 27-34.

56. O. Brik, "V proizvodstvo!" *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 105-08. About Rodčenko see also L. Volkov-Lannit, *Aleksandr Rodčenko risuet, fotografiruet, sporit* (Moscow, 1968).

57. L. Popova, "Foto-montaž," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 41.

58. S. Ejzenštejn, "Montaž attrakcionov," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 70.

59. Lunačarskij delivered his speech "Nazad k Ostrovskomu!" in the Malyj Theater on 13 April 1923. The speech announced a planned curtailment of experimental theater, especially that of the Proletkult type. More significantly, by its reiteration of the need for the continuity of cultural tradition, this speech signified the rejection of the artistic programs promoted by the left artists.

60. Ejzenštejn, p. 71.

61. Dziga Vertov, "Kinoki. Perevorot," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), pp. 135-143.

62. Vertov, p. 142.

Chapter Four

1. Leonid I. Strakhovsky, *Craftsmen of the Word: Three Poets of Modern Russia: Gumilyov, Akhmatova, Mandelstam* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 2.

2. Šklovskij's lecture was later published in a pamphlet form as *Voskrešenie slova* (St. Petersburg, 1914). See Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 141.

3. Quoted in Nils Ake Nilsson, *The Russian Imaginists*, Stockholm Slavic Studies, 5 (Stockholm, 1970), p. 13.

4. This statement was printed under the title "Majakovskij o futurizme" in *Novoe o Majakovskom*, p. 179. The addressee of this letter is nowhere indicated, although it was suggested that it may have been Trockij. Clearly, this is not only Majakovskij's own statement of poetic goals, but a program of a group.

5. PSS, XII, 23

6. Kulinič, p. 15.

7. Quoted in V. P. Rakov, *Majakovskij i sovetskaja poezija 20-x godov*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1976), p. 11. See also the entire ch. 1.

8. Ju. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 209-223; rpt. in Tynjanov, *Poetika*, p. 178.

9. On the Futurist background of the poets who later published in the *Lef* journal see Markov, *Russian Futurism, passim*.

10. Kulinič, p. 258.

11. V. Majakovskij and O. Brik, "Naša slovesnaja rabota," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 40-41.

12. Majakovskij and Brik, "Naša slovesnaja rabota," p. 41.

13. V. Majakovskij, "Prikaz No. 2 armii iskusstva," PSS, II, 14. Čužak criticized "Pro eto" in his article "K zadačam dnja (stat'ja diskussionnaja)," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 149-151.

14. Boris Arvatov, "Kontr-revoljucija formy (o Valerii Brjusove)," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 215-230. The Futurists continued to attack Brjusov throughout the 1920s. See also O. Brik, "Brjusov protiv Lenina," *Na literaturnom postu*, No. 5-6 (1926), pp. 28-30.

15. V. Sillov, "RASSEJA ili R.S.F.S.R. (zametka o proletarskoj poezii)," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 119-129.

16. Pasternak, *Safe Conduct*, p. 109. Pasternak described his contemporaries as follows: "The Epigones represented an impulse without fire or gifts. The Novators—nothing except a castrated hatred, an immovable militancy. These were the words and movements of big talk, overheard apelike and carried away haphazardly in bits, in disjointed literalness without any conception of the meaning that was animating this storm . . . As a movement, the Novators were distinguished by a visible unanimity. But as with movements of all times, this was a unanimity of lottery tickets, whirled into a swarm by the mixing-machine for the draw. The fate of this movement was to remain a movement for ever, that is, a curious event for the mechanical mixing of chances, from the hour when some of these tickets, issuing from the lottery wheel, would flare out in the conflagration of winning, of conquest, personality, and nominal meaning. This movement was called Futurism. The winner of the draw and its justification was Mayakovsky" (pp. 109-110).

17. About Gastev and the significance of his poetry for Lef, see Mazaev, pp. 60-69.

18. B. Arvatov, rev. of A. Gastev, *Pačka orderov*, in *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 243-245.

19. The First of May collection appeared in *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 9-19.

20. On the Futurist group 41° see Markov, *Futurism*, pp. 337-363. The group formally existed from the end of 1917 to 1920, although it also later published under this name.

21. The critic Sosnovskij from *Pravda* attacked this poem in his review of the newly appeared *Lef*, L. Sosnovskij, "Želtaja kofta iz sovetskogo sitca," *Pravda*, 24 May 1923. Brik replied in the name of *Lef*, defending both the journal and Terent'ev. O. Brik, "Sosnovskomu," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 4.

22. Brik edited three volumes of Formalist studies, *Sborniki po teorii poetičeskogo jazyka* (Petersburg, 1916, 1917, 1919), where he published his influential essay, "Zvukovye povtory." Brik's next essay, "Ritm and sintaksis," eventually printed in *Novyj Lef*, Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6 (1927), originated in 1920 as a paper on rhythmic-syntactical figures that Brik read during an Opojaz meeting the same

year. Both essays must have been well known and influential with poets who published in *Lef*. Erlich, p. 89.

23. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 168. Tynjanov, who refused to recognize Futurism in the Lef version, wrote: "Futurism has left the street (in fact, to be precise, it no longer exists); and the street is concerned neither with Futurism nor with poetry . . . And if some still argue about poetry, they do so matter-of-factly, with projects and schemes in which everything is calculated in advance as in a drugstore" (p. 178).

24. Tynjanov called "Rabočim Kurska" an ode. "Promežutok," p. 178.

25. N. Aseev, *Dnevnik poeta* (Leningrad, 1929), p. 103.

26. The term *social'nyj zakaz* is usually translated as "social order." Such a translation fails to convey the idea of the artist as a craftsman and of the producer-client relationship between the artist and the society. For the discussion of *social'nyj zakaz* see Barooshian, pp. 94-98.

27. "Pis'ma L. Ju. Brik," p. 163. Majakovskij indeed had some plans for writing larger prose works. He announced in July 1923 that he was writing a novel (Katanjan, p. 192) and mentioned it again in January 1924 (Katanjan, p. 200). It was supposed to be an adventure novel that, in Majakovskij's opinion, was to overshadow the success of the Tarzan series among the Soviet public. At the time, however, the adventure novel had begun to lose its appeal as the Soviet prose reoriented itself toward the new reality. In his autobiography, under the year 1925, Majakovskij notes: "The novel I finished only in my mind, not on paper, because while writing I began to detest everything invented and demanded of myself that the novel be written about a real person and be based on a fact." (PSS,1,28). At the end of 1924 Majakovskij apparently considered writing another novel, this time based on facts, for which he even signed a contract with Gosizdat. The action of the novel was to take place in Moscow and Leningrad beginning with the year 1914 and continuing to the current period. The subject was "the literary life and *byt*, struggle of artistic schools, etc." (*Večernjaja Moskva*, 26 February 1926, quoted in Katanian, pp. 256-257). The novel was never written; it seems doubtful that Majakovskij actually began writing it.

28. "Poslanie proletarskim poetam," PSS, VII, 151.

29. Vladimir Markov, *The Longer Poems of Velimir Khlebnikov*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 62 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p. 20.

30. Tynjanov saw that the image of Xlebnikov had overshadowed Xlebnikov's own poetry: ". . . Xlebnikov's name is on the lips of all poets. What threatens Xlebnikov now—is his own biography. This biography is exceptionally canonical, a biography of a madman and a seeker who died from hunger. And a biography—and especially death—wipes out the work of a man." "Promežutok," p. 180.

31. Markov, *The Longer Poems*, p. 20.

32. See two letters by Xlebnikov to Brik in V. Xlebnikov, *Neizdannye proizvedenija*, ed. N. Xardžiev and T. Gric (1940) rpt. Munich, 1971), pp. 384-385.

33. About the circumstances surrounding the publishing of Xlebnikov's poem in *Izvestija* see N. Stepanov, *Velimir Xlebnikov. Žizn' i tvorčestvo* (Moscow, 1975), pp. 228-229.

34. N. Aseev, "Čerez mir—šag," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 42-44.

35. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 181.

36. Markov, *The Longer Poems*, p. 146.

37. Tret'jakov, "Otkuda i kuda," p. 195.

38. Markov, *The Longer Poems*, p. 118.

39. Dm. Petrovskij, "Vospominanija o Velemire Xlebnikove," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 143-71. Petrovskij's essay appeared later as *Povest' o Xlebnikove* (Moscow, 1926). Concerning Xlebnikov's "legend," in 1925 the critic I. A. Aksenov noted: "Xlebnikov at present is very popular. A legend grew and continues to develop around this name. It seems that currently the legend about Xlebnikov enjoys greater popularity than the poetry of this founder of Cubo-Futurism. Not without reason *Lef* began its activity not from printing a poem of its mentor, but from a publication of one variant of the legend about Xlebnikov." I. A. Aksenov, rev. of *Otryvok iz dosok sud'by* by V. Xlebnikov, in *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 5 (1925), p. 277.

40. Petrovskij, p. 160.

41. Quoted in Petrovskij, p. 169.

42. Petrovskij, p. 169.

43. Petrovskij, pp. 170-171.

44. The announcement was printed in *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 171.

45. Markov, *The Longer Poems*, p. 20.

46. V. Markov, "Predislovie," in V. Xlebnikov, *Sobranie sočinenij*, ed. N. Stepanov and Ju. Tynjanov, I (1928; rpt. Munich, 1971), ix.

47. N. Stepanov, "Tvorčestvo Velimira Xlebnikova," in Xlebnikov, I, 34.

48. Stepanov, p. 35.

49. PSS, XII, 373.

50. G. Vinokur, "Xlebnikov," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 4 (1924), p. 224.

51. Also in the prerevolutionary period Majakovskij was less extreme than many of his fellow Futurists. V. Markov considers his Futurism to be "of a conservative variety." Markov, *Futurism*, p. 317.

52. PSS, XII, 23. N. Xardžiev analyzes the mutual influences between Majakovskij and Xlebnikov in N. Xardžiev and V. Trenin, *Poetičeskaja kul'tura Majakovskogo* (Moscow, 1970), ch. "Majakovskij i Xlebnikov."

53. PSS, II, 14.

54. See A. El'jaševič, *Lirizm. Ekspressija. Grotesk. O stilevyx tečenijax v literature socialističeskogo realizma* (Leningrad, 1975), p. 262.

55. Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems 1917-1967* (New York, 1967), p. 25.

56. Tynjanov noted that Blok used for his poetry the musical form of the "romance," with its primitivism and its emotionality. Tynjanov, "Blok" in Ju.T., *Poetika*, p. 122. See also V. Šklovskij, *Poiski optimizma* (Moscow, 1931), pp. 101-109, and Ju. Lotman and Z. Minc, " 'Čelovek prirody' v russkoj literature XIX veka i 'cyganskaja tema' u Bloka," in *Blokovskij sbornik* (Tartu, 1964).

57. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 176.

58. About the reception of "Pro eto" see Senta Everts-Grigat, *V.V. Majakovskij: Pro eto. Übersetzung und Interpretation*, Slavistische Beiträge, 84 (Munich, 1975), pp. 236-253.

59. Lunačarskij called "Pro eto" a deeply lyrical and revolutionary *poema*." (Katanjan, p. 183). Voronskij, who complained that the new Soviet literature lacked pathos, passion, emotional fullness, and verbal intensity, singled out Majakovskij's "Pro eto" as a "happy exception," saying: "The most valuable aspect of it ["Pro eto"] is the presence of a deep, authentic feeling, true poetic sincerity, and an intensity of experiences . . . Majakovskij's *poema* has a hero—a big man who feels unbearably confined in the petty *byt* that surrounds him." *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 6 (1923) pp. 320-321.

60. Majakovskij and Brik in their introduction to *Lef* prose and poetry described "Pro eto" as "an exercise in polyphonic rhythm within a *poema* that has a wide social context." "Praktika," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 41.

61. PSS, IV, 436.

62. PSS, I, 26.

63. Pasternak, who saw that Majakovskij's poetry was based on "the Romantic conception of life as the life of a poet," regarded such poetic protests against *byt* as a feature of this Romanticism: "Romanticism always needs philistinism and with the disappearance of the petty bourgeoisie loses half its poetical content." Pasternak, *Safe Conduct*, pp. 128-129. Majakovskij in "Pro eto" still protests against philistinism, assigning it now to the remnants of bourgeois mentality.

64. V. Majakovskij, "Rabočim Kurska dobyvšim pervuju rudu," *Lef*, No. 4 (1923), p. 52.

65. Majakovskij, "Rabočim Kurska," p. 56.

66. S. Vladimirov, *Ob estetičeskix vzgljadax Majakovskogo* (Leningrad, 1976), pp. 112-114.

67. V. Majakovskij, "Jubilejnoe. Aleksandr Sergeevich—razrešite predstavit'sja. Majakovskij," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), pp. 16-23.

68. Ann and Samuel Charters, *I Love: The Story of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik* (New York, 1979), p. 233. About the factual character of Majakovskij's *poema* "Vladimir Il'ič Lenin" and its reception see A. Smorodin, *Poezija V. V. Majakovskogo i publicistika 20-x godov* (Leningrad, 1972), pp. 150-183.

69. N. Aseev, "Večnaja poema," *Smena*, No. 2 (1949), pp. 6-7; quoted in Vladimirov, pp. 132-133.

70. V. Majakovskij, "Vladimir Il'ič Lenin," *Lef*, No. 3 (1925), p. 16.

71. Katanjan, p. 215.

72. Katanjan, p. 217. Majakovskij was rightly concerned because the poem had a mixed reception. Cf. a statement by the critic G. Gorbačev, who saw that a large part of "Vladimir Il'ič Lenin" was a "monotonous and drawn-out illustration to a thoroughly studied textbook of the Party history." G. E. Gorbačev, *Sovremennaja russkaja literatura. Obzor literaturno-ideologičeskix tečenij sovremennosti i kritičeskie portrety sovremennyx pisatelej*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1931), p. 203. Gorbačev also maintained that "Majakovskij is primitive in his Communist statements, so pupil-like faithful to the tradition in his description of the history of the revolution ('Vladimir Il'ič Lenin'). He adopted Leninism too late, only by reason and, in essence, too superficially to be independent in his revolutionary thinking" (pp. 198-199).

73. V. Rogovin, "Problema proletarskoj kul'tury v idejnoestetičeskix sporax 20-x godov," *Iz istorii*, p. 101.

74. *Novyj mir*, No. 8-9 (1926). Quoted in PSS, XII, 562.

75. PSS, XII, 117.

76. O. Mandelštam, "Literaturnaja Moskva," *Rossija*, No. 2 (1922), p. 23. Quoted in "Komentarii," *Poetika*, by Tynjanov, p. 476.

77. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," pp. 175-78.

78. R. Jakobson, "O pokolenii, rastrativšem svoix poetov," in R. Jakobson and D. Svjatopolk-Mirskij, *Smert' Vladimira Majakovskogo* (1931; rpt. the Hague, 1975), p. 28.

79. Gorbačev, pp. 204-05. Concerning Xlebnikov's influence on Aseev see: A. Urban, "Poezija Nikolaja Aseeva," in N. Aseev, *Stixotvorenija i poemy* (Leningrad, 1967), pp. 9-11. Aseev wrote about his treatment of the poetic word that he derived from Xlebnikov in N. Aseev, *Začem i komu nužna poezija* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 53-80. In remembrance of his relationship with Majakovskij, in 1936-1939 Aseev wrote a book-length *poema* titled *Majakovskij načinaetsja*. There, among other topics, he described the history of Futurism and his friendship with Majakovskij. Separate chapters are devoted to Xlebnikov, Kručenyx, and others. Lef is mentioned only indirectly. In 1940, at the time of a temporary cultural thaw and a revival of interest in Majakovskij, Aseev was awarded the Stalin Prize for this *poema*.

80. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 41.

81. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 193.

82. N. Aseev, "Čerez mir—šag," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 42-44.

83. N. Aseev, "Intervencija vekov," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 44.

84. N. Aseev, "Mašina vremeni," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), pp. 47-48.

85. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 194.

86. N. Aseev, "Černyj princ. Ballada ob anglijskom zolote, zatonuvšem v 1854 godu u vxoda v buxtu Balaklavy," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 29-36.

87. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 194.

88. V. Majakovskij, "Pro eto," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 67.

89. N. Aseev, "Liričeskoe otstuplenie. Dnevnik v stixax," *Lef*, No. 6 (9124), pp. 5-15.

90. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," p. 41.

91. V. Kamenskij, "Žongler," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 45-47.

92. N. Gorlov, "Lef preodolevajuščij slovo i slova preodolevajuščie Lef," *Lef*, No. 3 (1923), p. 19.

93. V. Kamenskij, "Gimn 40-letnim junošam," *Lef*, No. 5 (1924), pp. 8-9.

94. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," p. 41.

95. A. Kručenyx, "Maroženica bogov," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 49-51.

96. A. Kručenyx, "Traurnyj Rur", "Rur radostnyj," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 51-52.

97. A. Kručenyx, "Razbojnik Van'ka Kain i Son'ka manikjurščica (Ugolovnyj roman)," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), pp. 24-26.

98. Pasternak, *Safe Conduct*, p. 199.

99. Pasternak, *Safe Conduct*, p. 134.

100. B. Pasternak, "Vysokaja bolezn'," *Lef*, No. 5 (1924), pp. 10-18.

101. PSS, XII, 281-282.

102. K. Pomorska, *Themes and Variations in Pasternak's Poetics*, PdR Press Publication on Boris Pasternak, 1 (Lisse, 1975), p. 8.

103. M. Drozda, "Pasternak i levoe iskusstvo," *Československá rusistika*, 4 (1967), p. 226.

104. A. Z. Ležnev, *Sovremenniki. Literaturno-kritičeskie očerki* (Moscow, 1927), p. 10.

Chapter Five

1. The key presentation of the problem of early Soviet prose is found in A. G., "Diskussii o sovremennoj proze," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 2 (1924), pp. 271-278. For recent detailed analyses see also: G. A. Belaja, *Zakonomernosti stilevogo razvitija sovetskoj prozy dvadcatyx godov* (Moscow, 1977); V. V. Buznik, *Russkaja sovetskaja proza dvadcatyx godov* (Leningrad, 1975); N. A. Groznova, *Rannjaja sovetskaja proza 1917-1925* (Leningrad, 1976); N. I. Velikaja, *Formirovanie xudožestvennogo soznanija v sovetskoj proze 20-x godov* (Vladivostok, 1975); and *Russkaja sovetskaja povest' 20-30-x godov*, ed. V. A. Kovalev (Leningrad, 1976).

2. Cf. essays by Boris Ejxenbaum, "V ožidanii literatury," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 1 (1924), pp. 280-290; and "V poiskax žanra," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 2 (1924), pp. 228-31.

3. Ju. Tynjanov commented: "In the transitional period what is valuable for

us are not 'successes' and 'ready things.' Like children who do not know what they can do with toys that are too good, we do not know what to do with good things. We need a way out. 'Things' can be 'unsuccessful,' but it is important that they bring near the possibility of successes." "Promežutok," p. 195.

4. B. Ejxenbaum, "O. Genri i teorija novelly," *Zvezda*, No. 6 (1925); rpt. in B. E., *Literatura. Teorija. Kritika. Polemika* (Leningrad, 1927), pp. 166-168; and by the same author, "O Šatobriane, o červoncax i russkoj literature," *Žizn' iskusstva*, No. 1 (1924), p. 3. See also: N. Aseev, "Ključ sjužeta," *Pečat' i revoljucija*, No. 7 (1925), pp. 67-70; A. Slonimskij, "V poiskax sjužeta," *Kniga i revolucija*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 4-6.

5. Mazaev mentions that in 1921 200 private publishers were registered, seventy of whom were active and printed mainly *bul'varnaja* and *polubul'varnaja literatura* (p. 81).

6. For a rare discussion of the prerevolutionary popular literature and its connection with film see Neia M. Zorkaja, *U istokov massovogo iskusstva v Rossii 1900-1910* (Moscow, 1976). The popularity of detective literature was by no means a new phenomenon in the 1920s. For example, in August 1908, in Petersburg alone, 600,000 copies of adventures of Nat Pinkerton, Nick Carter, and other detectives were sold. In the same year, 624 titles about their adventures were published. A. Britikov, "Detektivnaja povest' v kontekste priključeničeskix žanrov," in *Russkaja sovetskaja povest'*, p. 422.

7. Ju. Tynjanov, "Literaturnoe segodnja," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 1 (1924), rpt. in *Poetika*, p. 150.

8. Tynjanov, "Promežutok," p. 170.

9. Ejxenbaum, "V poiskax žanra," p. 292.

10. Ejxenbaum, "V poiskax žanra," p. 294.

11. Gary Kern, "Introduction," in *The Serapion Brothers: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gary Kern and Christopher Collins (Ann Arbor, 1975), p. xi.

12. After the October Revolution, Shklovsky was involved in an underground organization plotting to restore the Constituent Assembly. See *The Serapion Brothers*, p. 172.

13. D. G. B. Piper, *V. A. Kaverin: A Soviet Writer's Response to the Problem of Commitment*, Duquesne Studies Philological Series, 11 (Pittsburg, 1970), pp. 22-23.

14. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," pp. 40-41.

15. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," p. 40. Majakovskij and Brik were most likely parodying the approach to literary analysis popularized by A. A. Reformatskij in *Opyt analiza novellističeskoj kompozicii* (Moscow, 1922) who similarly diagramed literature.

16. According to Belaja, "In the beginning of the 1920s, the 'Lef' artists frequently appeared as the continuators of the struggle led by the early Futurists

for the intensification of style in general and, especially, for the intensification of the word" (p. 118).

17. A. Voronskij wrote: "Babel' represents a great hope of contemporary Russian Soviet literature and is already its great achievement," In "Babel'," *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 5 (1924), p. 295. See also: V. Šklovskij, "I. Babel' (Kritičeskij romans)," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), p. 156, and A. Ležnev, "I. Babel'. Očerk," *Krasnaja niva*, No. 8 (1928), p. 22.

18. N. Aseev, "Zavtra," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), p. 173.

19. Aseev, "Zavtra," p. 178.

20. Ulrich Weisstein gives an excellent description of Expressionism in his articles "Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon" and "Expressionism: Style or *Weltanschauung*," both in *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, ed. U. Weisstein (Paris and Budapest, 1973), pp. 15-44.

21. The first half of the 1920s is the time of an increased interest in Expressionism in Russia. On the reception of Expressionism see "Kommentarii," in Tynjanov, *Poetika*, pp. 444-445. See also: Vladimir Markov, "Russian Expressionism," in *Expressionism*, pp. 315-327. For an analysis extending the concept of Expressionism to the general panorama of early Soviet literature see El'jaševič, *Lirizm*, esp. ch. "Ekspressionizm i ekspressivnij realizm," and "Ekspressivnoe načalo v russkom iskusstve," pp. 126-180.

22. Aseev, "Zavtra," pp. 172-173.

23. On the relationship of Georg Grosz to the Russian left art movement see A. M. Ušakov, "Majakovskij i Grosz," *Poet i socjalizm. K estetike Majakovskogo*, ed. V. Percov (Moscow, 1971), pp. 328-342.

24. N. Aseev, "Vojna s krysami," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), pp. 20-21.

25. Aseev, "Vojna," p. 22

26. A. Veselyj, "Vol'nica," *Lef*, No. 5 (1924), p. 38.

27. Veselyj, p. 39.

28. Veselyj, p. 39.

29. Veselyj, p. 38.

30. M. Čarnyj, *Artem Veselyj. Kritiko-biografičeskij očerk* (Moscow, 1960), p. 114.

31. Since 1922 Buxarin advocated the creation of *krasnaja romantika* to counteract the influence of NEP literature. See ch. "N. I. Buxarin o xudožestvennoj literature," in Polonskij, *Očerki literaturnogo dviženija*, pp. 177-188.

32. Marietta Šaginian, "Priključenija damy iz obščestva," *Krasnaja niva*, Nos. 48-51 (1923); Džim Dollar [M.Šaginian], *Mess Mend, ili Janki v Petrograde* (Moscow, 1924); Džim Dollar [M. Šaginian], *Lori Len, metalist* (Moscow, 1925); all rpt. in Marietta Šaginian, *Sobranie sočinenij* (Moscow, 1956), II.

33. The idea of a parodie treatment of adventure and mystery plots as a way of opening new possibilities in prose was strongly supported by the Formalists,

who did not, however, share Lef's utilitarian view of literary forms. See Ejxenbaum, "O. Genri," p. 209.

34. V. S. [Viktor Šklovskij], "Tarzan," *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 3 (1924), p. 253. A detailed discussion of the adventure literature of the 1920s is found in Britikov, "Detektivnaja povest'."

35. Among the Formalist critics, Šklovskij worked most intensely on the problems of prose, especially its structural devices. See V. Šklovskij, *O teorii prozy* (1925; rpt. Ann Arbor, 1972). An article from this volume, "Texnika romana tain," had originally appeared in *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 125-155.

36. Cf. "The adventure-colonial novel is clearly turning canonical. Thanks to the light hand of Pierre Benois, all its elements are irrevocably defined and create a completely mechanical effect." Ju. R., review of a translation of a French adventure novel, *Russkij sovremennik*, No. 4 (1924), p. 272. (Pierre Benois [1886-1962], French author, wrote the novel *Atlantis* [1919], which enjoyed great popularity in Russia. The Russian version of the novel appeared in 1922 and was followed by several books by this author that were also very successful.)

37. V. Šklovskij, "Iperit (Otryvok iz romana)," *Lef*, No. 7 (1925), p. 70.

38. Šklovskij, together with Vsevolod Ivanov, eventually published an adventure-detective novel, *Iprit* (Moscow, 1926). Kušner's story appeared as B. Kušner, "Nezatuxšie kolebanija (Roman)," *Lef*, No. 6 (1924), pp. 55-88.

39. Quoted in Belaja, p. 129.

40. Majakovskij and Brik, "Praktika," p. 41.

41. O. Brik, "Ne poputčica," *Lef*, No. 1 (1923), pp. 121-122.

42. Brik, "Ne poputčica," p. 140.

43. Brik, "Ne poputčica," p. 134.

44. Within the Lef group, the publication of "Pro eto" met with a strong opposition from N. Čužak. See N. Čužak, "Vokrug 'Ne poputčicy'," *Lef*, No. 2 (1923), p. 69. Critics generally were negative about Brik's story. They found that he spent too much time elaborating the bourgeois life style and drew conclusions that were most trivial.

45. About Sergej Tret'jakov and his fictional and theoretical writings see Fritz Mierau, *Erfindung und Korrektur: Tretjakows Asthetik der Operativität* (Berlin, 1976), and by the same author, "Tatsache und Tendenz. Der 'operierende' Schriftsteller Sergej Tretjakow," in *Lyrik. Dramatik. Prosa*, by S. Tretjakow (Leipzig, 1972), pp. 423-537; and by Heiner Boehncke, "Nachwort," in *Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers: Aufsätze, Reportagen, Porträts*, by S. Tretjakov (Reinbek, 1972), pp. 188-219.

46. Quoted in Mierau, "Tatsache und Tendenz,", pp. 464-465.

47. S. Tret'jakov, "Po povodu 'Protivogazov'," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 108. The play appeared as S. Tret'jakov, "Protivogazy. Melodrama v 3-x dejstvijax," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 89-108.

48. S. Tret'jakov, "Moskva-Pekin (Put'fil'ma)." *Lef*, No. 7 (1925), p. 33.

49. Miroslav Drozda, *Babel-Leonov-Solženicyn* (Prague, 1966), p. 42. Also quoted in Jiří Franěk, "Babel a avantgarda," *Československá rusistika*, No. 3 (1968), p. 155.

50. "Ot redakcii," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), p. 88.

51. E. Krasnoščekova, "Kommentarii," *Izbrannoe*, by Isaak Babel', (Moscow, 1966), pp. 462, 467.

52. I. Babel', "Iz knigi 'Konarmija'," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 63-75; by the same author "Iz knigi 'Odesskie rasskazy'," *Lef*, No. 4 (1924), pp. 76-88; and "Moj pervyj gus'. Iz knigi 'Konarmija'," *Lef*, No. 5 (1924), pp. 48-50.

53. Vjačeslav Polonskij, *O sovremennoj literature* (Moscow, 1928), p. 7. In 1924 Polonskij presided over a debate "Sobesedovanie o gerojax 'Krasnoj armii' Babel'ja." Participants in the debate were C. M. Budennyj, the military leader of the army division that was the subject of Babel's stories, and D. Furmanov, A. Voronskij, G. Lelevič, V. Šklovskij, A. Ležnev, L. Sejfullina, Ju. Libedinskij, M. Levidov, and A. Tarasov-Radionov. Furmanov's account of the debate was published in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 74 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 504-505.

54. Drozda, *Babel-Leonov-Solženicyn*, p. 35.

55. See footnote 17.

56. By 1928 it became obvious that the literary model proposed by Babel' would not be continued in Soviet literature. See N. Stepanov, "Novela Babel'ja," in *I. E. Babel'. Stat'i i materialy*, ed. B. V. Kazanskij and Ju. N. Tynjanov, Mastera sovremennoj literatury, 2 (Leningrad, 1928), p. 21.

Epilogue

1. In Czech criticism, the avant-garde is defined as a trend that (1) distinguished itself by a definite, widely propagated ideology in conflict with a contemporary society or a culture, and (2) acted as an organized movement showing militant activism and demanding collective action and discipline. In world literature the example given is Dadaism and Surrealism. Within and around Lef, the critic finds a unique conception of the avant-garde, which is connected for the first time not only with the destruction of the past, but also with a positive, workable vision of the future. See Květoslav Chvatik, "K voprosu o xudožestvennom avangarde," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), pp. 193-196. For an extended but essentially identical definition in Polish, see Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu: Główne teorie i programy literackie XX stulecia*. Prace Popularnonaukowe, 5 (Toruń, 1965), p. 124. In Russian, the term is equated with left art and clearly distinguished from modernism. According to the Russian definition, the avant-garde includes Futurism, Proletkult, Lef, various versions of Constructivism, and Litfront, and is reflected in media such as literature, art, theatre, architecture,

and film. The author sees the basis of avant-garde esthetics in Opojaz and Lef. See V. V. Kozinov, "K voprosu ob estetike russkogo avangardizma," *Literaturnye napravlenija i stili*, ed. P. A. Nikolaev and E. G. Rudneva (Moscow, 1976), pp. 318-330. For a comparable Yugoslav definition, see Aleksandar Flaker, "Futurizam, ekspresionizam ili avangarda u russkoj književnosti," *Zbornik za slavistiku*, No. 11 (1976), pp. 7-14. In English, however, less distinction is drawn between avant-garde and modernism. Robert Williams, who in the introduction to his book summarizes the use of the term in English, sees three stages within the avant-garde: "aesthetes," who emphasized artistic innovation; "futurists," who subscribed to a mixture of artistic innovation and revolutionary commitment in a revolt against bourgeois society; and "constructivists," who stressed the revolutionary commitment. This development, as defined by Williams, spans the period from the beginning of the century until the middle 1920s. See Robert C. Williams, *Artists in the Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde, 1905-1925* (Bloomington: 1977), pp. 10-11. A similar lack of division between modernism and avant-garde is seen in the title *Russian Modernism: Culture and the Avant-Garde, 1900-1930*, ed. George Gibian and H. W. Tjalsma (Ithaca, 1976).

2. Bukovski, "Majakovskij und der LEF," pp. 13-24.

3. The volume, "Novoe o Majakovskom," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 65 (1958), apparently threatened the official image of the poet, mainly through the printing of Majakovskij's letters to Lilja Brik. Following the intervention of the Central Committee, the already announced second volume of materials was never published. Some of the contributions were later printed abroad in *Vladimir Majakovskij: Memoirs and Essays*, ed. Bengt Jangfeldt and Nils Ake Nilsson, Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 2 (Stockholm, 1975). Concerning Majakovskij's relation to Lef, V. P. Rakov (*Majakovskij i sovetskaja poezija 20-x godov*, 2nd ed. [Moscow, 1976], p. 12) comments: "It is difficult to name a more complex problem in the artistic biography of the great poet." Rakov also subscribes to the official opinion that Majakovskij's literary works were in conflict with the theories propagated by the left artists. The definitive Russian biography of Majakovskij by Viktor Percov, a one-time Lef member, is an example of a treatment that deliberately obscures Majakovskij's function in *Lef* and *Novyj Lef* and contains a number of misstatements (*Majakovskij. Žizn i tvorčestvo*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. [Moscow, 1976]). See also by the same author, "Čuvstvo novogo i predrassudki novatorstva. Majakovskij v žurnale 'Lef,'" *Znamia*, No. 12 (1970), pp. 199-216.

4. "A Bibliography of Brik's Works" has been published in Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, pp. 149-154.

5. Mazaev, *Koncepcija "proizvodstvennogo iskusstva."* This book, introduced as a counterargument against the alleged Western glorification of the avant-garde, offers a good analysis of the theory of industrial arts in the context of Proletkult and Lef. For the review, see N. Maksimova, "Uroki odnoj koncepcii," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 1 (1977), pp. 279-283.

6. Only some examples of *literatura fakta* and a volume of plays appeared

in print. Sergej Tret'jakov, *Den Shi-khua. Ljudi odnogo kostra. Strana-perekrestok*, introd. Viktor Percov (Moscow, 1962) and by the same author, *Slyšiš. Moskva?! Protivogazy. Ryči, Kitaj!* (Moscow, 1966).

7. Some exceptions where Čužak and Arvatov are marginally discussed include Larisa Novožilova, *Sociologija iskusstva. Iz istorii sovetskoj estetiki 20-x godov* (Leningrad, 1968); V. Rogovin, "Problema proletarskoj kul'tury v idejno-estetičeskix sporax 20-x godov," in *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli*, ed. L. V. Denisova (Moscow, 1967), pp. 59-118; and, more extensively, Mazaev, *Koncepcija "proizvodstvennogo iskusstva."*

8. John Bowlt in "New Soviet Publications on Modern Russian Art: A Review Article," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 21 (1977) states that although "we may assert that a dramatic aesthetic shift in the Soviet exposition and a dramatic aesthetic shift in the Soviet exposition and evaluation of many artists is now occurring . . . the whole subject of the Russian avant-garde or leftist art of the period from 1910 through the twenties is still a dangerous and enigmatic one for the Soviet historian" (pp. 254, 256).

9. J. Vavra, "Devětsil a sovetská avantgarda 1923-1926," *Česká literatura*, No. 5 (1963), pp. 418-27; Zdeněk Mathauser, "Avantgardou križem krážem (poetismus a LEF)," in his *Nepopulární studie. Z dějin ruské avantgardy* (Praha, 1969), pp. 74-90; Jan Jiša, "Majakovskij a česká marxistická křitika tricátych let," *Slovanský přehled*, No. 3 (1963), pp. 124-128. For the materials on the Czech reception of Majakovskij, see Růžena Nikolaeva, comp., *Vladimír Majakovskij v české literature. Bibliografie*, introd. Jan Jiša (Praha, 1970).

10. Zdenék Mathauser, *Umění poezie. Vladimir Majakovskij a jeho doba* (Praha, 1964).

11. Miroslav Drozda and Milan Hrala, *Dvacátá léta sovétské literární kritiky (LEF-RAPP-Pereval)*, Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica Monographia, 20 (Praha, 1968).

12. Růžena Grebenčikova, "Literatura faktu. Na okraj historie a mythologie," *Československá rusistika*, 4 (1958) 216-226; Miroslav Drozda, "Pasternak i levoe iskusstvo," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), 221-226; Vratislav Effenberger, "Revoluční psychoideologie sovětské avantgardy," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), 196-208; Květoslav Chvatik, "K voprosu o xudožestvennom avantgarde," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), 193-195; Jiří Franek, "Babel a avantgarda," *Československá rusistika*, 13 (1968), 155-162; Růžena Grebenčikova, "Literatura faktu a teorie románu," *Československá rusistika*, 13 (1968), 162-167; Miroslav Drozda, "Osip Brik jako kritik," *Československá rusistika*, 12 (1967), 11-17.

13. *Problémy literárnej avantgardy. Konferencia slovenskej adademie vied v Smoleniciach 25.-27. oktobra 1965* (Bratislava, 1968).

14. Vasil Choma, *Od futurizmu k literatúre faktu* (Bratislava, 1972).

15. Among numerous publications on this topic, see *Deutschland. Sowjetunion. Aus fünf Jahrzehnten kultureller Zusammenarbeit*, ed. Heinz Sanke (Berlin, 1966); Horst Fliege, "Die führende Rolle der kommunistischen Verlage

bei der Edition der sowjetischen Literatur in der Weimarer Republik," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Pädagogischen Hochschule Erfurt-Mühlhausen*, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, 7 (1970), pp. 71-80. See also the articles by Hildegard Gillsch, Rosalinde Gerecke, and Hans-Georg Ristow in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Pädagogischen Hochschule Erfurt-Mühlhausen*, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, 3 (1966). Other publications include H. -D. Müller, "Der Malik-Verlag als Vermittler der jungen Sowjetliteratur in Deutschland 1919-1933," Zeitschrift für Slawistik, 7 (1962), pp. 720-738; and Klaus Globig, "Die Zeitschrift 'Das neue Russland' als Propagandist der jungen Sowjetliteratur in Deutschland," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 10 (1965), pp. 296-314. Revealing for the extent of Majakovskij's popularity are the bibliographies by Leonhard Kossuth, "Bibliographie deutschsprachiger Veröffentlichungen über Wladimir Majakowski. Teil I: 1919-1949," *Sowjetwissenschaft. Kunst und Literatur*, 21 (1973); and Friedhilde Krause, "Wladimir Majakowski in deutscher Übersetzung," *Sowjetwissenschaft. Kunst und Literatur*, 16 (1968), pp. 753-763.

16. Marjorie L. Hoover, "Brecht's Soviet Connection Tretiakov," *Brecht Heute, Brecht Today*, 3 (1973-74), pp. 39-56.

17. Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie. Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*, Sammlung Luchterhand, 19 (Neuwied, 1971), pp. 97-110.

18. For the East German polemics with the West German view of Soviet literature, see Erhard Hexelschneider, *Ausverkauf eines Mythos. Zur Interpretation sowjetischen Literatur in der BRD* (Berlin, 1975).

19. This change is by no means uniform. Many East German studies still search for the beginnings of the realistic method while analyzing the avant-garde. See Nyota Thun, *Das erste Jahrzehnt. Literatur und Kulturrevolution in der Sowjetunion* (Berlin, 1973).

20. Among them are *Links! Links! Links! Eine Chronik in Vers und Plakat 1917-1921*, ed. Fritz Mierau (Berlin, 1970); Fritz Mierau, *Revolution und Lyrik. Probleme sowjetischer Lyrik der zwanziger und dreissiger Jahre* (Berlin, 1975).

21. Sergej Tretjakow, *Lyrik-Dramatik-Prosa*, ed. Fritz Mierau (Leipzig, 1972); and by the same author, *Brülle, China! Ich will ein Kind haben*, ed. Fritz Mierau (Berlin, 1976). See also the following articles by Mierau: "Sergej Tretjakows 'Ljudi odnogo kostra' (1936)," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 21 (1971), pp. 90-95; "Scheitern oder Korrektur? Sergej Tretjakows Konzept der 'linken Kunst' in 'Menschen eines Scheiterhaufens' (1936)," *Kürbiskern*, No. 4 (1975), "Produktionsstück 'Khochu rebenka' (2. Fassung)," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 20 (1975), pp. 226-421; "Polemik und Korrespondenz. Fjodor Gladkow and Sergej Tretjakow," *Weimarer Beiträge*, No. 10 (1973), pp. 66-81; "Tatsache und Tendenz. Der 'operierende' Schriftsteller Sergej Tretjakow," in *Lyrik—Dramatik—Prosa*, pp. 421-529.

22. Fritz Mierau, *Erfindung und Korrektur. Tretjakows Ästhetik der Operativität* (Berlin, 1976).

23. Fritz Mierau, "Majakowski lesen. Zum 85. Geburtstag am 7. Juli 1978," *Sinn und Form*, 30 (1978), pp. 650-652.

24. Hans Joachim Schlegel, "Anmerkungen zur Rezeption der frühen sowjetischen Literatur," *Akzente*, 21 (1974), pp. 506-512. Hans Günther and Karla Hielscher, "Zur Rezeption der sowjetischen linken Avantgarde," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 19 (1975), pp. 31-36. See also Friedrich Rothe, "Marxistische Ästhetik—ein Steckenpferd der Linksliberalen," *Von der kritischen zur historisch-materialistischen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Werner Girnus et al., 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1972), pp. 30-57.

25. Recent German publications on the Russian avant-garde theater include: Joachim Paech, *Das Theater der russischen Revolution. Theorie und Praxis des proletarisch-revolutionären Theaters in Russland 1917 bis 1924*, Skripten Literaturwissenschaft, 13 (Kronberg, 1974); Wsewolod Meyerhold, *Theaterarbeit 1917-1930*, ed. Rosemarie Tietze (Munich, 1974). On the avant-garde film, see: Dziga Vertov, *Schriften zum Film*, ed. Wolfgang Beilenhoff (Munich, (1973); *Sergej M. Eisenstein. Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Werner Sudendorf (Munich, 1975); Sergej M. Eisenstein, *Schriften*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schlegel, 3 vols. (Munich, 1973-75); *Poetik des Films. Deutsche Erstausgabe der filmtheoretischen Texte der russischen Formalisten*, ed. Wolfgang Beilenhoff (Munich, 1975).

26. *Proletarische Kulturrevolution in Sowjetrussland 1917-1921*, ed. Richard Lorenz, Sonderreihe dtv, 74 (Munich, 1969). See also a two-volume publication on Proletkult: *Proletkult*, ed. Peter Gorsen and Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, 2 vols., Problemata, 22, 1-2, 23 (Stuttgart, 1974, 1975); and *Kultur und Kulturrevolution in der Sowjetunion*, ed. Eberhard Knödler-Bunte and Gernot Erler, Schriften des Instituts für Kultur und Ästhetik, 1 (Kronberg, 1978).

27. Heiner Boehncke, "Zur weiteren Beschäftigung mit S. Tret'jakov," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 4 (1971), p. 80; Hans Günther, "Proletarische und avantgardistische Kunst. Die Organisationsästhetik Bogdanows und die LEF-Konzeption der 'lebensbauenden' Kunst," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 12 (1973), pp. 74-83; Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, "Zur Frage der Rekonstruktion proletarisch-revolutionärer Kunst und Literatur," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 4 (1971), pp. 72-79; by the same author, "Thesen zur politischen Einschätzung des Proletkult," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 5-6 (1972), pp. 153-203; Renate Lachmann, "Faktographie und formalistische Prosatheorie," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, No. 12 (1973), pp. 84-91.

28. Boehncke, "Zur weiteren Beschäftigung," p. 80. (All translations from German are mine, HS).

29. Knödler-Bunte, "Zur Frage," p. 73.

30. S. Tretjakov, *Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers*, ed. Heiner Boehncke (Reinbek, 1972). Marjorie L. Hoover writes in the review of this book: "The book recapitulates a chapter on Marxist literary aesthetics, which undoubtedly it is the time to review. By the same token, Tret'iakov just as urgently needs to be viewed in toto as a writer and man of the theater . . . The latter task is not even attempted in the present volume" (*Brecht Heute. Brecht Today*, 3, 1973-1974, p. 270).

31. Heiner Boehncke, "Nachwort," in *Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers*, p. 198.

32. Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, ed. Hans Günther and Karla Hielscher, Reihe Hanser, 87 (Munich, 1972), p. 116.

33. Heinz Brüggemann, "Aspekte einer marxistischen Produktionästhetik. Versuch über theoretische Beiträge des LEF, Benjamins und Brechts," *Erweiterung der marxistischen Literaturtheorie durch Bestimmung ihrer Grenzen*, ed. Heinz Schlaffer, Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften, 4 (Stuttgart, 1974), pp. 109-143; and by the same author, *Literarische Technik und soziale Revolution. Versuche über das Verhältnis von Kunstproduktion, Marxismus und literarischer Tradition in den theoretischen Schriften Bertolt Brechts* (Reinbek, 1973); Karla Hielscher, "Vom russischen Futurismus zur linken Avantgarde des LEF," *Arbeitsfeld: Materialistische Literaturtheorie. Beiträge zu ihrer Gegenstandsbestimmung*, ed. Klaus-Michael Bogdal et al. (Wiesbaden, 1975), pp. 165-192; Hans G. Helms, "Studien zur Praxis und Theorie der operativen Literatur," *Protokolle*, No. 2 (1976), p. 145; Hans Günther, "Die These vom Ende der Kunst in der sowjetischen Avantgarde der 20er Jahre," *Referate und Beiträge zum VIII. Internationalen Slavistenkongress Zagreb 1978*, Slavistische Beiträge, 119 (Munich, 1978).

34. Dieter Bachmann, "Gebrüll aus weiter Ferne. Tretjakows 'Brülle, China!' im Zürcher Theater am Neumarkt," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 26 June 1975; Franz Schonauer, "Kunst für das praktische Leben. Sergej Tretjakows Ansichten über eine nützliche Literatur," *Deutsche Zeitung/Christ und Welt*, 7 July 1972; Marianne Kesting, "Was bringt die Kunst um? Die sowjetischen zwanziger Jahre—Sergej Tretjakovs Schriften zum ersten Male in deutscher Sprache," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 Sept. 1972.

35. Gerd Wilbert, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des Programms der "Linken" Kunst und der "Linken Front der Künste" (LEF) 1917-1925. Zum Verhältnis von künstlerischer Intelligenz und sozialistischer Revolution in Sowjetrussland*, Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas, 13 (Giessen, 1976).

36. Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism 1917-1921; Vladimir Majakovskij: Memoirs and Essays*, ed. Jangfeldt and Nilsson.

37. *Der vrålande parnassen: Den ryska futurismen i poesi bild och dokument*, ed. Gunnar Harding and Bengt Jangfeldt (Stockholm, 1976). See also Lars Kleberg, "Med notesblock och uten klocka on Sergej Tretjakov," *Ord och Bild*, 83 (1974), pp. 25-26. In Danish appeared *Order er blevet til handling: Skifter*

om kunst og revolution 1923-34, ed. Niels Brunse and Hans Jørgen Nielsen (Copenhagen, 1974). On Russian art, see Troels Andersen, *Moderne russisk kunst 1910-1930* (Copenhagen, 1967) and also *Malevich*, comp. Troels Andersen (Amsterdam, 1970), catalogue.

38. *Russian Modernism: Culture and the Avant-Garde, 1900-1930*, ed. Gibian and Tjalsma; *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*, ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt (New York, 1976); Vahan D. Barooshian, *Russian Cubo-Futurism 1910-1930: A Study in Avant-Gardism* (The Hague, 1974); Williams, *Artists in the Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde 1905 1925*.

39. Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922* (London, 1962); reissued as *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922* (London; New York, 1970); Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*. For additional publications by Bowlt, see the bibliography to this edition. Among numerous catalogues of exhibitions on avant-garde art, see *Russian Avant-garde 1908-1922*, introd. Leonard Hutton-Hutschnecker (New York, 1971); *Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design Since 1917* (London, 1971); *Tatlin's Dream: Russian Suprematist and Constructivist Art 1910-1923*, introd. Andrei Nakov (London, 1973); *Stage Designs and the Russian Avant-garde 1911-1929*, introd. John E. Bowlt (Washington, 1976). On poster art, see *Russian Revolutionary Posters 1917-1929*, comp. Stefan Congrat-Butler (New York, 1971) and *Revolutionary Soviet Film Posters*, ed. Mildred Constantine and Alan Fern (Baltimore, 1974). See also the following articles dealing with the postrevolutionary avant-garde: John E. Bowlt, "The Failed Utopia: Russian Art 1917-32," *Art in America*, 59, No. 4 (1971), 40-51, and by the same author, "Early Soviet Art," *Art & Artists*, No. 10 (1975), pp. 34-43; Szymon Bojko, "Vkhutemas," *Art & Artists*, No. 9 (1974), pp. 8-13; Alan C. Birnholz, "El Lissitzky: The Avant-garde and the Russian Revolution," *Artforum*, No. 1 (1972), pp. 70-76; Jennifer Licht, "Rodchenko: Practising Constructivist," *Artnews*, 70, No. 2 (1971), pp. 54-60; Andrei B. Nakov, "Back to the Material: Rodchenko's Photographic Ideology," *Artforum*, No. 16 (1977), pp. 38-43. Several journals devoted entire issues to the avant-garde or its aspects, e.g., *Screen*, 14, No. 3 (1974) deals with Brik's and Eixenbaum's work on film; *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, Nos. 13, 14 (1976), is devoted to Futurism and Constructivism, although not to Lef; *Soviet Union*, 3, Pt. 2 (1976), deals with Constructivism; and *October*, No. 7 (1978), discusses Soviet revolutionary culture. Recently appeared a very informative catalog of an exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930: New Perspectives*, comp. Stephanie Barron and Maurice Tuchman (Los Angeles, 1980).

40. Eisenstein needed no special rediscovery since his essays and film scripts have long been available to the English-speaking audience. Among several publications, see Sergei Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director*, trans. Z. Danko (New York, 1970); David Meyer, *Sergei M. Eisenstein's Potemkin: A Shot-by-Shot*

Presentation (New York, 1972); *The Complete Films of Eisenstein Together with an Unpublished Essay by Eisenstein*, trans. John Hetherington (New York, 1974); *Eisenstein: Three Films (Potemkin, Oktober, Nevsky)*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York, 1974).

41. *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. and ed. Edward Braun (New York, 1969); James M. Symons, *Meyerhold's Theater of the Grotesque: The Post-Revolutionary Productions 1920-1932*, Books of the Theatre Series, 8 (Coral Gables, 1971); Marjorie L. Hoover, *Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theater* (Amherst, Mass., 1974).

42. Among English translations of books dealing with the Soviet avant-garde, see Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution: Soviet Architecture and City Planning*, trans. Thomas E. Burton (London, 1970); El Lissitzky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, trans. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge, 1970); Szymon Bojko, *New Graphic Design in Revolutionary Russia*, trans. Robert Strybel and Lech Zembrzuski (New York, 1972); Luda Schnitzer et al., eds., *Cinema in Revolution: The Heroic Era of the Soviet Film*, trans. David Robinson (New York, 1973); Ion Barna, *Eisenstein*, introd. Jay Leyda (Bloomington, 1973).

43. Williams, p. 9.

44. Williams, p. 21.

45. Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (Princeton, 1973), p. 212.

46. Brown, p. 303.

47. R. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Princeton, 1968).

48. Boris Thompson, *The Premature Revolution: Russian Literature and Society 1917-1946* (London, 1972) and by the same author, *Lot's Wife and the Venus of Milo: Conflicting Attitudes to the Cultural Heritage in Modern Russia* (Cambridge, 1978).

49. Barooshian, *Russian Cubo-Futurism*, p. 128. See also by the same author, "Russian Futurism in the Late 1920's: Literature of Fact," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 15 (1971), 38-46, and "The Avant-Garde and the Russian Revolution," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, No. 4 (1972), pp. 347-60.

50. Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is intended as a listing of works most pertinent to the subject of the Left Front of the Arts with the emphasis on the *Lef* period. Sources referred to in the notes have been included selectively. All references to the journals *Lef* and *Novyj Lef* are made to:

Lef. Žurnal levogo fronta iskusstv.
Otvetstvennyj redaktor: V. Majakovskij.
Moscow, 1923-1925; rpt. Slavische Propyläen,
Texte in Neu- und Nachdrucken, 91, I, II.
Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970.

Novyj Lef. Žurnal levogo fronta iskusstv.
Pod red. V. Majakovskogo.
Moscow, 1927-1928; rpt. Slavische Propyläen,
Texte in Neu- und Nachdrucken, 91, III, IV.
Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970.

Arvatov, B. "Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo." *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923).

_____. *Iskusstvo i klassy*. Moscow-Petrograd, 1923.

_____. "Literatura i byt." *Zvezda*, No. 6 (1925).

_____. "Iskusstvo v sisteme proletarskoj kul'tury." In *Na putjax iskusstva*. Ed. V. Bljumenfel'd, V. Pletnev, and N. Čužak. Moscow, 1926.

_____. *Iskusstvo-proizvodstvo*. Moscow, 1926.

_____. *Sociologičeskaja poetika*. Moscow, 1928.

_____. *Ob agitacionnom i proizvodstvennom iskusstve*. Moscow, 1930.

Aseev, N. "Ključ služeta." *Pečat i revoljucija*, No. 7 (1925).

_____. *Dnevnik poeta*. Moscow, 1928.

_____. *Začem i komu nužna poezija*. Moscow, 1961.

Bałuch, J. *Poetyzm: Propozycja czeskiej awangardy lat dwudziestych*. PAN Prace Komisji Słowianoznawstwa, 20. Wrocław, 1969.

Baluxatyj, D. "Literaturnyj i iskusstvovedčeskij žurnal za gody revoljucii 1917-1922." In *Periodika po literature i iskusstvu za gody revoljucii*. by K. Muratova, Leningrad, 1933.

Barooshian, V. *Russian Cubo-Futurism 1910-1930: A Study in Avant-Gardism*. Series Maior, 24. The Hague, Paris, 1974.

_____. *Brik and Mayakovsky*. Slavic Printings and Reprintings, 301. The Hague, 1978.

Belaja. G. *Zakonomernosti stilevogo razvitija sovetskoj prozy dvadcatyx godov.* Moscow, 1977.

Bowlt, J. *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934.* New York, 1976.

Brik, O. "Majakovskij—redaktor i organizator," *Literaturnyj kritik,* No. 4 (1936).

_____. "IMO—Iskusstvo molodyx." In *Majakovskomu. Sbornik vospominanij i statej.* Ed. V. Azarov and S. Spasskij. Leningrad, 1940.

Brown, E. *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932.* 1950; rpt. New York, 1971.

_____. *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution.* Princeton, 1973.

Bugaenko, P. *A. V. Lunačarskij i literaturnoe dviženie 20-x godov.* Saratov, 1967.

Buznik, V. *Russkaja sovetskaja proza dvadcatyx godov.* Leningrad, 1975.

Charters, A. and S. *I Love: The Story of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik.* New York, 1979.

Choma, V. *Od futurizmu k literatúre faktu.* Bratislava, 1972.

Chvatik, K. "K voprosu o xudožestvennom avantgarde." *Československá rusistika,* No. 4 (1967).

_____. *Strukturalismus a avantgarda.* Prague, 1970.

_____ and Z. Pešat, eds. *Poetismus.* Prague, 1967.

Čukovskij, K. *Futuristy.* Petrograd, 1922.

Čužak, N. *K dialektike iskusstva. Ot realizma do iskusstva, kak odnoj iz proizvodstvennyx form. Teoretiko-polemičeskie stat'i.* Čita, 1921.

_____, ed. *Literatura fakta.* 1929; rpt. Munich, 1972.

Denisova, L. "Problema dialektiki v sovetskoj estetike 20-x godov." *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik stat'ej.* Ed. L. Denisova. Moscow, 1967.

Dinerštejn, E. "Majakovskij v fevrale-oktjabre 1917g." In *Novoe o Majakovskom.* Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 65. Ed. V. Vinogradov et al. Moscow, 1958.

_____. Majakovskij v 'Kruge' 'i 'Krasnoj nov'i." In *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura. Stat'i, publikacii, materialy i soobščenija.* Ed. Z. Papernyj. Moscow, 1964.

_____. "Izdatel'skaja dejatel'nost' V. V. Majakovskogo (K 75-letiju so dnja roždenija)." *Kniga. Issledovanija i materialy,* XVII. Moscow, 1968.

Drozda, M. *Babel-Leonov-Solženicyn.* Prague, 1966.

_____. "Osip Brik jako kritik." *Československá rusistika.* No. 1 (1967).

_____. "Pasternak i levoe iskusstvo." *Československá rusistika.* No. 4 (1967).

_____ and M. Hrala. *Dvacátá léta sovětské literární kritiky (LEF-RAPP-Pereval).* Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica Monographia, 20. Prague, 1968.

Effenberger, V. "Revolučni psychoideologie sovětské avantgardy." *Československá rusistika.* No. 4 (1967).

Ejxenbaum, B. "V ožidanii literatury." *Russkij sovremennik.* No. 1 (1924).

_____. "V poiskax žanra." *Russkij sovremennik.* No. 2 (1924).

_____. "Vokrug voprosa o formalistax." *Pečat i revoljucija.* No. 5 (1924); trans. as "The Theory of the Formal Method." In *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views.* Ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska. Cambridge, 1971.

_____. "O. Genri i teorija novelly." *Zvezda.* No. 6 (1925).

El'jaševič, A. *Lirizm. Ekspressija. Grotesk. O stilevyx tečenijax v literature socialističeskogo realizma.* Leningrad, 1975.

Erlich, V. *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine.* 3rd ed. The Hague, 1969.

Ermolaev, H. *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism.* University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 69. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963.

Farber, L. *Sovetskaja literatura pervyx let revoljucii 1917-1920 gg.* Moscow, 1966.

Fitzpatrick, S. *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky October 1917-1921.* Cambridge, 1970.

_____."The 'Soft' Line on Culture and Its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927." *Slavic Review.* No. 2 (1974).

Franěk, J. "Babel a avantgarda." *Československá rusistika.* No. 3 (1968).

Gorbačev, G. *Sovremennaja russkaja literatura. Obzor literaturno-ideologičeskix tečenij sovremennosti i kritičeskie portrety sovremennyx pisatelej.* 3rd ed. Moscow, 1931.

Gorlov, N. *Futurizm i revoljucija.* Moscow, 1924.

Gosplan literatury. Sbornik literaturnogo centra konstruktivistov. Moscow, 1925.

Grebenčikova, R. "Literatura faktu a teorie romanu." *Československá rusistika*, No. 3 (1968).

_____. "Literatura faktu. Na okraj historie a mythologie." *Československá rusistika*, No. 4 (1958).

Grey, C. *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1921*. London, 1962.

Groznova, N. *Rannjaja sovetskaja proza 1917-1925*. Leningrad, 1976.

Hendersen, E. "Left Front: The October Revolution in the Poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky." Diss. Yale 1975.

Humesky, A. *Majakovskij and His Neologisms*. New York, 1964.

Hutnikiewicz, A. *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu. Główne teorie i programy literackie XX stulecia*. Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, Prace Popularnonaukowe, No. 5. Toruń, 1965.

Jakobson, R. *Novejšaja russkaja poezija*. Prague, 1921.

_____. "O pokolenii, rastrativšem svoix poetov." In *Smert' Vladimira Majakovskogo*, by R. Jakobson and D. Svjatopolk-Mirskij. 1931; rpt. The Hague, 1975.

Jangfeldt, B. *Majakovskij and Futurism 1917-1921*. Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 5. Stockholm, 1976.

_____ and N. Nilsson, eds. *Vladimir Majakovskij: Memoirs and Essays*. Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 2. Stockholm, 1975.

Jaworski, S. *U podstaw awangardy. Tadeusz Peiper pisarz i teoretyk*. Cracow, 1968.

_____. *Między awangardą a nadrealizmem. Główne kierunki przemian poezji polskiej w latach trzydziestych na tle europejskim*. Cracow, 1976.

K voprosu o politike RKP (b) v xudožestvennoj literature. Moscow, 1924.

Kalinin, N. *Slovo i vremja*. Moscow, 1967.

Kataev, V. *Trava zabvenija*. Moscow, 1967.

Katanjan, V. *Majakovskij. Literaturnaja xronika*. 4th ed. Moscow, 1961.

Kogan, P. *Literatura velikogo desjatiletija*. Moscow-Leningrad, 1927.

_____. *Naši literaturnye spory*. Moscow, 1927.

Kovalenko, S. "Majakovskij i poety-konstruktivisty." In *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura. Stat'i, publikacii, materialy i soobščenija*. Ed. Z. Papernyj. Moscow, 1964.

Kulinič, A. *Novatorstvo i tradicii v russkoj sovetskoj poezii 20-x godov*. Kiev, 1967.

Ležnev, A. *Sovremenniki. Literaturno-kritičeskie ocerki*. Moscow, 1927.

_____. *Voprosy literatury i kritiki*. Moscow, 1924.

L'vov-Rogačevskij, V. *Novejšaja russkaja literatura.* 3rd ed. Moscow-Leningrad, 1924.

Maca, I. "Sovetskaja estetičeskaja mysl' v 20-e gody." In *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik stat'ej.* Ed. L. F. Denisova. Moscow, 1967.

Maguire, R. *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920's.* Princeton, 1968.

"Majakovskij o futurizme." In *Novoe o Majakovskom.* Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 65. Ed. V. Vinogradov et al. Moscow, 1958.

Majakovskij, V. "Pis'ma k L. Ju. Brik (1917-1930)." In *Novoe o Majakovskom.* Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 65. Ed. V. Vinogradov et al. Moscow, 1958.

Markov, V. *The Longer Poems of Velimir Chlebnikov.* University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 62. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962.

_____. "Predislovie." *Sobranie sočinenij,* by V. Xlebnikov. 1928; rpt. Munich, 1971.

_____. *Russian Futurism: A History.* Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1968.

Mathauser, Z. *Nepopulární studie. Z dějin russké avantgardy.* Prague, 1969.

_____. *Umění poezie. Vladimír Majakovskij a jeho doba.* Prague, 1964.

Mazaev, A. *Koncepcija "proizvodstvennogo iskusstva". Istoriko-kritičeskij očerk.* Moscow, 1975.

Mierau, F. *Revolution und Lyrik. Probleme sowjetischer Lyrik der zwanziger und dreissiger Jahre.* Berlin, 1973.

_____. *Erfindung und Korrektur. Tretjakows Ästhetik der Operativität.* Berlin, 1976.

Naumov, E. "Lenin o Majakovskom (novye materialy)." In *Novoe o Majakovskom.* Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 65. Ed. V. Vinokur et al. Moscow, 1958.

Neznamov, P. "Majakovskij v dvadcatyx godax." In *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura. Stat'i, publikacii, materialy i soobščenija.* Ed. Z. Papernyj. Moscow, 1964.

_____. "Majakovskij v dvadcatyx godax." In *Majakovskij v vospominanijax sovremennikov.* Ed. N. Reformatskaja. Moscow, 1963.

Novožilova, L. *Sociologija iskusstva. Iz istorii sovetskoj estetiki 20-x godov.* Leningrad, 1968.

Oulanoff, H. *The Serapion Brothers: Theory and Practice.* The Hague, 1966.

Pasternak, B. *Safe Conduct: An Autobiography and Other Writings.* 5th ed. New York, 1958.

Percov, V. *Revizija Levogo fronta v sovremennom iskusstve.* Moscow, 1925.

_____. *Majakovskij. Žizn' i tvorčestvo.* 3rd ed. Moscow, 1976. 3 vols.

_____, ed. *Poet i socjalizm. K estetike Majakovskogo.* Moscow, 1971.

Pickel', F. *Liričeskij epos Majakovskogo.* Moscow, 1964.

Piper, D. *A. Kaverin: A Soviet Writer's Response to the Problem of Commitment.* Duquesne Studies Philological Series, 11. Pittsburg, 1970.

Polevoj, V. "Iz istorii vzgljadov na realizm v sovetskom iskusstvoznanii serediny 1920-x godov." In *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik stat'ej.* Ed. L. Denisova. Moscow, 1967.

Pomorska, K. *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambiance.* The Hague, 1968.

Rakov, V., ed. *Sovetskaja literatura 20-x godov. Materialy mežuzovskoj naučnoj konferencii.* Čeljabinsk, 1966.

_____. *Majakovskij i sovetskaja poezija 20-x godov.* Moscow, 1976.

Rogovin, V. "Idejno-estetičeskie diskussi 20-x godov (bibliografičeskie materialy)." In *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik stat'ej.* Ed. L. Denisova. Moscow, 1967.

_____. "Problema proletarskoj kul'tury v idejno-estetičeskix sporax 20-x godov." In *Iz istorii sovetskoj estetičeskoj mysli. Sbornik stat'ej.* Ed. L. Denisova. Moscow, 1967.

Sajanov, V. *Sovremennye literaturnye gruppirovki.* Leningrad, 1928.

Šapirstein-Lers, Ja. *Obščestvennyj smysl russkogo futurizma.* Moscow, 1922.

Seeman, K. "Der Versuch einer proletarischen Kulturrevolution in Russland 1917–1922." In *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* No. 9 (1961).

Selivanovskij, A. *Očerki po istorii russkoj sovetskoj poezii.* Moscow, 1936.

Šešukov, S. *Neistovye revniteli. Iz istorii literaturnoj bor'by 20-x godov.* Moscow, 1970.

Šklovskij, V. *O teorii prozy.* Moscow-Leningrad, 1925.

_____. *Tret'ja fabrika.* Moscow, 1926.

_____. *Poiski optimizma.* Moscow, 1931.

_____. *O Majakovskom.* Moscow, 1940.

Smorodin, A. *Poezija V. V. Majakovskogo i publicistika 20-x godov.* Leningrad, 1972.

Stepanov, N. "Biografičeskie svidenija." In *Sobranie socinenij.* by V. Xlebnikov, vol. I. 1928; rpt. Munich 1971.

_____. "Tvorčestvo Velimira Xlebnikova." In *Sobranie socinenij.* by V. Xlebnikov, Vol. I. 1928; rpt. Munich, 1971.

_____. *Velimir Xlebnikov. Žizn' i tvorčestvo.* Moscow, 1975.

Surma, Ju. *Slovo v boju. Estetika Majakovskogo i literaturnaja bor'ba 20-x godov.* Leningrad, 1963.

Švecova, L. " 'Lef' i 'Novyj Lef'." In *Očerki po istorii russkoj žurnalistiki 1917-1932.* Ed. A. Dement'ev. Moscow, 1966.

Szymak, J. *Twórczość Ilji Sielwińskiego na tle teorii konstruktywizmu (1915-1930).* PAN Prace Komisji Słowianoznawstwa, 6. Wrocław, 1965.

Thomson, B. *The Premature Revolution: Russian Literature and Society 1917-1946.* London, 1972.

_____. *Lot's Wife and the Venus of Milo: Conflicting Attitudes to the Cultural Heritage in Modern Russia.* Cambridge, 1978.

Timofeeva, V. *Jazyk poeta i vremja. Poetičeskij jazyk Majakovskogo.* Moscow, 1962.

Trotsky, L. *Literature and Revolution.* Trans. R. Strunsky. Ann Arbor, 1960.

Tynjanov, Ju. "O Xlebnikove." In *Sobranie sočinenij.* by V. Xlebnikov, vol. I. 1928; rpt. Munich, 1968.

_____. *Poetika. Istorija literatury. Kino.* Ed. V. Kaverin and A. Mjasnikov. Moscow, 1977.

Weisstein, U., ed. *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon.* Paris and Budapest, 1973.

Wilbert, G. *Entstehung und Entwicklung des Programms der "Linken" Kunst und der "Linken Front der Künste" (LEF) 1917-1925: Zum Verhältnis von künstlerischer Intelligenz und sozialistischer Revolution in Sowjetrussland.* Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas, 13. Giessen, 1976.

Williams, R. *Artists in the Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1905-1925.* Bloomington, 1977.

Vinokur, G. *Kul'tura jazyka.* 2nd ed. Moscow, 1929.

_____. *Majakovskij—novator jazyka.* 1943; rpt. Munich, 1967.

Vladimir Mayakovsky: Innovator. Moscow, 1976.

Vladimirov, S. *Ob estetičeskix vzgljadax Majakovskogo.* 2nd ed. Leningrad, 1976.

Xardžiev, N. and V. Trenin. *Poetičeskaja kul'tura Majakovskogo.* Moscow, 1970.

Zelinskij. K. *Legendy o Majakovskom.* Moscow, 1965.

Zemskov, V. "Vstreči Majakovskogo i Esenina." In *Majakovskij i sovetskaja literatura. Stat'i, publikacii, materialy i soobščenija.* Ed. Z. Papernyj. Moscow, 1964.

Slavistische Beiträge, Band 134:

WILHELM BREITSCHUH

DIE FEOPTIJA V. K. TREDIAKOVSKIJS EIN PHYSIKOTHEOLOGISCHES LEHRGEDICHT IM RUSSLAND DES 18. JAHRHUNDERTS

Die *Feoptija* Trediakovskijs, das wohl bedeutendste religionsphilosophische Werk der russischen Aufklärung, wird in der vorliegenden Studie erstmalig eingehend untersucht und interpretiert, nachdem das Manuskript des um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts entstandenen und seither de facto vergessenen Poems durch den russischen Literarhistoriker I. Serman im Jahre 1959 wiederaufgefunden und in den *Gesammelten Werken* Trediakovskijs gedruckt worden ist.

Ohne seine Herkunft aus der russisch-orthodoxen Tradition zu verleugnen, hat Trediakovskij in der *Feoptija* den Ertrag seiner Studien und Reisen in Holland, Frankreich und Deutschland, seine Kenntnis der klassischen und modernen europäischen Sprachen und Literaturen, der europäischen Naturforschung und Geistesgeschichte in ein umfangreiches Poem verarbeitet. Vor allem hat die an der Wende des 17./18. Jahrhunderts weit verbreitete physikotheologische Bewegung, mit ihrem B e s t r e b e n, den christlichen Gottesglauben mit den Erkenntnissen der neuen Naturwissenschaft in Einklang zu bringen, in der *Feoptija* ihren Niederschlag gefunden.

Durch den Vergleich der Texte wird im einzelnen nachgewiesen, daß eines der einflußreichsten Zeugnisse des physikotheologischen Weltverständnisses - Fénelons *Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu, tiré du spectacle de la nature* - von Trediakovskij als Hauptquelle benutzt worden ist. Darüber hinaus werden die Bezüge zur gleichzeitigen deutschen Literatur, insbesondere den Gedichten von B. H. Brockes, dem Dichter des Hamburger physikotheologischen Kreises, aufgezeigt.

Schließlich wird in der Studie herausgearbeitet, daß Trediakovskij, von A. Popes mustergültigem *Essay on Man* angeregt, seine *Feoptija* nach den Merkmalen der im zweiten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts in Westeuropa dominierenden literarischen Gattung des Lehrgedichts gestaltet hat.

München: Verlag Otto Sagner 1979. VIII, 523 S. DM 48.-

Slavistische Beiträge

105. Pogačnik, J.: Von der Dekoration zur Narration. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der slovenischen Literatur. 1977. 165 S.
106. Bojić, V.: Jacob Grimm und Vuk Karadžić. Ein Vergleich ihrer Sprachauffassungen und ihre Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der serbischen Grammatik. 1977. 257 S.
107. Vintr, J.: Die ältesten čechischen Evangeliare. Edition, Text- und Sprachanalyse der ersten Redaktion. 1977. 367 S.
108. Lohff, U. M.: Die Bildlichkeit in den Romanen Ivan Aleksandrovič Gončarovs (1812-1891). 1977. XVI, 244 S.
109. Regier, Ph. R.: A Learner's Guide to the Old Church Slavic Language. Part 1: Grammar with Exercises. 1977. XLIV, 368 S.
110. Worth, D. S.: On the Structure and History of Russian. Selected Essays. With a Preface by Henrik Birnbaum. 1977. X, 276 S.
111. Schulte, B.: Untersuchungen zur poetischen Struktur der Lyrik von Sima Pandurović. *Posmrtne počasti*. 1977. 345 S.
112. Albert, H.: Zur Metaphorik in den Epen *Živana*, *Medvjed Brundo*, *Utva* und *Ahasver* des kroatischen Dichters Vladimir Nazor. 1977. 171 S.
113. Slavistische Linguistik 1976. Referate des II. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens (5.-7. 10. 1976). Herausgegeben von W. Girke und H. Jachnow. 1977. 261 S.
114. Matuschek,H.: Einwortlexeme und Wortgruppenlexeme in der technischen Terminologie des Polnischen. 1977. VIII, 417 S.
115. Schreier, H.: Gogol's religiöses Weltbild und sein literarisches Werk. Zur Antagonie zwischen Kunst und Tendenz. 1977. 123 S.
116. Beiträge und Skizzen zum Werk Ivan Turgenevs. 1977. 142 S.
117. Neureiter, F.: Geschichte der kaschubischen Literatur. Versuch einer zusammenfassenden Darstellung. 1978. 281 S.
118. Russel, M.: Untersuchungen zur Theorie und Praxis der Typisierung bei I. A. Gončarov. 1978. 401 S.
119. Referate und Beiträge zum VIII. Internationalen Slavistenkongreß Zagreb 1978. 1978. 451 S.
120. Slavistische Linguistik 1977. Referate des III. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens Bochum. 27.9.77 - 29.9.77. Herausgegeben von W. Girke und H. Jachnow. 1978. 260 S.
121. Müller, V.: Der Poetismus. Das Programm und die Hauptverfahren der tschechischen literarischen Avantgarde der zwanziger Jahre. 1978. VI, 215 S.
122. Pailer, W.: Die frühen Dramen M. Gor'kijs in ihrem Verhältnis zum dramatischen Schaffen A. P. Čechovs. 1978. VIII, 210 S.
123. Thomas, G.: Middle Low German Loanwords in Russian. 1978. 269 S.
124. Lehfeldt, W.: Formenbildung des russischen Verbs. Versuch einer analytisch-synthetisch-funktionellen Beschreibung der Präsens- und der Präteritumflexion. 1978. 114 S.
125. Schön, L.: Die dichterische Symbolik V. M. Garšins. 1978. VI, 203 S.
126. Berg, R.: Die Abstrakta auf -nie/-tie, -ka/-ok, -ost', -stvo/-stvie, -ie/-ьe in den "Pis'ma i Bumagi" Peters des Großen. 1978. IV, 352 S.
127. Stricker, G.: Stilistische und verbalsyntaktische Untersuchungen zum Moskovitischen Prunkstil des 16. Jahrhunderts. 1979. XIV, 678 S., 3 Tabellen.

128. Heim, M. H.: The Russian Journey of Karel Havlíček Borovský. 1979. XII, 194 S.
129. Malingoudis, J.: Die Handwerkerbezeichnungen im Alttschechischen. 1979. IV, 221 S.
130. Roth, J.: Die indirekten Erlebnisformen im Bulgarischen. Eine Untersuchung zu ihrem Gebrauch in der Umgangssprache. 1979. VIII, 186 S.
131. Nitsch, E.: Thema und Anweisungsstruktur im Text. Mit einer Analyse des ersten Abschnittes aus "Noc s Hamletem" von Vladimír Holan. 1979. VIII, 178 S.
132. Höck, Ch.: Zur syntaktischen und kommunikativen Struktur slavischer Partizipial- und Gerundialkonstruktionen. 1979. X, 283 S.
133. Slavistische Linguistik 1978. Referate des IV. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens Tübingen 26.-29. Sept. 1978. Herausgegeben von Jochen Raecke und Christian Sappok. 1979. 276 S.
134. Breitschuh, W.: Die Feoptija V. K. Trediakovskijs. Ein physikotheologisches Lehrgedicht im Rußland des 18. Jahrhunderts. 1979. VIII, 523 S.
135. Gallant, J.: Russian Verbal Prefixation and Semantic Features: an Analysis of the Prefix вз-. 1979. 460 S.
136. Jachnow, H. (u.a.): Zur Erklärung und Modellierung diachroner Wortbildungsprozesse (anhand russischer substantivischer Neologismen). 1980. IV, 230 S.
137. Breu, W.: Semantische Untersuchungen zum Verbalaspekt im Russischen. 1980. X, 231 S.
138. Slavistische Linguistik 1979. Referate des V. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens Zürich 25. - 27. Sept. 1979. Herausgegeben von Daniel Weiss. 1980. 259 S.
139. Franz, N.: Groteske Strukturen in der Prosa Zamjatins. Syntaktische, semantische und pragmatische Aspekte. 1980. 312 S.
140. Baer, J. T.: Arthur Schopenhauer und die russische Literatur des späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts. 1980. VIII, 194 S.
141. Lempp, A.: Das zusammengesetzte Verbalprädikat mit „da" im Neubulgarischen. 1981. IV, 102 S.
142. Stephan, H.: „Lef" and the Left Front of the Arts. 1981. XIV, 242 S.
143. Kempgen, S.: „Wortarten" als klassifikatorisches Problem der deskriptiven Grammatik. Historische und systematische Untersuchungen am Beispiel des Russischen. 1981. X, 309 S.
144. Peters, J.: Farbe und Licht. Symbolik bei Aleksandr Blok. 1981. VIII, 315 S.