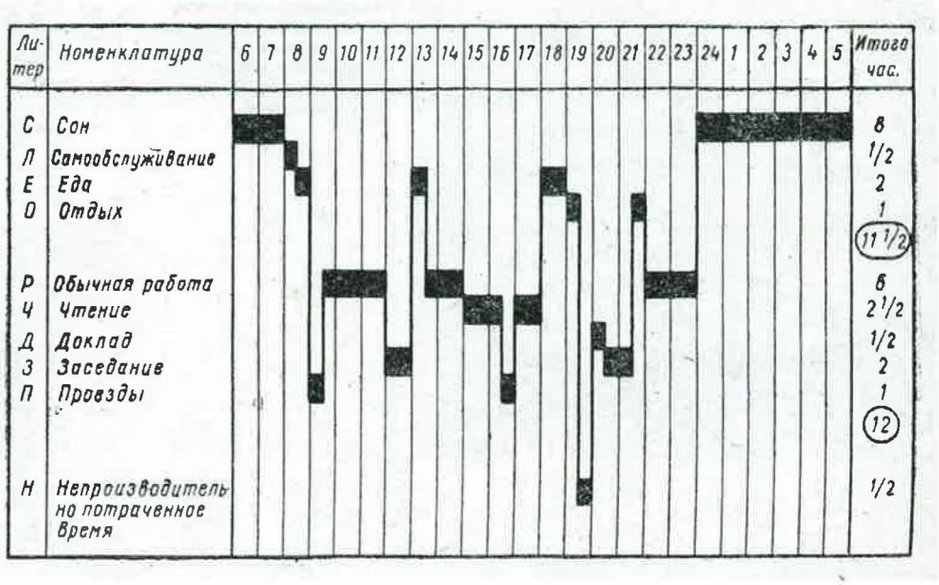
Opposite page: **Photograph from Sergei Tret'iakov's *Vyzov: kolkhoznye ocherki* (The Summons: Sketches from the Kolkhoz)** (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1930).

Right: **Chronocard from the 1968 edition of Platon Kerzhentsev's *Printsipy organizatsii* (Principles of Organization)** (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924).



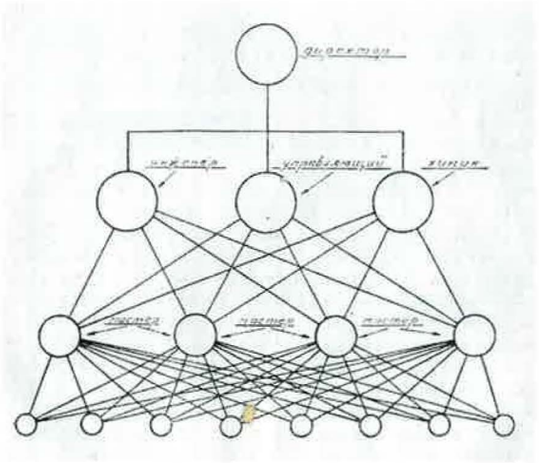
SOCIAL ENGINEERING

DEVIN FORE ON SOVIET ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE

WITHIN THE CULTURAL HISTORY of selfhood, the Soviet "chronocard" constitutes a very curious artifact. Distributed to the thousands of members of the League of Time, a division within the legendary movement for the Scientific Organization of Labor (NOT), this tool for autosurveillance enjoined its user to register in its columns such everyday activities as sleeping, working, eating, commuting, attending lectures, relaxing, hygiene, and reading. (The chart also featured a write-in category at the bottom.) Part of a pervasive mania for efficiency and social management in the early Soviet period, the chronocard arrayed the biorhythms of the individual like the timetable of a train. However, unlike practices such as the confessional, diary writing, and other reflexive techniques of the self that were dominant in the West, the end product of the chronocard's quantitative life-logging was never meant to be a stable subject. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the card's method for self-auditing is the utter discontinuity of the events that it records. Once the prescribed block of sleep breaks off punctually at 8 AM, life activities begin to flicker all over the chart. A montage of unconnected episodes and encounters, the chronocard presents a manifestly nonidentitarian portrait of the human psyche.

Before founding the League of Time in 1923, Platon Kerzhentsev began his political career working in the grassroots studios of the Proletkul't, where he and colleagues like Stepan Krivtsov and Valerian Pletnev investigated the properties of different group configurations. For the Proletkul'tists researching in these social laboratories, collectivism was not an abstract ideal but a concrete science that had its own laws and analytic instruments. The group engineered communal studios for making graphic art, literature, and theater, and even assembled information collectives to form a kind of distributive organic computer based on a principle they called *vzaimoinformatsiia* (reciprocal information). One important discovery made during these experiments was that the products of collective labor qualitatively changed depending on the size of the ensemble. Based on this research, Kerzhentsev and his colleagues stipulated that for the purposes of, say, collective artistic creation, studios must consist of twenty to twenty-two people—no fewer, but also no more. Against an ascending current of Soviet gigantomania that equated bigger with better, Proletkul't work demonstrated that a group that was too large was just as disadvantageous as one that was too small, and might even prove to be counterproductive.[1]

The Proletkul't organizational scientists experimented not just with the size of these collectives, but also with different structural topologies. Kerzhentsev designed flexible organizational schemes for a variety of operations, including



This page and opposite: **Five organizational schematics from Platon Kerzhentsev's *Printsipy organizatsii* (Principles of Organization)** (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924).

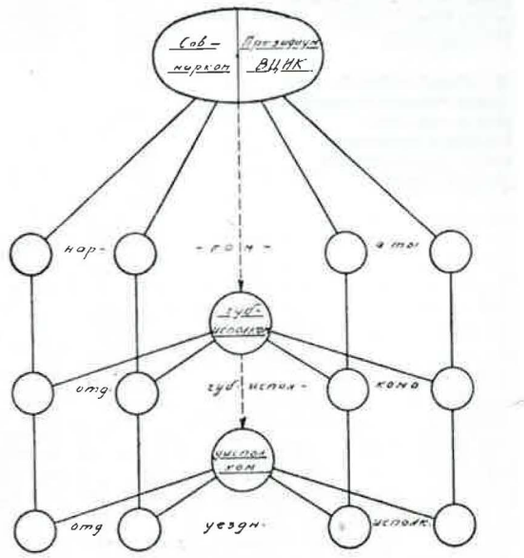


Рис. 12. Система двойного подчинения (отделы исполкомов одновременно подчинены и местной власти — исполкому, и центральной власти — народному комиссариату).

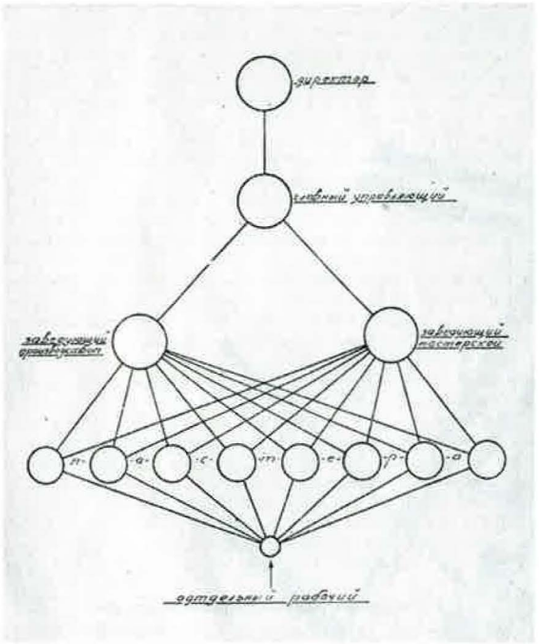
Collectivism was not an abstract ideal but a concrete science that had its own laws and analytic instruments.

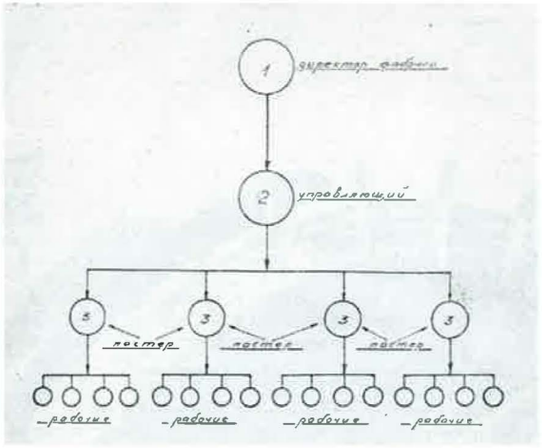
education, political deliberation, and, of course, production. To each of these tasks corresponded a distinct social morphology, and each of these configurations, in turn, placed different demands on the abilities and resources of its constituent members. A favorite topic in Kerzhentsev's essays on organization was the principle of *re*organization, which he illustrated with reference to Trotsky's Red Army: Established during the Russian Civil War, this military body was at various times also deployed as a labor unit (both in factories and in the countryside) and as an educational institution (to combat rural illiteracy). For Kerzhentsev, each of these emergent properties—war machine, force of production, instrument of enlightenment—could be extracted from the same collective depending on that group's configuration. Why demobilize the Red Army at the end of the civil war when instead it could be continuously reorganized?[2]

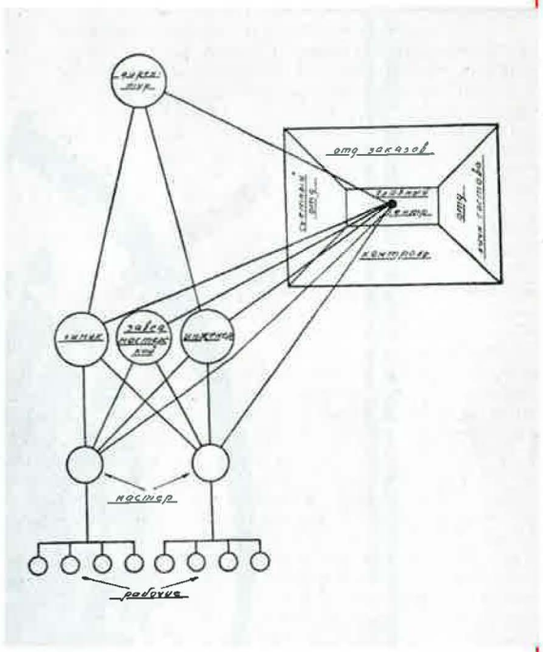
Interrogating the undifferentiated distinction between individual and collective, Proletkul't research into the scale and topology of group design discovered an entire universe of mesoscalar social configurations between these two extremes. (At the present historical juncture, this is an especially urgent lesson for the Left in the United States, which now confronts the painful consequences of having focused for decades on the highest levels of government, while the Right has been strategically targeting school boards and state legislatures and mobilizing regional forces from megachurches to local talk radio.) Each particular assemblage is held together by different forces of affective adhesion, unleashing different emergent capabilities latent in the social group: The leaderless pack, for example, dispels the paranoid identifications of the crowd, but is itself prone to forms of physical contagion (Canetti and Deleuze); the heterosexual couple constitutes a metabolic combat vehicle whose internal hierarchy makes it superior in warfare to the homosexual group, which is fused by lateral bonds (Virilio); and the capitalist enterprise generates, in addition to its concrete material output of commodities, a surplus quantum of energy that can be discharged only in the international arena through imperialist violence (Luxemburg). Every social apparatus generates determinate effects and by-products that are by turns salutary and baleful.

The Proletkul't experiments recognized, too, that the behavior of a collective regularly diverges from the explicit objectives of its members, even when these objectives are held in common by a group of like-minded individuals. So often it is organizational topology, rather than personal intention, that determines the success or failure of a given political impulse. The disjuncture between individual and collective behavior, which marks the disciplinary border between psychology and sociology, cuts both ways: Just as a progressive initiative will fizzle when introduced into a social framework that neutralizes it structurally, so, too, can a selfish motive generate altruistic behavior if put in the right context. The Futurist Viktor Pertsov, who began his career as a secretary in Kerzhentsev's organization, observes in "Individual and Collective" that personal proclivities and tendencies will assume different articulations depending on the social system into which the individual is placed. Thus, Pertsov proposes, a person with a restless character has the potential to become either a vagrant or a traveling scholar, depending on his society.[3] Given proper organization, the personal shortcomings of an individual, no matter how egoistic, can be transformed into collective accomplishment. This notion can be found already in Immanuel Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace" (1795), where the philosopher observes that "the problem of the constitution of a state, however hard it may sound, would be capable of solution even by a race of devils, if only they had understanding."[4]

Aleksandr Rodchenko once noted that a host of divergent capacities are always present in any given psyche. "A man is not just one sum total," he wrote: "He is many, and sometimes they are quite opposed." From this, Rodchenko famously concluded that it is impossible to provide a single, summary portrait of a person, either psychological or physiognomic.[5] For him, the







self is always a multitude, the individual dividual. The Proletkul'tists were similarly skeptical of the conceit of the internally "harmonious" (i.e., monotonous) self that had underwritten bourgeois ego psychology, and they campaigned instead for the individual to acquire a rich inventory of selves that were maximally discontinuous and conflicted. From the trade union, the guild (*artel*), and the seminar to the artistic circle (*kruzhok*), the workers' club, and the amateur theater group, revolutionary society dramatically multiplied the opportunities for organizational interface, and while each of these systems interpellated an additional aspect of individual identity, there was no expectation that these diverse facets would ever achieve a grand characterological synthesis. To the contrary, for the psychoanalyst turned schizoanalyst Aron Zalkind, NOT's ideal for the "psychology of the future human" was perforce radically discontinuous and dynamic, a self based not on "stagnation" but on "condensation." Anything but harmonious, this subject was a "cold bomb" who, Zalkind explained, could be "either peaceful or explosive" depending on the social field in which she was situated.[6] This highly reactive and fundamentally unstable human compound might be reading quietly one moment and agitating fervently the next. The ideal of discontinuous selfhood that is illustrated in the League of Time's chronocard recalls Marx's famous account of communism as a social organization in which it is possible "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner . . . without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[7] Each station of the day is a practice, not a personal identity.

In this way, the organizational scientists of Proletkul't proposed a unique solution to political philosophy's seemingly insoluble conflict between necessity and freedom, between social constraint and individual liberty. For them, revolutionary society was to be realized not by subordinating the individual to a monolithic collective, nor by espousing a version of radical autonomy that, to Marx at least, was tantamount to sociopathy (the pseudoliberty of "man as an isolated monad who is withdrawn into himself"[8]). Rather, they advocated multiplying and diversifying what Viktor Shklovsky later called "unfreedoms" (*nesvobody*). Forms of objective unfreedom are indispensable for creation, novelty, and personal development; the ossatures of human relationships and labor habits are the "gymnastic equipment" on which the self exercises, Shklovsky wrote in 1926.[9] Increasing the number of unfreedoms thus further individuates the subject, transforming an anthropologically underdetermined being into a sheer singularity. While the individual withers under conditions of radical autonomy, she thrives through the intensification and continuous variation (i.e., reorganization) of the connections binding self to world. As Lenin observed in a philosophical fragment on dialectics, it is through a kind of robust and positive intersectionality, not through dedifferentiation and generality, that the individual is able to partake of the universal: "Every individual enters incompletely into the universal, etc., etc. Every individual is connected by thousands of transitions with other kinds of individuals (things, phenomena, processes), etc."[10] Here Lenin anticipates the process that Gilbert Simondon would later dub "transindividuation," the mechanism whereby a singularity emerges through an encounter between forces exerted by both organic and inorganic beings within a given sociotechnical milieu. Each additional vector, or what Lenin calls a "transition," diversifies the repertoire of entanglement in the world, further individuating and nuancing the subject in the process. "The more strings the marionettes are allowed to have, the more articulated they become," writes Bruno Latour. And so "the question to be addressed is not whether we should be free or bound but *whether we are well or poorly bound.*"[11] The revolution instructs that self-realization comes about not by freeing oneself from bonds, but by multiplying good bondage. □

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For notes, see page 272.

FRY/GREENFIELD continued from page 51

of subjects almost too on the nose. (In one suite of photographs, for instance, Greenfield captures the young and beautiful wife of a Russian oligarch, posing stone-faced in her impersonally palatial Moscow home, her unhappiness so palpable it practically screams "golden handcuffs"; or dressed in a blue-and-white sweater bearing the legend I'M A LUXURY.)

But what makes Greenfield's photographs multilayered, sensitive, and fascinating—and carries them beyond a single-minded morality tale—is her understanding that people's relationships with things in this lurid world are pleasurable and miserable both. Her shiny surfaces smooth over the brittleness of the desiring lives she captures in all their awkwardness and emptiness—but only just. Though clearly, she, too, is seduced. Don't we all want to be the oligarch's wife—with her lean thighs, smooth complexion, and opaque air—if just for a day?

But the rich do not emerge scot-free. Walking through the show, I was reminded of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), whose titular protagonist, a showgirl in Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century, rises over the course of the novel from obscure penury to fame and riches through a series of decisions both cunning and lucky. At the end of the book, however, she is far from satisfied; she remains perennially, essentially wanting. "Amid the tinsel and shine of her state walked Carrie, unhappy," Dreiser writes. "Generation Wealth" is not *Sister Carrie*: In Greenfield's world, the good life, or at least the semblance of it, is infinitely more accessible—and infinitely more precarious—than it was in Dreiser's time. But Greenfield's animating question still echoes Dreiser's: If we had what we're craving, would our hearts finally gladden? Or would they continue to ever long? Greenfield's pictures know: The more you have, the more you want; the more you want, the more you lose. □

"Generation Wealth" is on view through Jan. 7, 2018.

NAOMI FRY IS A WRITER LIVING IN BROOKLYN.

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of *Inscriptions #018*, 2017, over which floats the phrase I IDENTIFY WITH THE BIRDS, a vaguely wistful echo of Houellebecq's preferred posture relative to the rest of humanity (watchful but fundamentally separate). These works seem to tempt overdetermined readings: The gallery's press materials, for example, describe the squat concrete EUROPE sign depicted in *France #014*, 2016, as a "crumbling" symbol of "a continent on the verge of decomposition," when in fact it seems pretty much intact, if undeniably a bit stained. And yet one senses that the pervasive vibe of fatigued disdain that the work registers is at least as much personal as political, that the gaze it offers looks inward to matters of existential disposition no less than outward to matters of state.

Superficially at least, the feel of this first space—heavy-handedly forlorn and lugubrious, like its lighting scheme—stood in stark contrast to the second room, found on the other side of a heavy curtain, where all was fluorescent glare and hot, gaudy color, the floor carpeted wall to wall with hundreds of kitschy laminated place mats from popular French holiday spots. The dozen or so photos, printed at a slightly larger size than their cousins next door, were also dominated by mostly depopulated images evoking a kind of touristic veneer—hotel interiors, a bus wrap water park ad, a clutch of cookie-cutter Spanish vacation homes climbing up an escarpment below an aspirational sign reading BEVERLY HILLS—or, in a few cases, the encroachment of "civilization" into the realm of the "natural," as in the show's most memorable photograph, *France #002*, 2017, in which a crappy-looking chain supermarket clings to the side of a bucolic cliff face like a consumerist bubo. Sohier's soundtrack for this space featured not the chilly urban rumbles of the previous room, but rather faint sounds of play and celebration. Yet the amusements to which the room gestured remained distant and disembodied—evoking a vague sense of merriment, perhaps, but one conspicuously lacking any sign of flesh-and-blood merrymakers—and the enjoyment it figured felt rote and etiolated.

On the day I visited, one small, unauthorized sign of embodiment had insinuated itself into the gallery (which, fittingly enough, also appeared to be totally unstaffed): a single latex glove sitting crumpled on the floor, left perhaps by a hypochondriac visitor or a distracted art handler. Whatever its origin, it provided a telling accompaniment for this world-weary work, which, like the novels that paved the way for it, starts from the proposition that civilization is fundamentally ill, a kind of patient on Houellebecq's table whose only (slim) chance for survival must necessarily begin with an invasive, clinical examination. □

JEFFREY KASTNER, A NEW YORK–BASED WRITER AND A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO *ARTFORUM*, IS THE SENIOR EDITOR OF *CABINET* AND A COAUTHOR OF *ARTISTS WHO MAKE BOOKS* (PHAIDON/PPP, 2017).

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FORE/SOVIET ORGANIZATION continued from page 223

NOTES

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Caption acknowledgments
Page 216: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Pioneer*, 1930. © Estate of Aleksandr Rodchenko/RAO/VAGA, NY. **Page 227:** El Lissitzky, *Cloud Iron. Ground Plan. Views from the Kremlin*, 1925. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.