

# Marxism, art and the Soviet debate over “proletarian culture”

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## A few remarks on our approach to art

The subject of this talk is our work in the sphere of art and culture. With the aim of shedding some light on that work, I would like to begin, at least, to consider the debate over cultural problems that occurred in the Soviet Union in the 1920s—specifically, the debate over the “proletarian culture” movement.

We place questions of culture at the center of our work. We have noted before that Trotsky’s literary struggle against bureaucratism in the USSR began with the writing of the essays in 1922 and 1923 that made up the volume *Literature and Revolution*.

The notion that Trotsky’s intervention on art and culture was a reckless excursion, a diversion from the political and ideological struggle, is deeply mistaken. With the failure of the German revolution in October 1923, in particular, Trotsky recognized that there was a colossal shift in the world situation. He argued that there was the short lever of correct policy and the longer lever of international revolution.

There was no defeatism in the policies of the Left Opposition. Given the temporary isolation of the Soviet Union, everything depended on the correct approach to economic and cultural life. Russia’s backwardness, including its reflection within more uneducated and inexperienced layers drawn toward the Bolshevik Party, created an immense pressure on the workers’ regime.

In July 1923, several months before the open battle with the emerging bureaucratic caste began, Trotsky published his remarkable article, “Not by Politics Alone,” whose title indicated his insistence on the urgency of the cultural problems. He admonished those who continued to utilize the language and rhetoric of the pre-revolutionary days, a language that was no longer likely to arouse anyone, and argued that “our chief problems have shifted to the needs of culture and economic reconstruction.” He continued: “We must learn to work efficiently: accurately, punctually, economically. We need culture in work, culture in life, in the conditions of life.” [1]

Lenin, Trotsky, Aleksandr Voronsky and others tirelessly promoted the cultural welfare of the population, in its most elementary aspects (literacy, family relations, alcoholism, “cultured speech,” punctuality, etc.) as well as its most elaborate and mediated form, artistic creation. They advocated the study and assimilation of artistic classics, as well as—in the cases of Trotsky and, most specifically, Voronsky—encouraging the birth of a new imaginative literature, with remarkable and enduring results.

In the course of those efforts they found themselves in opposition to

vulgar, shallow and wrongheaded “left” arguments that sought to reduce art to an expression of the (alleged) immediate political and practical needs of the Soviet working class and Bolshevik regime, in the name of so-called “proletarian culture.” This program ultimately became even more narrowly focused in the form of “Socialist Realism,” as artistic creation was brutally harnessed to the interests and aims of the national-bureaucratic caste, creating what Trotsky would call “a kind of concentration camp of artistic literature.” [2]

Indeed, over the next several decades, Stalinism expended great effort in shoveling dirt on the early accomplishments of the revolution in art and culture, and the human beings responsible for them, while encouraging everything backward in Russian society, the legacy of that “realm of darkness” exposed and decried by the country’s great democratic publicists in the nineteenth century.

In the end, the objective difficulties facing the first sustained attempt to organize social life on a principle other than the exploitation of man by man had proved overwhelming, with terrible results. In facing our own specific challenges today, under quite changed conditions, hardly anything could be more vital than studying the lessons of those dramatic experiences.

First, however, I would like to give some indication of our general approach, which, in any event, owes a great deal to Trotsky and Voronsky.

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Every significant artistic coming to terms with the world, in our view, contributes toward expanding our sensitivity to the human condition and our own psychological and, ultimately, social awareness. Such efforts must encourage honesty with others and oneself, broadmindedness and, if it’s not too pompous a phrase, depth of soul. An encounter with a serious work inevitably enriches the personality, and draws attention to the essential and most complex questions in life.

The relationship between artistic truth and the socio-historical process is immensely complicated; each set of historical conditions needs to be examined concretely. However, it would be hard to conceive of a decisive break in social continuity in the modern era, involving the conscious rejection of the established order by masses of people, that would not be preceded (and be prepared, in part) by a period of intense artistic and intellectual ferment. At present, we largely witness the consequences of the absence of such ferment, in the overall debasement of social life.

Serious art works toward transforming life. However, the impatient, the pragmatic, the youthful will never be satisfied by the contradictory and sometimes subterranean character of this development, by the fact that the most profound works do not tend to offer *specific* political conclusions and that the artist often has only a limited conception of the ultimate consequences of his or her own effort. Rosa Luxemburg comments, in an article entitled “Life of Korolenko,” that “[W]ith the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance; the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive.” [3]

Nonetheless, one of the first “discoveries” about the world that the serious artist and his or her viewer or reader will make is that it needs to be changed. Art, by its own particular means—and a grasp of those particular means is hardly beside the point—helps align thinking and feeling closer to the actual state of human affairs; certain forms offer insight into the nature of social relationships, the mood and sentiments of various social groupings, the diversity and complexity of the social organism itself, as well as the more enduring and even vexing features of human psychology.

In our historical conditions, working to transform life means, above all, undermining the grip of the existing order over humanity’s heart and mind. No one who responds deeply and consistently to art’s “human-ness” is likely to remain indifferent in the end to a system rooted in exploitation and which has the cruelest consequences for vast portions of the global population. Furthermore, by exposing people to the infinitely varied, transitory character of human relationships, art weakens the claims of permanence and legitimacy, much less God-given authority, made by the powers-that-be.

Art and science are not intrinsically at odds. They cognize the same universe. In the most general sense, one is inclined to believe that rational insight into social life and history is indispensable for any serious creative effort. In arranging sounds in a certain order, designing plans for a new building or adding color to an empty canvas, one adopts a certain standpoint *vis à vis* the external world, toward history, toward other people. One approves or disapproves of things. One displays urgency or one doesn’t. One is critical or caustic, self-satisfied or demoralized. In that overriding sense, in order to contribute and not merely kill time, every artist needs to be something of a specialist in the way people organize life on this planet.

Producing a drama, a novel or a film without some *advanced* degree of insight into the larger, socially crucial relationships between human beings and the history of those relationships seems a particularly reckless and futile effort.

Is art, however, merely a vaguely disreputable, somewhat more nebulous and slightly out-of-focus younger sibling of science and philosophy, the “negative” image of those other fields’ “positive”? Is art’s realm those difficult-to-get-at places between humanity’s teeth that science and philosophy simply cannot reach? If this were the case, it would be, to a considerable extent, a luxury item. One would have to ask: What is the need for art? To borrow a thought from Trotsky in another context, if art has no independent function, if it is identical with sociological or other processes, then it is unnecessary, useless; it would be actively harmful because it would be a superfluous complication—”and what a complication!” [4]

Rationalism and logic, science and history do not exhaust art. Its objectively indispensable function is to picture human life by adhering intimately to psychological and social experience (including experience with sound, color, the movement of the human body), adhering to the inner and outer contours of that experience, and transforming them into images that catch at essential realities in a concrete, sensuous manner.

Science resolves the material of the world into abstract categories. In science, logical evaluation holds sway; in art, aesthetic evaluation. Art makes use of the concrete and sensuous itself to create its own particular abstractions, images. In everyday life, however, our sentiments are bound up with specific people and events. In artistic imagery, our feelings and thoughts are refined and heightened, not tied to this or that fleeting impression or moment. Art has its own peculiar generalizing powers.

We Marxists emphasize the need for objective knowledge in art. That is one of our responsibilities. If we did not, who would? We insist that art today needs the element of scientific appraisal like never before in the modern era. Intellectual slovenliness, self-indulgence and cheap emotional histrionics pervade the scene. Nonetheless, we are also perfectly well

aware that sincere and spontaneous art only emerges out of the closest contact with the unconscious and the deliberate accessing of what normally remains hidden inside.

There is a realm that lies outside the *immediate* power of science, much less “common sense,” to cognize. Humanity has a vast socio-psychological experience. All of the experiences with love, fear, death, the continual interaction of human beings and nature, the almost infinitely complex relations of human beings to one another, the building up of the “inner life,” the “soul,” and all of these under changing historical conditions. Serious art also crystallizes this vast experience.

A few months ago, a reader of the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in, informing me that the novel was finished. After all, if the theme of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* could be summed up in one sentence, why waste all our time with an 800-page book? This manages to miss everything. The art work creates a space in which truths about human existence are not merely stated, off the top of the head, as rational concepts, but established—proven dramatically, emotionally and intellectually through the most intense reworking and experiencing. In some fashion or other, the reader or viewer or listener undergoes the same painful-pleasurable ordeal as the artist.

At the highest levels of art, the attempt to separate thought from feeling is entirely vain. Here, thinking and feeling are passing back and forth between charged poles so rapidly and meaningfully that a heightened state is attained. One *thinks emotionally* and *feels ideas* in an unsurpassable manner. As Voronsky puts it, one feels as though one is “brushing up against the very depths and sources of being; one senses harmony in the cosmos, and one’s impressions are magnificent and triumphant.” [5]

Our movement has insisted that a crisis currently exists in artistic perspective and production, not just in cinema, but more generally, a spiritual crisis bound up with the traumas and disappointments of the twentieth century and the general social impasse.

We strenuously reject the conclusions of those who have essentially given up, in politics or art, in the face of the present difficulties. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the abandonment of reformism by the social democratic parties, the decay of the traditional labor organizations have driven a considerable number into despair and demoralization.

The long-time editor of the *New Left Review*, Perry Anderson, associated with various Pabloite tendencies, declared a few years ago: “Whatever limitations persist to its practice, neo-liberalism as a set of principles rules undivided across the globe: the most successful ideology in world history.” [6]

Postmodernism adapted itself more or less cheerfully and playfully to this supposed triumph. A deplorable figure like Jean Baudrillard, a former Marxist, of course [*There must be or there certainly ought to be application forms in France, either in government, academia or private business, that contain “Former Marxist” as one of the standard possible choices under “previous work and/or life experience”*], proclaims the “death of the real”—i.e., as Doug Mann notes in “Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction,” Baudrillard “argues that in a postmodern culture dominated by TV, films, news media, and the Internet, the whole idea of a true or a false copy of something has been destroyed: all we have now are *simulations* of reality, which aren’t any more or less ‘real’ than the reality they simulate.”

Baudrillard “describes a postmodernity predicated on death—the end of history, the social, meaning, politics, etc.—whilst offering no recipes or strategies of resistance.” A perverse and paradoxical change has taken place, “signaling the end of the very possibility of change.” [7]

Baudrillard notes that his decision to visit the US stemmed from his desire to seek “the finished form of the future catastrophe.” [8]

Left critics of postmodernism, like the academic Fredric Jameson, operate within the same essential intellectual orbit, perhaps deploring or lamenting what Baudrillard and others celebrate or ironize about, but

accepting, for all intents and purposes, the inevitability of global capitalist rule.

Jameson cites various symptoms of what he calls “the cultural logic of late capitalism”—for example, the thoroughgoing commodification of culture, its subsuming into a degraded mass culture, the loss of depth in art, the “waning of affect” (feeling or emotion), the increasing stagnation and lifelessness of the art object, the dominance of impersonal pastiche, the death of personal and individual style, and so on. Many of these points are valid as a surface description. But what is Jameson’s perspective?

A commentator notes that, in Jameson’s view, “Multinational capitalism creates such a complex web of telecommunications, telemarketing and mobile services that the subject becomes mesmerized within the network of the image.” [9]

The outlook is rather grim. For left-wing organizations, “there cannot but be much that is deplorable and reprehensible in a cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past into visual mirages, stereotypes, or texts, effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm, from visions of ‘terrorism’ on the social level to those of cancer on the personal.” [10]

As a way out, Jameson offers the “political unconscious,” the site of confused, but perhaps utopian desires. He advocates the “‘conspiratorial text,’ which, whatever other messages it emits or implies, may also be taken to constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century, whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality.” [11]

It is “by attempting to represent an unrepresentable society and then failing to represent it, by getting lost and caught up in representing the unrepresentable,” [12] a commentator notes that the conspiratorial text apparently makes progress. Jameson argues that “in representations like these, the operative effect is confusion rather than articulation. It is at the point where we give up and are no longer able to remember which side the characters are on, and how they have been revealed to be hooked up with the other ones, that we have presumably grasped the deeper truth of the world system.” [13]

“Confusion rather than articulation.” Truly, a condition of remarkable disorientation. In politics, of course, Jameson falls back on the alliance of various petty bourgeois protest movements, the “new social movements.” He speculates that it may even be possible to “go around,” to “outflank” the dominant postmodern culture. We have nothing nearly so clever in mind. We propose a direct challenge to the existing order in politics, and in art, a truthful picturing, by whatever formal means the artist chooses, of the world. This means, in the first place, struggling to overcome the present crisis in artistic perspective.

### In defense of the classics

One approach to considering our present dilemma might proceed along the following lines. In his 1925 essay, “On Art,” Aleksandr Voronsky, the great Soviet critic and editor, and Left Oppositionist, illustrated his notions about artistic intuition with a reference to Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, published in 1878. Tolstoy had died only 15 years before the date of Voronsky’s writing, Chekhov had died 21 years prior to Voronsky’s essay, Dostoyevsky, 44 years; the Moscow Art Theatre, with Stanislavski at its helm, still operated; Voronsky was to collaborate with Maxim Gorky, one of the last major figures from pre-revolutionary Russian literature.

The entire history of Russian literature, with the principal exceptions of Pushkin and Lermontov, had unfolded in the 80 years preceding the October Revolution. Gogol, whose *Dead Souls* was published in 1842, was followed by Turgenev, Goncharov, Ostrovsky, Nekrasov, Leskov, Uspensky... Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy. And, of course, the great critics and enlighteners—Belinsky, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov.

What is our situation? It might be claimed that American literature reached its highest point to date 80 years ago. Arguably the greatest work of fiction produced in this country, Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*, appeared precisely eight decades ago, in 1925; another of the most remarkable works, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, was published the same year; Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* the following year. In Dreiser’s work one finds perhaps the most acute and all-sided alignment of the individual and national tragedy.

The past 80 years hardly constitute a wasteland—Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner, Richard Wright, whose *Native Son*, unthinkable without Dreiser, is at least half a great novel, and many others. An obvious flourishing of certain new or renovated forms took place—commercial cinema, jazz, dance and musical theater. But, I would argue, an overall decline in American cultural life began in the late 1930s.

On the one hand, increasing disillusionment with the Soviet Union, which, however, did not lead, for the most part, to the disappointed drawing the most profound or enduring conclusions; and, on the other, the devil’s bargain entered into with Stalinism by the liberal intelligentsia had a profoundly disorienting effect.

Left intellectuals, anticipating an extension following the war of the New Deal, a Popular Front US-style, were utterly unprepared for the change of course initiated by the American ruling class in 1948 with the onset of the Cold War. They were either purged by McCarthyism, deeply damaging cultural life until our own day, or they made a new Faustian bargain—with the most violently reactionary elements in American society becoming converts to the new, national religion of anticommunism.

And this “religion,” even in its most liberal, social reformist incarnation, proved far too weak and ultimately dishonest and self-contradictory a foundation for penetrating artistic examinations of postwar American society. The film, novel and drama associated with the liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s have not, by and large, proven enduring.

I think it is legitimate to point to increasingly diminished returns in the last several decades. In the more recent period: John Updike and Philip Roth, both capable of brilliant passages and remarkable individual insights, but, in the end, minor writers, with limited outlooks. We know the unhappy situation in cinema, with a few exceptions. I do not believe that either drama, poetry, visual art, music or dance has experienced a golden age in recent decades.

The state of cultural life and the general attitude exhibited by contemporary society toward its greatest artistic treasures are not small matters to us. We work under the conditions produced by the decline of capitalism; of course, we understand that the degradation of culture is, in the final analysis, a symptom of this system’s decay, but it also creates difficulties for us.

We feel intensely protective, more protective than anyone, toward the “classics” in art and literature. We encourage their study, we polemicize for their study. Marxism, as Lenin insisted, has assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the thousands of years of human culture.

We rely for the success of the socialist project on a far higher level of knowledge and thinking, within far wider sections of the population, than currently holds sway. What is socialist consciousness? The most penetrating and critical appraisal of reality, grounded in social understanding—all aspects of reality, the lessons of history, the laws of social life, science too—but also insight into psychology, the extraordinary flexibility and adaptability of the human personality, as well as the heavy

weight of the past “on the brain of the living,” our capacities for nobility, cowardice, self-sacrifice, bravery, self-delusion.

Who would be foolish enough to embark on an undertaking like ours, which demands so much of consciousness (and also the unconscious), unaccompanied by Shakespeare, Goethe, Mozart, Dostoyevsky, Van Gogh, Dreiser, Chaplin and countless others? Is some of this work demanding? Yes, and a good thing too. Trotsky once noted, “That which can be grasped without any difficulties is generally useless, regardless of the subject.” [14]

We are unashamed “classicists.” Does that imply a hostility to modernity or experimentation and innovation in art? Absolutely not. It simply means that nothing extraordinary is possible, including meaningful innovation, except on the basis of the working through and mastery of what is best in historic culture. This has its political correlative: it will always be found that the greatest creativity in politics, such as the development of the *World Socialist Web Site*, is predicated on the firmest political principle.

In any event, a little historical perspective is needed. Have we been inundated in recent decades with important Realist (or any other kind of important) novels, with epic works of theater, with an excessive reverence for classical form in any field—or have we, on the contrary, suffered in many artistic spheres from the flourishing of a rather cold and empty technical virtuosity, quite cut off from large human concerns?

Again, we make no bones about encouraging the reading of Hawthorne, Dickinson, Poe, Melville, Twain, Howells, Wharton, James, Mencken, London, Norris, Dreiser, Fitzgerald and the rest.

How would the presence of a Twain or a Mencken alone alter the present climate in America, where merely watching a film or an evening’s worth of television is often a painful, if not degrading experience? The poverty of much of official American culture is almost inconceivable: drab, banal, unimaginative, mind-numbing, devoted to money-grubbing, when not actually practicing deceit on a gigantic scale. A culture designed to make people stupid and unfeeling and uncurious. We can see the results in some of the letters we receive. “Abu Ghraib—who cares?” Or even the emails from certain sympathizers, like the one who boasted that he liked to leave his brain at the cinema door.

And politics in the United States—what a field day for the satirist! In both parties, a surplus of pious hypocrites and well-heeled sociopaths, the thought of whose conduct behind closed doors makes one shudder! American political life generates more than its share of unintentionally comical moments: for example, a Tom DeLay, Republican House leader, former pesticide salesman, corporate shill, reactionary ignoramus, lecturing the American people on the “culture of life” during the Schiavo case.

The nineteenth century Russian critic Pisarev once lamented, speaking of Russian society, how “poor and stupid” we are! And Trotsky explained that only after the working class took power in 1917 did it understand how poor and backward “we still are.” [15]

We have no reason either to conceal our difficulties. Our poverty and backwardness lie in a technological abundance combined with a terrible cultural and intellectual deficiency. That is not our fault, or the population’s. Decaying capitalism, which has no progressive solutions to any problem, is responsible. And the working class, as it begins to mature politically, will tackle this problem too. But we must say what is.

So we encourage the “classics,” along with genuine originality and experimentation, against cynical postmodernism and its apologetics for what exists, as well as various forms of pseudo-populist “left” art, and, in general, all concessions to artistic amateurism and backwardness.

But this is not a new theme in the history of our movement.

The political and cultural education of the working class was inevitably a critical concern of the socialist movement from its first days. Before the principles of scientific socialism had even been laid down, Engels wrote

of England in 1845 that “the epoch-making products of modern philosophical, political, and poetical literature are read by working-men almost exclusively.... In this respect the Socialists, especially, have done wonders for the education of the proletariat.... Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today.” [16]

The German Social Democratic Party, the first mass socialist party of the working class, laid great stress on the cultural uplift of the population. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to account for its activities in any detail, but certain facts should be noted. First and foremost, the SPD leadership, or that element that concerned itself with cultural problems, did everything in its power to urge the study and appreciation of the classics of world and German literature.

Historian Vernon Lidtke notes somewhat disapprovingly, for example, that the People’s Free Theater movement “must be viewed as an archetypical example of those socialist-dominated organizations, that were designed to transmit to workers what Social Democratic leaders considered to be the best of established European and German culture.” [17]

Lidtke writes that “Social Democratic cultural commentators looked on their own socialist literature as artistically inferior, and accepted it primarily and often exclusively because of the message it carried.” [18] Tens of thousands attended musical and literary evenings, organized by the party, listening to the music of Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Liszt, Wagner and Handel and the works of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Tolstoy, Ibsen and others.

The attitudes of Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg were unequivocal. Along with Plekhanov, Mehring was a pioneer in the application of historical materialism to cultural and literary problems.

Luxemburg summed up her feelings for Mehring’s contribution and her own approach to the problem in a letter on her colleague’s seventieth birthday in 1916.

Addressing Mehring, she wrote: “For decades now you have occupied a special post in our movement, and no one else could have filled it. You are the representative of real culture in all its brilliance. If the German proletariat is the historic heir of classic German philosophy, as Marx and Engels declared, then you are the executor of that testament. You have saved everything of value which still remained of the once splendid culture of the bourgeoisie and brought it to us, into the camp of the socially disinherited. Thanks to your books and articles the German proletariat has been brought into close touch not only with classic German philosophy, but also with classic German literature, not only with Kant and Hegel, but with Lessing, Schiller and Goethe. Every line from your brilliant pen has taught our workers that socialism is not a bread and butter problem, but a cultural movement, a great and proud world-ideology. When the spirit of socialism once again enters the ranks of the German proletariat [the letter was written during World War I, following the colossal betrayal of the SPD leadership] the latter’s first act will be to reach for your books, to enjoy the fruits of your life’s work.... Today, when intellectuals of bourgeois origin are betraying us in droves to return to the fleshpots of the ruling classes, we can laugh contemptuously and let them go: we have won the best and last the bourgeoisie still possessed of spirit, talent and character—Franz Mehring.” [19]

Luxemburg had set out her views on the proletariat and culture in 1903. Again, they leave little room for misunderstanding. She explained, and this argument was reiterated by Trotsky two decades later in *Literature and Revolution* against the advocates of so-called “proletarian culture,” that in the history of previous class struggles, aspiring classes had been able to anticipate their political rule by establishing intellectual dominance, setting up a new science and a new art against the obsolete

culture of the old ruling authority during its decadence.

She explained: "The proletariat is in a very different position. As a non-possessing class, it cannot in the course of its struggle upwards spontaneously create a mental culture of its own while it remains in the framework of bourgeois society. Within that society, and so long as its economic foundations persist, there can be no other culture than a bourgeois culture..."

"The utmost it can do today is to safeguard bourgeois culture from the vandalism of the bourgeois reaction, and create the social conditions requisite for a free cultural development. Even along these lines, the workers, within the extant form of society, can only advance insofar as they can create for themselves the intellectual weapons needed in their struggle for liberation." [20]

## The origins of the Proletarian Culture movement

The particular conditions in backward Russia produced a somewhat different dynamic. To a certain extent, many of the cultural questions that arose in the German socialist movement before 1914 did not become contentious issues in Russia until after the taking of power by the working class under Bolshevik leadership in October 1917.

The debate over "proletarian culture" in the USSR and its consequences are quite critical for our work today. I will attempt to suggest certain of the most crucial themes of that debate.

As I noted, Trotsky and Voronsky, following an initial intervention by Lenin, upheld and deepened the Marxist viewpoint on art and culture. The reconstruction of the country following seven years of war and civil war was an immense project, particularly for the first workers' state, established in backward Russia, surrounded by enemies and cut off from the cultural and technological benefits in more economically advanced Western Europe. Raising the cultural level of the masses impressed itself on the Bolshevik leaders as the question of questions.

Opposition to classical Marxist conceptions came from various quarters, including, as Frederick Choate notes in his foreword to the volume of Voronsky's writings, "from unexpected places: not from open enemies of the revolution, but from poorly educated supporters of the Soviet regime in general, and from representatives of the 'Proletarian Culture' movement in particular." [21]

The central figure in the Proletarian Culture movement, or Proletcult, for short, was Aleksandr Bogdanov. He deserves a certain amount of attention for his role in the history of Soviet cultural life, as well as his significance as a "forefather" of many ideological trends in opposition to Marxism throughout the twentieth century—trends that, in some cases, are still with us today. Those with a history in the Marxist movement will know him as a principal target of Lenin's extraordinary work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908).

Bogdanov was undoubtedly a remarkable personality. Trained as a doctor, with a great interest in physiology, technology and natural science, the eventual author of two utopian science fiction novels, Bogdanov, who was arrested and exiled three times, joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1899, the same year he received his medical degree.

He worked closely with Lenin following the Bolshevik-Menshevik split and through the 1905 Revolution. However, the defeat of the revolution and the retreat of the working class led Bogdanov to draw certain quite false philosophical and political conclusions.

Infatuated by the latest discoveries in physics and the natural sciences, particularly in regard to atomic structure, and subscribing to the false conclusions drawn from these discoveries by certain of the scientists themselves (Ernst Mach, for example), Bogdanov rejected dialectical

materialism in favor of "positivist" notions advanced as the latest word in philosophy.

Bogdanov, following certain of these scientists, rejected materialism and argued that things or bodies were "complexes of sensations," and that "we sense only our sensations," as one leading scientist put it. [22] In other words, we know only color, taste, odor, hardness, coldness, etc., but not the things-in-themselves. The materialists, he claimed, were "metaphysicians" for insisting that the world existed entirely independently of our consciousness of it.

Lenin's strenuous defense of dialectical materialism against Bogdanov dealt a tremendous blow to the latter's political and philosophical credibility, particularly to his pretensions as the representative in the Marxist movement of the "new science." He left active political life in 1911 and, unlike Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky, other leading members of his group, never rejoined the Bolshevik Party, devoting himself instead to "organizational science" and "proletarian culture."

Bogdanov also drew some very mistaken and disorienting political conclusions from the defeat of the 1905 Revolution. While Lenin and Trotsky were straining to abstract from the experience every critical lesson as part of the preparation for the next social upheaval, Bogdanov was wondering out loud if the defeat did not arise from some defect in the working class.

It seemed to him that the revolution's failure stemmed from organic weaknesses in the working class itself, its ideological immaturity and lack of cultural independence from the bourgeoisie. This, of course, has been a common response to setbacks, almost a gut reaction, of "leftist" intellectuals of a certain stripe. We continue to see this, on a grand scale, in our own day. Bogdanov was one of the founders of this misbegotten tendency, although, it must be said, made of far higher and better material than his counterparts today.

Since the political struggle had proven inadequate, he concluded, "it was necessary to develop and systematize elements of the incipient culture—what he called 'elements of socialism in the present.' [23]... [The struggle for socialism] involved 'the creation of new elements of socialism in the proletariat itself, in the internal relations, and in its conditions of life: the development of a socialist proletarian culture.'" [24]

Perhaps summing up his position, one historian writes, "What counted, in particular, was the conscious cultivation of the embryonic elements of socialism prior to the seizure of revolution. In Bogdanov's words, '*Socialist development will be crowned with socialist revolution.*'" [25]

This is not our conception at all. We fight for the maximum political and cultural development of our own forces and the widest possible section of the working class. That is why we are here. That is what we do every day. We cede to no one the responsibility for constructing an international socialist culture. We fight for a party with the largest possible membership, periphery and influence.

We understand, however, that the political process is objectively driven. We are here, notwithstanding all the individual paths by which we arrived at this location, for definite historical and social reasons. Socialism comes into existence as a movement, as an ideology, because of the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism and the reflection of those contradictions in the minds of the greatest thinkers.

There is not an ounce of fatalism in our approach, but we recognize that capitalism and its crisis do the lion's share of the work. The task of humanity, as Lenin explained, is to comprehend the objective logic of economic evolution so that we are able to adapt our consciousness to this reality "in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible." [26]

This is very far removed from Bogdanov's desperate project of socially, culturally and morally renovating the working class. In the end, such intellectuals, and we have our own share of neo-utopians, semi-idealists and muddleheads today, weigh up the working class and always find it lacking.

Such views were common in the New Left and associated cultural circles in the US (and elsewhere) in the 1960s and 1970s. This notion, that the working class is inevitably unprepared for or even unworthy of its revolutionary role, is profoundly reactionary and antithetical to the historical materialist approach. We work toward the cultural and moral improvement of the population; no doubt, a significant change in mood is indispensable for socialism to take deep root. But one must have a sense of historical proportion. There are definite limits, produced by the objective facts of life under capitalism, to that process.

The working class, because of its exploited and oppressed condition, because it is propertyless and culturally deprived, does not come forward politically as one. There are more advanced layers; our party finds support within those layers. Other layers will be sympathetic, but not active. Still others will remain more or less neutral. Others, in the minority, the most backward, will be actively hostile.

The development of the economic and political catastrophe of capitalism will propel masses of people into struggle. Everything then depends on the existence of Marxist cadres who can politically educate and prepare the most advanced sections of the working population for the struggle for power. We insist that an objective impulse to social revolution exists and we base our activity on that.

To Marx, in the *German Ideology*, “communist consciousness” was a *product* of the social revolution, not its *prerequisite*: “Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can take place only in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fit to found society anew.” [27]

In 1932 Trotsky explained to a French writer: “Those who speak of proletarian literature, counterposing it to bourgeois literature, evidently have in mind not several works but a totality of artistic creation that, to their way of thinking, constitutes an element of a new, ‘proletarian’ culture.... If capitalism offered such possibilities to the proletariat, it would no longer be capitalism. There would no longer be any reason to overthrow it.

“To portray a new, proletarian culture within the confines of capitalism is to be a reformist utopian, to believe that capitalism offers an unlimited perspective of improvement.

“The task of the proletariat is not to create a new culture within capitalism, but rather to overthrow capitalism for a new culture.” [28]

So we have the historical materialist view, with its emphasis on the objective impulse to revolution, vs. the subjectivist view, which begins with consciousness, the moral condition of the working class. What the adherents of the latter are really talking about is sorting out family relations and the sex lives of the population—in other words, everyone must be liberated from all neuroses and repression before a revolution is possible.

A blow-by-blow account of the rise and fall of the Proletcult movement, founded on the eve of the October Revolution, would be inappropriate. In any event, the organization *as an organization* is not of the most exceptional importance.

Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks were prepared, in the early days of the revolution, to give Bogdanov and his co-thinkers the benefit of the doubt. The old political-philosophical differences had lost some of their immediacy. In any event, the regime was strapped, engaged in fighting a bloody civil war. Here was an organization ostensibly dedicated, and no doubt sincerely, in its own fashion, to the education of the working class.

The Proletcult movement was, in the first place, supported and promoted by the Bolsheviks. The organization opened workshops, studios, theaters,

classes. It was granted semi-official status as an organization for the education of the working class. If it dedicated itself to literacy, to adult education, to matters as elementary as proper hygiene, to teaching the classics, to encouraging workers’ self-expression and self-confidence...

Alas, this was not good enough for Bogdanov and his co-thinkers—they had something far grander in mind. Wishing away the extremely backward conditions in the new workers’ state, or ignoring them, a Proletcult resolution declared: “We are immediate socialists. We affirm that the proletariat must now, immediately, create for itself socialist forms of thought, feeling and daily life, independent of the relations and combinations of political forces.” [29]

All manner of harebrained schemes came out of the Bogdanov-inspired movement—proletarian culture, proletarian morals, the proletarian university, proletarian science.

Equally pernicious as the dreaming up of these idle schemes was the hostility of many members toward past culture and art. In the most famous poem associated with the Proletcult, *We*, Vladimir Kirillov wrote, “In the name of our tomorrow we will burn the Raphaels, destroy the museums, and trample on the flowers of art.” [30]

Proletcult, as far as one can tell, carried out a good deal of useful elementary work. The organization established studios open to workers and young people; many, hungry for culture, flocked through its doors. Numerous distinguished artists, musicians and theater directors taught classes at the Proletcult. By 1920 it claimed 400,000 members, although there are suggestions that those figures are somewhat inflated.

Lenin was hostile to Bogdanov’s schematics. He chided the Proletcultists for “dilating at too great length and too flippantly on ‘proletarian culture’... For a start, we should be satisfied with real bourgeois culture; for a start, we should be glad to dispense with the cruder types of pre-bourgeois culture, i.e., bureaucratic culture or serf culture, etc.” [31]

He kept a watchful eye on Proletcult’s antics and once the civil war ended and a period of economic reconstruction commenced, Lenin urged that Proletcult be subordinated to the government’s education department. Why was a special organization, subsidized by the government, and, what’s more, burdened with a variety of farfetched notions, required? Moreover, the political situation, worsened by great economic hardship, remained extremely tense. The possibility of a “Bogdanovite” party, rooted in political confusion and an adaptation to Russia’s backwardness, arising to challenge the Bolsheviks was not inconceivable.

Lenin accordingly drew up his famous draft resolution, *On Proletarian Culture*, which argued that “Marxism has ... assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture.” [32]

The Proletcult’s subordination to the government education department irrevocably altered the movement’s place in Soviet cultural life. Its claim to be the “third path” (along with the party and the trade unions) to proletarian power now lost all credibility. Bogdanov withdrew in 1921 and the organization declined, until it was officially put to death by the Stalinist decree that ended all independent artistic groupings in 1932.

However, that did not put an end to “the strange career” of proletarian culture. Indeed, the most vituperative and reactionary uses of the phrase, in political abuse of Trotsky, Voronsky and the genuine upholders of socialist-artistic tradition, were yet to come. Followers of Bogdanov remained active in a number of cultural and literary organizations, such as VAPP (the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and MAPP (the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers), and around publications such as *October* and *On Guard*.

A “proletarian writers” resolution from 1925 provides some flavor of the level of argument. It began: “Artistic literature is a powerful weapon of the class struggle ... the rule of the proletariat is incompatible with the rule of non-proletarian ideology, and consequently with non-proletarian

literature.... Artistic literature in class society not only cannot be neutral, it actively serves one or another class.” [33]

“Trotskyism,” it declared, “in the field of art signifies the peaceful collaboration of classes in which the role of hegemon is maintained completely for the representatives of the old bourgeois culture.” [34]

Who were these demagogues? Voronsky called them “‘brave little schoolboys’ with penknives” who “don’t know what they’re doing.” He argued that their false point of view “reflects the moods of wider circles within our party, and the party youth in particular.” [35] These younger, inexperienced elements were used by the rising bureaucracy to corrode the atmosphere, introducing anti-intellectualism and eventually anti-internationalism.

One historian points out that the new generation of guardians of the proletariat in art came generally from the petty intelligentsia in the provinces and had far narrower intellectual origins than the revolutionary generation. She writes that “when this new generation made its entry into Soviet culture, their militant parochialism went against the general tenor of intellectual life. The consequences of their triumph are with us still.” [36]

As I suggested, the strange career of proletarian culture took an unexpected turn in the mid-1920s, becoming something quite different from the idea Bogdanov had in mind. The theory, latched on to by the rising bureaucracy and its “militantly parochial” hangers-on, became an adaptation to the prevailing unfavorable conditions and a complement to the Stalinist conception of socialism in a single country.

In May 1925, Bukharin explicitly declared that Trotsky, in his rejection of the very notion of proletarian culture, had made a “theoretical mistake,” exaggerating the “rate of development of communist society, or, expressed differently ... in the speed of the withering away of the proletarian dictatorship.” [37]

### **Trotsky and Voronsky oppose the vulgarizers**

The arguments of Trotsky and Voronsky against proletarian culture focused on a number of critical issues: 1) the ‘cultural question’ in the proletariat as opposed to the bourgeois revolution; 2) the nature of the relationship between a class and *its* culture; 3) a Marxist approach to artistic and creative work.

Like Luxemburg and Trotsky, Voronsky explained that the working class came to power in a far different manner than the bourgeoisie did in its day. The bourgeoisie matured economically and culturally, as an exploiting class, to a considerable extent within the framework of feudal society. However, “By its very position inside bourgeois society, the proletariat remains economically and culturally deprived... Therefore, when it overthrows the bourgeoisie and takes power into its own hands, one of the sharpest and most acute problems is the problem of assimilating the entire enormous sum of cultural achievements of past epochs... In illiterate, hungry, plundered, destitute and wooden Russia, with its remnants of Asiaticism and serfdom, we are ominously reminded of this literally at every step.” [38]

Consider our situation. We have this school. It is an immense and indispensable achievement. We do not underestimate its significance for an instant. This, if you like, is a ‘proletarian school’ or a ‘socialist school.’ If ‘proletarian culture’ exists within capitalism, this is it! Its qualitative political and intellectual level is extraordinary.

But consider the resources the bourgeoisie had at its disposal before it assumed political power from the *ancien régime*: universities, newspapers and journals, cultural academies, institutions of all varieties, all financed and supported by an already prosperous and influential class.

Trotsky sums up this problem graphically, pointing out “that the German bourgeoisie, with its incomparable technology, philosophy, science and art, allowed the power of the state to lie in the hands of a feudal bureaucratic class as late as 1918 and decided, or, more correctly, was forced to take power into its own hands only when the material foundations of German culture began to fall to pieces.” [39]

In other words, many of the world-historical conquests of German ‘bourgeois’ culture, in philosophy, in art, in science, were accomplished under “feudal bureaucratic” political rule: Hegel, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, Kleist, Büchner, Wagner, Fontane, Hauptmann, even the early novels of Thomas Mann, the quintessential chronicler of the German bourgeoisie, all under “feudal bureaucratic” rule. And what about “bourgeois science”? Einstein was appointed director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Physical Institute in 1914, still under the rule of the feudal-bureaucratic class. Only with the collapse of the Empire and the flight of the Kaiser in November 1918 did the bourgeoisie formally take the political reins, reluctantly as Trotsky notes, by which time ‘bourgeois culture’ was, in fact, already in the throes of deep crisis!

But, argued the ‘proletarian’ critics, why could not the working class create an art and culture within a far shorter span of time? Fundamental questions of perspectives were involved.

Those who began from the Marxist-internationalist perspective conceived of the problem of culture-building in the USSR as entirely dominated by the approaching European and world revolution. Trotsky famously described the Bolsheviks as “merely soldiers in a campaign... bivouacking for a day... Our entire present-day economic and cultural work is nothing more than a bringing of ourselves into order between two battles and two campaigns... Our epoch is not yet an epoch of new culture, but only the entrance to it.” [40]

There is no such thing and can be no such thing as a proletarian culture, for the simple reason that the working class comes to power for the express purpose of doing away with class culture and creating the basis for a human, classless culture. Unlike the bourgeoisie before it, the working class does not come to power in order to initiate its own proletarian epoch, to perpetuate its rule. The proletarian regime is unique in that its successful functioning involves its own dissolution.

Bukharin and the Proletcultists had something quite different in mind, an extended historical period, an independent period of ‘proletarian rule,’ with its own culture, morals and science, supposedly. In fact, what they had in mind, semi-consciously or not by this time, was an indefinite period of rule by the national-opportunist bureaucracy.

The task of the proletarian intelligentsia in general, both Trotsky and Voronsky argued, was not the abstract and artificial formation of some new culture existing in mid-air, but the urgent, definite task of “culture-bearing,” the planned and arduous job of “imparting to the backward masses... the essential elements of the culture which already exists.” [41]

A new culture, a genuinely socialist culture, could not be created by small numbers of people in a laboratory, both Trotsky and Voronsky insisted. The relationship between a class and its culture was immensely complex, not solved by a few phrases, much less ultimatums and shouting at the top of one’s voice.

What we have in the Soviet Union at present, Voronsky pointed out persuasively, is an art organically and inevitably bound up with the old, an art that people attempt to adapt to new needs, the needs of the transitional period. “Ideological slant doesn’t change the situation at all, and doesn’t justify the counterposition of this art to the art of the past, as an original cultural value and force... For what we actually have for the time being is the culture, science and art of previous epochs. The man of the future social structure will create his own science, his own art and his own culture on the foundations of a new material base.” [42] This was profound and sobering. But it was bound *not* to satisfy impatient and vulgar thinkers.

Voronsky and Trotsky vigorously opposed the superficial, thoughtless and subjectivist approach to artistic work of the *On Guard* group, VAPP and others. Voronsky is tremendously eloquent on this question. He tirelessly argues for sincerity, honesty, psychological insight, a feeling for “the powerful instincts and forces of life” [43], above superficial political agreement. He insisted, above all, on the great objective, irreplaceable value of art as a means of seeing, feeling, knowing the world.

In 1932, living in Leningrad, the anti-Stalinist writer Victor Serge (in a piece included in a valuable collection of his articles on literature and politics that was recently published) noted, “The mechanisms of artistic creativity are far from being completely understood by us. In any case, it is certain that for many artists a complete attempt to subordinate creative activity, where a number of unconscious and subconscious factors come into play, to a rigorously conscious direction, would result in an awkward impoverishment of his work and personality. Would the book gain in clarity of ideas what it had lost in spontaneity, human complexity, deep sincerity, and rich contradictions? In some cases, perhaps. But the charm and effect of a work of literature come precisely from the intimate contact between reader and author, at levels where the purely intellectual language of ideas is no longer enough, a sort of sharing that cannot be attained other than by a work of art; by weakening the ways this sharing takes place, we weaken everything; I do not see what can be gained by this, although I understand all too well that the politician prefers above all others novels that are based on the articles of his programme.” [44]

The Proletcultists, inspired by Bogdanov, operated in fixed categories. There were three basic class groupings in the USSR—proletariat, layers of the petty-bourgeoisie, and the remnants of the shattered bourgeoisie and nobility; hence there must correspond three basic categories of literature: proletarian, petty-bourgeois and bourgeois-landowning. And they attempted to make sense of things with such naked, abstract and simplified schemas.

Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and the rest were poets and writers from the gentry, acknowledged Voronsky, but did that mean that their work lacked all *objective* value, all truth-telling?

The honest artist, by the very nature of his or her pursuit, can paint a picture of the world that contradicts his or her conscious notions and even class interests. Of course, there are limits to this. Class position and self-interest can corrupt and destroy an artist’s work; a generally unfavorable intellectual climate may not provide him or her with the necessary depth of feeling and understanding, even on the unconscious level, to propel such a struggle for the ‘facts of life.’

Voronsky placed great emphasis on intuition in the process of ‘removing the veils’ created by everyday life and habits and truly seeing the world. But intuition, the artist being able to identify the precise detail or image that will capture the truth without fully realizing why he or she is able to do it, is not a mystical process. Voronsky explains that “intuition is nothing but the truths, discovered at some time by previous generations, with the help of rational experience, which have passed into the sphere of the subconscious.” [45]

The Proletcultists argued that the artist “used reality,” transmitted ideology, organized “the psyche and consciousness of the reader in the direction of the finite tasks of the proletariat,” etc. [46] The question left unanswered by those who spoke about organizing the psyche or the consciousness or the emotions was: but does it do so “in correspondence with living reality”? Voronsky asked the proletcultists point-blank: “Do our subjective sensations have objective significance?” [47] We return here to the philosophical questions that Lenin took up against Bogdanov 15 years earlier.

Materialists, Voronsky insisted, understand that “we cognize an objective world that is independent of us. Our images [including artistic images] of the world are not exact copies, but neither are they vague hieroglyphs of the world: moreover, they are not merely subjective in

character. Practice determines what it is in our images that has only personal significance and what is a genuine, accurate representation that provides the truth.” [48]

The artist who ‘surrenders’ to the world and its infinite richness, Voronsky passionately argued, who reduces the socially distorting tendencies in his or her work to the greatest possible extent, finds the world as it truly is, “in its most lively and beautiful forms.” [49]

Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, we have consistently posed the question: Was there an alternative to Stalinism?—and answered in the affirmative. Was there an alternative to “proletarian culture” in art? Yes, above all represented by the efforts of Voronsky and his associates, provided political and ideological assistance by Trotsky, to develop a new Soviet literature in the 1920s.

Voronsky’s principal work was editing the journal, *Red Virgin Soil*, which published much of the most remarkable fiction and poetry in the USSR from 1921 to 1927, when he was removed from the editorship by Stalin’s Politburo.

His name is invariably associated with the work of the so-called “fellow travelers,” a term coined by Trotsky to describe a disparate group of literary figures who generally sympathized with the revolution, or accepted it, but maintained their distance from the Bolsheviks and Marxism.

Voronsky’s attitude, and the attitude of Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky and others, combined ideological firmness with great patience and flexibility. After all, Voronsky’s concern was not with scoring immediate political points, like his vulgarizing opponents, but with the emergence of a critical-minded and elevated culture that would make a difference in the lives of millions. He encouraged those writers who honestly and artistically shed light on Soviet reality, warts and all.

Voronsky resolutely stood his ground against ferocious and increasingly vile criticism, admitting the fellow travelers’ “ideological jumble and confusion” [50] but insisting, “artistically they are honest; their works give pieces of real life, and not saccharine legends... These fellow-travelers were the first to aim their blows at wooden agitation pieces... They approached the *Russian* revolution, and not revolution in general, outside of time and space.” [51]

We have much to learn from this work. Of course, we have very few “fellow travelers” in the literal sense at the moment, i.e., artists who sympathize with our program of socialist revolution. But there are certainly many “fellow critics” of capitalist society, some of whom will become “fellow travelers,” or perhaps more, as the political situation matures. And there are plenty of semi-critics, one-quarter critics, as well as quasi-critics and pseudo-critics.

Adopting the proper approach and tone, that balance of criticism, ideological sharpness, friendly advice, encouragement, “shots across the bow” and so forth, is no small matter. It takes a considerable amount of political and artistic experience. Mistakes are sometimes made. But Voronsky’s (and Trotsky’s) work along these lines is invaluable.

In conclusion, I simply want to bring your attention to the work of Voronsky as the *de facto* leader and certainly ideological guide of the *Pereval* [*Mountain Pass*] group, composed of younger writers. Here, perhaps, Voronsky found the most receptive audience of artists, talented and sensitive young people, committed to the revolution and hostile to the banalities and empty-headed rhetoric of the proletcultists and budding Stalinists.

As one of the Perevalist writers, Abram Lezhnev, wrote, “For us, socialism is not an enormous workers’ dormitory, as it is for the maniacs of productionism and advocates of factography... For us, it is the great epoch of freeing man from all the chains which bind him, when all the capabilities in his nature are revealed with full force.” [52]

The 1927 platform of the group, on the eve of the catastrophe for Soviet art, is another tragic reminder of what was lost to Stalinism. Historian



Robert Maguire sums up the *Pereval* platform: “There was strong disapproval of the notion that any one literary group, however distinguished, should enjoy ‘hegemony’; support for the principle of ‘free creative competition’ in all the arts; a definition of literature’s task as ‘the continual recording of the human personality in its inexhaustible variety’; a protest against ‘any attempts to schematize man, vulgar oversimplification of any kind, deadening standardization, any belittling of the writer’s personality...’; an insistence that literature must link itself to the classical heritage, not only of Russia but of the world; a concept of the work of art as a unique organic individuality ‘where elements of thought and feeling are recast esthetically’; an emphasis on high standards of literary craftsmanship; and a suggestion of the ‘sincerity’ doctrine in the insistence on the ‘revolutionary conscience of each artist’ which ‘does not permit him to conceal his inner world.’” [53]

We would be happy, I think, to accept these principles as a general guide to our own work today.

#### Notes:

- [1] *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York and London, 2004), p. 18.
- [2] *The Revolution Betrayed* (Detroit, 1991), pp. 155-156.
- [3] [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/06/korolenko.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/06/korolenko.htm)
- [4] *Trotsky’s Notebooks: 1933-1935* (New York, 1986), p. 104.
- [5] “The Art of Seeing the World” in *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings: 1911-1936* (Oak Park, Michigan, 1998), p. 367.
- [6] *New Left Review*, January-February 2000.
- [7] Neville Wakefield, *Postmodernism: the Twilight of the Real* (London and Winchester, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 140.
- [8] [www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/america.html](http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/america.html)
- [9] [www.mun.ca/phil/codgito/vol4/v4doc2.html](http://www.mun.ca/phil/codgito/vol4/v4doc2.html)
- [10] *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina, 1992), p. 46.
- [11] *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana, 1995), p. 3.
- [12] [www.mun.ca/phil/codgito/vol4/v4doc2.html](http://www.mun.ca/phil/codgito/vol4/v4doc2.html)
- [13] *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 16.
- [14] “Leninism and Workers’ Clubs” in *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York and London, 2004), p. 365.
- [15] “A Few Words on How to Raise a Human Being” in *Problems of Everyday Life*, p. 172.
- [16] *The Condition of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex and New York, 1987), p. 245.
- [17] *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York and Oxford, 1985), p. 148.
- [18] *Ibid*, p. 138.
- [19] [www.marxists.org/archive/mehring/1918/marx/tranpref.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/mehring/1918/marx/tranpref.htm)
- [20] [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1903/misc/stagnation.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1903/misc/stagnation.htm)
- [21] Foreword, *Art as the Cognition of Life* (Oak Park, Michigan, 1998), p. x.
- [22] V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (New York, 1972), p. 36.
- [23] Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca and London, 1988), p. 31.
- [24] *Ibid*, p. 39.
- [25] *Ibid*, pp. 40-41.
- [26] *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 337.
- [27] *German Ideology* excerpted in Marx and Engels on *The Socialist Revolution* (Moscow, 1978), p. 44.
- [28] Maurice Parijanine, “‘Proletarian Literature,’” appendix to *Writings of Leon Trotsky: 1932* (New York, 1973), p. 352.
- [29] *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*, p. 148.
- [30] Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990), p. 131.
- [31] *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*, p. 172.
- [32] “On Proletarian Culture” in Lenin *On Culture and Cultural Revolution* (Moscow, 1978), p. 147.
- [33] *Art as the Cognition of Life*, Appendix 1, p. 436.
- [34] *Ibid*, p. 439.
- [35] “Art as the Cognition of Life” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 136.
- [36] Katerina Clark, “The ‘Quiet Revolution’ in Soviet Intellectual Life,” in *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana, 1991), p. 226.
- [37] *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*, p. 169.
- [38] “On Proletarian Art and the Artistic Policy of Our Party” in *Art as the Cognition of Life* (Oak Park, Michigan, 1998), p. 148.
- [39] *Literature and Revolution* (London, 1991), p. 217.
- [40] *Ibid*, pp. 219-220.
- [41] *Ibid*, p. 222.
- [42] “On Proletarian Art and the Artistic Policy of Our Party” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, pp. 160-161.
- [43] “In Memory of Esenin” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 244.
- [44] “Literature and Revolution” in *Collected Writings on Literature and Revolution* (London, 2004), p. 88.
- [45] “On Art” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 208.
- [46] “Art as the Cognition of Life” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 96.
- [47] “On Artistic Truth” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 324.
- [48] *Ibid*, p. 324.
- [49] “The Art of Seeing the World” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 375.
- [50] “On Proletarian Art and the Artistic Policy of Our Party” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 167.
- [51] “Art as the Cognition of Life” in *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. 125.
- [52] Foreword, *Art as the Cognition of Life*, p. xix.
- [53] *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Ithaca and London, 1987), p. 401.



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