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PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST  
September 10, 1975

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pryde Haig David-West', written in a cursive style.

stipulated the qualifications of the prospective designer:

. . . a critical attitude towards the surrounding world of things, a sense of inventiveness, perceptivity, an explorer's initiative, a willingness constantly to improve and simplify objects, and a feeling for variety. An inventive proposal and not merely a project is what is expected of a designer.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing the educational goals of the program, Rodchenko maintained particularly that these were:

The development of the ability simultaneously to accept colored, linear and kinetic impressions, approaching optical impressions not as externally occurring movement, but as taking place within a subject's internal world (tension, mood changes).<sup>2</sup>

The application of this system in Soviet art education was instrumental in Gan's recognition as the "Robespierre of Constructivism."<sup>3</sup>

At the end of 1921, Constructivist design entered Weimar Germany. This entry was a physical one, as the German-Soviet Trade Agreement (May, 1921) had cleared the way. In accordance with Point 4 of the program which had been drawn up by the artistic-collegiate syndicate, art ambassadors were despatched. This ambassadorial mission consisted of some of the leaders of the Soviet revolutionary artistic intelligentsia. They included the literary giants, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Aseyev and Skhlovsky; the innovators of Soviet theatre, Yesenin and Duncan; and the Constructivist designer, El Lissitzky.<sup>4</sup> Since the concern is

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1 From the Rodchenko Archives in Moscow, cited in Bojko, 18-19.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 20.

4 Lissitzky-Küppers, 22.

specifically with Constructivist design, the focus is on Lissitzky's movements and work in Weimar Germany.

Lissitzky's first "port of call" was Berlin. His first contact there was with George Grosz, on account of Grosz's ruthless attitude toward postwar society and art. This German artist was not only an adept in satirical drawings and paintings; his radical nature was also expressed in prose. On his discontent with German art and artists, Grosz expressed the following view:

Many Expressionists started here . . . Kandinsky projected the music of his soul to his canvas. Paul Klee sat at the Victorian sewing table, crocheting delicate handwork suitable for young ladies. The feelings of the painter were the sole object to be portrayed in so-called pure art, consequently the true painter had to depict his inner life. This is where the trouble starts. . . They all claim to portray the soul. . .

The compass and ruler banished the soul and metaphysical speculations. The Constructivists appeared. They look more clearly at time. They do not escape into metaphysics. . . They want reality, they want to work to meet actual needs. They make fresh demands that artistic output should have a purpose which can be controlled by requirements.

.....  
 If the present-day artist does not want either to work aimlessly or to have an aim that misfires because it is out of date, then he can only choose between technology and class-war propaganda. In both cases he must give up "pure art" either by enrolling as an architect, engineer, or poster designer. . . or by enlisting - as a painter and critic reflecting the image of our time, as a propagandist and advocate of the revolutionary idea and its supporters - in the army of the oppressed, who fight for their fair share of the things that matter in this world.<sup>1</sup>

Grosz, an active member of the German left, typified the

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1 Ibid., 22-23.

sway towards Bolshevism in the German artistic intelligentsia, a characteristic of the post-Versailles period. Lissitzky found Grosz's artistic convictions vis-à-vis the socio-political milieu coinciding with his to a large extent. The only element which seemed to be in contradiction to the principles of Constructivist design, was Grosz's contention that the "present-day artist" could only choose between technology and propaganda. In the Constructivist ethic, technology furnished the new artistic form, while ideology or propagandistic convictions formed the basis of content. There was no question of one or the other. Both had to assume a dialectical relationship. This contradiction notwithstanding, Lissitzky found in Grosz the mechanism which triggered his campaign in Weimar Germany.

In 1922, a pragmatic link between the avant-garde artists of Western Europe and Soviet Russia was forged in the publication of the Constructivist journal, Object.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with Point 9 of the program which had been outlined by the artistic-collegiate syndicate, Object's purpose was to introduce the revolutionary developments in Soviet art and literature to a West European audience. Also, in accordance with Point 10 of the program, its

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<sup>1</sup> A connection between the export of Constructivist design and Soviet foreign policy (as determined by Comintern) is identified here. As the road to Rapallo opened, Object was launched in anticipation of the official end of the blockade which was to be a consequence of the Treaty of Rapallo.

purpose was to circulate in the Soviet Union, as well as in other countries (notably those which were already in the Soviet orbit), information concerning artistic developments in Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia. Contributors to this journal were constituted of West Europeans and Russians. The following represented Western Europe: Charles Chaplin, Le Corbusier, Fernand Léger, Gino Severini, and Theo van Doesburg. Soviet Russia was represented by Sergei Prokofiev, Alexander Rodchenko, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Yesenin, and Vladimir Mayakovsky.<sup>1</sup> El Lissitzky, the originator of the idea for the journal, was both the general editor and art director.<sup>2</sup>

During the first year of his German campaign, Lissitzky worked with inexhaustible energy, tact, and a well formulated strategy. With great swiftness, he persuaded a large faction of the German artistic avant-garde to take interest in the revolutionary events in Soviet Russia and in their artistic representation (as manifested in Constructivist design). Doesburg, the "problem child of Weimar," was among the German resident artists who demonstrated admiration for the personality, ideas and work of Lissitzky. After the collapse of the Düsseldorf

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1 Lissitzky-Küppers, 340.

2 Lissitzky's cover design for Object is reproduced (Illustration 12, p.102 ) and analyzed in Part III where its impact on subsequent German designs is also discussed.

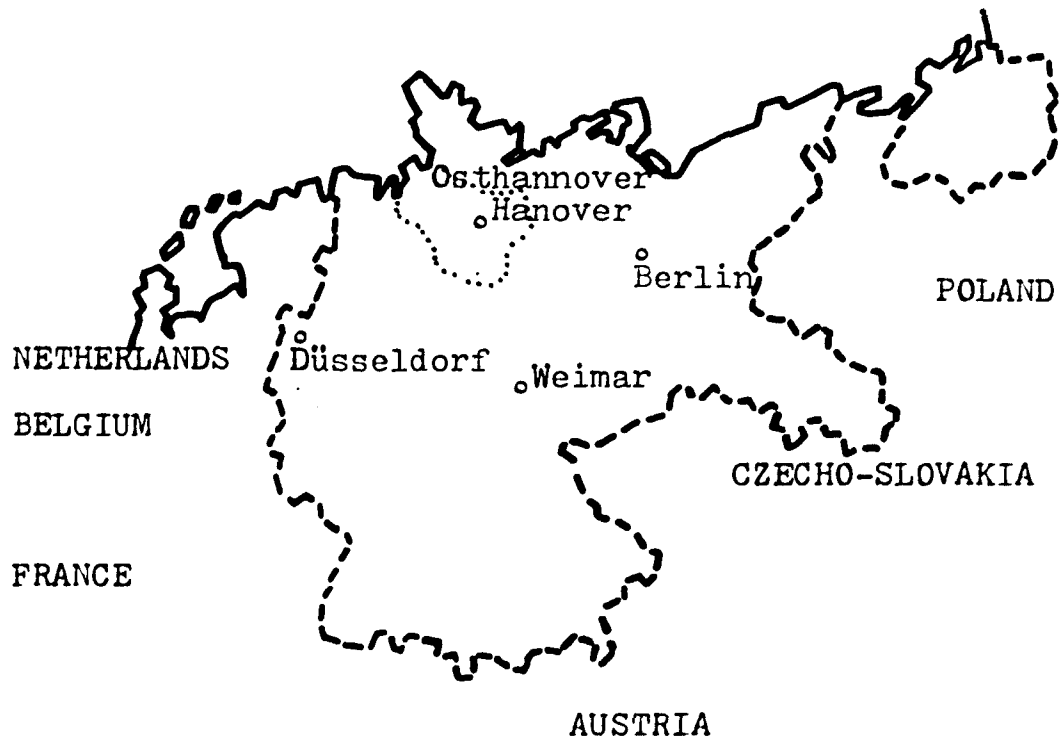
Congress,<sup>1</sup> Doesburg conceived the idea of organizing a convocation in the city of Weimar, of those artists who were opposed to Expressionism. Doesburg's idea was in accord with his ideological confrontation with Walter Gropius' Bauhaus. The convocation was attended by Lissitzky and adherents to his Constructivist doctrine. It is recorded that by the end of 1922, "Lissitzky had converted nearly all modern artists from the Weimar Bauhaus."<sup>2</sup>

In Hanover, a meeting with Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), and their subsequent friendship, resulted in Lissitzky's first public exhibition of his designs. A relentless propagandist for novel ideas, Schwitters arranged for Lissitzky's membership in the Kestner-Gesellschaft, a major and an exclusive syndicate for propagating revolutionary art in Hanover, as well as in the Osthannover area (See Map 1, p. 85). This syndicate was founded by radicals during the First World War. Under its auspices, Lissitzky exhibited his works during the Hanover Dada Festival of October, 1922. Following the general public's enthusiastic response to his works, the Kestner-Gesellschaft arranged

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1 During the Spring of 1922, a monster congress convened in Düsseldorf. In spite of its designation, the First International Congress of Progressive Art, it was the view of most of the participants (Constructivists, Dadaists, members of De Stijl, and New Objectivists) that it achieved nothing. It ended in a fiasco, as the Constructivists walked out.

2 An excerpt from a conversation between Marc Chagall and Edouard Roditi, cited in Lissitzky-Küppers, 385.



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Map 1. Weimar Germany After the Treaty of Versailles  
Showing Major Cities Visited by El Lissitzky.



a one man exhibition for Lissitzky from the end of 1922 to the beginning of 1923.<sup>1</sup> No sooner were the arrangements completed, than Doesburg arrived in Hanover. Forging his way into the syndicate, Doesburg engaged its members in endless theoretical discussions on the parallels between his work and Lissitzky's. The syndicate pointed out to him the obvious differences between his metaphysical constructions and the self-explanatory designs by the Russian Constructivist.<sup>2</sup> But Doesburg won ultimately, and his works were included in the exhibition. There seems to be a significant connection between these events and his intransigence at Weimar. Given the fact that Lissitzky's work was held in respect in Weimar Germany, Doesburg might have viewed such a joint exhibition as being instrumental in his being admitted officially and totally into the Bauhaus community.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, however, Lissitzky had proposed to the Kestler-Gesellschaft that László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) should be invited to have a showing of his works during the up-coming exhibition. The proposal was accepted. Moholy-Nagy had arrived in Berlin in 1921 on self-exile from his native Budapest. Taking a studio in Berlin's west-end, he had arrived at the conclusion that Kandinsky's cerebral

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1 Ibid., 33.

2 Ibid.

3 None of the sources which were available to the author elucidated the precise purpose of Doesburg's Hanover adventure.

paintings which were reminiscent of the "undersea world,"<sup>1</sup> needed to be revolutionized. Here at the west-end studio, he had met with Lissitzky. A friendship between the two artists flowered following this meeting, which had the ultimate effect of converting Moholy-Nagy to Constructivist design. He later came to epitomize the penetration of this Soviet-conceived aesthetic into the Bauhaus orbit.

Moholy-Nagy Introduces Constructivist Design at the Weimar Bauhaus

László Moholy-Nagy read law at the University of Budapest during the turbulent years of the Magyar-Slav conflict in Austria-Hungary. During the First World War, he was a soldier in the Central army, fighting on the Russian front. There, he shared in the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The declaration of a Hungarian Soviet in 1919 was viewed by Moholy-Nagy as the dawn of a new and a trouble-free era.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, he offered to work for the Communist regime. But his offer was rejected as a result of the landholding status of his family before the Communist takeover.

In spite of his legal training, Moholy-Nagy maintained his interest in painting. He was particularly interested in visually commenting on the disposition of the Hungarian peasantry with nonrepresentational images. Establishing a logical connection between the purported

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1 Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1969, 18.

2 Ibid., 13

social change in the Communist order and artistic creation, he arrived at the conclusion that his art could become an essential weapon for the implementation of the change. But due to his rejection in Budapest, Moholy-Nagy left for Vienna on self exile in 1920. Assuming a very critical attitude toward the Hungarian Soviet, he made the following declaration in Vienna:

. . . a truly revolutionary new system would differ in all respects from the familiar old pattern. The present Communist Party is still part of this bourgeois world and its able propagator [Capitalism]. It blows a red tin trumpet while imitating the cult of the dead and base past under the deceptive name of 'proletcult.' The present Communist system of economy might offer new opportunities to a number of men who can cleverly mix enterprise and politics, but it will never solve the deeper and most vital needs of survival.<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting upon the Hungarian revolt of the previous century (December 1848), Moholy-Nagy also contended that Hungarians could not sever the Austrian dualism because the revolt lacked a "revolutionary content."<sup>2</sup> He held the view that to succeed, the new order had to call on art to play a role. Such an art, he reiterated, should have a revolutionary content. His offer had thus been to work as an artist for the Communist regime. But the kind of works which Moholy-Nagy produced at the time, despite their non-representational images, did not produce any conclusive evidence that (in a Soviet framework) they could foster

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1 Ibid., 14.

2 Ibid.

Socialist construction. Implicit in his attitude toward art and its coexistence with politics, a contradiction is identified. His ideological proclamations proposed a conjunction of content and form, but his paintings were only revolutionary in form. He attacked the economic system of the bourgeoisie, but he stuck to painting, which, by its very nature is not a mass oriented medium, hence links itself with the bourgeoisie. He questioned the inability of the Hungarian Soviet to address the proletariat, but his work was metaphysical, hence could not link itself with the proletarian movement. This contradiction is exemplified in Moholy-Nagy's Bridges (Illustration 9).



9. László Moholy-Nagy, Bridges, 1919.

Moholy-Nagy did not arrive at a unity between artistic form and social content, and did not recognize the primacy of content, until he was introduced to Constructivist design in Berlin. Here, he became receptive to the ideology

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I am particularly grateful to the members of my Dissertation Committee; without the guidance of Professors David W. Ecker, Henry J. Perkinson and Janice L. Gorn, this document could not have been completed. My gratitude must be extended to Professor L. Jay Oliva with whom I consulted on the diplomatic history of Soviet Russia. I should also thank Professor Jerome J. Hausman who helped me considerably in developing the study.

Finally, my wife deserves my profound appreciation for her translations of Russian documents, and for the understanding that she demonstrated throughout my study period.

PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST  
New York City, 1975.

that "Constructivist design and reconstructed society are an inseparable entity."<sup>1</sup> His article to a revolutionary Hungarian magazine in 1922 is demonstrative of this reception:

. . . the reality of this century - determines what we can grasp and what we cannot yet understand. And this reality of our century is technology: the invention, construction and maintenance of machines. To be a user of machines is to be of the spirit of this century. It has replaced the transcendental spiritualism of past eras.

Everyone is equal before the machine. I can use it, so can you. . . There is no tradition in technology, no class-consciousness. Everybody can be both the machine's master, or its slave.

This is the root of Socialism. . . It is the machine that woke the proletariat. We have to eliminate the machine if we want to eliminate Socialism. . . This is our century: technology, machine, Socialism. . .

. . . The art of our time has to be functional, precise, all-inclusive. It is the art of Constructivism.

In Constructivism, form and substance [content] are one. . . Constructivism. . . is not confined to picture-frame and pedestal. It expands into industry and architecture, into objects and relationships. Constructivism is the Socialism of vision.<sup>2</sup>

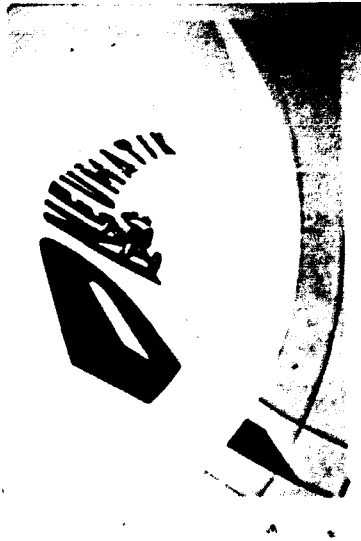
Moholy-Nagy's ideological proclamations on art now became consistent with those of the Constructivist designers in Soviet Russia. Turning a major part of his attention to graphic design, his subsequent work began to be pervaded by elements of the "Socialism of vision." This is exemplified in his poster of 1923 (Illustration 10, p. 91).

Before the end of 1922, Walter Gropius had found in Moholy-Nagy, a direct force that was needed to revo-

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<sup>1</sup> Moholy-Nagy, 18.

<sup>2</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, "Constructivism and the Proletariat," MA, May, 1922, cited in Moholy-Nagy, 19.



10. Poster by László Moholy-Nagy, 1923.

lutionize the Bauhaus curriculum. Gropius had decided that the predominance of German Expressionist forces and metaphysics at the Bauhaus were an anathema to his goal of forging a link between art, technology and the social milieu. He thus wished to draw stronger Constructivist forces into the orbit of the school.<sup>1</sup> In reference to his meeting with Moholy-Nagy, Gropius has stated:

It was in Berlin in 1922 that I first met Moholy-Nagy. Impressed by the character and direction of his work, I offered him a professorship at the Bauhaus. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In 1923, Moholy-Nagy went to Weimar, to teach at the Bauhaus. His arrival at Weimar was received with grievance by the conservative faction of the Weimar community. This grievance evolved into another wave of protests against the institution. Why? The advent of

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<sup>1</sup> Moholy-Nagy, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Gropius, "Preface," László Moholy-Nagy, The New Vision, New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1947, 5.

Moholy-Nagy created two radically opposed interpretations of the aims of the school: Itten led a faction which propagated German Expressionism and metaphysics. The new teacher championed the course of Constructivist design. He drew a following whose aim was based on a visual vocabulary which revolved around a geometric order. This order was oriented towards socio-functionalism. As the school's director himself joined Moholy-Nagy's faction, Itten resigned. Students and teachers who had supported Itten were infuriated. Soon, the conservative citizens of Weimar began to attack the Bauhaus. Then there was a temporary stalemate in the hostility, as students began, gradually, to accommodate Moholy-Nagy. A member of the Student Council summed up the situation in the following statement.

This Russian trend [Constructivist design], created outside the Bauhaus, with its exact, simulatively technical forms was disgusting to us who were devoted to the extremes of German Expressionism. But since Constructivism was the newest of the new, it was - so we figured - the cleverest move to overcome our aversion and, by supporting Gropius' choice . . . incorporated this newest into the Bauhaus system.

. . . So Moholy came to Weimar as the "champion of youth," as we labeled him in contrast to the "old" [teachers] Kandinsky, Fejninger, and Klee who were between forty and fifty.<sup>1</sup>

Outside the city of Weimar, the situation did not improve. The Thuringia State Government which had jurisdiction over the city, ruled that the school should be discontinued.

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<sup>1</sup> Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, 35.



This ruling came as a result of Government's conviction that the Bauhaus was Communist oriented. The advent of Moholy-Nagy tended to be demonstrative of the successful penetration of the school by Soviet revolutionary ideology.<sup>1</sup> Following the State Government's ruling, eminent scholars, artists, artistic organizations, as well as popular journals across Continental Europe protested. Some of the scholars included the physicist, Albert Einstein; the novelist, Gerhart Hauptmann; and the psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich. The artists included George Grosz, Kurt Schwitters and Oscar Kokoschka. The Austrian and German Werkbunds were among the artistic organizations which protested. Journals which reacted against the ruling included the Kunstchronik im Kunstmarkt of Berlin; A Magyar of Budapest; Pragertablatt of Prague; Weekbald of Rotterdam; and Das Werk of Zürich. Across the Atlantic, the fate of the Bauhaus was received with sympathy in the United States. The Freeman of New York condemned the Thuringia State Government's ruling.

But despite these international protests, the Government did not deviate from its stand. Walter Gropius, on his part, was not interested in any form of a compromise with the Government. So it had to be that on April 1, 1925,

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<sup>1</sup> By the end of 1923, German-Soviet relations had been strained. It had become very clear in Germany that the Soviet Union had been primarily concerned with the escalation of revolutionary movements in Germany as a result of the cooperations Treaty of Rapallo. These movements had climaxed in the State of Thuringia, where Comintern had launched an abortive coup d'état. Georg von Rauch, A History of Soviet Russia, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967, 191-196. The Thuringia Government's ruling was therefore aimed at wiping out all vestiges of Communism in the State.

the students and teachers of the Bauhaus gathered all their artistic gadgets, as well as their ideological convictions, and found their way out of Weimar, Thuringia. The school was reestablished in Dessau in the State of Anhalt whose Government was more tolerant.<sup>1</sup> But shortly after the school had settled in its new home, internal and external tension continued to escalate. In 1928, Gropius liquidated the directorship and returned to private practice as an architect. This created a chain reaction of teacher resignations. Moholy-Nagy resigned, then Herbert Bayer. Other prominent teachers soon followed suit.

These were the days when Adolf Hitler (1889-1945?) was forging his way to the leadership of Germany. Following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and the subsequent World Depression, Hitler formulated a diabolical scheme. When unleashed, this scheme would make him master of German politics, and would lead to the Second World War. In the frontlines of the Nazi Party, he captured the confidence of the German proletariat, and assumed the Chancellery of Germany in 1933. By this time the Bauhaus had moved to Berlin. Here, it came face-to-face with the wrath of Hitler. He decided that the school was a breeding ground for Bolshevik culture which militated against the "German spirit."<sup>2</sup>

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1 This tolerance was demonstrated by the conferment of the title of Professor on Gropius by the State Government.

2 Fitch, 14.

Accordingly, it was wiped out completely.<sup>1</sup>

Thus ended the German period of the Bauhaus. But many of its students and teachers who continued to work in the tradition of Constructivist design left Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup> They settled in other parts of Western Europe and in the United States of America. László Moholy-Nagy, for example, founded the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937, which was subsequently renamed the Institute of Design of the Illinois Institute of Technology. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to trace the movements of the members of the Bauhaus community after its dismemberment in Germany. It will suffice to say that this dismemberment did not culminate in a break in the historical continuity of Constructivist design. The palpability of this continuity shall be seen in Part III.

### Synthesis

In view of the fact that Soviet Russia was virtually cut off physically from the rest of the world during the early Bolshevik period, artistic communication could not be established, physically, with Western Europe. But desirous

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1 This action was in keeping with the program which had been drawn up by the Hitler movement as early as 1920. With the objective of creating a German national press, it had stated in part, "We demand legal prosecution of all tendencies in art and literature of a kind likely to disintegrate our life as a nation, and the suppression of institutions which militate against the requirements above-mentioned." Cited in Frederick Schuman, "The Program of the NSDP," Germany Since 1918, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937, 115.

2 The Hitler movement was also hostile to aliens in Germany. Hence Moholy-Nagy, for example, had no alternative to leaving the country, being a Hungarian.

of keeping European artists abreast of revolutionary developments in the Soviet artistic scene, an artistic-collegiate syndicate was established in Moscow, which, through radio messages, disseminated their aesthetic position. After the Soviet Government concluded a Trade Agreement with Weimar Germany (1921), the Constructivist designer, El Lissitzky was despatched to Germany as an "art ambassador." A major objective of his mission was to change the course of German art to be in accord with the aesthetic which had evolved after the NEP. To accomplish this objective, he took the following steps: 1) Making friends with members of the German artistic intelligentsia, notably with the satirist and radical ideologist, George Grosz; the Dadaist, Kurt Schwitters; and with the Hungarian émigré, Moholy-Nagy; 2) Converting the left-wing artists to the aesthetic of Constructivist design, notably Moholy-Nagy; and 3) Exhibiting his works publicly and participating in radical artistic events. In 1922, he launched the Constructivist journal, Object, in anticipation of the end of the Soviet embargo which was to be a function of the Treaty of Rapallo. This journal officially linked European and Soviet artists in the sense that it became a medium of the exchange of artistic views.

In 1923, Moholy-Nagy, who had been converted to Constructivist design, joined the teaching staff of the Bauhaus at Weimar, in the State of Thuringia. Founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, the Bauhaus had been staffed by German Expressionists and metaphysical artists like

Itten, Kandinsky and Klee. But it had been Gropius' goal to develop the school into an establishment which would be in opposition to Expressionist and metaphysical tendencies. He wanted his students to produce works which would be socially and politically relevant to the 20th century. Initially, this wish was only expressed in Gropius' public pronouncements. Identifying a link between Gropius' attitude and Bolshevist propaganda, conservative Weimar criticized the Bauhaus relentlessly. The advent of Moholy-Nagy, which coincided with a Soviet sponsored abortive coup d'état in Thuringia, was viewed by the Government of Thuringia as a successful Communist takeover of German art education. Accordingly, it ruled that the Bauhaus should be closed. This ruling instantly catapulted the Bauhaus into international significance. Its fate was received with sympathy by eminent German scholars, artists, and organizations, as well as by publications in Europe and in the United States. But the Government did not withdraw its ruling.

So, in 1925, the Bauhaus was moved to Dessau, Anhalt, where, due to other conflicts, Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, and other prominent teachers resigned. The school later moved to Berlin. But here, it was destined to come face-to-face with Adolf Hitler, who, deciding that it was a breeding ground for Bolshevist culture, wiped it out completely in 1933.

Hitler's hostility toward non-German conceived artistic tendencies, as well as his hostility toward aliens, forced many of the members of the Bauhaus community to leave Nazi Germany. Moholy-Nagy, for example, finally fled to the

United States and founded the New Bauhaus in Chicago. It subsequently became the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

The international sympathy which the Bauhaus had gained as a result of its conflict with the Thuringia State Government, as well as its final conflict with Adolf Hitler, were instrumental in the diffusion of its adopted Constructivist system to other countries.

PART THREE

FORMAL CONNECTIONS:  
CONSTRUCTIVIST, BAUHAUS AND  
RECENT GRAPHIC DESIGNS.

To Betuška



## CHAPTER VII

### CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVIST AND BAUHAUS DESIGNS

The foregoing section described how, taking advantage of the German-Soviet Trade Agreement and the Treaty of Rapallo, the Soviet artistic-collegiate syndicate penetrated the circles of the German artistic intelligentsia. It also analyzed how the ideological content of Constructivist design was accommodated by the Bauhaus. Such an accommodation logically presupposed a new formal order in subsequent Bauhaus designs which would be in accord with the formal order of Constructivist designs. This position was held in view of the fact that content and form conjoin in the theory of Russian Constructivism.<sup>1</sup>

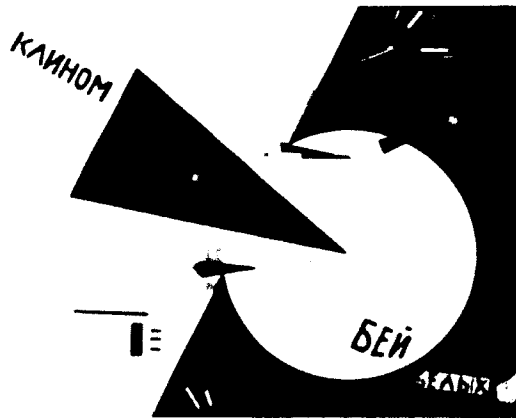
In this chapter, the structural qualities of both Constructivist and Bauhaus designs are discussed, and connections established. The first six designs (Illustrations 11 through 16) were executed by the Constructivist designers, Eleazar Markovich (El Lissitzky), Alexander Rodchenko, and by Georgi Stenberg (1900-1933), and Vladimir Stenberg (1899-?), from 1919 to 1923. The following six designs (Illustrations 17 through 22) were executed by

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<sup>1</sup> The conjunction of content and form has been discussed in Chapter IV, this Manuscript, 41-44.

the Bauhaus designers, Karl Rohl, Eberhard Schrammen, Oscar Schlemmer, Joost Schmidt, Herbert Bayer, and Jan Tschichold, from 1919 to the 1930's.

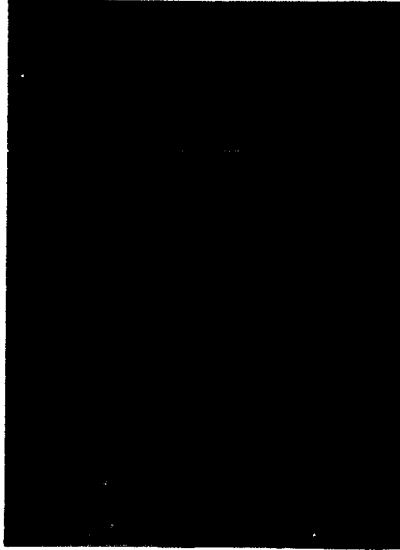
Formalist Ordering of Constructivist Designs



11. Poster by El Lissitzky, 1919.

In this poster, the graphic elements are simple and geometric in character. Two large trapezoidal areas of black and white are obliquely separated. Sharp aggressive rectangular, triangular shapes, as well as circular forms are juxtaposed with the direct impact of the trapezoidal areas. Simple sans serif letter forms are obliquely placed in relation to the total geometry of the poster. There has been an attempt to distribute the groups of letter forms in such a way that a sense of balance has been maintained.

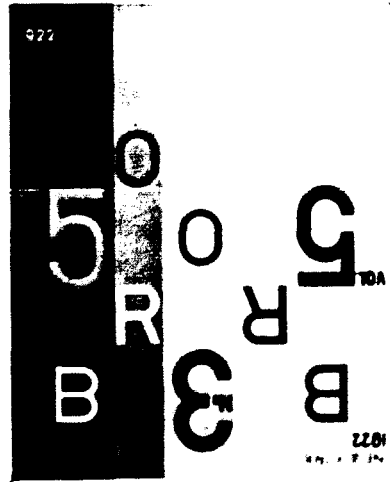
Lissitzky has applied the technique of montage, a characteristic of Cubism (the Synthetic period). But Lissitzky's montage is simplified and abstracted, the elements are stripped to their primal qualities, to assume an architectonic character when viewed as a totality.



12. Cover design by El Lissitzky, 1922.

Immediately visible here is a diagonally placed geometric form which assumes the shape of a try-square, counterpointed by bold stencilled sans serif letter forms. Other groups of letter forms are similarly constructed and placed at strategic positions in the work to constitute rectangular bars which complement the principal elements. The geometric interrelationships of the component parts of this design produce a dynamic sense of equilibrium. This is accentuated by the contrapositioning of the individual forms, as well as by their tonal juxtaposition with the field against which they are set.

The mode of execution of this design is, as in the previous one, montage. But here, Lissitzky has taken his simplification further: the radiational lines in the previous poster are not experienced here. Rather, he has relied largely on typographical forms. Using contrast and balance, they have been forged into a visually informative totality.



13. Cover design by El Lissitzky, 1922.

Vertically divided into areas of tonal densities which range from black to white, this work is composed entirely of letter forms. The letter forms are very simple, geometrically constructed, unserifed, modular and rendered in red, white and black. These three colors are distributed on the total visual field in such a way that the tonal variations of the vertical sections cease to be isolated areas. Lissitzky has blended the techniques of asymmetric and symmetric mise en page to arrive at a work which is a dynamic visual communicator.

An unusual quality of this work is the repetitiveness in the use of letter forms, but a repetitiveness with a difference. It should be noted that the bottom half of the design is a reversal of the top half, save the groups of letter forms which diagonally bisect the work. The individual elements are geometrically related to each other, forming a coherent iconography.



14. Sketch for a poster by El Lissitzky, 1922.

The principal graphic element here is a red star constructed by an assembly of regular pentagonal shapes, and isosceles triangular shapes of congruence. Centrally placed at an oblique angle, the impact of this star is accentuated by the introduction of black rectangular bars which enclose sections of it. The central form is counterpointed by a series of almost parallel lines of sketchily rendered letter forms. A sense of equilibrium is thus maintained, as circular forms are introduced. A group of letter forms which constitute an arc connecting two vertices of the star tend to emphasize the significance of the central image.

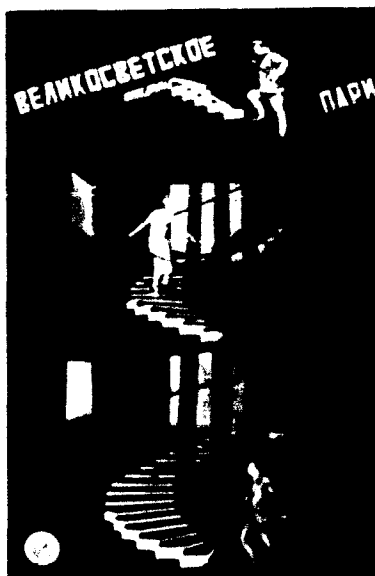
A departure from the previous works is the curvilinear manner in which the lower letter forms are placed; but in accordance with the others, the geometric interrelationships between elements to form a coherent visual order have been maintained.



15. Poster by Alexander Rodchenko, 1923.

Rodchenko's work departs from the overall formal simplicity of Lissitzky's, but demonstrates a similar geometric ordering. The principal graphic element is what appears to be a human face, rendered in a strict geometric manner. Of particular significance here is how the eyes have been treated: a pair of three circular shapes containing radii which are congruent to diameters. The rest of the figure is composed of rectangular and trapezoidal shapes. The juxtapositioning of green, red and white colors enhances the impact of the work. Rodchenko's typography is simple and direct, and variegated to arrest the viewer's attention. The distribution of the various elements has been taken to such an extreme that the total work tends to appear to be over balanced.

Flat color fields have been blended with three dimensional forms to accentuate the message which the poster was intended to convey.



16. Poster by Georgi and Vladimir Stenberg, 1923.

Segments of cosinusoidal and sinusoidal waves have been brought into play with rectangular and trapezoidal forms to give the illusion of a spiral staircase within an interior. The juxtapositioning of red, blue and yellow colors with their corresponding tones introduces depth and tension in this poster. The confinement of the major graphic elements to the center of the visual field tends to emphasize their impact. This is accentuated by the perspectival rendering of rectangular shapes on the left half of the work. The letter forms here assume the characteristic simplicity and geometricity of Lissitzky and Rodchenko, and are placed in a geometric relationship to the other elements.

The Stenberg brothers have blended photographic montage with plain color fields and vignettes to arrive at an organized visual statement.

### Conclusion

As opposed to designs which were produced by Jugendstil artists like Toulouse-Lautrec and Mucha; to paintings by a Cubist artist like Picasso, Expressionists like Kokoschka and Beckman; or by the Italian Futurists, the formal orientation of Constructivist designs is toward simplicity and order. The works of Lissitzky, Rodchenko and the Stenberg brothers, some of the proponents of this Soviet aesthetic, are demonstrative of these qualities. Immediately visible in these works are purely geometric graphic elements: circular, rectangular, trapezoidal and triangular shapes or sections thereof. Stripped to their barest essentials, these elements are composed into an architectonic amalgam in each work. The impact of Constructivist designs is enhanced by the use of dynamically juxtaposed colors or densities, and by the isolation of the principal elements by an abundance of negative space. Such space tends to function as a mechanism which directs the viewer's attention to the pictorial message.

The typography of Constructivist design is also simple and direct. Governed by the "laws of typographic mechanic,"<sup>1</sup> letter forms are constructed without serifs,

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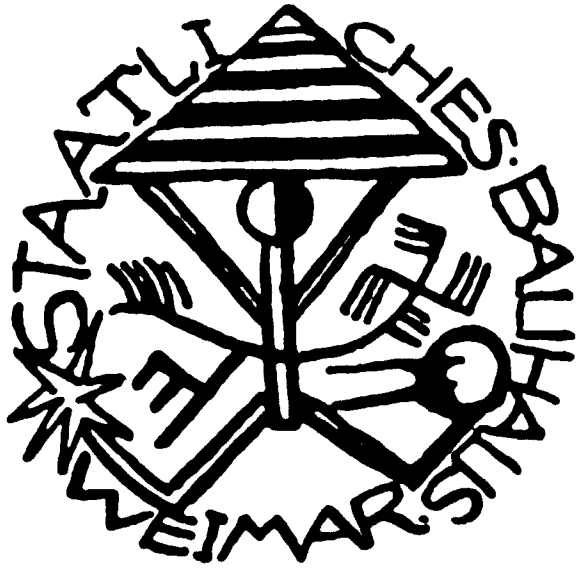
<sup>1</sup> These laws were formulated by El Lissitzky in 1919-1920 as a theoretical framework for Constructivist typography. Szymon Bojko, New Graphic Design in Revolutionary Russia, London: Lund and Humphries Ltd., 1972, 16.



and in proportions and relationships to the individual iconographic elements, as well as to the architecture of the total design.

Artistic montage is a characteristic mode of execution which runs through the Constructivist vein. Derived from the Cubist practice of collage, the Russian Constructivist designers simplified and abstracted their montage to produce visually informative works whose forms were in accord with the technological forms of their industrialized society.

Formalistic Ordering of Bauhaus Designs



17. Seal for the Bauhaus by Karl Rohl, 1919.

In this work, attributes of Expressionism are immediately visible: excitement, disturbance or agitation, and formal distortion in a rather arbitrary manner. The influence of the Die Brücke movement can also be noted, as evidenced by the rendering of the central elements which are

reminiscent of the rough strength of old German woodcuts, and the force of traditional African sculpture. These were aesthetic qualities which Die Brücke artists like Kirchner and Schmidt-Rottluff sought to regain. A geometric (circular) order is maintained in the assembly of the letter forms, but the individual letters are arbitrarily rendered in a child-like manner. No sense of geometric interrelationship has been demonstrated.

It appears as though Rohl was more concerned with expressing his personal idea of the Bauhaus, than with producing a work which would be viewed and understood by the masses of people in an industrialized society.

Eberhard Schramman  
**Der Austausch**



18. Poster by Eberhard Schramman, 1919.

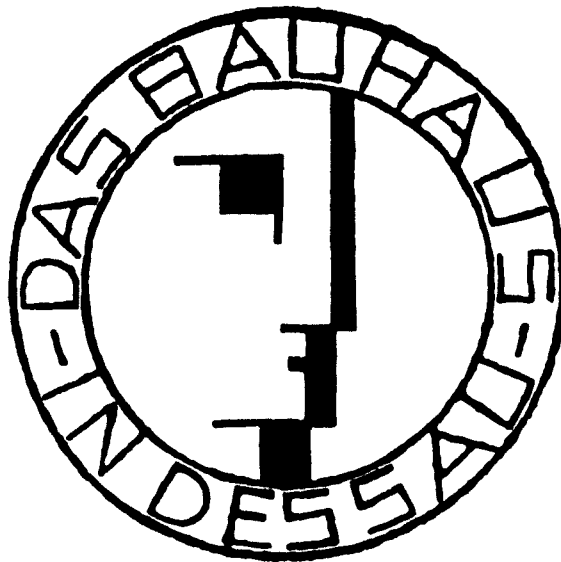
The dominant visual graphic element in Schramman's work is a human face executed in the manner of German woodcuts, reminiscent of Die Brücke prints. It is a mellange of nongeometric and ungeometrically interrelated shapes of various sizes, arbitrarily rendered to express the

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artist's personal interpretation of a human face. Three kinds of letter forms have been used: a line of asymmetrically placed, italicized, serifed and underscored letters; a line of symmetrically placed and serifed letters; and a line of sans serif letters which are also symmetrically placed. These letter forms have been confined to the top section of the poster, and have been separated from the rest of the work by two parallel lines. No attempt has been made to integrate the typographical elements with the pictorial material.

In relation to Russian Constructivist designs, Schrammen's work does not demonstrate a formalistic parallel.



19. Seal for the Bauhaus by Oscar Schlemmer, 1923.

Executed after László Moholy-Nagy took Constructivism into the Bauhaus, this work demonstrates a radical departure from Expressionist or metaphysical tendencies. The crude rendering of the central figure in Rohl's work (Illustration 17, p. 108) has been replaced by a purely geometric

figure whose component parts are in relationship to each other. A concentric circle has also been introduced to stabilize the work. Rohl's arbitrary and child-like letter forms have been revolutionized; all extraneous matter has been eliminated. The result is a simple, direct and modular set of letter forms whose individual forms are proportionately related to each other, as well as to the total design. The calculated placing of the elements, and the juxtapositioning of broad and narrow strokes, produces a tensional equilibrium.

This work demonstrates formal parallels to Rodchenko's poster (Illustration 15, p. 105).



20. Poster by Joost Schmidt, 1923.

The axis of Schmidt's work is composed of a collection of rectangular and circular shapes, arcs of circles, parallel lines, and geometric letter forms, which form a diagonal entity. The interrelationships between the individual forms, as well as their proportionate relation-

ship to the total design, demonstrates Schmidt's mastery of geometric laws and of Constructivist technics. The manner in which the individual letter forms have been constructed is reminiscent of Rodchenko's work (Illustration 15, p. 105); and the circular configuration of the top letters is an echo of Lissitzky's design (Illustration 13, p. 103). Schmidt's axis form also demonstrates a parallel to Lissitzky's "try-square" (Illustration 12, p. 102).

The total architecture of this poster is a radical departure from the instinctively rendered composition of the Expressionist work by Schrammen (Illustration 18, p. 109).



21. Poster by Herbert Bayer, 1926.

Designed four years after Lissitzky's cover design (Illustration 13, p. 103), Bayer's poster demonstrates formal connections with the Russian Constructivist's design. Both have been divided into areas of tonal densities ranging from black to white, and both have been composed entirely of letter forms which neutralize the various color densities,

as a result of the balanced distributions of the letter forms. Bayer's typography is simple and direct, and the individual letters are unserifized and modular in character. These are qualities which have been experienced in Constructivist designs.

It should be noted that the letter forms are geometrically related to each other, as well as to the architecture of the poster. These are consistent with the Constructivist formal system.



22. Poster by Jan Tschichold, 1930's.

In Tschichold's work, a circular photographic montage has been balanced with an oblique line. The line echoes Lissitzky's "try-square" (Illustration 12, p. 102), and is set at right angles to lines of sans serif letter forms. It is noted that the props of the human form in the circle, which consist of canon balls and a railway track, are repeated in the total design. Lissitzky's repetitiveness (Illustration 13, p. 103) has its parallel here in the photographic

montage.

Tschichold's poster demonstrates an awareness of Constructivism's formal characteristics, which include the abundant use of negative space to isolate and to emphasize the major elements. The use of photographic montage is a phenomenon which had been explored by Russian Constructivists, as evidenced in the work by Georgi and Vladimir Stenberg (Illustration 16, p. 106).

### Conclusion

An examination of the visual characteristics of Bauhaus designs which were produced between 1919 and 1933 reveals the following facts:

1. Designs which were produced before Constructivist design entered the orbit of the Bauhaus demonstrate Expressionist formal tendencies. Early Bauhaus designers seemed to have been concerned with expressing their ideas in their works purely on individualistic vantage points, for the sake of art alone. They did not seem to have attempted to communicate ideas visually to an audience in a technological society, using the tangible materials of that society. This tendency could be analogous to scribbles in a student's note book, as opposed to type-written manuscripts to be presented to a teacher. The former is meant specifically for the student's eyes and for his or her understanding; the latter for others.
2. Designs which were produced after the German-Soviet Trade Agreement, after Object was launched in Berlin, and



after Constructivist design entered the orbit of the Bauhaus, demonstrate the formal characteristics of Constructivist designs. These include the proportionate and geometric interrelationships between purely geometric pictorial elements, and simple, direct, unserifized letter forms. Where letter forms alone constitute the total work, such forms are also in accord with the Constructivist formalistic ordering. The use of the technique of montage, which was first applied to visual communication design by the Russian Constructivists, is identified in Bauhaus designs. Another Constructivist characteristic which permeates Bauhaus designs is the use of negative space as a directional force - the tendency of directing the viewer's attention to the principal elements.

It has been found that from 1923, Bauhaus designers became concerned with the social relevance of their works - the visual communication of messages to people other than themselves. This new attitude is vividly exemplified in a comparison of the two seals of the institution (Illustrations 17, p. 108; and 19, p. 110).

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVIST DESIGNS AND CONTEMPORARY POSTERS

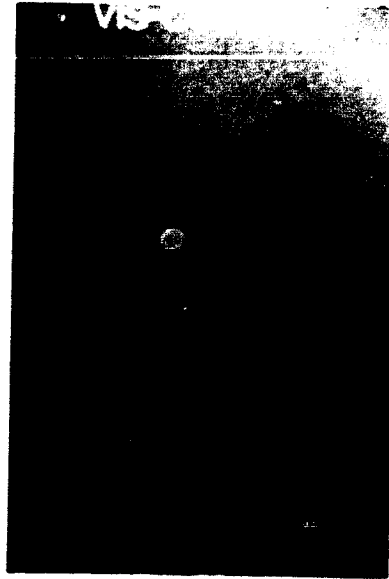
It has been stated earlier, that as a result of the Thuringia State Government's attitude toward the Bauhaus, the school was catapulted to international significance.<sup>1</sup> It has also been stated that the Bauhaus' final conflict with Adolf Hitler in Berlin resulted in its dismemberment, and that as a result of this dismemberment, and the Hitler movement's attitude toward aliens in Germany, many Bauhaus people, notably Moholy-Nagy, had to flee from Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup> These developments were forces which generated the diffusion of the Constructivist aesthetic - an aesthetic which had been adopted by the Bauhaus - to other countries.

In this chapter, it shall be seen that even in recent times, many posters which have been produced in many countries demonstrate the characteristics of Constructivist design. Posters from nineteen countries are discussed, and their formal connections with Constructivist designs established.

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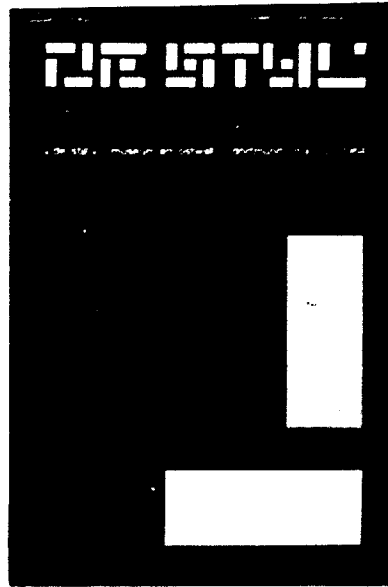
1 See this Manuscript, 92-93.

2 Ibid., 95.

Formalistic Ordering of Contemporary Posters

## 23. Austria: Tino Erben, 1971.

In the work by the Austrian designer, Tino Erben, the central image resembles the eyes in Rodchenko's poster (Illustration 15, p. 105). Erben has been consistent in the use of his chosen style of letter forms, namely, the modular style. This consistency is a tendency which has been identified in Constructivist designs. The use of space as an isolating mechanism, and as a directional force here, have also been encountered in Constructivist designs.



24. Brazil: Almir Mavigner, 1964.

Brazil's Almir Mavigner has deployed sharply delineated rectangular shapes to arrive at an orderly, balanced design. He has also introduced a line of sans serif letter forms, composed of a series of thin rectangular bars which relate geometrically to the other forms in the work. Space has been used in such a way that the graphic elements have been accentuated. The overall simplicity and order, as well as the employed technique of montage are reminiscent of Constructivist designs.



25. Britain: Crosby, Fletcher and Forbes, 1965.

Theo Crosby, Alan Fletcher and Colin Forbes of Great Britain have jointly produced a work which powerfully exerts an understanding of geometric laws. The British flag has been wrapped around a cube whose three-dimensional nature distributes the rectangular, trapezoidal and triangular formations of the flag into an unusual collection of interrelated parts. The British trio have employed the asymmetric technique in their typography, which is composed of simple and direct letter forms. The Constructivist characteristics of simplicity and order, as well as the technique of montage are evident in this work.

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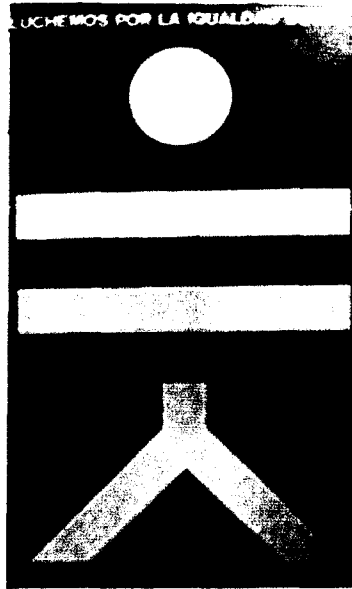
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26. Bulgaria: Stefan Boryson, 1973.

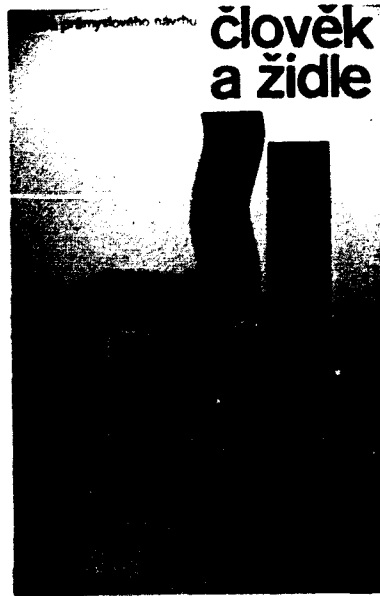
Composed almost entirely of letter forms, Stefan Boryson's work is both orderly and dynamic. The letter forms which are geometric in character, have been developed into rectangular and triangular configurations, drawing attention to the centrally placed high-contrast photographic image. The individual letter forms have been placed in such a way that they are geometrically related to each other, as well as to the total work.



27. Cuba: Felix Beltran, 1972.

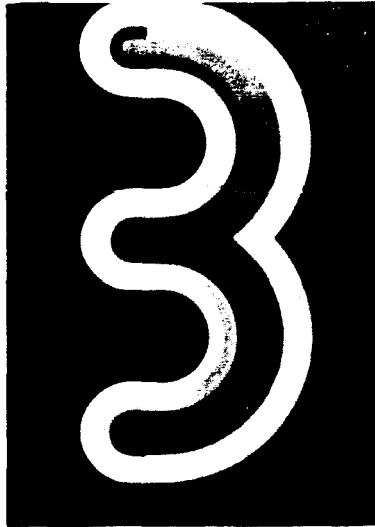
The iconography of this poster bears a strong resemblance to Rodchenko's geometricized human form (Illustration 15, p. 105). In the Cuban's work, however, the forms have been further simplified. The letter forms have also been placed in a similar position to Rodchenko's, but more simplified. They are unserifed, and constitute a line which echoes the parallel rectangular shapes in the center of the design. The liberal use of space which has been experienced with Constructivist designs is a major aesthetic quality in Beltran's poster.





28. Czechoslovakia: Jan Rajlich, 1970.

Jan Rajlich's work reflects Lissitzky's try-square (Illustration 12, p. 102). The geometric form has been juxtaposed with a curvilinear form which echoes the former. The letter forms are simple and direct, in the tradition of Constructivist designs. Space has also been used to isolate and to accentuate the graphic elements.



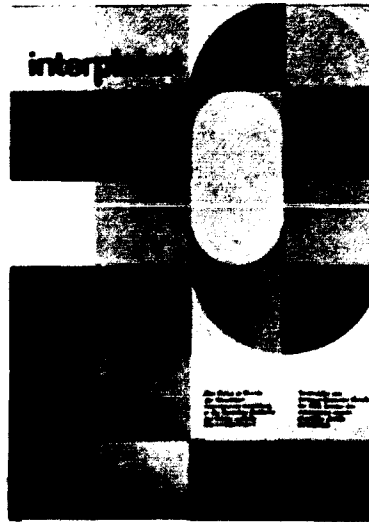
29. Finland: Osmo Pasanen, 1971.

The dominant image in Osmo Pasanen's work has been composed of a series of arcs of concentric circles. Corresponding areas of these arcs have been rendered in a progression of tonal densities. The tonal range is reminiscent of Lissitzky's cover design (Illustration 13, p. 103). The overall configuration of the image, which assumes the form of a "3," is also reminiscent of the manner in which Lissitzky constructed his "3" in his other cover design (Illustration 12, p. 102). Pasanen's letter forms are simple and without serifs, and have been distributed on the visual field in such a way that a sense of order and balance has been maintained. The Constructivists' use of space as a mechanism for directing attention to the major elements has been employed in this Finnish designer's poster.



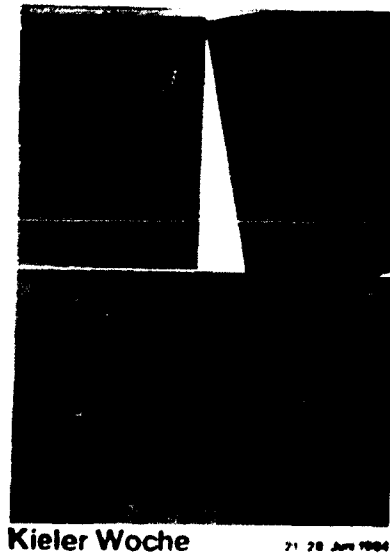
30. France: André Pasture, 1966.

André Pasture of France has made use of solid rectangular and curvilinear areas, lines, and arcs of concentric circles to depict railway tracks and platforms. He has also counterpointed these forms with lines of sans serif letter forms placed at right angles. The total design is stable, and the individual elements are in geometric relationship to it. Space has been capitalized to isolate the principal elements, a characteristic tendency in Constructivist designs.



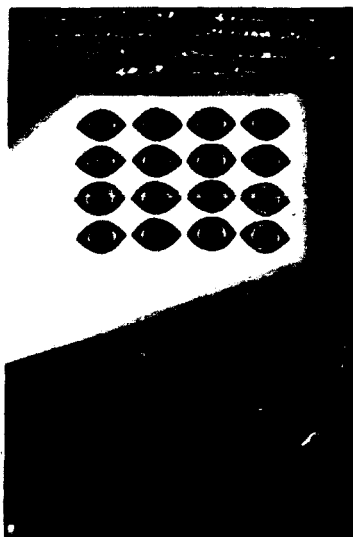
31. East Germany: Klaus Witkugel, 1972.

This work bears a strong resemblance to Herbert Bayer's poster (Illustration 21, p. 112). It thus parallels Lissitzky's design (Illustration 13, p. 103). But Witkugel has introduced a giant letter form which has been fragmented by areas of varied tonal densities. The tones have been distributed in such a way that they are complementary to the architecture of the total work. Letter forms have been used in the manner of the Constructivists.



32. West Germany: Hans Hillman, 1964.

In this work, Hans Hillman of West Germany has logically coordinated rectangular, trapezoidal and triangular shapes, and offsetted them with sans serif letter forms. The result is a coherent visual statement. There is a resemblance between the white triangular form in this work and the large red one in Lissitzky's poster (Illustration 11, p. 101).

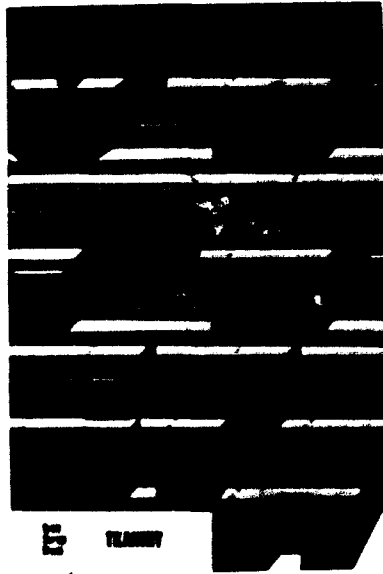


33. Iran: Morteza Momayez, 1973.

Morteza Momayez of Iran has composed this work with circular, rectangular and trapezoidal shapes, which are counterpointed by Arabic calligraphy. An important quality in this poster is the liberal use of space which serves to direct the viewer's attention to the major graphic elements.

34. Japan: Yusaku Kamekure, 1968.

The Japanese designer, Yusaku Kamekure, has isolated an isosceles triangular form and a circular form within a square form in this work. These have been brought into a direct impact with a plain color area. The emphasis here has been the interplay of geometric elements. Simply constructed letter forms have been distributed logically on the visual field to guarantee a sense of balance.



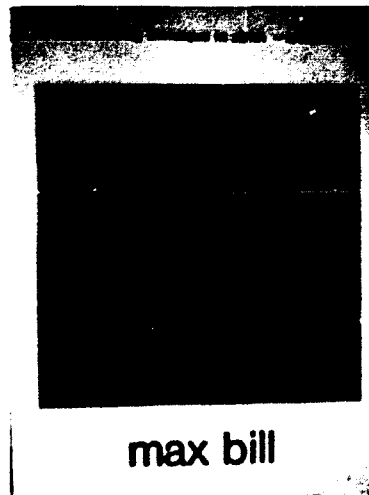
35. Poland: Józef Mroszczak, 1974.

Józef Mroszczak's design is dominated by parallel stripes. These have been offset by bold sans serif letter forms, rendered three dimensionally. The overall effect is that of a logically distributed series of geometric forms. Of particular significance in this work is the interpretation of negative space. As opposed to the usual predominance of solid space, Mroszczak has organized his forms in such a manner that the colored stripes collectively constitute a dominant negative space.



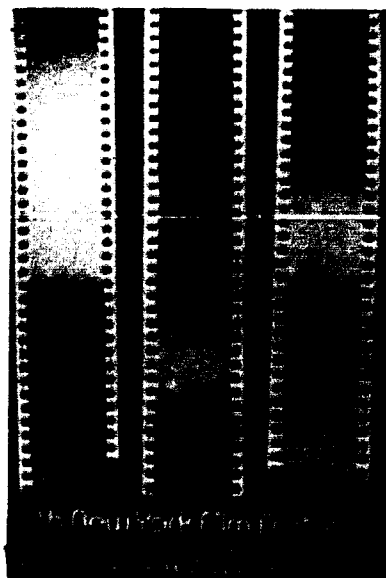
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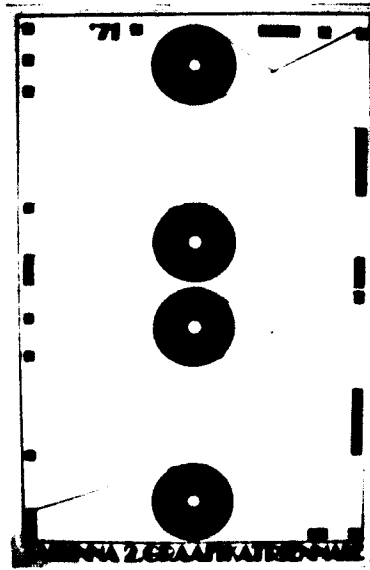
36. Switzerland: Max Bill, 1964.

From Switzerland, Max Bill has produced a poster which demonstrates a checkerboard-like central form, composed of areas with different tonal densities. These areas have been logically assembled to insure a sense of dynamic balance in the work. Bill's letter forms are without serifs, and are placed in such a way that they integrate with the central forms.



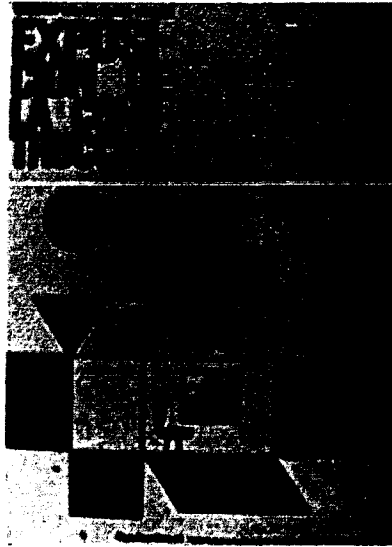
37. The United States of America:  
James Rosenquist, 1970.

The pictorial elements in Rosenquist's poster bear a resemblance to the vertical tapered lines in the design by the Stenberg brothers (Illustration 16, p. 106). The Stenbergs' use of vignettes is also experienced here, but Rosenquist has organized his vignettes in such a way that they tend to make the pictorial elements (film strips) look naturalistic. Rosenquist's letter forms are geometric in character and complement the total design. The mode of execution of the principal forms is what appears to be photographic montage.



38. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics:  
Tonis Vint, 1971.

Tonis Vint's work demonstrates order and equilibrium. Pairs of concentric and congruent circular forms have been connected with lines and rectangular forms. Square areas have been introduced to counterpoint the longer rectangular ones. It is noted that the top section of this poster is a repeat of the bottom section. This repetition is reminiscent of Lissitzky's design (Illustration 13, p. 103), but Vint's repetitiveness does not seem to invite the viewer to approach the work from multiple vantage points as Lissitzky's does. A striking quality in Vint's work is the liberal use of space, which tends to draw attention to the principal elements.



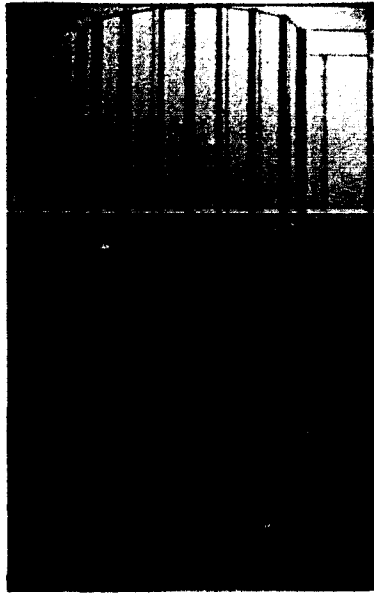
39. Uruguay: Ajax Barnes, 1964.

In Ajax Barnes' work, the major graphic element has been composed of rectangular, trapezoidal and triangular areas. The overall effect gives an illusion of a graphically rendered building whose visible sides have been opened and placed at their corresponding edges. The interior of the building thus becomes visible, while the shape of the building gains emphasis. The sharp edges of the forms have been counterpointed by a circular form placed in an asymmetric position. A group of sans serif and modular letter forms have been introduced to order the total design. The individual forms in this poster have been placed in such a way that they complement each other, while forming a coherent totality. Space has been used abundantly to further accentuate the message.



40. Venezuela: Gert Lenfert, 1964.

In this work, the Venezuelan designer, Gert Lenfert, has assembled solid rectangular forms of various tonal densities to produce what appears to be a collection of three dimensionally rendered cubes viewed at different angles. The iconography has been offsetted by parallel lines of serifized letter forms, which though anomalous to the dominant geometric forms, have been placed in such strategic positions that they are complementary to the total design. Space has been utilized to accentuate the primary elements.



41. Yugoslavia: Neša Paripovič, 1971.

From Yugoslavia, Neša Parapovič has produced a design which is composed mainly of vertical lines of unequal widths, forming what appears to be a graphically rendered ribbed column. These lines have been counterpointed by thin horizontal lines to distribute the impact of the dominant form. The solid forms which flank the lower left and right edges of the culumnar form tend to be reminiscent of the three dimensionally rendered forms in Rodchenko's poster (Illustration 15, p. 105). In the lower section of the poster, Paripovič has placed a line of bold and simply constructed letter forms which offsets the fragile forms above.

## Conclusion

The posters which have been discussed in this chapter share the following formal characteristics:

1. The principal graphic elements are geometric in form; in most cases, circular, rectangular, trapezoidal and triangular shapes have been combined to form a coherent iconography, or used individually.
2. The geometric iconographic elements are logically related to each other, as well as to the architecture of the total design.
3. Letter forms are simplified, geometrically constructed, and integrate with the pictorial material to complement the total design.
4. Where letter forms alone constitute the total work, such forms, while maintaining a simplistic and geometric character, coordinate well with each other, and collectively form an architectonic entity.
5. Where letter forms are serifized, as in the poster by the Venezuelan designer, Gert Lenfert (Illustration 40, p. 134), such forms are placed in such positions that they are complementary to the total visual effect in the work.
6. Space is liberally used to isolate the principal graphic elements, thereby emphasizing their significance.

All these characteristics are qualities which have been experienced in Constructivist designs. It may be said, therefore, that these posters demonstrate formal connections with Constructivist designs.



PART FOUR

DISCUSSION

CHAPTER IX  
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Conclusions

This study has surveyed Constructivist Art, a major aspect of the art of Russia, which flowered after the Bolshevik Revolution, and has analyzed its impact on contemporary poster design.

The survey has revealed that being an integral part of the totality of Soviet Socialism, Constructivist Art had its sources in the very phenomena which shaped the character of that political system. These include the interpretation and the systematic application of Marxist socio-economic principles, and the advent of technology and industrialization in Soviet Russia.

At the moment in history when Soviet Socialism entered its internationalist phase, Constructivist Art was exported. In accordance with Soviet Russia's objective of converting Germany to its political system - an objective which underscored the traffic of political ideas between the Soviet Union and Western Europe - Constructivism entered Weimar Germany to champion this conversion in the artistic arena. Through El Lissitzky's personal contacts with proponents of the Bauhaus movement, and through the launching of the Constructivist journal, Object, in Berlin, the Constructivist idea was accommodated by the German Bauhaus.

It has been found that this accommodation was not only ideological; it was also pragmatic. Analyses of both Constructivist and Bauhaus designs reveal that whereas Bauhaus designs which were executed before Constructivism was accommodated by the institution do not demonstrate formal connections with Constructivist designs, those that were executed after the accommodation demonstrate such connections.

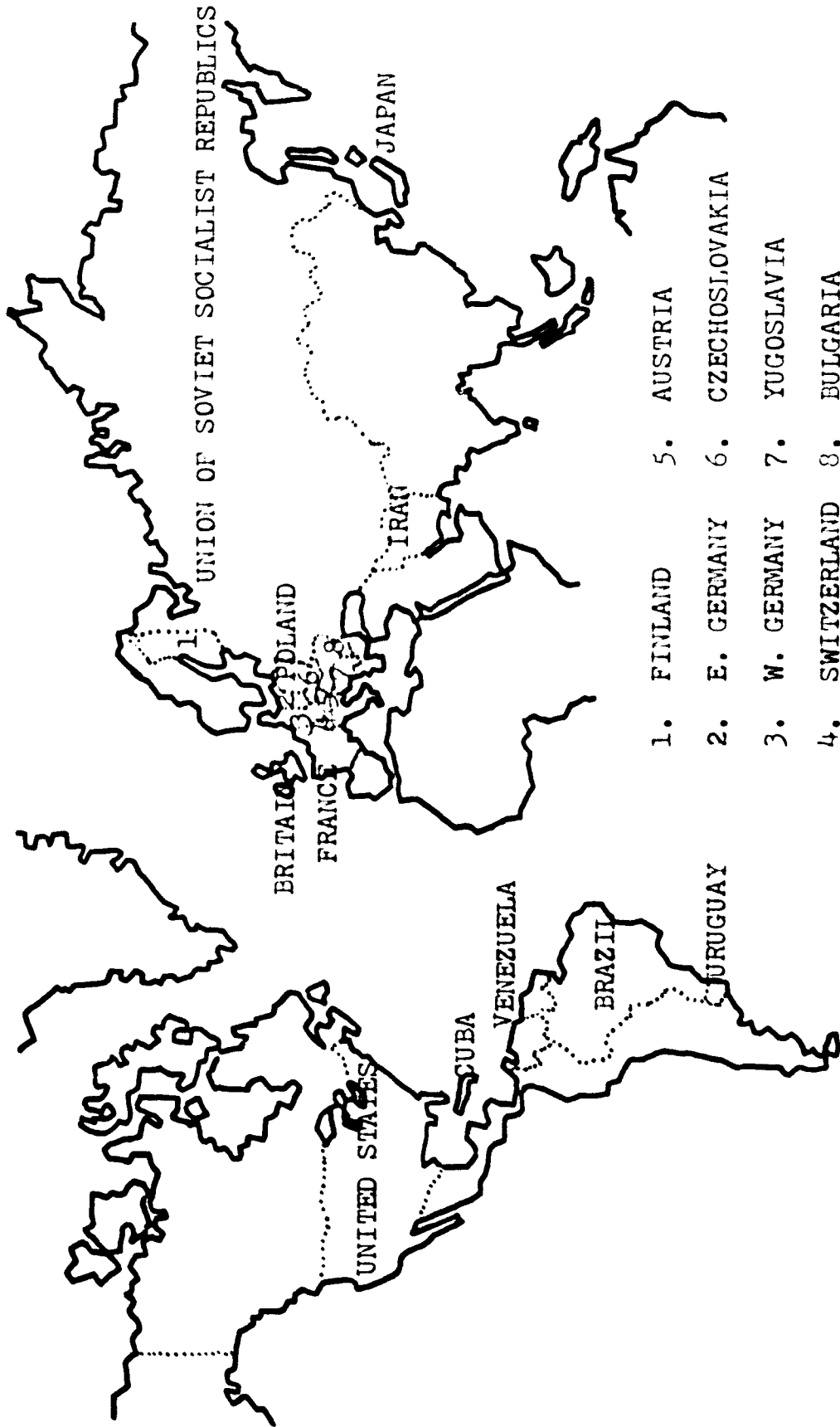
It has also been found that contemporary posters from many countries<sup>1</sup> demonstrate connections with Constructivist designs. Analyses of these groups of works reveal that the formalistic ordering of contemporary posters seems to have been derived from that of Constructivist designs.

It is contended that this derivation is a function of the diffusion of the Constructivist ethic from the German Bauhaus. The diffusion was generated by two major political factors which ensued during the life-span of the Bauhaus in Germany. The first factor is the Bauhaus' ideological confrontations with the Government of the State of Thuringia after 1923, which was instrumental in catapulting the Weimar Bauhaus to international significance; the second factor is the school's final conflict with the Hitler movement in 1933, which brought about its complete

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<sup>1</sup> A geographic representation of the countries whose contemporary posters have been found to demonstrate parallelisms with Constructivist designs reveals that the Constructivist ethic has diffused to most of the world's habitable continents. See Map 2, this Manuscript, 140.

21.	Poster by Herbert Bayer, 1926.	112
22.	Poster by Jan Tschichold, 1930's.	113
CONTEMPORARY POSTERS		
23.	Austria: Tino Erben, 1971.	117
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27.	Cuba: Felix Beltran, 1972.	121
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30.	France: André Pasture, 1966.	124
31.	E. Germany: Klaus Witkugel, 1972.	125
32.	W. Germany: Hans Hillman, 1964.	126
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36.	Switzerland: Max Bill, 1964.	130
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39.	Uruguay: Ajax Barnes, 1964.	133
40.	Venezuela: Gert Lenfert, 1964.	134
41.	Yugoslavia: Neša Paripovič, 1971.	135



Map 2. Parts of the World Showing Countries in which the Constructivist System has been Applied in the Designing of Contemporary Posters.

dismemberment and the diaspora of its Constructivist affiliates to other parts of Western Europe and to North America.

It is further contended that with the assistance of mass media technology, the Bauhaus' adopted Constructivist aesthetic diffused to other parts of the world as early as during the Thuringian confrontation. Also, this very technology helped to continue the diffusion from wherever the Bauhaus Constructivists might have settled when they fled from Nazi Germany. Contingently, through a systematic process of diffusion in the passing of time, the Constructivist ethic has gained a worldwide following in our generation.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

As a result of the delimitations which were placed on the research, this dissertation has not explored the full range of problems which remain unsolved in Marxist studies, Socialist thought, and in 20th century graphic design. The following suggestions are aimed at solving some of these problems.

1. Plekhanov and Lenin drew Marxist theory into the sphere of influence of a country with its own unique revolutionary development and requirements. It has been seen how this radically transformed art and art education in Revolutionary Russia. It has also been seen how this transformation affected Weimar art and art education. The connotations which Marxist theory in aesthetics generate in present day Soviet Union, Germany, and elsewhere have

not been investigated in this dissertation. Current literature on Marxist aesthetics does not provide adequate information on these connotations. Thus a study designed to inquire into current attitudes on Marxist aesthetics worldwide would add considerably to our knowledge.

2. Questions concerning the progress of Socialist thinking on poster design and art education have not been completely explored in available documents on Socialist theory. The following questions could be considered: What are the attitudes toward poster design and Bolshevik art educational ideas in Socialist thinking today? To what extent have the Communist intervention in South Korea (1950) and the Kremlin's interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968); the Socialist Revolutions in China (1949) and Cuba (1959); and the worldwide effervescence of Socialist ideology among young people during this final quarter of the 20th century advanced the role of the poster as a medium for universal education? A study designed to examine these and other related questions would provide information regarding the poster's place in Socialist thinking after the Leninist era.

3. Artistic concepts are transmutable in their journey through time and space. There are ample examples of this tendency in the history of art and aesthetics. Since available bodies of literature have not analyzed the vicissitudes of "Constructivism," a study could be undertaken to inquire into the various concepts which may have

been associated with "Constructivism" after the German Bauhaus period. Such a conceptual analysis would provide answers to many yet unanswered questions. For example, did this seething revolutionary aesthetic maintain its form-content dialectic after the revolutionary spirit of the interwar period? Does "Constructivism" generate parallel concepts in Capitalist and Socialist societies today?

4. In this dissertation, the posters by nineteen contemporary designers have been found to demonstrate formalistic connections with designs by Russian Constructivists. It is not known if these designers were directly or indirectly influenced by Russian Constructivists and or Bauhaus people. This is a dilemma which could be projected into an empirical study. Such a study could aim at establishing whether individual designers studied with Russian Constructivists or with Bauhaus people. Persons interested in this research could prepare questionnaires and mail them to the designers, or interview the designers individually as to their educational experiences.<sup>1</sup> The findings of such research would, besides solving the dilemma, contribute to knowledge concerning student-teacher relations in graphic design education.

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<sup>1</sup> The designers could be contacted through the Organizing Committee of the International Poster Biennale, Plac Małachowskiego 3, 00-916 Warsaw, Poland.



5. An objective of the International Poster Biennale in Warsaw is to analyze aesthetic similarities in worldwide posters.<sup>1</sup> A study could be undertaken to determine the precise number of posters which demonstrate aesthetic similarities during a given biennale in the future, as well as during subsequent ones. The aesthetically similar posters could then be analyzed individually to determine the historical, political and sociological sources of the similarities. Such a study would thus be concerned with the problem of distribution: how many posters demonstrate x,y and z characteristics? How many countries' posters demonstrate x,y and z? What are the historical, political and sociological sources of x,y and z? Research aimed at providing information on these questions would extend the author's investigation considerably.

6. It should be clear that by its very nature and habitat, the poster is both content and mass oriented in that it is designed to convey a particular body of information or knowledge to the human community. These orientations have the tendency of limiting the designer in his or her selection of forms and formalistic ordering. The designer must employ such forms which must be ordered in such a manner that the final product would be visually

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<sup>1</sup> See this Manuscript, 13.

<sup>2</sup> x,y and z would be a set of standard criteria which would have been established.

informative. It has been seen in this dissertation that many designers in our time have employed Constructivist forms and or formalistic ordering to insure visual information. A theoretical proposition could thus be extracted: that the application of the Constructivist formal principles in the designing of posters would insure visual information, particularly in industrialized or industrializing societies. This proposition calls for an empirical justification. A descriptive inquiry could be undertaken, in which samples could be drawn from the human communities in various societies. Subjects could then be asked to view a selected group of stimulus materials, while a researcher or researchers could interview them (the subjects) as to their responses to the stimuli. The stimuli should be several posters aimed at conveying a particular message, but designed in various artistic styles. For example, one poster could be designed in the Jugendstil idiom, another in the Expressionist, and another in the Constructivist. The responses should then be analyzed to identify the artistic style which most aptly conveys the intended message.

From the results of such an inquiry, a definite aesthetic could be recommended for the respective societies. After replicating the study with other subject matters (in the stimuli) in those very societies, a consensus could be arrived at as to which particular artistic tendency would best convey a wide range of different kinds

of information. Such a consensus would be instrumental in prescribing directions for the teaching of poster design in colleges, universities, as well as in specialized art schools. The ultimate effect would be that future designers would not simply apply standard artistic idioms according to their convictions, but in relation to the perceptual tastes of the people in their social milieus.

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## APPENDIX

INVITATION LETTER FROM THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL POSTER BIENNALE IN WARSAW, POLAND,  
STATING THE GLOBAL SCOPE OF THE BIENNALE.

[Pryde Haig David-West  
11 Waverly Place #5M  
New York City, N.Y. 10003]

5th International Poster Biennale - Warsaw 1974  
Plac Małachowskiego 3, 00-916 Warszawa, Phone 27-73-53

Dear Sir:

The Organizing Committee of the 5th International Poster Biennale will consider it a privilege having you at the official opening ceremony of the event to be held in Warsaw on the 3rd of June, 1974.

The Biennale is now a widely recognized survey over what has been achieved in the field of the poster, and since the pending event's motto is "Water is Life," the UNESCO has granted its patronage and included the 5th Biennale into its "Man and His Environment" program.

Alongside the Biennale itself, some other exhibitions will be on view: the 4th International Poster Biennale Prize Winning works - works of Roman Cieślęwicz, Shigeco Fukada, André François - at the Warsaw Poster Museum; Roland Topor's exhibition; as well as the 5th International Graphic Art Biennale, held in the beautiful ancient town of Kraków from the 20th of June to the 20th of September, 1974.

We hope to make our event [the Poster Biennale] into an interesting review of the contemporary poster throughout the world. That is why we feel confident that you will find it possible to attend.

Please find enclosed an invitation card. Looking forward very much to having you in Warsaw in June of this year, we remain,

Sincerely yours,

[signed] Professor Józef Mroszczak,  
Chairman.

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76-19,019

DAVID-WEST, Pryde Haig, 1946-  
RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTIVIST ART AND ITS  
IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY POSTER DESIGN:  
AN INQUIRY INTO THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN  
CONSTRUCTIVIST DESIGN, BAUHAUS  
INFLUENCE AND RECENT GRAPHIC DESIGN.

New York University, Ph.D., 1976  
Fine Arts

**Xerox University Microfilms**, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

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**PART ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

CHAPTER I  
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The Problem

The problem of this dissertation was to survey a major aspect of the art of Russia immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, namely, Constructivist Art, and to analyze its impact on contemporary poster design.

Four key questions which were inherent in the general statement of the problem constitute subordinate problems.

1. What were the sources of Constructivist Art in Russia?
2. What was the nature of the traffic of political and artistic ideas between Russia and Western Europe, especially between proponents of Russian Constructivism and the German Bauhaus?
3. What were the consequences, if any, of the ideological traffic involving Constructivist and Bauhaus designs?
4. Are there connections between the findings of subordinate problem three and the ways in which the visible graphic elements are arranged in contemporary posters?

Certain specific or technical terms were used in this dissertation; they were defined as follows:

1. Constructivism is an aesthetic which emphasizes a conjunction of visually informative messages and simple geometric, clearly delineated forms in the visual arts. Operationally, it referred to designs produced between 1919 and 1923 by Russian artists who joined the Bolshevik revolutionary spirit of Socialism.
2. Contemporary referred to current or recent works. In this dissertation, it denoted posters which were exhibited at the International Poster Biennales in Warsaw, Poland from 1966 to 1974.
3. The Bauhaus was a teaching institution for the arts founded by Walter Gropius at Weimar, Germany, in 1919.<sup>1</sup> Its curriculum was based on the philosophy of "Art and Technology - A New Unity."<sup>2</sup>
4. Design is the aesthetic arrangement or composition of plastic elements or details which constitute a work of art, viewed with reference to the invention and disposition of its forms, colors or organization. In its technical application, it is seen in the logical

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1 Herbert Read, ed., Encyclopedia of the Arts, London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, 72.

2 Eckerhard Newmann, ed., Bauhaus and Bauhaus People, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970, 15.

coherence of graphic elements, executed with a conscious objective of transmitting a message visually.

5. Formalistic Ordering referred to structural quality. It denoted the way in which visible graphic elements or shapes are arranged or put together. This definition implied that where words constituted a design or a component part of a design, the letters which constituted such words were to be analyzed in terms of their structural qualities.

6. Poster is an organized assemblage of graphic elements on a large rectangular surface, whose purpose is to transmit a message visually. Usually, a poster involves the union of words and pictorial material to be displayed in a public place to attract attention. See Illustration 1.



1. Poster by Pryde Haig David-West, 1974  
70cm. x 100cm.

7. Proletcult is a short form for the Organization for Proletarian Culture, a militant Socialist organization for the arts which was founded by Alexander Bogdanov in Russia in 1906.<sup>1</sup>

In order to structure the research, the following delimitations were placed on the study:

In regard to the nature of the traffic of political and artistic ideas between Russia and Western Europe, data were sought from the period between 1917 and 1923 for the following reasons: 1) this period marks the emergence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (1917), and Lenin's attempts to export the revolution to Western Europe; 2) Constructivist design evolved during this period in Russia, and after the conclusion of the German-Soviet Trade Agreement (1921), Constructivist designers established physical contacts with avant-garde artists in Germany; and 3) the Bauhaus, which was founded in 1919, added Constructivist elements to its curriculum in 1923.

In regard to the analyses of Constructivist and Bauhaus designs, only those Constructivist designs which were executed between 1919 and 1923, and those Bauhaus designs which were executed between 1919 and 1933 were

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<sup>1</sup> Camilla Gray, The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, 244.

considered. This delimitation was placed because the first recorded Constructivist design was executed in 1919, and 1923 denotes the year in which the Bauhaus added Constructivism to its curriculum. The dates 1919 and 1933 denote the period during which the German Bauhaus was active.

The data on contemporary posters were limited to those posters which have been exhibited during the International Poster Biennales in Warsaw from 1966 to 1974 because the Warsaw Biennales are known to have been major international exhibitions which have attracted worldwide participation by professional designers.

### Significance

Existing bodies of literature dealing with the history of 20th century graphic design, Marxist aesthetics, and the political and diplomatic histories of Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany immediately following the end of the First World War do not provide a clear picture of the relationship between Russian Constructivism and Bauhaus graphic design. Connections between Constructivism and contemporary posters have also not been studied in great detail. Consequently, the teaching of graphic design in colleges, universities and in specialized art schools does not include specific references which elucidate the interconnected roles which Marxist aesthetics and Soviet-German diplomacy played in the formulation of the structural qualities of Bauhaus graphic designs. The

elucidation of such references would broaden our knowledge in graphic design by identifying the origin and evolution of the minimalism and geometric formalism which characterize many posters which are produced today, worldwide.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Data for the theoretical framework of the study were compiled from three types of literature: the history of graphic design in the 20th century; aesthetics in the theory of Marxism; and the political and diplomatic histories of Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany immediately after the First World War.

#### Literature on 20th Century Graphic Design

Writing in Germany after World War I, Jan Tschichold discussed the evolution of the modern movement in graphic design by mapping a lineage from the turn of the century to 1935. His chronology, which touches on influences on German graphic design of the 1930's, from art movements which emerged during the period, falls short of explicating or expounding on those influences. He contended that attempts were made between 1910 and 1925

. . . to revive German typography by means of new and more expressive 'fancy typefaces' . . . but with little success, as can be judged from typefounders' specimens of the period.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Tschichold, Asymmetric Typography, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1967, 16.

Tschichold's work does not make any attempt to explain why the Germans wished to revive their typographic design during that period. His discussion leaves a gap between the 1920's and the development of functional design in the 1930's; no clear account of what directly preceded the development of typographic design is given. Tschichold's book contains several illustrations of works by Russian Constructivists, notably, Eleazar Markovich (Lissitzky), alongside those by German and other West European designers, without presenting any discussion as to their connections.

A posthumous monograph on Lissitzky, prepared by his widow, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers represents the first comprehensive diary on the year-to-year activities of Lissitzky. It is also an account of the role the designer played in the diaspora of Soviet artistic propaganda. Lissitzky-Küppers asserted that Eleazar assumed the role of revolutionary commentator and ideologist while launching the Constructivist art journal, Object, in Berlin in 1922, and proclaimed:

. . . from now on, art, while preserving all local characteristics and symptoms, is international. The founders of the new guild of artists [the Constructivists] are making sure that the links are securely established between Russia, which experienced the most powerful revolution, and the West, with its miserable Black Monday mood; in doing this, they are ignoring all distinctions between psychological, economic, and purely national art. Object provides the link between two adjacent lines of communication . . .

Object will champion Constructivist art whose mission is not, after all, to embellish life but to organize it . . . We are not in favor of an art which stands outside of life and is apolitical on principle

. . . We cannot imagine a creation of new forms in art unrelated to the change in social form.<sup>1</sup>

These convictions reflected the political attitude of Russian Constructivist designers, who were in total support of Bolshevik internationalism.

Lissitzky-Küppers recounted many meetings and discussions involving Eleazar and the West European artistic avant-garde. Of these, those which concerned the Bauhaus community are of particular relevance for this dissertation:

At the Bauhaus in Weimar, Theo van Doesburg introduced to his students all the latest sensations in the art world. He was full of enthusiasm for Lissitzky's book, Of Two Squares, and reprinted it in the periodical, De Stijl . . . [Doesburg had met with Lissitzky in Berlin on the latter's arrival there in 1921.]<sup>2</sup>

Though it does not contain scholarly analyses of the Russian Constructivist's activities in Germany, this monograph provided useful information concerning the exportation of Russian Constructivist ideas to Germany. It also provided data on the response of the Bauhaus community to these ideas.

In a study of the various developments in Russian art from the period of the icons to Constructivism after the Bolshevik Revolution, the art historian, Camilla Gray-Prokofieva has presented an exhaustive survey tracing the debate on the renewal of art as a socially active

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1 Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1967, 340-341.

2 Ibid., 24.

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RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTIVIST ART  
AND ITS IMPACT ON  
CONTEMPORARY POSTER DESIGN

An Inquiry into the Connections between Constructivist  
Design, Bauhaus Influence and Recent Graphic Design.

PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department  
of Art and Art Education of the School of Education,  
Health, Nursing, and Arts Professions of New York University.

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force in Russia. On the one end of the debate were the "Wanderers" whose idea was the prevention of the accusation that art was an empty diversion to be despised. On the other end were the Constructivists who held the view that art had to build for social man, rather than imagining or interpreting psychological sensations. Gray-Prokofieva has brought the debate to a head in discussing the works of Malevich and Tatlin, and the Suprematists and Constructivists, when the idea of art as a spiritual activity (painting) was juxtaposed with that of socio-political propaganda (posters). Emphasis was given to the shift from the artist-priest (painter) to the artist-educator-engineer (graphic designer-constructor); from the art for the bourgeoisie, to that for the masses of people.

Although no section of Gray-Prokofieva's book was devoted to an exhaustive inquiry into the traffic of revolutionary artistic ideas between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, the book contains some points which are consonant to that traffic. For example:

It was here at Vitebsk in 1920 that Lissitzky designed his The Story of Two Squares, published in Berlin in 1922, which seems to be the first fully developed example of the new design that appeared in the West.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Camilla Gray, The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1962, 253-254.

Another contribution to this body of literature was made by the art critic, Szymón Bojko. Having had regular access to archives in Moscow, Bojko surveyed the advent of revolutionary graphic design in Bolshevik Russia, and reflected upon its connections with Soviet art education and political propaganda. On the subject of the relationship between the Bauhaus community and the Russian Constructivists, he concluded:

While on the subject of the Bauhaus, it might be useful to add some facts on that school's contacts with artists from the Vkhutemas [major art school in Moscow] circle. Moholy-Nagy's letter written at Weimar to Rodchenko (1923) has survived. It contains mention that a series of books devoted to current art problems had been started. They were to be prefaced by a discussion on Constructivism.<sup>1</sup>

Bojko also asserted that the Constructivist designer, Lissitzky, exerted a strong influence on 20th century graphic design, especially on posters and other forms of mass publications. The particular nature of the influence was not outlined, but a brief discussion on Lissitzky's West European missions presented a feasible datum for the research:

Lissitzky, during his protracted foreign sojourns [1921-1925], maintained contacts with numerous artistic communities in the West as a representative of Moscow's Inkhuk . . . The establishment in 1922 of a periodical, Veshch - Objiet - Gegenstand - [Object], published in Berlin under the editorship of Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, had an almost symbolic aura about it. The introductory article in the first issue began with the words 'The blockade on Russia is ending . . .'

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<sup>1</sup> Szymón Bojko, New Graphic Design in Revolutionary Russia, London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd., 1972, 23.

. . . the periodical was a germ, drawing together the revolutionary art of Russia and that of progressive segments of the creative intelligentsia in the West.<sup>1</sup>

In her introduction to an exhibition of French posters from 1750 to 1974, Geneviève Picon traced the history of poster design in Western Europe. Discussing the objectives of poster design today, she concluded that

The public must be able to absorb an image without mistaking it for anything else. In other words, the poster, whether or not it conserves a link with academicism, must be at the level of the [social] habits and the perceptual capacities of the public [the masses of people].<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the content of today's poster must reflect the collective attitudes of our contemporary society. In regard to the forms which are used in the posters of our time, Picon maintained:

. . . but the poster uses new forms, it does not invent them. It must wait until these forms become sufficiently familiar. It is not invention, but accentuation, simplification, and presentation that lends the poster its originality.

Cassandre, perhaps the greatest poster artist of the twentieth century [in Western Europe], utilized . . . Constructivism.<sup>3</sup>

A synthesis of Picon's discussions regarding 20th century posters, with particular reference to recent posters, points to the conclusion that the conjunction of popular forms and social content is a characteristic feature in these posters. But this very conjunction was the

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1 Ibid.

2 Geneviève Picon, "Preface," The New School Art Center, Three Centuries of French Posters, New York: NSAC, 1975, 5.

3 Ibid., 6.

requirement which Russian Constructivists postulated in response to Bolshevist ideology, during the first quarter of this century. Picon's failure to identify and to examine this fundamental connection between Russian Constructivism and today's posters leaves a gap in her essay.

In an invitation to David-West to attend the fifth International Poster Biennale in Warsaw, the Organizing Committee asserted that the "Biennale is now a widely recognized survey over what has been achieved in the field of the poster . . ." <sup>1</sup> It had earlier outlined the aim of such a survey:

. . . the setting up of an international documentation and research center, which would comprise a great collection of international posters [of our time] . . . <sup>2</sup>

Such a center was to serve as a medium for the analyses of aesthetic similarities in worldwide posters. The assumption might have been that posters produced today worldwide share certain aesthetic qualities which might have been derived from a particular source or sources. Subsequent articles <sup>3</sup> have neither investigated this similarity in detail, nor elucidated the historical and or political background of the similarity.

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1 See "Appendix," this Manuscript, 152.

2 Józef Mroszczak, I Międzynarodowe Biennale Plakatu w Warszawie, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Artystyczno Graficzne, 1968, unpaginated.

3 Many articles have been written on the Warsaw Biennale in art journals worldwide. Such journals include, among others, Art Forum, California; Gebrauchsgraphik, Munich; Projekt, Warsaw; Studio Internacional, London; and Výtvarné Umeni, Prague.



The literature on 20th century graphic design suggests that Russian Constructivism had an influence on the German Bauhaus. Such an influence is attributed to contacts between Russian Constructivists and Bauhaus designers. The factors which generated these contacts are not clearly explained. Also, there is a suggestion that worldwide posters today tend to demonstrate aesthetic similarities. But here again, the similarities are not elucidated.

### Literature on Marxist Aesthetics

In an exposition on Marxist art and literature, Ernst Fischer has written:

The major task of a Socialist society, where the 'art market' is no longer supplied with commodities mass-produced by Capitalist speculators, is therefore two-fold: to lead the public towards a proper enjoyment of art, that is to say, to arouse and stimulate their understanding; and to emphasize the social responsibility of the artist. That responsibility cannot mean that the artist accepts the dictates of the dominant taste, that he [designs] as so-and-so decrees; but it does mean that, instead of working in a vacuum, he recognizes that he is ultimately commissioned by society. There are many cases, as Mayakovsky [Bolshevist revolutionary poet] pointed out long ago, when this social commission does coincide with an explicit commission of any particular social institution. A work of art does not have to be understood and approved by everyone from the start. It is not the function of art to break down doors but rather to open locked ones. But when the artist discovers new realities . . . he does it also for others [the masses of people] . . .<sup>1</sup>

This document identified a major premise of the ideological foundation of revolutionary art in Bolshevik Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach, trans. Anna Bostock, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971, 209-210.

In his anthology, Lee Baxandall raised a central question: What is the relation of the arts to Capitalism, class-values, patronage and private property, or Communism, Realism and freedom of expression? Drawing from the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin), this question was analytically answered by some of the major writers on Marxian theory. In his response, John Berger discussed Socialist Art, while weighing major historical artistic movements on the scale of socio-serviceability:

The Fauves and Cubists were profoundly hostile to and contemptuous of the whole bourgeois establishment. Nevertheless, the protests of these artists were directed primarily against the philistinism of the bourgeoisie. They hated what the bourgeois stood for in terms of the class struggle. And also, for the most part, they were quite unable to see their way to joining the proletarian struggle for Socialism. They fought only with their paint brushes and only for painting.

As a result of this their works were not addressed to any particular class or section of the public.<sup>1</sup>

Implicit in Berger's discussion is the view that revolutions in form and space or discoveries of new ways of manipulating plastic elements, as were characteristic of Fauvism and Cubism, would not be tantamount to socially serviceable works of art. Formal revolutions must conjoin with specific social statements. The work of art would then not be executed purely for the sake of art, but also for society. This volume identified another premise.

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<sup>1</sup> John Berger, "The Problems of Socialist Art," in Radical Perspectives in the Arts, ed. by Lee Baxandall, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, 211.

In another work, Baxandall, together with Stefan Morawski, presented a compilation of some of the major writings by Marx and Engels on art and literature. This was fundamental to the research in that it provided information which helped to further structure the ideological foundations of Soviet revolutionary art. Morawski maintained that:

The art for art's sake movement is not specifically mentioned by Marx or Engels. Yet, they surely were aware of its inception. Indirectly, they disparaged it when they spoke of sophisticated egotistical art meant for a restricted circle . . . If an either-or choice of the class affinities demonstrated by the anti-ideological aesthetes had to be made, undoubtedly Marx and Engels linked them more closely with the bourgeois than with proletarian values.<sup>1</sup>

Henri Arvon has written a discursive book on the ideological importance of art, and has outlined a capsule history of art in Socialist societies. Beginning from Marx to Stalin, Arvon has paid particular attention to the potentialities as well as the problems and conflicts of Marxist aesthetics - an aesthetic committed to political relevance. He has stated that the aesthetic position of Georgi Plekhanov, which was wrested from Marxian theory subsequently had an influence on the radical faction of the Russian artistic intelligentsia. Plekhanovism suggested the strict separation between aesthetic pleasure and the eminently social role of art:

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Morawski, "The Chief Aesthetic Problems Considered by Marx and Engels," in Marx and Engels on Literature and Art, ed. by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973, 27-28.

Art that regards the providing of aesthetic pleasure as its principal goal is considered to be an aristocratic luxury and therefore condemned absolutely; art can redeem itself only by serving the people.<sup>1</sup>

Arvon has maintained that after the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet revolutionary art was exported to Germany; he has not treated the specific nature of the exportation:

The revolutionary art [Constructivism] that flowers after the October Revolution in the Soviet Union tends to spread to other countries simply because of its Socialist aims that recognize no national boundaries. It gains a particularly strong foothold in Germany, for that country is shaken to its foundations by revolutionary movements. . . all of German art is affected by it . . . attempts are made to apply the new aesthetic born in the East during the Weimar Republic.<sup>2</sup>

Two points are noted here: 1) The diaspora of Constructivism was connected to the international revolutionary aims of Bolshevism; and 2) Since the Bauhaus flowered during the Weimar period in Germany, it was affected by Constructivism. There is a suggestion here that subsequent educational work at the Bauhaus reflected Socialist ideals on art.

In a recent compilation of Marxist views on aesthetic questions, Maynard Solomon has shown the connections between the arts and society, and art and revolution. He has elucidated the aesthetic views of Marx and Engels, as well as of subsequent interpreters or followers of

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1 Henri Arvon, Marxist Aesthetics, trans. by Helen Lane, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973, 14.

2 Ibid., 71.

Marx and Engels such as William Morris, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and others. The section on Morris presents his views on "Art, Labor, and Socialism." Morris perceived a necessity for parallelism between art and Socialism. He stated:

Some people will perhaps not be prepared to hear that Socialism has any ideal of art, for in the first place it is so obviously founded on the necessity for dealing with the bare economy of life that many, and even some Socialists, can see nothing save the economic basis; and moreover, many who might be disposed to admit the necessity of an economic change in the direction of Socialism believe quite sincerely that art is fostered by the inequalities of condition which it is the first business of Socialism to do away with, and indeed that it cannot exist without them . . . I assert first that Socialism is an all-embracing theory of life, and that as it has an ethic and a religion of its own, so also it has an aesthetic. . . secondly, I assert that inequality of condition, whatever may have been the case in former ages of the world, has now become incompatible with the existence of a healthy art.<sup>1</sup>

As one of the leading art educators at the turn of the century, Morris' political attitude must have been reflected in his pedagogical ideas. This suggests that Morris' art educational idea, which formed the basis of Walter Gropius' Bauhaus idea, was grounded in Socialist ideology.

In her contribution to Solomon's anthology, Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leaders of the German Spartakists, extrapolated views on the conditions of the evolution of

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<sup>1</sup> Maynard Solomon, Marxism and Art, New York: Random House Inc., 1974, 83-84.

an anti-bourgeois aesthetic. For example,

The working class will not be in a position to create a science and an art of its own until it has been fully emancipated from its present class positions.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the Marxian idea of the political relevance of art, Luxemburg's contribution toward the spread of Marxist aesthetics in postwar Germany is significant for this study. Although she was murdered in 1919, her ideas continued to spread. The Spartakist League's subsequent alliance with the Russian Bolsheviks was thus not only a specifically political alliance. Bolshevik ideas on artistic questions were also involved.

Solomon's section on "The Bolsheviks" begins with Lenin's contribution. This Bolshevik leader held the position that:

Art belongs to the people. It must let its roots go down down into the very thick of the laboring masses. It should be understood and loved by the masses. It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will. It must awaken and develop the artistic instinct within them.<sup>2</sup>

Herein lies the basis of a Leninist aesthetic. Lenin's ideology of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" thus included aesthetic questions, and was not specifically economic. Therefore, Constructivist Art, which evolved as a response to Leninism, must have reflected the Leninist aesthetic.

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1 Ibid., 158.

2 Ibid., 166.

I hereby guarantee that no part of the dissertation which I have submitted for publication has been heretofore published and copyrighted in the United States of America, or anywhere else in the world, except in the case of passages quoted from other sources; that I am the sole author and proprietor of said dissertation; that the dissertation contains no matter which, if published, will be libelous or otherwise injurious, or infringe in any way the copyright of any party; and that I will defend, indemnify and hold harmless New York University against all suits and proceedings which may be brought and against all claims which may be made against New York University by reason of the publication of said dissertation.

PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST

Ph. David West  
September 10, 1975.

The literature on Marxist aesthetics is largely a documentation of Karl Marx's views on aesthetic questions, as well as those of his followers and interpreters. The relationship between art and politics is the focus in the literature. But the specific area of graphic design has not been clearly connected to Marxist aesthetics.

#### Literature on Soviet-German Politics after World War I

Edward Carr has completed a monumental inquiry into Soviet Russia's domestic and foreign policies between 1898 and 1923. In the first volume, Carr analyzed the events and controversies in Russian history (1898-1917) which were instrumental in formulating the theoretical basis for the Bolshevik Revolution. He began by studying the actual constitution which was erected by the revolutionaries, and their plans for achieving its goals. Carr finally turned to the multifarious problems which faced the Bolsheviks when they took possession of the rapidly disintegrating Russian Empire, and examined the solutions they adopted. Since the revolution did not only oust Czardom, but also the preexisting aesthetic position in Russia, this volume served as a point of departure for determining the connections between Constructivism and Bolshevik political ideology.

Carr's third volume is sub-titled "Soviet Russia and the World: 1917-1923." It presents an appraisal of Soviet foreign policy. Here, Carr has exposed in detail, the clandestine operations of the Communist International



(Comintern). Also, he has discussed Soviet Russia's attitude toward the Weimar Republic:

The revolution in Germany seemed not only to bring welcome relief from immediate military dangers and break the ring of armies that encircled the Soviet Republic, but to be the long-expected second and greater wave of the world revolution. The Bolshevik leaders from Lenin downwards were imbued with the unanimous and unquestioning conviction that it would quickly deepen and develop and, assuming a proletarian and Socialist character, spread over Western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Carr maintained that this conviction led the Russians to annul the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 3, 1918) which had disengaged the Soviet Union from the First World War. In its place, they proposed a new settlement to Germany and Austria-Hungary:

By a fraternal union with workers and peasants of the Soviet Union they [Germans and Austro-Hungarians] will redeem the wounds inflicted on the population of the occupied regions . . . <sup>2</sup>

The Soviet Union was thus appealing to the masses of people in Germany and Austria-Hungary to accommodate Bolshevik ideals.

F.L. Carsten has contended that such an appeal did not begin after the German Revolution. Soviet Russia had been wooing the Germans and Austro-Hungarians since the Bolshevik Revolution to join their revolutionary course. Carsten concluded that these appeals had favorable results:

Many [Germans] looked toward Soviet Russia and hoped that it would bring about the realization of the ideals of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 3 vols., Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969, III, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 45.

Socialism . . . since the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, Bolshevik propagandists tried with all their strength to bring about a fraternization, there is ample evidence that their efforts had not been entirely in vain.<sup>1</sup>

Hence Bolshevik principles gained support in Germany, which would imply that the aesthetic position which Bolsheviks took may have been accepted by the radical faction of the German artistic intelligentsia.

In his study, Georg von Rauch has revealed that Germany's attitude toward the accommodation of Bolshevik ideals became more definite after the Treaty of Versailles, and after the Communist takeover in Budapest:

News received in March 1919, of the outbreak of a Communist rising in Hungary under Béla Kun [which subsequently established a Soviet system in place of Count Karolyi's monarchy] was grist for Marshall Foch's mill [Foch was the High Commander of the French Army]. Added to this was the fact that Germany had not yet decided whether it would accept or reject the Peace of Versailles. If Germany were to go Communist and refuse to sign the Versailles Treaty, Foch argued, the West would be in serious danger.<sup>2</sup>

Germany finally signed the Treaty of Versailles, but turned toward the Soviet Union for a fraternity, as a result of the harsh terms of the treaty. The fraternity provided a pretext for the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow to escalate its Bolshevization drive in Germany.

In the area of Soviet-German political relations, the literature focuses upon Soviet Russia's successive

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1 F.L. Carsten, The Reichswehr and Politics: 1919-1933, London: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1966, 7.

2 Georg von Rauch, A History of Soviet Russia, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 105.

attempts to export the Bolshevik Revolution to Germany. It identifies Germany's attitude toward Soviet Russia as shifting from hostility during the First World War to fraternity after the Treaty of Versailles. But the connections between these political developments and the flowering of Constructivism at Weimar after Versailles are not elucidated.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION

Methodology

The information concerning the sources of Constructivist Art in Russia was gathered from the literature on 20th century graphic design as well as from documents on Marxist aesthetics with a view of answering the following questions: 1) How did Constructivist Art begin in Russia? 2) What external influences characterize its evolution? 3) What effect did Marxian philosophy have on Russian art? 4) How did Leninism change the course of art in Russia? and 5) What ideological statements serve to describe and explain the beginnings of Constructivist design in Russia? Information concerning the nature of the traffic of political and artistic ideas between Soviet Russia and Western Europe was obtained from graphic design and diplomatic (Soviet-German relations) literature to answer the following questions: 1) What were the respective political attitudes of Germany and Russia immediately after the First World War? 2) How did these attitudes shape Soviet-German relations? 3) How did artistic traffic begin? 4) What kinds of communication ensued? and 5) How did this communication affect art and art education in Germany at the time, especially at the Bauhaus?

Information concerning the consequences of the ideological traffic involving Constructivist and Bauhaus designs was obtained by identifying and analyzing the formalistic ordering of the two groups of designs. The data for the analyses (graphic designs) were gathered from publications which were available to the author.<sup>1</sup> Answers to the following questions were sought from the data:

1) What graphic elements are immediately visible in the designs? 2) How are these elements executed? 3) Do Bauhaus designs demonstrate a parallel formalistic ordering to Constructivist designs? and 4) If parallels do exist, which designs were executed earlier, chronologically?

The answer to the fourth question was instrumental in conjecturing about the nature and direction of influence. Finally, the information concerning the connections between the findings of the preceding inquiry and the formalist ordering of contemporary posters was examined by identifying the structural qualities of recent posters. These were analyzed in reference to the list of visual characteristics of Constructivist designs. Posters which have

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<sup>1</sup> The publications include: Mildred Constantin, ed., Word and Image: Posters in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968; Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1967; Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sovietsky Reklamny Plakat, Moskva: Sovietsky Chudozhnik, 1972; Dietner Schmidt, Bauhaus, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1966; and Hans Wingler, Das Bauhaus, Bramsche: M. Dumont Schauberg, 1962.

been reproduced in the catalogues of the International Poster Biennales in Warsaw were included in this analysis, as well as slides of worldwide posters which are in the author's collection and are duplicated in available catalogues.<sup>1</sup> These posters are representative of worldwide posters as evidenced by the very procedures in developing the biennales.<sup>2</sup> In determining the impact of Constructivist design on contemporary posters, the following procedure was followed: 1) Identification of graphic elements which are visible in Constructivist designs; 2) Description of the ordering of these elements; 3) Identification of graphic elements which are visible in contemporary posters; 4) Description of their formalistic ordering; 5) Descriptive analysis of how the graphic elements seen in contemporary posters are identical to those which are seen in Constructivist designs; and 6) An appraisal of whether contemporary posters demonstrate a parallel formalistic ordering to Constructivist designs.

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1 Works in these exhibitions have been selected by outstanding professional designers and critics serving on a jury. Drawn from around the world, the following have served on the jury: Dr. Alena Adlerova (Czechoslovakia); Helge Bertram (Denmark); Dr. Jan Bialostocki (Poland); Pierre Brattiga (Holland); Prof. Erbito Carboni (Italy); Heinz Edelmann (W. Germany); Alan Fletcher (Britain); Hiromu Hara (Japan); Walter Herdeg (Switzerland); Robert Indiana (USA); Prof. Werner Klemke (E. Germany); Martti Mykkanen (Finland); Pierre Restany (France); and Orest Wierejsky (USSR).

2 The Organizing Committee of the biennales works in collaboration with world bodies like the UNESCO, the International Graphic Alliance (AGI) and the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA).

## Presentation

The dissertation proper is divided into three parts: Part II contains Chapters IV, V and VI, and is entitled "Constructivism: Evolution and Dissemination." Chapter IV surveys the foundations of Constructivist Art in Russia by mapping out the political, social and artistic developments during the Bolshevik period, with highlights on the major stylistic shifts in Russian art and their intercourse with the shifting balance of forces which characterize the socio-political climate of Russia during the period.

Chapter V discusses Soviet Russia's geo-political goals and their consequences. The focus is on Soviet-German rapprochement from the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) to after the signing of the Peace of Versailles (1919), while elucidating Soviet Russia's attempts to Bolshevize the Weimar Republic of Germany. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the political developments which served as forces for the dissemination of Russian Constructivist ideology to Germany.

Chapter VI presents an analysis of the means by which Russian Constructivism was exported to Germany against the backdrop of social discontent in Germany as a consequence of the terms of the Peace of Versailles. It focuses upon the travel to Berlin of the Russian Constructivist, Eleazar Markovich (Lissitzky), and analyzes his contacts with the German artistic avant-garde. This

chapter contains an exposition on the Bauhaus community and the ideological conflicts which ensued on the advent of Constructivism. This analysis includes its introduction into the art educational curriculum at the Bauhaus through the Hungarian Socialist artist, László Moholy-Nagy.

Part III contains Chapters VII and VIII, and is entitled "Formal Connections: Constructivist, Bauhaus and Recent Graphic Designs." Chapter VII identifies and describes the formal characteristics of Russian Constructivist designs which were executed between 1919 and 1923, and these serving as criteria, connections are drawn with the structural qualities of Bauhaus designs which were executed between 1919 and 1933. The works which are analyzed are those done by designers of the respective "schools" who are highlighted in the literature on 20th century graphic design. Such designers include, among others, Lissitzky and Rodchenko (Russian Constructivists), and Bayer and Schmidt (Bauhaus designers).

Chapter VIII deals in a similar manner with contemporary posters, demonstrating that formal connections do exist. It was not deemed necessary or practical to analyze all contemporary posters as this would be repetitious; hence, representative posters from each country's entry at the Warsaw biennales which demonstrated formal similarities to Russian Constructivist designs are discussed. The countries represented are: Austria, Brazil, Great Britain, Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Finland,



France, East Germany, West Germany, Iran, Japan, Poland, Switzerland, the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

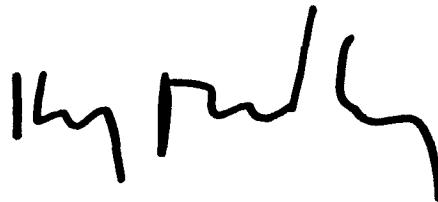
Part IV contains the final chapter (Chapter IX) and is entitled "Discussion." It consists of a discussion of the author's conclusions and suggestions for further research in the area of poster design.

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PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST  
September 10, 1975

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pryde Haig David-West", written in a cursive style.

PART TWO

CONSTRUCTIVISM:  
EVOLUTION AND DISSEMINATION

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FOUNDATIONS OF CONSTRUCTIVIST ART

The ordering of the discussion in this chapter is as follows: First, there is a brief examination of the effects which Marxist theory had on Russian art. Plekhanov, who is considered one of the originators of Russian Marxism is highlighted, and there is an analysis of his application of Marxian theory to Russian social conditions. This examination elucidates the ideological foundations of Constructivism. There is also an account of the advent of Cubism and Futurism in Russia, and the way they were interpreted by Russian artists. Juxtaposed with political unrest, this section ends with the preparations of Russia's revolutionary protagonists for a confrontation with Czarism which culminated in Bolshevism. The section brings to a focus, the specific aesthetic position which was opposed by Russia's radical artistic intelligentsia. Second, the emergence of Lenin is discussed, and the impact of his Bolshevik ideology on art examined. This section elucidates the exodus of the preceding aesthetic position and the advent of a new one in accordance with Bolshevism. It denotes the origin of revolutionary art in Soviet Russia, which is the matrix of Constructivism. Third, there is an exposition of the strategy which was adopted by the

revolutionary artistic intelligentsia to develop the new aesthetic so that it would reflect the principles of Bolshevism, namely, that art should be a very specific weapon for enhancing Socialist construction. This strategy contributed to the birth of Constructivist design. Fourth, the evolution of Constructivist design is analyzed. This section emphasizes Lenin's decision to modify his economic program to partially accommodate Capitalism, and examines a debate which ensued in Russian artistic circles in response to the new economic order. This debate attracted artists like Kandinsky and Malevich who proposed a metaphysical art, and Rodchenko and Tatlin who suggested that artists should use the materials of the new industrial society to produce works which would serve the proletariat. In the final analysis, the "metaphysicists" lost the debate. Consequently, art education in Soviet Russia emphasized a preference for Constructivist design, which was viewed as educational to the masses of the people. This chapter ends with a synthesis of the discussions.

#### Toward a Marxist Aesthetic in Russia

Karl Marx (1818-1883) viewed the spectrum of human society as one totality. He postulated that society should be determined in its various historical phases by its organization of the means of production. Marx viewed such an organization, namely, the way society produces goods, feeds itself and disposes of labor or labor-saving machinery, as the basis of the social fabric. Other

specific human dispositions such as art, science, government, law and the various professions emerge from the economic structure. He held the position that these are not necessarily determined by economics, but that they are simply rooted in a society which is determined by economics.<sup>1</sup> In the Marxian system, art is therefore a microcosm which, with other varied microcosmic components, sustains the equilibrium of the macrocosm (society) after having derived its life-force from it. This attitude toward art was adopted in Russia as a result of a chain of interwoven developments which became manifest in the final quarter of the 19th century.

In 1883, the first Marxist group was founded by radical intellectuals who wished to end Czarism in Russia.<sup>2</sup> This development was a consequence of the application of the theories of Das Kapital, the major work of Karl Marx, to Russian social conditions, by G. Plekhanov (1858-1915).<sup>3</sup> Das Kapital was concerned with the collective social process. It emphasized social relationships between persons in a Capitalist system, where the exploiting social class shapes to its requirements all human resources, from political power to education and art. It suggested a trans-

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1 Robert Goldston, Communism: A Narrative History, Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1972, 95.

2 Ibid., 96.

3 Ibid.

formation of the material means of production in the transition from Capitalism to Socialism.<sup>1</sup>

Plekhanov's application of Das Kapital assumed immediate relevance to Russian society following economic, political and artistic developments which resulted from the famines of 1891-1892.<sup>2</sup> Foreign capital from Belgium, England, France and Germany entered the country to instigate a relentless exploitation of its resources. The most productive of Russian industries were handled by foreign Capitalist concerns. In art, this period was concomitant to the rise of Impressionism in Western Europe. With the escalation of Russo-European economic dialogue, Capitalist attitudes toward art gained momentum in Russia. Business magnates as well as the nobility became patrons and collectors of works of art.<sup>3</sup> In the circles of the artistic intelligentsia, the doctrine of "art for art's sake" gained momentum. Plekhanov warned against this doctrine, contending that it arose and developed where an insoluble contradiction existed between the artist and his social milieu. He maintained that such a contradiction exercised an unfavorable effect on the work of the artist in that it

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1 Karl Marx, Capital, 3 vols., New York: International Publishers, 1967, 761-764.

2 Georg von Rauch, A History of Soviet Russia, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, 11.

3 Tamara Rice, A Concise History of Russian Art, London: Thames and Hudson, 1963, 233.

extricated him from the general social milieu.<sup>1</sup> Plekhanov brought his argument to a head by drawing attention to Púshkin's dilemma during the reign of Nicholas I.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's continued accommodation of Capitalist attitudes resulted in the entry of successive European artistic discoveries. In the early 1900's Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque formulated Cubism in France by fusing Cézannesque and traditional African geometry. In 1909, Filippo Marinetti launched Futurism in Italy. Taking off from Cubist geometry, Futurism was concerned with expressing the mechanical force and movement of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup> The entry of these movements resulted in the evolution of successive waves of experimentation among Russian artists. Notably through Mikhail Larionov (1881-1964) and Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), the characteristics of Cubism and Futurism were fused impressionistically to form what came to be known as Cubo-Futurism.<sup>4</sup> Larionov later evolved a totally new form of painting, which, using the ingredients of Cubo-Futurism, demonstrated an experimentation with

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1 Georgi Plekhanov, Art and Society, New York: Critics Group, 1963, 49-53.

2 Alexander Púshkin (1799-1837) was a Russian poet who was banished by the nobility as a result of the revolutionary content of his Ode to Liberty. He was reinstated as a court poet in 1825 by Nicholas I. His dilemma stemmed from his conflict in satisfying the Czar and in expressing his revolutionary ideas.

3 William Gaunt, Modern Art from Impressionism to the Present Day, London: Frederick Warne and Co. Ltd., 1964, 50.

4 Camilla Gray, The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1962, 94-96.



the current concepts of time, space and light, which had been forged in mathematical physics. This new style became known as Rayonism.<sup>1</sup> By 1913, Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935) had fused Rayonist, Cubist and Futurist principles to arrive at a purely metaphysical form of painting, Suprematism.<sup>2</sup>

The radical intellectuals viewed these artistic experiments as extricating the artists from the general social milieu. They believed that, given the rapidly decaying society in Russia, the artists should aspire to produce works which would be socially relevant to the proletarian struggle for freedom from the exploiting bourgeoisie. At a convention of European Marxists in Amsterdam, as early as 1889, Plekhanov had represented Russia's radical intellectuals and had proclaimed that the emancipation of the Russian proletariat was of high priority. He had contended that the cultural trend within Russia was becoming increasingly decadent. Plekhanov had further stressed that art and literature had to be at one with the struggles of the proletariat. His proclamations in Europe resounded with increased vitality among his followers in Russia, as they escalated their attack on Czardom. One of such followers was a legal practitioner, Vladimir Ulyanov (1870-1924), who subsequently became

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1 Harvard Arnason, History of Modern Art, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1971, 212.

2 Ibid., 219-220.

known as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Lenin later came to epitomize the transformations which, in the course of Russian history, changed the structure of the society, as his Marxist-Plekhanovist ideas fermented into Bolshevism.

#### Bolshevism on Art

In August, 1914, the world slipped into the abyss of war. Prior to this, European and Russian Marxists had outlined proposals for its prevention.<sup>1</sup> They had planned to apply one of the principles of Marxian theory, namely, the international solidarity of the working class. In the framework of such a solidarity, it was inconceivable that workers of any nation should take up arms to kill their ideological "brothers." But when the war broke out, the Marxist coalition had not succeeded in working out practical steps for its aversion; consequently, the coalition was dissolved. At this time, Lenin was in Switzerland. The capitulation of the Marxists left him in cold fury. In 1916, he formulated a strategy for a Russian Socialist revolution, which, if and when successful, could signal the opening of Socialist revolutions throughout Western Europe. His plans well prepared, Lenin returned to Russia in April, 1917, to forge his way into the mainstream of Russian politics, and attempt to change the course of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldston, 136.

In the meantime, Russia was accumulating successive waves of reverses in the battle. Consequently, military mutiny became rampant. Simultaneously, Russia's domestic economy approached a complete collapse. In the cities and villages, starvation was pervasive. Added to this, young men were indiscriminately drafted into the army, instantly shipped to the frontlines of battle, where many of them died. On March 8, 1917, these conditions which enraged the masses of the people, brought about a state of revolution.<sup>1</sup> Housewives organized a revolt in the streets of Saint Petersburg. Virtually all the factory workers rose in support of the revolt. The militia was released to contain the situation; instead, they joined forces with the revolting mob. Czarist authority thus collapsed in Saint Petersburg, and consequently in the Russian Empire, as the incumbent Czar, Nicholas II abdicated the Romanov throne.<sup>2</sup>

With the liquidation of Czarism, Russia's revolutionary intelligentsia assumed total control of power. But they soon split into two factions on ideological differences: One faction, namely, the Mensheviks (the minorities), proposed that Russia should continue along the course of Capitalism, which, step by step, would be

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1 Ibid., 138.

2 Ibid., 139.

displaced by Socialism. Their theoretical rationale was wrested from orthodox Marxism, which postulated the inevitable ultimate collapse of Capitalism, as a consequence of its inherent contradictions. The other faction, namely, the Bolsheviks (majorities) proposed an application of Marxian theory, but in the context of Russian realities. It was during this ideological split that Lenin returned to Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Instantly rising to the leadership of the Bolsheviks, he began hammering away his ideology which included: The leadership of the Bolsheviks in the peasant revolution and an unconditional assistance to the peasantry in the total seizure of land. The total opposition to the orthodox Marxist idea of the Mensheviks. The total and unconditional withdrawal of Russia from World War I. And the implementation of radical changes in Russian society which would completely sweep away the ideas and people in the wheel of Russian power in all segments of the society of the Czarist period. Lenin proclaimed that after the eradication of the old social order, all citizens were to become employees and workers in and for the community. The slogan of "Collective Man" formed the core of his ideology.<sup>2</sup> Lenin's new society was to be analagous to a beehive, where

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Duranty, USSR: The Story of Soviet Russia, Philadelphia: V.B. Lippinott, 1944, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolaevich Miliukov, Outlines of Russian Culture, New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1960, 87.

Dissertation Committee: Professor David W. Ecker, Chairman;  
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Special Consultant: Professor L. Jay Oliva.

DWE .

Abstract of  
RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTIVIST ART  
AND ITS IMPACT ON  
CONTEMPORARY POSTER DESIGN

An Inquiry into the Connections between Constructivist  
Design, Bauhaus Influence and Recent Graphic Design.

PRYDE HAIG DAVID-WEST

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department  
of Art and Art Education of the School of Education,  
Health, Nursing, and Arts Professions of New York University.

1975

everything would be based on a purely social point of view, with no rudiments of the consciousness of the self.

The Bolsheviki finally seized state power on November 7, 1917, after winning landslide victories in the Soviets of Saint Petersburg and Moscow. The militia, the industrial workers, the peasants as well as some artists<sup>1</sup> were overwhelmingly prepared to accept the leadership of Lenin and his Bolsheviki. Representing the conforming artists, Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) expressed vociferously that, for the artist in the new Leninist society, the streets were his brushes, and the squares and parks his palettes. This idea found its practical expression in monumental art. The regular forms of figures were enlarged to huge scales. People whose ideas underscored the development of Bolshevism were depicted in gigantic statues and mural paintings. These included, Marx, Engels, Radishchev, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Razin and Bauman.<sup>2</sup> But as most of the paintings were executed in the Cubist geometric style with a lavish use of brilliant colors (thus blending Fauvist elements) in order to accentuate

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1 Nonconforming artists like Kandinsky and Malevich, who continued to propagate metaphysicism, either withdrew from public notice or fled the country.

2 Radishchev was a Russian liberal of the 18th century; Herzen and Chernyshevsky were 19th century Socialists; Razin was a 17th century revolutionary; and Bauman was a radical who was murdered in 1905. Miliukov, 88.

the images, the masses of the people were caught with the awe of incomprehension. Following this, Futurist experiments blew into the open. Artists began to attempt to express Lenin's idea of "Collective Man" by applying the technique of Futurist simultaneity in their paintings. But here again, the orgy of line and color met with the disappointing bewilderment in the response of the proletariat. To salvage this chaotic period in Russian art, an entirely new strategy was employed. The artistic intelligentsia began to formulate ideas for the production of works of art in which proletarian content would be in conjunction with popular forms.

#### Form and Content Conjoin

The aesthetic which emerged viewed art as an ideological superstructure of the society. Considered as a specific weapon for enhancing Socialist construction, its aim was to educate and organize the wide masses of the Russian people. It was argued that as an instrument for social change, the new art could not afford to be apolitical. And as a means of the acquisition of knowledge, it had to be a reflection of material and objective reality. This new direction in Russian art postulated the primacy of content which would declare its dialectical conjunction with form. The artistic intelligentsia held that the content of the work of art, which had to be directed toward socio-functionalism, should reflect the essential relationships inherent in the subject matter.

They argued that form must, in the final analysis, be the image which should express these relationships and insure effective communication between the artist and the rest of the human community (the collective audience). Herein lay the matrix of a philosophical issue which, in the passing of time, formed the cornerstone of the Theory of Reflection.<sup>1</sup>

The reflective nature of the new art first found support among the avant-garde artists who continued to work in the tradition of Cubo-Futurism, Rayonism or Suprematism. But the very core of their Weltanschauung was loaded with contradictions. While they regarded themselves as revolutionary artists and purported to create a proletarian art, they at the same time proclaimed the primacy of form whose content had no bearing on the theory and practice of proletarianism. While they joined in the denunciation of bourgeois aesthetic positions, they at the same time produced paintings which reflected those very positions. Their works thus deprived the proletariat of a powerful weapon in its struggle and in its systematic dialogue with Socialist construction. These artists

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<sup>1</sup> Following the application of this theory to art and literature by Soviet Marxist-Leninist theorists in the 1920's, the noted Hungarian Marxist writer, Gyorgy Lukács has, in recent times, identified its philosophical link with Hegelian dialectics. Lukács has distinguished the specificity of art in its unity of form and content from scientific empiricism where content is independent of form. Béla Kopecsi, "The Many Faces of Realism," The UNESCO Courier, March, 1973, 20.



imagined that they could create a revolutionary art outside of the Revolution and bring it ready-made from their studios as a gift to the proletariat and to the Socialist society. But their experiments with form and their clever manipulation with paint and other plastic materials turned out to be totally outside the principles of Bolshevism, hence their works were useless to the proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

Other groups of artists soon emerged and declared their support for the course of the Revolution. These were: The New Society of Painters (NOZh); the Society of Artists of the Revolution (AKhR); the Society for "Being" through Art (BYTIE); and the Society for "Growth" through Art (ROST).<sup>2</sup> A major component of the first three groups was an amalgam of painters who, though maintaining the prerevolutionary tendencies of easel painting, were able to address the proletariat by integrating proletarian forms with a historical content pertinent to Bolshevism. The ROST, whose principal ideologist was Vladimir Mayakovsky, were interested in producing works which would address the masses of the people directly. They were concerned with current problems as opposed to historical manifestations. Hence, utilizing painterly techniques of Cubo-Futurism,

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1 Mikhail Apletin, Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Art in the USSR, Moscow: Iskra Revolutzii, 1934, 13.

2 Ibid., 10.

Rayonism and Suprematism, they combined them with typographic elements (letter forms) to produce posters. These were mass produced and circulated throughout the Soviet Union. Inherent in this medium was its non-centralization. In contrast to paintings or sculptures which by their very natures are centralized, hence depriving the total population from gaining access to them, posters give each citizen an equal opportunity for their viewing and enjoyment. This ROST aesthetic which stressed a pluralist Weltanschauung, which was in total accord with the idea of Socialism, and therefore in perfect tune with Marxist aesthetics, was subsequently developed into Constructivist design.

#### Emphasis: Didactic Design

The preceding divergent aesthetic positions all occupied the artistic intelligentsia during the Civil War which broke out after the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>1</sup> After the war, Lenin entered the cultural arena in an attempt to restore order. He issued decrees that all existing artistic bodies or groups should be brought under the central administration of the Commissariat for Education.<sup>2</sup> It was Lenin's view that such a centralization within the system would make it impossible for the artistic avant-garde

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<sup>1</sup> After the Bolshevik takeover, a Civil War broke out in Russia. Assisted by Great Britain and France, the Mensheviks rose against the Bolsheviks. This war disordered Russian society to a large extent. Rauch, 78-96.

<sup>2</sup> Gray, 244.

to have an independent function in the search for truth and knowledge. It would rather play the role of a servant of the Socialist state.

The Proletcult which had been reorganized in 1917 opposed this centralization of artistic affairs under the aegis of party control. Under its principal ideologist, Alexander Bogdanov (1873-1928), it contended that there were three independent roads to Socialism. These were, the economic, the political and the cultural. Accordingly, it argued, the Proletcult "must have its own art in order to organize its forces in the struggle for Socialism."<sup>1</sup> In response to this argument, Lenin made it clear that such a monopoly by one school of thought to the production of a proletarian art was both ideologically and pragmatically unhealthy for Russian Socialism. In December, 1920, he issued a decree which ordered the Proletcult to submit to the central authority of the Commissariat for Education.<sup>2</sup> This signaled the demise of the Proletcult. It was disbanded altogether in 1923.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin's ideas were not opposed only in the cultural milieu. His economic program also came under fire. Russian malcontents contended that the ouster of Capitalism had

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., 245.

3 Basil Dmytryshyn, USSR: A Concise History, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, 133.

caused the economic fabric to decline. They argued that state or party monopoly had proven ineffective. In 1921, cries of faithlessness in the Bolshevik Administration became the order of the time. Workers in Saint Petersburg initiated a nationwide strike as a result of the ebbing economy. The strike reached its climax in the industrial district of Vasilievsky Ostrov (across from the Gulf of Kronstadt) where the core of Russian navy power was housed. This strike became known as the Kronstadt Rising.<sup>1</sup> Lenin envisaged the insurrection as a pointer to the dangers which the Bolshevik Administration would face unless a way was found to salvage the economy. Accordingly, he sought to compromise his theory and the socio-economic reality of the day. This compromise was manifested in his New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>2</sup> Admitting that his plans for an immediate and a total transition to a purely Socialist division of property far exceeded the current strength of Soviet Russia, Lenin postulated a mixed economic system. The Socialized sector was to compete with private enterprise, with the hope that the Socialized concerns would gradually and systematically outplay the private concerns. Accordingly, the large industrial plants, transportation, banks and foreign trade continued under state control,

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1 Rauch, 126-128.

2 Ibid., 129.

while the rest of the industrial field and the domestic traffic of goods were surrendered to private entrepreneurs. Foreign capital was again welcomed under the NEP, and the embargo on international trade lifted.

As the NEP took root, a polemical debate ensued among the Soviet artistic intelligentsia. The question of disparity concerned the formulation of a new Soviet aesthetic and the role of the artist in the new partially Capitalist society. Kasimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Anton Pevsner (1886-1962), and Naum Gabo (b. 1890) emerged from the isolation that they had been forced into as a result of the ideological turmoil of the preceding period, to spearhead one end of the debate. They reemphasized that art was essentially a metaphysical activity. They argued that the function of art was only to order man's vision of the material world. It was their claim that in becoming politically relevant, art would cease to be alive. Conversely, Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), and Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) insisted that the artist had to become a technician, to channel his work toward the tools and materials of modern production. Their slogan became "Art into life."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, 247.

The debate fermented into an understanding, even outside the Russian intelligentsia, that easel painting and "pure art" were no longer valid preoccupations. They were declared dead. Art which linked itself with the new industrial ambiance, and which was educational to the masses of the people, was declared as the only socially serviceable art form. It was held that only this kind of art was acceptable for enhancing the new social milieu.

Art education in Soviet Russia began to take a new turn in terms of emphasis in curriculum content. Graphic design and industrial art teaching gained priority in art schools across the country. At the Vkhutemas, for instance, the foundation course, "Construction," emphasized the didactic goals of design. Students were indoctrinated in the slogan "Death to [pure] art, long live production."<sup>1</sup> Outside the pedagogical institutions, posters and books which demonstrated the new aesthetic struck the imagination and the socializing instincts of Russians. Following their defeat in the debate, Kandinsky and Malevich filtered out of the mainstream of Soviet art.

This new aesthetic was Constructivist design. It shall be seen in the next chapters how it was exported to Weimar Germany, and subsequently diffused to other parts of the world, as Soviet Socialism entered its internationalist phase.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 19.

## Synthesis

The application of Marxian economic principles to Russian social conditions by Georgi Plekhanov led to the introduction of Marxist aesthetics in Russia during the final quarter of the 19th century. Radicals within the Russian artistic intelligentsia began to question the art for art's sake doctrine which had been imported from Western Europe. This malcontent culminated in the ouster of the imported doctrine when Vladimir Lenin led the Bolsheviks to terminate Czarist rule in Russia, and turned the country into a Socialist one in 1917.

Under Bolshevik rule, all preexisting ideas and people in the limelight of Russian Society were wiped out. In the field of the visual arts, artists were required to produce works which would be politically and socially relevant - art was henceforth viewed as an ideological weapon for social reconstruction. Cubism and Futurism which had entered Russia during Czarist rule, and which had generated waves of experimentation among Russian artists, were violently criticized by the artistic avant-garde which declared its support for Bolshevism. The criticism stemmed from the fact that these movements only emphasized formal innovations. In the new Soviet society, artistic content had to be in conjunction with form. This requirement was most aptly met by a group of artists who subscribed to the ROST, a society which was committed to combining the formal elements of Cubism and Futurism with typographic elements to produce posters. Mass produced

This study surveys a major aspect of the art of Russia immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, namely, Constructivist Art, and analyzes its impact on contemporary poster design.

The dissertation is organized in the following manner. Part I presents the research problem and its significance; operational definitions of certain specific and technical terms; a discussion of the theoretical framework for the study which includes the reviews of related literature in the areas of graphic design, Marxist aesthetics, and Soviet-German politics. The methodology employed to implement the study is also presented.

Part II presents a scenario of the aesthetic, historical and political developments in Soviet Russia which nurtured the evolution of Constructivism, and an examination of Soviet Russia's alliance system with Weimar Germany from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Treaty of Rapallo. Using these events as a frame of reference, the channel through which the ideas and works of Russian Constructivists penetrated Weimar Germany is identified. Highlighted here include Plekhanov's application of Marxian economic principles to Russian social conditions; the emergence of Lenin and Bolshevism, and their impact on Russian art; the activities of



and circulated throughout the country, these posters were in accord with the principles of Bolshevism. Hence, they were consistent with Marxist aesthetics as applied in Soviet Russia at the time.

As a result of general discontent with his economic program, which became evident in the Kronstadt Rising (1921), Lenin decided to restructure Soviet economy. He introduced a New Economic Policy which lifted the embargo on foreign trade and introduced partial Capitalism in Soviet Russia. The New Economic Policy thus anticipated an escalation in industrialization. With a view toward introducing an aesthetic which would be consistent with the new economic order, the artistic intelligentsia, after a polemical debate, decided on the total invalidity of easel painting and "pure art," which preached metaphysicism. Graphic and industrial design were henceforth regarded as the only valid artistic preoccupations. These media were viewed as blending the forms of the industrial age with visually informative messages, with a purpose of educating the masses of the Russian people. This tendency found its manifestation in Constructivist design. Ideologically, this aesthetic was consistent with ROST principles, but rather than applying Cubist and Futurist formal tendencies, it derived its forms from the total industrial milieu.

CHAPTER V  
SOVIET-GERMAN RELATIONS

This chapter reviews Soviet Russia's alliance system with Weimar Germany after the Soviet Union's withdrawal from the First World War, to the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo. Its relevance to the problem of this dissertation is that it identifies and analyzes the major factors which served as forces for the entry of Constructivist design of Western Europe. The relations with Weimar Germany are important because there, the Constructivist aesthetic entered the Bauhaus which was instrumental in diffusing it to other parts of the world. This diffusion will be discussed later. The ordering of the review below is as follows: First, there is an exposition of Lenin's idea of a world revolution and an identification of the factors which made Germany his first "port of call." This discussion anticipates the rest of the chapter. Second, there is an examination of the political events which transpired between the conclusions of the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Versailles. During this period, the Russian Bolsheviks formed an alliance with the German Spartakist League to Bolshevize Germany. Although such a scheme did not materialize, it was instrumental in injecting Bolshevik ideology into German society.

Third, political events which occurred between the signing of the Treaties of Versailles and Rapallo are discussed. This section focuses upon Germany's attitude toward the Versailles protocol; the drastic terms of the Treaty were interpreted by Weimar Germany as implying its extrication from the European community. German opinion began to sway toward fraternal relations with Soviet Russia. These events led to commercial negotiations between the two countries which culminated in the sensational Treaty of Rapallo. Weimar Germany's accommodation of Soviet Russia was instrumental in the spread of Bolshevist ideals among the German artistic intelligentsia. A consequence of this accommodation was the penetration of Weimar by Russian Constructivism. This chapter ends with a synthesis of the discussions.

### Lenin's Idea of a World Revolution

The disintegration of the international Marxist coalition in 1914 on the drum beats of war had infuriated Lenin. On his return to Russia, he worked out a strategy for its reestablishment. In March, 1919, he founded the Third Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow.<sup>1</sup> With the objective of reinstating the coalition, its purposes

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<sup>1</sup> According to Gregory Zinoviev (1883-1936), a cofounder of the International, it gained its inception in 1918 when the Bolshevik Party assumed the name of the Russian Communist Party, and when the German Spartakist movement evolved into the German Communist Party. Its [re] founding in 1919 was to give it an official international recognition. Michael Florinsky, World Revolution and the U.S.S.R., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933, 41-42.

were: 1) To claim allegiance from the more radical sections of foreign Socialist Parties; 2) To function as an instrument through which separate Communist Parties might be established throughout Europe; 3) To serve as a vehicle for channelling Soviet advice, direction, agents, arms and cultural values and propaganda to European and global Communist Parties; and 4) To help these Communist Parties in triggering revolutions in their respective countries. In January, 1920, Zinoviev spelled out its ultimate goal: "We shall establish workers' and soldiers' councils in Berlin and Warsaw, in Paris and London, and the might of the Soviets will one day extend throughout the world."<sup>1</sup>

In June, 1920, the Second Congress of the Comintern convened and laid down twenty-one conditions for admission to the organization. These conditions, among others, included: 1) A rigid subordination to the central body; 2) The maintenance of strict Communist discipline; 3) A vigorous battle against social democratic ideologies; and 4) An active propaganda in the labor unions, the armies and in the intellectual circles.<sup>2</sup>

The major hopes of the Comintern were centered on Germany. From the outset, the Bolshevik leaders viewed Germany through a haze of preconceptions. Karl Marx had

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1 Ibid., 46-56.

2 Basil Dmytryshyn, U.S.S.R.: A Concise History, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, 398-402.

asserted that it was the most advanced Capitalist country in efficiency and in organization and structure.<sup>1</sup> It was the country in which the planned direction of the economy had made the most rapid strides before and during the war. The German economist, Rudolf Hilferding, had also pointed out that it would suffice to take over the six largest banks in Berlin in order to overrun Germany.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Germany was highly industrialized but could be seized with ease. These factors were instrumental in shaping Lenin's conviction that Germany was the country to which an exportation of the Bolshevik Revolution would yield the most favorable prospects for the envisaged world revolution. The Bolshevik leaders were convinced that a successful Communist takeover in Germany would signal successive similar takeovers across Europe, and would protect their revolutionary experiment in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

#### From Brest-Litovsk to Versailles

Two days after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, Lenin addressed a radiogram to all nations and governments, calling for an immediate armistice and repudiating all annexations and indemnities.<sup>4</sup> It had been Lenin's contention that Russia's continued participation

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1 Edward Carr, German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars: 1919-1939, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1951, 25.

2 Ibid.

3 Dmytryshyn, 95.

4 Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 1.

in World War I was anathema to the principles of Socialism. At the same time, he perceived Russia's withdrawal as clearing the way for the entry and subsequent spread of Bolshevism in Germany.

Russia's signal to withdraw from the war was enthusiastically received by Germany. Totally unaware of Lenin's scheme, Germany viewed such a withdrawal, which invariably was tantamount to the acceptance of a defeat, as logically signaling the collapse of the Bolshevik régime. Accordingly, Germany informed Russia that it was ready to negotiate a settlement. On December 22, 1917, peace negotiations between Russia and the Central Powers<sup>1</sup> began at Brest-Litovsk. The peace was concluded on March 3, 1918.

The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk were very drastic for Soviet Russia. Considerably large percentages of its population, land and industry were lost to Germany.<sup>2</sup> These conditions were obvious from the outset, yet Lenin fought for the conclusion of the peace with firm logic. Needing time to consolidate the Bolshevik Revolution as a major step in the direction of a world revolution, he was willing to make peace with the Central Powers at virtually any price.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Central Powers consisted of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy, the third member, maintained neutrality.

2 Paul Milioukov, La politique extérieure des soviets, Paris: M. Giard, 1936, 30.

3 Vladimir Lenin, Selected Works, New York: International Publishers, 1943, 327-377.

Shortly after the Brest-Litovsk settlement, Germany capitulated from World War I. On November 9, 1918, the German people rose in a revolt against the Kaiser, which culminated in his abdication. The German monarchy thus ended. It was replaced by a republican system of government. Simultaneously, Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919), leader of the Spartakist movement, declared the German "Socialist Republic."<sup>1</sup> The restless nature of this period in Germany was a signal for Lenin to make an attempt to overrun the country. Accordingly, Karl Radek (1885-?) was despatched to Berlin to spread Bolshevist ideology to the leftists.<sup>2</sup> In response to a call from Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), and other leading members of the Spartakist movement, a National Congress of Spartakists convened from December 30, 1918 to January 1, 1919, and decided to found the German Communist Party (KPD).<sup>3</sup> Radek is reported to have participated actively during the Congress.<sup>4</sup> On January 9, 1919, Radek concluded a mutual assistance pact with the KPD. Its object was to initiate the total collapse

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1 Georges Castellan, L'Allemagne de Weimar: 1918-1933, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1969, 16.

2 Karl Radek was not only a political radical. His interests extended to include the interpretation and propagation of radical views on art, in accordance with the ideals of the Soviet Communist Party. This is verified by his alliance with A.A. Zdanov in the 1930's to formulate Zdanovism. His work in Germany may thus not have been concerned specifically with the dissemination of political ideology.

3 Castellan, 18.

4 Ibid., 320.

of German Capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Under the terms of the pact, Soviet Russia recognized Karl Liebknecht as the president of the "German Soviet Republic." It also promised to furnish the KPD with propaganda literature, and to place specially trained revolutionary agents at the KPD's disposal.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the Liebknecht-Radek pact, Communist terror besieged Berlin. This terror soon spread to other parts of Germany, and lingered on into May, when the German Government troops finally brought it to an end. Earlier, however, the terror in Berlin had been crushed by German Government and volunteer troops. The capitulation of the Communists in Berlin has been attributed to the lack of coordination within their ranks.<sup>3</sup> Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who had remained in Berlin after their defeat, to continue writing articles to keep up the spirits of their followers, had been brutally murdered by Government troops on January 15, 1919.<sup>4</sup> Infuriated by these killings, more and more of the right-wing working-class had joined forces with the Communists.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the ultimate collapse of the Communist terror, it is of significance

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1 Milioukov, 34.

2 Ibid.

3 Sefton Delmer, Weimar Germany: Democracy on Trial, London: Macdonald St. Giles, 1972, 40.

4 Ibid., 37-40.

5 Ibid., 40.



to note that the German people were beginning to demonstrate an inclination towards accommodating Communism. This was tantamount to a sway towards Soviet Russia's Bolshevik ideals. This sway became more pronounced when the terms of the Treaty of Versailles became commonly known.

On May 7, 1919, the German official delegation was handed the terms of the Treaty of Versailles at the Peace Conference which had convened at Versailles. The treaty was to bring the First World War to its official end. It had been Germany's view that the Allied Powers<sup>1</sup> would grant it a peace treaty which would show none of the harshness that Germany itself had imposed on Russia at Brest-Litovsk. Germany had supposed that the Allies would regard the abdication of the Kaiser, its establishment of a fully democratic government, and its defeat in the war as expiating all sins that it might have committed.<sup>2</sup> But the terms of the treaty were contrary to its expectations. Germany was stunned. "The unbelievable has happened, our enemies have presented us with a treaty which surpasses the worst fears of our greatest pessimists," Konstantin Fehrenbach, President of the German Assembly protested.<sup>3</sup> The peace was thus opposed. But such an

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1 The Allied Powers consisted of Great Britain, France and the United States of America.

2 William Carr, A History of Germany: 1815-1945, London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1969, 288-289.

3 Delmer, 52.

opposition implied Germany's willingness to a resumption of the war. Such an implication frightened Germany. The alternative was to sign the treaty unconditionally. On June 28, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, popularly referred to by Germans as the "Dictate of Versailles,"<sup>1</sup> was signed and World War I came to its official end.

#### From Versailles to Rapallo

German discontent with the "Dictate" stemmed from its requirements that Germany be totally disarmed, be confined territorially, and be required to pay such heavy reparations that a full payment could cripple Germany for decades.<sup>2</sup> After the conclusion of the treaty, France gained control of German coalfields and had the right to garrison the industrial heart of Germany. Germany viewed these developments with grievance. It sought to defy the "Dictate" but needed an ally. Bolshevik Russia which was ideologically opposed to the Allied Powers was the only Power to which Germany could turn.<sup>3</sup>

Influential groups in Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union observed that their countries had something in common. They were both outcast by the Allied Powers.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, pressure for a German-Soviet rapprochement became widespread in Weimar Germany. Businessmen wanted commercial

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1 Ibid., 53.

2 Brig. Gen. James Collins, ed., Encyclopedia of World War II, New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1972, I, 2.

3 Delmer, 68.

4 William Carr, 307.

Comintern; and the contacts between the Soviet artistic intelligentsia and the German avant-garde, with a focus on Lissitzky, Gropius, Doesburg, Moholy-Nagy, and the Bauhaus.

In Part III, formal connections between Constructivist and Bauhaus designs and contemporary posters are identified and discussed. Constructivist designs which are illustrated and analyzed are those executed by Lissitzky, Rodchenko and the Stenbergs. Bauhaus designs illustrated and discussed were designed by Rohl, Schrammen, Schlemmer, Schmidt, Bayer and Tschichold. Contemporary posters from nineteen countries are illustrated and discussed. They were selected from works which have been exhibited at the International Poster Biennales in Warsaw from 1966 to 1974. The countries represented are, Austria, Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, East Germany, West Germany, Iran, Japan, Poland, Switzerland, the USA, the USSR, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

The author's findings are presented in Part IV, and their implications for further study discussed. The survey reveals that the very phenomena which structured the evolution of Soviet Socialism are the sources of Constructivist Art. It also reveals that being an integral part of the totality of that political system, Constructivist Art was exported to Weimar Germany in response to Soviet Russia's geo-political goals. It is found that

ties between the two countries to secure new markets in Soviet Russia. The German Government wanted to renew political and economic contacts with the Bolsheviks, which would lead to military agreements to facilitate its plans for a rearmament. The artistic intelligentsia was interested in getting acquainted with the artistic experiments which had evolved since the Bolshevik Revolution. The German proletariat wanted a change in the social structure as a result of the inflation which had engulfed Weimar Germany since the end of the war.

Shortly after the terms of the Treaty of Versailles had become popularly known in Germany, Comintern had issued a proclamation to the German workers. In this proclamation, Zinoviev had declared that ". . . the proletarian revolution is the only salvation for the oppressed classes of the whole world . . . Down with the Versailles peace . . . Long live the Soviets in the whole world!"<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, a pamphlet had been issued in the Soviet Union, entitled, To the German People, which contained a similar appeal. In Germany, the Soviet-sponsored KPD called on the German people to form an "Alliance with Soviet Russia,"<sup>2</sup> in its official organ, Die Rote Fahne.

In spite of Soviet Russia's obvious intentions of Bolshevizing the whole of Weimar Germany, the German

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1 Edward Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution: 1917-1923, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1953, 137.

2 F.L. Carsten, The Reichswehr and Politics: 1918-1933, Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1973, 325.

Government concluded a Trade Agreement with the Soviet Union on May 6, 1921.<sup>1</sup> Lenin later remarked that it was clear that the German Government madly hated the Bolsheviki, particularly because of their clandestine operations in Germany, ". . . but the interests of the international situation are pushing it towards peace with Soviet Russia against its [the German Government's] will."<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the German-Soviet Trade Agreement was concluded barely two months after Lenin had announced his New Economic Policy (March, 1921). The escalation of Soviet industrialization was therefore to be a function of the entry of German technology of the Soviet Union. It should also be noted that Constructivist design which had evolved after the NEP naturally required the latest development in printing technology to sustain its social significance.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the entry of German technology was to have an impact on the new Soviet aesthetic. Subsequently, Soviet graphic designers were to travel to Weimar Germany for two reasons, namely, to study the latest developments in German printing technology, and to introduce their new aesthetic to the German artistic intelligentsia. The latter was in keeping with Comintern's scheme of Bolshevizing Weimar Germany. Germany was also to benefit from this

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1 Castellan, 322.

2 Edward Carr, 330.

3 Good quality printing is an aesthetic quality in posters, books and other forms of mass distributed graphic designs.

Trade Agreement, which, ostensibly, promoted import and export trade with the Soviet Union. Subterraneanly, Weimar Germany built various military installations in the Soviet Union where it carried out its rearmament plans.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the technological consequences for the Soviet Union, and the military consequences for the German Republic, the negotiations between the two countries prepared the ground for the Treaty of Rapallo. On April 16, 1922, the German and Soviet delegations to the Economic Conference at Genoa (which opened on April 10, 1922) overstepped the Genoa negotiations and concluded a bilateral cooperations pact at Rapallo.<sup>2</sup> This treaty initiated many avenues for cooperation between the two countries.<sup>3</sup> These were later summed up by the German Government: "We want to see a strengthening of Russia in the economic, military, and political spheres, because it means the strengthening of an ally . . . We also want to strengthen ourselves by helping to build in Russia an armaments industry which in case of necessity can be helpful to ourselves."<sup>4</sup> With the assistance of Weimar Germany, Soviet Russia had thus broken the boycott which had isolated it since the Bolshevik

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1 Delmer, 69.

2 The wrangle over Germany's reparations payments had caused the Allied Powers to call an Economic Conference at Genoa (April 10 - May 19, 1922). Both Germany and Soviet Russia had been invited.

3 Edward Drake, "The Soviet Alliance System: 1917-1941," unpublished dissertation for the Ph.D., New York University, 1957, 211.

4 Delmer, 70.

takeover. It shall be seen in the next chapter how this new development in Soviet geopolitics, which was a consequence of a chain of interconnected developments, facilitated the export of the aesthetic of Constructivist design to the Weimar Bauhaus, from where it diffused to other parts of the world.

### Synthesis

Soviet Russia's relations with Germany after the First World War was characterized by a desire to export the Bolshevik Revolution to Germany. It was the conviction of the Bolshevik leaders that such an export would, on the one hand, clear the way towards a global Communist takeover, and on the other hand, would be instrumental in sustaining the revolutionary experiment within the Soviet Union. But to implement these goals, certain preliminary steps had to be taken. First, Soviet Russia withdrew from World War I by unconditionally signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. Second, it initiated the founding of a German Communist Party (KPD) through its agent, Karl Radek, and Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg of the German Spartakist movement. Third, it fomented an open conflict between the KPD and the German Government with a view of bringing an end to German Capitalism. During this conflict, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were brutally murdered; the killings became instrumental in swaying more Germans towards their Communist course. Communist terror began to spread throughout Germany, but was finally contained by the government.

Germany's sway towards Communism became more pronounced when the terms of the Treaty of Versailles became popularly known. Assisted by Bolshevik propaganda, the German Communist Party launched campaigns which emphasized the adoption of Soviet domestic policies. Angered by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and desirous of violating its harsh requirements, the German Government concluded a Trade Agreement with Soviet Russia. While promoting trade between the two countries overtly, covertly, it enabled Weimar Germany to rearm itself in total violation of the Versailles protocol. The Trade Agreement supplied Soviet Russia with the technological advancement it required in keeping with Lenin's New Economic Policy. The influx of German technology also helped to sustain the aesthetic of Constructivist design which had evolved in response to the NEP. The trade negotiations led to the multi-cooperations Treaty of Rapallo between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia. This treaty was instrumental in formally ending the economic embargo which had been placed on Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution. The lifting of this embargo enabled Russian Constructivist designers to establish physical contacts with the German artistic intelligentsia to study the latest techniques in printing technology, and to attempt to revolutionize German art. The latter was in keeping with Soviet Russia's goal of exporting Bolshevism to Germany, under the aegis of Comintern which had been founded in 1919.



CHAPTER VI  
CONSTRUCTIVIST DESIGN EXPORTED

The ordering of the discussion in this chapter is as follows: First, there is an account of the general atmosphere in the German cultural milieu after the First World War. The emphasis is on the effect which Bolshevist propaganda and Versailles had on the artistic intelligentsia. Second, the events which transpired in the city of Weimar, as a consequence of the entry of Bolshevist ideas, are analyzed. Of particular interest here are the ideological conflicts which ensued as a result of Walter Gropius' rejection of orthodox ideas in art education. Gropius proceeded to design a curriculum which would transform the Bauhaus into an institution in which design would be mass oriented toward social change. The connections between these phenomena and Russian Constructivism are examined. Third, the actual manner in which Constructivist design entered Weimar Germany is discussed. The focus here is on El Lissitzky's contacts with the radical faction of the German artistic avant-garde. Attention is also given to the meeting between Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy. This meeting is important because of Moholy-Nagy's subsequent conversion to Constructivism. This was instrumental in diverting the course of graphic design education in Weimar

Germany. Fourth, there is an exposition on Moholy-Nagy, and on his introduction of Constructivist design to students at the Bauhaus, amidst protests from the Bauhaus community, as well as from the government of the city of Weimar. These protests fermented into an international issue, generating debates in newspapers and art journals in Eastern and Western Europe and in the United States. These events culminated in the termination of the Weimar phase of the Bauhaus. Moholy-Nagy later moved to Dessau, and finally to Chicago, spreading the Constructivist idea. There is also an account of the final dismemberment of the Bauhaus when Adolf Hitler became German Chancellor. This dismemberment was also instrumental in diffusing the Constructivist system to other parts of Europe. The chapter ends with a synthesis of the major points in the foregoing discussion.

#### German Cultural Milieu after Versailles

Postwar Germany was in a ferment. The distaste for the war, the discontent with Versailles, and the waves of Communist terror had thrust the cultural fabric of the society into confusion. This confusion gave way to a search for novelty. Immediately after Germany's capitulation from the war, Berlin became the entertainment center of Europe:

Truncated, impoverished, facing a permanent economic crisis and with little hope of a lasting improvement, Germany wanted to enjoy itself. Once the war was over a dance fever spread, the like of which had not been witnessed in Europe since the Middle Ages. According to the new Zeitgeist, sex, like justice, had to be seen

to be done. The new sex wave ranged from the establishment of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) research institutes to nude shows and hard-core pornography.<sup>1</sup>

This was the period when Weimar popular culture was dominated by the nude dances of Mary Wigman and Anna Pavlova; when Josephine Baker, wearing only her scanty banana skirt, besieged the whole of Berlin; and when Germans went wild over the legs of Marlene Dietrich.<sup>2</sup>

In the visual arts, the radical avant-garde were in demand of new symbols which would coincide with the yearn for social change, which permeated the conscience of the proletariat. Attributing the perversion which had pervaded Germany to the ruthless attitude of the bourgeoisie, these artists fomented a revivalist scheme. This scheme questioned the preexisting aesthetic of art for art's sake, and proposed the creation of works which would comment on the ills of the society. Also, the artists believed that such a commentary would clear the way toward Socialist idealism.<sup>3</sup> A practical application of this scheme is exemplified in The Little Murderer (Illustration 2, p. 68) in which George Grosz (1893-1959) depicted sex and violence, and in The Night (Illustration 3, p. 68) in which Max Beckmann (1884-1950) commented on the killings of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg of the Spartakist movement.

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1 Walter Laqueur, Weimar: A Cultural History, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974, 225.

2 Ibid., 23, 245.

3 Harvard Arnason, History of Modern Art, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968, 309.



2. George Grosz, The Little Murderer, 1918.



3. Max Beckmann, The Night, 1919.

The revolutionary atmosphere which permeated the artistic milieu also affected art education. When Walter Gropius (b. 1883) assumed the headship of both the Grand Ducal Saxon School of Applied Arts and the Grand Ducal Academy of Arts,<sup>1</sup> he saw this as an opportunity to transplant his social criticism into art education.<sup>2</sup> Combining these two schools to form the Staatliches Bauhaus in 1919, he sought to eliminate 19th century dualism in art education which had separated the individual from the community. In its place, Gropius proposed the "fundamental oneness"<sup>3</sup> between art, economic gratification, and the proletariat. Subsequently, his formulation of a new curriculum for the Bauhaus, which propagated socio-functionalism as the criterion for the recognition of a work of art, generated waves of ideological conflicts at Weimar.

#### Ideological Conflicts at Weimar

Gropius' curriculum was designed with the purpose of turning Bauhaus students into creative social organisms. Their products were meant to be mass oriented toward social change, in total defiance of the preexisting idea regarding

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1 Nikolaus Pevsner, Academies of Art, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973, 276.

2 Walter Gropius, who was an architect, believed that an architect should be concerned with the unity of the various formal, technical, social and economic problems which arose in connection with building. This belief led him to connect the function of a house to socio-economic problems in society. Hence his social criticism stemmed from dissatisfaction with nonfunctional buildings. James Fitch, Walter Gropius, New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960, 28-31.

3 Pevsner, 277.

the Bauhaus community accommodated Constructivism as a result of the export. Analyses of Constructivist and subsequent Bauhaus designs justify this finding.

The author contends that the Constructivist system diffused to other countries as a consequence of the Bauhaus' political conflicts with German conservatives, as well as with the Hitler movement. Contingently, it is further argued, the Constructivist system has influenced poster designers in our time. Analyses of representative contemporary posters justify this argument.

It is also contended that the application of Constructivist principles has been caused by designers' obligation to produce informative designs. Accordingly, the author suggests that empirical studies could be undertaken to determine whether posters demonstrating Constructivist techniques would be more informative than posters which demonstrate other artistic techniques.

the function of art - the idea of art for art's sake. The educational work of the Bauhaus called for a complete spiritual revolution in the individual, as well as in the society. It was thought that such a revolution would help in overcoming the fragmentation of human existence.<sup>1</sup>

The orthodox or conservative faction of the Weimar community wished to remain faithful to the old order and to the old aesthetic position. The Bauhaus philosophy was therefore received with violent attacks. Given the fact that Bolshevist propaganda was, like an avalanche, submerging Germany at the time, many critics saw Gropius linking his ideas to those of Soviet Bolshevism. Accordingly, they descended on the Bauhaus with cries of "Art-Bolshevism which must be wiped out. . ." <sup>2</sup> No sooner did these cries get into the local press in the district of the city of Weimar, than were they reverberated across Germany. Soon, right-wing factions throughout Germany and across Western Europe began to attack the Bauhaus in newspapers. Some of the headlines read as follows:

"Art-Bolshevism."  
 "The Collapse of Weimar Art."  
 "Disintegration of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar."  
 "Swindle-Propaganda."  
 "Storm over Weimar."  
 "Staatliche Rubbish."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Laqueur, 117.

2 Herbert Bayer, et al., eds., Bauhaus: 1919-1928, New York: MOMA, 1959, 9.

3 Ibid., 93.

Within the Bauhaus community itself, there were ideological confrontations. Gropius was successful in preventing the students from being directly involved in the conflict, but no way was found to arrive at a bilateral understanding with those teachers who adhered to the old aesthetic position. It should be noted that two already established art schools were merged to create the Bauhaus, and that the teachers of those schools subsequently became the pioneer teachers at the Bauhaus. These teachers included Johannes Itten, Lyonel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks and Adolf Mayer. Subsequent appointments to teaching positions included Georg Muche (1920), Paul Klee (1921), Oskar Schlemmer (1921) and Wassily Kandinsky<sup>1</sup> (1921).

In the very constitution of the teaching staff lay a paradox. While Walter Gropius sought to develop a socially functional art at Weimar, it was painters of the orthodox order who dominated his staff. While he stressed the necessity of the fusion of art and technology, architecture and engineering were not taught at the Bauhaus. While he stressed that the students should become creative social organisms vis-à-vis the technological social milieu, theosophy was the point of departure in many of the studios.<sup>2</sup>

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1 After the artistic debate which followed Lenin's New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union, Kandinsky fled to Weimar.

2 Laqueur, 177-178.



What Itten, Kandinsky and other painters created in their studios had very little to do with the curriculum which Gropius had proposed. Itten continued to produce works which demonstrated Expressionist and metaphysical tendencies. His Red Tower (Illustration 4) for example, had nothing to do with the thrust of Gropius' curriculum.



4. Johannes Itten, Red Tower, 1918.

Kandinsky's work continued to be pervaded by a metaphysical aura, as exemplified by his Composition (Illustration 5, p. 73). Feininger demonstrated an unmitigated opposition to the doctrine of socio-serviceability. Klee remained hostile to anything less than free artistic creativity. Mucbe issued logical explanations concerning the irreconcilable differences between artistic creation and propaganda. Schlemmer maintained a neutralist position, and sought a compromise between the ideologically opposed factions.



5. Wassily Kandinsky, Composition, 1923.

In spite of this fiasco within, Walter Gropius remained firm on his pedagogical principles in his public pronouncements.

Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931), an advocate of the De Stijl movement, launched an independent attack on the Bauhaus. Doesburg's attack stemmed from his failure to understand why Gropius had not appointed him as a teacher in the Bauhaus.<sup>1</sup> As early as before the First World War, Doesburg had been an advocate of a reformed relationship between art and society. It was believed that Gropius had given bold approval to Doesburg's ideas.<sup>2</sup> But what caused Doesburg's enigma was how and why Gropius could have backslided to accommodate Expressionist tendencies. What Gropius did not overlook, however, was the fact that

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1 Eckhard Neumann, ed., Bauhaus and Bauhaus People, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970, 74.

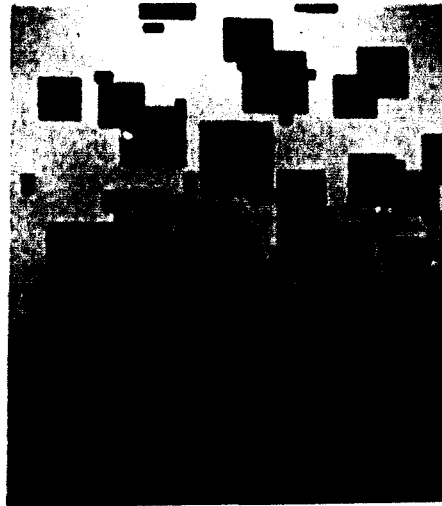
2 Ibid.

professional expertise and ideological conformity were not the sole criteria for appointments to teaching positions at the Bauhaus; certainly not in a politically restless Weimar. Gropius had identified that despite all his talents, Doesburg possessed the undesirable qualities of extreme sensitiveness and aggressiveness. It was Gropius' view that such qualities would be antipathetic to his efforts in preventing the students from participating actively in the ideological confrontations.

By 1922, Theo van Doesburg had moved to the city of Weimar to assume permanent residence. His purpose was to brew trouble from a close-quarter range which would be instrumental in ousting the Expressionist and metaphysical elements from the Bauhaus community. In anticipation of the Constructivist phase of the school, he began to teach functional typography to groups of students at his studio. It is paradoxical that Doesburg's Weltanschauung at this time was radically opposed to his original De Stijl aesthetic. While like German Expressionism, Malevich's Suprematism, or like Mondrian's Neoplasticism, he had used the structured image or symbol to preach a metaphysical message, he currently began to propagate the idea of the wed-lock between artistic form and social function. His Rhythm of a Russian Dance (Illustration 8, p. 76) demonstrates parallels with Malevich's Red Square and Black Square (Illustration 6, p. 75) and Mondrian's Composition in Blue B (Illustration 7, p. 75). Doesburg's deviation



6. Kasimir Malevich, Red Square and Black Square, 1915.



7. Piet Mondrian, Composition in Blue B, 1917.



8. Theo van Doesburg, Rhythm of a Russian Dance, 1918. from metaphysics and from the idea of art for art's sake could have stemmed from his interest in the artistic developments in Soviet Russia. His shift in Weltanschauung could also have been a function of his accommodation of Bolshevist propaganda. The strategy which Doesburg adopted during the sojourn of El Lissitzky (1890-1941) in Germany; the terrorist attitude which he demonstrated during the convention of the First International Congress of Progressive Art in Düsseldorf; and the battle tactics which he employed on the issue of the convention of the Constructivist Congress at Weimar, are all indicative of his orientation toward Bolshevism. After 1923, Doesburg filtered out of the mainstream of the Bauhaus movement, when Constructivism entered the orbit of the school. Although he was not recognized as a champion of the entry, his major goal was achieved.

Constructivist Design Enters Weimar Germany

Following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Lenin's plans to consolidate the Bolshevik Revolution were not confined specifically to the economic sphere. Also, his idea of a world revolution ramified to include the dissemination of Bolshevik ideology that was not specifically concerned with the economic status of the proletariat. The Bolshevik leader was also concerned with the place of art in the new Soviet and his envisaged world Communist community.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, an artistic-collegiate syndicate was founded at the Commissariat for Education. This syndicate was to function as a disseminator of artistic propaganda. From the outset, it drew up a ten-point program, of which only the fourth, ninth and tenth points are of relevance to the discussion in this section. These are as follows:

Point 4. The exchange of state authorized representatives of art who will be sent to all countries as art ambassadors.

Point 9. The establishment of an international press agency whose function will be the dissemination of information concerning the art of Soviet Russia.

Point 10. The publication of art journals which will be mass circulated in Soviet Russia, as well as in other countries.<sup>2</sup>

An international artistic bureau was subsequently established which functioned in coordination with Comintern.

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolaevich Miliukov, Outlines of Russian Culture, New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1960, 88.

<sup>2</sup> Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1967, 337.

The purpose of this bureau was to form direct associations with all artistic organizations across Western Europe, with a particular attention on Weimar Germany. But in view of the fact that Soviet Russia was virtually isolated from the rest of the world at the time, it was not possible to establish physical contacts. The international artistic bureau thus resorted to spreading its ideas through radio messages. Part of these read as follows:

The World War requires us to reassess all values. At a time when there is a huge reconstruction going on in life at a tremendous pace, when consciousness cannot catch up with creation, art is left behind at the freezing point of the old prewar state of affairs. Both the millions of victims and the worldwide social revolution [referring specifically to the revolution in Germany which ousted the Kaiser] require a powerful impetus from art.

. . . . .  
The moment demands the convening of an international conference to discuss the progress and potential of the inventions [Soviet artists' experiments to blend artistic form with proletarian content] which are not only required by the present but also by the future. . .<sup>1</sup>

It was the assumption in Soviet artistic circles that West European art had been brought to a stalemate as a result of the outbreak of the war. But the Dada movement had evolved in Switzerland as early as 1916, and in Holland, De Stijl had been formulated in 1917. These two idioms had been synthesized to form Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) in Germany immediately after the First World War. In spite of their opposition to the aesthetic position of the prewar

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

period, the New Objectivist painters of Weimar Germany were unable to address the proletariat directly. The revivalist scheme which they formulated only took the form of a clinical view of their social milieu. Their very medium of expression, namely, painting, was contradictory to the ideals of Socialism. Hence Germany's subsequent accommodation of Russian Constructivist design stemmed from the fact that in Soviet Russia, a way was found to link technological form with the ideological content pertinent to Socialism. This link was manifested in the very process of developing the aesthetic of Constructivist design: Alexie Gan (1893-1939/40?) is considered to have been the major formulator of a theoretical system for approaching a design problem in the Constructivist vein.<sup>1</sup> This system was contained in his exposition of the triadic elements of Constructivism in 1920. Presented in the form of slogans, Gan's triad was as follows:

1. Tectonics: A concept borrowed from geological terminology, used here to designate the organic unity of ideology and form.
2. Fracture treatment: The state and behavior of material and the manner in which it is shaped.
3. Construction: The creative process.<sup>2</sup>

In its practical application, this system was contained in the curriculum of the core program at the Vkhutemas. Alexander Rodchenko, the designer of the curriculum,

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1 Szymón Bojko, New Graphic Design in Revolutionary Russia, London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd., 1972, 20.

2 Ibid.