UTSIIA!
TRATSIIA!

Edited by
Matthew S. Witkovsky and Devin Fore

With contributions by Yve-Alain Bois, Masha Chlenova, Devin Fore, Maria Gough, Christina Kiaer, Kristin Romberg, Kathleen Tahk, and Barbara Wurm

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DEMONSTRATION

Communist art is . . . a sphere in which practice and intuition often outstrip the most imaginative theoretician.

Vladimir Mayakovsky, 1923[1]

For all of the diverse photographic documentation that Lenin left behind in the press, after his death the iconography of the Bolshevik leader quickly coalesced around a few stock poses. Central to this image repertoire was the set of three agitational postures mustered on the cover of *Zhizn' Lenina* (*Lenin's Life*; fig. 1): there, at the base, he launches himself forward like the figurehead on a ship's bow, his curved arms anchoring his body on the edge of the rostrum; in the middle, he extends his arm to the crowd in a gesture of recognition and salutation; and at the top, he stands fixed and firm, the worker's cap in his outstretched hand punctuating his speech in a stance of defiance. These three images (see fig. 2) became ubiquitous in the Soviet imaginary, so that even when they were cleansed of the indexical residue of the original photograph and reduced to mere silhouettes (see pls. 21, 22), their referent remained unmistakable.

Upon Lenin's death and with his assumption from the status of historical contemporary to that of first Soviet saint, a fourth gesture joined this set of canonical postures, one that seems to have no source in the abundant documentation of his life: an image of the leader pointing.[2] Evidently the need for this particular pose was so acute that, even with all of the stock photographs at hand, artists still felt compelled to invent it. Curiously, though, in all of the compositions that feature Lenin pointing ahead in this manner, his eyes trained on their target with unswerving precision, the actual object that he points at remains unknown. The target of his gesture is always off-frame, a virtuality: in one poster he motions toward the "becoming of Socialist Russia"; in another he points "forward"; in yet another he simply "shows the way" (pls. 17, 23, 257). This way forward, the terminus of his gestural vector, is never represented concretely, leaving viewers forever to imagine what this object might be. The physical gesture precedes its content. So while Lenin's outstretched arm directs and focuses the attention of the spectator, in leaving the message of this communication unspecified, his gesture paradoxically completes itself in the very act of pointing.

Through this very formalism and vacuity, Lenin's gesture exemplifies one of the most prevalent aesthetic and noetic strategies of early Soviet art and culture: the device of demonstration. Responding to Lenin's injunction "to educate the masses through living, concrete examples and specimens from all regions of life," artists and authors put the "specimens" of their age on display in all of their singularity and material specificity.[3] Strategies of demonstration were indeed so endemic to early Soviet life, and were often realized with such astonishingly awkward literalism, that reflecting upon them here risks belaboring the

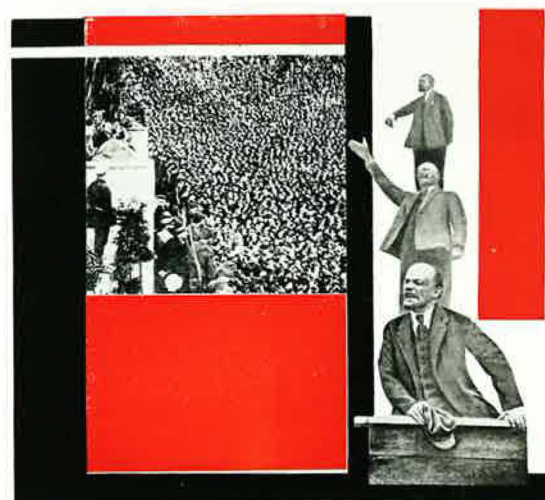

Fig. 1

Figure 1. Artist unknown. Cover for *Zhizn' Lenina* (*Lenin's Life*), n.d. Relief process; 22.9 × 25.4 cm. Collection Merrill C. Berman.

1. Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 13 (Khud. Lit-ra, 1961), p. 61.

2. An exhaustive collection of photographic and cinematic documentation of Lenin can be found in the two-volume *Lenin: Sobranie fotografii i kinokadrov v dvukh tomakh*, 2nd ed., ed. S. Telingater et al. (Iskusstvo, 1980).

3. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, "O kharaktere nashikh gazet," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 37 (Gos. Izd-vo Polit. Lit-ry, 1958–65), p. 91.

4. For responses to the resolution of RAPP from May 4, 1931, see I. Makar'ev, "Pokaz geroev truda—general'naia tema proletarskoi literatury," *Na lit. postu*, part I in nos. 31–32 (1931), pp. 27–36; part II in no. 33 (1931), pp. 10–15; and part III in nos. 35–36 (1931), pp. 57–60. Also see B. Mikhail, "Za kachestvo pokaza geroev truda," *Na lit. postu*, nos. 31–32 (1931), pp. 50–53.

5. Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse Savage (Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 20–21.

Fig. 2

Figure 2. K. A. Kuznetsov. Lenin giving a speech to military trainees from a truck on Red Square, 1919, in I. S. Smirnov, ed., *Lenin: Sobranie fotografii i kinokadrov v dvukh tomakh* (*Lenin: Collection of Photographs and Film Stills in Two Volumes*), vol. 1 (Iskusstvo, 1970), p. 191.

obvious. Soviet Russia was, simply put, an immense theater of exhibition that was underwritten poetologically by diverse strategies of "showing" (*pokaz*). Thus, for example, in May 1931, having absorbed all other rival groups to become the country's most powerful literary organization, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) published a resolution announcing its prime aesthetic directive to be that of "showing the heroes of the Five-Year Plan."[4] This directive interfaced with a massive apparatus of display that was situated at the intersection of spectacle and surveillance and that consisted (objectively) of a media infrastructure driven by technologies of exhibition such as film and photography and (subjectively) of the corollary psychological expectation that, as a citizen, one should always be on display.

One possible reading of this situation would claim that the poetics of *pokaz* veiled a condition of fundamental lack. From this perspective, the many photographs of women driving tractors would conceal the fact that the peasantry remained a socially benighted class confined within traditional gender roles; or the enthusiastic display of industrial goods would compensate for the fact that the shelves in the stores were actually empty; or the many variants of Vladimir Tatlin's iconic *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala* (*Monument to the Third International*, 1920) displayed at demonstrations and circulated on the pages of the print media (see pls. 266–68) would invoke the morphology of industrial modernity precisely at the moment when the industrial capacity of the country, devastated by the civil war, had fallen to 30 percent of its prewar levels. Surely all of this display cannot simply be taken at face value. In this Jean Baudrillard-inspired reading, the "Soviet empire of signs" – an empire of unparalleled symbolic richness that continues to amaze today – was in effect a "representational machine" that served as "advertising" for a socialism that did not exist in reality.[5] Under conditions of material privation and factual absence, techniques of demonstration and display were needed to deliver a compensatory simulacrum.

As persuasive as this logic of symbolic compensation is, and as much as it satisfies our instinctive hermeneutics of suspicion, might it instead be possible that the Soviet poetics of *pokaz* served purposes other than covering over lack and whitewashing imperfections? For starters, hardly all of the specimens put on display were affirmative models. To be sure, Maxim Gorky and the authors in RAPP presented models that were meant to be advanced and emulated, but in many other instances ambivalent and even negative phenomena were put on display and presented for judgment. Take the widespread staging of play-trials, or *agitsudy*, which rendered verdict over everything from malingerers to venereal diseases. As the editors of *Nastoiashchee* (*The Present*) announced in their opening column for the new journal, "Reader, we want

to show [*pokazat'*] you and your age in all of its contradictions and complexity."[6] Still in the process of emergence, socialist life was not exclusively positive. Heroes and saboteurs, feats of labor and negligent physicians, achievements and shortcomings: the most important thing was just that it all be shown. And so, rather than asking what these manifold acts of display might conceal and speculating about their absent cause, perhaps we should accept these demonstrations in their ideological candor and instead consider, first, how they communicate and, second, why this particular type of communication became so prevalent in the early Soviet period.

The name for this strategy of communication is *ostension* (from the Latin *ostendere*, meaning "to exhibit"). It entails pointing, or otherwise directing attention at, an object, person, or phenomenon. By putting something or somebody on display, ostension uses this object to communicate. In this regard it is unlike other strategies of symbolic representation such as language, in which arbitrary signifiers stand in for absent referents. Instead of communicating signs, the ostensive gesture communicates a situation or matter itself. Ostension uses a concrete excerpt, or specimen, from reality to stand in for a generic class or type: asked if I need anything from the store, I hold up a pack of cigarettes; or I bring a sample swatch of a fabric to a factory and show it to the operator in order to have it manufactured; or, when someone is pouring tea at the workers' club, I touch my empty cup to indicate that I'd like more to drink. As a strategy of communication that deploys fragments of the world as messages, the ostensive sign is thus consubstantial with its referent (and therefore, technically, not a sign at all). As the Czech semiotician Ivo Osolsobě explains in his seminal writings on the subject, this "cognitive use of non-signs" presumes that message and reality are made of the same stuff.[7] Indeed, if there is information conveyed in these "objectual messages," it is a transmission without abstract content, for, unlike symbolic language, the ostensive sign does not convey information or content about reality but is instead an event of and in reality itself. Its signifying mode is presentational rather than re-presentational, immanentist rather than metaphysical. Osolsobě thus observes that the primary function of this primitive strategy of signification is neither connotation nor denotation – neither metaphor nor reference – but the act of showing and manifesting.[8] In his own classification of images, Jacques Rancière has more recently proposed a comparable typology, distinguishing the "ostensive image" from, on the one hand, the "metaphorical image," which sets in motion an "operation of interpretation," and, on the other, the "naked image," which "is intent solely on witnessing" and which denies "the rhetoric of exegesis." In the "sheer haecceity" – or "this-ness" – of the ostensive image, "presence opens out into the presentation of presence."[9]

Two explanations for the explosion in forms of ostensive communication in the early Soviet period stand out. First were the new conditions for public existence ushered in by the Bolsheviks and the resulting exuberance about the possibility of demonstration in itself. With the elimination of the restrictions that the tsarist regime had placed on the circulation of information, Russians discovered a newfound fascination and political agency in acts of communication and mutual display. "Everything was new, everything was for the first time. The first factories, the first *kolkhozes*, the first collective kitchens. . . . Just information in and of itself was interesting."[10] In this nascent and provisional public sphere, popular communication and open debate became realities for the first time. In the same way that liminal social spaces such as coffeehouses and Masonic societies had contributed to the emergence of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe, the Bolsheviks established transitional sites such as workers' clubs and village reading halls (see pls. 83, 223) that were situated at the juncture between domestic life and the sites of industrial and agricultural production and that, as spaces of interaction and socialization, provided the institutional infrastructure for cultivating a public life that was previously nonexistent in Russia. Assemblies became a defining social genre of the time. "Everyone to the meeting!" enjoins one of Liubov' Popova's projections for the play *Zemlia dybom* (*The Earth in Turmoil*, 1923; pl. 122). The newly created public sphere, with its emphasis on self-display and performance, went hand in hand with the pervasive theatricalization of everyday life, evident in all varieties of mass actions, public spectacles, demonstrations, and parades that characterized the period. (Significantly, Osolsobě cites Nikolai Evreinov, choreographer of the 1920 reenactment of the storming of the Winter Palace [see pl. 261], as one of the first theorist-practitioners to recognize the explicit connection between ostensive communication and the theatricalization of life.)[11] The press played a role equal to that of the clubs and the streets in jump-starting Soviet public life. On the cover for *Vestnik truda* (*Labor Bulletin*), no. 1 (1925; fig. 3), designed by Gustav Klutsis (Gustavs Klucis) and Sergei Sen'kin, two unidentified men shake hands, their partnership echoed and formalized by the intersection of the two red frames behind them. As they present themselves to each other, the men likewise engage the camera lens directly with a stark and planar frontality (*lobovo*). These two figures constitute themselves through sheer exteriority, as photographic surface. Abandoning psychological complexity and depth hermeneutics for pure visual dynamism and optical effect – as is typical for the

6. *Nastoiashchee*, no. 1 (Jan. 1928), p. 3.

7. This is semiotician Thomas Sebeok's perplexed characterization of Osolsobě's theory of ostension, quoted in Ivo Osolsobě, "Ostension nach 35, genauer gesagt nach 1613 Jahren," *Balagan: slavisches Drama, Theater und Kino* 8, no. 1 (2002), p. 60.

8. See Ivo Osolsobě, "Die Ostension als Grenzfall menschlicher Kommunikation und ihre Bedeutung für die Kunst" (1967), *Balagan: Slavisches Drama, Theater und Kino*, part 1 in vol. 7, no. 2 (2001), pp. 47–63; part 2 in vol. 8, no. 1 (2002), pp. 45–57. Also see Osolsobě, "Ostension," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 656–60.

9. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliot (Verso, 2007), pp. 26, 22, 24, 23.

10. E. Mikulin, "Gody i dni," quoted in L. A. Az'muko, "Eshche raz o 'literature fakta,'" in *Problemy stanovleniia sotsialisticheskogo realizma v russkoi i zarubezhnoi literature*, ed. N. V. Kovrigina (Irkutskii Gos. Universitet, 1972), p. 59

11. Osolsobě, "Die Ostension als Grenzfall," part 2, p. 45.

12. Sergei Tret'iakov, "Autobiographie," *Internationale literatur*, nos. 4–5 (1932), p. 47.

13. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 235.

14. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, "A Great Beginning," in *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (Progress, 1960), pp. 418, 422, 432.

15. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Hackett, 1976), p. 57.

Fig. 3

Figure 3. Gustav Klutsis (Gustavs Klucis) (Latvian, 1895–1938) and Sergei Sen'kin (Russian, 1894–1963). Cover for *Vestnik truda* (*Labor Bulletin*), no. 1 (1925). Letterpress; 24 × 17.4 cm. Ne boltai! Collection. Cat. 155.

work of Klutsis generally – the cover of the *Bulletin* presents its reader with a manifest display pursued for its own purposes.

In addition to the new conditions of public existence, there was a second cause for the efflorescence of ostensive communication in these years, one that was less aesthetic than noetic. The latter term refers to the cognitive process whereby a phenomenon, experience, or event becomes an object of thought: in philosophy, the noema is a percept en route to becoming a concept; in rhetoric, it is defined as a figure whose significance is initially obscure but that, through sustained reflection, eventually acquires meaning to become, as it were, thinkable. Herein lay the preeminent cognitive vocation of demonstration in Soviet society: to designate and conceptualize emergent phenomena. A life-world in which "everything was new, everything was for the first time" had exposed the incapacity of received language to address all of the unprecedented social, technical, and political formations that were called into being by the Bolsheviks. Every day the Soviet citizen encountered factually existing entities that as yet had no name nor even a corresponding concept. All of the ideas, customs, and devices inherited from the bourgeois age were being interrogated and revised: encyclopedias were being rewritten from the perspective of the proletariat, universities restructured around new taxonomies of knowledge, speech reinvented to reflect postrevolutionary experiences and social relations. Within the accelerated revolutionary conjuncture, historical reality had outstripped the capacity of human thought to theorize events that were unfolding at lightning speed. "Our reality is convulsive and more powerful than the wildest fantasy," wrote the journalist Sergei Tret'iakov.[12] Indeed, the cliché that truth is stranger than fiction applies above all to revolutionary moments, moments when the human faculty of the imagination, even in its most delirious, cannot hope to keep up with, much less surpass and anticipate, the changes taking place in the reality around it. At exceptional historical intervals such as these, human fantasy no longer serves as an incubator for the new, but, to the contrary, actually stifles the development of novel historical forms. With good reason, this was a decade not of dreaming but of "fantasectomy."[13] As Lenin insisted in his key text "A Great Beginning" (1920), what was needed after the revolution was "less political clatter and more attention to the living facts taken from actual life. . . . Those who try to solve the problem of the transition from capitalism to socialism on the basis of abstract ideas like liberty and equality are thus deluded, since this is a historical situation, a concrete technical-social situation." When history outpaces ideation, the new will necessarily arrive unannounced, unanticipated by purposive thinking. The new takes the form of an exception that exceeds conception. For this reason Lenin stipulated that genuinely revolutionary acts – acts that perforce take the form of the exception – are "*first* demonstrated *by deeds*," after which they "adopt the title."[14]

In other words, revolutionary phenomena are first demonstrated and only then designated. When thought lags behind history, "primitive" ostension – pointing at reality – is the only means to bring consciousness back up to speed. Ostension becomes an elemental noetic resource for communicating about phenomena that do not yet have an established concept and for tracking patterns that are still in the course of their emergence. Pointing toward exempla ostensively allows the subject, however provisionally, to cognize the present at a moment when the present has outpaced received routines of thought and categories of reason. "Exemplification of an unnamed property usually amounts to exemplification of a nonverbal symbol for which we have no corresponding word or description," observed the philosopher Nelson Goodman.[15] In pointing toward an exemplum – in demonstrating materially rather than defining discursively – ostension fashions out of existing matter a sign that, while still lacking a corresponding concept, nonetheless serves as a placeholder for this idea, for a knowledge, that is yet to come. Under revolutionary conditions in which history exceeds the powers of the human imagination, strategies of demonstration and display function not as compensation for an absence, then, but as the noetic vector of the new.

The explosion in ostensive communication in the early Soviet period coincided with the proliferation of

technical media such as photography and cinema, which are privileged means of such display. Even prior to any explicit propagandistic agenda, the primary purpose of Dziga Vertov's film *Shestaia chast' mira* (*One Sixth of the World,* 1926), for example, is simply to place Soviet life on display. The film is framed at either end by intertitles that declare "I see" (*Vizhu*) (fig. 4a). Between these invocations unfolds a sweeping, detailed inventory of the contents of the republic that seeks to connect the factory sites of the industrial proletariat to the traditional labor practices of minority cultures performed in distant locales. Inspired by the various mass correspondent movements that flourished in the 1920s – photo-correspondents (*fotokory*), worker-correspondents (*rabkory*), peasant-correspondents (*sel'kory*), artist-correspondents (*khudkory*), and so on – Vertov's kino-eye group set up a network of reciprocal display designed to connect the multiethnic citizenry of the Soviet empire laterally. As is typical of many of Vertov's films, segments depicting various scenes are coupled with segments depicting theater audiences watching the very same scene (figs. 4b and 4c). One of the most striking rhetorical devices in the film is the use of intertitles to herald the figures onscreen in the manner of an ode: "You, mother playing with a child" or "You, child playing with a captured arctic fox."[16] In the opening segments depicting Western Europe, where the intertitles assume a hectoring tone, this "You" is often grammatically the direct object of the phrase "I see" (thus "I see you": *Vizhu vas*), positing camera vision as a mode of objectification that reflects the reification of social relations under capitalism generally. But in the scenes depicting Soviet Russia, by contrast, the "You" of the intertitles always appears only in the nominative case, as valorizing apostrophe rather than dehumanizing objectification. If, in the West, to be on display is to be an object, both grammatically and existentially, to be on display in Russia is to be a subject. In the Soviet Union, where, as Walter Benjamin put it, "the human being's legitimate claim to being reproduced" had achieved its most radical fulfillment, mutual recognition through cinematic visualization established a very different mechanism of ideological interpellation, one in which people realize themselves as enfranchised social agents by putting themselves on film.[17] Recall the striking frontal comportment of the two men on the cover of the *Labor Bulletin*, who eagerly present themselves to each other as well as to the camera: here the power of the gaze rests not at its apex and alleged source, with the photographer-spectator, but with the luminous subjects on display. As Vertov explained in an interview, the people in *One Sixth* become members of Soviet society through the very act of showing themselves: "The film has, strictly speaking, no 'spectators' *within the borders of the USSR*, since all the workers of the USSR (130–140 million) are not spectators but participants in this film. The very concept of this film and its whole construction are now resolving in practice the most difficult theoretical question of how to eradicate the boundary between spectators and spectacle."[18]

As *One Sixth of the World* also attests, though, ostensive communication always risks devolving into unchecked accumulation. Phenomena are presented entirely without metaphor or taxon, one by one, individual by individual, item by item, and with a degree of specificity and explicitness that is often startlingly straightforward (from "You, suckling at your mother's breast" to "You, chipper centenarian"). The injunction to look results in sheer nominalism in Mayakovsky's *ROSTA No. 332* as well (1921; pl. 193): the sequence begins, "Look at these drawings and see for yourself / the number of goods and what's been delivered" and then presents a list-like inventory covering everything from beans to chemical dyes. As Osolsobě notes, the grammar of ostension may be very primitive – it knows only the present tense and the indicative mood – but its lexicon is as vast and variegated as material extension itself.[19] Hence the extravagance of these amassed collections, whose noneconomism expresses a "disappointment with universals."[20] Ostension eschews universal categories, offering instead concrete instances in all of their divergent particularity.

It is not surprising that didactic exempla of the period, such as children's books, would exhibit this same degree of explicitness – for example, *Kak otdykhal Lenin* (*How Lenin Relaxed*), *Kak my otbili Iudenich* (*How We Recaptured Yudenich*), or, in a striking tautology, *Kak rubanok sdelal rubanok* (*How a Plane Made a Plane*, 1930; pl. 169) – for teachers have long made use of ostensive display for the purpose of learning. But the fact that, after the revolution, acts of ostension extended far beyond situations of explicit pedagogical instruction to become the master strategy of communication in general reflects the degree to which Soviet society had in fact became a school, a gigantic institute for creating knowledge and inculcating new habits.[21] Thus the cover of the second issue of *Proletarskoe foto* (*Proletarian Photo*) (fig. 5) and Boris Ignatovich's photograph *Remontnye raboty* (*Repair Works*, pl. 240) are utterly concrete in their particularism at the same time that they exhibit a stagey, almost illustrative quality. Illuminated by a bright flash that flattens the surface of the subject while simultaneously cutting deep shadows into the space behind, each of these photographs enacts a small theater of labor. As if in response to Tret'iakov's call to create "photographs that . . . show [*pokazat'*] not how work is done in reality but how it should be done," they identify phenomena in the present that open onto the future.[22]

16. Michael Kunichika, "'The Ecstasy of Breadth': The Odic and the Whitmanesque Style in Dziga Vertov's *One Sixth of the World* (1926)," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 6, no. 1 (2012), pp. 53–74.

17. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility" (3rd version), trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 262.

18. "'Shestaia chast' mira' (beseda s Dzigoi Vertovym)," *Kino*, no. 33 (August 17, 1926), p. 3; trans. as "A Sixth Part of the World (A Conversation with Dziga Vertov)," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004), p. 182 (translation modified).

19. Osolsobě, "Ostension," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, p. 659.

20. Stanley Cavell, "The World as Things," in *Cavell on Film* (SUNY Press, 2005), p. 268.

21. The verb *ostendere* first appeared in Augustine's treatise *De magistro*. Osolsobě, "Ostension," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, p. 656. On ostension and learning, see also Chad Engelland, *Ostension: Word Learning and the Embodied Mind* (MIT Press, 2014).

22. Sergei Tret'iakov, *Mesiats v derevne (iun'–iul' 1930 g.)* (Federatsiia, 1931), p. 201.

23. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

24. Sergej Tretjakow [Sergei Tret'iakov], "Die Tasche," *Unsere Zeit* 6, no. 3 (1933), p. 170.

25. On "metaobjects," see Osolsobě, "Die Ostension als Grenzfall," part 2, p. 50. Being "homomaterial" with the stuff of reality itself, the "objectual messages" of ostensive communication constitute what Osolsobě deemed a "sheer anti-semiotics." As a "theory of nonsigns," ostension thus keeps in check a "pansemiotic" approach that seeks to model all forms of human communication on language. Ivo Osolsobě, "On Ostensive Communication," *Studia semiotyczne* 9 (1979), p. 68.

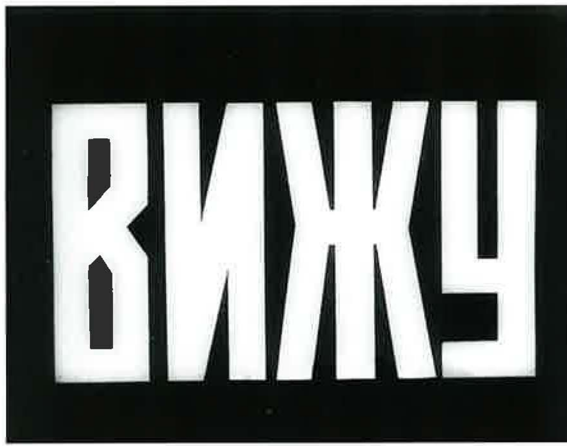

Fig. 4a

Fig. 4b

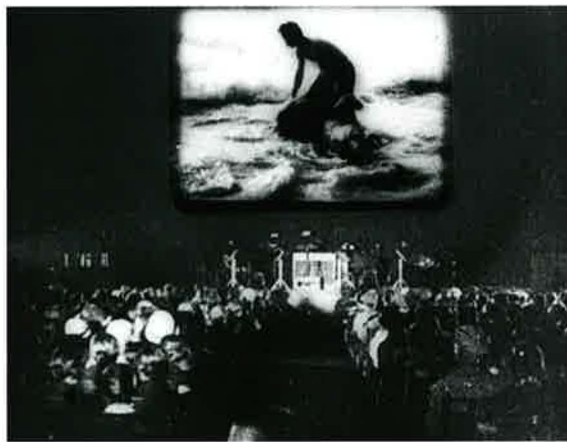

Fig. 4c

Figure 4a. Intertitle from Dziga Vertov (Russian, 1896–1954), *Shestaia chast' mira* (*One Sixth of the World*): "Vizhu" (I see), 1926. Black-and-white film, silent; 83 min. Austrian Film Museum, Vienna.

Figure 4b. Still from Dziga Vertov, *Shestaia chast' mira* (*One Sixth of the World*), 1926. Black-and-white film, silent; 83 min. Austrian Film Museum, Vienna.

Figure 4c. Still from Dziga Vertov, *Shestaia chast' mira* (*One Sixth of the World*), 1926. Black-and-white film, silent; 83 min. Austrian Film Museum, Vienna.

Figure 5. Mikhail Kalashnikov (Russian, 1906–1944). "Elektroburenie v Donbasse" (Electric Drilling in the Donbass), cover for *Proletarskoe foto* (*Proletarian Photo*), no. 2 (February 1932). Offset lithograph and letterpress; 25.5 × 17.5 cm. Collection Merrill C. Berman. Cat. 139.

Anchored in existing reality and yet also pointing toward a norm still to come, these pictures exemplify what Katerina Clark designated as the "modal schizophrenia" of early Soviet art, which strives simultaneously to depict what is and what should be.[23] Once the revolution had obviated the distinction between the reflectionism of traditional mimetic realism and the overweening demiurgy of a heroic modernism – the poetological distinction between passive reproduction and active creation – finding new cultural forms within existing life became the principal means of artistic innovation. "I do not invent my heroes," Tret'iakov wrote, "but instead find them in life, and my talent consists either in finding a hero who simultaneously represents a type or in tracking down a given phenomenon in the masses."[24] At those historical moments when "convulsive" history leaps ahead of human consciousness, artistic talent is expressed not in bold invention, but in the more humble calling to gather and collect the newly emergent exempla from reality and make them available to conceptualization by putting them on display.

The demonstration of concrete individuals who anticipate types – of specimens that don't yet have a genus – is related to one final form of ostensive communication that was ubiquitous in the early Soviet period: models. How exactly does one categorize the design models produced in the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops (VKhUTEMAS)? On the one hand, as concrete things, they are far more intuitive and *anschaulich* (in the Kantian sense of being immediately given perceptually) than any discursive statement. But on the other hand, these "studies," as they were designated, were never meant to be realized as functional architecture but instead served as platforms from which to prospect fundamental principles of optics, repetition, facture, structural distribution, support, and so on. The purpose of these models was to extrapolate rules of form nondiscursively, to play matter self-reflexively so that it discloses underlying conditions and laws of reality. Design models are thus "metaobjects" that propose principles and investigate problems that could not be articulated or resolved by theoretical means.[25] As Boris Arvatov

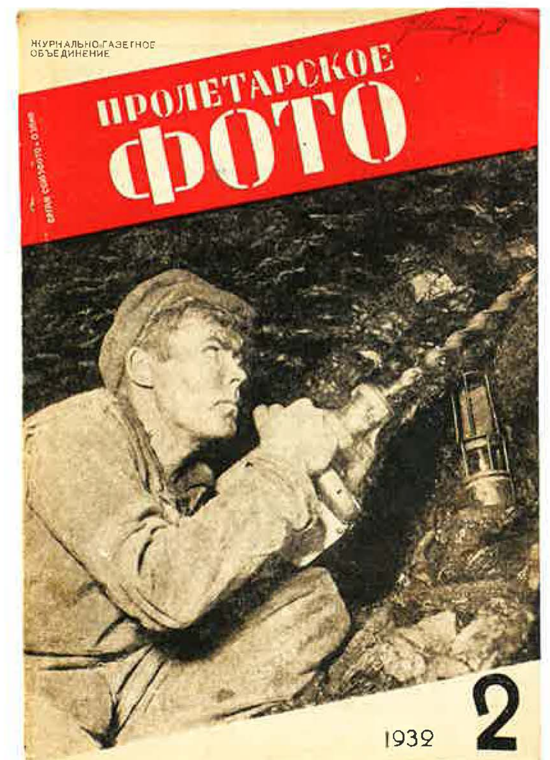

Fig. 5

26. Boris Arvatov, "Oveshchestvlennaia utopiia" (1923), translated by Richard Sherwood as "Materialized Utopia," in *The Tradition of Russian Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (Da Capo, 1974), p. 86.

27. V. F. Krinskii, I. V. Lamtsov, and M. A. Turkus, *Elementy arkhitekturno-prostranstvennoi kompozitsii* (Gos. Naucho-Tekhnicheskoe Izd-vo, 1934), p. 152.

28. See Gough's brilliant discussion of the principle of tensegrity, which was "discovered" by Karl Ioganson in the early 1920s only to be "discovered" two more times, once by the artist Kenneth Snelson in the late 1940s and again by the architect R. Buckminster Fuller in the late 1950s. In each of these cases, a formal principle was deployed in distinctive contexts to very different ends. Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (University of California Press, 2005), pp. 61–100.

observed in an essay on the work of VKhUTEMAS instructor Anton Lavinskii entitled "Materialized Utopia" (see fig. 6), "There was just one purpose: to demonstrate, and not to discuss."[26]

Models are especially valuable heuristic devices in those situations where categorical knowledge is lacking or, further, where established concepts are obstacles to invention. One project, coming out of Vladimir Krinskii's VKhUTEMAS workshop (1920/26; pl. 60), responded to the instructor's assignment to create "a unified and expressive series on the basis of a complex metrical order, and of ratios (nuanced and contrasting) of intervals and forms." At the conclusion of this intricate assignment, which goes on for paragraphs, Krinskii states pithily: "The problem is solved with a maquette."[27] The answers to some problems cannot be explicated, they can only be demonstrated. And, what is more, these models keep providing answers long after the original question has ceased to be posed. The contents of these embodied communications can never be exhaustively decoded. Thus, in an important study of Russian Constructivism, Maria Gough has shown that the Spatial Constructions of Karl Ioganson (Kārlis Johansons) (1920/21; p. 48, fig. 3), also an instructor at VKhUTEMAS, exemplify laws of engineering that, given current industrial capacities, could not yet be realized in the 1920s but that would find an application much later, in the 1950s, albeit under very different social and material conditions.[28] Likewise, today, at the centennial of the Bolshevik revolution, we face the question of what other principles and potentials – whether political, aesthetic, or technological – can be recovered from these anachronic inventions, which keep generating new proposals.

Fig. 6

Figure 6. Anton Lavinskii (Russian, 1893–1968). "Plan goroda budushchego" (Plan for a City of the Future), in Boris Arvatov, "Oveshchestvlennaia utopiia" (Materialized Utopia), *Lef*, no. 1 (1923). Letterpress; 15.5 × 23 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Director's Fund, Capital Campaign General Acquisitions Endowment and Robert Allerton Purchase Fund, 2009.485.