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# Metaphor and Modernity: Russian Constructivism

BRIONY FER

It is in order to regroup values that the poet utilizes metaphor, and not just for the sake of linguistic exercise.<sup>1</sup>

Voloshinov made this statement in 1926 with the intention of salvaging technical devices such as metaphor from purely linguistic definition and of restoring a non-verbal sense to the '*linguistic envelope*—the semantic shift'. For Voloshinov, the device played through a series of implications to the visible and knowable but not necessarily 'uttered' context. 'Discourse', he wrote, 'is, as it were, the "scenario" of an event'.<sup>2</sup> This was a criticism of the 'immanent' structure of Formalist linguistics, where artistic method was treated as autonomous and where the analysis of formal structure was deemed an *a priori* discipline which should precede any sociological analysis. Initially at least, Russian Formalist critics had tended to regard metaphor as just one of a whole range of technical devices which operated within the text to maximize the effect of 'literariness'. Shklovsky in particular tended to underestimate metaphor as a device because it had conventionally been held to endorse the Aristotelian idea that language was essentially figurative and worked in images.<sup>3</sup> As Formalist theory developed a firmer grip on semantics, metaphor regained some of its former status—but was now defined in radically different terms, with imagistic content only one of its aspects, and one which could, if need be, be dispensed with altogether. Its refound status was focused on its multiplicity.<sup>4</sup>

It is a broad view of metaphor, rather than a more narrowly defined figurative interpretation, which informs this discussion of Constructivist works by Rodchenko, Popova, Medunetsky and Vesnin. The studies in construction under consideration date from the difficult interval 1918–21, where the status of art itself was under attack following the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>5</sup> The question to be asked here is how these 'abstract' works can be seen to represent the world which produced them—but in a way which obviously does not depend on illusion and resemblance. Like metaphors, the works are unstable, caught mid-way between different categories, rather than markers on an unproblematic track towards 'art in production'. Because metaphors are linguistic tropes, their application to visual art must itself be metaphorical. As such, metaphor is used here to bring out the uneasy nature of the relationship of art and language, of art theory and language theory—and not simply as a means of mapping a linguistic system of explanation onto art. Before elaborating

that argument, some preliminary points need to be made in order to provide the relevant context. The first set of points are about the status of realism in the period, the second about the status of language.

When Voloshinov wrote that metaphors entailed a regrouping of values, he was not excluding their capacity to draw attention to the 'literariness' of the text. For Voloshinov, this was not a matter of *either* values *or* literariness, but two ways of referring to the same thing. Indeed, like Jakobson, Voloshinov wanted a relative and contextually resonant view of metaphor and other tropes.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Jakobson, however, he insisted on the basically social structure of language. Necessarily Voloshinov adopted a position *vis-à-vis* contemporary Realist aesthetics when he stressed that discourse did not reflect a 'non-verbal situation as a mirror reflects an object'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, criticism of reflection theory was a strategy characteristic also of Constructivist practice. Figurative realism persisted throughout the revolutionary reorganization and early twenties, and was a consistent presence well before Socialist Realism was imposed as official Soviet cultural policy in the early thirties.<sup>8</sup> As such it was the constant complement and underside of all avant-garde activity.

A pre-requisite for geometric abstraction was a belief in the value of the resistance of art to narrative, to literature, and consequently to figurative realism as it had developed in Russia during the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> By the twenties, interpretations of conventional Realist aesthetics ranged from the vulgar Marxist view of art as an unmediated window onto the world to more subtle formulations of the mirror theory of art as reflection which acknowledged the mediating aspects of art. Some of the crudest versions of the idea of figurative art as the mere reflection of reality had been marshalled by the avant-garde itself in defence of the cause of artistic autonomy. Rozanova, for example, had discussed the art of the past as *mere* imitation in 1913:

The artist of the Past, riveted to nature, forgot about the picture as an important phenomenon, and as a result, it became merely a pale reminder of what he saw, a boring assemblage of ready-made, indivisible images of nature, the fruit of logic with its immutable, nonaesthetic characteristics. Nature enslaved the artist.<sup>10</sup>

With its connotations of passivity and subservience, this parody of representation became a commonplace to the avant-garde and its audience. Their denial of the technical aspects of realist art was an

inconsistent, but pragmatic, position to take which enabled a clear-cut affirmation of Futurist art by contrast. The opposition was stark, as David Burliuk put it:

Today we do have art. Yesterday it was the means, today it has become the end. Painting has begun to pursue only Painterly objectives. It has begun to live for itself.<sup>11</sup>

According to this avant-garde model, representation tended to be confused with resemblance.<sup>12</sup> Yet it is clear from the constant insistence on 'painterly objectives' as exclusive of representation, that the notion of autonomy itself was conceptually interlocked with that which it set out to negate—figurative realism as it had developed from the nineteenth century.

In fact, the inheritance of Realist practice and criticism was far more substantial than the parody suggests. It was a tradition in criticism which allowed for latent meanings to surface, revealing more than the conscious mind intended. This was the tradition taken up by Lukàcs, which derived from nineteenth-century Realist aesthetics. Dobrolyubov's 'magic mirror' reflected the world of social and class development.<sup>13</sup> Engels took Balzac to be the greatest master of realism on the grounds that 'his truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances' compelled him to represent the world in a way that went against his own class sympathies.<sup>14</sup> Lenin pursued the same line of argument in the article that he wrote on Tolstoy in 1908:

That Tolstoy, owing to these contradictions, could not possibly understand either the working-class movement and its role in the struggle for socialism, or the Russian revolution, goes without saying. But the contradictions in Tolstoy's views and doctrines are not accidental; they express the contradictory conditions of Russian life in the last third of the nineteenth century . . . From this point of view, the contradictions in Tolstoy's views are indeed a mirror of those contradictory conditions in which the peasantry had to play their historical part in our revolution.<sup>15</sup>

Here was the idea that the mirror could show more than the author could knowingly articulate, revealing real conditions through the breadth of detail. For Lukàcs later, as well as for the nineteenth-century Realist critics, the desired effect was an image of the totality of social relations. This was to be achieved through the portrayal of representative social and class types.

When it came to applying this type of criticism after the revolution to a contemporary, rather than to a past culture, its critical aspects were for the most part shed in favour of a fairly crude insistence on intentionality. 'Contradiction' gave way to celebration of the new soviet types. However, there were those, like Trotsky, who insisted on the mediating properties of art whilst continuing to use the image of the mirror. For Trotsky, the mirror was an agency

of reconstruction—not passive but active. 'Of course', he wrote in *Literature and Revolution* in 1923, 'no one speaks of an exact mirror', but 'To reject art as a means of picturing and imaging knowledge because of one's opposition to the contemplative and impressionistic art of the past few decades, is to strike from the hands of the class which is building a new society its most important weapon'.<sup>16</sup> Yet Trotsky was in agreement with the Realist position that works without 'subject matter' gave up their capacity to communicate. It was in opposition to the view that this capacity resided solely in subject and motif, and that art reflected society, that Russian Constructivism developed.

Both Lenin and Trotsky insisted upon the problematic character of the period of transition, which would ultimately lead to Communism. However, the Realist position taken by the AKhRR group in the twenties refused to allow for such conflict to be enacted in art.<sup>17</sup> Yevgeny Katsman's use of an illusionistic technique in *Listening (Members of the Communist Faction from the Village of Baranovka)* (Fig. 1), demonstrates an acceptance of the authority of nineteenth-century modes of representation. The AKhRR group assumed that there could be such a thing as a 'truthful' picture, and that 'truth' was pictured by a skilled, academic and photographic rendering. Despite claims for the compatibility of figurative realism to the period and its increasing legitimisation by the Party,<sup>18</sup> its refusal of the contradictory and the uncertain made it no real correlate for the period of transition: that problematic was expressed in Constructivism, not simply by rejecting the category of 'art'—for that step was not nearly so simple as it has often been taken to be—but just because of the difficulties of signification, of the shifting, unstable character of the works produced.<sup>19</sup>

In order to make sense as avant-garde practices, both Futurism and Constructivism opposed and negated the strategies associated with Realism. To claim that the work of the avant-garde was as a consequence conceptually interlocked with what it negated opens Constructivism to a whole field of reference previously denied to it. This axis of Constructivism-Realism was one of a series of antinomies with which the avant-garde worked—and it provided the base-line, as it were, for other associations and inferences to work from. That is to say that the works did not simply negate, but signified, and it is what was signified, and how, that is at issue here.<sup>20</sup> So how, without the appearance of subject matter, might reference and association operate? 'Reference' is here taken to indicate both a process of pointing to and also of carrying associations.

Kristeva has discussed the 'aura of systematics' that prevailed at the time of the inception of modern linguistics (and, as she claims, in which linguistics is still bathed).<sup>21</sup> Russian Constructivism was pervaded with the same aura which she identifies in Russian Formalist literary criticism and linguistic analysis. At the heart of the programme of the First Working



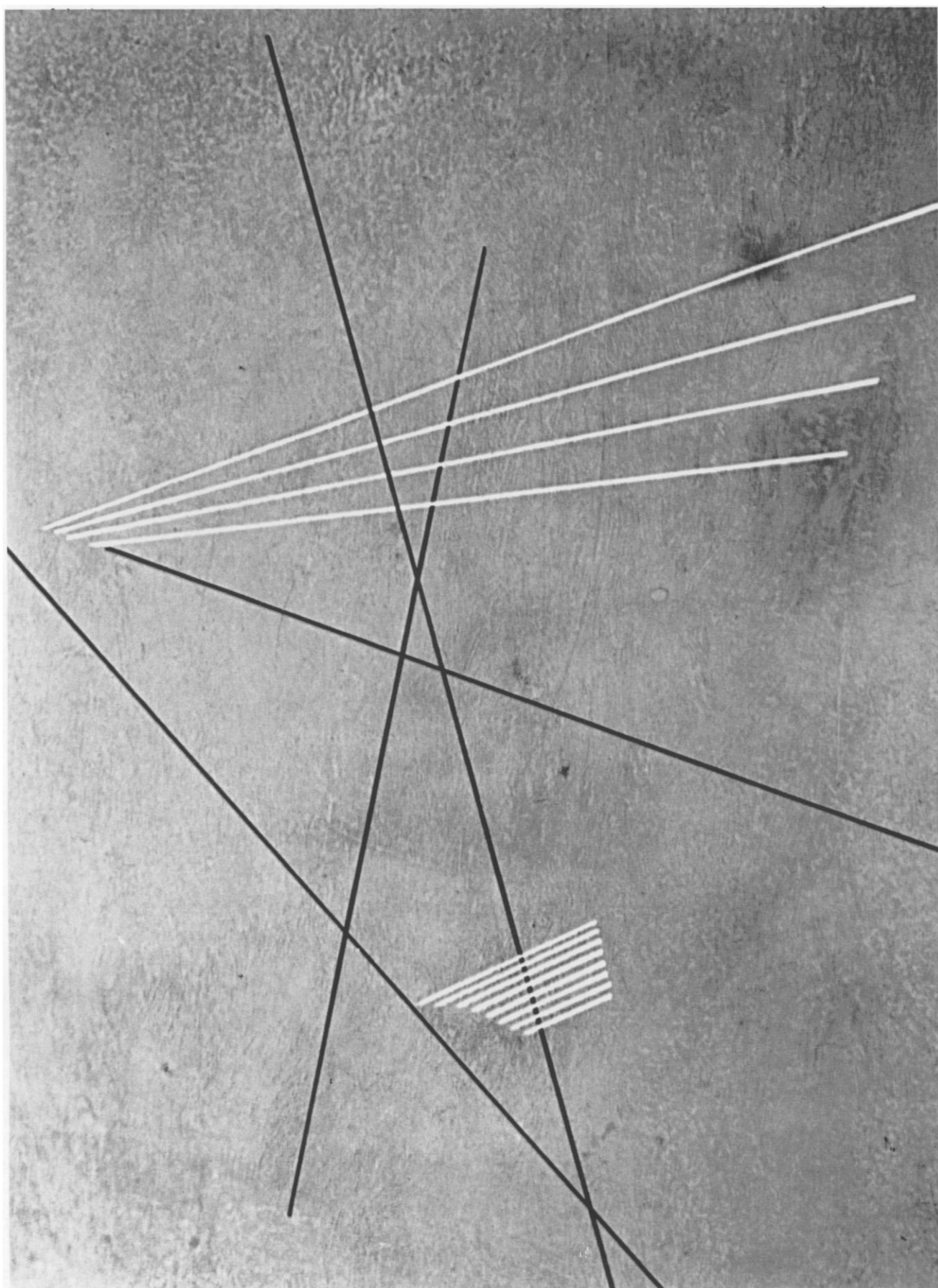
Fig. 1. Yevgeny Katsman: 'Listening (Members of the Communist Faction from the Village of Baranovka)', 1925, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Group of Constructivists, set up in 1921, was the apparently objective analysis of a systematic practice. The basic system would consist of a set of principles—scientific principles—which could, once established, be applied in the production of useful goods. In the 'First Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists', produced in March 1921, the three central tenets of Constructivist production were claimed to be *tectonics*, *faktura* and *construction*—that is, structuring, handling, and organizing material. The aim was to achieve 'the communistic expression of material structures' and a synthesis between the 'ideological aspect with the formal'.<sup>22</sup> The intentions of the Constructivists and their context within avant-garde circles have been well documented elsewhere, in particular by Christina Lodder.<sup>23</sup> The problem addressed here is how a belief in such principles could have come to be held.

The Constructivists thought that principles could be established that would enable the systematic structuring of properties. As a procedure, this was adapted from the earlier definition of properties peculiar to painting. Accordingly, it followed that Realism should have been identified as that which

allowed the intrusion of properties alien to painting such as narrative. Narratives, which told tales of social, sexual, and other mores, were seen as the cuckoo in art's nest.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, one of the key points made in support of geometric abstraction in the 1910s had been its status as the antithesis of language; consequently art had gained its autonomy *because* literary and other referential concerns had been dispelled from it. The resistance to language was all-important—yet this idea of an imperviousness to language developed amidst a set of debates about language as a paradigmatic system. Art was, in an important sense, seen to be *like* language because it functioned systematically—and its analysis could be scientific just as linguistic analysis was. Language provided a model as a system, not as a means of 'thinking in images' or as a vehicle for narrative.<sup>25</sup>

In art as in language, the system was believed to be made up of component parts. In art those components were elements in a formal 'language'—a language that was modelled on verbal language. These elements were the subject of practical demonstration in Constructivist works. As Popova wrote in connection with the  $5 \times 5 = 25$  exhibition, held at



*Fig. 2.* Alexander Rodchenko: 'Linear Construction', 1918, oil on board, 47 × 36.2 cm. Private collection.

the All-Russian Union of Poets Club in Moscow in 1921:

Our work on each of the elements (line, plane, volume, space, textural colour, material etc.) goes beyond the bounds of a mere abstract exercise in elements. The results of this research compel us to set ourselves a specific aim: to concretize the element, i.e. to reduce it to a defined and concrete form so that the artist can use it freely and assuredly for his general constructive objectives.<sup>26</sup>

Work on elements within the 'language' was endorsed by giving it the status of 'laboratory work'—just as, in science, 'pure' research could be carried out and then applied. This was a way of rationalizing the sort of work that had been done previously, particularly since 1918. In 1921, Rodchenko referred to the way in which 'work in the composition of forms and on their structural systems gradually brought the *line* to surface as an element of construction'.<sup>27</sup> The line, as one element within the system, preoccupied Rodchenko in a series of works which included *Linear Construction* of 1918 (Fig. 2) and *Non-Objective Painting* of 1919 (Fig. 3). *Faktura* or the density of surface, on the other hand, was under scrutiny in the *Black on Black* series (Fig. 4).

The basic elements of art had been identified as geometrical well before the Constructivists treated them to *soi-disant* laboratory conditions. Malevich,

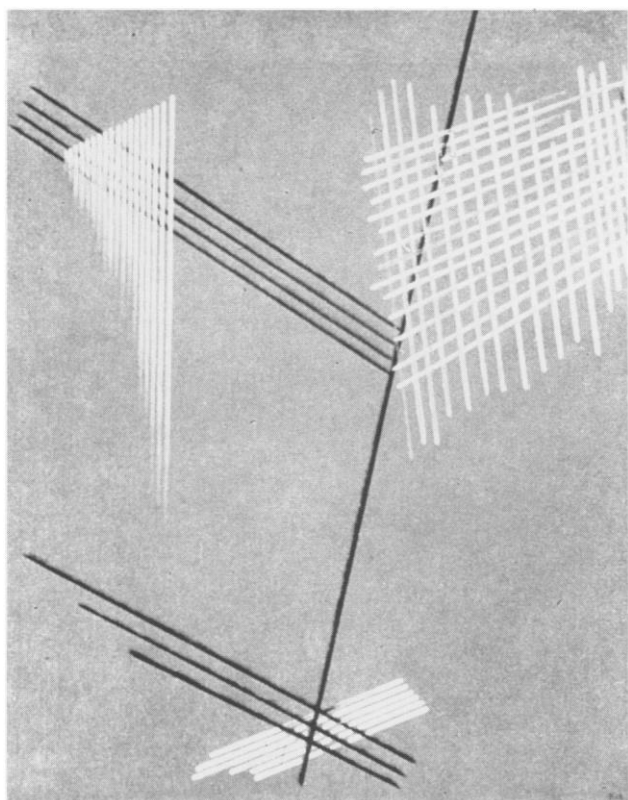


Fig. 3. Alexander Rodchenko: 'Non-Objective Painting', 1919, oil on canvas, 84.5 × 71.1 cm. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist through Jay Leyda.

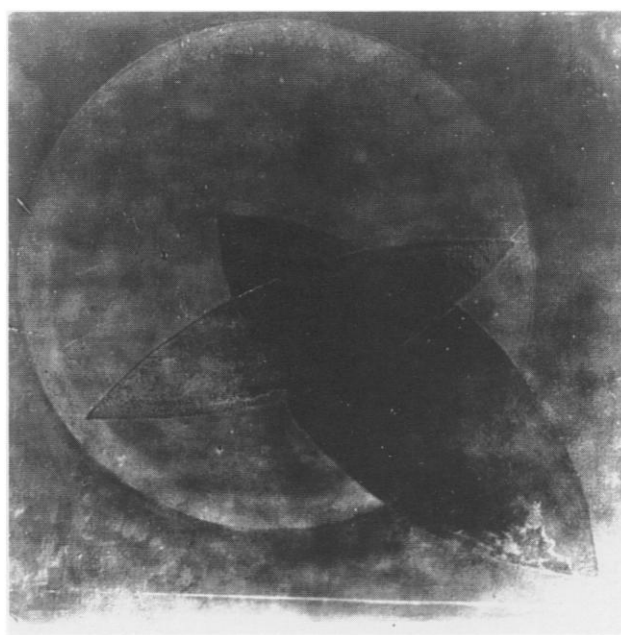


Fig. 4. Alexander Rodchenko: 'Suprematist Composition: Black on Black', 1918, oil on canvas, 29 × 29 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Photograph courtesy, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

with more mystical ends in view, had represented the system of devices which constituted art in a series of endless permutations of forms in static, in dynamic, in lateral and in literal relationships with one another.<sup>28</sup> For Malevich's Suprematist works to be perceived *as art* required a familiarity with the idea that the system of art was of a geometrical order (an idea that could be traced to the academic classical tradition) and that a function of art could be to lay that system bare. As such, the square of *The Black Square* and its permutations were represented as part of a system and, moreover, as part of a system that was analogous to that of verbal language. Planes, lines and surfaces came to be seen to be like the verbal 'material' of language and to correspond to the devices in language which rendered that material 'artful'. This blurring of the distinction between material as the 'stuff' of art *and* as the device or process was a characteristic of the practice of art: the square for Malevich or the line for Rodchenko were both the raw material and a basic device of art.

The concept of 'raw material' was an aspect of Futurism that was developed by the Formalists. Jakobson was consistent in his treatment of the material of literature as its verbal texture—as that which made up its 'literariness'.<sup>29</sup> Shklovsky, on the other hand, was at times rather ambiguous about what actually constituted 'material'—he referred sometimes to the material provided by the experience of the world and sometimes to the technical materials at the disposal of writers.<sup>30</sup> The material which most concerned him, though, was the material of prosaic or everyday language, that was 'made strange' and therefore *artful* through the use

of poetic devices. It was this process which triggered the necessary poetic effect of defamiliarization or deflection from reality.<sup>31</sup>

The point here is not to find direct equivalences between art and language theory, but rather to point to their problematic relation. For it soon becomes clear that the task of specifying equivalent devices in art and in literature, words for colours and such like, is a ludicrous one. Rather, the analogy was general enough to be effective and endowed the system of art with a 'grammar' and a 'syntax' of its own. In art, the 'system' was seen to be in opposition to realist and figurative art. In Formalist literary criticism, on the other hand, the Realist literary tradition of the nineteenth century was deemed just as suitable for analysis as the sort of Futurist poetry which loudly celebrated its own autonomy.<sup>32</sup> Shklovsky, for example, treated narrative description as a literary device in his study of Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, which appeared in *LEF* in 1924. Descriptive passages were treated as a device to slow down the plot.<sup>33</sup> Art critics such as Punin and Tarabukin, who worked within a broadly Formalist critical framework, never tackled the Realist tradition in visual art in this way, but defined modern painting by virtue of its difference to the traditional form; in Tarabukin's words, its difference to 'the "literary story" which usually prevailed over form in traditional canvases'.<sup>34</sup>

The search for the features which differentiated art from narrative, art from the whole spectrum of its 'others', focused on one key distinction: construction and composition. A series of debates were conducted at INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) during the spring of 1921.<sup>35</sup> Because this distinction was so insecure, it is revealing. The debates show how the terms cut across contemporary discourse, working through analogy and metaphor; how their binary opposition defined the relative properties of each; how that definition was anything but secure or fixed. There was an awareness of the difficulties involved in categorizing the process of art in this way; for example, Rodchenko was fairly tentative when he commented, 'in my works, there is not yet pure construction, instead there is constructive composition'.<sup>36</sup> Differences of opinion emerged during the discussion at a meeting at INKhUK on 22 April 1921. Some—notably members of the First Working Group of Constructivists—believed that construction must be related to three-dimensional objects and not to the two-dimensional realm of painting, and that construction must be closely related to utilitarian work in production. Others believed that construction was not tied to a utilitarian purpose but was essentially an organizing artistic device. Without conceding that construction was purely aesthetic, Rodchenko evidently believed that a little confusion was a necessary, if not necessarily desirable, part of the transition to construction proper.

For those committed to utilitarian purpose, a distinction was made between 'construction', as an organizing principle and the kind of aesthetic func-

tion which accorded with the retrogressive notion of the 'composition'. It is this distinction that Medunetsky tried to demonstrate in the drawings *Construction* (Fig. 5) and *Composition* (Fig. 6), both dated 1920. The 'construction', annotated 'proekty konstruksy' (project of construction), is a drawing of a three-dimensional object; the 'composition', on the other hand, is frankly two-dimensional and in effect 'framed' by the enclosing ruler-drawn lines. The configuration within the frame is an arrangement of both ruler- and hand-drawn lines and of compass- and hand-drawn circles. Medunetsky has used chiaroscuro and shading to demarcate the forms against a blank 'background'. If the chiaroscuro were intended to suggest relief, this is denied by the other elements. The 'construction', on the other hand, is made up exclusively of ruler- and compass-drawn lines. The three-dimensional object depicted is not entirely logical in terms of its spatial relationships and, although a 'real' object of sorts, it is not one with a recognizable use. As a construction, it was intended as 'laboratory work' where 'research' was done in the abstract, as it were, in preparation for functional deployment of the principles established.

Of these two drawings, the construction actually relies to the greater extent on resemblance—in

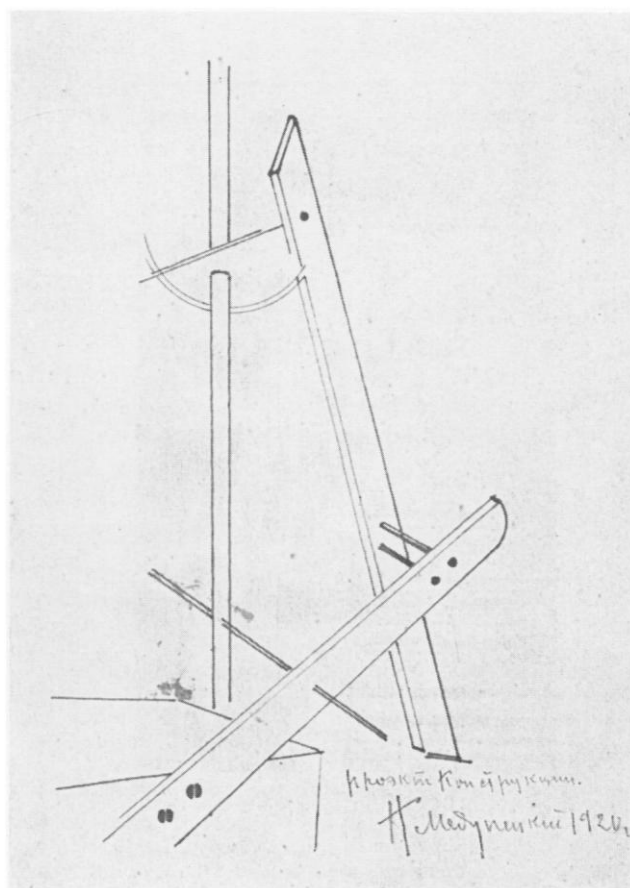


Fig. 5. Konstantin Medunetsky: 'Construction', 1920, brown ink on paper, 27 × 19.1 cm, on reverse, Inkhuk stamp no. 27. The George Costakis Collection, Athens.

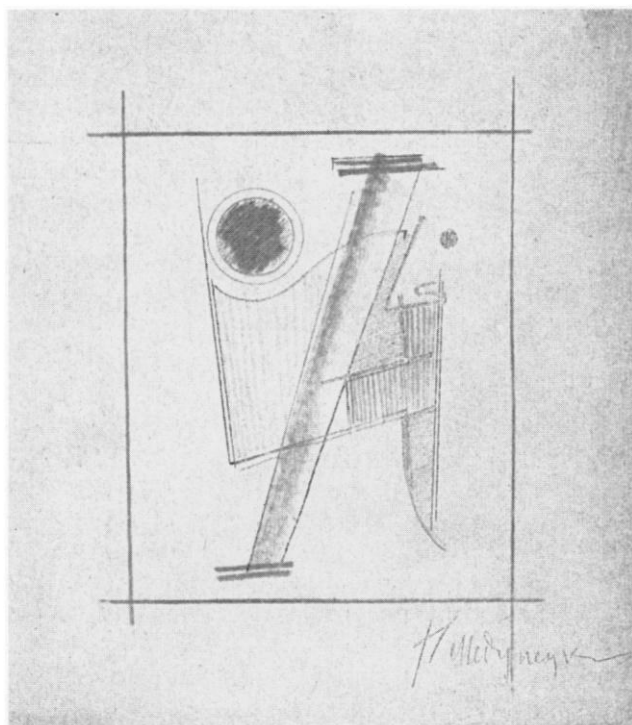


Fig. 6. Konstantin Medunetsky: 'Composition', 1920, pencil and orange crayon on paper, 26.8 × 23.4 cm, on reverse, Inkhuk stamp no. 26. The George Costakis Collection, Athens.

looking like something three-dimensional if, admittedly, of uncertain use. It was on this point that Ioganson criticized both Medunetsky and the Stenberg brothers for merely representing (in the sense of resembling) technical constructions.<sup>37</sup> This tendency towards resemblance seems to have been a by-product of the insistence on the three-dimensional nature of construction, as opposed to the picture-flatness of paintings. As Christina Lodder has written, although Medunetsky and the Stenberg brothers did not 'totally dismiss the idea that a construction could exist within the two-dimensional art form, [...] their formulations led them to see it as only effective in the three-dimensional technical construction'.<sup>38</sup> Vladimir Stenberg's contributions to the INKhUK debate of a *Construction* (Fig. 7) and a *Composition* (Fig. 8) may be seen to illustrate the same point, similarly making the distinction between two and three dimensions. The *Construction* is a drawing for a three-dimensional structure. The problem, however, is in what sense these works in construction, or even the objects they depict, can be understood to be 'technical constructions'.

Construction was distinguished from composition in an INKhUK paper of March 1921,

*Construction is the effective organization of material elements*

The indications of construction:

- i. the best use of materials
- ii. the absence of any superfluous elements

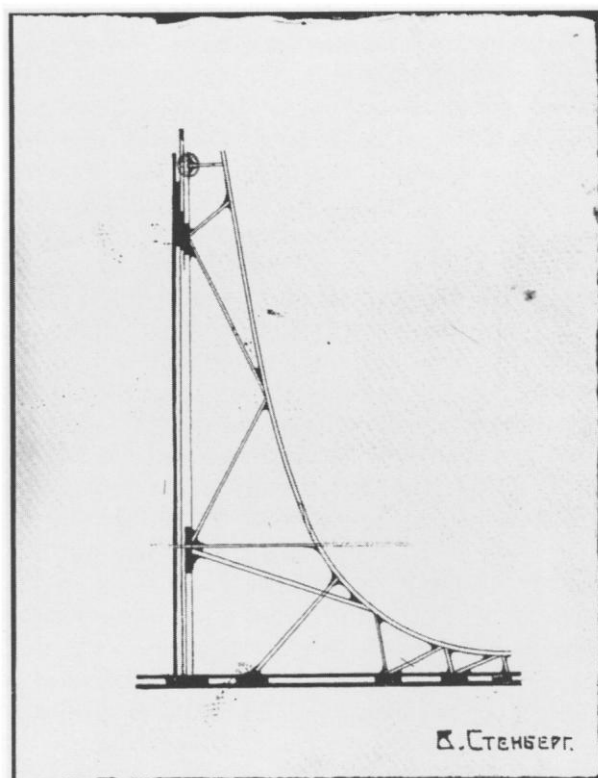


Fig. 7. Vladimir Stenberg: 'Construction', 1920, ink on paper, 25.4 × 19.3 cm, Inkhuk stamp no. 6. The George Costakis Collection, Athens.

The scheme of a construction is the combination of lines, and the planes and forms which they define; it is a system of forces.

Composition is an arrangement according to a defined and conventional signification.<sup>39</sup>

Construction, then, was seen, as 'effective organization' as opposed to 'arrangement'; it was a 'system' which, we can deduce, is *not* subject to 'a defined and conventional signification'. And signification might, but need not, refer to figuration; or the conventional meaning attached to the composition might be, not figurative reference, but that of the art object and the 'purely aesthetic' interests attributable to it. This could be interpreted to mean, of course, that construction does not depend on signification or meaning—conventional or otherwise. This distinction between system and signification, as if they were exclusive objectives, is belied by dependence of the 'constructions' on reference and association—to three-dimensional constructions, to technical drawing and so forth. This set of associations can provide a frame of reference for Medunetsky's construction; for it is not inherently more systematic than other possible formulations, yet it drew on a contemporary currency of meanings to signify technical construction. The idea of the system itself had been signified through the underlying reference to the realm of language theory, to questions of what language is. Now this can be seen

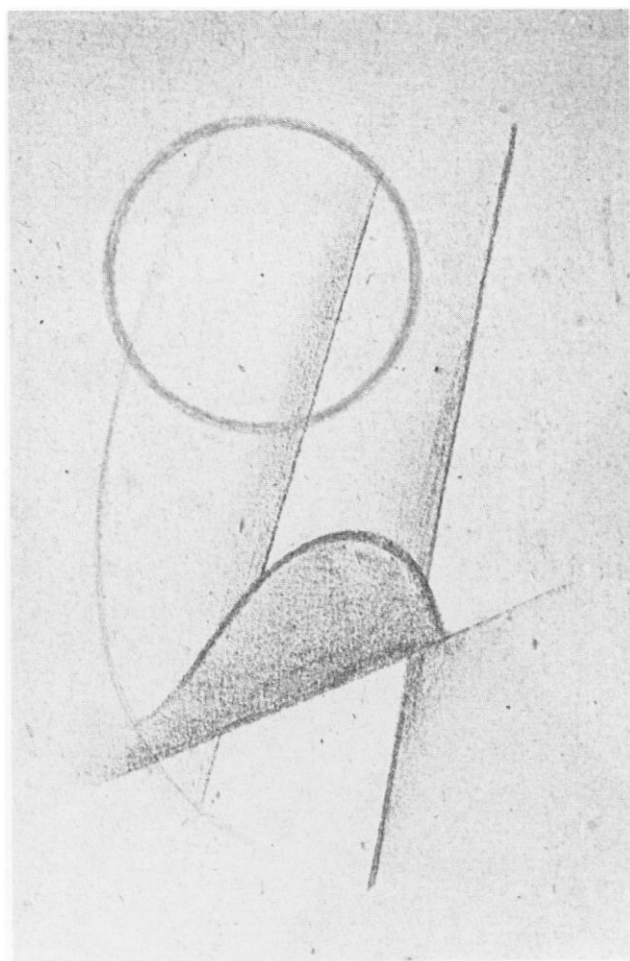


Fig. 8. Vladimir Stenberg: 'Composition', 1920, coloured pencil on paper, 21 × 13.9 cm, Inkhuk stamp no. 5. The George Costakis Collection, Athens.

to be overlaid by the dual possibilities within the system of art: composition or construction. So individual parts are represented as *if* part of a system, which may be a system of composition or, more appropriately, of construction. In construction, the parts are represented as scientific, as governed by objective principles: 'constructiveness' is integral to the artefacts only in so far as it is signified.

The network of discourses allowing these works to be seen as constructions rather than as compositions, or indeed as absurdly failed technical drawings, also allied the constructions with other social systems, notably those of science and industrial production. In the reconstruction of social life after 1917, these had changed radically and, in the limited context of this discussion, it is possible to identify a shift in the primary fields of reference—from systems of language and language theory to a situation where these, still residual, were overlaid with other, more urgent metaphors. The connotations of the term 'construction' changed accordingly. Like *faktura*, the term 'constructive', which formed the root of the term Constructivism, had originally entered the Russian language from the French. Its specific appli-

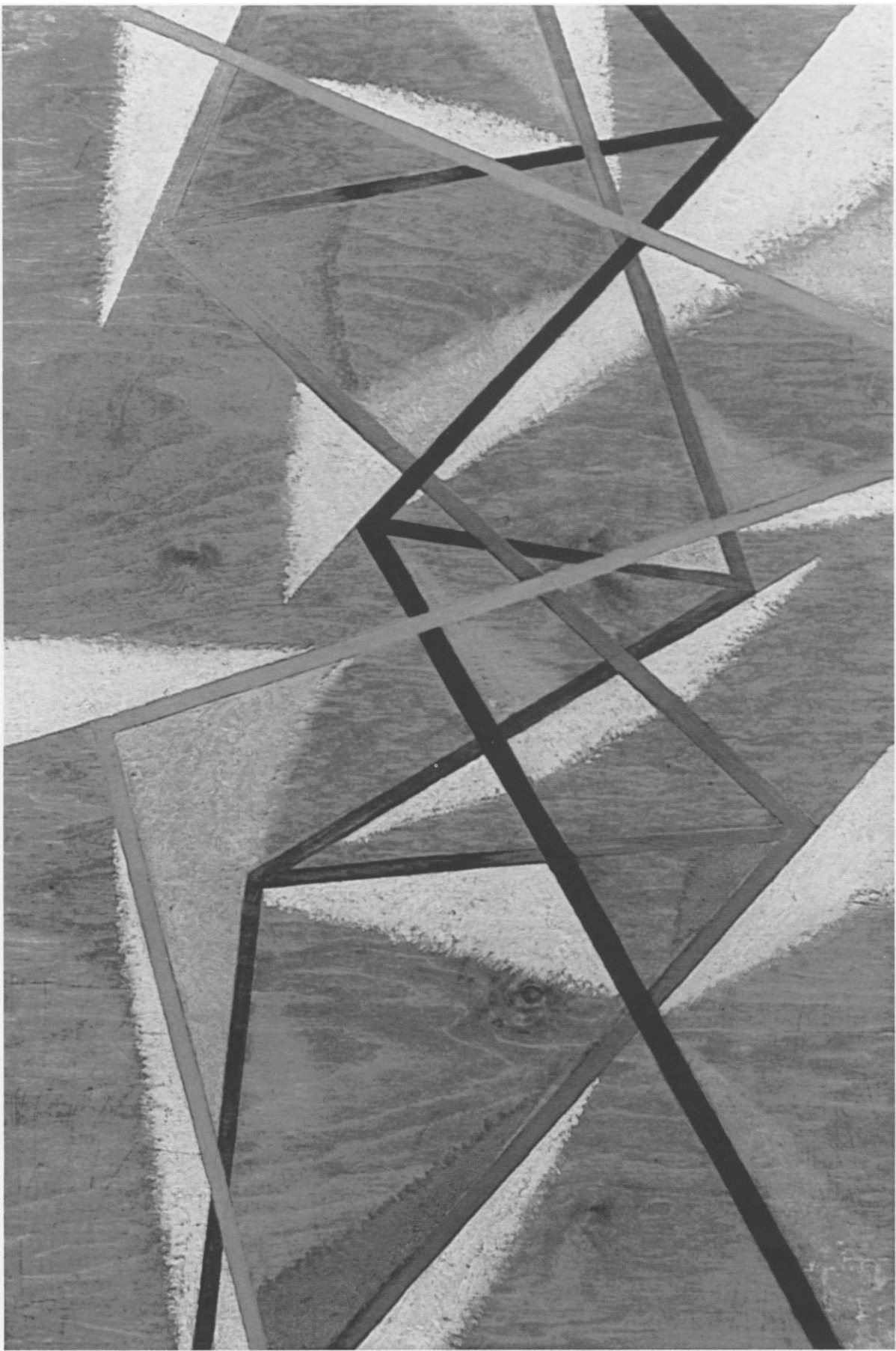
cation to art in this instance derived from its use in French Cubist theory, with which the Russians were familiar. As in the French, the meaning of the word 'konstruksiya' ranged through building to grammatical construction.<sup>40</sup>

In the early 1910s, the Russian avant-garde was using the term 'constructive' to refer to the surface of Cubo-Futurist works.<sup>41</sup> After 1917, the term accrued connotations of the social role of the artist as that of a constructor and an engineer. This move has been well documented elsewhere and Christina Lodder has noted the first probable use of the term in 1918 by Osip Brik, who wrote that the artist was 'now only a constructor and technician, only a supervisor and a foreman'.<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that here the label 'constructor' is only one of a string of epithets, but the one which evidently caught hold (might foremanism have captured hearts in different circumstances?). This elision with other terms, the sliding scale of imagery, suggests a clustering of associations that was really far less specific than is often suggested. Far more concrete was the point of principle that art was now to be considered a particular kind of work—production rather than creation—and thus analogous with other kinds of work in industry. This analogy was a pre-requisite for the artist to be seen as a constructor and enabled art to be recognized as a specialist type of work: the constructor was, crucially, a specialist worker.

The acknowledgement of artistic construction as the work of the specialist was itself dependent on the broader concept of the 'bourgeois specialist' addressed by Lenin. The utopian idea that there could immediately be outright workers' control was dismissed by Lenin as 'left-wing childishness' in favour of the more pragmatic assertion of the need to engage 'bourgeois specialists' in the running of industry during a period of transition. His speeches and articles returned again and again to the need for the 'work of communist construction' to exploit for its own ends the science, technology and culture developed under capitalism: 'This is the only way we can emerge from this quagmire of destruction, frightful difficulties, ruin, barbarism, poverty and starvation . . .'.<sup>43</sup> Despite the contradictions involved, the way forward had to be expedient; for under capitalism:

science and technology exist only for the rich, for the propertied class; capitalism provides culture for the minority. We must build socialism out of this culture, we have no other material . . . we have bourgeois experts and nothing else. We have no other bricks with which to build.<sup>44</sup>

The metaphor of building socialism was one that recurred in Lenin's writing; elsewhere, for instance, he claimed that, 'At present we are only laying the foundations of this future society'.<sup>45</sup> The idea of the 'construction' of a new system of social organization was pervasive in contemporary political discourse.



*Fig. 9.* Lyubov Popova: 'Constructivist Composition', 1921, oil on panel, 93 × 62 cm. Collection of Roald Dahl. Photograph: M. W. Keen.

Its linguistic sense, meanwhile, was central to Formalist textual analysis. On Lenin's death in 1924, an issue of the journal *LEF* was given over to Formalist investigations of the construction of Lenin's language as prose speech, the critic Tynyanov stressing that in Lenin's use of vocabulary, 'Every construction has its rules'.<sup>46</sup> In short, artistic, linguistic, technological and political discourses were interacting; there was an overlaying of signifiers—in references to construction as a linguistic or conceptual system, to construction in the building industry, to the construction of a new society.

To trace these shifting and reciprocal allusions and referents is certainly not a matter of looking for the subject matter depicted in Constructivism. For if Constructivist work secures our interest, it is clearly not through resembling that to which it refers. Yet whilst resemblance does not operate here in the way I earlier associated with mimetic art, it perhaps should not be ruled out of court altogether. After all, the idea of an object that literally looks like 'nothing on earth' is inconceivable. Any configuration is vulnerable to a figurative reading; the idea of likeness can emerge even from a collection of straight lines and hatched areas, such as to be found in Popova's *Constructivist Composition* (Fig. 9), shown at the  $5 \times 5 = 25$  exhibition in 1921 as a piece of 'laboratory work'. However, a figurative reading is not only uninvited, it is positively resisted; conditions are imposed upon the viewer to read the lines as various devices—as joins, as edges, as parts of a structure. Popova tested the limits of resistance to resemblance by refusing to allow the structure to be resolved into a recognizable object, a negation which depends upon the process of recognition being set in train and frustrated. Yet at the same time, what the work is most obviously recognized as being like are other configurations similar to it, for instance, Popova's and Vesnin's associated drawings (Figs. 10 and 11). These likenesses, within the same configurational type, signified a 'collective' enterprise, whose 'grammar' derived from what can be seen as an avant-garde house-style.<sup>47</sup> Because the work cannot but refer to the world in which it was produced, it is characterized by an ambiguity between reference and resistance to reference that is in the nature of Constructivism.

The use of compass- and ruler-drawn lines in Constructivist work, particularly in the difficult period which led in 1920–21 to the commitment to utilitarian design, has tended to be seen as an intermediary stage on the path to work in three-dimensions.<sup>48</sup> Yet it is these techniques which exemplify that necessary, if puzzling, ambiguity which also pervades later Constructivist work in production. Rodchenko had produced a series of drawings in 1915 in which he used these techniques of ruler- and compass-drawing—techniques derived most obviously from Malevich's geometric 'vocabulary' and also from Tatlin's use of unconventional materials derived from non-art realms such as industry. By the

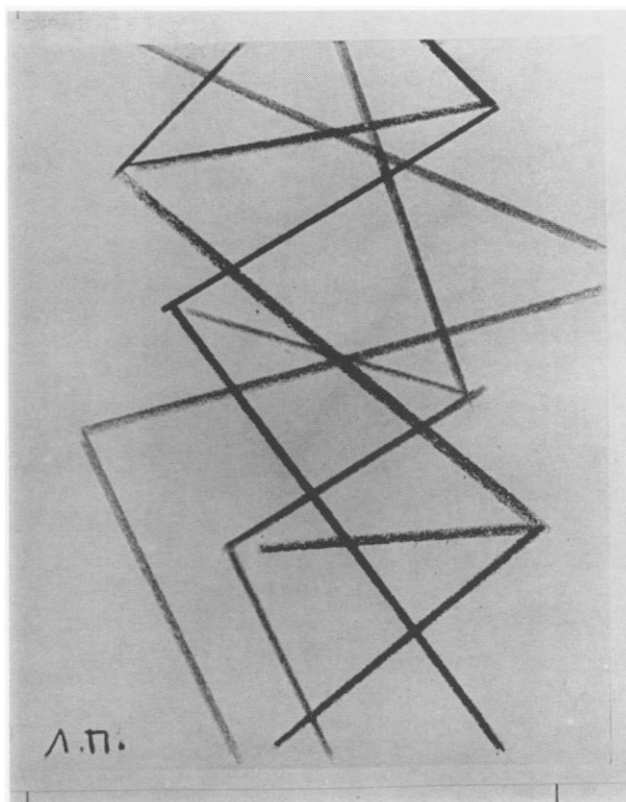


Fig. 10. Lyubov Popova: 'Line Construction', 1921, coloured pencil on paper, 12 × 9.5 cm. Private Collection, Paris.

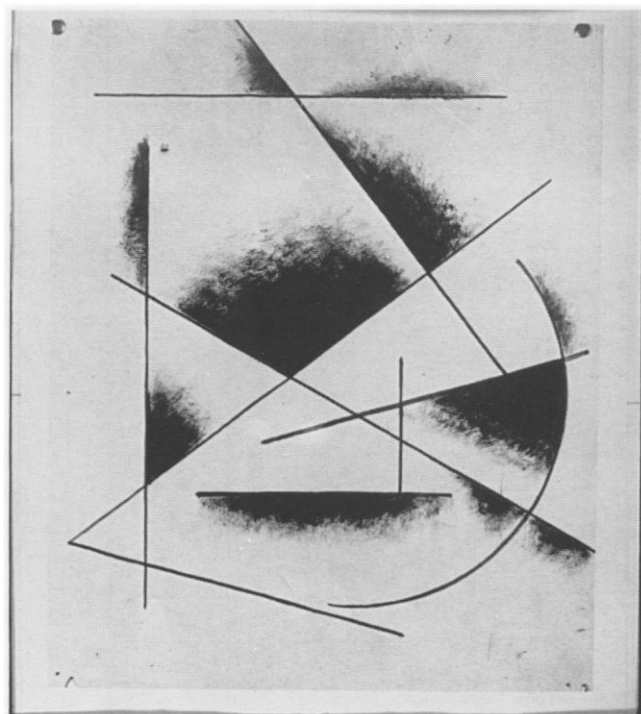


Fig. 11. Alexander Vesnin: 'Construction of Lines', 1921, gouache on paper, 40 × 34 cm. Galerie Jean Chauvelin, Paris.

time Rodchenko produced his *Linear Construction* (Fig. 2) in 1918, the currency of meanings associated with these techniques had undergone some subtle shifts. In both the 1915 *Ruler Drawing* (Fig. 12) and the later *Linear Construction* the rules of art were literally transgressed through the use of implements that denied the individual hand of the artist. The decision to use the ruler in each had this much in common, yet the specific connotations of that act were changed with the Revolution. By 1918, the conditions of the very institution of art were shifting and, with the reorganization of culture, the conception of art had become unstable.<sup>49</sup> Such a transgression was itself a part of the destabilizing process. The act of drawing with a ruler modified the realm 'art' as a mode of painting—in that it could be seen as a literal travesty of the representational procedure.

In Rodchenko's *Linear Construction* the line is literally ruler-drawn, but it is represented as a basic device in the system. Various permutations on the basic device of the line (Fig. 13) were produced in a series of works which included *Non-Objective Painting* (Fig. 3). Moreover, the device of the ruler-drawn line signified an art that was systematic and scientific. The literal modification of conventional pictorial usage was seen to make art akin to science, and its institutions as akin to scientific institutions of 'research'. The kind of language employed in Constructivist programmes, such as 'laboratory work', or the use of mathematical figures in the title of the exhibition  $5 \times 5 = 25$ , reinforced this kinship (the

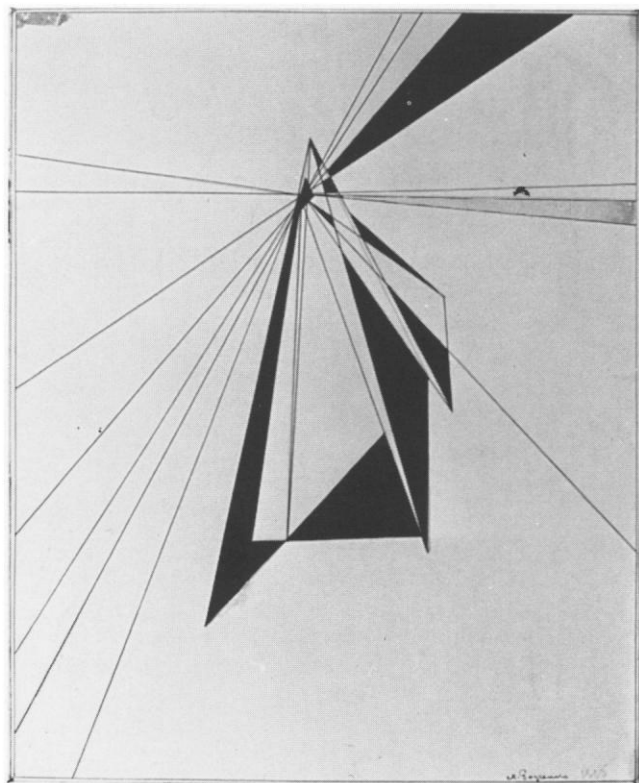


Fig. 12. Alexander Rodchenko: 'Ruler Drawing', 1915, ink on paper, 25 × 20 cm. German Karginov, Budapest.

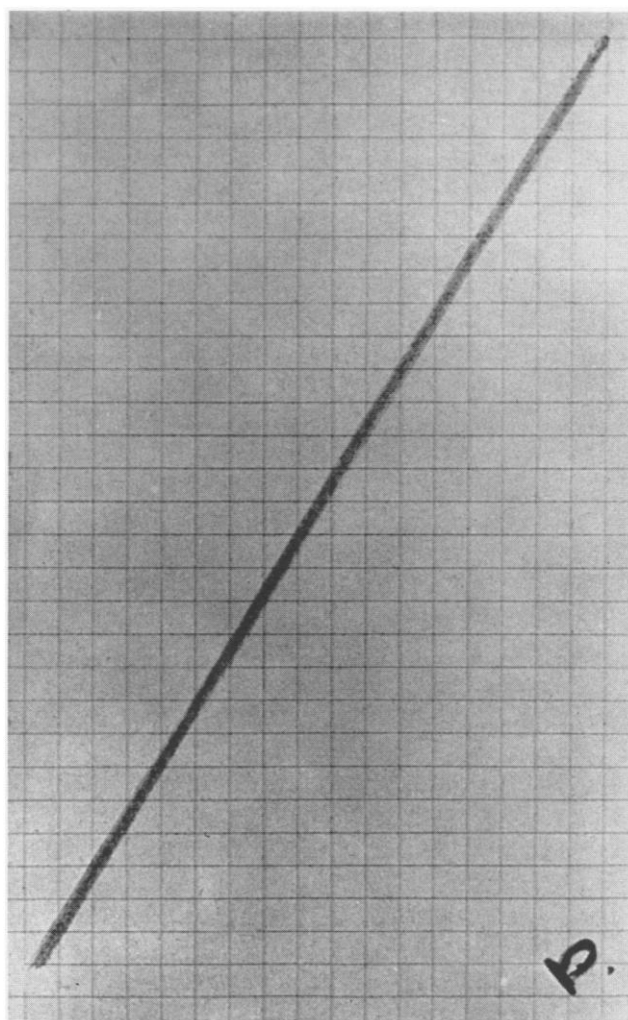
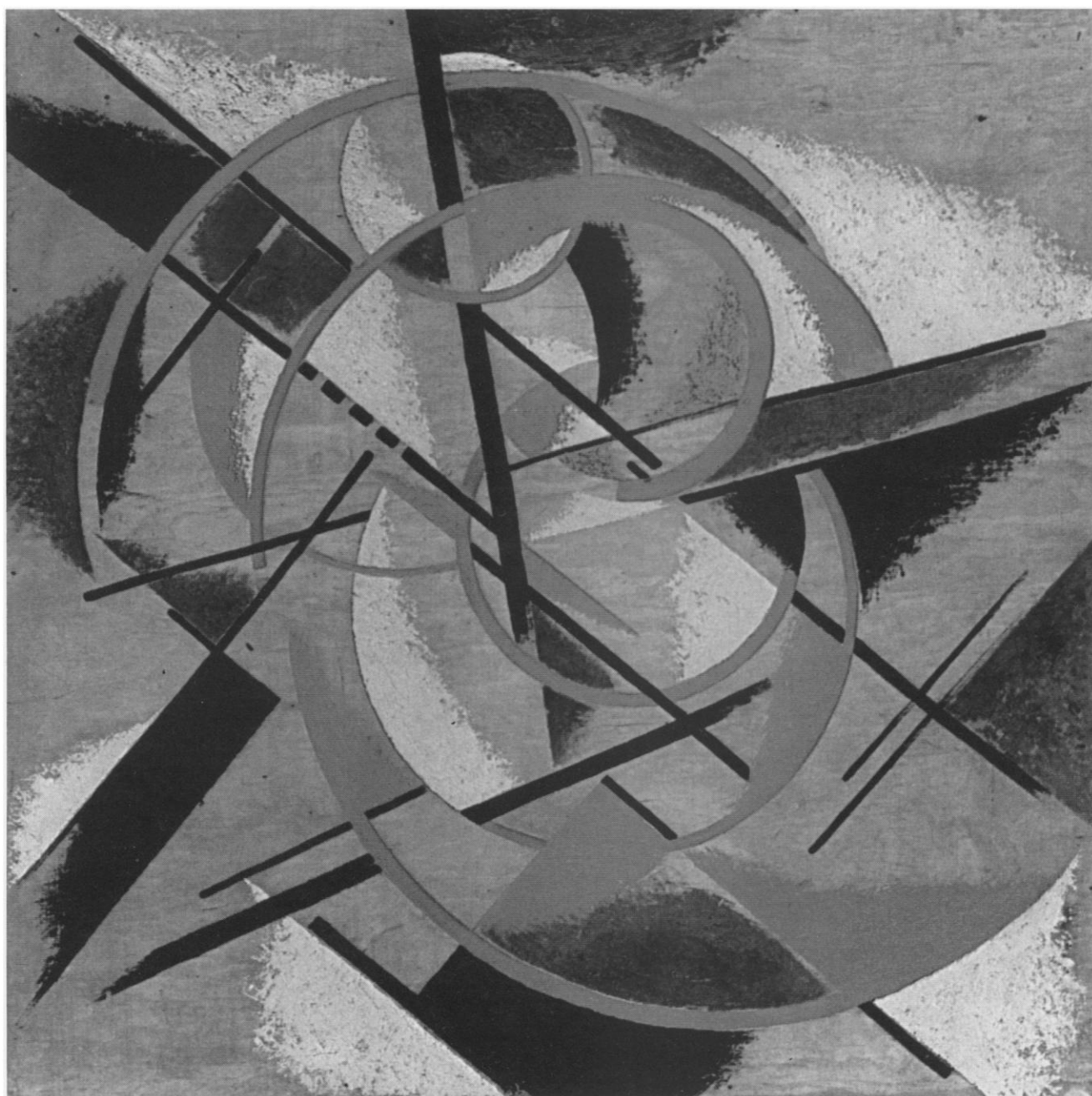


Fig. 13. Alexander Rodchenko: 'Line Drawing', 1921, crayon on paper, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Private Collection, Paris.

terms were not solely responsible for the kinship, then, but nor were they superfluous).

A relationship with science is established and these works are represented as akin to science. This relationship to science, it can be argued, is metaphorical. The metaphor relies on the invasion of one realm (that of the art work) by another (that of science); this was done by using tools that belonged to science and not, conventionally, to art. Tools conventional to the scientific or technical draughtsman, like the ruler, the compass or the set-square may not be used in order to draw a diagram and the marks produced might be perfectly normal to find in a technical diagram, but are not normal to find in a painting. Beyond serving to draw certain types of line, the tools do not serve the same function in each case. There is no credible way in which Rodchenko's *Linear Construction* or Popova's *Constructivist Composition* (Fig. 9) can be judged as accurate or inaccurate, as correct or incorrect. Nor is Popova's *Spatial Force Construction* of 1920–21 (Fig. 14) literally to be seen as a scientific diagram, although Popova has used the ruler, the compass and the broken line familiar



*Fig. 14.* Lyubov Popova: 'Spatial Force Construction', oil with marble dust on wood, 112.6 × 112.7 cm. The George Costakis Collection, Athens.

in diagrammatic drawing. In a different context, Danto has called the use of diagrams in art 'rhetorical' because in art diagrams come to express something about what they show, through the cultural connotations that they carry, rather than merely demonstrate.<sup>50</sup> What might be expressed is the art work's claim to scientific status, in that it cannot possess that status apart from metaphorically.<sup>51</sup>

The metaphor, then, does not consist of the ruler- and compass-drawn lines themselves: the lines are literally ruler-drawn, but they are metaphorically scientific and objective. It is the work as a whole, rather than simply the lines on its surface, which is engaged in the metaphor. For it is the work (painting)

and not just the lines themselves which undergoes a change of meaning—which is 'metaphorized'.<sup>52</sup> This process involves the displacing realm (science) acting upon the displaced realm (art) by what has been seen as a process of both collusion and collision.<sup>53</sup> The 'system of associated commonplaces' attached to each realm, to use Max Black's phrase,<sup>54</sup> are thus brought into play in what must be considered a reciprocal process. This process may illuminate one realm more than the other: in this case more is shown about art than about science.

The realm of art is displaced in a number of ways; it is displaced as a conventional vehicle of representation in the terms offered in current Realist discourses,

that is to say, with the premium on resemblance; but it is also displaced as the expression of emotion then associated with the 'intuitive' curves and fluidity of, say, a work by Kandinsky. This was a sliding scale of associations and negations which relied on assumed knowledge and which could be understood as common currency by Rodchenko and Popova. It could oscillate between the common-place and the more specialized aspects of art practice. That is, common-places could derive from anywhere and be readily available across a wide spectrum, or they could be produced and reproduced more narrowly within avant-garde discourse itself.<sup>55</sup>

In Rodchenko's *Linear Construction* (Fig. 2), the art of painting was not altogether eliminated as a category for conceiving of the work; the category of art was retained in the evidence of *faktura* in the scumbled ground—and in the areas of brushwork in both the works by Popova (Figs. 9 and 14). Even in Rodchenko's *Non-Objective Painting* (Fig. 3), where there is very little trace of handling left, the character of the work *as art* necessary to the metaphor still remains; it is sufficient that the object is offered for exhibition—or even that the object is simply hypothetically exhibitable. Because the negotiation of a

metaphor involves and requires a familiarity with both that which is displaced and that which is doing the displacing, the terms for negotiation need to be available. If they are not available, then the procedure is simply meaningless, as indeed it was to many contemporary commentators who were situated outside the avant-garde community.

The point here is that the identity of 'art' has to have some kind of residual presence for the mechanism of metaphor to operate meaningfully. What happens, then, when there seems to be no active presence of the category in Constructivist design? When it seems to be eliminated altogether? For instance, the series of textile designs by Popova and illustrated in *LEF* (Fig. 15) no longer appear to retain the subject 'art' for alien realms to come into conflict with. Osip Brik was insistent that these designs were not determined 'by abstract, aesthetic considerations' but by economic purpose.<sup>56</sup> The functional was opposed to the decorative. However, the implications of these two terms hovered around the category 'art'. Rather than the decorative belonging to art, and the functional not, both properties were signified rather than inherent in art. 'Functionalism' was itself a category signified—just

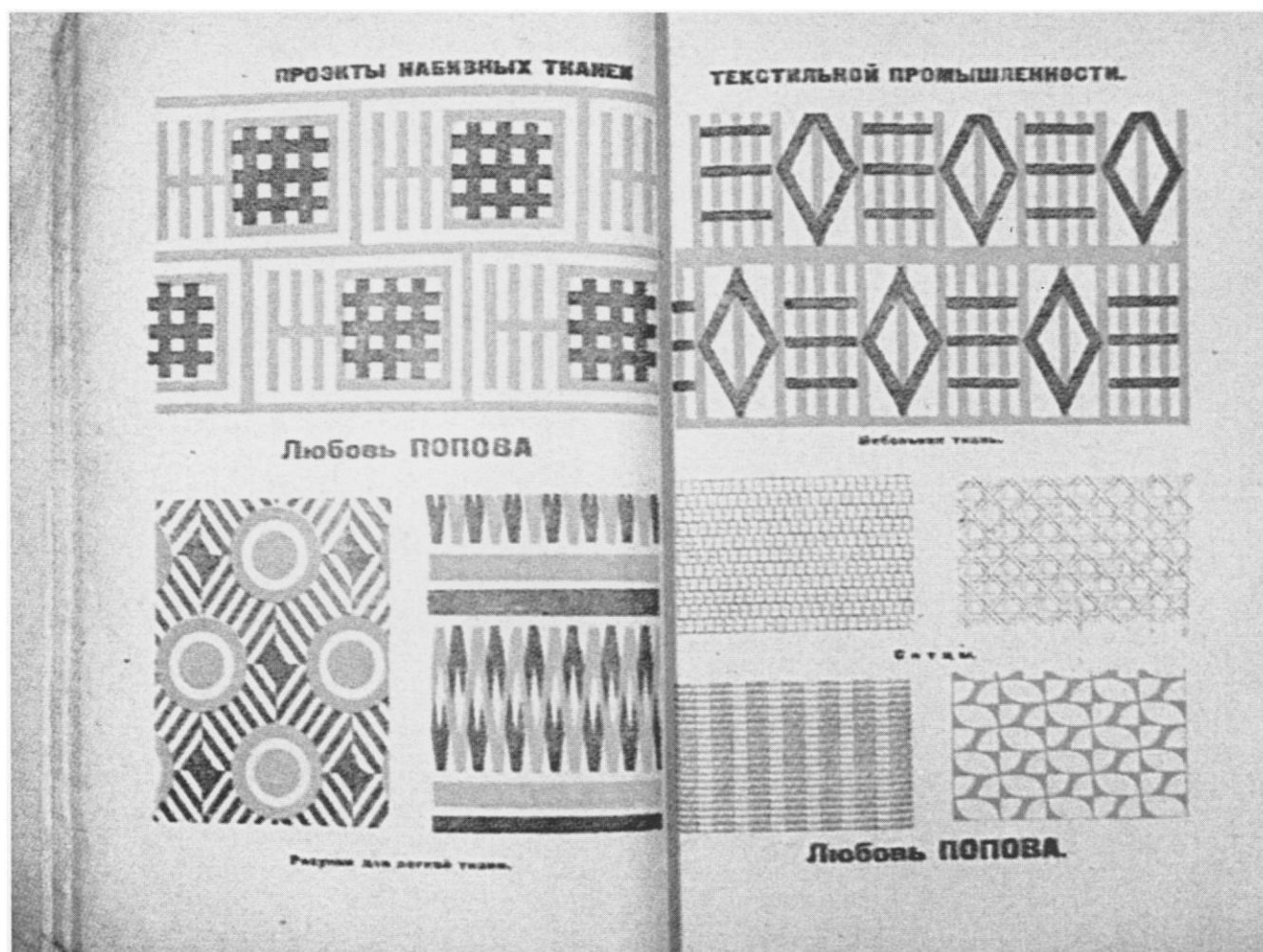


Fig. 15. Lyubov Popova: designs for textile prints from *LEF*, no. 2, 1924.

one form, one might argue, of decorativeness.<sup>57</sup> For, of course, there is no absolute reason why a series of geometric designs should fulfil the function of the fabric better than other possible solutions, such as more conventional, figurative prints (Fig. 16). Yet they have the capacity to appear as rational and efficient solutions, a capacity which required the lingering reference to the geometric 'vocabulary' of forms developed by the avant-garde in art, and thus to the stock of metaphorical meanings that reference entailed.

This claim for the on-going role of the mechanism of metaphor in Constructivist work in production is not intended to restore utilitarian design to a purely aesthetic category. Instead it is meant to draw attention to the difficulties and to the ambivalence of the works, for the transition into production was far from straightforward. The science metaphor demonstrates at once the claims for scientific status and the subversion of its own claimed scientificity.<sup>58</sup> The result was a multiplicity of references. For, like the idea of construction, the 'scientific' cut through various realms. Amongst these, Formalist criticism was believed to be a scientific system; so was Marxism.

It was the belief in a scientific theory and practice which united the different groups within the LEF,



Fig. 16. Printed fabric, illustrated in *L'Art décoratif et industriel de l'URSS*, Paris, 1925, p. 54. By Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the Left Front of the Arts, set up in 1923. Outlining in the journal *LEF* the three basic claims for the OPOYAZ Formalists' contribution to the proletarian construction of culture, Osip Brik placed first and foremost the fact that theirs was a scientific system—as opposed to an accumulation of facts and personal opinions; secondly, their work was not concerned with the 'language of the gods' but social evaluation; and thirdly, that it entailed a knowledge of the laws of production and not a mystical penetration into creation.<sup>59</sup> These were fundamental tenets of Formalist theory that were shared by the Constructivists in their rejection of the role of the artist as an agent of individual experience, mystical experience or psychological revelations. Brik maintained that poetry and writing were worthless as 'an expression of his "I"'.<sup>60</sup> The negation of the individual 'hand' of the artist in the Constructivist works entailed the same suppression of the self. The critic Zeitlin defined what it was to be scientific in literary criticism when he claimed, also in *LEF*, that 'Any scientific research into literary facts must first and foremost entail a detailed description of them, correctly classified . . . there is no point to well-turned sociological generalizations of these facts, unless the facts themselves are first established'.<sup>61</sup> Here, literary facts were situated within the text itself as structural elements and literary devices—not as somehow 'external' to the text and thus in the 'real' world.<sup>62</sup> This corresponded to the idea of 'laboratory work', whereby artistic devices were investigated in isolation, although the status of this kind of work became the subject of debate.

In his *Art and Class* of 1923, the *LEF* critic Arvatov defended Constructivist work on materials in the 'laboratory' whereas the critic Tarabukin saw the Constructivists' work on non-utilitarian construction as inherently contradictory and aesthetic.<sup>63</sup> Arvatov believed that 'experiment' with basic elements was scientific and a necessary pre-requisite of productivist work. This position rested on the assumption that such 'experiment' could be carried on apart from other types of activity and experience, that it could be conditioned and thus produce objective results. The metaphor of science engaged Constructivism in a dialogue with Formalism and questions of what a language is; its functionalism merely cast the 'device'—the device that was still to all intents and purposes autonomous—in a utilitarian guise. At the same time, the metaphor also engaged Constructivism with the orthodox view of Marxism as a scientific discipline. Although Lenin criticized political Leftists for being over-predictive and thus 'playing at science' (in such claims as: 'During the coming spring and summer . . . the collapse of the imperialist system must begin'),<sup>64</sup> historical materialism was seen to be scientific in that it could deduce the collapse of capitalism from its analysis of economic and social forms. The scientific status of orthodox Marxism has subsequently been opened to question within Marxism itself, but

it was central to the understanding of Marx current in the twenties.<sup>65</sup>

The metaphor of science cut across discourses, and with it were carried layers of further inference. Foremost amongst the terms understood, as it were, in parallel to it, were 'material' and 'materialism'. The term 'material' was crucial in the Constructivist effort to develop a practice compatible with Marxism. Osip Brik, for example, used the term to describe *raw material* in the Formalist sense, to refer to the basic organization of colour and form within Rodchenko's productive work; he also referred to a 'material culture' in the sense of design, that would revolutionize taste for the proletariat, the future consumer; 'material culture' meant work in production, and thus was used in a Marxist sense to describe the economic position of the producer within the prevailing relations of production.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, in opposition to any form of mysticism, Brik stressed Rodchenko's as a materialist practice, consistent with the Marxist sense of materialism. Although the references to Formalist and Marxist senses may have been literally inconsistent, Brik's attempt to combine Formalism and Marxism depended on this series of metaphorical relations.

These linguistic metaphors, which pervade Constructivist theory, should not be conflated with the metaphorical procedure as it operates pictorially. They may, however, reinforce certain pictorial metaphors, or they may point to a metaphorical currency within practice; for example, in so far as 'material' is demonstrated pictorially through *faktura*, a pictorial metaphor is brought into play. If this is a relationship of mutual reinforcement, it must also be open rather than closed given the peculiar conditions of visual representations. One of the points of this article has been to refute the idea that pictorial metaphors are linguistic metaphors *visualized*; or indeed that linguistic tropes may be simply mapped onto the visual field.<sup>67</sup> Of course there is a relationship between the verbal and the visual, but it is not a straightforward one.

Within Russian Constructivism, visual metaphor works as a critical device, which not only enables negation but involves the work in realms of reference to social experience. For a series of absolute negations brings with it, inevitably, a set of affirmations. The associations with engineering and science, with mathematics and logic, with historical materialism and politics, were not analysed as operating metaphorically by the Constructivists themselves; but to recast the problem in terms of a visual metaphor is to suggest how politics could be inscribed onto artistic practice through a metaphorical process. The Constructivist use of visual metaphor revealed productive tensions between social realms, including the realm of art. This was not a question of picturing that art is *like* science, nor was it simply an obscure way of picturing what could equally well be 'literally' pictured in another fashion, say, figuratively or photographically.<sup>68</sup> For there is an insistence in the

works upon the marks they are made up of, upon their own self-reflexiveness—without which the metaphor would not exist; and it is this resistance to reference which always accompanies the shifting, allusive associations to other areas of social life. To refer back to Voloshinov, the function of metaphor is not just for the sake of linguistic exercise, but works to re-group values and to make this shift of ground 'visible' in metaphorical terms.<sup>69</sup> The self-reflexiveness of Constructivist work conflicted with the reflection theory of contemporary Realist aesthetics, and so enabled art to engage with the conditions of its own making—at the same time as it engaged with the world which produced it.

*This article is based on a chapter in Russian art and theory in France 1918–25; a comparative study of artistic avant-gardes, Ph.D. Thesis, Essex University, 1988. Part of it was given as a paper at the Association of Art Historians' Conference, London, 1986.*

### Notes

1. 'Discourse in life and discourse in poetry: questions of sociological poetics', *Zvezda* 6, 1926, in Ann Shukman (ed.), *Bakhtin School Papers. Russian Poetics in Translation*, no. 10 (Oxford, 1983), p. 29. Voloshinov was a member of the Bakhtin group, interested in a socio-poetics that integrated aspects of Marxism and Formalism.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3. Victor Erlich, in his classic work on Russian Formalism, suggested that Shklovsky's emphasis on the function of 'making strange' within poetic language always cried out for a more searching discussion of metaphor. He pointed out, 'Fundamentally, Sklovskij's view of poetic art was not as prejudicial to imagery as it may have seemed on the surface. Stripped of deliberate overstatements and polemical irrelevancies, the orthodox Formalist position would boil down to the notion of the metaphor as the prime exponent of the Poetic Principle on the level of lexical meaning', Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (The Hague, 1955), p. 232.

4. It came to refer to a variety of structural relationships between sets of devices such as sound repetition, sound-difference, and rhythmical parallelism. See Tynyanov on 'rhythmical metaphors' in *Problema stixotvornogo yazyka*, p. 224. Voloshinov talked about intonational metaphor and the potential for metaphorical meanings to unfold from the tone of certain utterances, in Voloshinov *op. cit.*, p. 15.

5. Note that the term 'Constructivism' was only coined in 1920–21, to denote a commitment to utilitarian work in production, see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1983), for a discussion of the application of the term, especially pp. 2–4. Lodder refers to the work prior to this as 'non-utilitarian constructions'. The linear constructions by Rodchenko to be discussed here were originally called 'non-objective creation' (*Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo*).

6. Jakobson argued for a contextual view of metaphor in his Prague essay, *On Realism in Art*, written in 1921. It was here that he also claimed that the function of the metaphor was to 'make it harder to guess'—assuming that behind the metaphor there is something literal to guess at. This view of metaphor is refuted later in this article.

7. Voloshinov, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

8. All independent art groups were dissolved by decree in 1932; Socialist Realism became official cultural policy at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.

9. Russian Realism developed in the radical work of Repin and the Wanderers during the 1870s and 80s.

10. Rozanova, 'The Bases of the New Creation and the Reasons Why It is Misunderstood', 1913, in Bowlit (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934* (Viking Press, 1976), p. 105.

11. David Burliuk, 'Cubism (Surface-Plane)', 1912, *ibid.*, p. 70.

12. Meyer Schapiro made the point in his critique of Alfred Barr's 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalogue that 'The logical opposition of realistic and abstract art by which Barr explains the more recent change rests on two assumptions about the nature of painting, that representation is a passive mirroring of things and therefore essentially non-artistic, and that abstract art, on the other hand, is a purely aesthetic activity, unconditioned by objects and based on its own eternal laws', 'Nature of Abstract Art', 1937, in *Modern Art 19th and 20th centuries Selected Papers*, vol. 2 (London, 1978), p. 195.

13. Writing on Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Dobrolyubov claimed, 'it reflects Russian life; in it there appears before us the living contemporary Russian type presented with relentless severity, and truth; it reflects the new world of our social development . . .', in R. E. Matlaw (ed.), *Belinsky Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov Selected Criticism* (New York, 1962), pp. 139–40.

14. Engels, 'Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle', 8 May 1859, in B. Lang and F. Williams (eds.), *Marxism and Art. Writings on Aesthetics and Criticism* (New York, 1972), pp. 48–50.

15. Lenin, 'Leo Tolstoy as a mirror of the Russian Revolution', *Proletary*, no. 35, September 11(24), 1908, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, p. 206. This article was written in response to articles in the legal Russian press celebrating Tolstoy's eightieth birthday.

16. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 137. Originally published Moscow, 1923.

17. The AKhRR group was set up in 1922. AKhRR (The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia) was committed to heroic realism.

18. For a discussion of State patronage in this period, see E. Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: the State and Society, the Peredvizhniki and their tradition* (Ann Arbor, 1977).

19. The best detailed description of the process of 'art into production' can be found in Christina Lodder, *op. cit.* There has been a tendency within Modernist writing concerned to sustain the category of art to lose interest in its apparent demise following the 'heroic years' after the Revolution. On the other hand, those interested in correcting this point of view have tended to see it as bad faith to question the theoretical bases of the category change.

20. Poggioli defined the work of the avant-garde as the practice of negation in *The Theory of the Avant-garde* (Belknap/Harvard, 1968). The idea that devices of negation also act as devices of signification was used to account for meaning in avant-garde practices in the Open University Course A315 *Modern Art and Modernism: From Manet to Pollock*, 1983, in particular in *Russian Art and the Revolution* by this author and in *Surrealism* by David Batchelor and Charles Harrison. Christopher Green also approaches Cubism as a set of refusals, as a practice of art whose meanings are defined by differentiation from the attitudes conveyed in the work of opposing groups, see Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1987).

21. Julia Kristeva, 'The Ethics of Linguistics', *Desire in Language* (Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 24.

22. 'First programme of the Working Group of Constructivists', March 1921, translation by Christina Lodder.

23. Christina Lodder, *op. cit.*

24. As Rozanova had put it in 1913, 'The era of the final, absolute liberation of the Great Art of Painting from the alien traits of Literature, Society, and everyday life', 'The Bases of the New Creation and the Reasons why it is Misunderstood', 1913, in Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-garde*, p. 108.

25. Eichenbaum objected to this conventional view of language, 'the conception of poetry as "thinking in images" and the equation "poetry=imagery" . . .', in 'The Theory of the Formal Method' (Leningrad, 1927), in L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (eds.), *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 11.

26. From 'Rough Notes for a lecture at the Exhibition 5 × 5 = 25', cited in *Russian Women-Artists of the Avant garde 1910–30*, Galerie Gmurzynska (Cologne, 1979), p. 212. Popova never actually joined the First Working Group of Constructivists.

27. Rodchenko, 'The Line', 1921, INKhUK Archives, translated in S. O. Kahn-Magomedov, *Rodchenko, The Complete Work* (Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 293.

28. Malevich's mystical interests have been discussed by Susan Compton, for example in her article 'Malevich's Suprematism—The Higher Intuition', *The Burlington Magazine*, August, 1976.

29. Jakobson wrote, 'The object of study in literary science is not

literature but 'literariness', that is, what makes a given work a *literary work* . . .', *Recent Russian Poetry* (Prague, 1921), quoted by Eichenbaum, 'The Theory of the Formal Method' (Leningrad, 1927), in Matejka and Pomorska, *Readings in Russian Poetics*, pp. 7–8.

30. Shklovsky's notion of 'making strange' (*ostranenie*) applied at one and the same time to normal perceptions and to prosaic, everyday speech patterns, to reality and to writing. See also Erlich on Shklovsky's theoretical inconsistencies in *Russian Formalism*, p. 189.

31. Shklovsky's distinction between prosaic and poetic speech patterns derived from Potebnya's *Journey from Poetry into Prose*. Shklovsky had made the distinction in his text of 1914, *The Resurrection of the Word*.

32. The Formalists were at pains to prove that their mode of enquiry was not confined to 'vanguard' literature and poetry but applicable to every variety of *genre*, from folktales to detective novels to Tolstoy.

33. 'The mystery novel allows the author to incorporate into a work long passages of description of local colour which, while serving the purpose of holding back the plot, themselves undergo pressure from the plot and are perceived as belonging to the work of art', Shklovsky, 'Technique of the mystery novel', *LEF*, no. 4, August–December, 1924, p. 24. Also published in Shklovsky *O teorii prozy* (Moscow, 1925). Other plot devices discussed were the mystery of dreams and the false or misleading solution.

34. Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* (From Easel to Machine) (Moscow, 1923), translated by Christina Lodder.

35. The immediate context for these debates was the General Working Group of Objective Analysis which included Popova, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Medunetsky, the Stenberg brothers, Tarabukin, Babichev and others. They are discussed by Christina Lodder in *Russian Constructivism*, p. 83. The research to date on these debates is limited, although Christina Lodder has used archival material from the INKhUK archive, Moscow, to comment on work from the INKhUK folio from the Costakis collection, see A. Rudinstein (ed.), *Russian Avant-Garde Art. The George Costakis Collection* (Thames and Hudson, 1981). She looks in some detail at the differing positions in the light of new documentation, but does not address the problematic nature of the distinctions and debates as attempted here. The debate is also discussed and excerpts from the INKhUK archive papers translated in S. O. Khan-Magomedov *Rodchenko The Complete Work*, pp. 83–9.

36. From comments by Rodchenko at the INKhUK debate on construction and composition in Khan-Magomedov, *ibid.*, p. 87.

37. See Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

40. Alternative Russian words for construction were 'stroyeniye' and 'postroika'. The verb 'stroit' translates as 'to construct'. However, the *Dictionnaire Français-Russe complet* (NP Makaroff, St Petersburg, 1913) notes "construire une maison"—postroit; "construire un poème"—sochitat, napisat; 'konstruktsiya' is listed under grammatical construction. The French word 'construction' carried various meanings, including the architectural, the mathematical, the geometric, the algebraic, the social as well as the literary or poetic.

41. See, for instance, David Burliuk on the organization of the picture surface and his view that 'construction can be shifted or displaced', a view at odds with much of the French emphasis on classical ordering within Cubism, 'Kubizm', 1912, from *Poshchечina obshchestvennomu vkusu* (*A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*) (Moscow, December 1912), translated in Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, p. 76.

42. In the first issue of *Art of the Commune*, 1918, Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 76. She discusses the derivation of the term constructor from the building industry together with its mixed references to the craft tradition.

43. Lenin, 'The Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government', published in pamphlet form by the Petrograd Soviet Workers' and Red Army Deputies, March–April, 1919, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 75.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

45. Lenin, 'Speech to the First All Russia Congress of Communist students', April 17, 1919, first published in 1923, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 324.

46. Tynyanov, 'Slovar Lenina-polemista' ('The Vocabulary of Lenin the Polemicist'), *LEF* no. 1(5), 1924, p. 81. See also Tomashevsky's essay entitled 'Konstruktsiya tezikov' ('The Construction of the Proposition'), p. 140. Other essays included in this special issue on Lenin were by Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, Yakubinsky, and Kazansky.

47. This is discussed by Fer, *Russian Art and the Revolution*, in the course A315, *Modern Art and Modernism: From Manet to Pollock*, The Open University, 1983.

48. Christina Lodder, for example, stresses this development as a chain of problems: 'From this arose, on the one hand, Rodchenko's works with rule and compasses leading to his linear studies and line constructions on canvas, and, on the other, his monochromatic canvasses such as *Black on Black*. Whereas the *Black on Black* represented a *tabula rasa*, Rodchenko's work with the line led directly to the three-dimensional constructions,' *op. cit.*, p. 22.

49. I say 'shifting' rather than 'shifted' because the reorganization of cultural institutions was a gradual process. For a detailed historical discussion of these changes, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Commisariat of Enlightenment. Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky* (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

50. See Arthur Danto's discussion of the use of diagrams in art in *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Harvard, 1981), p. 148. He is principally concerned with the American painter Lichtenstein here.

51. For a discussion of the distinction between literal and metaphorical possession see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 50–2.

52. 'Metaphorized' is the term used by Richard Wollheim to describe a rather different process of metaphoricity to the one under discussion here. See the Chapter 'Painting, metaphor, and the body: Titian, Bellini, De Kooning, etc.', in Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Thames and Hudson, 1987). Wollheim's concern is with a psychological interpretation of pictorial metaphors of the body. Note that Wollheim also places great emphasis on the point that what is metaphorized in pictorial art is the picture as a whole, rather than something the painting picks out, *ibid.*, p. 307.

53. C. Day Lewis' claim 'We find poetic truth struck out by collision rather than the collusion of images' (C. Day Lewis, *The Poetic Image* (London, 1947), p. 72) is cited by Karsten Harries, 'Metaphor and Transcendence' in Sheldon Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (The University of Chicago, 1978), p. 71. She cited Day Lewis to draw attention to the way recent interpretations of metaphor have challenged the Aristotelian stress upon similarity in dissimilars.

54. See Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 40.

55. Max Black allows for this range in his view of metaphor: 'Metaphors can be supported by specially constructed systems of implications, as well as by associated commonplaces; they can be made to measure and need not be reach-me-downs', *ibid.*, p. 43.

56. Brik, 'From Pictures to Textile Prints', *LEF*, no. 2, pp. 27–34.

57. Reyner Banham originally discussed the issue of functionalism as symbolization in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London, 1960).

58. Although the term 'claims' is used here, this argument does not rely exclusively on the conscious intention of the artist concerned to produce a metaphor. Were it a question of intentionality, then the metaphor would hold only if the artist believed art to be unlike science and set about testing the resistance of art to science. The metaphor theory holds because of the position of the works within the discourses of art and science, and not because the artists concerned stated their intentions to produce a metaphor.

59. Osip Brik, 'The So-Called Formal Method', *LEF*, no. 1, p. 214.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

61. Zeitlin, 'The Marxists and the "formal method"', *LEF*, no. 3, 1923.

62. Whether the 'fact' referred to the literary material or to external phenomena became the focus of debates around 'factography' in the second half of the twenties. 'Factography' was promoted in *NOVY LEF* (1927–28).

63. See Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine*, 1923. Tarabukin was not a member of the LEF group and the criticisms were mutual. Arvatov reviewed Tarabukin's book in *LEF*, no. 4, p. 210. Arvatov praised those chapters which dealt with specialist artistic matters, by which it is likely that Arvatov meant those chapters dealing with the genesis of modern easel art from Impressionism which corresponded with Arvatov's own analysis in *Art and Class*. On the other hand, Arvatov criticized Tarabukin's approach to professional problems of production and to what he called the 'exceptionally poor' sociological section.

64. Lenin, 'Left-Wing Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality', May 1918, *Collected Works*, vol. 27, pp. 323–54.

65. The idea of the necessity of scientific method was traced back to Marx's conception of historical materialism. Marx thought that it was vital to base socialism on a scientific foundation and to find objective laws by which societies functioned and changed. The scientific method used to interpret data was the materialist dialectic. Although present in Marx's writing, this kind of scientism gained particular ground in the 1920s and was a powerful current within Leninism.

66. Brik, 'Into Production!', *LEF*, no. 1, pp. 105–8.

67. This mapping of linguistic tropes onto art is a feature of Bethany John's article, 'Visual Metaphor: Lost and Found', *Semiotica* 52–3/4, 1984, pp. 291–333. Here metaphor, simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, etc., are applied to what are seen as the visual equivalents of linguistic uses, in particular in Dada photomontage.

68. That is to say, this discussion rejects the idea of metaphor as either simile or substitution. The literature on metaphor is extensive but, briefly, these distinctions relate to Max Black's rejection of the 'comparison' and 'substitution' views of metaphor in favour of an 'interactive' view; see Black, *Models and Metaphors*, *op. cit.* Accordingly, Black would disagree with Jakobson's interpretation of metaphor in his 1921 article, 'On Realism' (see footnote 6). Here Jakobson implied that there must be something literal to be guessed at behind the metaphor—and that metaphors are just a harder and more opaque way of saying what could more easily be said literally. In a later article, 'Two Aspects of language and two types of Aphasic Disturbances', written in 1954, Jakobson treated metaphor as a trope of similarity, which is equally problematic in the terms of this article, where conflict has been seen to coexist within metaphor with aspects of collusion; where the crucial point about metaphor has been that it is not merely a dressed-up simile. For Jakobson, however, the difference between metaphor and metonym was that metaphor was a 'figure of similarity' and metonym a 'figure of contiguity'. In his study of the prose work of Pasternak he had seen the characteristic tendency within poetry to be towards metaphor and that of prose towards metonym (see Jakobson, 'Randbemerkungen zur Prosa des Dichters Pasternak', *Slavische Rundschau VII*, 1935, p. 336, cited by Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 231). This distinction between metaphor and metonym was central to the 1954 article. Metonymy was discussed in terms of displacement and metaphor in terms of substitution; metonymy functioned through contiguity and metaphors through similarity (and contrast). This was an interpretation of Freud which offers a useful description of the complex process of metonymy. In a brief digression into the subject of visual art, Jakobson suggested that the orientation of cubism was metonymic—that is, characterized by the substitution of one term by another from a contiguous realm—where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches (or parts or fragments of the whole). So, too, realist literature was metonymic, he argued, in that it exploited contiguous relationships, digressing from plot to atmosphere, from characters to the setting in space and time, see Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of language and two types of Aphasic Disturbances', written 1954, first published as Part II of the *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956), and in *Selected Writings II*, p. 256. The purpose of this article has been to show that the main tendency of Constructivism was towards metaphor, although Jakobson's view of metonym and the substitution of parts for whole intersects with the idea of component parts within the system prevalent in Constructivist discourse. Jakobson's characterization of metaphor has been influential. It was his distinction and the view of metaphor as substitution that Lacan used in 'L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud', 1957, translated as 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud', in *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 151. Like Jakobson, Lacan believed that the operation at work within metonym was displacement whereas the operations at work within metaphor were condensation and substitution. Lacan argued that metonymy had the power to circumvent the obstacles of social censure, whereas the power of metaphor lay in its capacity to reveal the repressed symptom, thus his notion of the paternal metaphor in the Oedipal experience. Fred Orton critically applies Jakobson's view of metonym and his distinction between metaphor and metonym in 'Present, the scene of . . . selves, the occasion of . . . ruses', catalogue essay for a Jasper Johns exhibition in Los Angeles, 1987/88, in abbreviated form in *Block* 13, Winter 1987/88.

69. Voloshinov, *op. cit.*