The Operative Word in Soviet Factography

DEVIN FORE

Beyond Vulgar Production: Nikolai Chuzhak

Shortly before the appearance of the seventh and final issue of the journal *Lef* in 1925, members of the organization were called to the Moscow Proletkul't facilities in the middle of the winter to debate the future of the avant-garde group as a mass movement. At the top of the agenda at the First Moscow Conference of the Workers of Lef on January 16 and 17 was establishing a decentralized communication network between Moscow Lef and the group's peripheral sectors (such as the new IugoLef, or "Southern Lef"), while at the same time ensuring that the Moscow group maintained its executive role. The question was how to balance the centrifugal and the centripetal impulses within the organization—how to disseminate Lef's program on a mass scale but also staunch the dissipation of the group's energies at this moment of dispersal.

Yet a second agenda emerged with the first keynote speaker, Nikolai Chuzhak. For Chuzhak, the primary concern was not Lef's putatively imminent organizational crisis, but the marriage within its ranks between reactionary politics and traditional forms and media of artistic production. While he lauded the efforts of the plastic and graphic "effectuators" [*deistvenniki*], who had advanced the program of production art by successfully navigating the transition from an art of illusionistic representation and reflectionist realism to an art of objects with a "definite material value,"[1] Chuzhak contrasted these successes with the literary "trash" of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Nikolai Aseev, who continued to write in traditional poetic genres and who consequently remained "trapped in the cage of the old, banal everyday life."[2]

Since Chuzhak had resigned from the group's editorial board the previous year in protest against the decision to publish what he deemed aesthetically reactionary literature—Mayakovsky's *About This*, Aseev's *Lyrical Digressions*, and Osip

1.   *Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa* (January 16–17, 1925), RGALI (Russkii Gosudarstvnnyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva), f. 2852, op. 1, d. 115, p. 3b.

Brik's *She's Not a Fellow Traveler*—the targets of his criticisms must have come as no surprise to those in attendance.[3] But his indictment of these members of Lef as *literary* producers was new. It suggested that the crisis facing the group was the result not of structural or organizational problems, but of the incapacity of its literary division to commit itself fully and consistently to the task of developing a specifically literary art of production. As Aleksei Gan pointed out at the conference, Lef's production artists and its littérateurs comprised two distinct groups. Just a glance at the pages of its journal, he suggested, would confirm the obvious: that there was a manifest division within the group between the literary program and the goals of production art.[4] Their literary work, Chuzhak added, had fallen behind the times. For him, the crisis was not organizational, but generic.

Unprepared for the attack on Lef's writers, the conference's second keynote speaker, literary critic and author Osip Brik, could not respond to many of Chuzhak's charges, and so spoke on organizational tensions in the group as he had originally planned. Chuzhak's contention that an insuperable chasm had developed between Lef's aesthetically conservative literati and its more radical production artists went unanswered. When core Lef member Viktor Pertsov later published *Revision of the Left Front in Contemporary Russian Art*, a book-length report that was commissioned by the conference's Presidium to evaluate the organizational crisis, this reticence appeared on his summary ledger as an ellipsis:

BEFORE LEF	THROUGH LEF
1. painting (easel)	poster, advertisement, general graphic montage. chintz-textiles, cover art work.
2. theater (professional)	demonstrations, the effective cell of the worker's club.
3. sculpture (architecture)	furniture, everyday objects, the construction of dwellings.
4. literature (poetry, narrative)	. . .

When challenged to abandon traditional generic conventions, to industrialize and collectivize its techniques of production, and to renounce a reflectionist epistemology based on illusion—in short, when challenged to consummate the break that had been undertaken in the other media of production art—writing drew a blank. Mayakovsky "could not bring himself to admit that he wrote 'poetry.'"[5] This was hardly surprising, Pertsov wrote, if you consider that three-fourths of

2.   Ibid., p. 5a.
3.   See Nikolai Chuzhak, "Pis'mo k redaktsiiu," *Lef*, no. 4 (1924), p. 213, as well as his "Krivoe zerkalo. Lef v prelomlenii 'Lefa,'" *Oktiabr' mysli*, no. 2 (1924), pp. 39–46.
4.   *Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa*, p. 20b.
5.   Viktor Pertsov, *Reviziia levogo fronta v sovremennom russkom iskusstve* (Moscow: Vserossiiskii

Mayakovsky's works at that time, like those of Aseev, did not actually satisfy the criteria of production art. An equally abashed Brik "couldn't make up his mind"[6] about the future of writing. The result, Pertsov concluded, was that the "silence of literature as an art form at the conference struck everyone as an enormous and foolish dead end."[7]

It was a glaring irony of the conference, then, that Brik of all people—the prominent literary theorist of the Petersburg OPOIaZ (*Obshchestvo po izucheniiu poeticheskogo iazyka* [The Society for the Study of Poetic Language]) Formalists and the one figure on *Lef*'s editorial board who should have been able to address a literary art of production—had in fact nothing to say on the topic. And the irony is compounded if you consider, too, that it was Brik who is recognized as the mastermind behind the conversion *en masse* of the INKhUK Constructivists to an art of production on November 24, 1921.[8] Apparently the founder of production art, himself a writer, had left literature out of its charter.

To understand the origins of this "inevitable self-abolition" of literature,[9] of this impossibility of a literature of production in 1925, we must return to 1921, when the conceptual frameworks of the programs for Constructivism and production art were first systematically articulated, specifically, to the nine public meetings held between January and April during which members of INKhUK discussed the merits of "composition" and "construction." The strategies for artistic production that were established in those sessions had vast implications for the dispensation of powers within a hierarchy of the mediums. Within the "composition-construction debates" a variety of proposals were tendered concerning the distinction between aesthetic and utilitarian objects, as well as the structural principles by which elements within these objects were to be integrated. For the most part, the terms "composition" and "construction" were construed to delineate the distinction between planar and spatial works. For example, Christina Lodder's assertion that Constructivism "was primarily concerned with three-dimensional utilitarian structures," while two-dimensional experiments were "essentially incidental to [its] main tasks"[10] would appear to be corroborated by any number of primary statements on the topic that explicitly disallowed the possibility of pictorial "constructions": "a construction is

Proletkul't, 1925), p. 34.

6.   Ibid., p. 36.

7.   Ibid., p. 37.

8.   Nikolai Tarabukin's *From the Easel to the Machine* delivers the now legendary account: "Here we have to mention a momentous session of the 'Institute of Artistic Culture' (INKhUK) that took place on November 24, 1921, where O. M. Brik gave a talk about INKhUK's transition from the Commissariat of Enlightenment to the Supreme Soviet of National Economy. Having rejected easelism as an end in itself and entering upon a platform of production, twenty-five masters of left art recognized that this transition was not only necessary, but also inevitable." Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* (Moscow: Rabotnik Prosveshcheniia, 1923), pp. 17–18. Justifiably skeptical of Tarabukin's revelational account, S. O. Khan-Magomedov has cautioned against taking this date as the definitive terminus post quem of production art. See the discussion of Brik's talk in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm. Kontseptsiia formoobrazovaniia* (Moscow: Stroiizdat, 2003), pp. 177–78.

9.   Pertsov, *Reviziia*, p. 36.

only in real space" (Ioganson), "a real construction is a constructed object and is built in space" (Rodchenko), etc.[11]

While it would be unnecessary to again catalog the manifold contributions to a series of remarkable debates that operate, quite justifiably, as *loci classici* for scholars of Constructivism,[12] let's consider one canonical document that has a privileged status within the debates. At the fifth INKhUK meeting on the subject of composition and construction on March 1, a special commission was convened to summarize the conclusions of the preceding four sessions. The resulting First Protocol penned by Aleksei Babichev, Nikolai Ladovskii, and Liubov' Popova proposed the following critical distinction between construction and composition:

> The scheme of construction is a conjunction of lines, and of the planes and forms that they determine. It is a system of forces [*sistema sil*]. Composition is a combination in accordance with the defined, conventional sign [*po opredelennomy uslovnomu priznaku*].[13]

If the Second Protocol of the March 1 Special Commission reinforced the standard opposition between tectonic and planimetric forms ("the strict definition of the technical construction has turned out to be inapplicable to pictorial constructions"), their First Protocol reveals that this division is organized around a more fundamental dichotomy, namely the categorical distinction between a "system of forces" and the "conventional sign." And indeed, closer examination reveals that many of the proposals offered in the 1921 debates similarly imply that the construction-composition binary pivots on this subtending distinction between force and signification, between matter and writing. Vladimir Krinskii, for example, suggested that a construction is a "binding together of forces and purpose," while composition is a "combination and organization of marks."[14] Two years later no doubt remained that these were the meanings of the debates' terms. "Into Production!," Brik's most famous treatise on production art that appeared in the first issue of *Lef* in 1923, opens in fact with the observation that the popular understanding of "construction" and "composition" construes the former to mean "building" and "producing form" [*oformliat'*], and the latter to designate "writing" [*pisat'*] and "creation."[15]

10.   Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 181.
11.   Ioganson and Rodchenko, cited in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, pp. 101, 103.
12.   This has already been accomplished in numerous other contexts, notably: Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, pp. 83–94; the collection of primary documents translated in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–32*, ed. Jaroslav Andel (New York: Rizzoli International, 1990), pp. 61–82; and Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, pp. 85–180. Khan-Magomedov's book reprints many of the original documents from these debates and is in this regard an invaluable resource. Maria Gough provides the most compelling interpretive account of these debates in the opening chapter of her *Artist as Producer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), where she differentiates between four competing understandings of the conceptual fault line between composition and construction: the "dimensionality" thesis, the "organic-unity" thesis, the "utilitarian" thesis, and the "common denominator" thesis.
13.   Aleksei Babichev, Nikolai Ladovskii, and Liubov' Popova, cited in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 103.
14.   Krinskii, cited in Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 97.

It is well known which of the two terms was ultimately valorized and which course the members of INKhUK chose. Positing the primacy of concrete experience, the Constructivists abandoned the enervated field of language and signification—which was dismissed as the dominion of illusionism, thought, verisimilitude, and mere secondary effects—in order to commune with systems of physical force. Matter itself, not the sign thereof, was the point of departure for the anthology of INKhUK writings, *From Representation to Construction*, which was proposed by Brik in September 1921 to be the group's collective opus on the transition from composition to construction.

It is unsurprising that Brik would be the catalyst for this passage in the Soviet avant-garde after all. He had been campaigning for several years against ineffectual art works whose only purpose was to reflect reality. For example, Brik explained in the inaugural 1918 issue of *Art of the Commune* that an authentically proletarian art must be founded upon not "the vapors of ideas, but the material object." What was needed to realize this new type of production, he declared, was an "institute of material culture," and everyone

> who loves an art that is alive; everyone who understands that it is not
> the idea, but the real object that is the goal of all authentic creation;
> everyone who can create something concrete should take part in the
> construction of these authentically proletarian centers of artistic cul-
> ture. Reality, not an apparition: this is the slogan of the future art of
> the commune.[16]

Three years later, after the move from St. Petersburg to Moscow, Brik would find this "institute of material culture" among the INKhUK Constructivists.

Why was it that composition and construction were understood at that time to be incompatible? Why did the members of INKhUK feel compelled to choose between these two terms? Asking these questions, inquiring into the cause of the debate itself, is necessary, for the opposition between composition and construction was predicated upon a delimitation that was itself a theoretical operation with certain and profound consequences for the subsequent development of the Soviet avant-garde. The balkanization of aesthetic production into the tectonic extensivity of "building" and the psychic intensivity of "writing" subscribes to a world view that categorically distinguishes between phenomenal experience and language. And the inaugural division between "systems of force" and "the conventional sign" that was reflected in the First Protocol of the March 1 Special Commission is what enabled the Constructivists, and the production artists after them, to unproblematically hypostatize sensuous materiality over thought and processes of signification.[17] The fallout of this critical maneuver, as we have already

15.   Osip Brik, "V proizvodstvo!," *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), p. 105.
16.   Osip Brik, "Drenazh iskusstvu," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, no. 1 (1918), p. 1.
17.   Here, however, we should be circumspect about flattening the differences within the ranks of the Constructivists and the production artists. As Chuzhak pointed out at the 1925 conference, there

observed, was the "inevitable self-abolition" of the verbal arts at the 1925 confer-
ence, "the silence of literature" that "struck everyone as an enormous and foolish
dead end."

The question was whether there could be a place for literature and language
in an art of production. Answering this question would require a more compre-
hensive and sophisticated model of productive labor that was applicable not just
to physical substance, but to spatial and noetic phenomena alike. Equally unre-
solved in 1925 was the problem of how to modernize writing, how to reconceive it
as a technology of advanced industrial modernity. After the devastation of the
civil war, and at the threshold of the great era of building and industrialization in
the Soviet Union, could the word have any constructive function to perform?
Could it ever be as real as Tatlin's coats or Rodchenko's Workers' Club? Would it
be possible to conceive of a literature that was not just an epiphenomenal derivate
of more primary economic elements, but that instead, as Marx proposed in notes
on the Russian anarchist Bakunin, would itself be a concrete force of production
that could be counted among other "*acquired forces of production,* material and men-
tal: language, literature, technical skills, etc. etc."?[18]

Factography was a response to these questions. It was, of course, not just a lit-
erary phenomenon, but a practice that was realized in a variety of symbolic and
discursive fields including, most famously, photography and cinema, and in each
of these mediums it developed its own protocols and conventions. But in each
manifestation, in each art, it could be recognized by its fundamental preoccupa-
tion with processes of sign-production, with the aspect of "composition" that had
been absent from the earliest production art.[19] And so even if the following essay
appears to focus only on the particular case of a *linguistic* art of production, this
does not mean that the arguments it presents pertain to literature alone; rather, it
focuses on models of language and practices of writing because it is in those fields
that factography's unique approach to semiotic operations is articulated in its
most pronounced and exemplary form. It is in literature that factography's inno-
vation becomes most obvious, because it was in literature that this innovation was
least likely.

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were two chief groups within the Constructivists, those led by Aleksandr Rodchenko and those led by
Aleksei Gan (*Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa,* p. 2b). This distinction is a useful one.
While Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and the theorist Brik subscribed to production models of a
more mechanical materialist variety, Gan, Boris Kushner, Popova, and Tarabukin conceived of artistic
production in a less dualist fashion. Tarabukin, for example, proposed the hybrid notion of "composi-
tional construction"; and in a response to Brik's talk on December 29, 1921, Kushner similarly cau-
tioned the speaker that "the labor of the artist at a factory is cerebral labor" (Kushner, cited in Khan-
Magomedov, *Konstruktivizm,* p. 201).
18.   Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke,* vol. 18 (Berlin: Dietz, 1958), p. 620.
19.   This remains the persistent insight of Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's key essay from 1984, "From
Faktura to Factography," which examines the reorientation of the Soviet avant-garde in the middle of
the 1920s away from their "laboratory" preoccupation with the art work's material facture and toward
an active engagement with the informational and communicative components of artistic practice.

If traditional reflectionist literature was the least likely candidate to be ranked among "acquired forces of production," factography turned writing into a tangible reality of reconstruction. At the moment of the Soviet Union's radical encounter with modernization in the second half of the 1920s, factography estab-lished the parameters of a language commensurate with advanced industrial existence. When Tret'iakov observed in 1934 that the "real flowering of the *ocherk* [the factographic sketch] began in the epoch of the reconstruction,"[20] his subsequent statement suggested that the relationship between factography and its industrial environment was not simply coincidental, but was instead powerfully motivated. Factography did not only represent these social and technological transformations, but also contributed to them. Thus, as Chuzhak explained in his programmatic essay "The Literature of the Construction of Life," the advent of factography in the Soviet Union was in no way a revival of bygone realist conventions from the nineteenth century that aspired to reflect reality with the utmost degree of objectivity. Factography had nothing to do with the "naive and lying verisimilitude"[21] of bourgeois realism's aesthetic of resemblance. Rather, its interventionist, operative aesthetic called upon the producer "not simply to depict life, but to create it anew in the process."[22]

Even before the emergence of factography as an identifiable practice, Chuzhak had attacked the first generation of production artists who conceived of thought and language as passive mental representations of a more essential and immutable physical world. These transcendental materialists had ignored the mental activity that was constitutive of any object. He designated this psychic component as "the object in the model" [*veshch' v modeli*], and cautioned that the cognitive "model" of a thing cannot be cleaved from its objective and material instantiation. Since conceptual processes are what endow matter with a sensual, perceptual form, it would be absurd

> not to acknowledge the "plan of the object" as an "object" itself, for nei-ther a plan for an object nor an object is in any way an end in itself [*samotsel'nyi*]: from the "plan" follows the "model"; from the "model" the "object"; from the "object" as an instrument (better, a *workbench*) another "object," etc. The idea, the plan, the workbench, the object—all of these are links in one and the same "thingly" chain [*vse eto zven'ia odnoi i toi zhe 'veshchnoi' tsepi*][23]

For Chuzhak, the mental sign and the physical object are situated upon a single continuum established through purposive activity ("the plan"). This instrumental

Buchloh's essay first appeared in *October* 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 82–119.
20. Sergei Tret'iakov, "Evoliutsiia zhanra," *Nashi dostizheniia*, nos. 7–8 (1934), p. 160.
21. Nikolai Chuzhak, "Literatura zhiznestroeniia: istoricheskii probeg," in *Literatura fakta. Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov Lefa*, ed. Nikolai Chuzhak (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), p. 38.
22. Sergei Tret'iakov [Sergej Tretjakow], *Feld-Herren: der Kampf um eine Kollektiv-Wirtschaft* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1931), p. 23.
23. Nikolai Chuzhak, "Ot illiuzii k materii. Po povodu Reviziia LEF'a," in *Reviziia levogo fronta,* ed.

"'thingly' chain" that joins together symbol and substance approximates anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan's notion of the "operating sequence," a "link between technics and language" that mediates between individual memory, symbolic language, socially acquired gestural repertoires, material instrumentation, and spatial extension.[24] For Chuzhak, the physical object could not be reified at any single node in this circuit between the "plan" and the "object," but instead had to be conceived as an ever-shifting function within this matrix of potentiality. Engels described this morphological vision: "the world is not to be grasped as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which apparently stable things no less than their images in our heads, its concepts, undergo uninterrupted change of becoming and passing."[25]

The eager polemicist Chuzhak made clear who was to blame for the problematic distinction between "real" and "virtual" objects [*nastoiashchikh i nenastoiashchikh predmetakh*]:[26] it was Brik's reinscription of the boundary between cognition and physical production that ignored the dialectic of ideology and nature, that metabolism between social relations and matter out of which human history emerges. "The idea, the plan, objects, the object" are all moments, Chuzhak wrote, in the "unbroken" circuit that comprises the "single purposive process of the unfolding means."[27] In his review of the 1925 conference, Chuzhak criticized the ontological undercurrent in first-generation production art:

> The theoreticians of [production art's first] phase (Brik and others) committed gross errors that thoroughly vulgarized the left current and that triggered justifiable attacks. By asserting art's physical origins, they conceptualized it as something absolute. "We need none of your ideas!"—this was the slogan of the first production artists (the phrase comes from Brik). And hence the attacks on them: "by espousing vulgar materialism, you are myopically discarding from your baggage art, which is a source of influence on the masses." . . . The "idea" is an "object" (the actual phrase is: "object in the model") that is just as indispensable as the object that is made "with the hands."[28]

Observing Marx's analysis of the commodity as a phenomenon that possesses both tangible and nonsensuous qualities (value, for example), Chuzhak cautioned Lef workers against neglecting key ideological and social components of the material object, an oversight which would reduce the work of art to its physiological, even

Viktor Pertsov (Moscow: Vserossiskii proletkult, 1925), p. 125.
24.   André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 114.
25.   Friedrich Engels, cited in Herbert Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," *Telos*, no. 4 (1969), p. 20.
26.   Chuzhak, "Ot illiuzii k materii," p. 126
27.   Nikolai Chuzhak, "Iskusstvo byta," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, nos. 4–5 (1925), p. 10.

biological, aspects.[29] It was the task of Lef artists, Chuzhak announced, to fight this dualist tendency by constructing "the bridge from the idea to the object,"[30] but instead certain artists perpetuated the "vulgar materialist" error of viewing objects as inert realia, as transhistorical forms that are indifferent to sociocultural inflection. Two of Chuzhak's regular targets among the Lef artists were, not surprisingly, Brik's favorite producers Stepanova and Rodchenko.

All of this is also to say that the factographers were hardly "fact fetishists," as their detractors suggested.[31] To the contrary, Tret'iakov, and to an even greater degree Chuzhak, were social constructivists of the most profound imprint who challenged the base-superstructure mechanicalism that dominated the discourses of cultural production after the Second International. The doxa of the latter posited a conceptually impenetrable material order as the determining instance of everyday experience, and by thus obscuring culture's and ideology's generative share in the production of seemingly concrete phenomena, concealed the provenance of objects that initially came into existence as human artifacts but were subsequently habituated and reified as spontaneous pseudo-objectivities. Their origins effaced, these social objects acquired the patina of natural matter. Challenging this willed forgetting, both Tret'iakov and Chuzhak emphasized on repeated occasions that there was nothing absolute and nothing universal.

For them, the essence of an object could not be extrapolated from its substance, but was instead realized through its utility—what Chuzhak called the "plan" of the object. The concepts of purpose [*naznachenie*] and determination [*napravlenie*] figured prominently in Chuzhak's polemics against the hackneyed distinction between matter and concept:

> Art . . . *is the production of values (objects) that are necessary to a class and to humanity.*
>
> Because we utilize the ideological (like the material) values that have been built upon a dialectical understanding of the world, and because we only utilize them with an eye to their purpose, there *can be no talk about negating the "idea of objects."*

28.   Nikolai Chuzhak, "Na soveshchanii rabotnikov Lefa," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no. 1 (1925), p. 93.
29.   It is interesting to note that Brik was a leading member of OPOIaZ, the St. Petersburg group of Formalists who were branded a "biological deviation in literary theory." See, for example, M. Grigor'ev's critique of the OPOIaZ conception of art as a "purely physiological fact" in "Biologicheskii uklon v literaturovedenii (kritika biologicheskikh poniatii v literaturovedenii)," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 3 (1928), pp. 24–30. This analysis was developed more systematically the same year in Pavel Medvedev's *Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, in which Medvedev criticized Formalism's privileging of biological and physiological aspects of aesthetic reception. According to Medvedev, this had produced a theory of art which was marred by the "tendency to equate an ideological phenomenon to a product of individual consumption." In their zeal to eliminate psychologistic accounts of an art work's conceptual content, the Formalists ignored the social and communicative aspects of the art work and thereby reduced it to an object to be "ingested by the individual organism." *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 11.
30.   Chuzhak, "Iskusstvo v nashi dni: most ot illiuzii k materii," p. 3.

> The subject of the art of the day is not only the tangible object, but also the idea, *the object in the model.*
>
> Hence the incorporation of all kinds of experimental art, from bio-mechanically trained movements to the construction of the world by means of *dialectical* modeling (constructivism, symbolics).[32]

As Tret'iakov was furthermore aware, purpose and determination also suggested a solution to the dogged question of formalist tendencies within the avant-garde work of Lef. The answer to formalism, Tret'iakov argued, was not to take up revolutionary thematics; for if form without content was tantamount to ontological materialism, then content without form would conversely yield psychological realism, something that was hardly any more desirable. But the functionalist perspective circumvented this quaint division between form and content, a division that Tret'iakov regarded as the aesthetic corollary of the metaphysical dualism between physical matter and cognitive content that we have been describing here. In his editorial intervention into an exchange between Boris Kushner and Rodchenko on photography, he reminded the readership of *Novyi lef* that neither the "what" (content) nor the "how" (form) are as important as the "why" [*zachem*] of any given product of labor. This is because the "why" "is the link that transforms a 'work' into an 'object,' i.e., into an instrument of expedient effect."[33]

Tret'iakov's reading of Pudovkin's film *The End of St. Petersburg* perfectly illustrates how this functionalism works. Focusing on one particular scene in the film that features a cup of hot tea, Tret'iakov noted that this cup is not used as one would expect it to be used, as a drinking vessel. It is not presented in accordance with its habituated, naturalized purpose, but has been refunctioned by Pudovkin to operate indexically, to serve as an indicator of time as the steam above it slowly dissipates. Like so many of his statements, Tret'iakov's comment about the multivalence of the cup is deceptively simple; but it gets at the core of Pudovkin's cinematic poetics and, furthermore, suggests a profound indictment of ontological materialism. Tret'iakov explains: "At some point Chekhov said: no superfluous objects can appear in a theatrical performance; if a gun appears on stage in the first act, it will be fired in the last act. The objects on Pudovkin's screen are just such Chekhovian guns; the only difference is that they don't shoot, but do something else instead." The point is that the things which appear in Pudovkin's films may operate within a closed narrative economy according to the principle of "dramaturgical incest,"[34] but the codes and meanings within this constellation of

31.   Fedor Ivanov, "Fetishisty fakta," *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 7 (1929), pp. 227–37.
32.   Nikolai Chuzhak, "Pod znakom zhiznestroeniia," *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), p. 38.
33.   Sergei Tret'akov, "From the Editor," in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips, trans. John E. Bowlt (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 270.
34.   In their *Public Sphere and Experience*, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge discuss the consequences of a pedagogy based upon "universal comprehensibility," i.e., one that disciplines the labile imagination of

objects are anything but fixed. The objects in his films exist not as stable and immutable matter, but are instead dynamic modalities that are constantly subject to detournement and retaxonomizing. *The End of St. Petersburg* suggests to Tret'iakov that the boundaries between sign and instrument are porous: the cup "is an indicator of time as the steam above it grows thinner. Standing alone on the stark boards of the table, the glass characterizes hunger and poverty. Thrown through the window, it functions as a traditional shot that averts danger."[35] Pudovkin's cup does not have one purpose, then, but three (none of which, moreover, accord to its "natural" use as a vessel): as an indicator of time, it is an index; as an emblem of poverty, it is a symbol; as a projectile, it is a signal or a weapon. One and the same cup can serve a variety of functions, both symbolic and material. Whatever purpose that may be, the quiddity of the cup is not indelibly encoded in its physical substance. Both a mental sign and a physical signal, Pudovkin's triplicate cup demonstrates that signification and matter are equally meaningless, indeed unthinkable, beyond their functional value. And so Tret'iakov sums up: "There is no absolute objectivism in the world."[36]

Productive parallels can be established here between the theory of symbolic activity [*deiatel'nost'*] posited by the Soviet psycholinguist Lev Vygotskii and Tret'iakov's notion of the "operativity" of the factographic work. "Operativity" was the term Tret'iakov used to designate a situational aesthetics that conceptualized representation not as an objective reflection of a static world, but as an operation that by definition intervenes in the context of the aesthetic act. Vygotskii similarly proposed that the sign was an instrument with which the human being actively manipulates its environment.[37] Communication, symbolic exchange, and thought itself were for Vygotskii always activities that were both processual and purposive, never simply indifferent reflections of the status quo. Like Pudovkin's glass, the specular sign was also a tool, an activity (Vygotskii), an operation (Tret'iakov). This

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children with the fixed conceptual taxonomies of adults. In the latter, every object is accorded but one function, and thereby loses its potential multivalence. Negt and Kluge term this tyranny of univocal meaning "dramaturgical incest," a reformulation of the principle of Chekhov's gun: "'Dramaturgical incest,' the principle that a door in a stage set must be used within the play, that a clothes hook must at some point have an article of clothing hung on it, that a character who appears in the drama must enter into some relationship with other characters—this is the mark of a value abstraction that governs most of the forms of the bourgeois tradition of art and expression. There prevails here a primacy of economy, which drives experience and reality away from the thread of the action. This schematism is alien to language as such. A child will take up words and sentences from its mother that are not geared to the basic message she is trying to get across. However, as soon as this child has undergone the educational process, it will insist on universal comprehensibility." *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 274.

35.   Sergei Tret'iakov, "Our Cinema," trans. Devin Fore, in this issue, pp. 41.
36.   Ibid.
37.   See the contributions in James Wertsch, ed., *Culture, Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and Caryl Emerson, "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1983),

instrumental understanding of the activity of signification could be confirmed, Vygotskii observed, by the phylogenetic origins of human language. He explained in *Thought and Language* that the organ for these first utterances had not been not the mouth, but the hand: the "first stage in the development of human speech" can be found in the "gestures of apes [that] are a transitional form between grasping and pointing. . . . We consider this transitional gesture a most important step from unadulterated affective expression toward objective language."[38] This monkey-hand, this transitional gesture that is part manipulation (grasping) and part deixis (pointing) dismantles the idealist hierarchy between the hand and the mouth. And so while some theorists would claim that the human is defined by his ability to use instruments, and others would claim that it is the capacity for symbolic language that distinguishes the human from the animal, for Vygotskii, these two positions are ultimately indistinguishable. From the functionalist perspective, there is no difference between tool and sign. *Homo faber* is perforce *Homo sapiens.* The linguistic sign should therefore be understood as a "quasi-object" with both cognitive and physical properties, as Vygotskii's student Aleksei A. Leont'ev (1903–1979) has proposed.[39]

This conception of language as a social assemblage that spans manual and symbolic production was at the core of factography's "polytechnic" orientation. In his book *The Writer in Production* (1931), Pertsov defined factography as the "polytechnic organization of literature," and declared that its agenda was to overcome the baleful effects of a division of labor that had erected a barrier between the professional author and the manual worker. The group of writers and artists who left

pp. 245–64.

38.   Lev S. Vygotskii, *Thought and Language*, trans. E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975), p. 35. Vygotskii credits Wilhelm Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie I: Die Sprache* with this insight. André Leroi-Gourhan confirms the shared origin of gesture and language: ". . . humans, though they started out with the same formula as primates, can make tools as well as symbols, both of which derive from the same process or, rather, draw upon the same basic equipment in the brain. This leads us to conclude not only that language is as characteristic of humans as are tools, but also that both are the expression of the same intrinsically human property, just as the chimpanzee's thirty different vocal signals are the precise mental counterpart of its use of several sticks to pull down a banana hanging overhead—in other words, no more a language than fitting sticks together is, properly speaking, a technique. . . . The origin of language in anthropoids preceding Homo sapiens thus seems to have been closely linked with technical motor function. Indeed the link is so close that employing as they do the same pathways in the brain, the two main anthropoid characteristics could be attributed to one and the same phenomenon." *Gesture and Speech*, pp. 114–15.

39.   The model of the "quasi-object" recognizes that the sign has both objective and subjective qualities, that it is both material and ideal. Aleksei A. Leont'ev explains the semiotic operation: "When we speak about the 'body' of a sign as the material substrate of its ideal content, we do not mean that a sign must necessarily, in whatever form it may exist, have some sensuously perceptible contour; as a sign image, for example, it loses this materiality and becomes a fact of consciousness. The paradoxical point about this is that when a sign loses the sensuous qualities of its 'body,' its content itself becomes sensuous. Indeed, even this loss is relative: there is no sign image that cannot be potentially 'materialized,' i.e., acquire material form in communication, or that cannot in general be externalized." Aleksei A. Leont'ev, "The Psycholinguistic Aspect of Linguistic Meaning," in *Recent Trends in Soviet Psycholinguistics*, ed. James Wertsch (New York: M. E. Sharp, 1977), p. 57. Taking the term not from a Marxian epistemology but instead from Michel Serres's *Parasite* (1982), Bruno Latour similarly designates as "quasi-object" a category of phenomena that is both socially and naturally determined. See Latour, *We Have Never Been*

behind their offices in 1929 and entered into Soviet factories and *kolkhozes* in order to participate directly in the life of production was only the literalist response to the challenge of merging practices of signification with the methods of industry and production;[40] the other response would be the epistemologically more radical initiative to abolish the division of labor entirely and thereby transform the very parameters of human experience. If, as Chuzhak predicted in 1925, the task of the final phase of communism would be the liquidation of "the law of the division of labor that enslaves the human being, and with it the opposition between mental and physical labor as well,"[41] this prelapsarian correspondence between thought and deed appeared at the time under the sign of polytechnic production: "the basic idea of polytechnism," Pertsov wrote in *The Writer in Production*, "consists of the elimination of the separation of physical and mental labor."[42] While objectivist realism was the artistic correlate of a bourgeois consciousness that reflects events passively—a contemplative subjectivity that was engendered in educational institutions which emphasized abstract book knowledge to the exclusion of applied and embodied experience—polytechnic factography would by contrast be a verbal art forged in the factories, a "transitional gesture" in literature that was not contemplative, but both psychic and manual at once. Its operative utterances would not sunder force from signification, construction from composition, but rather alloy the two within a technical culture congruent with the most advanced forms and methods of industrial production.

Polytechnic Production: Aleksei Gastev

One figure who supplied the needed theoretical armature for a monistic practice that bridged economies of material, cultural, and cognitive production was Aleksei Gastev. An experimental scientist, Proletkul't poet, and factory organizer who was responsible for elaborating the most influential phenomenology of labor of the 1920s, Gastev published numerous studies and treatises on the mechanisms by which the industrial factory transformed the character of human experience and culture. Although he never published a single article in *Lef* or *Novyi lef*, he enjoyed extreme popularity among the Futurists both for his terse, mechanical poetry and for a body of research, NOT (*Nauchnaia Organizatsiia*

Modern, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
40.   Viktor Pertsov, *Pisatel' na proizvodstve* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1931), p. 8. On page 13, Pertsov adds: "proletarian literary cadres should be formed not on the basis of professional isolation, but on the basis of the polytechnical inclusion of literature into the set of skills that are necessary for the constructor of socialist society."
41.   Nikolai Chuzhak et al., "Proletarskaia kul'tura. Tezisy," *Al'manakh proletkul'ta* (1925), p. 14. Although this essay appeared in the *Al'manakh* without attribution of authorship, Chuzhak claimed to have written it at the 1925 conference.
42.   Pertsov, *Pisatel' na proizvodstve*, p. 20. For a thorough disquisition into the evolution of the division of labor, see Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (London:

Truda [The Scientific Organization of Labor]), which sought to optimize the symbiosis between human and machine both in the factory and beyond the factory walls, in everyday life.

If Brik's vulgar materialism left no place for language, Gastev, much like Chuzhak, located communication and material production on a single continuum. But while Chuzhak's musings about the "thingly chains" that span thought and matter always had a whiff of speculative philosophizing about them, Gastev delivered the empirical research to substantiate these Futurist fantasies. At the moment of Lef's 1925 crisis, the producers who would soon lead the factographic revolution were engrossed in his work. Indeed, references to Gastev and his NOT theories were ubiquitous during this critical period for the group: Tret'iakov's first factographic *ocherk*, the 1925 "Moscow-Peking: A Travel Film," begins with the injunctions to write "pursuant to NOT [*po NOT*]" and to follow the doctrines of TsIT (Gastev's *Tsentral'nyi Institut Truda* [The Central Institute of Labor]);[43] Chuzhak's opening salvo at the 1925 conference first invoked Gastev's NOT method as the necessary theoretical foundation for production art,[44] and then demanded that the vulgar "fetishization of the concrete object must . . . be eliminated from Lef's daily use";[45] and in the introduction to his analysis of the 1925 conference, *Revision of the Left Front of the Arts,* Pertsov similarly stated that Lef's future work must incorporate an array of NOT principles.[46] Gastev himself had been invited to speak at the conference, and even serve on its Presidium, although he was not formally recognized as a member of Lef. He was evidently perceived to be a pivotal figure at the moment of the group's transition.

Like Nikolai Bukharin and Aleksandr Bogdanov, two leading Party figures who challenged Stalin's drive to develop heavy industries such as steel production at the expense of lighter consumer industries, Gastev was skeptical of the vulgar hyperindustrialists who regarded the factory to be nothing more than an enterprise for the manufacture of material objects. The elaborate and functionally differentiated composition of the modern factory suggested to him a gigantic laboratory in which new patterns of human interactivity and cultural value come into being. Gastev viewed the machine as a device for social production: "The world of the machine, the world of equipment, the world of working urbanism creates particular unified collectives and generates special types of humans who must be accepted."[47] Because the industrial machine is not a piece of indifferent nature, but an apparatus

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Macmillan, 1978).
43.   Sergei Tret'iakov, "Moskva-Pekin (put'fil'ma)," *Lef,* no. 7 (1925), pp. 33–69.
44.   *Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa*, p. 3b. Chuzhak reiterated this demand in a series of essays that appeared later that year in the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* under the title "Iskusstvo v nashi dni."
45.   *Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa*, p. 6b.
46.   "Given the profound connection that the new artistic culture has with industry, it is not surprising that the author has borrowed for his analysis of Lef a whole series of concepts that have been introduced into contemporary life by the growing movement of broad cultural transformation that is associated with the activity of the TsIT." Pertsov, *Reviziia*, p. 7.
47.   Aleksei Gastev, "Nashi zadachi," in *Kak nado rabotat'. Prakticheskoe vvedenie v nauku organizatsii*

that requires culturally conditioned cognitive frameworks for its operation (in the form of technical experience, training, knowledge, etc.), it is quintessentially a cultural and ideological apparatus that is inseparable from the ideas and acquired mental protocols that animate it. This understanding of the inherent sociality of technology was aptly summarized by the theorist of production art, Boris Arvatov: "For the animal, the machine is a piece of nature, but for us it is a social organism, and for this reason it is an organism that molds ideas."[48] The observation that the machine was not just a physical but also a social organism led Gastev to suggest that machines represent highly elaborate aggregations of knowledge and instantiated experience.[49] Indeed, if the industrial enterprise is characterized by the massive accumulation of dead labor in the form of factory machines, these machines' outward appearance as inert or inorganic matter is contradicted by the fact that they are actually nothing more than labor, social relations, and abstract knowledge in their objectivated form. If anything, the machine's human nature is only further augmented by its technical complexity. As factory mechanization increases, Gastev explained, industrial production begins to achieve ever-higher thresholds of socialization.

In order to optimize the exchange between the machine and its human operator, Gastev's research focused on seamlessly integrating the nervous system of the human body with the electrical networks of machines. He declared that the new biometric science would attend to these interfaces [*ustanovki*]. Within the program of "national energetics," Gastev proposed to fuse together mechanomorphic "techno-energetics" with organic "bio-energetics,"[50] the result of which would be the perfect unity of human and machine:

> *Of course, the difference between machine and instrumental muscular work is being completely eliminated.* We introduce not only templates, but also conductors. Everyone knows that contemporary machines for processing (machine-instruments) are interesting for us (worker-organizers) not because of their so-called thrust [*tiagoi*], but precisely because of their *intuitive system for processing*: the diverse types of switches, speeds, transformers, controls, conductors, etc., i.e., precisely those interfaces [*ustanovkami*] which we also engage for instrumental muscular labor.

truda (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1966), p. 24.

48. Boris Arvatov, "Iskusstvo i organizatsiia byta," in *Ob agit- i proziskusstve* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1930), p. 81.

49. Here we should recall that the Russian word *tekhnika* encompasses both the world of physical machines and the skills and social knowledge needed to operate them. Like the German word *Technik*, it denotes both "technique" and "technology," and thus designates both the culturally acquired and transmitted *dispositif* as well as the material means of production. As Gilles Deleuze pointed out, "Never is an arrangement-combination technological, indeed it is always the contrary. The tools always presuppose a machine, and the machine is always social before it is technical." Deleuze, cited in Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 122.

> And so *an integrated world of labor interfaces* [*trudovye ustanovki*] is coming
> into being that will have just as much significance for instrumental
> muscular labor as it does for machine labor, and consequently, for
> assembly and constructive labor as well.[51]

This passage is revealing for its dismissal of the physical pulsion or thrust [*tiaga*] of
the machine and its emphasis instead on the machine's elaborate "system for process-
ing"—the diverse interfaces with which the machine quite literally "faces" its
operator as a human artifact. Gastev's analysis of the various means by which
machines are combined both with each other and with the worker drew upon Marx's
critical distinction in *Capital* between "a number of machines" and a "complex sys-
tem of machinery" (i.e., "a chain of mutually complementary machines of various
kinds"). Marx explained that the modern factory did not represent a merely quantita-
tive accumulation of machines, but instead incorporated the discrete machines
within a functional totality on the organismic model. The resulting megamachine
constituted an assemblage in which each individual machine "form[s] a special
organ, with a special function in the combined mechanism."[52] For Gastev, the inter-
faces of the machine must be optimized in order to incorporate its human operators
into the cycle of production. Such a machine was less the mute, iron behemoth of
the first Industrial Revolution than a dynamic station that was covered with inter-
faces and coupling mechanisms that convey informational and pulsional flows.

  In contrast to the prevailing image of Gastev as a fanatical rhapsode of heavy
industry, what emerges here is quite a different Gastev, a technician who envi-
sioned a revolutionary body of the future that was not enclosed within an armored
carapace but was instead distinguished by its very permeability and capacity for
interchange. Like La Mettrie, Gastev suggested that NOT conceives of the "human
as a machine," indeed, as "the best of all machines in the world";[53] but Gastev did
not look upon the human machine as something that was perfect, complete, or
self-contained. Just the opposite: he was impressed precisely by its ontological inde-
terminacy and open-endedness, by its dynamic capacity to augment itself through
social and technological organs. For Gastev, the human was never fully comprised,
never a figure of immanence. Invoking Darwin's "theory about the production of
biological adaptations [*prisposoblenii*]," Gastev suggested that the human "is also a
workstation, built over the course of millions of years." And what is so remarkable
about *Homo sapiens*, he continued, is that evolution ceases to be a biological eventu-
ality for this species, and becomes instead a social process. For it is through the
organs, languages, bodies of knowledge, and technological prostheses of its own
fashioning that the human being evolves. "And we intend to perfect [the human]
by creating in it a culture of calculated supply, a culture of energetics, a culture of

50. Gastev, "Vosstanie kul'tury," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 46.
51. Gastev, "Vidy trudovykh ustanovok," in *Trudovye ustanovki* (Moscow, Ekonomika, 1973), p. 145.
52. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 499–501.

speed, of interfaces, of registration, of control, of management, and of 'bureau-cracy' [*deloproizvodstvo, lit.*, 'file-production']."[54]

Gastev observed that the intensification of "biological machinism" in the modern industrial enterprise made it increasingly difficult to determine where the machine ends and the human begins.[55] But such an inquiry would amount to little more than an antiquated humanism anyway. Following a "completely monistic approach to the workshop implement, to the instrument, to the mechanism and to the living human machine,"[56] Gastev investigated the functions of certain "operational complexes" [*operatsionnye kompleksy*], organizational units that closely resemble Leroi-Gourhan's "operating sequences" and that encompass both worker and machine in a single unbroken chain:

> The factory machine long ago ceased to be an individual organizational unit; it is intimately connected to the system of other machines and represents an unbroken organizational complex. The combination of these machine complexes with human complexes is extremely intri-cate: in it individual workers enter into exchange with a certain machine, and then with another, and their relationships include the enterprise's entire circuit for processing. Sometimes an individual worker, in the form of a determinate circuit of movement, passes through a entire series of machines. . . .
>
> These machine-human complexes also produce the synthesis between biology and engineering that we are constantly cultivating. And the integrated, calculated incorporation of determinate human masses into a system of mechanisms will be nothing other than social engineering.[57]

Because "there is nothing completely discrete in the factory,"[58] production and labor cannot be conceived as a series of reified punctualities that oppose the worker to the machine, but instead must be organized in open circuits or complexes. This was the subject of Gastev's article "Analytics of Production," which explored poten-tial taxonomies "to somehow classify this entire enormous world of labor movements."[59] Not an easy task, he explained, since it is much easier to catalogue individual objects than to posit a morphology of the movements and flows them-selves. Gastev based his classifications of gesture and movement on chrono-photographs that were derived, indicatively, from the single-exposure method of Etienne-Jules Marey rather than the frozen snapshots of Eadweard Muybridge.

53.   Gastev, "Chto takoe NOT?," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 157.
54.   Ibid., p. 165.
55.   Gastev, "Uchebno-ustanovochnyi plan," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 152.
56.   Gastev, "Orgametodika," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 188.
57.   Gastev, "Organicheskoe vnedrenie v predpriiatie," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 223.
58.   Gastev, "Ustanovochnaia programma," in *Trudovye ustanovki*, p. 242.

Since technologies are the concrete precipitates of the mode and relations of production that dominate in a given historical epoch, technological changes are per-force bound up with social transformations, as Marx suggested in his *Poverty of Philosophy*: "In acquiring new productive forces [i.e., technologies], men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production . . . they change all their social relations."[60] Gastev reasoned accordingly that the great era of Soviet reconstruction would expand to encompass all registers of human experience, and as a result would introduce countless transformations into the cultural production and urban life-world of his day: "Machinism is gradually saturating not only the purely industrial aspect of human life; it will fuse enterprises together, it will permeate all areas of everyday life, it will give rise to the mighty edifices we boldly call machine cities."[61] In contrast to the hyperindustrialists of vulgar production who reduced the factory to a site for the manufacture of physical objects, and who completely over-looked the factory as a potential machine for the production of social relations that could be disseminated into the reproductive sphere of everyday life, Gastev argued that the cognitive protocols, gestural operations, and technical knowledge that were acquired at the workbench had applicability far beyond the factory walls. These complexes are analogous to what Negt and Kluge have called *Kreisläufe* ("circuits" or "circulations"): heuristic economic units that span lived biological processes, the reproduction of the experiential totality of life, and the societal forces of labor.[62] The "operational complexes" of the industrial enterprise generate novel collectivities of experience and give rise to unprecedented "human complexes" [*liudskie kompleksy*] that are organized according to new principles of social integration. If, as Gastev sug-gested, "the perfectly organized and well-equipped factory becomes a machine for social engineering,"[63] then the Soviet factory could not be simply a house of labor, but must be transformed into a factory of human relations. There was even a model for a biomechanical vivarium built at TsIT, a kind of experimental ossature for train-ing the movements of the worker in the same way that Lissitzky's or Popova's Constructivist stage sets canalized the energetic expenditures of the actor in Meyerhold's theater. This "Machine for Social Engineering" was part workers' club, part art installation, part industrial dressage—a prototype for a threshold space designed to encode the principles of factory organization and sociality into the

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59.   Gastev, "Proizvodstvennaia analitika," in *Trudovye ustanovki*, p. 106.
60.   Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 109.
61.   Gastev, "Novaia industriia," *Vestnik metallista*, no. 2 (1918), cited in Kurt Johansson, *Aleksej Gastev: Proletarian Bard of the Machine Age* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1983), p. 62.
62.   "In order to arrive at a more comprehensive circuit [*Kreislauf*], one must include the people who are active in this economy, the reproduction of the context of living [*Lebenszusammenhang*], and thus the reproduction of society's labor power." Negt and Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn I: Entstehung der industriellen Disziplin aus Trennung und Enteignung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 240. The interaction between the forces of production and social reproduction was, of course, the explicit theme of Tret'iakov's 1926 "production play" *I Want a Baby*.
63.   Gastev in a stenogram of a talk given at TsIT on November 17, 1925, cited in Gastev, "Ot 'sot-sial'noi inzhenerii' k kibernetike. O metodologicheskoi kontseptsii Tsentral'nogo Instituta Truda," in

muscular repertoire of the worker; this embodied information could then be carried out into the heretofore unrationalized and benighted realms of everyday life.

Gastev's vision of the factory as a "probative workshop in which everything that [the worker] has is perfected daily"[64] responded to contemporaneous educational initiatives to transform the factory into an institution of higher learning and cultural edification.[65] Since the time of their work in the Party schools in Capri and Bologna between 1909 and 1911, both Bogdanov and Lunacharskii had called for the radical restructuring of pedagogical practices along socialist lines, and this restructuring was understood to require, above all, a school system that integrates experiential learning and theoretical scholarship within the context of living labor processes. This was, we observed earlier, the basis for a polytechnic approach to knowledge-production and -acquisition. Whereas bourgeois education was based on abstract knowledge and sedentary book learning without any connection to practical experience, the polytechnic communist pedagogy of the factory-university fused together scholarship, praxis, and the most advanced forms of production in order to advance new forms of embodied knowledge and thought.[66] For Gastev the industrial enterprise would become the predominant cultural institution of the proletariat: "with regards to its construction, the factory gradually comes to resemble a type of laboratory, a type of experimental school; and out of the accursed workhouse emerges a gigantic technical university."[67] An enthusiast of the Montessori method that privileged hands-on, kinetic understanding, Gastev felt that the polytechnic training of the modern industrial complex would cultivate an integrated consciousness that was qualitatively different from the contemplative and specular subjectivity that emerged in the bourgeois ghettoes of education far away from the sites of production. As Bertolt Brecht suggested in 1931, "an act of cognition is no longer possible outside of the universal process of production. One has to produce in order to know, and producing means being in the process of production." Thus: "Only the subject who participates and who is involved is capable of knowing here."[68]

According to Gastev, the imbrication of industrial factory production and vital processes of social reproduction (such as education and other cultural systems) was facilitated by contemporary technology's extreme degree of rarefaction

Trudovye Ustanovki, p. 21.

64.   Gastev, "Kak nado rabotat'," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 167.

65.   See, for example, Aleksandr Bogdanov, "Nauka i proletariat," "Nauka i rabochii klass," "Proletarskii universitet," and "O provintsial'nykh universitetakh," in *O proletarskoi kul'ture 1904–1924* (Moscow: Kniga, 1924). Also see Leon Trotsky, "A few words on how to raise a human being," in *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp. 169–78.

66.   See Edwin Hoernle's *Grundfragen der proletarischen Erziehung* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1983), and Anatolii Lunacharskii, "Basic Principles of the United Labor School," in *Bolshevik Visions: The First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed. William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1984), pp. 300–14.

67.   Aleksei Gastev, "Kinematika kul'tury," *Prozhektor*, no. 21 (1925), p. 21.

68.   Bertolt Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozess. Ein soziologisches Experiment," in *Bertolt Brechts Dreigroschenbuch. Texte Materialien Dokumente*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973),

and refinement. As mechanical technologies grow smaller and more mobile, Gastev predicted that the threshold between the factory and quotidian experience would continue to attenuate until it disappears entirely. He substantiated this observation with a prescient analysis of labor activity that pivoted on the distinction between two gestures: the force-motion of striking [*udariat'*] and the control-motion of pressing [*nazhimat'*]. These two movements, the most basic units in his phenomenology of labor, would provide a common foundation for rationalizing cultural and factory production alike. As he noted in his famous 1923 brochure "The Insurrection of Culture," all work can be broken down into its muscular and neural components:

> Unless a person is physically impaired, he should be able to pass an examination of two types of motion: the act of striking and the act of pressing. It is necessary to be able to strike correctly, and it is necessary to be able to press correctly. Striking is a work motion that is primarily executed at a remove from the object being processed; it is a swift and sharp motion. Pressing is a motion that is always executed in contact with the object being processed; it is a smooth motion.

> Striking is primarily an examination that tests the charge of force coordinated with dexterity; pressing is an examination that tests the most precise redistribution of intensities.[69]

While he suggested that all labor movement falls into one of these two categories, this did not mean that these two gestures were of equal importance in the current regime of production. He predicted, in fact, that the chief task in the epoch of reconstruction would be to perfect the motion of pressing: "We learned how to strike forcefully (the front). Now we must learn to press methodically."[70] As we saw earlier, Gastev believed that "contemporary machines for processing (machine-instruments) are interesting for us (worker-organizers) not because of their so called pulsion, but precisely because of their *intuitive system for processing*: the diverse types of switches, speeds, transformers, controls, conductors, etc." And so whereas he associated striking with the former era of machine force, shock [*udar*] and thrust [*tiaga*], Gastev believed that the current task facing Soviet society was to develop and refine a culture of pressing, of sensible instrumentation, of "smooth movement" [*dvizhenie plavnoe*] and "contact with the object being processed" [*soprikosnovenie s obrabatyvaemym predmetom*]. This epochal shift in the economy of gesture was later echoed by Jean Baudrillard in his account of the transition from neuromuscular flexion to cerebro-sensory vigilance:

> Buttons, levers, handles, pedals (even nothing at all—as when one passes

pp. 165, 175.
69.   Gastev, "Vosstanie kul'tury," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 51.

in front of a photo-electric cell) have thus replaced pressure, percussion, impact, or balance achieved by means of the body, the intensity and distribution of force, and the abilities of the hand (from which little more than quickness is now asked). A prehension of objects involving the whole body has given way to simple contact (of hand or foot) and simple surveillance (by the eye or, occasionally, by the ear). In other words, only man's "extremities" now have an active part in the functional environment.[71]

And so while older instruments such as the ax or the hammer required the involvement of the worker's entire organism, the mechanized factory engaged only the haptic periphery of the machine operator. With the increasing importance of gestural refinement and precision, labor becomes as much a psychic phenomenon as a dimensional or material one. In the university-laboratory of the factory, the worker is schooled in those "transitional gestures" between motoric manipulation and communication that are the fundamental components of modern production.

One of Gastev's favorite passages from *Capital* (and one which also formed the epigraph for Vygotskii's 1925 essay "Consciousness as a Problem of the Psychology of Behavior")[72] was Marx's famous account of the distinction between human and animal labor in which he observed that the former possesses an inalienable cognitive component: "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax."[73] If animals produce spontaneously out of instinct, and human production presupposes purposive thought and language, then the qualitative difference between animal and human labor can be attributed to the latter's ideational investment in the object of labor. Gastev consequently recommended to the worker that he or she conceptualize work before executing it: "Before you begin to work, you have to think it through entirely, think it through in such a way that the model of the completed work merges definitively in your head with all of the protocols for the devices of labor."[74] He called this prospective conceptualization *trudovaia ustanovka*, a mental orientation toward the purposive process of labor that is identical to Chuzhak's notion of the *model'*.[75] Human labor presupposes a tentative mental framework for the act of production that is generated through the interaction of that memory, language, and consciousness. Against the

70.   Ibid., p. 34.
71.   Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso, 1996), p. 49.
72.   L. C. Vygotskii, "Soznanie kak problema psikhologii povedeniia," in *Psikhologiia i Marksizm*, ed. K. N. Kornilov (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1925), p. 175.
73.   Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 283.
74.   Gastev, "Kak nado rabotat' (komentarii)," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 117.
75.   One should take note of a generative ambiguity in the Russian word *ustanovka*, which refers to a physical "interface," "mount," or "installation" at the same time that it also designates the cognitive orientation of the perceiving subject. It is the word with which Soviet gestalt psychology renders *Einstellung* in Russian, and the one used by Formalists to describe the subject's horizon of expectation

fetishists of material production, Gastev consequently wrote that "*we do not recognize the differences* between so-called physical labor and so-called mental labor. During the period of its coordinated movements, the slash of the blade simultaneously reveals to us how far the elements of the imagination—the elements of memory—extend into labor and gives us the key to the structure of so-called cognitive labor."[76]

Because of its emphasis on the cognitive components of labor, some scholars consider Gastev's NOT to represent a Marxian variant of cybernetics. Whether or not that claim can be justified,[77] it is certainly true that Gastev recognized the centrality of informational systems to the economy of production. For him, data and statistics were as important to the modern factory as hydraulic presses and conveyer belts. Gastev's striking vision for the perfection of our species through a "culture of calculated supply, a culture of energetics, a culture of speed, of interfaces, of registration, of control, of management, and of 'bureaucracy'" may indeed have made him the only thinker ever to have proposed human evolution through bureaucratization. Still, as eccentric as this proposal may seem, it nonetheless contains a certain aperçu about the need to develop sophisticated systems of information management to control increasingly elaborate human-machine assemblages. These changes in the structure of production required a new species of managerial number-crunchers, a "giant swarm of quality control inspectors"[78] who were trained in the factory-universities and who could translate the operations of the industrial plant into facts and figures. This is why NOT is associated today with the initial appearance of a technical intelligentsia class in the Soviet Union.[79]

Gastev's vision of the future of work was extrapolated from his observations about the historical evolution of technology. His genealogy of machine culture was articulated in a photo-essay, "The Kinematics of Culture," which appeared in 1925 in the same illustrated magazine that was also concurrently publishing Tret'iakov's China reportages, *Prozhektor*. Starting his account with an analysis of architectural

in the aesthetic encounter.
76.   Gastev, "Trudovye ustanovki," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 195.
77.   Although the theoretical and historical origins of cybernetics are traditionally dated to the 1948 publication of Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, it is not inaccurate to describe Gastev's work as cybernetic, or at least proto-cybernetic. If a cybernetic system is defined by the presence of two features—(1) autoregulating servo-mechanisms that manage the system through feedback (control), and (2) interfaces for the exchange of information between the organism and the outside world (communication)—then Gastev's NOT can be characterized as a cybernetic science. Indeed, both *avtoreguliatory* (autoregulators) and *ustanovki* (interfaces) were central to NOT theories. On Gastev as cybernetician, see A. Bert, "V. I. Lenin i nauchnaia organizatsiia truda," *Pravda*, October 24, 1962; and Gastev, "Ot 'sotsial'noi inzhenerii' k kibernetike. O metologicheskoi kontseptsii Tsentral'nogo Instituta Truda," in *Trudovye ustanovki*, pp. 5–22. Samuel Lieberman suggests that NOT's rehabilitation in the 1960s was facilitated by growth in the Soviet computer industry in "Technology, Work, and Sociology in the USSR: The NOT Movement," *Technology and Culture* 16, no. 1 (1975), pp. 48–66.
78.   Gastev, "Kak nado rabotat'," in *Kak nado rabotat'*, p. 167.
79.   See Kendall Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical*

constructions around the turn of the century, Gastev noted that the buildings produced in those years were marked by an increasing physical massiveness and material accumulation. But right at the moment when the revenant serenity and stability of antiquity's forms appeared to have found favorable ground within the industrial world, these static structures were suddenly liquefied once again:

> And then, right at that moment, when the terrestrial orb was frozen in all of that bulky construction, piled high with iron, brick and earth, poured concrete—at that time, all of that bulky construction was dissolved by an astonishing development that was its almost complete negation. An unusual suppleness, mixing, and modularity in construction cleared a path in the work of construction.[80]

Within the fields of architectural and industrial engineering as well as design culture, "mobile lightness," glass, and a molten fungibility became the modernist elements that displaced the grandiose and static monumentality of the older constructions. Gastev's vision of a life-world composed of compact, mobile, and modular forms belonged to the same ephemeral and functional civilization that Ernst Jünger described in *The Worker* of 1932: this was a technical world that appears "as a transitional landscape. There is no permanence of forms here; all forms are continuously modeled by a dynamic unrest."[81] It was the first step in the dematerialization of the modern object.

Within his historical overview of this mutation in the culture of things, Gastev focuses in this photo-essay on one particularly decisive narrative: the history of the energy sources (steam, gas, and electricity) that animate—and liberate—these things. The real stars of "The Kinematics of Culture" are not the objects, but the energies which dissolve them. His historical teleology proceeds in a neat progression: the steam engine gave birth to the locomotive, which realized new thresholds of speed and mobility, but remained locked in its tracks; gas then made possible the automobile and airplane, machines that were free from the fixity of the rails, but were still not completely liberated from space; the final leap in the increasing mobilization of technology was taken when at last engineers were able to harness electricity. The latter (the most "democratic" medium, Gastev proposed) realized the fantasy of unrestrictedly portable technologies: whereas steam and gas power required not only relatively bulky engines to convert a fuel source into usable energy, but also the physical presence of an ample volume of this coal or petrol, dimensionality ceased to be a limit category for those modern electrical technologies which could be completely uncoupled from their energy source and which thus began to involute that once stable Kantian a priori of experience, space. In his famous 1955 lecture at Munich's *Technische Hochschule*, "The Question

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Intelligentsia, 1917–1941 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).
80.   Gastev, "Kinematika kul'tury," p. 19.

Concerning Technology," Heidegger proposed a similar delimitation between tradi-
tional and modern cultural artifacts: while the former built physical, discrete
objects, the latter generated an immaterial and undifferentiated *Bestand*, a
"resource" or "standing-reserve" that "no longer stands over against us as an
object."[82] As a result of electrification, the *Gegenstand* was displaced by *Bestand*, the
object by its potentiality.

Much of Gastev's photo-essay resonates with the account proposed by
Nikolai Tarabukin's 1923 essay *From the Easel to the Machine*. The polemic in the sec-
ond half of Tarabukin's essay against an outmoded "handicraft" [*kustarnyi*]
conception of the object; his critique of the vulgar constructivists who resolve "the
extremely complicated question about production skills in a highly primitive fash-
ion"; his vision of the industrial enterprise that "unifies in a single creative act all
participants in this process, from the inventor of the machines to the worker at
the factory workstation"[83]—all of these components of Tarabukin's tract on the
art of production also circulate in Gastev's contemporaneous writings on produc-
tion. But while Tarabukin concludes that the artist will eventually come to occupy
a "purely *agitational* role" in the factory,[84] Gastev envisions an entirely more cyber-
netic variant of this process: for him, the volatilization of the stable
dimensionality of the artifact is accompanied by its reconstitution as an informa-
tion-object. Within Gastev's energeticist monism, the electrical pulse functions
not only as a source of motive power, but also as an excipient of information. This
is why "The Kinematics of Culture" begins with the steam locomotive and the
automobile, but concludes with electricity: for electricity not only liberated the
object from its physical confines, but also enabled unrestricted circulation of
information. The telegraph, the telephone, and, most importantly, the wireless
radio are the teloi of culture's kinematics. Gastev's map for the development of
modern machinery starts, in other words, with transportation and the movement of
physical bodies in space, passes through electricity, and ends with communication

81.   Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1981), p. 172.
82.   Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning
Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 17.
83.   Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine*, pp. 18, 20, 22. "Many modern products are no longer objects
as such. Instead, they are either complexes of a number of objects that are linked inseparably in the
process of consumption and thereby form a system, or they represent a kind of noncorporeal energy.
Such is, for example, the use of electrical energy, which is itself an intricate system of interfaces
[*ustanovok*] from which is derived a number of 'utilities' in the form of light, heat, moving force, and
so forth. Thus we arrive at a new concept, unknown in the conditions of a less-developed material cul-
ture, namely that of 'interfaces' [*ustanovok*]." Tarabukin, *From the Easel to the Machine*, cited in Maria
Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, p. 147. Translation modified.
84.   Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine*, p. 25. Tarabukin's essay serves as the centerpiece of Maria
Gough's *The Artist as Producer*. See, in particular, her crucial chapter on Tarabukin and Oswald
Spengler, "The Death of the Object," pp. 121–50. Gough sees confirmation of Tarabukin's pronounce-
ment that the production artist will play a "purely *agitational* role" in the vita of Ioganson, who went
from being a designer of discrete objects in his OBMOKhU phase to agitating as an administrator and

technology. Striking is transformed into pressing, the transfer of force into the transmission of information, kinematics into telematics.

So it is now evident why Gastev's theoretical model of labor and cultural evolution would have been so compelling to Chuzhak and Tret'iakov at the moment of their attempted renegotiation between force and signification. But we have not yet considered the actual manifestations of this polytechnic approach to production in the literary practice of the factographers. We must still examine the formal and stylistic qualities of this literature. The contours of such a practice can be partially discerned in the literary work of the worker-poet Gastev himself. Consider his immensely popular 1921 collection *A Packet of Orders,* a work in which, as he claimed in 1924, he was "trying to solve a verbal-aesthetic problem: to find a new kind of short artistic reportage which is dictated by all of modern life and which stands under the sign of the economy of the word."[85] As Arvatov noted in his enthusiastic review of *Packet* in the first issue of *Lef,* there was virtually no generic precedent for this type of writing: "*Packet* is not poetry, and not even prose poetry; the literary form of *Packet* has no progenitor in art." Although this form had no past, Arvatov declared, it certainly had a future: the "socialization of the poetic form" evident in *Packet* anticipated the approaching literary art of production.[86] The almost total absence of predicates, metaphors, and figural rhetoric in Gastev's language impoverish the descriptive register of these texts, making his lyrics quite literally an-aesthetic. Within the antireflectionist language of *Packet* that negates "graphic, external mimesis" [*izobrazitel'naia, vneshnaia podrazhatel'nost'*],[87] there is no scenography, no narrative, and the gnomic and tenseless verbs remain either unconjugated or in their imperative mood. Gastev called this combination of illocutionary act, technical precision, and terse, telegrammatic style the "technification of the word" [*tekhnizatsiia slova*].

Although Arvatov initially claimed that the language of *Packet* was unprecedented, later in the review he indicates that there is in fact an intimate filiation between Gastev's "word beneath the press" [*slovo pod pressom*] and the most abjectly instrumentalized order of industrial discourse: the newspaper. Indeed, we might add, ever since Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve published an article on the newspaper in 1839 entitled "De la littérature industrielle," critics had been observing that journalism and mechanical technologies had many features in common: their rigorous subordination of individual style to highly schematized, prefabricated formats; their collectivized and anonymous methods of automated manufacture; the periodicity and utility of their product; and their orientation toward channels of mass distribution. Such correspondences between reportage and factory production were precisely what drew the Lef factographers to the newspaper, the industrial enterprise of language.

party organizer at the factory Krasnyi Prokatchik in the mid-1920s.
85.   Aleksei Gastev, *Poeziia rabochego udara* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1971), p.19.
86.   Boris Arvatov, "Aleksei Gastev, Pachka orderov, Riga 1921 g.," *Lef,* no. 1 (1923), p. 243.

The Motoric Speech of the Newspaper: Grigorii Vinokur

In order to detail the formal qualities and generic kinships of industrial news-paper speech, we can draw upon the lucid research of an unjustly overlooked member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle [*Moskovskaia Lingvisticheskaia Kruzhka*, or MLK], Grigorii Osipovich Vinokur. Given the central role he occupied both within the MLK (after serving as its secretary, he then became chairperson of the group in 1922) and as a key contributor to *Lef* (he published as many essays in *Lef* as Brik and Mayakovsky combined), it is indeed surprising that so little attention has been paid to Vinokur by scholars of both Formalism and Futurism. If there was a single figure who bridged both of these groups, certainly it would have to be Vinokur. Indeed, if nothing else, his physical proximity to both organizations made him a key mediator between the MLK and Lef: Vinokur lived in the building on Lubianskii Passage just one entrance over from Mayakovsky's apartment, which also served as the editorial office of *Lef* and which was, in turn, in the same building—only two doors down, in fact—from the space in which the MLK's sessions were held. The intimate collabora-tion between Lef and the chairman of the MLK was acknowledged in numerous statements in which the members of *Lef*'s editorial board enthusiastically confirmed Vinokur as one of their own: Chuzhak, for example, lauded Vinokur's studies for establishing, among other filiations, the direct connection between Futurist poetry and the discourse of the newspaper.[88] And during the public inventory of Lef's vari-ous work divisions at the 1925 conference, Mayakovsky similarly distinguished Vinokur as the principal figure in Lef's sixth division—the group of newspaper workers [*gazetnye rabotniki*]—with an endorsement of his exceptional work "on news-paper language"[89] (which we will consider shortly).

Vinokur, the theorist responsible for providing Lef with a conceptual frame-work for its journalistic work, was not incidentally also the leading figure in the initial Soviet encounter in the first half of the 1920s with the work of the Swiss struc-tural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. As his biographer noted, the "history of Saussurianism in Russia" typically begins with Vinokur.[90] Even though it would not be published until 1933, already by 1922 a member of the Circle, Aleksandr Romm, had nearly completed work on a translation of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, and manuscript versions of this translation were in circulation at this time among the members of the MLK and their colleagues in Lef.[91] During his chair-manship of the MLK from 1922 to 1923, Vinokur was, moreover, responsible for organizing the first session on the *Cours* on March 5, 1923, where he presided over

87.   Ibid., p. 244.
88.   Chuzhak, "Krivoe zerkalo. Lef v prelomlenii 'Lefa,'" pp. 39–46.
89.   *Pervoe moskovskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov LEFa*, p. 31a.
90.   R. M. Tseitlin, *Grigorii Osipovich Vinokur (1896–1947)* (Moscow: Universiteta, 1965), p. 16.
91.   E. A. Toddes and M. O. Chudakova, "Pervyi russkii perevod Kursa obshchei lingvistikii F. de Sossiura i deiatel'nost' Moskovskogo Lingvisticheskogo Kruzhka," in *Fedorovskie Chteniia* (Moscow:

the meeting and delivered an introduction to Saussure's work. Two months later he published an article in *Lef,* no. 3, "Poetics, Linguistics, Sociology," which systematically explored the implications of Saussure's foundational distinction between "language proper [*la langue*] and individual locution [*la parole*],"[92] and which later became the theoretical point of departure for his 1925 book *The Culture of Language: Sketches on Linguistic Technology.* (The latter volume was originally conceived as an anthology of critical responses to Saussure's theory by members of the Circle [Nikolai Iakovlev, Kushner, Romm, Vinokur, and others], but when the collection could not be realized as it was first conceived, Vinokur, who was the editor, kept the project title for his own book.) Vinokur's conflicted response to the structuralist model was in many regards typical of Soviet Saussure reception, which was at once both enthusiastic about structuralism's superiority to the psychologistic language theories of the Neogrammarians, but also critical of its blindness to questions concerning the historical evolution and concrete usages of language [*la parole,* or *govorenie*]. Under the rubric of "linguistic technology" [*lingvistichekaia tekhnologiia*], Vinokur's *Culture of Language* confronted structural linguistics (or "abstract objectivism" [*abstraktnyi ob'ektivizm*], the apposite label Russians such as Valentin Voloshinov gave to Saussurianism) with the facts of linguistic invention and of speech as a historically concrete social force, and thereby endeavored to correct the structuralist misconceptualization of language as an indifferent objective force that cannot be influenced.[93] Vinokur's own writings concentrated on the shortcomings of Saussure's theories, but not with the intention of "deconstructing" or invalidating the structuralist model; rather, his studies were motivated by the desire to complete Saussure's project—to correct its oversights and supplement its deficiencies, and thereby establish an adequately historical variant of structuralism. The point of such a production-oriented methodology for linguistics was, as Arvatov proposed in his review of Gastev, to "socialize" language.

Vinokur's *Culture of Language* was preoccupied above all with examining the living materiality of communication, the "variety of speech genres" [*mnogoobrazie rechevykh zhanrakh*] that had been shunted aside by the structuralist approach: journalistic reporting, commercial exchanges, abbreviations, homonyms, deictics,

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Nauka, 1978).

92.　　Grigorii Vinokur, "Poetika. Lingvistika. Sotsiologiia. (Metologicheskaia spravka)," *Lef,* no. 3 (1923), p. 106.

93.　　When the authors of the original anthology *The Culture of Language* proposed their book to Aseev for publication, they declared that the intention of the volume was to study the possibilities for influencing the objective processes of language "in order ultimately to subordinate the element of language to the human being"—and not vice versa, as structuralist linguistics had done. Letter in RGALI, f. 2164, op. 1, d. 65, cited in Toddes and Chudakova, "Pervyi russkii perevod Kursa obshchei lingvistiki F. de Sossiura i deiatel'nost' Moskovskogo Lingvisticheskogo Kruzhka," p. 241. This approach to the study of language anticipates Voloshinov's critique of abstract objectivism in his 1929 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.* There the member of Bakhtin's circle argued that language can be comprehended only as an active and dialogical phenomenon that is wholly dependent upon the social contexts of its deployment. Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R.

oratorical speech, revolutionary language, and the unique features of written expression such as ellipses, typography, and irregularity in orthography. Linguistics as a discipline could accurately account for meaning in language, Vinokur suggested, only once it began to investigate the historical vicissitudes of pragmatic speech technologies in concrete communicative encounters, i.e., "the phenomena of language from the perspective of its expedient utilization by the speaker."[94] After the first edition of *The Culture of Language* appeared in 1925, Vinokur identified the field of research which corresponded to his notion of "linguistic technology," the discipline within linguistics to which he would dedicate the rest of his life's work: stylistics.[95] Stylistics encompassed all contextually based aspects of speech such as intonation, voice, and accent, and was therefore analogous to what Saussure had designated—and dismissed—as *parole* ("the distinction between language proper and the utterance [*govorenie*]," Vinokur wrote, "is nothing other than the distinction between *language in general and style*"[96]).

Vinokur's methodological affinities for applied linguistics and non-normative stylistics were motivated by his conviction that language must belong to its own time. In the 1920s he was energetically engaged in the debates around the reform and reinvention of a postrevolutionary Russian language. Influenced by the Futurist view of language as a revolutionary force, i.e., as a social and concretely historical "linguistic technology," Vinokur was skeptical of those champions of linguistic purism in his day who sought to rid language of the markedly alien elements that contaminate it: the everyday slangs, the unintelligible jargons, the foreign words, the phraseologies of subcultural social formations, the lexica of specialized professions—in short, many of the elements that would fall under the rubrics of stylistics and *parole.* In this regard, it is interesting to recall that Saussure's younger sibling, René, was a renowned scholar of Esperanto, for the visions of the first structural linguist and his Esperantist brother share striking commonalities, most notably, a shared belief in the possibility of language outside of time, in an immutable stratum of meaning uncorrupted by usage, cultural influence, and social transformation. While the members of Lef and the MLK championed rationalized linguistic planning and invention, they rejected this vision of a language capable of spanning all nations at all stages of cultural and technological development. Forms of speech evolve dynamically and symbiotically with their specific historical moment. In a 1925 essay on "International Language," Boris Arvatov criticized the linguistic counterrevolutionaries—the purists, the Esperantists, the abstract objectivists—for their efforts to establish a single universal language for all cultures, regardless of their degree of modernization or industrial development:

Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

94.   Grigorii Vinokur, "Poetika. Lingvistika. Sotsiologiia," *Lef,* no. 3, p. 108.

95.   In a prescient anticipation of developments in poststructuralist thought, his first two books tackled subjects that were anathema to structural linguistics: style and biography. The next study he published after 1925's *Culture of Language* was the book *Biography and Culture* of 1927.

> language is not simply conventional communication (semaphores, telegraphic code, etc.), but a gigantic field of culture that incorporates a considerable part of ideology, of so-called linguistic gesture [*zhesta*], and of concrete material forms. . . . [R]eal languages are continuously being perfected and modified. In fifteen to twenty years, it will be difficult to recognize the current languages.[97]

Linguistic revolution, in short, can no more be stopped than social upheaval or technological invention.

Here we arrive at the crux of our inquiry. Having profiled the intriguing and complex Soviet response to Saussure in a sketch that is unfortunately rudimentary but nonetheless sufficient for our purposes, I would now like to recall our disquisition's point of departure, namely, the exclusion of writing at the originary moment of the programs for Constructivism and production art in 1921, and the consequent fallout of this theoretical maneuver, the "silence of literature" at the 1925 conference. For now we can discern clearly the theoretical proposition behind this scission between construction and composition. Recall the phrasing of First Protocol of the March 1 Special Commission, which sundered construction's "system of force" from composition's "conventional sign" in order to valorize the former over the latter. A structuralist hypothesis is already evident in this First Protocol, albeit in its inverted formulation. As Derrida suggested in his essay "Force and Signification," the cardinal conceit of the structuralist perspective is to imagine that force and signification can exist independently of one another. If "force is the other of language without which language would not be what it is,"[98] Constructivism and first-generation production art are, analogously, the others of structural linguistics. The First Protocol's critique of processes of signification, its radical disavowal of what it perceived to be secondary or derivative ideological structures, established the opposition between construction and language, but in no way challenged the metaphysics behind this binary. The division posited in the First Protocol thus executed a theoretical maneuver that reproduced structuralism's fundamental conceptual logic—the diremption of *langue* from *parole*—even if it reversed the hierarchy that structuralism had established among these terms. Just as structuralism first cleaved force and matter from abstract systems of signification so as to celebrate the hegemony of the *eidos*, Brik, the theorist who led the INKhUK brigade toward production art on November 24, 1921, replicated this initial operation only to apotheosize the former terms, force and matter. Which is to say that even if the structuralist scheme is present only in its negated form, INKhUK's position is nevertheless still preserved in the conceptual opposition between "composition" and "construction." Brik's "vulgar materialist"

96.   Vinokur, "Poetika. Lingvistika. Sotsiologiia," p. 107.
97.   Boris Arvatov, "Mezhdunarodnyi iazyk," in *Ob agit- i proziskusstve*, pp. 219–20.
98.   Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago:

disavowal of language and ideology remained a dualist enterprise.[99] What can thus be observed in the case of Constructivism and early production art, then, is not *a*structuralism, but a resolute *anti*structuralism that remained perforce beholden to the master code.

Factography's operative language, by contrast, marked the reconvergence of force and signification. It is no accident that the leading figure in the Soviet response to structuralism was also the chief theorist of Lef's "newspaper workers" in 1925, for newspaper language—what would soon constitute the discursive foundation of factographic work—belonged to a paradigm of production that was neither structuralist nor Constructivist. Echoing Freud, we could characterize newspaper language as an "innervated" writing—a writing that is literally motoric, i.e., thoroughly automated and industrialized, but which is also capable of mediating between psychological and physiological processes, between the mental signs of the semioticians and the physical stimuli of the behaviorists.[100] In the fifth issue of *Lef*, Boris Eikhenbaum had aptly described this register of language in an essay on Lenin's speech patterns: "there is hardly a linguistic realm . . . in which the word would be exclusively a sign [*znak*]. . . . An article or a speech represents neither the bare formulation of thought, nor its simple expression in terms, but a certain verbal *process* that is triggered on the basis of a determinate stimulus."[101] This linguistic realm between conventional sign and somatic signal would become the territory of the factographers.

In the issue of *Lef* that followed Eikhenbaum's essay, Vinokur published "The Language of Our Newspaper," a rigorous analysis of newspaper speech as a writerly practice that was both automatic and somatic. Vinokur's analysis focused on three

University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 27.

99.   Derrida writes that the intention cannot be "through the simple motions of balancing, equilibration or overturning, to oppose duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form, the depth of meaning or value to the surface of figures. Quite to the contrary. To counter this simple alternative, to counter this simple choice of one of the terms or one of the series against the other, we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions." "Force and Signification," p. 19.

100.   I use the word "innervation" to designate the qualities of a factographic writing that is embodied and somatic at the same time that it is mechanized and motoric. Laplanche and Pontalis write that "innervation" is a "term used by Freud in his earliest works to denote the fact that a certain energy is transported to a particular part of the body where it brings about motor or sensory phenomena. Innervation, which is a physiological phenomenon, is possibly produced by the conversion of psychical into nervous energy." See "Innervation," in Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973). In a study of Benjamin and Freud, Miriam Hansen similarly writes that "innervation" "refers, broadly, to a neurological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and mechanical registers." Notably, Hansen traces the concept of innervation back to behaviorist and reflexological currents in the Soviet avant-garde. Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999), p. 313.

101.   Boris Eikhenbaum, "Osnovnye stilevye tendentsii v rechi Lenina," *Lef*, no. 5 (1924), p. 57. Eikhenbaum wrote other pioneering studies of the psychophysics of the literary text. See in particular his essay "How Gogol's *Overcoat* is made," in *Gogol's Overcoat: An Anthology of Critical Essays*, ed. Elizabeth

interrelated characteristics of newspaper language: (1) its extreme syntactic density; (2) its mechanicity as an industrial linguistic readymade; and (3) its lexicon, specifically, its "unintelligible argot" (e.g., foreign words and abbreviated designations). Vinokur's first proposition concerning the grammatical supersaturation of the newspaper was based upon the observation that the newspaper is composed almost exclusively of prefabricated phrases and clichés, of interlocking linguistic stereotypes. The lexical contents of the newspaper utterance are, Vinokur consequently reasoned, completely predetermined by its grammatical structure. The newspaper, which derives its structure from the telegram, privileges the syntactic axis of language over the lexical. Since its dense and impacted grammatical constructions would, moreover, be too taxing for oral transmission, the language of the newspaper can only exist in printed form—a proto-grammatological insight, to be sure. Newspaper language is a written, rather than a spoken, genre; and yet it is quite unlike prose. Vinokur contrasted these elaborate syntactic arrangements of the newspaper with the syntagmatic sequences that are characteristic of written narrative:

> An attentiveness to syntax is manifested in the systematic distribution of copulative particles and words over the entire segment, and permits an entire heap of facts to fit into a single grammatical chain. The exposition of these facts in typical conversational speech—as well as in all other kinds of written speech besides that of the newspaper—would demand a completely different narrative form made of several independent phrases. If we tried to divide up the very text of the telegram in this way, we would thereby deprive the telegram's language of its most basic characteristic, and what we would then be dealing with would no longer be a telegram, but some kind of historical narrative.[102]

One of the primary differences between the newspaper and the narrative is, therefore, the way that they organize information: as a result of its syntactic complexity, the information transmitted in the telegram and the newspaper can be apprehended almost synchronically, while the narrative work discloses its contents sequentially through a series of durative transformations across the exposition of the text.[103] The newspaper's language is presentist, instantaneous, and ephemeral, and its rigorously schematized constructions, one could surmise, are more suggestive of highly formalized lyrical genres than prose forms.

And yet the mechanical language of the newspaper is quite unlike the deliberately belabored language of poetry. Because the prevalence of grammatical stereotypes "inevitably mechanizes and automatizes newspaper speech," Vinokur

Trahan (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1982).

102.　Grigorii Vinokur, "Iazyk nashei gazety," *Lef*, no. 6 (1924), p. 123.

103.　The experiments in "reading hygiene" conducted by Miles Tinker and Donald Patterson in the late 1920s and '30s confirmed that the shorter line lengths of the newspaper column accelerated comprehension of the text and thus cut down on reading time. Newspaper language was, in effect, quite lit-

pointed out that it is possible to draw "justifiable analogies [between newspaper production and] industrial manufacture":

> The most widely used types of newspaper utterances (the lead article, the telegram, the interview) *are constructed using ready-made stereotypes*: they are conditioned by *templates of speech* that have already been manufactured in the course of newspaper production—by prearranged, cast *verbal formulae* and *linguistic clichés*.[104]

As a result of the rigid combinatory structure of journalistic language, nearly all elements of a newspaper article are determined in advance, and composition of the article proceeds swiftly, anonymously, and automatically. Tightly circumscribed by the newspaper's format and the prefabricated cast verbal stereotypes, the reporter's choices are limited to an extreme. "In other words, the vocabulary of the newspaper always has a *phraseological* character, i.e., it is the sum of fixed, serialized locutions whose precisely defined, mechanized value and meaning are already known in advance."[105] The newspaper's ideational content, which is wholly subordinated to its dense syntax, is the least significant of its aspects. The fully automated language of the newspaper is, *sensu stricto*, perfectly meaningless.

Vinokur's endorsement of the newspaper's linguistic automatism, of its syntactic complexity and its concomitant conceptual attenuation, provoked criticism from those who believed that the standardization of journalistic discourse reduced it to senseless *écriture automatique*. In an article that appeared in *Novyi lef,* "On the Problem of the Template and of Illiteracy (Against the Stereotype and the Mistakes of Contemporary Newspaper Language)," O. Pushas, for example, attacked Vinokur's earlier analysis of newspaper language. In making the linguistic cliché the fundamental structuring principle of the newspaper, Pushas argued, "the labor of the newspaper worker became the labor of an automaton." This "mechanical labor of the newspaper worker" produced a motorized and thoughtless language that ultimately "makes people into illiterates."[106] Yet Vinokur's whole point was that this is precisely the virtue of an automatized journalistic language that is stark and free of mental imagery (much like, we recall, the language of Gastev's *Packet of Orders,* which lacks all "graphic, external mimesis"): even if its phatic utterances appear completely meaningless, they nevertheless belong to the instrumentarium of the most technologically sophisticated cultural forms. Look at any industrialized country, Vinokur suggested, and you will find the same structurally intricate and motoric speech, the same "highly developed technical language" in their press, "the same stereotypes, the same syntactic provocations

erally "faster" than that of the novel.

104.   Vinokur, "Iazyk nashei gazety," p. 124. Here it is worth remembering that both "cliché" and "stereotype" literally designate metal casts or preformed block plates for mass production of printed matter.

105.   Ibid., p. 125.

and assaults, the same proverbs and sayings that have only a purely formal value."[107] If mechanized newspaper speech, in other words, is a kind of lingua franca among industrialized nations, if the automation of language increases with technological advances in the forces of production, how, Vinokur asked, could one then seek to deprive the Soviet citizenry of its linguistic share in "the culture of Modernity, the scientific, artistic, and political culture"?[108]

To address the question of meaning-production in the stereotyped language of the newspaper, Vinokur turned his analysis to its characteristic lexical features, namely, its extensive use of foreign words and abbreviations that were not understood by many native Russian speakers (and that many of the linguistic purists consequently wanted to purge from the press). The unintelligibility of the newspaper's vocabulary affiliated it with two other linguistic phenomena that Vinokur had already examined in previous articles in *Lef*: the *zaum* ("transrational") language of the Futurist poets Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, and the prefabricated phraseologies that circulated in contemporary revolutionary discourse. In "The Futurists: Builders of Language," which appeared in the first issue of *Lef*,[109] Vinokur used the example of *zaum* language to rout those purists who viewed language exclusively as an abstract and logical system of ideas. While he conceded to the enemies of Futurism that *zaum* language is indeed absurd and that, from the perspective of conceptual meaning, it must only baffle and confuse, he also argued that the *zaum* nonetheless comes to life as soon as it is situated in a specific communicative context. In this regard, *zaum* inventions were not unlike all of the neologisms and the foreign words that had proliferated in the Russian language since the October revolution and that were similarly meaningless until they were given a concrete social task. And what was the *zaum* word if not a neologism, an invented word? Both the *zaum* and the neologism were viable not because they made sense, but because they worked—and indeed, they even worked as language in the absence of sense. And so the chimerical problem of the semantic hermeticism of the *zaum* word or the neologism evaporated, Vinokur pointed out, as soon as it was introduced into everyday discourse, as soon as it began to function, as soon as we consider it from the perspective of what Vygotskii called *deiatel'nost'*, or purposive linguistic activity. In the following issue of *Lef*, Vinokur further expanded his account of the operative *zaum*-neologism through a study of the revolutionary cliché. "On Revolutionary Phraseology" suggested that, like the *zaum* language and like the foreign word, the jargon of the revolution has no ideational value. And Vinokur's analysis there furthermore revealed a new feature of this linguistic phylum, namely the mechanicity of the "fixed and established form which has been determined beforehand."[110]

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106.   O. Pushas, "K voprosu o shablone i bezgramotnosti," *Novyi lef*, no. 2 (1927), p. 43.
107.   Vinokur, "Iazyk nashei gazety," p. 132.
108.   Ibid., p. 128.
109.   Grigorii Vinokur, "Futuristy—stroiteli iazyka," *Lef*, no. 1 (1923).
110.   Grigorii Vinokur, "O revoliutsionnoi frazeologii (odin iz voprosov iazykovoi politike)," *Lef*, no. 2

Revolutionary phrases—clichés like "the onslaught of capital" [*nastuplenie kapi-tala*]—were linguistic readymades, prefabri-cated syntactic formulae that were fashioned for deployment in specific com- municative contexts. These, then, were the nearest relatives of the newspaper's vocabulary: foreign argot, invented words, jargon. They would all soon become the lexical stock in trade of the factographers.

According to Vinokur, these "*syntactic signals, provocations, assaults*" may "no longer convey any real concept at all,"[111] but they nevertheless possess a certain somatic dimension. They belong to a pragmatic and functional language that can- not be subsumed by the abstract differential schemes of Saussure's *langue*, but instead remains embedded in the experiential and embodied reality of the com- municative encounter. In this regard, Vinokur's analysis of motoric locutions bears a remarkable likeness to Adorno's essay from the early 1930s, "On the Use of Foreign Words." Like Vinokur's studies of "linguistic technologies" which exam- ined a variety of meaningless word-signals, Adorno's essay was preoccupied with examining the "foreign bodies assailing the body of language."[112] Adorno pro- posed that like "political jargon" and the quoted word, like the *terminus technicus* and the untranslatable "everyday way of speaking," the foreign word operates "beneath the sphere of culture but without fusing with the body of language," and thereby gives expression to the fact that "subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning."[113] The foreign word is an Other within speech, a challenge to abstract objectivism in language. Against linguistic purists, Adorno insisted that there is a register of speech that is alien to logic, a language with an "explosive force"[114] that remains unassimilable by rational thought. The corporeal aspect of this "pure creaturely language" [*reine kreatürliche Sprache*] echoed Vinokur's characterization of the *zaum* as a "product of purely bestial, animal creation."[115] For Adorno, the "found words, the performed words, the artificial words, in short, the made words"[116] comprised a mute language based not upon reflectionist mentation, but upon bodily contagion and proximity. Such signs are not tokens of something else: they do not represent a referent in absentia, but instead coincide only with themselves and only for the ephemeral moment of their use. The "hard, artificial,

(1923), p. 107.

111.   Vinokur, "Iazyk nashei gazety," p. 131.

112.   Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Use of Foreign Words," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 288.

113.   Adorno could not have better described Vinokur's life-project to establish stylistics against purism: "A worthy task for folklore would be to examine how foreign words operate beneath the sphere of culture but without fusing with the body of language—at the deepest level of language, in political jargon, in the slang of love, and in an everyday way of speaking that from the standpoint of organic language and linguistic purity would have to be called corrupt, but in which we may see the contours of a language to come that cannot be understood either in terms of the idea of the organic or in terms of education." Adorno, "On the Use of Foreign Words," p. 290.

114.   Ibid., p. 286.

115.   In the second edition to *Kul'tura iazyka. Ocherki lingvisticheskoi tekhnologii* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), p. 315.

unyielding foreign words whose life intersects the sphere of nuance for only a moment" are immanence in language, words which "do not even carry the expression of their own past."[117] Citing one of Rilke's *New Poems*, Adorno likened this word-signal, which was paradoxically petrified and fugitive at once, to a "quickly fading daguerreotype" [*schnell vergehendes Daguerreotyp*].[118]

The compound nature of a motoric newspaper language that is at once both readymade and embodied reminds us of its affiliation to that sign-class that dominated the documentary episteme of the 1920s, the index. Indeed, the verbal daguerreotypes of the factographers constitute a central chapter in a development that Denis Hollier has characterized in his work on French Surrealism as "the indexation of the tale."[119] Insofar as it is existentially and physically bound to its object, the indexical word is felt by the body; insofar as it has "no cognitive value,"[120] "asserts nothing,"[121] and indeed *describes* nothing (like Gastev's *Packet*), the index is as mute and unintelligible as the newspaper's alien argot; insofar as analog inscription technologies such as photography corresponded to the most advanced modes of production, the index was perceived to be the most mechanized and industrial of signs in the 1920s; and insofar as the index is the psycholinguistic equivalent of the signal, as Jakobson proposed,[122] and therefore constitutes a relay between the realm of conventionalized human signification and creaturely, "purely bestial" corporeal stimulus, it had an instrumental role to play in a literature that spanned intellectual and physical production.

Both composition *and* construction, both sign *and* force: this was factography's desideratum. Its literature discovered this readymade in the polytechnic language of the newspaper. Where the interval between signification and labor has been eliminated, when "the word has become an act,"[123] work ceases to be a voiceless abstraction—the uncoded biological emission that Marx designated "Arbeit *sans phrase*"[124]—and acquires the power to speak and communicate. Reflecting upon the Soviet case, Benjamin suggested that recent artistic developments in Russia had ushered in an epoch in which signification and production would be reconciled. It was in the Soviet newspaper, Benjamin observed, that

116.   Adorno, "On the Use of Foreign Words," p. 288.
117.   Ibid.
118.   Ibid., p. 287.
119.   Denis Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don't Cast Shadows," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 69 (Summer 1994), pp. 110–32.
120.   Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 94.
121.   Charles S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 226.
122.   Roman Jakobson writes that "the semiosis of signals assigns them either to indexical signals or indexical icons." "Language in Relation to Other Communication Systems," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 705.
123.   Sergei Tret'iakov, "Das Wort ist zur Tat geworden," *Unsere Zeit* 6, no. 9 (1933).
124.   This phrase is rendered in English as the value abstraction "labor pure and simple." Karl Marx,

Aleksandr Rodchenko. Newspaper Stereotypes on Rotary Press. *1928.*
Art © Estate of Aleksandr Rodchenko/RAO, Moscow/VAGA, New York.

language was recognized as a force of production, and that labor, conversely, acquired the capacity for speech. A labor of language, the newspaper would also be the language of labor:

> Work itself has its turn to speak. And its representation in words becomes a part of the ability that is needed for its exercise. Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized training but is based on polytechnic education, and this becomes public property. It is, in a word, the literarization of the conditions of living that masters the otherwise indissoluble antinomies. And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word—the newspaper, in short—that its salvation is being prepared.[125]

Benjamin's belated vision of 1934 was, however, not yet limned at the 1925 Lef conference in Moscow. The silence of writing at this earlier moment can be attributed to another silence at the conference: Tret'iakov, who was in China teaching Russian and working as a correspondent for *Pravda*, was unable to attend, but had already begun to write his first factographic *ocherki*, the first of which appeared in the final issue of *Lef* at the beginning of 1925. The salvation of the word was being prepared six thousand miles to the east in Peking.

Grundrisse, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 105.
125.   Walter Benjamin, "The Newspaper," in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael Jennings et al., trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), p. 742. Benjamin repeats this formulation later that year in his essay "The Author as Producer" and then again in his 1936 "Work of Art" essay. In both of the latter cases, he explicitly links this development to new