

COMMITMENT IN ARCHITECTURE:
Russian Constructivism

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Before the October Revloution in Russia, Tatlin, a member of the Russian Avant-Garde developed his language of non-objective constructions. These "sculptures", which he called his reliefs and counter-reliefs constituted the result of his investigation into tension arising from the supperimpositioning of different materials. Tatlin's formal language was based on the *inherent nature* of the various materials he used, and their associative meaning within the cultural-historic context. Rodchenko, Tatlin's follower also developed his own language of non-objective contructions based on preconceived manipulation of geometry, in contrast to Tatlin's intuitive approaches. These formal languages remained formal languages without a social content. The experience of these Russian Futurists during the Revolution, however, were to transform their formal investigations into an anti-aesthetic rhetoric that was to culminate into the Avant-Garde movement of Russian Constructivism. Russian Constructivism became a committed art, consciously seeking to negate the conception of art as a faculty autonomous of the social condition, and to fully integrate art into the social process of production, thereby, the Constructivit concluded, committing themselves to the clause of the Communist aspiration. To the extent that such was not possible without entirely surrendering the terms of art, Constructivism fluctuated between collapsing entirely into becoming a trivial, empty symbolism of machine aesthetics, and, on the other hand, a successful transformation of aesthetic into a powerful representation of the revolutionary imagination, based on the redefinition of the fundamental terms of art. The terms of art and architecture as laid down by the Constructivists remain important today within the legacy of modernism.

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When Tatlin created his Monument to the Third International it became the subject of exaltation at the 1920 Dada fair in Berlin. The placard that appeared with George Grosz and John Heartfield read:

Die Kunst ist tot

Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst

Tatlins

Art is Dead.

One recalls that on the Russian front itself, the "Programme of the Productivist Group", published also in 1920, had declared Art to be a lie.

In declaring the death of art, both Dada and the Productivists had severed the continuum of history. Habermas wrote of modernity: "...the time consciousness articulated in avant-garde art is not simply ahistorical; it is directed against what might be called a false normality in history".¹ It is only through positioning itself against the continuum that the Avant-Garde declared its own historicity. The sting of the Avant-Garde is historically specific. In terms of historical movements the Avant-Garde can be understood as protest, and it is within this dialectic between the art of negation and that which is being negated that the avant-garde is defined, that it is possible to at once anchor the status of the ephemeral against the infinitude of cultural history. It is thus against the back drop of the acceleration of history that modernism becomes self-conscious of the phenomenon of historicity.

¹ Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project", in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Forster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983).

But the historicity of the Avant-Garde, formerly a commentary on reality, when set within the Russian context of revolutionary reality, seemed to take on a dimension of reality itself. At a time when society itself declared a historical discontinuum, the rebellion of art collided with the social programme of rupture. In enlarging the capacity of its own content art had forsaken its traditional marginal position, its autonomy, with respect to the social process of production. The Russian Avant-Garde adopted a social content that transformed its role from one that was predominantly critical (as art) to one that flirted with the immense role of the reorganization of the social structure. Russian Constructivism came in at a critical moment and proposed that it would take on a role conventionally well beyond the limits of art.

There was a fundamental difference between the popular concept of *Maschinenkunst* and that of Russian Constructivism in spite of the invocation of Tatlin at the Dada Fair.

Constructivism was a notion built on the mechanistic reasoning founded upon a reduction of reality into means-end relationships between instruments and production. The constructivists, in their plight to re-engage art into the process of production in society, had rejected the autonomous marginal space assigned to art within the rise of bourgeois culture. Instead, they proposed to re-establish the interrelations between culture and civilization, one in which the distinction between the two was to be eradicated. In their new proposed system, culture was no longer confined to expression. Civilization became transformed based on a new mode of production founded on the technological, instrumental *a priori*.

Culture must now assume the forms of this *a priori*. This new mode of production became the new content of culture. Since within culture one could bring together physical and intellectual materials, culture itself became not only the platform of discovery, but in turns, endorsed the transformed civilization with a new meaning. Thus rejecting both the Kantian category of universal aesthetics and the role of cultural adversary of the Avant-Garde, the Constructivists sought to create a new category that art could assume. As such, Constructivists would have us believe that it was a proposal for a new mode of life, and not merely an avant-garde attitude. It was a notion of a new way of living: Communism its ideology, Constructivism its culture, and artists its protagonists.

Thus Constructivism sought to negate art as a faculty independent of the social process. Constructivists saw that art, the product of the synthesis of physical and intellectual materials, would give meaning to the forms of production. Subsequent to this conception of the integration between art and production, the content of art became utilitarian. Coined in such terms art took its place as the inception of products. Given its pragmatic ideology, Constructivism found its most powerful proclamation in architecture. Within such mutual link between the programme of Constructivism and the very programmatic nature of architecture there was forged a mutual dependency between the two, and architecture entered into its most powerful incarnation as an avant-garde art. This was a role that architecture had formerly found itself difficult to assume, since it would never assume the marginal status of a non-utilitarian art within the former Avant-Garde movements (except for other modernist movements

concurrent with the development of the Russian Avant-Garde, with a similar programme), dominated primarily by the visual and literary arts. Architecture was tied by an umbilical cord to the very mode of production of civilization and seemed to depend on it for its justification. The phrase "art is dead" in the Constructivist imagination became the polar opposite of the nihilistic antagonism that was Dada. In its proposal to negate the consciousness that was art, Constructivism was really proposing an alternate programme for civilization.

The machine to the Constructivists was not a liberating instrument freeing humankind from the binding chores of past societies. It was not merely the Futuristic lance that cut through the inhibitions on the physical and the psychological -- a liberation that maintain meaning only through the very act of liberation itself, through the consciousness of motion and speed, through the very extension of the body and the mind. Nor was the machine seen as the Heideggerian culprit of the instrumentalization of life and the subsequent loss of values. Rejecting first of all the idealism and the individualism of art the Constructivists sought to intergrate art into society through interpreting social organization as the organization of production -- that of construction. By injecting their influence on production, they thought, they could thus influence the very organization of society itself. Seen in such light the machine theoretically took on no individual meaning other than the revelation of techniques, ie., the process of construction. But as even the entire social construct was seen as a process guided by technique, so must art and every individual become subservient to such principles of organization. The machine became the model of the product of organization. And just as art itself became part

of this process, so must the product reflect the input of the intellectual imagination. Production itself was guided, not only by machine principles, but also by the principles of intellectual materials, of art, since in order to see art in the same sphere as mechanical production it is first necessary to reject the conception of any differences in utility between physical and intellectual materials. Thus interpreted, the Constructivists in fact did not propagate the machinization of society. Rather, the machine became the representation of the reorganization of society, a symbol of the new concept of organization and production, and of rejecting the old and accepting the inevitable progression of social evolution. It sought to become a symbol visible by many and make the Constructivist programme solidly understandable to the masses.

"Production", however, also contained a much more explored reference in Marxism. "Force of production" was generally used by Marx to indicate anything that could be used to create material use-value. This use of the concept of "material use-value" effectively ruled out all human-natural capacity (as opposed to particular capabilities), superstructural conditions, economic relations and ideological conceptions that might give rise to certain needs, productive impulses, or conditions that enable production, but cannot actually be used to create material use-value. Labour power constituted the primary force of production and preceded all others. Mental and physical capabilities were inseparable aspects of labour power. One cannot be effective without the other. This labour force was what Marx termed "subjective factor". Such categorization is useful here in pointing to us that there is one other category of productive force which Marx called "objective factor", i.e., the man-made and natural resources.

The man-made could be further understood to contain "general conditions" such as transportation and communication, and "instruments", ie., machines and tools. Understood in Marxist light the machine did not represent a conditions of society, but a tangible unit of production.

Constructivism thus could also be seen to be an attempt to posit their premise within the substantiality of the tangible and the identifiable factors of production. The Constructivist programme was conceived within the materialist construct comprising productive forces and the relationship between them which constituted the mode of production. Since within the Marxist construct the stages of development of the productive forces determined the economic structure and subsequently influenced the political and legal structure, production was seen to be the necessary point of injection, if the Russian Avant-Garde so desired to inject its art into the core of Marxist society. Not only was art the result of the mental and physical labour of the artist, but also of the principles of the instruments, ie., both the "subjective" and the "objective" factors.

Before returning to understanding the Constructivist ideology it is necessary first to consider the place of aesthetics within Marxism itself and to point out the such fact did not concur with such Constructivist polemic. Marx himself extolled art to a higher form of labour in which man expressed his humanness by virtue of the ability to create a human world. Within Marxist polemics art was incompatible with capitalism, which reduced the product of art to its exchange-value and ignore the value of the objectification through which the humanizing process was revealed. The tendency within capitalism was to redefine art in terms of

ordinary labour as outside the realm of creative work. To Marxism, as Adolfo Sanchez Vasquez pointed out in his book *Art and Society*, artistic labour was real and concrete; in expressing and objectifying human powers it materialized this process in objects which satisfied particular human needs. The labour of art is thus concrete and produces use-value. This use-value, however, depends on the relationship between the individuality of the worker-artist and human needs as expressed in the object. It is thus impossible for one product of art to be compared with others having different specific use-values in terms of exchange-values. To do this would mean disregarding the human needs satisfied by the peculiar labour of the individual worker.

The peculiarity of artistic labour within the Marxist conception presupposed an aspect of art that was separate and autonomous from its surrounding social conditions. Had art been entirely dependent on the social condition it would have been reproducible within the same conditions. Indeed, it was from the rejection of the reduction of artistic labour into the form of reproducible abstract labour that Marx enunciated the contradiction between art and capitalism. To Marx it was impossible to explain the permanence of works of art from ideas formulated from sociology. Within Marxist aesthetics there existed very much the notion of one aspect of art as autonomous, and could not be entirely reduced to a subservient position within other faculties such as religion and economics without losing the fundamental attributes of art. It was these attributes that lend art its permanence, and enabled it to transcend absolute social conditioning. The possibility of understanding art as an autonomous faculty of judgement, however, was only prominent after the

Enlightenment within the development of high bourgeoisie. In his *Critique of Judgement* Kant attempted to layout and understand the premises of "aesthetic judgement":

How is a judgement possible which, going merely upon the individual's own feeling of pleasure of object independent of the concept of it, estimates this as a pleasure attached to the representation of the same object in every other individual, and does so *a priori*, ie., without being allowed to wait and see if other people will be of the same mind?

The independence of aesthetics as a purposive criteria to be judged according to its own principles as prophesed in the representation of objects (as seperate from the object itself -- the concept of such object) relied on the claim of such judgement to be based on *a priori* universal principles:

...the possibility of a purely reflective judgement which is aesthetic and yet based on an *a priori* principle, ie., a judgement of taste, ir can be shown to have a justifiable claim to universual validity, definitely requires a critique of the judgement as a faculty having transcendental principles (like the understanding and the reason), and only in that way qualifies for incorporation into the system of the pure faculties of cognition.

This sense of autonomous criteria for the judgement of art, however, was an understanding of the qualitative attributes of art under the presupposition that it was possible to isolate the qualitative aspects of art from the phenomenon of art as an institution.

In fact it is the dialectic between art as autonomous judgement and as a socially conditioned institution that forms the unity of the reality of art. In Vasquez's words: "Art is an autonomous sphere, but its autonomy exists only *by, in and through* its social conditioning". In the creation of the object that contains the permanence quality of art the artist exist within the frame of mind posed on him as a limitation by culture.

The promulgation of the social disposition had long been an integral attribute of the institution of art in Western culture. Hegel saw in Greek art the complete integration of form and content. Greek art was to Hegel the highest form of artistic expression in which there existed the complete identification of artistic ideals and social aspirations. The medieval situation was one of subjugation of not artist to religion, but of man to God, in which the only meaning possible of that which was artificial relied upon the revelation of God within the conceptualization of man. To the extent to which religion could be regarded as constituted of transcendental faith, human institution, and human expression, Medieval expression was one of the subjugation of the individual (artist) to the institution that found its mandate in faith. With the rise of new found humanism in the Renaissance, the term Renaissance was most applicable not only to the rediscovery of classical forms and aesthetics, but to the rediscovery of human as independently meaningful. The rise of princely powers and the bourgeoisie accompanied the erosion of the mandate of faith held by the institution of religion. For an instance artists came under the power of no longer the religious institution, but the patron. The increasing alienation of society that Marx saw as a feature of the rise of the bourgeoisie also saw a loss of the social dedication of art. As Peter

Burger pointed out, art, at the patronage of the bourgeoisie was obliged to express the values of the bourgeoisie, which was no longer one based on the intergration of the individual with the vital process of production of life.¹

As Marx said, it was no longer production for man, but man for production.

Whereas Burger did not make any assertion as to the genesis of the relationship between art and the bourgeoisie, Vasquez, within his Marxist interpretation, described the rise of the autonomy of art as the resistance by artists against the alienation that existed in society accompanying the growth of the power of the bourgeoisie, as a result of nature, labour, and even art being brought under the values of material production: "Life lost its concrete, vital, and creative character and took on an abstract character".² Such a society is characteristically opposed to the nature of art. Vasquez saw modern art as an attempt to resist being absorbed into the alienation of society; art still as an expression of that which was human. The artist asserted his own freedom, but at a cost of foresaken its close relations with society, and of severing the vital relations between art and communication. Art then must be justified on its own grounds, and artistic judgement made on the exclusive terms of aesthetics.

¹ Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

² Adolfo Sanchez Vasquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Maro Riofrancos (New York: Monthly Review Press), p. 116

In the attempt to re-establish communication with society, art must search for a new language of expression. This however, could not be achieved on a purely aesthetic basis (Vasquez). Art must first abandon its autonomy and realign itself with social forces that were struggling to resolve the alienation, not just between art and society, but ultimately between humans. Within such course art was in fact rebellious against the institution and the status of the faculty of art within the bourgeoisie. Much as formerly the category of aesthetics had become the content of art, as the terms of art were being redefined, in instances where art became closely associated with social upheaval, or where it had actually adopted a programme of demonstration within the context of social action, art found a most direct blow against bourgeois values by radically changing its content. In such cases artists no longer merely redefined the terms of aesthetics. Thus "art is dead"; and likewise, "art is a lie".

Within the bourgeoisie it was no longer possible to understand the overall construct of human life due to the reduction of use-value into exchange value. It was impossible to construct an overall content of society that artistic form could refer to. It was then imperative for art to rediscover, within the dialectic of form and content, reference to a content that could be communicated and understood. Although Marx attempted to resolve the dialectic between the autonomy and the social commitment of art, in the Marxist disposition of the close association between art and social life, emphasis on the content of art gradually gained weight, which in turn made it necessary to be expressed through the creation of new forms. Although Marx's own conception of art remained ultimately influenced by the Hegelian notion of the unification of form and content,

this was rejected by especially three Russian theoreticians who found increasing following as Marxism took root in Russia. These were Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobrolynbov, who placed, in one form or other increasing emphasis on the social content of art. To them the chasm that became apparent between aesthetics and the social life was fundamentally irreconcilable, as art was seen as purely for the entertainment of the nobility and therefore an insult to the masses.¹ To them, and also especially to Plekhanov, Russian translator of the *Communist Manifesto* and mentor of Lenin before he broke with Lenin, the primary function of art was to reflect the phenomena of social life. Art was useful only insofar as it promoted social progress. Within this premise, it was also necessary to entirely suppress the subjectivity of the artist. In the insistence of social content in their work, both the Constructivists and later the social realists clearly began within this tradition. Constructivism, however, as developed, in their total rejection of art as a justified social faculty, stood in confrontation with Social Realism as an artistic persuasion.

This basic inadequacy in the reading of the aesthetic of Marx and Engels was however, attributable to the failure of Marx and Engels themselves in generating a coherent presentation of their aesthetic theories. In any case, the understanding of Marxist aesthetics in the days saddling the October Revolution by artists and theoreticians was limited to their understanding of materialism. Among the most prominent proponents of

¹ Henri Arvon, *Marxist Esthetics*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

an art based on proletarian culture was Bogdanov, Lunacharskii and Gor'kii who initiated together the Workers' School at Capri. Their ideas were by and large incorporated into the programme of the Proletkul't (Proletarskaya kul'tura) founded immediately after October, 1917, in Petrograd and in Moscow in February, 1918. Bogdanov expounded on the thesis of artistic production as merely another form of labour (Lodder). In Marx's thought, art's use-value, as mentioned, depended on the identification of the labour of the individual artist with human needs. The aspect of art that was autonomous from society, that was the precondition of the peculiarity of the individual artwork, however, escaped Bogadov's recognition. To Bogadov, the purpose of art was the organization of social experience. This had subsequently been adopted as the primary thesis of Proletkul't.

Proletkul't was an organization which Bogdanov started in 1917 to promote proletarian culture. Since after the Revolution of 1905 Bogdanov's effort to revise Marxism had been the centre of controversy within Bolshevism. He separated culture, economics and politics as independent routes to communism, and furthermore extolled cultural changes above changes in the economic and political structures. Bogdanov equated proletarian culture with communism and saw cultural changes as the tantamount path to true communism. He rejected Western civilization, and insisted that new culture must be built by the proletariat, from which would then be generated the institution and its values. To Bogdanov, culture was the organizing principle of society, and it was only through developing a genuine proletarian culture that true communism could be achieved. Communist culture, economic and political structures were not synonymous to Bogdanov, and a communist society could not be accomplished until a cultural revolution similar to the Bolshevik Revolution in politics could be attained. In order to arrive at such a proletarian revolution, art had to take a leading role, since it was the instrument of organizing social experience, it was able to transform the aspiration and the psyche of the masses, to the ends of social mobilization.¹ As Bogdanov insisted that true proletarian culture must be generated by the workers, he rejected the Bourgeois culture of the West.

Lunarcharskii was sympathetic with Bogdanov's view on the generation of a proletarian culture and joined the Proletkul't with the hope of promoting

¹ Timothy Edward O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture: Anatolii Lunarcharskii* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, UMI Research Press), p. 71.

cultural transformation and renewal after the Revolution. However, Lunarcharskii's background as part of the old *intelligentsia* also infatuated in him an appreciation of history and particularly the achievements of Western civilization. He did not think that the Revolution necessarily incorporated a complete break with the cultural past. In fact Lunarcharskii's sentiments converged with that of Lenin's, in opposition to that of Bogdanov's, on one significant point, that was, both Lunarcharskii and Lenin considered the largely uneducated proletariat a hindrance to the development of Soviet culture and saw the old bourgeoisie and the *intelligentsia* to be of use at least in helping launch a cultural renewal. One of Lenin's greatest concerns was in fact mass education led by the party, while Bogdanov saw literacy and education as relatively easy goals that would be self-regulated spontaneously by the completely new proletarian culture. Whereas Bogdanov, as a positivist, saw the world as a unitary experience, and thought consciousness a powerful force of revolutionary change, and art the most powerful promoter of that collective consciousness.¹ Lunarcharskii himself contended that once artists came to accept the Revolution, they could not but reflect on and express its greatness.

While the revolutionary content of art culminating in a proletarian culture was a thesis widely accepted since the early days of the Revolution, it should be noted that it had not fared without opposition from the party leadership. Trotskii, for one, saw the danger in cultivating the dictatorship of proletarian culture, since the *International* was to be a classless

¹ O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 9.

society. But even more important was the objection by both Lenin and Trotskii to the primary tenet of Bogdanov in favour of a complete break from Western Culture. On a less ideological platform, Lenin in particular, was weary of Bogdanov's contention that since culture, economics and politics were independent though simultaneous social processes, the government should have no part in determining cultural affairs. Bogdanov wanted complete autonomy for Proletkul't. Lenin, to be sure was more concerned with control by the party line. In October, 1920, at the Second All-Russian Congress of Proletkul't, Lenin drafted a resolution for the absorption of Proletkul't into Narkompros (Narodnyi komissariat proveshcheniya -- People's Commissariat of Enlightenment). Although the submission of the arts under the government through the umbrella government organ of Narkompros was in the end accepted, the general concern with the proliferation of a proletarian culture remained within the programme of the Russian post-Revolutionary Avant-Garde, and remained the vital link between the Avant-Garde and the claim to a revolutionary society.

Lunarcharskii was Commissar of Enlightenment from 1918 to 1929. As such he continued to stress the importance of the role the attainment of culture and enlightenment would have in promoting the emergence of the true Communist society, a view influenced, not in the least, no doubt, by his membership in the old *intelligentsia*. Apart from the obvious need for the expertise of the old *intelligentsia* the Soviet had in building up an economic structure, Lunarcharskii felt that the *intelligentsia* could form an important bridge in transforming culture and knowledge towards the Communist future. Lunarcharskii thought that the final socialist society

would have no need for an *intelligentsia* in so much as every member of such society would be a worker - *intelligent*. But until then, only the *intelligentsia* was capable of carrying out the transformation of the present backwardness and general ignorance of the Soviet society.¹ He wrote:

In the final socialist society [communism] there will be no intelligentsia. But from this it does not follow that the intelligentsia in general will not exist in a socialist society. The final socialist society is still far off [in the future].²

and:

In the future the masses will be transformed into the intelligentsia, and this will be the death of the present intelligentsia, but an extraordinarily joyous death, for it will signify the final victory of the proletariat. Then a classless society will be created, then the moral equality of all humanity will be achieved, and then the intelligentsia will not be needed.³

The new role of the *intelligentsia* would be the promotion of economics and culture, much as their role in Tsarist Russia lied within the realm of politics. The *intelligentsia* would be the teacher of the proletariat until such time as the proletariat would attain the necessary enlightenment,

¹ O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 44.

² as quoted in O'Connor, *ibid.*, p.44

³ as quoted in O'Connor, *ibid.*, p.44

while at the same time the *intelligentsia* would become incorporated into the spirit of the proletariat through their contact with them. As Lunarcharskii explained:

We summon the learned to give their knowledge to the unlearned and to become infected with the power of the labouring nation. From this combination the creation of the deucated man will gradually begin, a fighter-titan, who strains every nerve in order to alter the face of the earth, and then a man-god, the creature for whom, perhaps, the world was created, who will reign over nature, and such a one about whom we dream when we say an educated man. ¹

Though not exclusively attributable to the effort of Lunarcharskii, the conflict between the *intelligentsia* and the Bolsheviks was lessened considerably, especially with the introduction of NEP (New Economic Policy) by Lenin in 1921, when the Bolsheviks saw enough advantages in persuading the *intelligentsia* to contribute their knowledge resources to the benefit of the new government to at least sway the party to a more accommodating stance towards them. This cultural pragmatism of the NEP on the other hand, also generated certain degrees of antagonism from the Bolsheviks hard liners, industrial workers, and the rank and file towards the *intelligentsia* on whom they relied, especially as the living standard of qualified specialists improved under the sanction of the NEP.² Thus while the specialists received pay on a higher scale, harassment at the

¹ as quoted in O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 47

² O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 35.

work place also became increasingly commonplace. Much of the party rank and file resented what they saw as a retreat from War Communism towards the moderate bourgeois values of the NEP, while a number of scientists and scholars demanded increasing autonomy from the party in cultural and technical affairs. The pragmatism of Lenin that led him to initiate NEP, and to the realization of the importance of the *intelligentsia* in the development of a Soviet Culture, which he saw as a gradual process, also led him to clash directly with demands for autonomy from such groups as Proletkul't. Lunarcharskii upheld Lenin's imposition of NEP as in accordance with his vision of cultural transformation.

Despite the idealism of Lunarcharskii and his aspirations for the programme of education in the formation of Soviet culture, imbedded in Narkompros, it was nevertheless clear that Bolshevik tolerance and accommodation for the *intelligentsia* was, in the end, due to pragmatic reasons. The Bolsheviks gave cultural and education promotion the title of the "third front", after politics and economics. Not only did this signify an ideological disfavour towards the urgency of the development of culture in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, pragmatically, it meant that already restricted amount of funds were to be diverted to economic and political programmes before it would come under the disposal of Narkompros. This situation was particularly true at the beginning of NEP, but continued to perpetuate through the economic programme.¹ In addition to economic difficulties, Narkompros's programmes were further hampered by the internal crevices that existed among those associated with the

¹ O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 52.

administering of culture. As O'Connor pointed out, Soviet society in the twenties was one characterized more by the plurality of the programmes of numerous proposals and theories of reform. Nakompros simply lacked the time, as much as the resources, to consolidate these innovations into a palpable, practiceable programme.

But even more damaging to the advancement of Nakompros's task were the infighting among the students and professors from the old *intelligentsia* regarding their acceptance of the Bolsheviks. At the time of the Revolution Bolshevik uprisings had little use for, or support from the universities. Although much of the students were radicalized, they preferred to support the Kadets, the Social Revolutionaries and even the Mensheviks. Only a small fraction of the *intelligentsia* had aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks, while others pursued the paths of overt or passive resistance. However, resistance to socialism was not synonymous with unacceptance of the Revolution. Trotskii, for one, did not want to unnecessarily alienate those in such middle grounds. He called those who are thus between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat *poputchik* (fellow traveller), and opted for the possibility of assimilating them into the Soviet Culture under the programme of NEP in culture. After the October Revolution the less radicalized majority of the Union of Art Workers (Soyuz deyateli iskusstv) formed in Petrograd under the new freedom after the February Revolution, demanded complete autonomy from the Soviet Administrative organ from Lunarcharskii. Many of those who were not completely being integrated into Soviet artistic organizations, however, did agree to work in the Department of Museums and Conservation of Antiquities (Otdel muzeev i okhrany stariny) which

eventually became one strong hold of such resistance against the Bolsheviks by the old *intelligentsia*. Soviet Society at this point was relatively pluralistic. It was, however, decided to keep the conservative artists apart from the more progressive organization, the Fine Arts Department, IZO (Otdel izobrasitel'nykh iskusstv) in the Nakompros Resolution and Directive concerning IZO on May 1918. Shterenberg, appointed head of the IZO in January, 1918, wanted the conservatives to work in this safe zone, since their work, as he saw it, had nothing to do with the proletariat.

Lunarcharskii launched a campaign of propaganda soon after the October Revolution as an attempt to conjure such members of the *intelligentsia* that were uncommitted and reluctant to take a stand regarding the new culture into reconciliation with the Bolsheviks. Here Lunarcharskii seemed to have the full sanction of Lenin. As pointed out earlier, Lenin took an accommodating stance towards the culture of the old Bourgeois culture. At the same time Lenin's vision of the function of art in society was very much one of the education of the masses. On 13th April, 1918, Lenin embarked on a policy endorsing the setting up of monumental propaganda to honour the Russian Socialist Revolution which Lunarcharskii eagerly endorsed. At the same time Lunarcharskii himself gave speeches and wrote extensively on the merits of the *intelligentsia's* taking up the revolutionary cause. Lunarcharskii's propaganda was, unlike that of Lenin's, of course aimed at "educating" the *intelligentsia* rather than the masses. The value of the aspirational content of art was one that he happily brought to the attention of his audience, as he announced during a meeting of artists and sculptors during the winter of 1917-1918:

I've just come from Vladimir Il'ich. Once again he has had one of those fortunate and profoundly exciting ideas with which he has so often shocked and delighted us. He intends to decorate Moscow's squares with statutes and monuments to revolutionaries and the great fighters for socialism. This provides both agitation for socialism and a wide field for the display of our sculptural talents. ¹

Within *Nakompros*, Lunarcharskii must first resolve the conflict between those who opted for "pure art" and those who advocated that all art should be political. Lunarcharskii himself recognized the importance of propaganda, especially as the education of the masses was to be carried out within a socialist spirit. As an important medium of social change art should not merely reflect the current reality, but should take part in the organization of reality that would induce changes. However, he recognized that when art became pure propaganda, and its content entirely didactic, it would have little mass appeal. However, as it was not in the nature of artists to indulge in party goals and programmes, to Lunarcharskii, the artist's role became to reflect the greatness of the Revolution, and its aspirations.²

The origin of public agitation in the art of the Russian Avant-Garde, however, did not merely start with Lenin's proclamation and sanction. Soon after the October Revolution, "The futurists", wrote Lunarcharskii, "were the first to come to the assistance of the Revolution. Among the

¹ I. Grabar', "Aktual'nye zadachi sovetskoi skul'ptury", *Iskusstvo*, No. 112, 1933, p.155, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, note No. 52, Chpt. 2.

² O'Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture*, p. 68.

intellectuals they most felt akinship with it and were more sympathetic to it". Rodchenko also declared in 1917 that they, the futurists, were the first to come to work with the Bolsheviks.¹ Again, later he recalled: "I became utterly engrossed in [the Revolution] with all my will".² Tatlin also wrote: "to Accept or not accept the October Revolution. There was not such question for me. I organic merged into active creative social and pedagogical life".³ Lunarcharskii appealed to the broadly based Association of Art to create "new, free, popular forms of artistic life". As a response, Mayakovskii, Kamensky and David Burlynk drafted *Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of Art: the Hoarding of Literature and the Painting of Streets*:

From this day forward, with the abolition of Tsardom, the domicile of art in the closets and sheds of human genius -- palaces, galleries, salons, libraries, theatres -- is abrogated. ⁴

He also wrote in the first number of Art of the Commune:

The streets are our brushes, the squares our palette. ⁵

They took the slogan of "All arts to all the people".

¹ Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde*, (New Haven: Yale University Press) p. 139.

² Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 48.

³ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 47.

⁴ Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde*, p. 139.

⁵ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 48.

Mayakovskii indeed foretold the importance of architectonic arts in the palette of the Russian Avant-Garde (for it is within such that the arts could directly involve the programme of life itself). However, in these early days of the Revolution, the immediate concern for artists was the creation of an art consistent with the programme of Revolution.

Lunarcharskii and Lenin at least agreed on the role of art within the education of the masses, more specifically towards the establishment of a communist culture. Although Lunarcharskii called for the creation of "new, free, popular forms of artistic life", given his disposition concerning the preservation of the old bourgeois culture, this could more accurately be interpreted as a concern for the adaptation of the existing Avant-Garde into the new revolutionary culture. It was clear that the new art should follow the path initiated in the pre-revolutionary era by Russian pioneers such as Tatlin, Rodchenko, the Pevsners, and Popova, who had already, by that time, evolved a particular formal language following the legacy of Cezanne, Picasso, and Braque. Given the adversary stance of such Avant-Garde of the West towards established social institutions, the concerns of the Russian Avant-Garde in incorporating themselves into Revolutionary culture could be seen as political as it would be purely ideological. The Russian Avant-Garde was thus faced with a new problem, the active incorporation of a social content within a language established till now by and large formalistically. The programme of the Avant-Garde of the West, one of negation that arose from the tension between the artistic sensibility and the existing social order was no longer appropriate within the new social construct that spoke no longer of rebellion, but of aspirations and construction. The other recourse of art in such

circumstances was to turn to embracing entirely the social programme, a discourse by no means alien to the Russian consciousness within the influences of Dobrolynbov.

It was however, familiar discourse heard with different context. Instead of art as reflection of society art became a salient instrument propagating the message of the Revolution. From the conception of the Union of Art Workers, in which Mayakovskii participated, which had demanded the autonomy of art from politics, to Mayakovskii's responses to Lunarcharskii's appeal, it seemed that the Avant-Garde had been appropriated by its own commitment. In these early days of contact between the Russian Avant-Garde and the dominant social institution it had become the powerful instrument for the proclamation of a new social order establishing itself in spite of art. The Avant-Garde, it seems had fallen short of the ideals of an art that would become the leader and model of social organization.

Many of the artists who later became Constructivists were engaged in such new position of art. Painting was less adaptable to the new role of agitation than the other arts, most notably the literary arts, theatre, and architectonic constructions due to their compatibility with situation of larger audiences. Much of what was generated in the visual arts tended to be either spatial in nature, or degenerated into mass produceable graphic provocations. Tatlin, as head of the Moscow IZO was put in charge of the implementation of Lenin's plan for monumental propaganda in Moscow. He submitted a plan for fifty monuments in Moscow. In one installation, Tatlin planned coordinated illumination with search lights and

fire works, focussing on the Red Square, signifying the replacement of the old order with the new. Popova also collaborated with Aleksandr Vesnin on planning a theatricalized parade for May, 1921. The plan called for thousands of soldiers, gymnasts, military bands, trains, tanks, and planes, to march from the "Fortress of Capitalism" on one end of Khodyn' Field in Moscow to the other end, the "City of the Future". Popova and Vesnin's plan was never executed due to the financial hardship the new Soviet Government endured at that moment. However, in their drawing, one could clearly see the "architectonic" set that extended throughout and incorporated the entire field. On the left, the "fortress of Capitalism" was represented as enclosed and forbidding while the "City of the Future" on the right was open, and full of mechanical vibrance. The future was symbolized by mechanization and movement. The set drew on the iconographic powers of imagery, but was not built around the nature of mechanical construction. The relationship between the movements of the parts of the parade was fundamental at best, and the entire project was not able to rise beyond the level of powerful symbolism. Such were the mechanisms of propaganda art where art was subjugated to the demonstration of its content as its sole purpose. Such distinctions also set apart Tatlin's Monument to the Third International from other such instruments of agitation, in that Tatlin's Tower went beyond agitation and spoke of a fundamental change in the conception of art that had been conceived in Tatlin's imagination during the pre-revolutionary years, and had been given a new dimension and commitment by the new role in the new society that Tatlin had found himself obliged to expound on. The Revolution generated a feverish

search within the artistic *intelligentsia* for its own identity and its role in society, and such search had, in a sense given Tatlin's pre-revolutionary investigation a new justification. In any case the Avant-Garde just could not stop at the cul de sac that was propaganda, whereas propaganda had introduced the Russian Avant-Garde to a dimension the scale of which was never before imaginable. But more importantly, it had introduced the Avant-Garde to the possibility of social commitment, either through the conviction of the leftist artists, or through the needs for the arts to reorganize and manipulate their lot within the new Soviet reality. It had opened up the category of "proletariat art" that the Futurists so readily embraced that they had perhaps, for an instance, lost the identity of art to pure agitation.

If the events of 1917 had suddenly put the Russian Avant-Garde face to face with the necessity to adopt a social content in their work their formalistic language was developed in the years preceeding the Revolution. Between 1904 and 1909 Tatlin studied at the Penza art school under Afanas'ev who Tatlin later said was one of the persons that had influenced him the most. Afanas'ev was a member of the Society of Travelling Art Exhibitions (Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh khudozhestvennykh vystavok, 1870 - 1923), also known as the Itinerants or the Wanderers. Stylistically realists, these artists were committed to create art reflecting contemporary social reality. By 1919 - 1910 when Tatlin enrolled in the Moscow School of Painting he had already been associating with the Russian Avant-Garde, more specifically with Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. Through his Acquaintance with the Russian Avant-Garde at that point Tatlin was introduced to Western

progressive artists. To Tatlin's 1913 - 1914 visit to Picasso in Paris had already been attributed the importance of having provided Tatlin with the formative experience of seeing Picasso's Cubist collages.

Cubist Collages opened up new territories in painting. As far as what constituted a painting, or even the definition of works of art itself was put up for re-examination. No longer was the work of art bound to eternity. The very fact that Cubist collages utilized pieces of everyday reality, bits and pieces of newspapers, magazines, even refuse, spoke of the ephemerality of the works of art themselves as tied to the very facts of reality, and to the temporal nature of their creators.

The most obvious distinction between Cubist collages and Tatlin's painterly reliefs was that the former remained objective, whereas Tatlin's reliefs developed into purely geometric and non-objective constructions extending forward from the surface of the canvas. Such distinction only revealed a more fundamental distinction between the ways Tatlin and the Cubists used their materials. Cubist collages were constructed of bits of materials that were extracted out of and remain images of the bits of reality they represent. In fact, the very tenet of Cubist collages was founded upon the tension between the fragments of reality superimposed on each other, and the on conflict between that which is real, retaining their connection to separate realities even as part of another created whole. Such overlay when seen as a whole draws a new association which cannot be entirely encompassed by the individual fragments. In Tatlin's development, he had stripped his materials of their association with the temporal world, and spoke instead of the tension between the

material attributes of each raw piece he incorporated into his reliefs. As soon as Tatlin broke out of the pictorial frame of his earlier reliefs, he had abandoned the tension between that which was constructed and that which was painted on canvas, and between that extension from the surface of the canvas that qualifies the relief, and the very fact that all these were still entrapped within the traditional orthogonality of the canvas as a painting. Rather, Tatlin later developed his counter-reliefs which, as the name implied, was constructed and positioned on the surface of the wall so that the relief protruded out to incorporate that space in front of the two dimensional surface of the wall, rather than defining space and plasticity as done traditionally by carving into the solidity of the wall. Here the flatness of the wall was recognized as yet another material comprising the horizon for the contrasts of physical qualities of materials incompatible with the illusionistic space characteristic of paintings.

From the point of view of architecture, Tatlin's counter-relief constituted a cardinal point in the development of a language of an architectural Avant-Garde. The additive nature of the way that the counter-reliefs were constructed turned the traditional conception of architectural composition upon itself. Although the whole was clearly definable, no longer were the parts only identifiable as part of a larger system. The parts in Tatlin's counter-reliefs demanded as much of the whole and controlled the disposition of the whole as much as they are subordinated to the whole upon which subordination they owed their existence. Such possibilities were never present within Picasso's collages up to this point. To have accomplished it spatially, in a way encompassing the spatial *environment*

not contained within itself called for euphoria surrounding the liberation of the architectural language.

A second significant breakthrough of Tatlin's counter-reliefs was the degree of which space was incorporated into an integral material with the entire construction. Space was no longer merely shaped nor was merely used to shape solid forms, but became materialized as a counterpart to the solidity of physical material used. Space was used as integral to the very structure of Tatlin's constructions. The importance of Tatlin's inventions cannot be overestimated. Throughout the rest of the history of architectural modernism architects remained confronted with the problem of such additive and spatial possibilities.

The way in which different materials were combined and manipulated in such a way that recognized their individual qualities, that amplified the contradictions generated as these different qualities were brought together, and that resolved such contradictions within the entire construction, was what the Russian Avant-Garde called *Faktura*. *Faktura* was exemplified in Tatlin's counter-reliefs, but the concept was also essential to the understanding of the works of other Avant-Gardists ranging from painting to poetry. Of special importance in this respect were the works of Khlebnikov in poetry, as much as that of Tatlin's in the visual arts. Of primary importance to *Faktura* was first of all the ability to recognize the inherent qualities of materials. In many cases, especially in the case of words, such inherent qualities must be expanded to include associative meanings incorporated in each material. For the poets the associative meanings of words included an awareness of their

evolution through history, and their distortions through daily usage. To Tatlin, the *Faktura* of his materials then also contained the experiences of different uses for such materials in reality, such as the association of wood and ropes from maritime contexts. Such use of materials, as one must already have realized, existed prior to Tatlin and the Russian Futurists as the powerful tool of Cubist collages. Tatlin, however, had taken such devices out of the realm of objective art.

A second significant development of the Constructivist aesthetic and formal language was exemplified by Rodchenko, one of Tatlin's followers. Between 1919 and 1921 Rodchenko embarked on a series of "constructions" which had led him to an aesthetic conclusion akin to but quite different from that of Tatlin's. Unlike Tatlin, Rodchenko had not taken to emphasize the materialistic attributes and had not made a case in contrasting the inherent in the materials he used in these "constructions". Rather, Rodchenko made conscious efforts to enunciate the geometric properties brought out by the superimposition of the components of his "constructions". The nature of Rodchenko's objects brought about an important contribution to the spectrum of formal qualities that was later collectivized under Constructivism.

Rodchenko's embarking point was, likewise, the realization of the escape from the encapsulating two dimensional canvas surface into the incorporation of "real space". However, even in his early "constructions", it was clear by the very fact that he had painted these objects in monochrome, that the material qualities he expounded on was on the dimension of formal implications brought out by the geometric shapes,

and, more importantly, projections, exemplified precisely by their monochromatic treatment. In other words Rodchenko was more interested in the materiality of geometry. Rodchenko was made aware of the implications of the projection of lines, the spaciousness of planes and masses, and the exclamations of points. Rodchenko's "constructions" incorporated space not as a structural material, but as the encompassing dimensions within which these constructions began to acquire multiple qualities made possible by movements around them. In this respect, his "constructions" had qualities not unlike those of sculptures. But the language and thereby the meaning, was different, as he argued that as painting became non-objective, the focus became that of its essence. The geometric "essence" that Rodchenko made the fulcrum of his studies made the move into space, from the flat and illusionistic plane of the painterly surface. Imminently, Rodchenko's geometric investigations then led him to work with rule and compasses.

The utilization of rule and compasses, and the concentration of the formalistic qualities led Rodchenko to a reduction of his language to that of predeliberated constructions that seemed to have been issued through a rational faculty of deliberation. This put his work in contrast to the intuitive moves of Tatlin which brought out the tension between the inherent qualities of materials, at least at the time of his counter-reliefs, by the very irrationality of his superimposition. Rodchenko's rationality led him to a series of constructions entitled *Spacial Objects* built out of pieces of wood of equal length, used in a modular fashion. Here the relative neutrality of the building modules called attention to not so much the inherent qualities of the individual modules, but of that object created

through their combination. The emphasis of these works depended entirely on the relations between the independent modules put in various posture in relation to each other. As their postures changed, so did the formal qualities of the whole go through various transformations. These works, executed 1920 - 1921 also displayed a quality of "consolidation", not present within the earlier works, in that the relations between the geometric solids and space was brought about not so much by the process of projection. In these works space was to a larger degree, incorporated into the definition of the object as a whole, not in structural terms, but almost as voids. The use of repetitive elements, and of space, called to mind the very great genesis of a Constructivist manifestation, created 1919 - 1920 by Tatlin, his Monument to the Third International.

To what degree did Tatlin and Rodchenko influence each other in these projects could not be determined. However, the change in Rodchenko's work, and Tatlin's monument, represented an undeniable emphasis seen by and large in later Constructivist projects. Another important quality seen in Tatlin's Tower that also became evident in Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions* after this point, carried out in the same year (1920 - 1921) as his wood blocks constructions, was the incorporation of "movement" into both the internal dynamism of the work, and its relation to the observer, thereby engaging the observer directly into the scheme of creation. All these irrevocably pointed out their potential of being incorporated into an architectural language. In Rodchenko's case, at this point, however, these qualities were exemplified by his extension of his *Spatial Constructions* into a series of concentric formal elements, joined to each other by a piece of wire. These collapsible construction, not only

denote motion itself in their three dimensionality, but also motion in the very specific context of growth seen in the formal arrangements of the parts.

The October Revolution marked a fundamental change in the conception of a Russian Avant-Garde. As Paul Wood pointed out in his review of Lodder's book, these changes were two fold. Firstly, financial sponsorship from Narkompros replaced the patronage of an enlightened bourgeois audience. Secondly, the programme, and not the least, the negational attitude towards bourgeois culture was reformulated into a programme of support for the Revolution. The second aspect of the post-revolutionary Russian Futurists, so often mistakenly portrayed simple-mindedly as a form of utopianism, constituted a reconception of the fundamental relationship between culture and production. Despite the formal language already accomplished by Tatlin prior to 1917, as the status of the Avant-Garde went through a transformation within the new social context, so did art acquire a new content which ultimately changed its manifestation as an art form.

Both the Futurists and Proletkul't, under the auspices of Narkompros adopted a commitment towards creating a new proletarian art. Proletkul't, under the influence of Bogdanov and Russian/Slavic nationalistic tendencies explored the realm of folk and vernacular art in an attempt to transform and raise such onto a level that could be incorporated into a specific unification of science, industry and art, what Bogdanov called 'tectology'. Proletkul't was set up as an independent mass working class organization. The generation of a proletarian culture to Bogdanov could

not be left to the government, but must instead be taken up as the task of a working class elite with the proper ideological conviction.

Bogdanov's short-handed quotation from Marxism led him to encompass entirely the product of proletarian labour and to create a programme through which, not only their aesthetics, but also the nature of their cognitive abilities would be transformed whole into the core of a proletarian led culture. Bogdanov's embrace of Russian folk culture consisted of, on the one hand, adopting the reflection of such folk sensibility as the programme of art, and on the other a proclamation through artistic means to the proletariat to take up the cause of building a proletarian culture. Proletkul't artists thus worked on the Agit-Prop trains as a means to stimulate a population still ill-housed, ill-fed, and illiterate. Agit-Prop thus became a primary means of mass communication in early Soviet society.

Proletkul't sought to transform the status of proletarian culture through a fusion of it into the artistic faculty. This programme adopted reminded one of the Wanderers movement, a group with which Tatlin, as pointed out earlier, had had close relations. The goal of the proletarianization of culture was to be carried out by mobilizing workers and the masses for cultural works, primarily through such organizations as the trade unions. Proletkul't's programme of reflecting proletarian life through artistic representation, however, had not generated any specific forms of formal convictions. Such representations remained objective. In fact, members of Proletkul't had on numerous occasions attacked and questioned the Futurists' claim to a proletarian art based on non-objective language which the mass proletariat would certainly have difficulty understanding as

artistic output. Such judgements based on a reduction of the Futurists' polemics to Proletkul't terms were founded on their failure to investigate profoundly into the Futurist disposition, however, only served to trivialize their assessment of the Futurists' art. Indeed, Proletkul't, though one of the most salient proponents of proletarian culture was not alone in their espoused commitment. Other organizations such as the Central Labour Institute and the League of Time, were also given to the exhortation of the proletarian clause, as was INKhUK (Institut khudozhestvennoi kul'tury - Institute of Artistic Culture) and VKhUTEMAS (Vysshie gosudarstvennye khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie masterskie - Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops), the later the principle institution of the Constructivists.

But the Constructivists saw as their principle task the dismemberment of the concept of art as individual expression based on the preconception of the object represented. Rather, art was seen to be the manifestation of the artist's understanding of different materials, their inherent qualities and their associative meanings. Tatlin, by 1915 had already achieved a conception of art within such premises in his reliefs and counter-reliefs. Rodchenko had also gone ahead and forged this into a non-objective formal language the execution of which, however, was preconceived, and as Lodder called it, Euclidean. Tatlin's lead eventually led to not merely the negation of the terms of art, but to a rethinking of what the concerns of art were, and what was art. To justify such a redefinition of art would inevitably lead to the rethinking of a broader historical and social implications of his polemics. Tatlin's search was aided by the October Revolution which allowed him to formulate the commitment of

his art to one dedicated to the generation of a new cultural framework. The concept of construction had denied art, in its new context of the revolutionary society, its sanctuary of reflection and attempted to place it in a broader framework that could be expanded to include the social construct, taking social materials in the Marxist sense, since it was based on the relationship between material givens. The Constructivists were clearly not after a Marxist aesthetic but a new conception of art within communist conception of the social construct. Like other Avant-Garde movements, it sought to negate art as an entirely independent faculty. But unlike the others Avant-Garde movement whose power as a critique of society was condoned, first of all, by the possibility of the separation of art from the bourgeois mode of production into the marginal under the autonomy of the category of aesthetics, Constructivism sought to fully engage art into the process of social life and of production, abandoning its autonomy, adopting as the principle of its organization the very organization of society that the new communist society aspired to achieve. In this was Constructivism, as transformed from its creation as an aesthetic language to its adaptation of a new content, different from the Marxist conception of art, from other Leftist and progressive art movements, from the politicized Berlin Dada, from Agit-Prop, and also did they exceed the place of art within much of Bolshevism itself.

All said, but perhaps one of the greatest apatheosis is Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (third commitern) which was exemplary of the most aparent manifestation of the attitude of construction injected with a content of social conviction. The power was that tension brought forth by the *faktura* of glass and metal, but also by a resolution of the

superimposition of these material in the dynamics of the forms layered on top of each other. Such layering was heightened by the transparency of both the metal and glass construction so that at any moment the construction of the Tower was fully aparent, exhorting the factor of being man-made in such 'earth bound' form as the spiral. Many had traced Tatlin's spirals back to such icons as the *Tower of Babel* in its by now familiar execution in the world of art. The frugality of such art-historical inferences could be made obvious by two points: firstly, the *Tower of Babel* by Brugel, and the *Tower of Labour* by Rodin, as Elderfield had infered, although no doubt familiar to the artist Tatlin, could not have been known to the masses of the Soviet Union at which Tatlin's propagandistic creation was aimed:

As Principle it was necessary to stress that first all the elements of the monument should be modern technical apparatuses, promoting agitation and propaganda... ¹

The ends for which Tatlin's Monument was created casted severe doubt on the power of such iconographic inferences would have. Even had Tatlin been aware of the meanings encased whithin such iconic forms, and indeed, even if such meanings might had been entirely appropriate for the Soviet context, they could not have been a primary motive behind Tatlin's choice of forms.

Secondly, the language of dynamics in Tatlin's Tower was infinitely more pronounced than any implications of establishment and accomplishment it

¹ Comment by Punin on Tatlin's project, N. Punin, 'O pamyatnikakh', *Iskusstvo kommuny*, No. 14, 9 March 1919, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 56.

might had had, such as incorporated in the image of the *Tower of Babel* or even in the Eiffel Tower. To be sure the *Monument to the Third International* hailed the establishment of the Communist International. But such concept of the International belonged very much to the legacy of War Communism, to struggle and liberation. Tatlin's monument was not to the establishment of the Soviet State, but to the spread of communism across national boundaries. Such was the aspiration of the International, and the content of agitation and propaganda. The inferences of the historic references of the form of the spiraling tower told us less than its image in Tatlin's imagination. Tatlin was reported by A.A. Begicheva to have said:

I placed at its basis the screw, as the most dynamic form - a symbol of time: energy, lucidity, striving. ¹

There was no doubt as to the symbolic potential of the monument, symbolic of the content of Tatlin's commitment to the cause of the International. The use of materials of industry might amplify such hopes for the future and such fascination with the newly found beauty of industrial production and mechanics. But at the heart of Tatlin's creation lied not so much a total surrender of the artistic language to machine aesthetics, not to the fascination with the power of engineering, but in fact a continuation of Tatlin's pre-October concern with the expression of materials, and of construction. Tatlin himself drew the connections between his pre-revolutionary preoccupations and the monument:

¹ A. Begicheva, "Vospominaniya O Tatline. Do kontsa ne razgadi", MS, private archive, Moscow, p.10, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 65.

In 1915, in Moscow, there was an exhibition of material and laboratory models (an exhibition of reliefs and counter-reliefs). The exhibition of 1917 gave a series of examples of selection of materials, of more complicated investigations and demonstration of materials as such, and its consequences - movement, tension and their interrelationship

the investigation of material, volume and construction made it possible for us, in 1918, to move towards creating an artistic form of a selection of the materials iron and glass as the materials of modern classicism, equivalent in their severity to marble in the past. In this way there emerges the possibility of uniting purely artistic forms with utilitarian aims.

An example: the Monument to the Third International. ¹

The symbolic power of the monument was more derived from the contradiction between the transparent truss work of metal, a material of strength, and the transparent solids, built of glass, than it was from about being built of metal and glass. There was also a certain elements of contradiction between the rationality and the purity of the glass forms - a cube, pyramid, cylinder and hemisphere - and the irrationality behind the organic form of the double spiral. The dynamics of the monument were accentuated not in the least by the contradiction between the dynamic forms of the stationary metal supports, and the rotational

¹ V.E. Tatlin, T. Shapiro, I. Meerzon and P. Vinogradov, "Nasha predstavlyashchaya rabota", *VIII s'ezd sovetov. Ezhedrevnyi byulleten's'ezda VTs/K*, No. 13, 1 January 1921, p.11, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 64.

movements of the glass solids supported by the metal spirals. Again Tatlin wrote about this tension he derived from these contradictions in 1932:

There is normally a tension between simple and rectilinear forms and forms determined by the simplest curves. In architecture the use of curves and forms determined by complicated curvatures created by a complicated movement, a straight line or a curve is still a fairly primitive character; the whole thing is limited to a common section of the simplest forms...

The artist shall in his work, as a counterpart to technology, present a succession of new relationships between the forms of the material. A series of forms determined by complicated curvatures will demand other plastic, material and constructive relationships - the artist can and must master these elements. ¹

The significance of the communicative power of Tatlin's Tower was that it was based not on symbolic images, not on imageries derived from history, but that it demanded a complete break from that which was past, and arrived at a non-personal, non-objective language that was clearly emotional, dynamic and communicative. Communications here depended not on collective memories of historical references, but on a collective sensitivity to the implications of non-objective forms. It was a language that could be understood by all once it was put in its historic context as

¹ inr 10 V.E. Tatlin, "Iskusstvo v tekhniku", *Brigada khudozhnikov*, No. 6, 1932, pp.15 - 16, translation taken from Andersen, *Vladimir Tatlin*, pp. 75-6., in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 65.

Monument to the Third International. Where the language of Tatlin's counter-reliefs could not be understood by all, certainly not by illiterate proletarians, Tatlin's non-objective inquiry into the tension between forms and materials could easily locate a common sensibility when seen through the glasses of revolutionary aspirations. Tatlin's language was clearly representational, from which his architecture derived its power.

Tatlin's Tower was not only representative of revolutionary sentiments. At the very core of that fierce movement, the upheaval of the human race, encasing something as eternal as the cosmic order, as if in turning against its own history it had once and for all eradicated the ephemeral and established the eternal mechanisms now beating in itself as if that mechanism were its own heart. There was without doubt a clear reference to mechanics, not just in the choice of materials, but also in forms and constructions. For as much as Tatlin's reliefs and counter-reliefs brought out the question of *faktura* - the question of resolving the contradictions created by the coming together of different materials, it was only in the Tower that Tatlin turned to the very ways in which materials were used in industrial productions, dictated by the utilitarian requirements of industrial productions. It was only in the Tower that Tatlin began using different materials not just as different in textural, strength, and other inherent qualities, but in ways in which the inherent qualities of materials would dictate the forms of construction for which they were utilized, much as in industrial productions. Materials here, in other words, became *construction materials*. Thus the clad of the double spirals to be constructed of metal, took the forms of triangulations in metallic structures, while glass panes were used to enclose space and form

volumes. The more dynamic forms of the spirals were taken by metal, a strong, versatile material, while the more self-stable forms of the cube, the pyramid, the cylinder and the hemisphere lend their strength to and borrowed the mystery from glass. It was indeed easy to line up all these elements as symbolisms, but it surely took a great artist to present them in so contradictory a way that such contradictions immediately conjured up emotions about the boldness, contradictions, denials, egocentricity, and all the sentiments embedded in the opt for discontinuity with history that were the revolutionary ambitions.

Tatlin's Tower marked an exciting new beginning for architecture not merely as a collage of different materials, nor just as non-objective forms, but in its ability to recognize the inherent constructional properties of each different materials and to overlay these different constructional systems, each with its own integrity, in a way that would bring out the qualities to be got from the tension of the confrontation. This propinquity to the discourse of medium and techniques was surely an attitude of the Avant-Garde, but now present even in architecture, long suffering from its insecurity about the implications of its medium seen from the perspectives of representation and expression. But Tatlin's Tower showed the possibility of representation within the very process of construction, within the ways in which architecture must come to terms with its materials and to recognize the expressive power in construction even without the frugal aid of objective imagery, imageries that in architecture had passed from age to age, of which the meaning had become so dilute as to be inconsequential within the new, modern, society. Much as the modern sensibility was about the narcissistic image

of human ability to construct, about the egocentricity of technological possibilities, Tatlin's Tower represented the representation of that sentiment. But such representation, as all representation, only make sense, and thus must be understood within its historical context, one that revealed itself in a particular social and cultural condition.

Tatlin repeatedly referred to the utilitarian nature of his Tower. He rejected the traditional figurative monument, his monument was to house the seat of the International. However, albeit such functional programme, Tatlin's conception of the utilitarian was clear from the start, denying that the synthesis of all art was to be found only in architecture, he defined his task as

...to find a single form, simultaneously architectonic, plastic, and painterly, which would have the possibility of synthesizing the separate forms of these or other technical apparatuses. ¹

Much as Tatlin's Tower conveyed the exhortation of industry and technology the resolution of its constructional system remained only illusionistically technological. Firstly, given the size of the monument, the vertical and the diagonal struts holding the double spirals in place would, recalling to mind the Eiffel Tower, most efficiently be replaced by much more articulated triangulations. The inclination of the monument, and the boldness, or the coarseness of Tatlin's triangulations called for the diagonal buttress on the side of the monument, which was itself

¹ N. Punin, "O pamyatnikakh", *Iskusstvo kommuni*, No.14, 9 March, 1919, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 59.

canterlivering at a structurally inconvenient angle. The strong directionality of the structural awkwardness of this butress, and the overhanging, truncated cone at the apex of the spiral gave the monument much of its dynamic thrust. The overhanging cone itself, was tilted off the axis of the monument, it was not support by the spirals, but was instead formed by an extension of the struts supporting the spirals.

There was thus this constant struggle between the rational, the structurally necessary, and the irrational, that only create new structural necessities. Structural efficiency was sacrificed for a more powerful language that only described to its viewer the *representation* of technical feasibility and technical logic. In such confrontation between the expected image of the mechanical apparatus within the collective consciousness, and the real language of engineering efficiency and of the mechanically informed, Tatlin's language was one of the representation of utilitarian ambitions rather than one of submission to utilitarian control. His was not a proof of technical possibilities nor engineering wizardry. In such ways Tatlin's representation remained essentially an aesthetic and did not thus give up the autonomy of art. The communicative power of Tatlin's monument lied exactly on the survival of this autonomy, whereas he in fact had not yet succeeded in creating an integration of art into the social organization or the social process of production. By the same token, it could also be argued that Tatlin's imagination had essentially remained quite apart from the process of engineering, and that he ultimately had not been able to transform the imperatives of engineering, on its own terms, to a language of representation. Tatlin's technological

imagination thus remained on the level of critique, in this case a critique of the structural medium of architecture.

It was thus significant that Tatlin showed no interest in expressing the mechanisms that were to make possible the rotational movements of his Platonic forms encased within the discourse of the double spiral. It followed that what he was more interested in was the relationship between the various rhythms and the different paths of their movements and not movement itself. Tatlin's concern was more the abstraction of cosmological orders and remained separate from pragmatic mechanical interests. His preoccupation with cosmological orders was in turn that of an abstraction of history in its representation by time. Milner engaged in a rather extensive study of Tatlin's close friendship with the poet Khlebnikov who provided Tatlin with much inspiration in his work on the interpolation of historically associative meanings in materials. In Khlebnikov's case the use of materials became the use of words and sounds in his poems. Tatlin joined Khlebnikov in his rejection of the Futurism of Marinetti and instead adopted the Russian word *budetlyanin* which meant "future-dweller". Khlebnikov defined *budetlyanstvo* as the study of the "influence of the future on the past".¹ Khlebnikov believed intervals between major historic occurrences to be rhythmic and structured across time. While one may be skeptical as to the degree of Tatlin's conviction in Khlebnikov's metaphysical conception of history, there could not be any doubt as to the suitability of the representation of time as an abstraction of history. If Tatlin had intended his monument to be

¹ Milner, *Vladimir Talin*, p. 166.

instructional on the world view within the Marxist conception he had undoubtedly failed in such endeavour. For the view of history within the Marxist point of view (also held by Hegel) was one of an evolutionary process. However, when seen as the abstraction of the *idea* of history, the periodic relationships of Tatlin's platonic forms remained a convincing suggestion of the eternity and certainty of time within the movement of history.

It was clear that Tatlin was concerned with the *representation* of the *ideology* of the machine, of utilitarianism, of history, and of revolution. At no point did Tatlin's Tower belong to the category of machine art that Groz expounded on, nor was his art intended to be utilitarian. Puni was to later rebuke the utilitarian polemics of the Avant-Gardist publication, *Art of the Commune*:

...art cannot be useful because this ultimately contradicts the undoubted general principle of "utility" in contemporary industry... because aesthetics do not govern life, but follow in the wake of it...The construction of an object is completely dependent on its purpose, the artists may add only superfluous elements to this... Here we don't need artists, but very good technicians and mathematicians... all contemporary objects are beautiful and good, because the connection of their parts, the necessity of each part is dictated only by their usefulness, and the more purely this principle is carried out, the better the object is.

But in Tatlin's Tower it was the *idea* of utilitarianism that was important. It was precisely because Tatlin did not abandon the terms of art in favour of a purely production polemics that availed him the power of

representation. As the polemics of Constructivism were gradually consolidated, however, we were to see the increasing importance of utilitarianism, becoming not just the ideology, but actually taking over the content of their art.

¹ I. Puni, "Tvovchestvo zhizni", *Iskusstvo kommuny*, No. 5, 1919, p.1, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 77.

Since immediately following the October Revolution "Production art" had become increasingly associated with proletarianism within certain circles of the Futurists that were to evolve into Constructivist artists. Unlike the proletarian polemics of Proletkul't, these Futurists viewed the qualification of "proletarian" not in reference to certain class statuses. They identified it, instead, with workers activities, that is, industrial productions, and sought to adopt such a process into the production of art. Thus unlike Proletkul't that attempted to give old aesthetics new contents, to the Futurists, proletarian art of the future did not mean the adaptation of existing proletarian and folk aesthetics. Nor, in their bid for a complete break with the past, were the Futurists interested in non-industrial productions which by and large still dictated the real processes of production in such fields such as architecture, housing, and objects of daily house hold utility. In other words, the concerns of the Futurists were not that of integrating art and proletarian culture as they found it, but to see the process of industrial production as the organizing principles of the revolutionary proletarian society of the future, and to integrate such principles into art as also the principles of artistic creativity. Adopting thus what they saw as the true process of production the Futurists decried the illusionism of conventional and traditional bourgeois objective art: art was a lie.

The first signs of the consolidation of the idea of a "production art" appeared in the *Art of the Commune*, the official journal of the IZO from December 1918 to April 1919, among a whole assortment of ideas prevalent among the Avant-Garde at that time. It was in this journal that Mayakovsky first urged artists to see the streets as their brushes and

squares their palettes. Although as Chuzhak pointed out later, the practice of Futurism at this time was given almost entirely to agitational posters,¹ there emerged the search for a more coherent theoretical basis for the production of revolutionary art. Such new ideas were first proposed by such members as Osip Brik, Boris Kushner, Nikolai Punin, and later, Arvatov and Alexei Gan.

From the beginning, both Brik and Kushner took art from the realm of ideology and identified it as but another form of production. The artist, stripped of distortions now became "only a constructor and technician, only a supervisor and a foreman".² Such ideas fed on the concept of the *material* creation of art seen earlier in its revelation under Tatlin, and in such a way art was identified as the creation of real objects. However, these artists followed by placing art in the category of industrial work. The separation of art and production was seen as the remnants of bourgeois social structures.³ Avant-Garde debates in the Soviet Union at that time were concentrated mostly within institutions such as IZO, the State Free Arts Studios. In 1920 INKhUK was set up after the initiative of Kandinskii. The goal of INKhUK was to determine the "objective criteria of artistic value". The early programme of INKhUK constituted of, in large part, Kandinskii's investigative initiative into the means by which art affected the experiential elements of human understanding. The

¹ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 76.

² V. Dimitriev, "Perryi itoy", *Iskusstvo kommuny*, No. 15, 1919, p.2, in Lodder, *ibid.*, p. 76.

³ "Primechanie redaktsii", *Iskusstvo kommuny*, no.7, 1919, p.2, in Lodder, *ibid.*, p.77.

psychological implications of such language corresponded to Kandinskii's own inclinations in focusing on the subconscious dimensions effectuated by the use of colours and forms. INKhUK artists sought to establish a scientific basis for artistic analysis and drew as their subject of inquiry, from such sources as children's art and folk art, African tribal art, as well as comparative studies between artistic output in different mediums such as music and sculpture.

Kandinskii's willingness to draw from the psychological and the mythical subsequently compromised his leadership among other INKhUK artists who maintain that artistic inquiry must be based on the material qualities of objects as the source of creation. Rodchenko, Stepanova, Babichev and Bryusova took over the administration of the Institute as Kandinskii announced his departure on 27 January 1921, while the General Working Group of Objective Analysis was organized in November 1920. It was within this group that the Constructivist programme began to take form. Members in the group included Rodchenko, Alexei Gan, Stepanova, Vladimir and Georgiy Stenberg, Ioganson and Medunetsky.

INKhUK, under the General Working Group of Objective Analysis was dedicated to the objective definition of the work of art, the process of analysis that was to be independent of the creative process under the influences of perception and aesthetic emotions. This approach was to be based on the basic elements that constitute a work of art on the level of their *materiality*, and on the ways in which these elements would be organized to form the work of art as a whole. It was thought by the group that in adhering to such an objective study of art they would be

able to override all tendentious art plagued by problems of ephemeral, subjective aesthetic, historic, cultural and social nature. General disagreement arose within the group, however, over the precise definition of such an objective criteria. On 18 march, 1921 the First Working Group of Constructivists was organized within INKhUK by Rodchenko, Alexei Gan and Stepanova. With the introduction of the Constructivist group the platform of Production Art was established.

Tarabukin became the secretary of the group. He analysed the task ahead of them as the appreciation of the objective criteria of art as constituted of materiality, *faktura*, and composition of the elements, which in turn was influenced by the whole, culminating into a "system". The use of the term "composition", however, was heavily debated in light of a proposed alternative concept of "Construction". Rodchenko, who had been a fervent critique of Kandinskii, saw the "construction" alternative as the task leading to the final eradication of aesthetics and "taste", which he associate with "composition". Rodchenko believed that the catergories of aesthetics and tastes belonged to the society of the past, whereas the new art (construction) must be based on organizational principles according to the principles of engineering and technology. Rodchenko maintained that such an art built on the concept of organization of elements was the artistic equivalent to the accomplishment of social organization through the Revolution and the establishment of the communist society. The accomplishment of revolutionary social organization was, to his view, attained through the understanding of social materials and through their proper organization in entirely conscious and rational manners in accordance with the goals of society. Such a "goal"

that would turn out to be of consequence in artistic practice as well production, must now embrace the utilitarian imperative, which would dictate the "systems" of art.

This early effort to synthesize Constructivist ideas into a coherent whole thus inevitably reached its utilitarian conclusion. But it was important to note that such a commitment came out first of all from the debate on construction and organization. That this new art was thought to be communistic grew out of the theoreticizing of the concept of construction, and not because of its utilitarian element. This utilitarian element was a conclusion which alone would not constitute an art of communistic qualifications, but merely an applied art. This conclusion, nonetheless, was important to the Constructivists that by 1921 INKhUK adopted a resolution calling on those Constructivists who had rejected easel painting to henceforth commit themselves to production work, and to name Constructivism as the real form of expression of such a production art. But once such a utilitarian imperative was established the Constructivists entirely committed themselves to the integration of industry and art, that art was no longer seen as comprising its own ends, but put in a subservient position to production. It was at least theoretically so. Many Constructivist artists actually joined numerous industrial organizations attempting to work out the problems of production on a scientific basis. These organizations included the cultural departments of the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions, All Union Central Council of Trade Union's Central Scientific and Technical Club. The Supreme Council on the National Economy also set up a committee dedicated to the scientific organization of productions. Arvatov and Tatlin

also set up a production laboratory at the New Lessner Factory in Petrograd. In addition many members of INKhUK established contact with, and gave lectures at Proletkul't, and played an important role in the reorganization of Proletkul't. However, it was not aparent that any of such intercourse with the industries actually substantiated into any thing more than textile, graphics and furniture design and the design of house hold daily items.¹

The category of art was not merely intellectually incompatible with the constructivist programme. To the Constructivist, art had formerly stood in the place of religion. The task of the artist in the new communist society, however, was to establish a new communist culture, and such as the nature of culture had changed, so must the position of art with regard to culture. The Constructivists, thus, were not concerned with creating a new aesthetic, but with eliminating aesthetics as an autonomous faculty entirely, and with placing it under the dictatorship of engineering and production. Much as they had associated communist culture with industrial production, so did the total commitment of art became one of total surrender of the content of art to technology. Industrial production had utilitarian ends, and the entire process of production must follow technological principles. Art then, must give formal expression to such principles. Such were to be the basis of the new culture. In such a way the Constructivists, sought not to exhort technical profficiency, and not to create a "machine art", but to adopt in

¹ Constructivist involvement in these industrial organizations and a list of INKhUK theoretical work were documented in Lodder, pp. 91-93.

art the same process of industrial production as a model of the integral organizing principle of society. Thus Alexei Gan wrote in *Constructivism*:

It is necessary ... to master the idealistic world view and the materialistic understanding of the world, the philosophy and theory of scientific communism, to realize the practice of Soviet construction, determine the place where the intellectual productivist of constructivist constructions must occupy in communistic life, i.e. in the social production of the future culture...

Gan attempted to posit production art firmly within a Marxist polemic, thereby proving its true revolutionary nature. He associated art with being a product of bourgeois society which, he predicted, was destined to pass away as would the bourgeoisie itself. Gan further claimed that through using dialectical materialism as guideline, Constructivism was born out of a true recognition of the process of production itself within the industries. As art was part of the society of the past, the only appropriate culture for the new society was Constructivism, in which the role of the artist now becomes that of the organization of production. The Constructivist achieved such possibility, according to Gan, by adhering to the principles of construction through *tectonic*, *faktura*, and *construction*. *Tectonic* united the ideological and the formal, according to Gan. It emerges from the characteristics of communism and from the use of industrial material. *Tectonic* may thus be interpreted as the way in which constructivist art was henceforth thought to exist in the context of industrial production; the artist working under technological principles could not be separated from ordinary workers, much as art itself was

merely another form of labour. *Faktura* referred to the way in which the full attribute of materials must be realized and their potentials explored to the limits, without hampering the process of *construction* and *tectonic*. *Construction* was the actual process of structuring real materials in production.

The effort to redefine art was also prevalent in the theories of Arvatov, who, like Gan, also saw the uselessness of art within the new society. When he came closest to the Marxist conception of the historical development of the institution of art, Arvatov saw the development of art since Impressionism as a development of revolt against bourgeois society. But Arvatov attributed this to the consciousness that artists had acquired through progress in the technical process in the creation of art. Hence artists under the newly acquired consciousness of the process of art had subsequently replaced the process of painting with the process of consciously making it. To Arvatov, the development of art would inevitably coincide with the development of industrial processes, in the course of which, art will be reintegrated into the collective social process of production. Hence to Arvatov, artists must reorganize their activities around the process of industrial production. To put this into practice meant to redefine the process of artistic production as technical. Artist would no longer work with paint and brushes, but with scientific calculations, plans, with instruments such as the file, machinery, and scientific equipments such as compasses and rules. Art would then no longer be based on individual expressions and psychotic impulses. Instead, art, reduced into a process, must embrace utilitarian ends.

It would be incorrect to think that Marx's theories on the use-value of art were not known to the theoreticians of the Constructivist group. Kushner formulated his theories based on firstly, the differentiation between the man-made natural objects, reminiscences of Marxist theories on resources. Kushner, however, defined man-made objects in terms of time, space and function. Time in Kushner's definition comprised production and operation time, and was a primary determinant of the cost of the object produced, to which Kushner then attributed its use-value. Maximization of the use-value of an object thus depended on minimizing its production time and maximizing its use-time. Kushner's confusion hinged on his misunderstanding of the difference between use and exchange values. Thus he did nothing to elucidate the dilemma of the alienation of the producer from the product, much less the alienation of art as a consumer product from the artist producer. In fact, he accepted such division of labour within mass industrial production as imperative, and assessed that the role of art then was then the "exaggeration" of such a condition of the specialization of the function of things.

At the most extreme, Arvatov's theories implied the replacement of art by technology and the replacement of artistic impulses by standardized industrial production to be explored and instituted through the polytechnical transformation of the art schools, resulting in the production of standard material products such as furniture and textile, and other utilitarian objects. He had also went one step beyond those Constructivists who remained on the level of the redefinition of the production of art in terms of industrial techniques. Despite their attempt to reposition art within utilitarian production in society, the

Constructivists failed, in fact, to strike a balance between the creation of yet another aesthetic based on a varied process and different mediums, and the utter abandonment of art in favour of industry. In such rhetorics to implant their art in Marxist theories, they remained on the level of production, and did not recognize that the crux of Marxist critique of art existed in the relationship between the institution of art and society. In failing to recognize the Marxist conception of use-value of artistic labour, they did not differentiate between artistic and industrial labour. But dialectical materialism must be viewed in terms of the historical relationships of social materials, in which labour constituted the central element of appropriation as a resource. Marx and Engels saw the development of art since Romanticism as a revolt against the replacement of the unique use-value of art by exchange value in bourgeois society. To Marx and Engels, collective consciousness was informed and influenced by the social condition and not vice versa. In merely changing the techniques of art, however, it was impossible to affect the relationship between social institutions. By the failure to admit to art as a legitimate social institution, it was the Constructivists' intent to eradicate such an institution and to reintegrate art in the collective social process by intergrating themselves in industries, in which they were to realize later that they had little part. Their art did not evolve from an altered relationship between the institution of art as state sponsored, and the other parts of society. Thus in the case of a total surrendering of art to industry, the artist had in fact admitted to their uselessness. They had forgone their position in society as artists. In the large part, however,

Constructivist art remained on the level of an altered aesthetic. Their critique remained on a formal-technical level.

With introduction of NEP in 1921 there followed the introduction of a limited market economy and bourgeois relations in the soviet society. Part of Constructivist art relied on bourgeois sponsorship. But perhaps more important was the status of "third front" assigned to cultural development under Bolshevik pragmatism in NEP. Thus Constructivists must reassert themselves within the accomodating stance the Bolshevik took towards the technical *intelligentsia*. At the same time that the Avant-Garde was loosing their access to the government due to the reorganization of governmental organs. IZO was reorganized and financial sponsorship of the arts by the state also declined. Within such a society more emphasis was put on raising the level of technical profficiency as a means to economic regeneration. The status of art was severely compromised. The Constructivists renegotiated their position as artists in society and attempted to see themselves as part of the industrial imperative, and the technical *intelligentsia*. They saw art as a skilled activity indispensable to the communist society of the Soviet Union.¹ They rejected art as a form of reproduction of reality, but saw as the ultimate purpose of art the production of a real object. The existence of this object did not depend on some other forms of existence, but constitute in itself a reality. Such, as Lodder pointed out was Tarabukin's position. Tarabukin, like Arvatov, proposed a total integration of art into industrial production. No matter that Tarabukin represented an extreme

¹ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 103.

attitude, he quite rightly criticized the contradiction within the constructivist polemics:

Rejecting the aesthetic, the Constructivists had to give themselves another aim which logically developed from the very idea of construction, i.e., a utilitarian aim. Usually we understand construction as a specific form of structure having a utilitarian character of one sort or another, deprived of which it is deprived of all meaning.

But the Russian Constructivists, consciously not seeing themselves as painters, declared their approach to be "against art" in its typical museum form, and they formed an alliance with technology, engineering and industry without, however, having any specialized knowledge for this and remaining essentially artists *par excellence*.¹

Constructivist aesthetics and polemics, to Tarabukin, was not enough to uphold their position as skilled workers. To him, the Constructivists' art was meaningless unless there was real intercourse between art and production, between the processes of work and creativity.² Tarabukin thus called on the artists to become artist-engineers.

But it was precisely the grey area between the technological and the intuitive on which Tatlin thrived, from the early reliefs to the *Monument to the Third International*, that they Constructivists, under the consolidation

¹ Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine*, Moscow, 1923, p.10, in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 104.

² Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 104.

of their position, attempted to forsake. Khodasevich described Tatlin creating one of his reliefs:

He used a saw, an axe, a chisel, wire, nails, canvas stretched over sub-frames, coloured paper, paints, brushes, a spray, a kerosene lamp to blacken different surfaces for shadow ... He chopped, planed, cut, broke off pieces of glass, diluted size, and for a long time feasted his eyes on a scrap of sheet metal and it was generally clear that he was fired with inspiration. He drilled holes into primed canvases which I had prepared for portraits and pushed in some wire with which he fixed chocks, wood and crushed paper, repeating "Marvelous. Beautiful. We will colour some bits and darken others with smoke".¹

El Lissitskii also described Tatlin's attitude when designing his Tower:

[Tatlin] assumed - quite independent of the rational and the scientific methods of technology - that the intuitive and artistic mastery of materials would lead to inventions on the basis of which objects could be constructed. He believed that he could prove this theory with his design for the *Monument to the Third International* (1920). He accomplished this task without having any special technical knowledge of construction, thus proving his assumption.²

There existed, after the formulation of the Constructivist group, a severe disagreement between Tatlin and some artists within the group on this

¹ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* p. 14.

² El Lissitskii, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, trans. Eric Dluhosch, (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1970, p. 29.

subject. Brik, Stenberg, as well as most of OBMOKhU (Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov - Society of Young Artists) that constituted the most important fraction of the First Working Group of Constructivists, attempted to rid production art of its final remnants of the personal, expressive, and metaphysical. They asserted that their art would be rooted in works with real materials within the context of industry and rejected any claims of utopianism. Tatlin did not contest their assertion to utilitarian content of art but saw the development of such art as rooted in the previous artistic explorations. Babichev put the OBMOKhU dilemma into focus, however, by pointing out that by rejecting Tatlin's elements the OBMOKhU had in fact trivialized their own position, since on the one hand they had rejected the aesthetic faculty, while on the other their works were not really rooted in any technical exploration, and were not really utilitarian but at best could only be seen as a new mechanical aestheticism. Tatlin further observed that the OBMOKhU artists did not feel materials but merely copied them. Tatlin seemed to have hit a nerve by proposing in effect a reassessment of art in his observation of the OBMOKhU artists. It was that unspeakable "sigh" that constitute the real artistic knowledge of the nature of materials, which distinguished it from mere knowledge of its technical potentials.

At the same time Rodchenko was engaged in his geometric constructions. Although Rodchenko was a follower of Tatlin, his constructions represented the opposite extreme of Tatlin's creation. Rodchenko was not so much interested in the intuitive nature of materials as he was with the process of construction itself. Rodchenko's process, however, was one of preconceived procedures of attaining a rational whole in which the

process and perhaps the order of construction was clearly visible. Rodchenko was more concerned with the implications of the clearly distinguishable, reasonable formal characteristics of his work, resulting in constructions of solids and voids that seemed to emanate an internal coherency and an internal logic, logical within the context of the specific works. Rodchenko's initiatives must also be seen within the context of the development of art within the Soviet revolutionary society, within which, the Avant-Garde associated the commitment to society with the eradication of anything personal. Personal expression was seen as necessary only within bourgeois society. The new art they attempted to create must be based on well defined, almost scientific processes. They saw the category of aesthetics as personal, compulsive, and arbitrary. Their interpretation of the Avant-Garde was one of revolt against the alienation within bourgeois society. But they would not recognize that the very power of critique held by the Avant-Garde was founded first in the possibility of the separation of art from the social process of production, initiated by early attempts to define aesthetics as an independent *a priori*, by philosophers such as Kant and Schiller. Kant, of course, never made his way into the polemics of Marxism. But nevertheless, Marx and Engels was well aware that, integrated into the dialectical relationship between the institution of art and society was the dialectic of the temporal and the permanent, i.e., the dialectic between the autonomy of aesthetics and the conditioning of the cultural consciousness by the social condition. The Constructivists saw the temporal, ephemeral nature of the Avant-Garde not as the result of intercourse between art and society, but as the arbitrary personal revolt against the bourgeoisie. There could not

have been a revolt of art within the new communist society. Both their ideology and the social political condition would not have permitted such an Avant-Garde. Marx and Engels had not clearly predicted the role of art within the final triumph of communism, but only contended that within a communist society there would no longer be a separation between art and the work of the proletariat. Such was pointed out in *A German Ideology*. But as Wood had pointed out in his review of Lodder's book *A German Ideology* was not published in the Soviet Union until 1923. Nonetheless, the Constructivists, perhaps on their own attempt to formulate a relationship between art and the proletariat, entirely rejected past elements of art, asserted that a true communist art was no different than the intellectual organization of industrial production. They however, were unable to enunciate a distinction between their set of rational laws of the intellectual, formal organization of production, based on, but exceeding engineering principles, and the *a priori* that Kant had identified as aesthetics, thus the accusation that the Constructivists had merely replaced the aesthetics of expression by a new aesthetics of formal manipulations alluring to the look of mechanics. The development of Constructivism was henceforth to follow closely the path initiated by Rodchenko. Perhaps one area in which such an aesthetic could fruitfully fuse with their utilitarian commitment was in architecture, availed to them by the close integration of aesthetics and functional content of the architecture programme, i.e., before Constructivist artists were to evolve into the design of purely utilitarian objects such as ceramics, in which aesthetics could only take a marginal and more trivial role of applied art.

The Moscow VKhUTEMAS (Vysshie gosudarstvennye khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie masterskie - Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops) were set up in 1920 as workshops for the training of artists for industries as an effort to integrate art into life and technological productions. In reality VKhUTEMAS developed into a design institute committed primarily to the Constructivist programme and principles. The architectural development of VKhUTEMAS was more an eclectic collection of various persuasions than a unified Constructivist line. It could roughly be seen as consisting of a primarily traditionalist faculty that emphasized the approach of the old academy, and that part of the faculty that concentrated on the incorporation of ideas from the latest research. Among the latter, constituting a most substantial influence on the Constructivist conviction were the Vesnin Brothers who, in 1925, were to form the functionalist group of OSA (Ob'edinenie svoremennykh arkhitektorov - Association of Contemporary Architects).

Constructivist architecture was presented with the task of not merely developing unconventional formal manifestations alluring to the development of new building technology that was to result from the rise of industrial productions as the focus of Soviet civilization, but also new functional programmes arising from the needs of such a civilization that their architecture must account for. The latter turned out to be, however, more often than not, and except in the area of the the pressing housing needs of the new Soviet society, merely old activities imbedded within a new revolutionary content. The new political interpretations of such institutions as workers' clubs, the Palace of Labour, failed to demand

reorganizations of activities that would imply new architectural types. More often than not, there were new interpretations of old types.

The Vesnin Brothers presented a design for the complex of the Palace of Labour proposed for the centre of Moscow. The Palace of Labour was feignly Constructivist in disposition at best. Allowing for the intention to expose the reinforced concrete construction system the Vesnin Brothers employed, rather conventional architectural forms and spatial definitions. The complex consisted of various meeting spaces for mass gatherings and performances. However, even under the unconventional convocation of such revolutionary terminology as applied to these spaces, the complex spoke of none other than a naked theatre stripped of all decorations and ornamentations. Much as the Constructivists were to depend on the use of the nature of their material systems for the generation of forms, reinforced concrete here prophesied no revolutionary architectural evolution. As used in this case it remained essentially a masonry post and beam load bearing system, in which the transference of load was to take the most direct route via aligned columns. The plastic potential of reinforced concrete, by virtue of its strength was a language whose expresivity remained deamed unindustrial and incompatible with the utilitarian sentiment. Such was true, however, only if the evolution of plastic space was seen as psychotic and personally expressive. But the limitation of such early Constructivist imagination, its almost puritanical quality made it impossible for such architects to extend beyond the conventional utility of space. For without a revolution of the conception of the utility of space, such Constructivist architecture could remain but a skeleton of old arrangements. The meeting spaces remained

aligned on a linear axis starting from entrance, gathering space/lobby, to the main meeting space in the form of progressions already spoken of in the old monumental opera houses of Europe. The entire complex, as EL Lisitskii was to point out later, remained an object in space, integrated and unconnected to its urban setting, either in concept or in form. The principle failure of the Palace of Labour was a factor of deliberate blindness, or unwillingness to conceive of the gathering of proletariats as incorporating a poetic content, as Tatlin was able to invoke the Third International in his Monument. The desertion of the iconographic importance, and of the political symbolism embedded in such a concept as the "Palace of Labour" had given this building no inspiration for a revolutionary content that could be integrated into revolutionary forms. Such functionalism was in fact a total surrender of the element of art to the mechanical efficiency of abstract function. When such a disposition was taken at face value, and had taken over completely, there could be no architecture left, as there was no need for one. Architecture could have embraced the social and political aspirations behind the dynamics of organized labour, but there was none to be found as such organization was seen here as no more than the generic "meeting". The Palace of Labour in fact prophesied on a future development of the OSA as they were to embark on the most stringent sentiments in order to satisfy the needs for housing in the Soviet poverty years to come. But before all was given to the dangers of functionalism Constructivist architecture was to take an important turn in Vesnin Brothers' next project, the design for the Pravda Building in Moscow.

But before embarking on an investigation of the Pravda Building an important development that the Palace of Labour was in fact able to incorporate remained to be elucidated. I point to the ways in which the building was, despite the ultimate control by the composition of the whole, conceived of as made up of independent functional units. The spatial arrangements, and definitions of the meeting and circulation spaces was clearly distinguishable and legible from the exterior. On the level of the plan, the independent identity of the oval meeting hall was clearly expressed so that it read as if it were attached to the other parts of the building. Although the construction of the oval meeting hall itself remained more as a Rodchenko construction, its independence as an integrated unit within the composition of the whole gave the whole an *almost* Tatlin like additive quality. Whereas in Tatlin tension between individual parts were drawn not merely out of the contrasts in materials, but also out of the independence of the individual units he deployed in tightly overlapping manner, at the Palace of Labour such tension between individual units were not to be found by virtue of the straight forward, linear composition employed in such a way that any tension immediately suffocated. Thus the self sustaining units remained self sustaining, such that one could conceivably exist without the other, and that the whole remained a composition intact only by its linearity, but could conceivably be added onto at any moment. In such a way, the Palace of Labour emanate also an almost Baroque quality. In Baroque and Beaux Arts spaces the whole existed often by virtue of the tyranny of axuality whereas in Tatlin's constructions the whole was hold together by sheer tension arising out of the contradiction between the parts. External

expression of the parts became an important instrument of Constructivist and functionalist architecture. Thus even the most clear allusion to an industrial technological aspiration in what seemed to be a radio tower at the Palace of Labour became detached from the immediacy of the whole building and remained, an empty symbolism, in fact, a marquee at best, added onto the whole. The failure of the whole to tell an integrated story about technology rendered the radio tower but an added ornamentation. Such was the distinction between the iconographic, representational power of Tatlin's Tower, which told a convincing story, and the Palace of Labour, which became a collection of gestures paying lip services to features of industrial society.

Perhaps the more ironic failure of such early indication of functionalism as the Palace of Labour was the failure to conceive of function itself as intellectual material much submissivable to the same concept of *faktura* as the use of concrete and steel. In Tatlin's Tower the functional programme of both the enclosed space and the structural support elements were used in such a way that the relationship between each individual and the others did not merely contend with the overall arrangement, but heightened the contradictions between them into nexuses of tension, resulting in a clear consciousness of the different functions of the building revealing itself in a most tangible manner. Functions in Tatlin were used not unlike any other constructional material that can be manipulated, fragmented, overlapped on top of each other, and their inherent nature - their dynamics, statics, their spatial and formal implications etc., brought out in the manner of *faktura*. In the Palace of Labour, however, no such inferences were possible. Functions here

remained little more than the most straight forward flow diagrams. Functions here did not exceed itself, it stayed on the level of programmatic requirements and failed to become a material. It was indeed ironic that, such as the Constructivists' invocation of the concept of utility, they had not been able to utilize such concept under *their own terms*, but had instead allowed their own programme to suffer under total submission to one commitment, the total attribute of which they had however failed to realize. The straight forwardness and unsophistication of the use of the building's functional requirements, was a failure that disallowed the utter integration of the full inherent potential of building materials with their potentials to satisfy utility requirements. The more exciting images of the building alluring to progressive aspirations such as the radio tower of the Palace of Labour thus took on no more than the identity of a fetish, and the representational and communicative power of the architecture was thus drastically reduced.

The morbid fate of illusionistic functionalism in architecture was a fate that was to enchant the other branches of art in the subsequent development of Constructivism under the illusionistic banner of utilitarianism. The programme of utilitarianism was one adopted by the Constructivist from the production requirement of life without first having the ability to wrestle such requirements into their own terms. Many artists were to be captured by either one of the two incompatible faces of Janus - that to entirely loose the autonomy and identity of art or to fall backwards into the category of pure aesthetics that could at best hold on to the fringes of production, neither becoming part of production, nor influencing it. The seeds of such betrayal of art were in fact sown

when they could see in Tatlin's Tower no more than psychotic expressionism, and instead embraced a systematic and methodological approach to art. In the multitude of rhetorics on the disillusioning transparency of the educational programme of VKhUTEMAS that included such institutional categorization of colours, volumes, lines, and representation of volumes, that lend themselves too easily to being reduced into abstract entities that could not embrace within themselves any meaning, such instruments of representation and expression could remain no more than instruments without content. The failure to recognize function and content as *materials* of art left their representation on the level of aesthetics which they had decried. Function and content seen as not as sources on tension became anonymous sets of requirements that ultimately laid outside the realm of aesthetics and aesthetics became an empty array of aesthetical instruments, an art uncommitted. Ideology and production taken in their own right ultimately do not belong to art, and must be first transformed into terms of art.

This is not to say that function should become content. The content of representation remained that to which such an art was committed, i.e., their interpretation of the social condition within which such an art posits itself. Rather, when the materiality of function was recognized, it could be interpreted, manipulated, and integrated into the broader array of materials that were manipulated to give expression to the artistic imagination. In the Vesnin Brothers' design for the Pravda Building in Moscow, the various functions that this building were to contain were manipulated to give definition to the physical forms of the building. The Pravda Building was conceived to be an exceptionally small building

situated in the urban context of Moscow. But within the design itself were incorporated much of the elements of urban life aspired to as the vital functions of the urban society of the future. As the building was designed to house the offices of the Soviet newspaper Pravda, the Vesnins took the idea of mass communication beyond the printed page and speculated on the roles of visual signs, screens, loud speakers, and a search light, elements that were no doubt already familiar to the Soviet propagandistic sentiments through the activities of agit-prop. Vesnin did not so much develop nor expand such mediums into powerful instruments of communication within the mass cultures of the future, nor could they had foreseen the importance of the development of such propagandistic instruments into mass communication, nor the establishment of communication networks through such futuristic mediums. Vesnin's incorporation of the impact of technology on future life into his design remained rather superfluous at best. But these elements of communication were taken rather matter-of-factly, that the iconic expressive role of his building in the exhortation of communications were played down, as if the building were but one minor part of everyday life. The impartiality of Vesnin towards such extra-architectural elements with respect to other architectural functional aspects of the building resulted in, by the same token, the other functional aspects of the building's being brought out and exemplified. If a machine were permissible as a metaphor of the building, then there would be no reason why any particular parts of the mechanism should be seen with particular admiring deference. The image of the commonness of such an architectural machine was precisely the point, only that the

Pravda Building was in reality not such a machine, but the representation of one. Its comments were not particular on the building itself, but on an entire way of life. And thus in addition to such unconventional functions as mass communication, I must also point to the equitable ingratiation of the more routine architectural functions such as circulation, structure, office space, balconies, interior and exterior spaces, and the way in which each was recognized as an integral and unsparable part of the building, unsubmitive to any other parts, and each as vital to the functioning of the building as well as to the integrity of the aesthetic composition of the whole. Each was thus given clear and transparent architectural expression that both was influenced by and in turn influenced the composition of the architectural entirety. Thus, for example, the vertical movement of the elevators was at least as important as the visual screen and was given full revelation through a transparent glass enclosure protruding from the side of the building. The contrast between the static escalation of the staircase and the perpetual motion of the elevators, was brought out by revealing them side by side through the architectural skin of glass which is in itself a paradox in the definition of forms, by virtue of its imateriality. Within such a contrast the Vesnins brought out a powerful expression of the *idea* of movement in the machine age, of movement itself, contrasted to staticity, and of movement of the parts within a mechanistic whole. Vesnin's building may appear tame to our eyes accustomed to such connotations of the building as a machine by now, but the conception of the building as none more than a scarfolding supporting the vital functions required first of all a complete rejection of a tradition that spoke of buildings in terms of

walls, rooms, and axes, of plastic and sculpted surfaces, and of the definitions of space via planes.

There was a much tighter integration of the various functions of the building in the Pravda Building than the Vesnins were able to achieve in the Palace of Labour. The way in which these functions were clearly expressed lend the building almost the quality of Tatlin's constructions, or the quality of a collage, whereas here, in its architectural and utilitarian manifestation what was contrasted was not merely the materiality of glass and steel, but also the formal definition of various functions, each function contains within it a different nature and characteristic, as vertically oriented spaces, as horizontal protrusions, as rationally stacked, and expressively protruding. The building then, must be seen within the terms of construction as established earlier by Tatlin and Rodchenko that it could be understood to have any sense beyond the ornamentalism of an aesthetic. It was only in such sense, then, that the terms of non-objective construction was successfully transferred into the realms of architecture based on real notions of utility. It was, however, utility as interpreted represented within a specific revolutionary context that such could constitute a content of commitment by the artistic sentiments of Constructivism. Within architecture, Constructivism came closest to integrating the role of art with the process of life itself, in which the representation of the organization of activities actually became the content of art. And yet such was in fact not the process of production itself. The particularity of the architectural programme actually forbid its production through an industrial process.

The Constructivists walked a very thin line between collapsing entirely into an empty machine aesthetic on the one hand, in which case such an aesthetic was entirely submersive to function, and, on the other hand, loosing their art, given over to being controlled entirely by the engineering process. Architecture was one category in which Constructivist art must confront itself with the issue of function. When successful, function, as in the case of the Pravda Building, and in Tatlin's Tower, was recasted in the terms of art, and became a manipulable material such as space and volume. When unsuccessfully handled, architecture became merely fetishes, ornaments in their own autonomy without a commitment to the social condition, but at best an allusion to a machine language. Constructivism could thus easily and perilously be reduced to a language without a content. Such was the Constructivist dilemma, since their commitment was formulated entirely in terms of a commitment to utilitarianism. Degeneration was apparent later when Constructivist architecture was casted in codified instruments such as volumes, surfaces, axes, etc. When such syntactical instruments became the sole content, there was in fact no content, and Constructivism became uncommitted, an entirely autonomous aesthetic. Such, indeed, happened as Constructivist artists were to find, firstly, that art had a very limited role in the process of production, and had to satisfy themselves with the aesthetic design of goods of daily utility, designs that remain superfluous and bore no consequence on the actual process of production itself. Or had the Constructivists, in such cases, resume the marginal status of the Avant-Garde? The retreat of Constructivist artists back into the niche of aesthetics was, secondly, also the result of a

failure to reconcile a fundamental discrepancy between the social condition that the Constructivists aspired to , and the poverty stricken revolutionary Soviet social reality.

Constructivism remained essentially a representational art. Even in architecture functions was materialized in such a way that was representative of the *idea* of utility. Rather than utilitarian, theirs was the representation of utility and production within a very specific social construct that was after all, an aspiration. Neither in architecture nor in art did they established an integral relationship with the industrial process of production. For to do so would had required a revision of the relations between the institution of art and that of production.

Constructivist artists remained essentially artists outside the productive process. However, such an aspiration of utility within a new society was the real commitment of Constructivism, the content of their art. Rather than the eradication of the category of aesthetics, theirs was the representation of a social construct in which aesthetic was to have no part. The communicative power of their representation, however, was based on a firmly established aesthetical language. Furthermore, the syntax of such a language remained autonomous from the real industrial process of production that it represented. Such was clear from Tatlin's used of structures in his Tower. The Constructivist language was in fact based on its own principles of constructions that was quite apart from the organization of industry and engineering. Even in architecture the incorporation of functions into Constructivist constructions represented the expressivity of function as a construction material rather than the integration of art into the utilitarianism of the production process. The

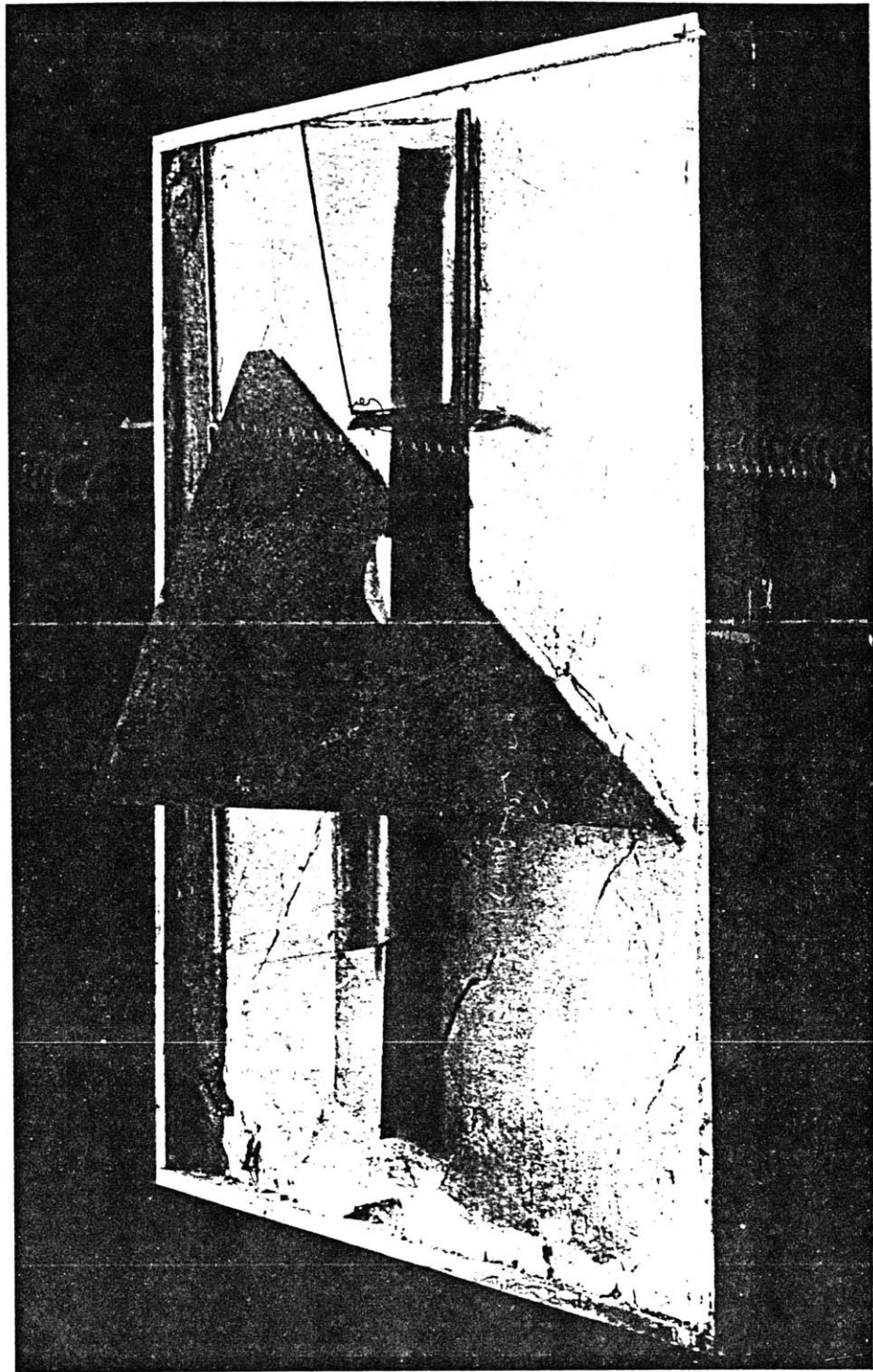
particularity of the architectural programme precluded the process of building construction from becoming industrial. Even if the structural systems and construction materials used was clearly unconventional and could only be achieved through technological innovations, such innovations were clearly out of the boundaries of the realities of Soviet capabilities at that time. The fact remained that much of the great works of Constructivist architecture that had broken architectural new grounds, such as Tatlin's Tower, the Vesnins' Pravda Building, Korschev's Spartakiada Stadium, and Leonidov's Lenin Institute of 1927, were all deliberately unbuilderble.

The contradiction remained, that Russian Constructivism built a language around the notion of technology and industry, but their concerns remained primarily one of art, representation, and expression. Despite their attempt to eradicate the category of aesthetics, this self-destructive consequence would not be allowed by the Avant-Garde itself. Constructivism stood as a metaphor of Avant-Gardism in that their negation of the category of aesthetics, their criticism, and their commitment, relied ultimately on the possibility of first having a manipulable aesthetical instrument. It was only after it was possible for civilization to conceive of aesthetics as an autonomous faculty, that aesthetics could carry on its back a content of criticism and aspiration. The Constructivist disposition continued to be one of negation, not merely of conventional aesthetics of the objective tradition of art, but also of their contemporary Soviet reality, and of the genuine conditions of the proletariat. In such way, the institution of Constructivism remained, in its relations to other institutions of society,

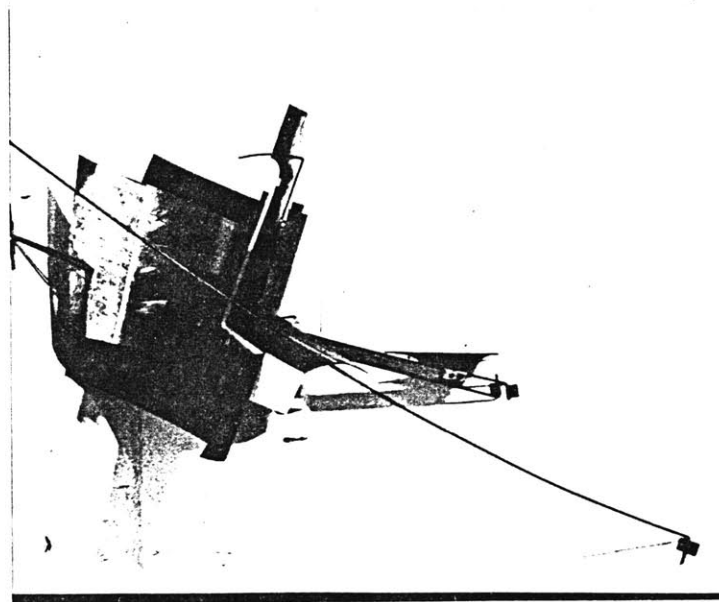
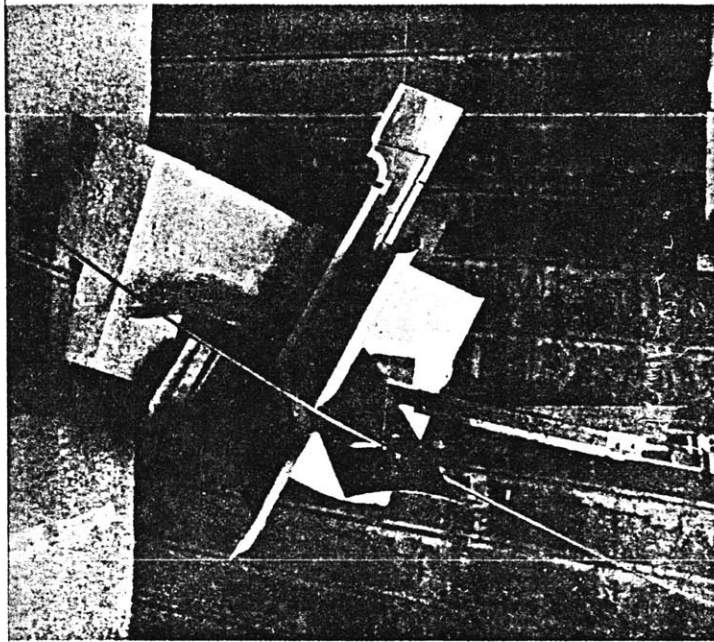
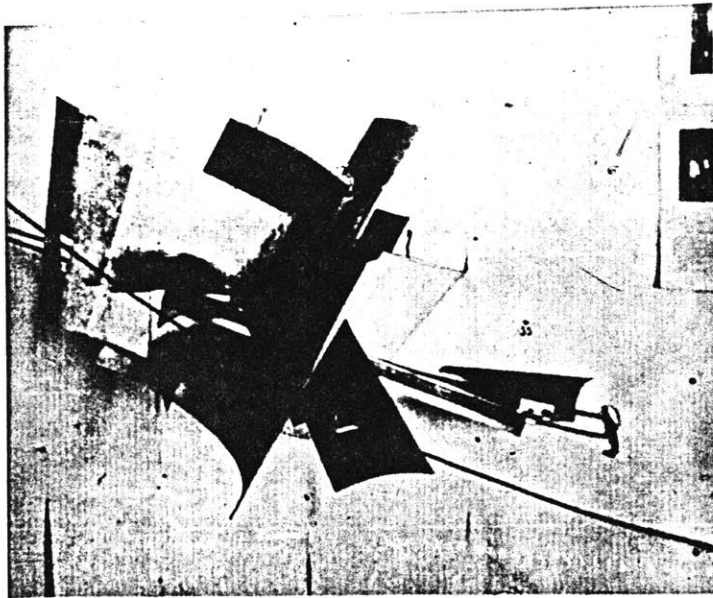
of the tradition of the great Avant-Garde movements within the rise of the bourgeoisie.

Also within the condition of Modernism, the Constructivist language remained one of self-reflectivity. The establishment of an aesthetic was an entirely self-conscious process of deliberate selection and elimination. Such a language was not based on the entirety of the proletarian production, but on a selected image of what it hoped to be. In this sense, however, the aesthetic of Constructivism at least concurred with the hope of the Proletariat. In the graphic arts, at least, the Constructivist aesthetic served the purpose of propagandizing and advertising an image of industrial advancement of the Soviet state through mass media, whereas in architecture and other fields of design, Constructivism could at best reflect on the technological advancement and the living standard that the Soviet society was not. Thus while it was useful of Constructivism and the Soviet Avant-Garde to project an image of advancement at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, such an Avant-Garde lance pointing at society in opposition to reality could not possibly be accommodated within an authoritarian society. Constructivist architecture retreated into functionalism under the veil of design housing and cities for an imaginary utopia. The Avant-Garde sentiment must be seen in its dual manifestation: the utopia it represented, and the contemporary reality it criticized. When such historical-cultural specificity was denied, Constructivism and the architectural Avant-Garde could only become the anonymous, hollow style that was Internationalism. The metaphor that was Constructivism found its parallel in the Bauhaus and other Avant-Garde movements in architecture

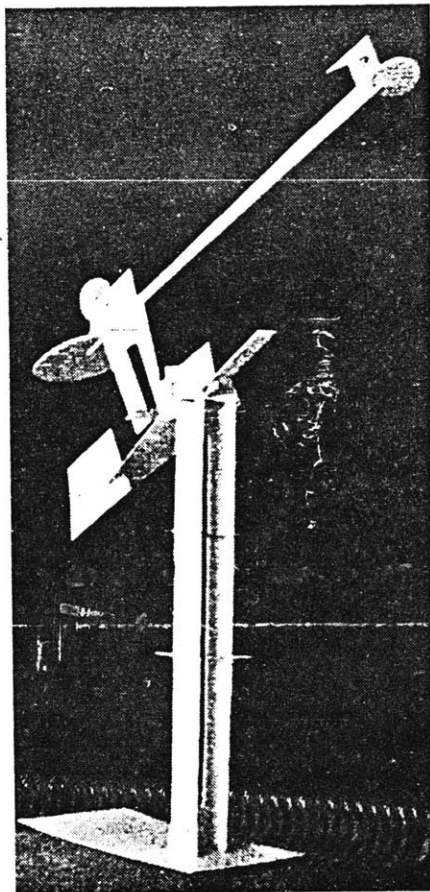
in Western societies. The formulation of Internationalism across the Atlantic casted the doom of Avant-Gardism in architecture. It was successfully incorporated into the bourgeoisie itself.



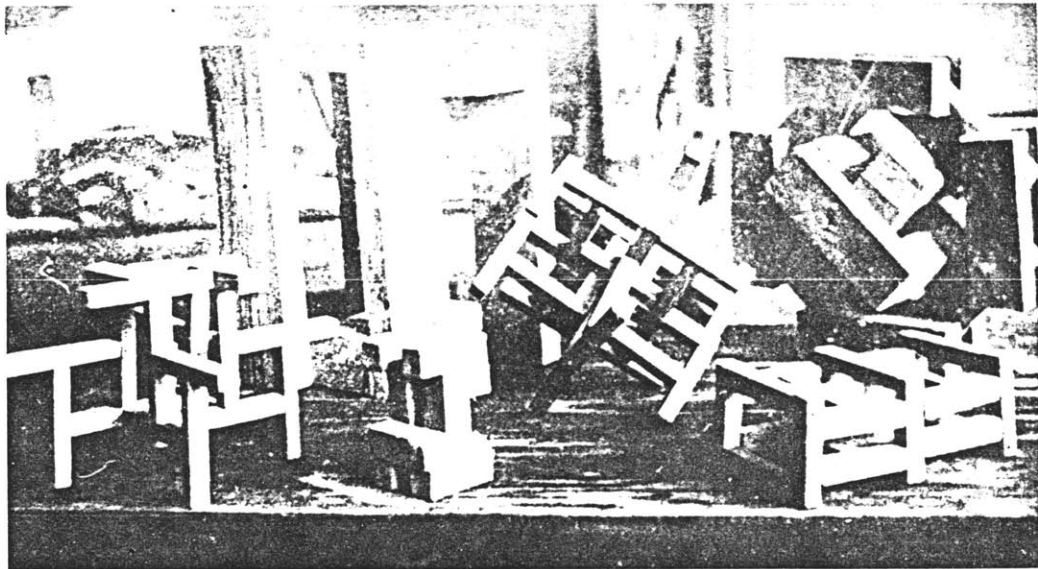
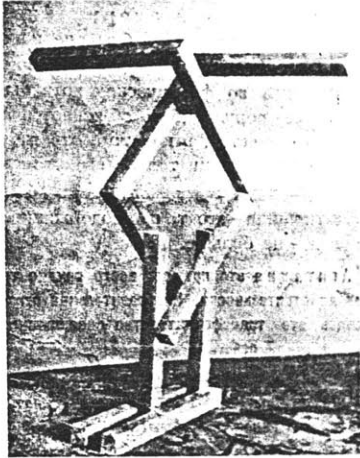
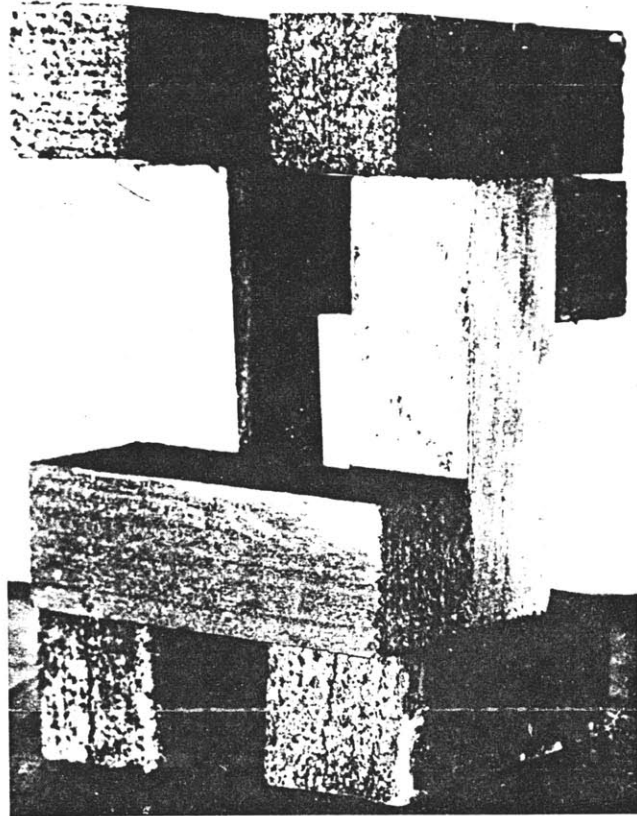
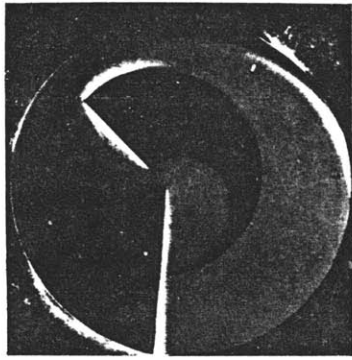
Tatlin: "Selection of Materials: Iron, Stucco, Glass, Asphalt", 1914



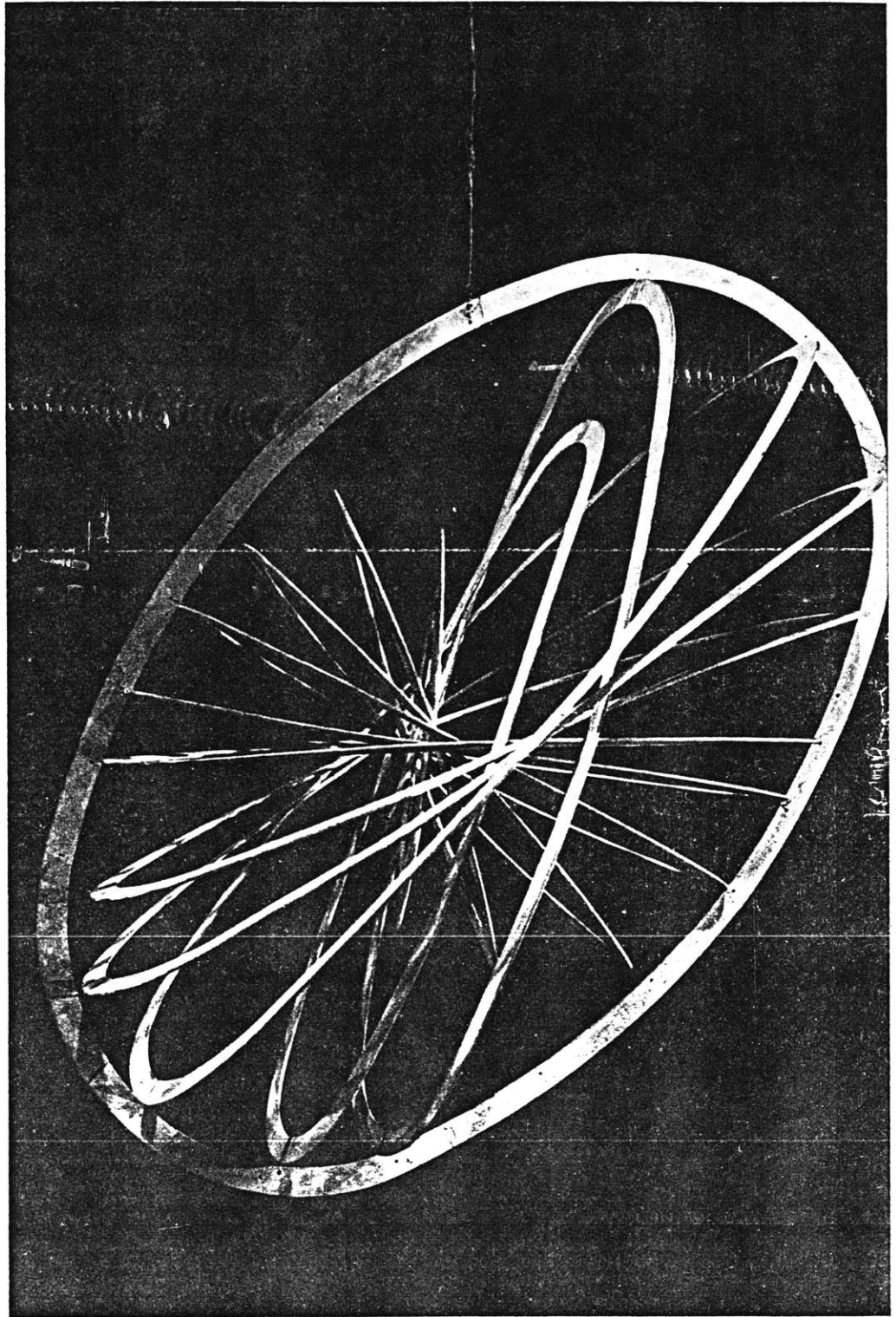
Tatlin: "Corner Counter-Reliefs", 1914-15



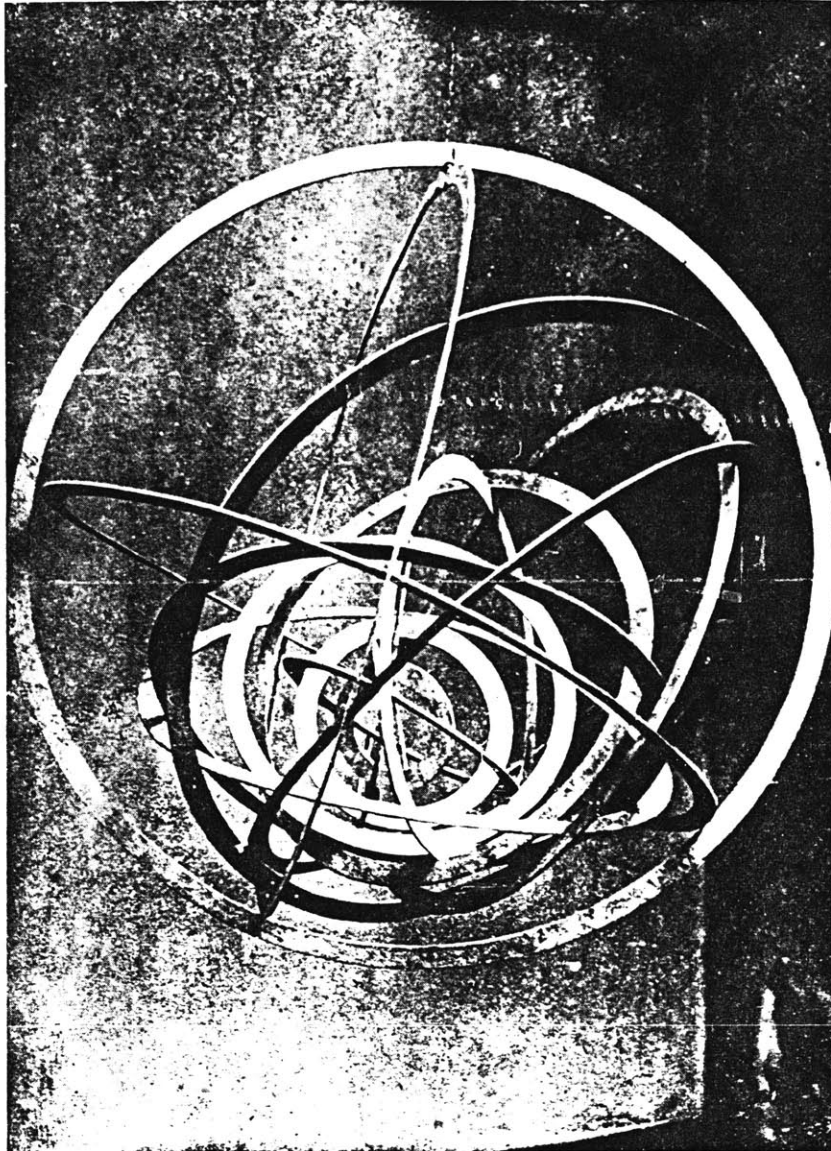
Rodchenko: "White Non-Objective Sculpture"
1918



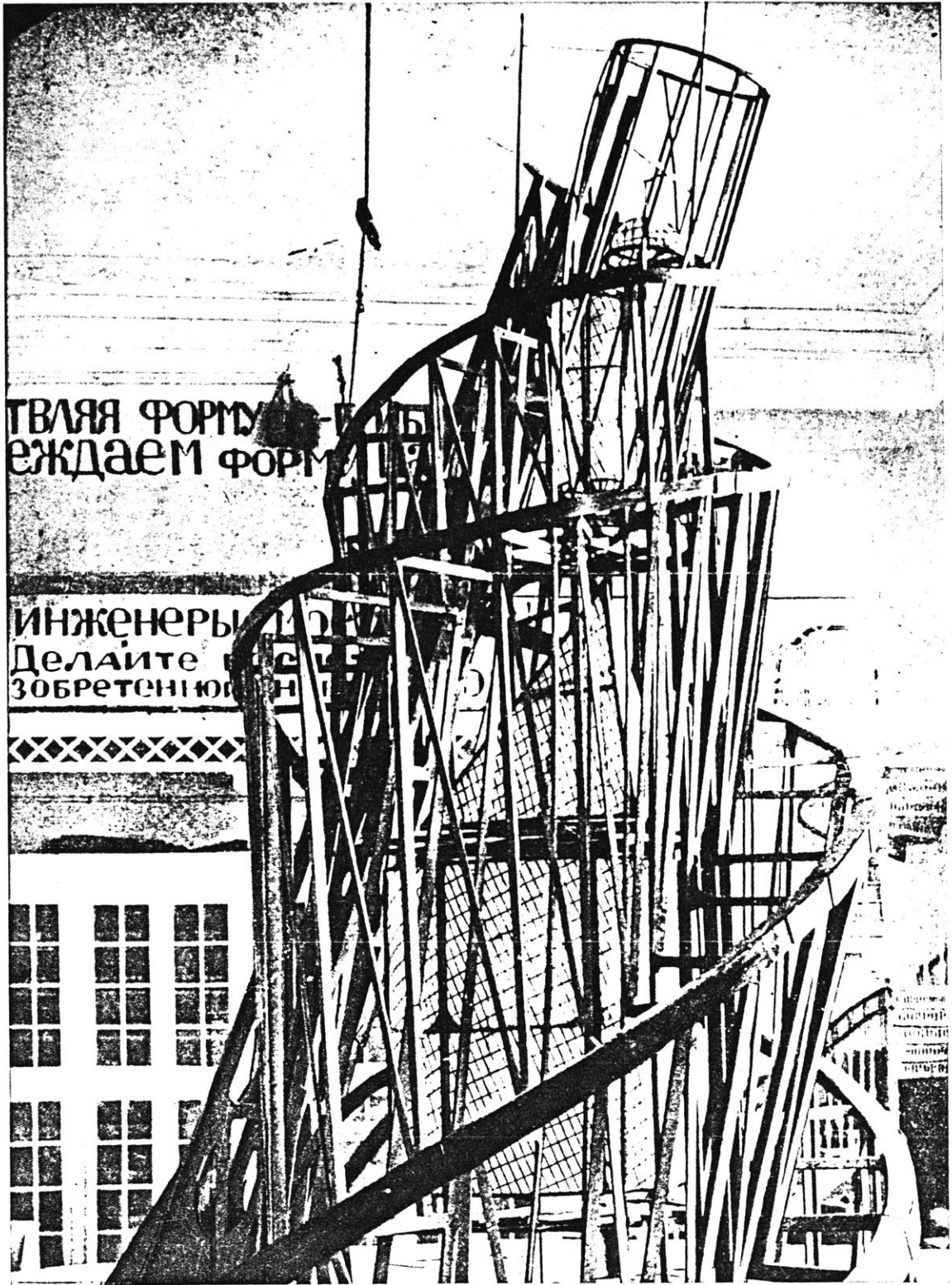
Rodchenko: (top left) "Black on Black" 1918
(top right) "Spatial Construction", 1920
(middle left) " Spatial Object", 1919
(bottom) "Spatial Construction", 1920-2



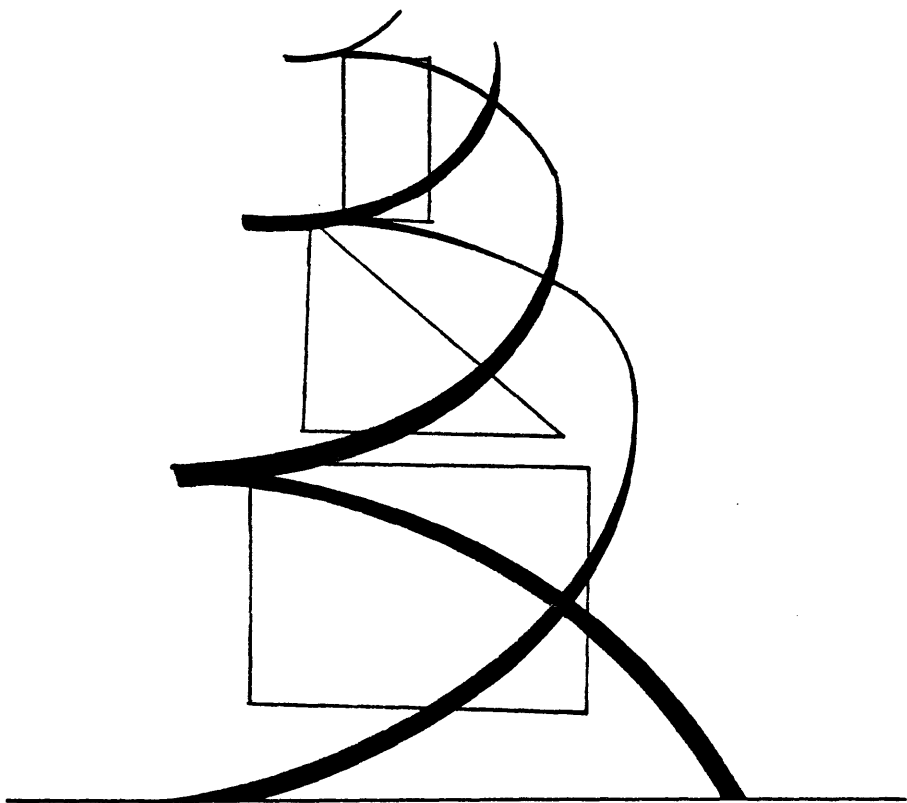
Rodchenko: "Spatial Construction", 1920-1



Rodchenko: "Spatial Construction", 1921



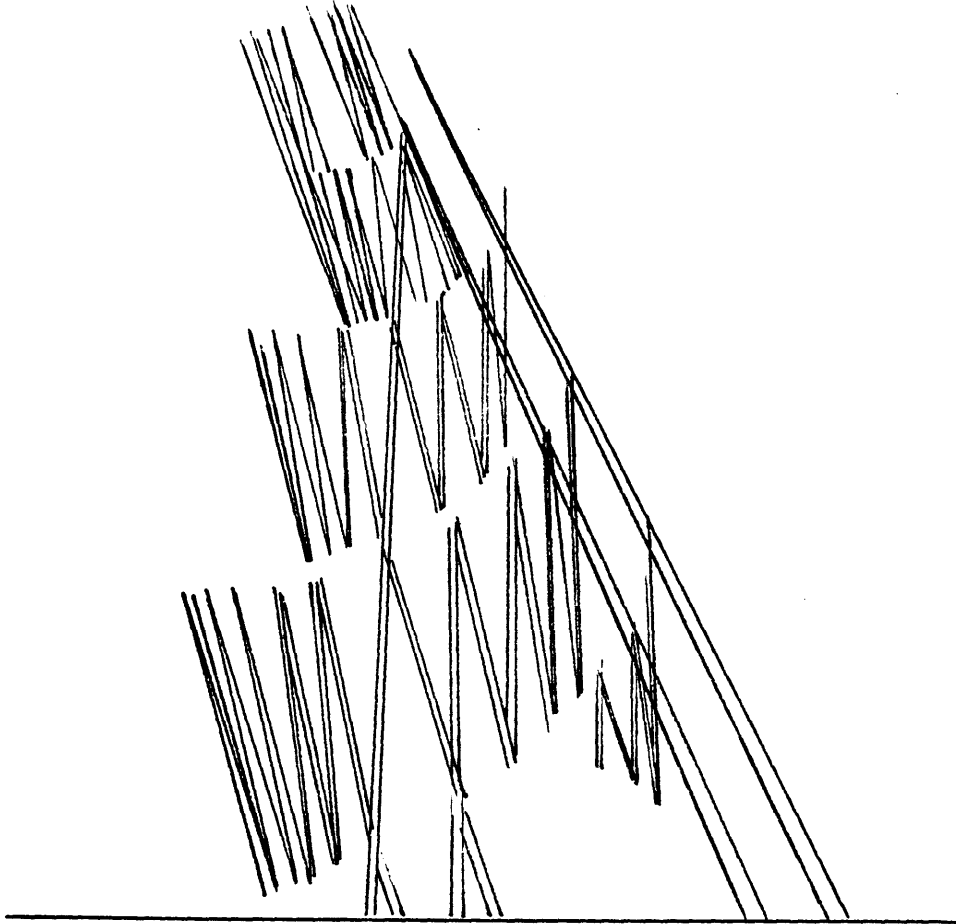
Tatlin: "Monument to the Third International", model, 1920



.the Conceptual and the Symbolic

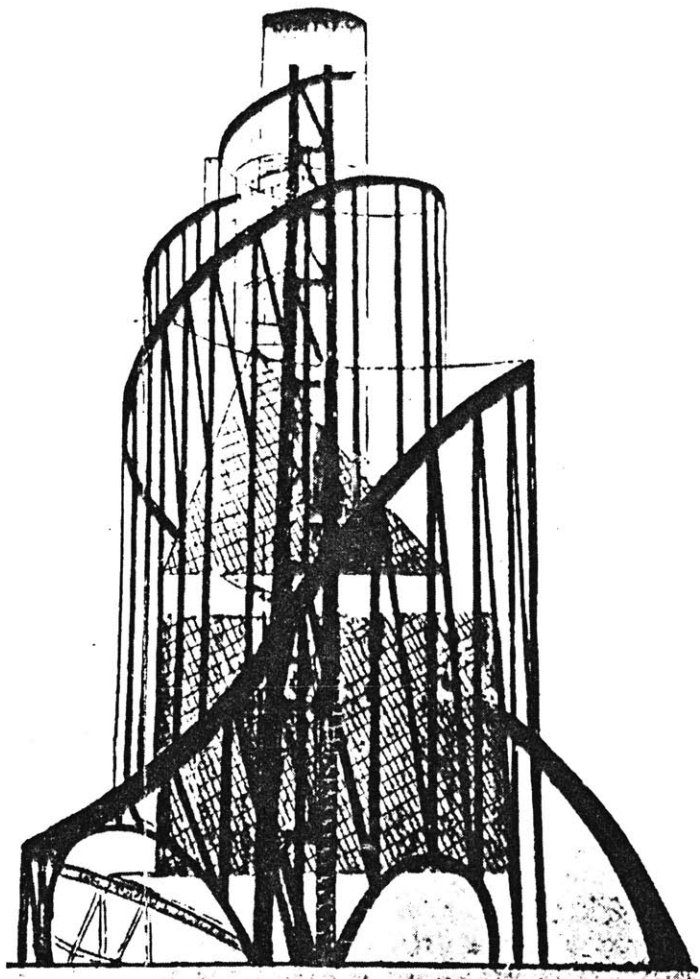
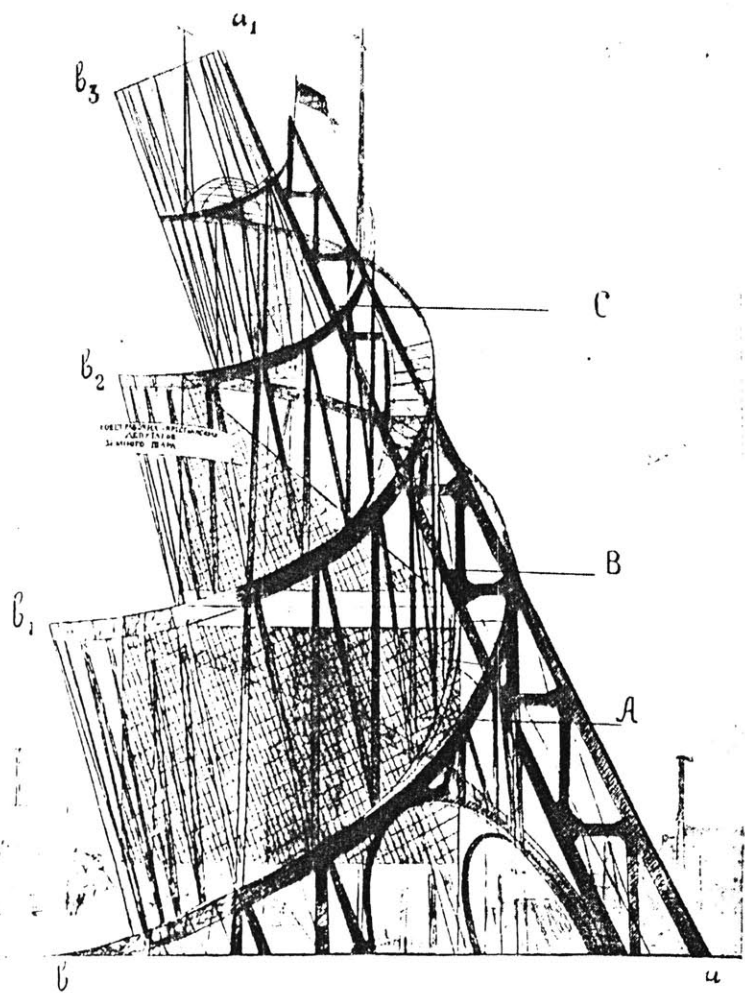
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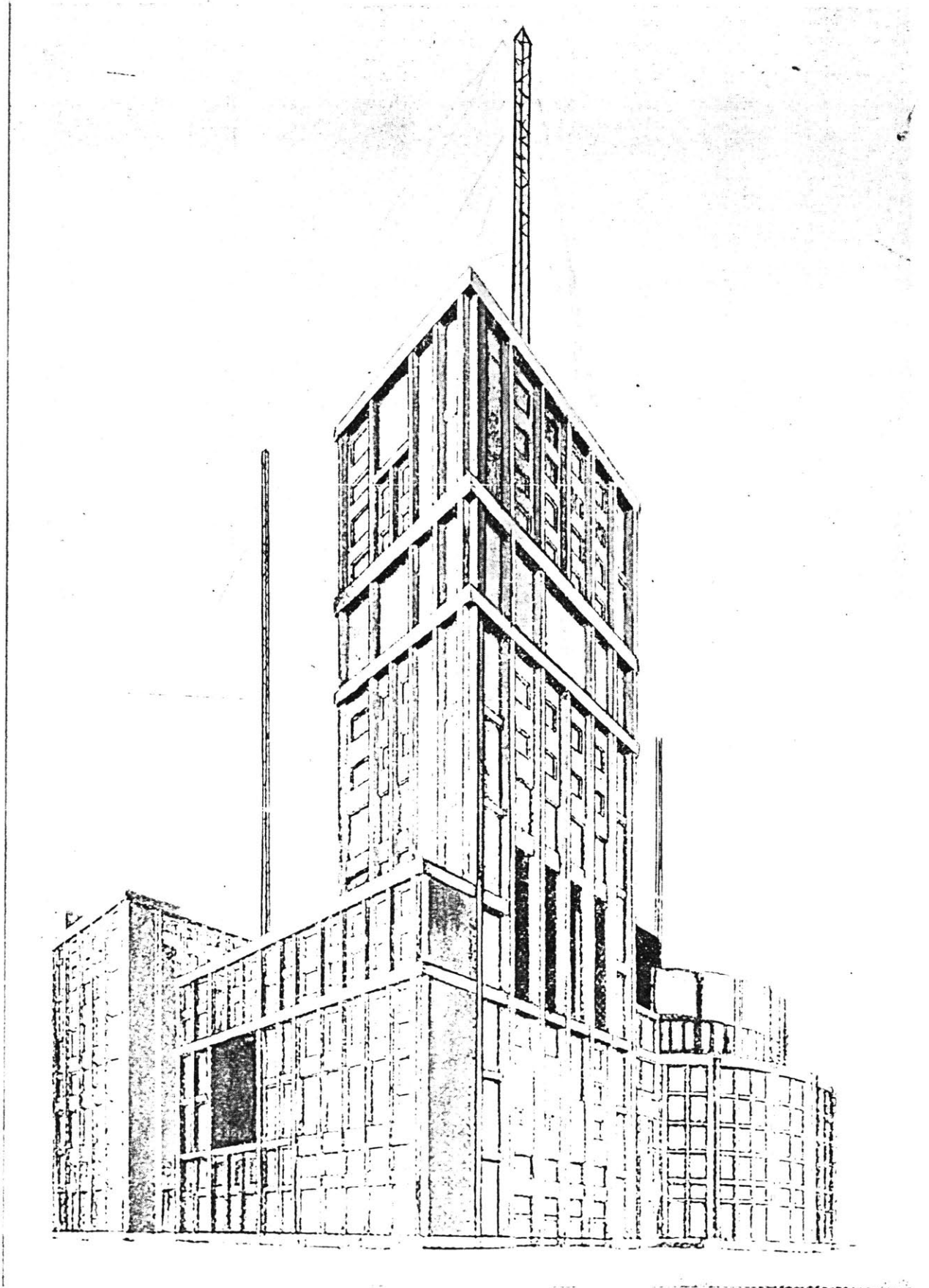
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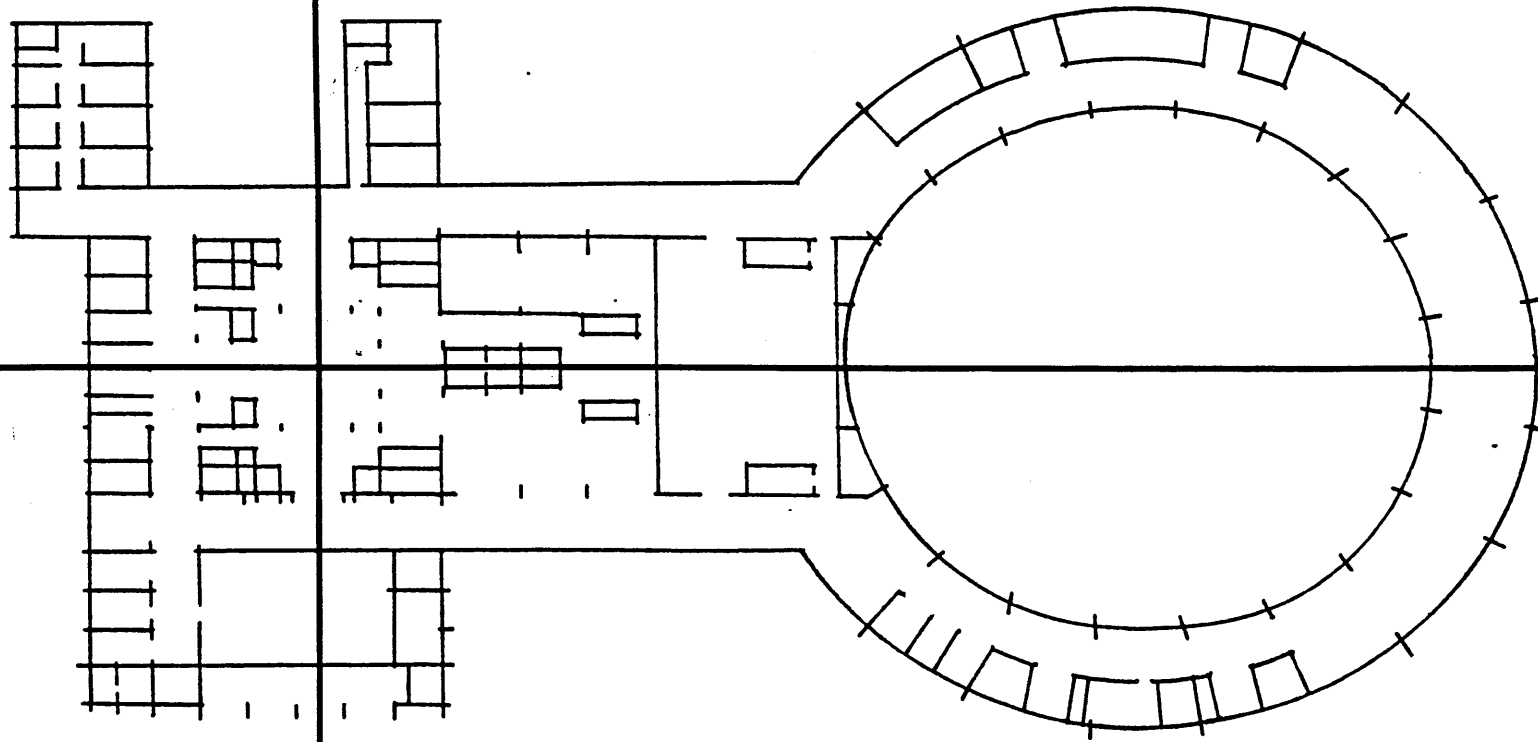
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Tatlin: "Monument to the Third International", drawings

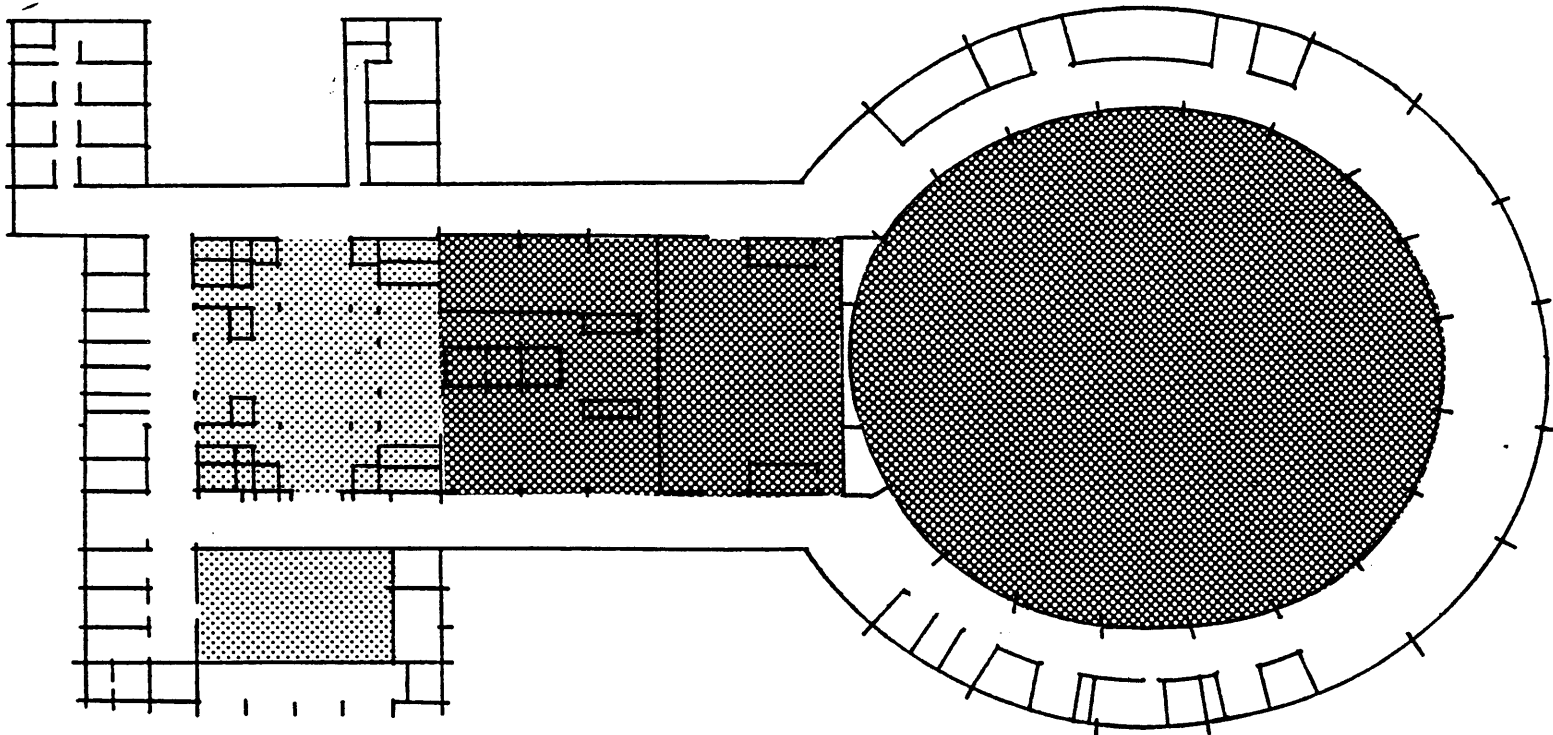




Vesnin Brothers: "Palace of Labour, Moscow", exterior perspective, 1922-23



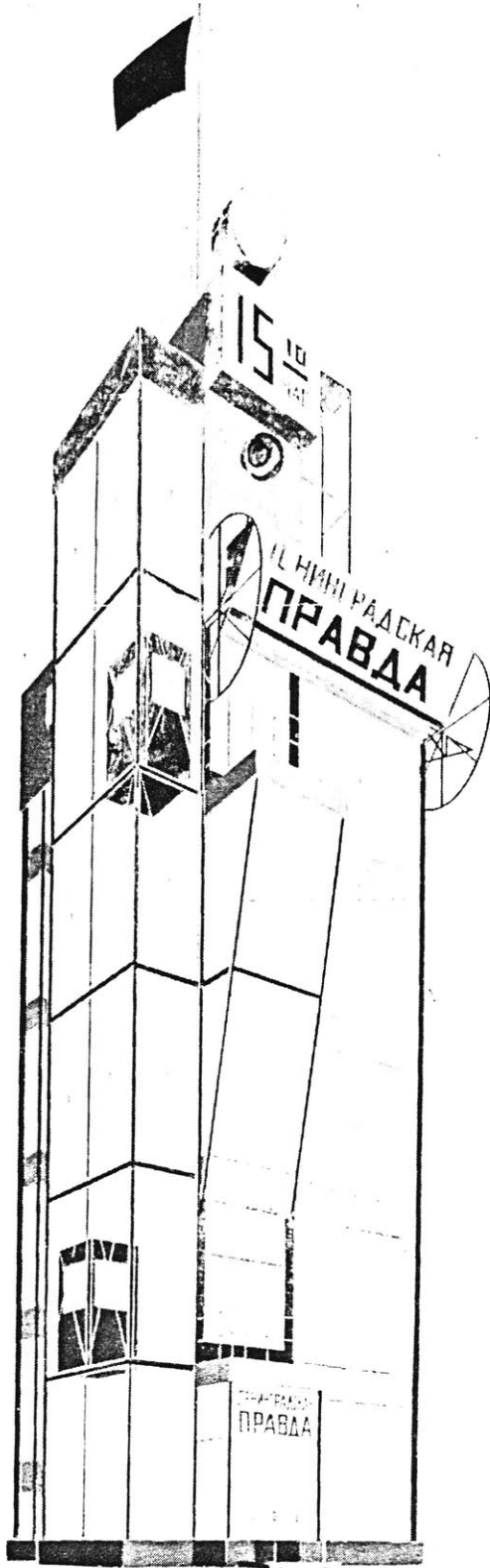
Vesnin Brothers: "Palace of Labour, Moscow", plan



gathering spaces

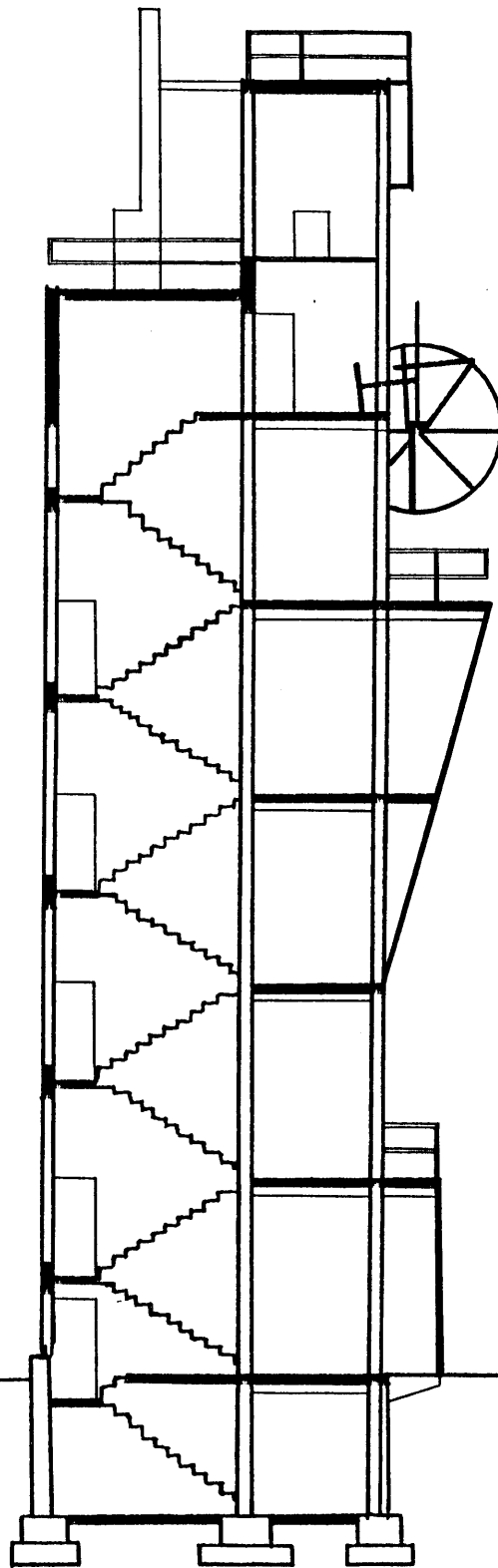
meeting spaces

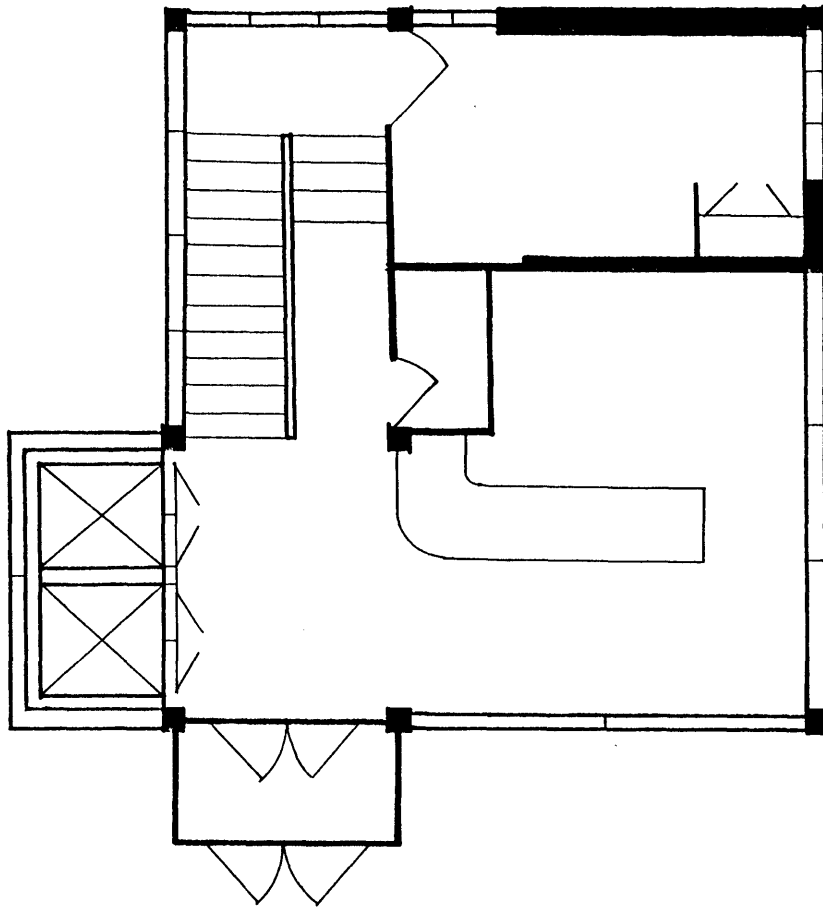
main meeting space



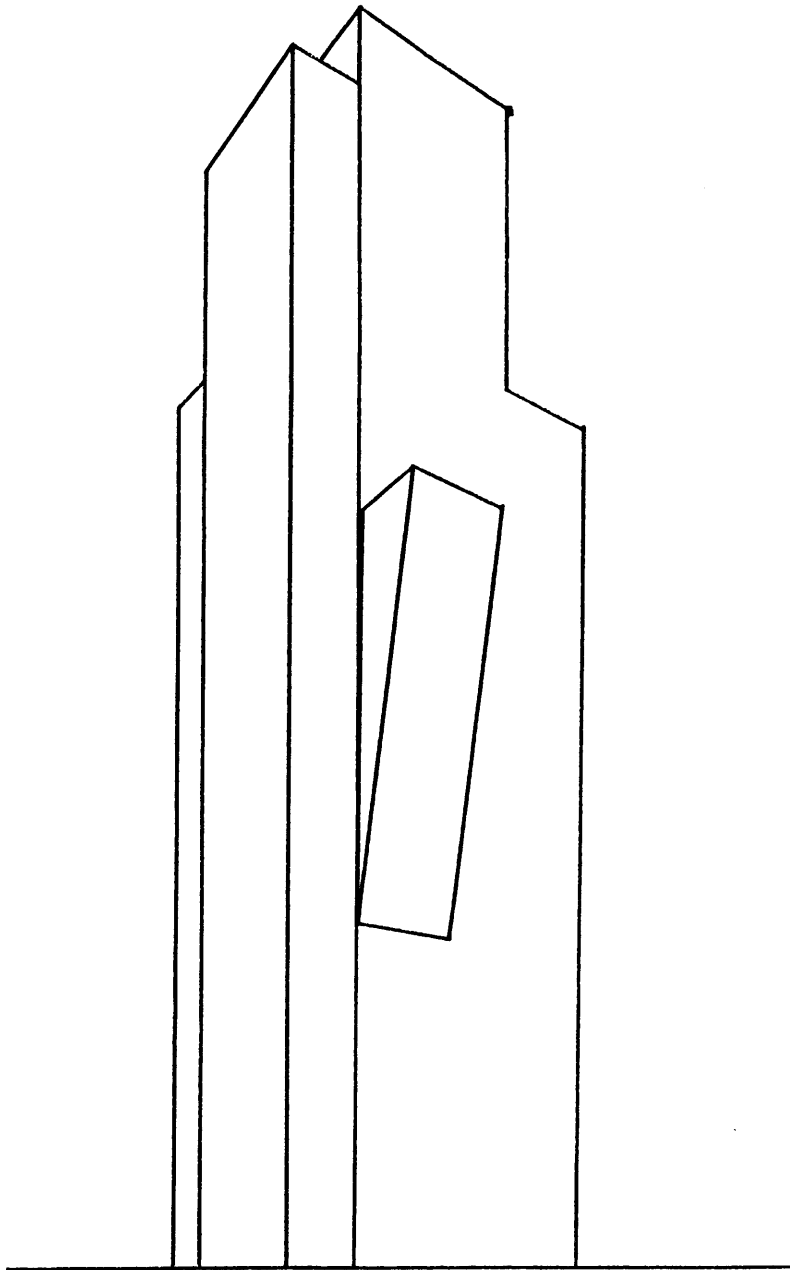
Vesnin Brothers: "Pravda Building, Moscow", exterior perspective, 1923

Vesnin Brothers: "Pravda Building, Moscow", section

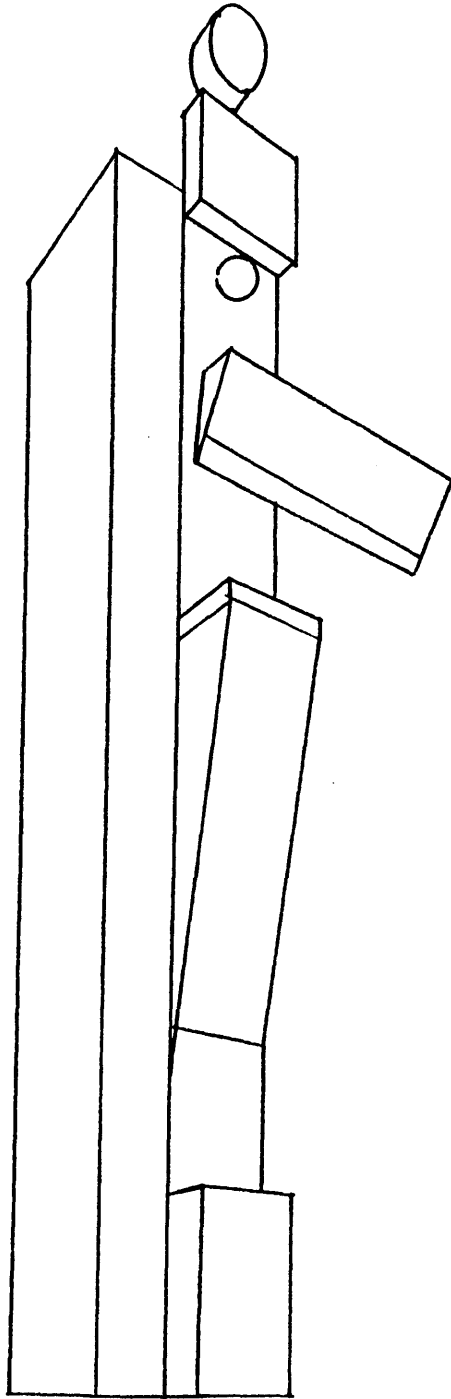




Vesnina Brothers: "Pravda Building, Moscow",
Ground floor plan



interlocking volumetric



exterior elements:

technology: spotlight
digital clock
loudspeaker
visual sign

architectonic: circulation
entrance
bay window
balconies

interior oriented: circulation
bay window

exterior oriented: spotlight
clock
loudspeaker
sign

interior/exterior: balconies
entrance

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