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Russian Futurism 1917–1919

Lili Brik
in memoriam

I. An Outline

The task of this review is to analyze the development of Petrograd and Moscow futurism during the first post-revolutionary years: its attitude to the revolution, its relations to the political powers, and its position in cultural life.[1] (For an outline of futurism in other parts of Russia, see Markov 1968, Rappoport 1974, and Jangfeldt 1975 and 1976.)

No matter how the face of futurism changed during these years, there was one person who was always in the front-line: Vladimir Majakovskij. This position he occupied in his broad capacity as poet, playwright, painter, and spokesman for avantgarde ideas. Majakovskij's development is representative—if not in detail, then at least in its general traits—of futurism as a whole. It is therefore both justifiable and convenient to describe "Russian futurism 1917–1919" principally from the point of view of Majakovskij's own development.

The history of post-revolutionary futurism can be divided into two distinct periods. The first one runs from October, 1917, until April, 1918, and can be called "Kafe Poėtov futurism"; the second one, which I call "IZO futurism", runs from the fall of 1918 until April, 1919.[2] Between these two periods lies the summer of 1918, which led to fundamental changes in the development of the Russian revolution, politically as well as culturally.

Kafe Poėtov Futurism

The first period of post-revolutionary futurism coincided with the militant and anarchistic period of the political revolution. This was the time of "left communism", headed by Buxarin, and of the impatient revolutionism of the left socialist-revolutionaries. But it was also the time of political anarchism, a movement tolerated by the Bolsheviks and, to a certain extent, even enjoying their support, until the middle of April, when the anarchists were raided by the Čeka.

The winter and spring of 1918 was also a time of political pluralism within the socialist camp: although most socialists were opposed to Bolshevism, socialist parties and groups were still allowed to exist, and the migration of members between the parties was "still to some extent operative" (Carr 1966: I, 193). This pluralism meant that there existed a freedom of (socialist) thought and expression: one could still be a *non*-Bolshevik socialist without being accused of being *anti*-Bolshevik or *anti*-Soviet. There was as yet no need for anyone with socialist sympathies to make a definite political choice.

It is against this general political background that one must judge the development of futurism as well. The first period of post-revolutionary futurism not only coincided with political pluralism and anarchism; it bore the same traits of revolutionary enthusiasm itself. Immediately after the October revolution, the old cubo-futurists Vladimir Majakovskij, David Burljuk, and Vasilij Kamenskij resumed the café tradition of pre-revolutionary futurism. Disappointed with the cultural program of the Bolsheviks (see section II, "Majakovskij and October"), they chose to continue the *épatage* of early futurism from the stage of the Kafe Poėtov in Moscow (hence the designation "Kafe Poėtov futurism").

The ideology of "Kafe Poėtov futurism" was anti-authoritarian and anarchistic socialism (the three poets gave their group the anarchistically sounding name "Federation of Futurists"). The manifestos published in *The Futurists' Newspaper* (Gazeta Futuristov) on March 15 declared that futurism is the esthetic counterpart of "socialism–anarchism" ("Otkrytoe pis'mo rabočim"), that art should come out onto the streets ("Dekret No 1 o demokratizacii iskusstv"), that the Academy of Art should be abolished and art separated from the state ("Manifest Letučej Federacii Futuristov"), and that only a "Revolution of the Spirit" ("Revoljucija Duxa") can free man from the fetters of old art (Ibidem, and "Otkrytoe pis'mo rabočim"). The manifestos were signed by all three futurists, except "Otkrytoe pis'mo rabočim" which was written by Majakovskij alone.

The separation of art from the state was a demand that had already been presented a year earlier in "Sojuz dejatelej iskusstv" (henceforth SDI), and not only by the futurists but by almost all artists, regardless of political faith. In March, 1918, however, the Academy had still not been abolished, and the issue was as topical as ever.

The "Revolution of the Spirit" was the third revolution that was

to come after the political and economical revolutions—a spiritual change without which the revolution would not be complete. The first two revolutions had been successful, but in the cultural field "old art" was till dominant:

> Театры попрежнему ставят: "Иудейских" и прочих "царей" (сочинения Романовых[3]), попрежнему памятники генералов, князей — царских любовниц и царицыных любовников тяжкой, грязной ногой стоят на горлах молодых улиц. В мелочных лавочках, называемых высокопарно выставками торгуют чистой мазней барских дочек и дачек в стиле Рококо и прочих Людовиков.
>
> ("Manifest Letučej Federacii Futuristov", Jangfeldt 1975, 156)

Against this background Burljuk, Kamenskij, and Majakovskij urged the "proletarians of the factories and the land" to carry through "a third bloodless but cruel revolution, the revolution of the spirit" (Ibidem).

The need for a spiritual change was felt not only by the futurists; the idea was expressed, in more or less identical terms, by people with differing political and esthetical creeds: the scythians (Ivanov-Razumnik, Belyj), Maksim Gor'kij, the anarchists, and others (see Jangfeldt 1976, 68–70). To Majakovskij the "Revolution of the Spirit" was of special importance, and he would return to the idea more than once, during the period of "IZO futurism", and again later (cf. especially the long poem "IV Internacional").

The anarchism of "Kafe Poėtov futurism" was not only theoretical but also had a practical side. Thus, for example, in March, at a time when anarchist occupations of private houses were commonplace in the new capital, Moscow, the three futurists occupied a part of the former restaurant, Peterhof, where they planned to organize a "House of free art" ("Dom svobodnogo iskusstva"), a club for what was called in *Gazeta Futuristov* "individualist-anarchism of creation"—"individual'-anarxizm tvorčestva". However, nothing came out of the futurists' occupation—for which the Moscow federation of anarchist groups disclaimed responsibility (UR 1918: 40, 20(7).3)—since they were ousted from the restaurant after only about a week (RU 1918: 43, 21.3). Nevertheless, the anarchist journal *Revolutionary Creation* (Revoljucionnoe tvorčestvo) listed the "House of free art" as one of

Moscow's anarchist clubs and *Gazeta Futuristov* as an organ of anarchism (RT 1918: I/II, 139, 141).

The first period of post-revolutionary futurism ended in April, 1918, when the Kafe Poėtov was closed (April 14). The "official" reason for the closing of the café was that the three "whales" of futurism were leaving Moscow in order to propagate futurism in other parts of the Russian republic (see Figaro 1918: 52, 15.4). In fact, the next day Burljuk left the capital,[4] and Kamenskij also disappeared from the Moscow scene; Majakovskij, for his part, spent most of his time from March until June making films.

The end of anarchistic futurism thus coincided with the end of political anarchism; even if the closing of the Kafe Poėtov had no direct connection with the Čeka action against the anarchists two days before, the coincidence was by no means accidental—it signalled the end of the "anarchistic" period of the Russian revolution, in politics as well as in culture. The end of "Kafe Poėtov futurism" also meant the final dissolution of the "classical" cubo-futurist group.

The Emergence of IZO

Parallel to the anarchistic futurism of Majakovskij, Burljuk, and Kamenskij, the spring of 1918 witnessed the emergence of another group that was to play a decisive rôle in the history of the Russian avant-garde. This was the collegiate formed by the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolij Lunačarskij, within Narkompros—IZO, short for "Otdel izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva". When, in November, 1917, Lunačarskij had called upon the artists in SDI to cooperate with the new political power, he had met with solid opposition from both the left and the right: art should be autonomous. Given this negative response, Lunačarskij decided to organize, behind the back of SDI, a collegiate that would try to solve one of the most urgent questions facing Narkompros: the reorganization of artistic life, which meant, above all, the abolition of the Academy.

IZO was instituted on January 29, 1918, and initially had seven members (six artists and one art historian): David Šterenberg (head), Čexonin, Al'tman, Karev, Matveev, Jatmanov, Vaulin, and Nikolaj Punin. According to the latter, "these were the only ones to whom the October revolution was not only an inevitable fact, but a necessary fact conditioned by the laws of history" (ŽI 1921: 8.11).[5] The fact that there was at this time only a tiny minority of seven people

that was willing to cooperate with the Bolsheviks (and thereby give up the demand that art be separated from the state) is interesting enough; still more significant is the fact that this "semerka" was immediately attacked by SDI for its "treason" against the cause of art. It was not only the conservatives who were against the founding of IZO, but the "left bloc" also "disclaimed responsibility for actions carried out by the persons in question" (NŽ 1918: 9.4./27.3).

The founding of IZO nevertheless had two major consequences: SDI was transformed into a body without any real influence on artistic life; the Academy was abolished, on April 12, and replaced, in October, by the first "free art studies" ("Svomasy").

At the beginning of April, Nikolaj Punin, Natan Al'tman, and the composer Artur Lur'e went to Moscow in order to participate in the organization of an IZO collegiate in the capital, and in connection with this they published a greeting to the Moscow futurists, notably Majakovskij and Tatlin. The tone of the greeting echoed the Moscow futurists' own verbal acrobatics:

> Петербург у вас в гостях эти дни, дорогие товарищи-москвичи, взрывающие станции на дорогах искусства. Осведомляем вас, что академия художеств уже в ящике раз навсегда ... Мы пригнали северную победу, мы — мастера и стальные стержни для ваших красных великих знамен ... Делайте все против охраны буржуазного хлама в искусстве ... Мы у руля. Леворуля! Социалисты великие, ересь, семя, ваши рабочие руки сюда! Вот рычаг, сжимающий прошлое, ненавидимое и вами. Приветствуем вас в Москве, тов. Маяковский и Татлин. Приезжайте к нам в Петербург!
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> (Anarxija 1918: 39, 9.4. Quoted from Ja. Tugendxol'd, "'Levyj' rul'", Rodina 1918: 16.4)

Two days later, on April 11, a Moscow collegiate was instituted; Tatlin joined it, and even became its head (Xronika 1975, 46). An artist like Malevič, on the other hand, who at this time was very much inclined towards anarchism and wrote articles for the daily newspaper, *Anarchy* (Anarxija), in his reply to the Petrograd greeting accused its authors of being no better than "The World of Art" and "Apollon" (Malevič, 1971, 58–59). As for Majakovskij, it should be noted that he did not join the Moscow collegiate, although he was directly called upon to do so.

Several events during the summer of 1918 contributed to the radical change in Russian domestic politics that took place in the fall of the same year. "The Bolshevik Revolution passed through three major crises, three periods when the existence of the Soviet regime was seriously threatened. The first and the greatest of these three crises was during the summer months of 1918, when the area of the Soviet Republic was restricted to a territory which roughly corresponded with that of the Muscovite principality in the fifteenth century [...]" (Chamberlin 1935, 42).

In a couple of months Russia witnessed the escalation of the civil war and foreign intervention; the expulsion, on June 14, of all socialist-revolutionaries of the right and the centre as well as the Mensheviks from membership in the Soviets at all levels, which left only one legal party with the Bolsheviks—the *left* socialist-revolutionaries; the expulsion from the Soviets of the *left* SR's as well, after their attempt during the fifth congress of Soviets, on July 4–6, to overthrow the Bolsheviks; the final closure, in July, of all socialist papers; the assassination of the Czar's family; the assassinations of the socialist leaders, Volodarskij and Urickij, and the attempt, on August 30, to murder Lenin; the beginning of "red terror", by a Čeka decree of September 4.

As a result of this, the Bolsheviks were the only legal party after the summer of 1918. E. H. Carr, the outstanding chronicler of the Russian revolution, concludes: "The events of the summer of 1918 left the Bolsheviks without rivals or partners the ruling party in the state; and they possessed in the Cheka an organ of absolute power" (Carr 1966: I, 177).

This polarization of political life had two important consequences: 1. People had to make a final choice: for or against. The fluidity of membership between the parties that had been conceivable during the spring, was no longer possible. Now there were only two camps, the "whites" and the "reds"; 2. The Bolsheviks, for their part, now needed all the support they could get, and therefore had to make Bolshevik politics more attractive to other socialists. Also, they could no longer afford to challenge the intelligentsia—especially the technical intelligentsia—the way they had done in the spring.

In the political field this meant a more lenient attitude towards the socialist parties which had been banned from the Soviets in the sum-

mer. "It was decided [at the sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at the beginning of November, 1918] to hold out an olive branch to the excluded socialist parties—or to accept it when proffered by them" (Carr 1966: I, 179). Even before this decision, the Mensheviks had recognized that the October revolution was "historically necessary", ruled out "all political cooperation with classes hostile to democracy", and promised "direct support of the military forces of the Soviet government against foreign intervention" (Carr 1966: I, 179). In response to this, the Bolsheviks allowed the Mensheviks to resume political activity, and also released all political prisoners "unless a definite charge of counter-revolutionary activities were preferred against them within two weeks of their arrest [...]" (Carr 1966: I, 178). The socialist-revolutionaries soon followed the example of the Mensheviks, and in February, 1919, "decisively rejected any attempt to overthrow the Soviet power by way of armed struggle" (Carr 1966: I, 180). Thus, for a certain period of time a political truce was brought about, even if there could be no doubt as to who dictated the conditions.

The same kind of rapprochement took place between the Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia. When the party reached out a hand, many of those who had previously been critical of Bolshevism accepted the offer. This did not necessarily mean that they had become Bolsheviks; but Bolshevism seemed to many non-Bolsheviks (socialists as well as non-socialists) a better alternative than the ideas for which the "white" side stood.

The example of Maksim Gor'kij is especially interesting in this respect. Until now Gor'kij had been very critical of, and even hostile to the Bolsheviks (see, for instance, his numerous "Untimely thoughts" ("Nesvoevremennye mysli") in *New Life*, Novaja žizn'. On April 9 he had even refused to debate with Zinov'ev before the Petrograd Soviet, the reason being "that the workers are seduced by demagogues like Zinov'ev; that the reckless demagogy of Bolshevism, exciting the black instincts of the masses, puts the working intelligentsia in the tragic position of strangers in their own milieu; and that the Soviet policy is a treacherous policy toward the working class" (NŽ 1918: 9.4/27.3). By September, however, Gor'kij had changed his position, and announced that "the terrorist acts executed against the leaders of the Soviet republic make him embark definitely on the road of close cooperation with it" (IRSL 1967, 698).[6] A month later, on October 6,

Gor'kij acted as chairman at a meeting of "the working intelligentsia", at which the representatives of the Bolshevik party called upon the intelligentsia to support the Soviet regime. One of the speakers was none other than Zinov'ev, who formulated the new political situation in this way: "For those who want to work with us, we open the road. [...] In an age like the one we are living through now, neutrality is impossible. [...] School cannot be neutral, art cannot be neutral, literature cannot be neutral. [...] Comrades, there is no choice. [...] And I would advise you [...] to go to the working class" (PP 1918: 13.10). The same kind of appeals were made at this time by other Bolsheviks as well, like Lenin and Radek.[7]

IZO Futurists in Power

The artists were also approached and called upon to side with the revolution. Just as the political leaders had turned to the socialist parties and the working intelligentsia, IZO turned to "the workers and the artists" and welcomed those who had now, one year after the revolution, come to serve "the socialist fatherland"—but only those who supported "contemporary art", who "break and destroy forms in order to create new art" (VNP 1918: 4/5, 14 [September/October]). The avant-garde character of IZO was further underlined by the fact that the third art debate organized by IZO (on October 24) was devoted to "The futurists and artistic creation". At this meeting the IZO Commissar Punin ardently spoke out in favor of futurism as the art of the proletariat (VNP 1918: 6/8, 89–91).

During the fall of 1918 the IZO collegiates in Petrograd and Moscow—the latter under the leadership of Vladimir Tatlin—were complemented by many of the foremost artists of the day: Kazimir Malevič, Pavel Kuznecov, Il'ja Maškov, Robert Fal'k, Aleksej Morgunov, Ol'ga Rozanova, Vasilij Kandinskij, Baranov-Rossinė, and others. IZO thus became a stronghold of the avant-garde, or the "futurists", as its adherents were usually called.

At this time, the term "futurism" was given a wider and less specific meaning: earlier, the name had been used to designate the "real" futurists, i.e. the cubo-futurists and other groups that called themselves futurists; in the fall of 1918, however, "futurism" became synonymous with "avant-garde", "left art", and so on—all non-realists, regardless of whether they were futurists, cubists, suprematists, constructivists, etc., were called "futurists" by the critics. For the sake

of simplicity, the "left-wing artists" themselves gradually accepted this rather imprecise definition.

Majakovskij and Osip Brik also began to work with IZO in the fall of 1918. They were both socialists, but when the Petrograd and Moscow collegiates were instituted in the spring of 1918, they had not joined them. On the contrary, Brik had devoted a number of articles (all printed in Menshevik newspapers) in December, 1917, and January, 1918, to criticism of the Bolsheviks' cultural program (for a discussion of these articles, see the section "Os'ka's noble letter", pp. 121). And, as we have seen, Majakovskij did not join the Moscow collegiate when he was specially invited to do so in April. Nor did he publish the few poems he wrote in the Bolshevik press; "Xorošee otnošenie k lošadjam" was in fact published as late as June 9 in Gor'kij's Menshevik paper, *Novaja žizn'* (Moscow edition).

It was thus in the general wave of rapprochement in the fall of 1918 that Majakovskij and Brik finally joined IZO.[8] This also meant that they abandoned the principle of the separation of art from the state expressed in "Manifest Letučej Federacii Futuristov". However, this manifesto was signed by Majakovskij, not by Brik, who as early as January, 1918, had warned against "the deceitful notion of 'autonomy'", which would only be used by the "old generals of art" in order to control art schools and institutions (VZ 1918: 22.1). From this rather obscure and enigmatic article it is clear that Brik obviously had nothing against state-supported art—as long as this art was the art he himself supported. Brik's dualistic position may, in fact, be traced back to Lunačarskij's unsuccessful November gathering of the artists and writers, at which Brik played the part of the Commissar's personal representative (Dinerštejn 1958, 566).

What Brik criticized was thus not state art *per se* but the fact that it was represented by the wrong people, i.e. the advocates of traditional esthetics. By cooperating closely with Narkompros, the futurists could prevent the "old generals of art" from gaining power and influence. Majakovskij and Brik in fact became more closely tied to Narkompros not only through IZO, but also through their own publishing enterprise IMO (Iskusstvo molodyx), which was financed by Narkompros; IMO's first books—*Misterija-buff* and the "revolutionary anthology" *Rye-Word* (Ržanoe slovo)—were published for the first anniversary of the revolution.[9]

One of the first questions raised in the now numerically and intellectually strong Petrograd collegiate was the need for a mouthpiece for IZO futurism. Brik suggested that IZO needed not only a journal but also an "simpler and more flexible" newspaper (IK 1918: 1), and on December 7, 1918, the first issue of *Art of the Commune* (Iskusstvo Kommuny) was published. In January, 1919, it was supplemented by *Art* (Iskusstvo), a similar paper published by the Moscow collegiate. A journal, *Visual Art* (Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo), was also planned, but only one much-delayed issue was ever published (the foreword was dated May, 1918, the year of publication was given as 1919, but it did not appear until the beginning of 1920).

The most important paper was *Iskusstvo Kommuny* (Petrograd, December, 1918–April, 1919; nineteen issues), with Brik, Punin, and Natan Al'tman as editors. The main contributors (besides the editors themselves) were Malevič, Šagal, Šklovskij, Boris Kušner, and Majakovskij, who published his poems as editorials (for an analysis of Majakovskij's rôle in *Iskusstvo Kommuny*, see Jangfeldt 1976, 30–71).

The main point in the ideology of IZO—as expressed in Majakovskij's poems, for example—was the struggle against the influence of the cultural heritage on the culture of the new society. As I have tried to show earlier (Jangfeldt 1976, 51–63), the futurists did not repudiate the old culture *as such* but fought against the *influence* of this heritage on the new art and literature. The IZO futurists, however, like other avant-garde groups, had a penchant for provocative formulations, and were themselves at times to blame for being misunderstood—not only by their contemporaries, but by later critics as well.

The "new" or "young" art that was to replace old art was, of course, futurism. According to the futurists themselves, futurism was the most advanced art of the time, and therefore the only art worthy of and consonant with the proletariat, historically the most advanced class. Thus futurism was equated with proletarian art. The IZO futurists never gave more precise definitions of these concepts, which were both positively charged and often used as mere catchwords in the debate. All that was "new" and experimental was declared "futurist" and thereby also "proletarian". In retrospect, one can say that "futurism" was what we today unite under the general heading of non-figurative or objectless art ("bespredmetnoe iskusstvo"). The IZO futurists were against all forms of representative art and spoke out in favor of Tatlin and his "material culture" or Malevič with his

suprematism (see Punin's article in IK 1919: 10, 2). They also stressed professionalism, talent, and quality; they detested the tendency, so common immediately after the revolution, to take a favorable view of all attempts to create "proletarian art", as long as the artist had a true proletarian ideology and/or background. So, for example, Majakovskij declared that "the attitude of the poet to his material should be just as conscientious as the attitude of a welder to the steel" (Majakovskij 1959, 454).

In this struggle against the influence of the cultural heritage, the futurists came to challenge not only the Proletkul'tists, who often rejected this heritage in words but who—due to lack of esthetic education—depended heavily on the old culture (see Jangfeldt 1976, 72–91), but also many of the esthetically conservative academicians and critics and, what is more, the whole educational policy of the Bolshevik party.

The position occupied by the IZO futurists at the end of 1918 was very strong.[10] They were in charge of art education in the whole republic; they were responsible for the purchases of new art for the museums; and they were able to propagate their ideas in organs published and financed by the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Nevertheless, they were far from satisfied with the speed of the revolution in the cultural field. Nothing had changed since the publication of the manifestos in *Gazeta Futuristov* in March. In December, 1918, therefore, Majakovskij, Brik, and Punin started performing for the workers of the Vyborg District in Petrograd. No doubt the futurists strongly felt the need for a social base on which to stand; they had to prove to the critics—and to the workers!—that they were as close to the proletariat as they themselves claimed to be.

As a result of these contacts, a Communist–Futurist Collective (Kom–Fut) was founded in January, 1919, consisting of Brik and Kušner and a couple of workers. (Since it was a party collective, Majakovskij, who was not a communist, could not participate.) The Kom-Futers claimed that the cultural policy of the Bolsheviks was not revolutionary at all, that the cultural revolution was lagging behind the political and economic ones by more than a year, and that it was now necessary to subject the Soviet organs of culture and enlightenment to a "new [...] cultural communist ideology", in other words, the ideology of the Kom–Fut, which, in turn, was that of IZO.

However, nothing came out of Kom–Fut. It was supposed to be a

party collective within the Vyborg District of RKP (b) in Petrograd, but was refused membership on the grounds that "by endorsing such a collective we may create an undesirable precedent for the future" (IK 1919: 9, 2.2). Thereby the Kom–Fut lost its *raison d'être* and ceased to exist, but from now on "Kom–Futy" became a common designation for communist-oriented futurists (for the history of Kom–Fut, see Jangfeldt 1976, 92–108).

This repudiation of Kom–Fut was just another example of the growing criticism of the futurists, whose position in the eyes of many had become far too strong. Although the IZO futurists' position was formally strong—it depended, in fact, to a great extent on the benevolence of Anatolij Lunačarskij—they had been subjected to harsh criticism ever since they had been able to influence cultural life in Russia.

The criticism had begun as early as the first anniversary of the revolution, when a few avant-garde artists decorated some streets in Petrograd, thereby realizing the demand set forth in "Dekret No 1 o demokratizacii iskusstv". These decorations long remained a cornerstone in the criticism of futurism's alleged "incomprehensibility" (although less than ten of the close on ninety artists taking part could be regarded as "futurists", and although not all of their decorations were particularly radical in form).

The accusation of "incomprehensibility" was coupled with criticism of the futurists' position within IZO. It was said that they had "occupied" IZO—"zasil'e" was the current expression—and were trying to achieve recognition as official "state art". It is true that the IZO futurists believed in the dictatorship of a minority in the cultural sphere (a counterpart to the Bolsheviks' dictatorship in politics[11]) and saw themselves in the rôle of this vanguard. Cf. Punin: "We want to see our October realized, we want to establish a dictatorship of the minority, for only the minority constitutes a creative force capable of walking in step with the working class" (IK 1918: 3). Thus, there was something in the criticism of "zasil'e". But this criticism also contained a strong distrust of the futurists' *motives*: it was suggested that they were not true revolutionaries but had merely taken advantage of the moment in order to gain a position of power. In particular among the representatives of the Proletkul't, every futurist approach to the proletariat was regarded as "an attempt of one class to influence the psychology of the working class in their own interest" (Grjaduščee 1918: 10, 10).

At the beginning of 1919 the attacks on futurism became more frequent and intense. One of the driving forces behind the anti-futurist campaign was Vladimir Friče (head of "fine arts" and "popular festivities" within the Moscow section of education), who was also one of the leading figures in the successful attempts to stop the second printing and staging of *Misterija-buff*. On March 1, 1919, the Moscow Soviet asked Friče to give a lecture on futurism before its Executive committee and plenary meeting (VI 1919: 6.3). At the same time, Ol'ga Kameneva, head of TEO (the Theatre section of Narkompros), also took exception to the futurists (VI 1919: 1.3), and futurism was made the subject of a special discussion in the Petrograd Proletkul't (VŽ 1919: 6/7, 72).

The IZO futurists tried to meet the criticism, and more than half of *Iskusstvo* No. 5 (April 1) was devoted to rebutting the attacks. But the front against futurism became both broader and more united. So, for example, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet decided that the organization of May 1st celebrations for 1919 should "on no condition" be entrusted to the futurists from IZO (Rostovceva 1971, 39), and on April 4 "Sojuz rabotnikov nauki, iskusstva i kul'tury" adopted a resolution in which Narkompros was prevailed upon to "pay attention to the unlimited dominance of futurism, cubism, imaginism etc. in the Soviet Socialist Republic" and to take measures to support those trying to create "genuine proletarian art in full concord with communism" (Pravda 1919: 9.4). A little later, on May 6, Lenin criticized the futurists for using "the peasants' and workers' institutions of enlightenment" for "their own personal tricks", and for presenting "the most absurd doodles" ("nelepejšee krivljanie") as something new and proletarian (Lenin 1963, 330).

As a result of these attacks, the IZO futurists were dealt a fatal blow: they were deprived of their most important mouthpiece, *Iskusstvo Kommuny*, which was closed after its nineteenth issue (April 13). *Iskusstvo* also began to experience publishing difficulties, officially due to shortage of paper,[12] and No. 6 did not appear until July 8. Majakovskij later spoke of "the persecution of left art, brilliantly completed by the closing of 'Iskusstvo Kommuny' and so on" (Majakovskij 1959, 42).

This was the beginning of the end of avant-garde hegemony within IZO. The last issue of *Iskusstvo* (No. 8) was published in September, and by the end of the year the futurists had lost their previous influence on cultural life. In a speech in December, Anatolij Lunačarskij "dwelled upon the at one time so noticeable predominance of leftist artistic movements in the country". He accounted for this by the fact that these had expressed such a clear sympathy for Soviet power, but that the changing attitude of the intelligentsia had now made it possible to create a "balanced" collegiate within IZO (IRSL 1967, 712).

The Avant-Garde and the State

Futurist hegemony within IZO lasted for a very short period of time, less than six months. The reason why they were given this position in the first place is quite obvious—the Bolshevik party had no elaborated view on cultural matters (not even the party program adopted by the eighth party congress in March, 1919, paid any attention to cultural policy), and the futurists were the only ones who showed any kind of revolutionary enthusiasm and were willing to work with the new government. Lunačarskij later explained:

> [...] они скорей почувствовали симпатию к революции и увлеклись ею, когда она протянула им руку [...] я протянул футуристам руку, главным образом потому, что в общей политике Наркомпроса нам необходимо было опереться на серьезный коллектив творческих художественных сил. Их я нашел почти исключительно здесь, среди так называемых "левых" художников.
>
> (Lunačarskij 1967, 116)

In order to answer the question as to why the futurists lost power and influence, one must take several factors into account. First of all, the general political situation, which left little room for esthetic experimentation: "The year 1919 was the year of Soviet Russia's most complete isolation from the outside world. [...] Throughout 1919 the dominant factor in Soviet foreign policy, as in the Soviet economy, was the civil war [...]" (Carr 1966: III, 117). Majakovskij summarized: "The authorities, busy with the fronts and the destruction, took little interest in esthetic feuds, wanted peace and order behind the lines, and tried to bring us to reason out of respect for 'the men of rank' ('imenitejšim')" (Majakovskij 1959, 42–43).

1919 seems to have been a crucial year for everybody who had greeted the revolution as a first step toward a spiritual rebirth. In a

letter to Ivanov-Razumnik in 1927, Andrej Belyj wrote that 1919 was "the most difficult year", "a clear disappointment in the nearness of the '*revolution of the Spirit*'" (Nivat 1974, 78; the italics are Belyj's). Also for the futurists, and especially for Majakovskij, the year 1919 was no doubt a year of disappointment—they understood not only that the Revolution of the Spirit was not close but also that it was not wanted in the form in which the futurists presented it.

The curtailment of the influence of the futurists, however, was not only due to the difficult political situation. There is no reason to believe that they would have stayed in power, had the political conditions been more favorable. The failure of the futurists to retain their influence must also be seen against the background of the educational and cultural level of the Russian people. The futurists represented the most advanced esthetics of their time, and wanted their ideas to become accepted as the "cultural ideology" of the uncultured Russian masses. The Bolshevik party, on the other hand, saw its immediate task in trying to eradicate illiteracy, which encompassed more than three quarters of the population. Here was a conflict—between the "spiritual revolution" of the futurists and the "cultural revolution" of the Bolsheviks—that could not be bridged.

This antagonism touches on the essential issue in relations between the state and the avant-garde. By closing *Iskusstvo Kommuny* and curtailing futurist influence within IZO, the government deprived the futurists of their opportunity to propagate, in organs and bodies of the Narkompros, ideas that ran counter to official ideology. One may argue that it was wrong of the Bolsheviks not to adopt futurism as the esthetic creed of the proletariat, but that is another question. The essential aspect of the problem is whether any state—especially a totalitarian one—can tolerate a government body using government-financed organs to advocate ideas which the government itself is opposed to.

From the point of view of the avant-garde, what is at issue is whether an avant-garde movement can ever exercise state power without losing its function as an avant-garde. Any group exercising state power must, in order to stay in power, comply with *raison d'état*. An avant-garde thus has two possibilities: either remain "in opposition" and thereby retain the intrinsic function of an avant-garde—or assume power, yield to state reason, make necessary compromises etc., and in that way abandon its rôle as an avant-garde.

One cannot but agree with Vratislav Effenberger, who contends that "revoluční oficialisace avantgardy směřuje k popření jejích vlastních sociálních a kulturních kritických funkcí" (Effenberger 1969, 157), and that "oficialisovaná avantgarda je komický protimluv" (Effenberger 1968, 54).

The history of IZO futurism seems to support this view: the futurists stayed in power as long as they could propagate their ideas without interference and without regard to state reason; when, faced with hard criticism, they refused to conform with official Bolshevik esthetics, they had to go.

II. Majakovskij and October

When trying to define more closely Vladimir Majakovskij's immediate reactions to the events of October, the most difficult problem is the lack of factual material. The poet himself made no official comments, and the only clue we have are a couple of words dropped at the great discussion about cooperation (or non-cooperation) with Soviet power, on November 17, 1917. Unfortunately, the record of this meeting has not been published in full, and all we know is that Majakovskij agreed with Fedor Sologub—who said that art belongs to the people—and that in order to attain this goal one has to turn to the new power—"prixoditsja obratit'sja k vlasti, privetstvovat' novuju vlast'" (Dinerštejn 1958, 566).[13]

This lack of factual material compels us to scrutinize the existing texts, i.e. poems, articles, correspondence all the more narrowly. I would in this connection like to call attention to a letter from Majakovskij to Lili Brik and the poem "To Russia".

1. "*Os'ka's Noble Letter*"

In a letter from Majakovskij to Lili Brik, written around Christmas 1917 (not in the middle of December, as is stated in Majakovskij 1961, 28), and sent to Petrograd from Moscow, where Majakovskij had moved at the beginning of the same month, we find the following passage:

> Прочел в "Новой жизни" дышащеее благородством Оськино письмо. Хотел бы получить такое же.
>
> (Majakovskij 1961, 29)

The letter Majakovskij refers to is a letter to the editor from Osip Brik, published in Gor'kij's Menshevik newspaper *Novaja žizn'* on December 5 (18), 1917. It was written in connection with the elections to the Petrograd City Duma, for which the Bolsheviks had nominated Brik as their candidate.

What, then, was it that Majakovskij found so "noble" in Brik's letter? The commentary to Majakovskij's collected works leaves us without any real answer:

> Оговаривая свое несогласие с "культурной программой большевиков, как она выразилась в деятельности ЦК пролетарских культурно-просветительных организаций", он [Брик, В. Ј.] в то же время заявил, что считает "преступлением перед культурой и народом всякий саботаж, всякий отказ от активной культурной работы".
>
> (Majakovskij 1961, 303)

The same explanation, word by word, is given in Percov 1969, 339, and LN 1958, 104, a fact which no doubt lends the commentary a semi-official air. Nevertheless, it fails to explain why Majakovskij was so enthusiatic about the letter. In fact, Brik's little article, called "My position", leaves no doubt as to the reasons for Majakovskij's positive reaction to it. I quote it here *in extenso*:

Моя позиция

Кто то из знакомых сказал мне, что я избран в гласные новой городской думы по списку большевиков. Для меня это явилось полной неожиданностью: никто моего согласия не спрашивал и никому я его не давал.

Я не политик, ни в какой партии не состою, я культурный деятель; поэтому я не знаю, хорошую ли политику ведут большевики или нет. Аресты инакомыслящих, насилие над словом, над печатью и прочие проявления физической силы не являются отличительным признаком большевиков: так поступает всякая власть. И в самодержавной России, и в либеральной Англии, и в демократической Франции; так поступали кадеты после 3–4 июля, так же собирался действовать Керенский накануне 25 октября.

Но культурная программа большевиков невозможна. В этом я убедился, присутствуя на конференции пролетарских культурно-просветительных организаций. Если предоставить им свободно хозяйничать в этой области, то получится нечто, ничего общего с культурой не имеющее. Поэтому я считаю преступлением перед культурой и народом всякий саботаж, всякий отказ от активной культурной работы. Сидеть и ждать, пока все образуется — почетная роль обывателя. Обусловливать торжество культуры победой контр-революции могут только безнадежно ослепшие люди. Единственно верный путь — неуклонно вести свою культурную линию, быть везде, где культуре грозит опасность, стойко защищая ее от всякого, в том числе и большевистского, вандализма.

По этим соображениям я не отказываюсь от своего неожиданного избранья, причем заявляю, что я в партии большевиков не состою, никакой партийной дисциплине не подчиняюсь, и ни в каких политических выступлениях участия не приму. Их культурная программа, поскольку она выразилась в деятельности Ц. К. пролетарских культурно-просветительных организаций, для меня совершенно неприемлема; именно с ней я считаю необходимым особенно энергично бороться.

Если большевикам моя позиция не подходит, то прошу вычеркнуть меня из числа гласных.

О. М. Брик.

(NŽ 1917: 193 (197), 5 (18). 12, p. 4)

The main elements of Brik's argumentation are thus that although he is not a member of the Bolshevik party, he 1) accepts the nomination on the condition that he will not have to submit to any party discipline or take part in any party manifestations, 2) does this because he does *not* agree with the Bolsheviks' cultural program, which he sees as a threat to culture; therefore he finds it his duty to fight Bolshevik "vandalism" and "defend culture" from within the party.

In other words, to Brik the nomination on the Bolshevik list is not a matter of political conviction, but a matter of tactics: he accepts the nomination in order to *fight* the party line on cultural questions. And he even issues an ultimatum: if the Bolsheviks do not approve of his "position", he will not accept nomination.

Given the full text of Brik's letter, it is not difficult to understand what Majakovskij found so noble in it: Brik's repudiation of the Bolsheviks' cultural policy, as "expressed in the activity of the Central

Committee of the proletarian organizations for culture and enlightenment".

The first conference of the proletarian organizations for culture and enlightenment was held in Petrograd a week before the October revolution. This conference, which had been convened in close cooperation with the Bolshevik party and, in particular, with the future Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolij Lunačarskij, laid the foundations of Proletkul't (as it came to be called in November, 1917; see Gorbunov 1974, 50). It may seem strange that Brik speaks about the Bolsheviks' cultural program "as expressed in the activity" of Proletkul't, when we know that in 1920 the party suppressed Proletkul't as an independent organization because it propagandized a view on culture alien to Bolshevik ideology and demanded independence from the party. But at this time cooperation between the party and Proletkul't was close (Proletkul't was, in fact, directly subsidized by the state), and the contradictions that were to lead to the split were not yet palpable. Furthermore, Lunačarskij always supported the independence of Proletkul't—even against Lenin—and Brik's equating Bolshevik with Proletkul't cultural ideology is therefore fully justified.

It is clear from the letter that Brik attended the conference mentioned. He defended futurism and attacked the traditionalism inherent in the cultural program of Proletkul't:

> Вспомните, как издевались надо мной на первой конференции пролетарских культурно-просветительных организаций, когда я позволил себе заметить, что пролетарский художник будет писать не кистью, а шваброй. Какое поднялось возмущение, когда я произнес слово "футуризм".
>
> (IK 1918: 3)

What Brik, as a spokesman of the avant-garde, could not accept, was the emphasis laid on the culture of the past and the unwillingness to recognize modern art and literature.[14] This conservatism was, of course, alien to the avant-gardists who, during the preceding decade, had effected one of the greatest revolutions ever in the field of art and literature. Here the clash was absolute: while Brik and his colleagues had rejected the esthetic brush in favor of the swab of de-esthetization and were on their way to developing the theory of production art, the task of the party (and Proletkul't) was to help the workers master this very brush.

Brik's letter to the editor was only one of several articles that he devoted to the problem of art in the new society at this time. In one of these (VZ 1918: 25.1), he criticizes Proletkul't for its vague use of the term "proletarian" poet and poetry. If "proletarian poetry" is something written "about" the people, then many bourgeois writers are proletarian. If only writers descending from the people are proletarians, then several Proletkul'tists must be excluded. And if only a "socialist" can be called proletarian, then what about the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries?

Brik concludes that one should not try to patronize any indefinable "proletarian poetry" but "give the budding poets and writers (i.e. the futurists—B.J.) a chance to appear before the face of the people". According to Brik, the proletariat itself will understand which kind of poetry is dearer to it, who are its "proletarian poets".[15]

This criticism of Proletkul't was to reach its peak a year later, in the winter of 1918–1919, in the violent polemics conducted mainly in *Iskusstvo Kommuny* (where Brik returned to the problem of defining "proletarian poet") and *Iskusstvo* and in the Proletkul't organs, but also in public debates (see Jangfeldt 1976, 72–91). Two of the main protagonists were none other than Brik and Majakovskij; the latter saw before him the following results of the conservative esthetics preached by the party and Proletkul't:

> Совдепы вычинят в пару лет.
> И в праздник
> будут играть
> пролеткультцы
> в сквере
> перед советом
> в крокет.
>
> (Majakovskij 1957, 101)

Majakovskij's enthusiasm over Brik's article was thus only the first expression, after the October revolution, of an artistic conviction that was fundamental to the esthetics of the avant-garde: there can be no revolutionary content without a revolutionary approach to form.

Majakovskij and Brik in fact followed Brik's formula—to work within the system in order to change it—when they began to work in IZO, in the fall of 1918. The same is true of the decision to organize

the Communist–Futurist Collective (Kom–Fut) within the party in January, 1919, and the second attempt to organize such a collective two years later (see Jangfeldt 1976, 92 ff.). All these attempts to formulate an alternative to the official cultural ideology—or lack of it—show the constant dissatisfaction of the avant-garde with the cultural policy of the Bolsheviks. As is shown by Brik's letter to *Novaja žizn'* and Majakovskij's reaction to it, this dissatisfaction goes back to the first months following the October revolution.

2. "*To Russia*"

In the spring of 1917, Vladimir Majakovskij greeted the February revolution with the poem "Revoljucija. Poètoxronika", published in May in *Novaja žizn'*. The long poem is an expression of revolutionary enthusiasm in general, but above all an actual *chronicle* of the events of February 27. It is clear from the poem that Majakovskij regarded this revolution as his own:

> Мы победили!
> Слава нам!
> Сла-а-ав-в-ва нам!

"Revoljucija" ends with the conviction that this day means the victory of socialism:

> ... днесь
> небывалой сбывается былью
> социалистов великая ересь!
>
> (Majakovskij 1955, 139, 140)

Against this background it is striking that Majakovskij did not dedicate any complimentary poem to the Bolshevik revolution until the fall of 1918—not until the first anniversary of the revolution did he stage "Misterija-buff" and print "Geroi i žertvy revoljucii". It is true that he wrote "Oda revoljucii" and "Naš marš" as early as December, 1917 (Jakobson 1956, 204), but these poems are emotional responses to a revolutionary atmosphere (see Smorodin 1972, 22) rather than expressions of support for the Bolshevik revolution in particular.

In fact, the first two years after the October revolution were a period of uncertainty and reflection for Majakovskij. This indisputable fact has been stressed by the Soviet scholar A. Smorodin, who talks about

Majakovskij's "silence" and his being "shaked by events" (Smorodin 1972, 20, 21). From the October revolution to the fall of 1919, when he began his work at ROSTA, Majakovskij wrote only about a dozen poems, most of which were in fact emotional and abstract revolutionary hymns, like "Oda revoljucii" and "Naš marš", or dealt with the problems of contemporary art and literature and their rôle in the new society (the poems in *Iskusstvo Kommuny*). In a letter to Lili Brik from March, 1918, Majakovskij complained: "Ne pišetsja, nastroenie gnusnoe" (LN 1958, 107).

It would thus seem as if Majakovskij's immediate poetical answer to the Bolshevik revolution was—silence. There is, however, in Majakovskij's PSS a poem that has escaped the attention of the Majakovskij scholars. This poem is "To Russia" ("Rossii"; Majakovskij 1955, 130).

In all of Majakovskij's PSS since the thirties, "Rossii" is dated 1916. However, since no manuscript has been preserved, and the poem has not been found in the periodical press of that year, the dating is said to be "arbitrary" (Majakovskij 1955, 436). In fact, "Rossii" was published only in 1919, in Majakovskij's first collected works, *Vse sočinennoe Vladimirom Majakovskim 1909–1919*, and dated 1915. In this book, however, out of eighty poems and plays, less than a fifth are correctly dated. The reason for this is the collection's rather peculiar genesis. During the first post-revolutionary years Russia experienced a constant paper shortage, and in 1919, with the escalation of the civil war, the crisis became acute. In spite of this, Majakovskij wanted to put out his first collected works, and he therefore invented a fictitious jubilee, the tenth anniversary of his literary début. The story of the publication of *Vse sočinennoe* is told by Lili Brik in an unpublished manuscript:

> Маяковскому очень хотелось выпустить свое, тогда еще не обширное, "Собрание сочинений", а придраться было не к чему, и тогда он решился на вполне безобидное жульничество [...], тем более, что стихи он действительно начал писать в 1909, правда не те, которые он пометил этой датой [...]. Ему нужен был этот юбилей для издания — вот он и подписал под стихами из "Пощечины" дату 1909 год. И, соответственно, изменил хронологию и по отношению к [...] другим стихотворениям.
>
> (L. Brik 1951, 34–35)

With this in mind, it is easy to understand the irony in the title of Majakovskij's foreword to the collection: "Ljubiteljam jubileev".[16]

The datings in *Vse sočinennoe* are thus of no help in trying to establish the time "Rossii" was written. In fact, several poems from the years around the revolution are also incorrectly dated in Majakovskij's *last* PSS: "Sebe, ljubimomy, posvjaščaet ėti stroki avtor" is said to have been written at the beginning of 1916, but was actually not written until a year later (Jakobson 1956, 204); "Oda revoljucii" is dated November, 1918—when it was published—but, as with "Naš marš", it had already been written by the end of 1917 (Ibidem); the long poem "Čelovek" is said to have been written in 1916–1917, although there is overwhelming evidence that it was actually written between February and October, 1917 (Dinerštejn 1958, 555–556; Jakobson 1956, 204; Spasskij 1940, 98, and Ėrenburg 1961, 391; the latter three speak about the poem as recently finished at the beginning of 1918).

The "arbitrary" dating of "Rossii" thus leaves us with the task of trying to pin it down chronologically according to the contents. Here follows the poem as it was printed for the first time, in *Vse sočinennoe*. As opposed to later editions, it is not divided into stanzas, and it lacks the "academic" punctuation that Majakovskij never cared for. A couple of orthographical errors have been corrected.

России

Вот иду я
заморский страус
в перьях строф размеров и рифм.
Спрятать голову глупый стараюсь
в оперенье звенящее врыв.
Я не твой снеговая уродина.
Глубже
в перья душа уложись!
И иная окажется родина
вижу
выжжена южная жизнь.
Остров зноя.
В пальмы овазился.
"Эй
дорогу!"

Выдумку мнут;
и опять
до другого оазиса
вью следы песками минут.
Иные жмутся
— уйти-б
не кусается-ль. —
Иные изогнуты в низкую лесть.
"Мама
а мама
несет он яйца?"
"Не знаю душечка.
Должен бы несть"
Ржут этажия.
Улицы пялятся.
Обдают водой холода.
Весь истыканный в дымы и в пальцы
переваливаю года.
Что-ж бери меня хваткой мерзкой!
Бритвой ветра перья обрей.
Пусть исчезну
чужой и заморский
под неистовства всех декабрей.

On a general level, "Rossii" is a poem about the poet and his home country. More specifically it deals—as is suggested by the title—with the attitude of the poet to Russia (and *vice versa*).

Through the whole poem, the poet is depicted as an ostrich from the other side of the sea. But the poet is not only compared to an ostrich: the image of the poet and the ostrich merge in a realized metaphor. So, for example, the ostrich's feathers are made up of *strof razmerov i rifm*. The ostrich is "silly" enough to dig himself into his *operen'e zvenjaščee*, that is, to occupy himself with poetry, to take refuge in poetry. The reason is that the ostrich does not belong in this *snegovaja urodina*. Majakovskij uses the word "urodina", meaning a (female) monster but also containing the word "rodina", with which it rhymes. By doing so, he creates a new meaning out of "urodina": a monstrous or hideous motherland.

Then the ostrich calls his soul to turn even deeper into the plumage,

that is into poetry, phantasy, dreams. The imaginary southern country Majakovskij sees before him, may be interpreted as the poet's vision of the revolutionary society as the dreamland of poetry; here, at last, he will be at home. But here too imagination is suppressed ($_{16}$*Vydumku mnut*) and the ostrich is thrown off the road ($_{14-15}$"*Ėj / dorogu!*"). Once again he has to hurry on to the next oasis, pressed by time (note the masterly expression $_{19}$*peskami minut*, alluding both to the desert sands and to a sand-glass). Even in his motherland, the land of the southern sun/the land of poetry, the ostrich/poet is looked upon as an alien and foreign element, and the attitude to him alternates between confusion and adulation (20–28).

The poet's utopia turns out to be a fiction, and at the end of the poem he is back in the wintry city of the first lines. Nothing has changed, and the poet finally surrenders and turns to his country with the words: $_{34}$*Čto-ž beri menja xvatkoj merzkoj!* The word "mërzkoj" (it must be pronounced "ë", since it rhymes with "zamorskij") is a concoction from "merzkij", loathsome, and "mërzlyj", frozen, and functions as an echo and qualification of $_{6}$*urodina*. The wind's razor may just as well shave off his feathers, i.e. poetry, and he himself disappear into the furious Decembers—$_{38}$*pod neistovstva vsex dekabrej*.

The theme of "Rossii" is a variation on the theme of the poet as an emigré in his own country. The poet with his phantasy and imagination is always "zamorskij", from the other side of the sea. When he "turns deeper into his feathers "and occupies himself with poetry, people are either confused or flatter him. And the Decembrist Russia is far away from the ideal land of the poet; here poetry has no *raison d'être* at all: $_{35}$*Britvoj vetra per'ja obrej*.

"Rossii" is a central poem in Majakovskij's works, since it is an expression of an essential, albeit not new, problem: the position of the poet in society, and the attitude of society to the poet. From the mood of the poem we may suppose that it was prompted by some specific event(s) that made the poet experience a feeling of total estrangement. The events following the revolution in October, 1917, may have had such an effect on Majakovskij, whereas it is difficult to find anything similar in 1916. It is therefore not impossible that "Rossii" was actually written in December, 1917 (the month is suggested by the last line of the poem).[17]

If we assume that "Rossii" was written then, it must be looked at

in conjunction with Osip Brik's letter and Majakovskij's reaction to it. In "Rossii" Majakovskij talks about himself as a poet of imagination and originality. For Majakovskij and other poets, the revolution was expected to create exactly that kind of society in which artistic creation was not only free but also liberated the people; the principles that governed art should govern life as well. This vision was dealt a fatal blow when it became clear that the Bolshevik party had chosen to support the Proletkul't. The Proletkul't challenged Majakovskij's image of the poet and stressed other qualities: the poet's origin was judged to be more important than what he wrote, and form was declared inferior to content. It was more important *what* was written—and *by whom*!—than *how* it was written.

Another important source of disappointment for Majakovskij was undoubtedly the Bolsheviks' appeal to the artists and poets in November. The party's invitation to cooperate with the Soviet power met with total repudiation on the part of the cultural workers, who were tired of state interference in artistic life and had far more anarchistic ideas of artistic freedom than the Bolsheviks were willing to accept. It is true that Majakovskij, according to the transcript, "greeted the new power", but Brik underlines that Majakovskij was "disappointed": "When he could not come to terms ("Ne sgovorivšis'") with the People's Commissar or find any other ways of propagating 'left art', Majakovskij went to Moscow, where, together with D. Burljuk and V. Kamenskij, he tried to talk to the people over the head of Lunačarskij [...] from the stage of 'Kafe Poėtov' [...]" (O. Brik 1940, 89).

The "flight" to Moscow at the beginning of December was thus a direct result of the impossibility of coming to terms with the new political powers. It is very plausible that "Rossii" may have been written at this time, when Majakovskij was utterly disappointed with the Bolsheviks' cultural policies. It would then coincide with Majakovskij's letter to Lili Brik, with its enthusiasm over Brik's criticism of the Proletkul't and the Bolsheviks' cultural ideology. Read in this light, the poem becomes a rejection of the utilitarian demands made of poetry at this time and a defense—albeit resigned—of imagination and originality.

In fact, the clash between Majakovskij and Lunačarskij seems to have been serious. Dinerštejn speaks about "some kind of abnormalities" in their relations, and quotes a note dating from 1938 (which,

unfortunately, has not been published in full), in which Punin recalls that "there was a conflict between Majakovskij and Lunačarskij [...]. It would be very interesting to reconstruct this [...]. Then it would be possible to explain in concrete terms Majakovskij's and Brik's delay in responding to the October revolution" (Dinerštejn 1958, 563–564).

It may seem a little strange that a poet could write, more or less at the same time, such different poems as "Rossii", on the one hand, and "Oda revoljucii" and "Naš marš", on the other. But, as we have seen, Majakovskij's attitude to the October revolution was highly complex in the initial stages; just as complex as his attitude to life in general. The "Poet of the Revolution" also had another side, the characteristic features of which were a child-like need for love and affection (see, for instance, his letters to Lili Brik), a general disposition towards depression (and suicide), and a strong sense of alienation, of not being understood (see Triolet 1975 and Jakobson 1931 among others). The feeling of estrangement expressed in "Rossii" would be echoed eight years later in the poem "Homewards!", "Domoj!" (the fact that these very lines were later deleted by Majakovskij, is a graphic confirmation of this duality in his character):

Я хочу
быть понят моей страной,
а не буду понят, —
что ж,
по родной стране
пройду стороной,
как проходит
косой дождь.
(Majakovskij 1958, 429)

In one of the draft versions (Majakovskij 1958, 428), the "rodnoj" of line four is substituted for "čužoj" (see also Jakobson 1971, VII). This substitution assumes special significance with "Rossii" in mind: Russia ("rodnaja strana") may very well be experienced by the poet as an alien country ("čužaja strana"). The substitution of "rodnoj" for "čužoj" is fully possible within a semantic field in which "rodina" and "urodina" form two interchangeable poles of one basic concept: Russia.[18] There is, as has been pointed out, "kein Gefühl so rein [...], dass es nicht mit einem ihm widerstrebenden Gefühl vermengt wäre (Ambivalenz der Gefühle)" (Jakobson 1972, 399).

With this dialecticism in mind, it should not seem illogical that Majakovskij's reactions to the events of October embraced both enthusiasm and estrangement. Most great Russian poets responded ambiguously to the revolution; and it seems absurd in my view that one should demand of Majakovskij a simple and unequivocal reaction to an event of such universal impact.

1. In Jangfeldt 1975 and 1976 I discuss in detail particular problems which are only mentioned in passing in this outline: Gazeta Futuristov; the futurists and IZO; the Revolution of the Spirit; the futurists and Proletkul't; and Kom-Fut.
2. For a discussion of Majakovskij's development between February and October, 1917, see E. Dinerštejn 1958.
3. This alludes to "Car' Iudejskij", a play by the Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov which was prohibited by church censorship before the revolution but could, by a strange paradox, be played in Soviet Russia. See Nils Åke Nilsson's article in this volume.
4. In one of his autobiographical sketches, Burljuk claims that he left Moscow on April 2, 1918 (Burljuk 1924, 45). This dating has since been accepted by the scholars (see e.g. Felix Philipp Ingold's interesting publication /Ingold 1973/ and Helga Ladurner's unfortunately highly inaccurate article on Burljuk /Ladurner 1978/). From the report in *Figaro* we learn that Burljuk participated at the closing of Kafe Poètov on April 14. It is therefore reasonable to believe that he left the capital the next day—which was April 15, new style, but *April 2, old style.*
5. The fact that he received the support of only a minority of artists obviously did not bother Lunačarskij, who is reported to have said in a discussion: "In politics we are for an active minority, in art for a union with individual outstanding talents [...]" (NŽ 1918: 21(6).4).
6. In order to guarantee the support of Gor'kij, who was of tremendous propagandistic importance to the Bolsheviks, and also of the rest of the literary intelligentsia, the writer was promised—and given—a publishing house, "Vsemirnaja literatura" which started up at the beginning of 1919. Here Gor'kij gathered around him many of the most famous writers of the time, who translated foreign literature and thereby got food for the day—not a common privilege in starving Russia.
7. A number of these articles and speeches were later collected in a small brochure called *Intelligencija i Sovetskaja vlast'. Sbornik statej*, M. 1919. Here was printed Gor'kij's address "Appeal to the people and the working intelligentsia" from November 28, in which he formulated the political alternatives in this way: "The proletariat and the working intelligentsia must decide to whom they are closer—the defenders of the old order [...] or those who arouse new social ideas and emotions [...]" (pp. 23–24).
8. Brik states that he and Majakovskij were invited to become members by Šterenberg and Punin in July–August, and that Majakovskij began work in the

collegiate in August or September (O. Brik 1940, 97, 93). It is true that contact between Narkompros and Majakovskij was established at this time: so, for example, Majakovskij is mentioned as a contributor to *Vestnik Narodnogo Prosveščenija* in the September issue of the journal (see also the facts presented in Katanjan 1961, 100). But Majakovskij, in fact, joined the collegiate much later, not before December. Brik worked out the statutes for IZO's "Bjuro xudožestvennogo truda", adopted on September 30, but became a member of the *collegiate* only on November 21 (see VNP 1918: 4/5, 42, and 1919: 1/3 (9/11), 128). Both he and Majakovskij attended the session of the collegiate on November 28, but while Brik is mentioned as a member, it is stressed that Majakovskij was present as a *non*-member: "Besides the members of the collegiate, *Vladimir Majakovskij* also attended the session [...]" (IK 1918: 1). Majakovskij took part in several sessions during the winter of 1918–1919 (see Majakovskij 1959, 216–238; 596–599); that he eventually did become a member is shown by the fact that he was formally removed from the Petrograd collegiate when he moved to Moscow in the spring of 1919 (Majakovskij 1959, 596).

9. One person who objected to the futurists' cooperation with the political powers was Viktor Šklovskij, who formulated the following ultra-formalist creed in an article in *Iskusstvo Kommuny*: "Art was always free from life, and in its colour was never reflected the colour of the flag over the town's castle" (IK 1919: 17, 30.3). When Šklovskij reprinted the article in his book *Xod konja* (Moskva–Berlin 1923), he added a note saying that it had been written "on the occasion of the futurists' assumption of leading posts in Narkompros" (p. 36).
10. One example of the futurists' strong position within IZO and Narkompros is the discussion that followed the staging, on the first anniversary of the revolution, of Majakovskij's play *Misterija-buff*. In a review, Andrej Levinson was very critical of the play and also accused the futurists of wanting to make their art the official art of the masses: "Samye pritjazanija futurizma—stat' oficial'nym iskusstvom očnuvšixsja mass predstavljajutsja mne nasil'stvennymi. [...] futuristy ne vedut, a sami vlekutsja za momentom, im nadobno ugodit' novomu xozjainu, ottogo oni tak gruby i zapal'čivy" (ŽI 1918: 11.11). This review elicited a violent reaction from nine supporters and friends of Majakovskij, and in an article in the same paper they explained that these kind of accusations should be answered "only by administrative means" ("liš' v administrativnom porjadke" (ŽI 1918: 21.11). The nine people who signed the article were all members of the IZO collegiate. The fact that they openly suggested such a measure shows not only that they felt their position to be very secure, but also that they obviously did not hesitate to use the same kind of "polemical methods" that they had been so critical of in tsarist Russia. (In summing up the discussion, this claim to a monopoly of opinions was denounced by Lunačarskij; ŽI 1918: 27.11.)
11. As a matter of fact, futurism was even regarded—by the futurists themselves—as a *corrective* to communism. In his answer to Šklovskij's article (note 9), Nikolaj Punin stressed that "futurism is a corrective to communism, since futurism is not only an artistic movement but a whole system of forms [...]. And now we are even prepared to assert that communism as a theory of culture cannot exist without futurism, just as yesterday evening does not exist without our remembrance of it today" (IK 1919: 17).
12. It is true that there was an acute paper shortage in Russia all through 1919, but the question of which papers are to be allocated supplies is, nevertheless, always a question of priority.
13. The edited version of the record has a more definite wording: "[...] nužno privetstvovat' novuju vlast' i vojti s nej v kontakt" (Majakovskij 1959, 215).
14. Later on, many Proletkul'tists were to ignore the importance of the cultural heritage, and it was, among other things, this attitude that led to the schism between the Proletkul't and the party; but at this time Proletkul't had to be judged solely by its program, and this expressively stated that "the proletariat [...] must master the whole cultural heritage" (Gorbunov 1974, 50).
15. Brik's other articles of importance include "Bol'ševiki i avtorskoe pravo" (NŽ 1917: 202(196), 15(28).12), a criticism of the decree on copyright; "Narodnoe prosveščenie" (NŽ 1917: 210(204), 24.12 (8.1.1918)), which criticizes the Bolsheviks for turning the journal *Narodnoe prosveščenie* into a pure party organ and thereby acting contrary to "the fundamental slogan of the socialist and generally democratic ("obščedemokratičeskaja") cultural program—freedom of spiritual self-determination"; "Rabočij teatr Rossijskoj Respubliki" (NŽ 1918: 3(217), 5(18).1)—aimed at Lunačarskij and his conservatism in reorganizing the state theatres; "Neumestnoe politikanstvo" (*Knižnyj ugol* 1918: 2, pp. 28–29), where Brik sees Blok's poem "The twelve", for instance, as an example of "neumestnoe politikanstvo"—he is not against political poetry, but it can exist only alongside other themes (religious, romantic, everyday /"bytovye"/ themes) and is acceptable only if the poet is able to transform his personal experience (which is of no interest to the readers) into "poetic material".
16. Majakovskij's biographer erroneously treats the dating "1909–1919" as a wish on the part of the poet to underline the connection between his "direct participation in the revolutionary struggle" and his first attempts, in the Butyrki prison, to write poetry (Percov 1969, 108).
17. This hypothesis has been confirmed orally by N. Xardžiev, the editor of the first volume of Majakovskij's PSS (Moskva 1939), who, in his turn, had it confirmed by Osip Brik; the poem had been redated in order to make it possible to publish it at all.
18. Marina Cvetaeva, in her article "Poėt i vremja" (1932), writes pertinently on the problem of the poet's estrangement in his own country: "Every poet is essentially an emigré, even in Russia. [...] The poet—indeed all people of art—but most of all the poet—bears a special stamp of discomfort, by which one recognizes the poet even in his own home. [...] Počvennost', narodnost', nacional'nost', rasovost', klassovost'—and the very sovremennost' that is created—all this is only a facade, the first or seventh layer of skin, which the poet does nothing but try to shake off" (Cvetaeva 1971, 624–625). This question is treated in Ilma Rakuša's article on the "nad-nacional'nost'" of Cvetaeva (Rakuša 1978).

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