



COLLECTIVE OCTOBER 1920
Master thesis

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of information explosion, people intend to explore the unknown places which do not exist in our daily routine, so they travel. But how about time travel? Isn't it fascinating going back and discovering the past? It is possible if we treat re-enactment as a way of traveling to the past. Re-enactment is not solely about nostalgia, but about experiencing the past with a different perspective. In October 1920, Petrograd in Soviet Russia, under the command of the Bolsheviks government, Russian citizens re-enacted the October Revolution for its third-year anniversary. It was named *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, because on the late night of 25th October 1917, the Bolsheviks led the workers to sneak attack the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government was located. Since there were over 100,000 participants involved, it was also called the mass spectacle. How and why did numerous people participate? Why three years after such brutal battle, that people were still willing to experience it all over again? In different direction of re-enactment, film director Sergei Eisenstein¹ was also involved into a film production about the October Revolution in 1927. Why was this revolutionary topic so inspiring for the artist at that time? After the Russian Revolution in 1917, there was already a Proletarian theatre movement going on. Theatre was open to everyone and it became a part of every Russian's daily life. When the two ideas—the re-enactment and the masses' theatre—met each other, the story became even more complicated. *The Storming of the Winter Palace* became a forgotten story for people today, although there was a documentary on the performance. But why? It is especially because from 1917 to 1924, the Russian Empire was under a rapid political transition from Absolutism to Capitalism, then to Communism². Therefore, the performance, as a part of the Communist memory, was incompatible with the socio-historical scenario of

today's Russia. Nevertheless, with so much confusion, I intend to disclose the backstage of this mass performance. By collecting the information little by little, the complexity behind the theatre play led me to discover in detail how theatre became the most influential activity in the Soviet society.

¹ Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (January 22, 1898 —February 11, 1948) was a Russian film director, who developed the practice of montage in filmmaking.

² The same year as the October Revolution, the February Revolution in 1917, which cause the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. Before that Russia was under Absolute monarchy, which is known as Tsarist autocracy. In between of the Absolutism to the Communism, the political status of the Provisional Government was pro-capitalism.

I

COLLECTIVE
OCTOBER 1920

Part 1: Before the day to come

³ James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals 1917–1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 200.

⁴ Nowadays Saint Petersburg. In 1914 the name of the city was changed from Saint Petersburg to Petrograd, then in 1924 to Leningrad, and in 1991 it changed back to Saint Petersburg.

⁵ Because of the lack of information, from Part 2 to Part 4, I collected and reformed the whole story by my understanding from books and articles, which were written by the director himself, some Russian theatre scholar who mentioned shortly in their works, or even a journalist who did participate the re-enactment etc.

⁶ The old Calendar, which is used by some Orthodox Churches, also the major catholic church in Russia. Therefore October 25th in Old Calendar is November 7th in New Calendar.

⁷ Yury Pavlovich Annenkov (July 23, 1889 — July 12, 1974), was a Russian artist originally known for his book illustrations and portraits, but he also involved in many theatre play for stage design later on.

“Three years ago, comrades—do you remember?
The Winter Palace fell—capitalism’s Bastille.
And now Soviet Russia has become the center
Of the whole Laboring world—and with us
The peasants and workers of all countries are raising³”

In the winter of 1920, the above text has been printed on posters, which can be found everywhere in Petrograd⁴, as people are waiting for the great spectacle of re-enactment of the October Revolution 1917. The performance is going to take place on the Palace Square right in front of the Winter Palace, which is the exact same location where the October Revolution happened three years before.

Part 2: Preparation⁵

October 25th 1920 of the Julian Calendar⁶: Since this morning, many people have already gathered at the Palace Square in front of the Winter Palace. The spectacle should be great, given that actors and citizens of Petrograd have already rehearsed many times. It is a big day, a big night for Petrograd, and the key to the Great Soviet Russia. All the people on the stage are getting ready for one last shot, to make sure this celebrated performance as great as it can be.

The 80,000 square-meter Palace Square is divided into three stages. The first stage is found at the entrance to the General Staff Building, and it is a 108 meters long by 16 meters wide stage extending from the arc-shape of the General Staff Building. This stage is divided to two symmetrical platforms, and in-between there is a connecting bridge built directly under the huge gate of the General Staff Building. The orchestra of 500 members is located just under the bridge. This is the main stage where most of the spectacle is going to be performed here. The painter Yuri Annenkov⁷ is com-

missioned by the Bolshevik government⁸ to design the stage for this spectacle. While it’s not his first time doing stage design for theatre, it’s definitely the biggest one he has ever designed—using the whole stage like his own canvas, complete with his painting style, a mix of the techniques Cubism and gouache. The background of the first stage is built from 2-dimensional panels with paint, and is composed of many elements he often uses in his works—irregular geometric blocks with ingredient airy colours. The immense scale of the stage alone makes the scene quite magnificent and impressive, but with the addition of his painting style, the stage appears to be rather rough. Since it’s an outdoor performance on the Palace Square, the stage is much simpler compared to the usual indoor theatre space, which is presumably decorated by red carpets and crystal chandeliers. On the right platform, the main architecture is a white triangle building with one immense arc next to it. There are five columns lined up on one side of the platform, with the troupe consisting of about 2600 actors and actresses including 125 ballet dancers and 100 circus members. Actors wear black suits with bow ties and top hats, while actresses wear classy bourgeois dresses made of fine fabric and hats with a flower and feather on top. Some men are even wearing military uniforms and semi-circle hats with feathers as decoration. They represent bankers, dignitaries and the army of the Provisional Government⁹, and the white platform is designed in an absolutely neat, beautiful and classy way. On the other side of the stage, one sees in remarkable contrast the intense and majestic red colour of the left platform. The stage on this side is formed in a more irregular direction due to the red workers’ houses and factories. We can vaguely see factory chimney and brick walls behind, because of the smoking air surrounding the stage. There are also approximately 2600 actors and actresses playing on this platform, dressing in indecent worker uniform and

⁸ The Bolshevik party is both socialist and communist party. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed to the Communist Party of Soviet Union, therefore in this essay I would like to call it the Bolshevik government instead of the Communist government.

⁹ The Russian Provisional Government of the Russian Republic, which was established immediately after the February Revolution, the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on March 15, 1917 of the new calendar.



▲ Actors and actress who play the Bourgeoisie on the white platform. Source: Political Theatre Issue (June 1975)



▲ Actors and actress on the red platform. Source: Political Theatre Issue (June 1975)

flat hat, rough and crude. They wear no make-up, act in a very humble style with feeble appearance. The whole setting makes a tired, unmanageable and sorrowful atmosphere surrounded on the red platform.

From the General Staff Building towards the direction of the Winter Palace, there is an invisible path that has been created by 100,000 spectators gathering on both sides

of the path. This is referred to as the second stage of the performance: the stage belongs to the spectators, who are from recruiting schools, associations for physical culture, and some under military training. The spectators are not only the Russian citizens but also people from everywhere. It's an international celebration and there are at least five American journalists participating in this great spectacle¹⁰. In this performance, the spectators also have an important task, as they play the Proletarians during the Revolution. They have been arranged to be in this particular position in the middle of the square. Undoubtedly it has the best viewing angle as every single corner of the square can be easily seen by the spectators. In the middle of the second stage stands Alexander Column, a 48-meter high monument in the centre of the Palace Square. The searchlight is set on the top of it, and ready to focus on either the red or the white platform. Together with the people who are waiting in the second stage area is Nicolas Evreinov¹¹, the principal director of this grand performance, who intends to challenge the possibility of his theatrical theory through this great spectacle. He has his own command station among the spectators towards the left, which is the best position to get this spectacle under control. However, this performance is an enormous undertaking for one man alone. Consequently there are three other directors collaborating with him: famous theatre director Alexandre Kugel and Yuri Annenkov are in charge of the first stage; the second stage is in the

¹⁰ Albert Rhys William, *Through The Russian Revolution*, New York, Boni and Live Right, 1921.

¹¹ Nikolai Nikolayevich Evreinov (February 13, 1879 — September 7, 1953) was a Russian theatre director and experimental theatre theorist.

charge of the theatre director N.V. Petrov; and Evreinov himself is in charge of the third stage. They communicate with each other—and their four assistant directors—by telegram lines. There is also a light signals system and motorcycle couriers to assist in case of an emergency.

From the director command station, there are two telegram lines routed toward the third stage, which is the main building of the Winter Palace placed on the south side of the Palace Square. For the final inspection, telegram cables are put in place to verify that the projection on the windows is in working order. In front of the Winter Palace, there are piles of wood, and healthy and athletic actresses waiting for their next instructions. They will play the role of the Women's Battalion¹², which is conducted by the Provisional Government. Finally, the battle cruiser "Aurora" is docked right behind the Winter Palace in the river Neva, which is located in the exact same spot as it was in the 1917 Revolution.

The performance isn't just on the stages. Five airplanes and ten cars with searchlights are assisting the lighting, which shifts from one stage to another. They play an important role in helping spectators follow up and pay attention to the major storyline. All around the square at the gates, there are about 200 cavaliers and 2,300 foot soldiers standing by for the last act in the performance. On the southwestern side of the square, the main medical station is located right next to a bunch of bushes and ready for any emergencies.

It's almost 10 o'clock.

Darkness has fallen over the Palace Square, and a sense of fear radiates through the audience. The cinematographers have been filming for the documentary of the celebration, since it's difficult to film the official re-enactment at night. They start filming this morning during the rehearsal. But now the real show is finally about to begin, and it's going to continue until the late night, even

¹² The Women's Battalion was formed after the February Revolution, it was consisted by all-female warrior.

¹³ Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky (May 2, 1881 — June 11, 1970) was a Russian lawyer and politician.

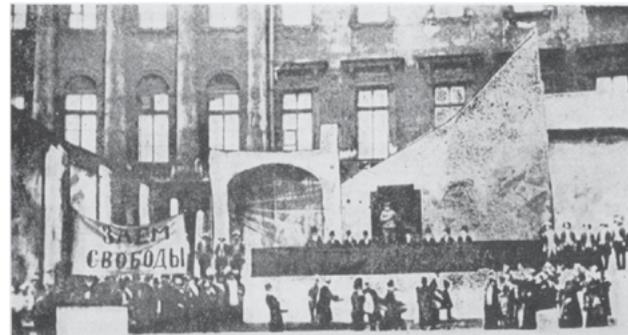
till the dawn, without any interruption. Directors are ready to commence. All the actors and actresses are prepared. It's all ready. 10 o'clock sharp, let the great spectacle begin!

Part 3: Act.1

Cannons from Aurora shots into the sky, eight trumpeters lead the opening of this mass action, with the accompaniment of the whole orchestra playing 'Robespierre' by Litolski. As these are military exercises, one has to be cautious: a command, an action. It is completely dark and cold, and suddenly the searchlight shines on the bridge of the first stage, the orchestra begins to play the symphony "La Marseillaise." The actors from the white stage, which represent the Provisional Government on the white platform is having a serious meeting, deciding whether to continue the war or not. One man stands out, because of his arrogant attitude and the way he walks. This actor is dressed in a military uniform and wears a military cap, but he seems to be of higher ranking than the other military people.

He is taking the role of Alexander Kerensky¹³, who was appointed as the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government in July 1917. He asks the crowd at the second stage for more attention, then he starts giving a speech complete with rich body language. Kerensky was shouting

to the crowd, "we wish to carry the world to a victory ends." In this part of story they represent the great success of the February Revolution in Russia. It brings the chance of survival for the people, and should be the moment "we live happily ever after", but the situation still goes awry. At this time the searchlight shifts from the white to the red platform on the other side of the stage where actors and actresses enter the stage stooped over, and walking with heavy



▲ The white platform, the actor in higher position is playing the role of Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky. Source: Political Theatre Issue (June 1975)

steps, with no expression on their faces. This is meant to represent the moment before the October Revolution, while the people are starving and the whole society is suffering from overload working. Actors who play the miners and hold hammers, working and walking around aimlessly. It shows the frustrating moment of the proletariat, as they are facing an uncertain future. Meanwhile the orchestra cautiously plays the "International¹⁴," which is the song belongs to the proletariat.

Those playing on the red platform include dozens of men, women and children, all tired after having finished their work at the factory. The atmosphere is full of despair and helplessness. But what they do not know is that they are about to be betrayed once again by their government, as Kerensky decides to stay in league with



bankers and dignitaries. Now the white platform is packed with actors wearing suits and holding white canvas money bags labelled with ridiculously huge numbers. These men move as comically as circus members. The other group of actors, who represents the wealthy businessmen, holding massive envelopes, and wearing suits and top hats, follow pridefully. Some of the actresses start dancing ballet, joyfully depicting a satirically cheerful atmosphere. It is positively pleasant to see this part of the show, but at the same time also ridiculous. Those on the white platform don't understand that something is going wrong on the other side of the stage, the red platform. The agreement between Kerensky and bankers and nobles brings the power back to the previous Russian political scene. This is not what the people expect, and suddenly from nowhere a bunch of soldiers waving red flags rush upon the stage and running into the workers. They are the Red Guards who start gathering everyone on the red platform furiously because the pursuit of a better and more equitable life is no longer possible with

▲ Hard-working proletarians on the red platform. Source: Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde (1988)

the Provisional Government. They must find another solution. The popular support for the Red Guard, the Bolsheviks, is increasing. As long as their leader Lenin comes back to Russia, they are ready to fight. Some of the Red Guards run amidst the spectators on the second stage, shouting the name of their great leader, "Lenin, Lenin!" La Marseillaise goes out of tune, and "International" gradually increases in loudness, with the accompaniment of the sound of people on the red platform singing in anger.

"Stand up, ones who are branded by the curse,
All the world's starving and enslaved!
Our outraged minds are boiling,
Ready to lead us into a deadly fight.
We will destroy this world of violence
Down to the foundations, and then
We will build our new world.
He who was nothing will become everything!"

On the other hand, the white stage is still continuing along "pleasantly". They do not care what is happening with the rebellious mob, as they have something more important to do; the celebration of the establishment of the Women's Battalion, consisting of 1,400 strong and proud female soldiers. The conflicting atmospheres on the two platforms is absurd. People from the red stage start shouting "morituri te salutant"¹⁵. Is it going to be the end of the Provisional Government?

The spotlight is on the red platform again. The Red Guard and the other actors are waving the large red flags. Their behaviour is becoming more organised as they all sing together. La Marseillaise goes terribly out of tune, meanwhile "International" from the left platform becomes the main melody, filling the whole space of the Palace Square.

¹⁵ "They who are about to die salute you!" in Latin.

"No one will grant us deliverance,
Not god, nor tsar, nor hero.
We will win our liberation,
With our very own hands.
To throw down oppression with a skilled hand,
To take back what is ours –
Fire up the furnace and hammer boldly,
while the iron is still hot!

This is our final
and decisive battle;
With the Internationale
humanity will rise up!"

The growing clamour on the second stage increases to a boiling point; it is time to let the Provisional Government become aware of the people's struggle. Red masses run toward the white platform. Because the Provisional Government is oblivious to what is happening, the first attack is seriously harmful, and most of the soldiers turn their allegiance to the Red. They stand with the people, the workers, the Proletarians! Soon there is only the Women's Battalion and a few armed soldiers left for the Provisional Government, so that the white platform is quickly occupied by the Red masses.

"You've sucked enough of our blood, you vampires,
With prison, taxes and poverty!
You have all the power, all the blessings of the world,
And our rights are but an empty sound!
We'll make our own lives in a different way -
And here is our battle cry:
All the power to the people of labour!
And away with all the parasites¹⁶!"

¹⁶ Parasite here means the middle-class people who grew rich by selling overprice basic necessities during the famine of war.

The voice of discontent has occupied the whole square, and the workers' demands have clearly been delivered. It is too late for the Provisional Government, and even though they try to fight back, it is no longer possible to calm the maddened crowd. The Provisional Government and Kerensky must escape immediately. Two motor cars from the side of the Palace Square hasten to meet at the white platform, honking their horns furiously. Kerensky rushes down, jumps into one of the cars, and escapes. They cross through the second stage of the crowd, and rush into the third stage of the Winter Palace. Meanwhile, the Red Guards have almost occupied the whole first stage, and the searchlight shines on the last battle raging on the connecting bridge—guess who is going to win?

Part 4: Act 2

The gate of the General Staff Building has been blocked by trucks loaded with workers and 2,300 armed foot soldiers. Trucks drive across the second stage of spectators, following the motorcars of Kerensky heading to the Winter Palace. This is the most important battle in the square. By the four side entrances, more and more



▲ Revolutionaries enter the Palace Square through the gate of the General Staff Building
Source: Political Theatre Issue (June 1975)

tanks and soldiers have been gathering, and eventually tanks fire on the bastions. They are all coming to support the Red Guards. The Provisional Government has nowhere to escape. Compared to

the delightful and joyous mood earlier, they now seem miserable and hopeless. Here and now the Women's Battalion is in danger, they hide themselves behind the piles of wood in front of the Winter Palace, seeming to have lost the confidence and support of the government. They try to defend but with their confusion and

loneliness in mind, they cannot stop the great rebel. The Women's Battalion is the last line of defence, and eventually they run into the Palace. The Red Guards and the revolutionaries run after them into the Winter Palace—victory over the government is imminent.

“Fire” behind the Palace, the Aurora from the Neva River, shoot the final signal into the air.

The attention is suddenly directed by a narrow beam of light to the Winter Palace's second floor windows. The silhouettes of a fighting scene are visible on the window, and a quick and brutal fight breaks out. The light shifts off of the window. Silence. Five red stars are then projected on the window, as the flag of the Hammer and Sickle is waving on the top of the palace.

“Contemptible you are in your wealth,
You kings of coal and steel!
You had your thrones, parasites,
At our backs erected.
All the factories, all the chambers -
All were made by our hands.
It's time! We demand the return
Of that which was stolen from us¹⁷.”

Ultimately Kerensky escapes successfully by disguising himself as a woman. It is nevertheless a workers' victory, and the people have their power back. A 40,000-strong choir sings the Proletarian “International” exhilaratingly in unison. Fireworks go off everywhere in the dark night, and the celebration ends with the huge success of the October Revolution, continuing to bring Russia the equal and harmonious bright future it seeks. The spectacle ends with a military parade.

This performance has taken a whole day to rehearse and play out,

¹⁷ Before the October Revolution, the factory workers were working as slaves and exploited by the factory owners. Here shows the appeal that the workers demanded to take back what they earned from the employers.

and runs until about 6 o'clock the next morning. While the actual revolution was brutal and violent, on this day and in this specific place, the Revolution is a great victory worthy of anything but fear. Although many of spectators didn't experience the actual revolution, this re-enactment brings people together not only for the memorial reason. All Russia owes the success of the October Revolution to the Bolsheviks, however, this great performance has to give credits to the collectives of Russian citizens.

II

BEHIND
“COLLECTIVE
OCTOBER 1920”

On October 25, 1917, Lenin leads the Bolsheviks and workers attacking the Winter Palace in Petrograd with the goal of overthrowing the Provisional Government, returning the power to the people. This will later be known as The October Revolution. Since then, the Bolsheviks and the working-class are given the mission of breaking the class boundaries, to elevate the social status of the proletariats and the labourers, and to establish a classless country: a Communist state free of capitalist exploitation.

Even though the Bolsheviks successfully overthrow the Provisional Government, the establishment of the Soviet Union is hindered due to the Russian Civil War¹⁸ and does not happen until 1922. Up until then, fear and uncertainty still remains in throughout the society as fighting between the Bolsheviks and supporters of the Provisional Government continues. Revolutionaries thus become the heroes, bringing hope to the people, with the aims to establish a state with joy and pride; a nation for the people. However, achieving the communist ideology isn't an easy task. To create society's focus on the equality of the people, they have to arm the working-class, but not in a way of giving them the weapons and leading them to the rebellion. It is much more crucial to arm the working-class with knowledge in order to build a new society with new social order. This is arduous, since in 1917, approximately eighty percent of the population is illiterate¹⁹. How could it be possible to distribute knowledge when most of the people don't even know how to read the alphabet? Even the great leader Lenin describes Russia as 'An uncivilised country'²⁰.

The Bolsheviks devise a historical mission: they intend to help people rethink the relationship between people and culture. Before the Revolution, culture seems to be developed only for the privileged classes, for the noblemen, the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois officials and the intellectuals. The proletariat are not only workers but also peasants,

soldiers, and sailors. They are excluded from participating in cultural development because they are considered unintelligent lower class, being judged by their appearance, clothes, belongings and professions, etc. Under the discrimination of bourgeois, the proletariat is ignored from the progression of society. Therefore to attain the goal of creating a new culture for the working-class, they must first abolish the luxurious and dissipated bourgeoisie culture. The solution to achieving this historical and cultural mission is thus found in art, a gentle and entertaining activity which is capable of delivering a message without a single written word.

“Arm the working-class with knowledge and organise its emotions with the help of art²¹.”

By the end of the Revolution 1917, the Bolsheviks declare freedom from the Russian Orthodox religion²² and thus the country becomes secularized. To separate the power of religion from the empire is the first step to annul the privilege of the upper class. The newly created workers' own culture needs a new belief and a new hero. Thus the story of the heroic labourer starts, creating a workers' art movement. The workers' struggle is emphasised in this movement, and art works are articulating the minutiae of their daily life: the working conditions. As a result, they present their work in public spaces: workplace, factories, or even somewhere they pass by everyday along the streets. This new demand of art urges the starting point of the Proletkult.

So what is Proletkult exactly? How does the role of this specific term become an instrument to form the Soviet Russia? Proletkult, a portmanteau word for “Proletarian Culture”, is a mass art movement, a Soviet-powerful, artistic and cultural enlightenment organisation²³. The original idea of Proletkult is creating a new art culture for the people. Since this new culture is for satisfying workers' leisure time, it oughts to

²¹ Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Gard Aesthetics*, Stockholm, Bokforlaget PAN/Norstedts, 1980, p.12.

²² Russian Orthodox is the major religion in Russia. After the October Revolution, the Russian empire was dissolved and the Tsarist government - which had supported by the Church and numerous privileges - was overthrown. That Russian Orthodox lost the power after the separation with the government.

²³Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde, Op. Cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁸ From November 1917 to October 1922, the Russian Civil War was a war between the Red and the White, the Socialist and the Capitalist.

¹⁹ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁴ Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet Stage 1917-1938*, London, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 22.

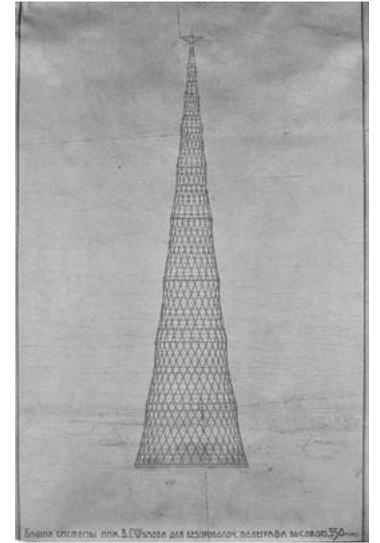
be simple and easy to understand. For instance, the topics shouldn't be too esoteric and the context shouldn't include metaphors that are too profound, so it could be pleasantly accepted by the masses. This point of view seems very similar to, and is easily confused with the concept of popular culture, but of course they both have strong demand for entertaining the masses. However, Proletarian culture is not the same as the popular culture, but its easy accessibility for the masses is where Proletkult sees the educational value in it. Meanwhile for the Bolshevik, in order to establish a classless society, they find a nimble way to generate workers' knowledge for the new society. Therefore culture becomes a powerful tool to decide the future of a society, but how? During the first national conference on worker-peasant theatre in April 1919, as the communist faction claims, they “must devote all its energies to formulating a new repertoire, without any borrowings from the past²⁴.”

As this new art for workers is not allowed to develop from the past, it became more difficult to create something from nothing. With the purpose of decomposing the bourgeoisie art, the proletarian pursues art in the most accessible way, and intends to develop art with the proletarian consciousness, in order to show their independence in the society. For that reason, workers get inspired from their proletarian lifestyle. They also relate the new art culture to their own professional knowledge. Most of them work in factories, thus facing cold-blooded machine is an essential part of their duty. The technique of operating the machinery trains them to think cautiously. Since productivity is their major task in factory, it leads them to create their art works in a productive and reasonable way. Therefore their creativity is highly based on the technical skills from work, which is a breakthrough to the common point of view of art — the one from the upper class. Thereupon, the workers see the art as an expression of their ability at work.

But wouldn't it be dull if everything just comes from daily life? At first,

the workers build art unconsciously with their capacity at work. But incidentally, these art work created also becomes a tool to examine the new technology developed from work. Since the purpose of new proletarian art is to create something new, the spirit of innovation becomes vital. Soviet literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky²⁵ says in his essay *Art as Technique* that (also translated as ‘*Art as Device*’), “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged²⁶.” Art comes to be a departure from ordinary, and it nurtures workers' daily life and force them to move on by giving this “unfamiliar” challenge. They tend to put the advanced technology and engineering into their art work. It raised the trend of industrial aesthetic, which is out of the usual sensation. Such industrial aesthetic is rapidly developed in the constructivist architecture later on. For instance, Shukhov Tower in 1922, which is designed by Russian engineer Vladimir Grigorievich Shukhov, who engages to develop engineering method on architecture structure, invents the lattice metal structure in construction in 1896, which is an ultra light-weight material. In order to have enough strength to support high architecture as Shukhov Tower, it has to be built in an hyperboloid geometry's structural way. In 1920s, most of the workers' art creation considers this technical and manufactural aspect highly fascinating. Meanwhile, the new geometric and symmetrical appearance of architecture forms the industrial aesthetic among the whole society. The progressive engineering leads the artist to create art with functional purpose, and develop workers' own aesthetic.

Art and the new culture is not limited to workers only, and is not



▲ Shukhov Tower by Vladimir Shukhov
Source: Wikicommons

²⁵ Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky (January 24, 1893 —December 6, 1984) was a Russian and Soviet literary theorist, critic, writer, who later also participated the film making with Sergei Eisenstein.

²⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, “*Art as Technique 1917*” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p. 5-24.

²⁷ Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet Stage 1917-1938*, Op. Cit., p. 28.

²⁸To comprehend more about the Communist ideology, I suggest to read: John A., Armstrong, *Ideology, Politics, and Government in the Soviet Union*, New York, Praeger, 1962.

developed solely by the workers. It needs a lot of financial support and public attention in order to proceed. Therefore, finding a sponsor in the Bolshevik government is essential. The government takes on a significant role in the promotion of artistic production, and bringing the art work to the public. In 1919, The Petrograd Department of Education holds an architecture competition for the Workers' Palace, where the topic is clearly proclaimed, "new building, with no links to the past"²⁷. In contrast to Capitalism, the communist ideological purpose is to have the capacity to maximise material use for everyone which is crucial to a society lacking resources²⁸, since the major objective of the factory is meant to reduce the additional cost through the production by raising industrial productivity. The professional working life becomes unseparated from workers' art creation. And it is definitely a breakthrough if the proletariat entails the communist ideology through their technical aspect of art. However, as the political transition in Soviet Russia happened rapidly, and the promptness is important for the whole society, both the people and the Soviet government are keen for an efficient way to create their own culture. The art and culture created in this way could bring the maximum benefit to the working-class community.



COLLECTIVE
THEATRE

“Under the even more complex political circumstances of the blood-bath accompanying civil war the theatre and only the theatre could serve as primary school and newspaper for the masses thirsting for ‘education, enlightenment and knowledge’. For the light which the theatre radiated could reach everyone. The language of the theatre was comprehensive to everyone²⁹.” During the Russian civil war period from 1917 to 1922, the raise of the theatre activity orientate the people suffering from the war, and is considered as an efficient art form to cultivate and to satisfy the other art domains.

By the time of the Bolsheviks victory in October 1917, Proletkult has already over 400,000 members, mostly workers and soldiers, with many of them participating in theatrical clubs and studios³⁰. Theatre becomes the most popular form of entertainment, and acting becoming a part of everyone’s daily routine. In 1920, Viktor Shklovsky is surprised by this situation, “All Russia is acting, some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed in to the theatrical³¹.” One wonders then, why is it theatre? How does theatre become so essential for the proletarian daily life? Is it only about the entertainment? What about its educational objective? How do the Bolsheviks see the value in it? Theatre gives an occasion to gather people from different professional backgrounds. It is a great outset to develop a new art culture. For instance, a theatre play needs a playwright to create the story, a painter to design the stage, an actor to perform the story, a dancer to inspire joy or sorrow, a composer to bring together the music, a technician to assist the transition, and lastly a theatre director to guide the play. But all of these are just common concepts of theatre and how to realise a play. Because theatre must now reflect the proletarian life, it must evolve from its bourgeoisie origins into another form more well-adapted. Theatre was once a place full of wealthy people, in formal attire, not only for nobles. The delicate costumes and props on the stage, and its decorations with red carpets and chandeliers make

²⁹ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, Op. Cit., p. 41.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

³¹ Ibid, p. 41.

it even more luxurious. Communist supporters calls it “the bourgeois ‘fetishised’ art³²,” since the major goal of the October Revolution is to end the economy and culture bondage caused by the upper bourgeoisie class. Thus they describe art with this economy term from Karl Marx and his critiques of the capitalist political economy, “Commodity fetishism³³.” In capitalist society, classes in the market are reflected on the affordability of commodities. As upper class pursuing the higher prized goods, owning the product becomes a powerful symbol for the people who could pay. Meanwhile, it conceals the unfair actuality of slavery of working-class. In such a materialistic world, how could we imagine that workers, in their inappropriate garments, could ever find a place in such a magnificent theatre space? In order to create the proletarian theatre, this stereotype has to be changed.

Proletariat Theatre’s main objective is to break the stereotypes associated with the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, a revolution in theatre. Theatre director, Nikolai Evreinov, under the influence of the Proletkult, creates the theatrical theory “*Theatre as life*³⁴,” in which he claims everything could happen on stage. If we question what is acting about? In his opinion that actor could learn a lot about acting from anything in our lives. As he gives an example of stone-like desert flower, which is imitating the rock next to it. Therefore, this stone-like flower is the actor from the nature, which he finds that actors should be able act naturally, not in a way of being realistic, but naturally showing him/herself on the stage³⁵. He also questions a lot about what is theatre exactly? The traditional theatre is developed with a religious purpose, later regarded as an entertainment. Some people consider theatre as a space for superior enjoyment, and they think the act on the performing platform can be only understood by the intellectuals. The stage ought to be a holy area for actors, designed as an individual platform. As the acts switch, the immense curtains go up and down to divide the space between stage and auditorium. The unspoken rules of theatre emerge: while

³² Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Gard Aesthetics*, Op. Cit., p. 30.

³³ Recommend to read: Geoffrey Pilling, *Marx’s ‘Capital’: Philosophy and Political Economy*, London, Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1980.

³⁴ Recommend to see his work: Nicolas Evreinov, *The Theatre in Life*, New York, Brentano’s, 1927.

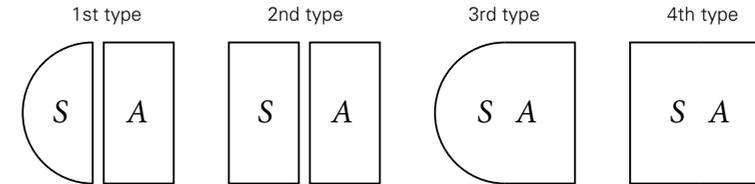
³⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁶ Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Gard Aesthetics*, Op. Cit., 1980.

³⁷ Prairie Thunder, "What Is Ritual Theater?" on *Ritual theatre* [Online], <http://ritualtheater.wikidot.com/what-is-ritual-theater>, January 2009.

actors are on the stage, the audience stays in their seats, keeping quiet during the performance, and applauding at the end of the performance. Theatre in Evreinov's opinion isn't any of them, which shouldn't be held in a specific place for any commercial exploitation, and it is unnecessary to classify stage and auditorium in theatre. Lars Kleberg — Swedish contemporary theatre critic and expert of soviet theatre — claims in his work *Theatre as action*³⁶ that "the 'representative' view of the audience serves as the starting point for a number of widely different concepts of the ideal relationship between stage and auditorium" in which he develops 3 types of theatre spaces:

The first type spatially separates the stage and the auditorium. The play is about showing an ideal world which doesn't exist in reality, and usually is more about artistically making the stage splendid, visually differing fiction from reality. It draws a clear line between stage and auditorium. The second type proposes that stage and auditorium are still separated, but in this case the stage mirrors the reality, bringing the audience to the story on the stage. It creates emotional connections between stage and auditorium. The third type is ritual theatre, where stage and auditorium is in the same space. Ritual theatre usually refers to a religious ceremony which includes the Spirits. It may also refer to a non-religious theatre, where a message is delivered to the audience, and usually intends to awake or transform the audience deeply³⁷. Kleberg takes the example of Evreinov's theory, and refers to Evreinov's theatre as "ritual." As Evreinov believes that not only mankind but also animal could act. He considers that acting is possible everywhere, therefore the formal theatre space is not a pre-requisite. But the point of "Theatre as Life" is not about acting exactly the same as out of theatre or imitating the emotion vividly like realism theatre. Theatre is supposed to be a platform to express the truth of oneself, and possibly a place where you could discover and develop yourself, in this case, the individuality becomes essential. There is no need to have class rules between the actors and the audience. This transition of theatre space in his theo-



ry, somehow also reflects the transition of society that all proletariats are pursuing: a society without boundaries and classes. As the wall of classes in society have been wrecked, the invisible wall between stage and auditorium has also been destroyed by questioning the necessity of the formal theatre space. This move brings the audience onto the stage, which means that the actors are the audience, and the audience are the actors at the same time. It merges the spaces of stage and auditorium in the same way as ritual theatre. However, for Evreinov, theatre draws a parallel to one man's life, with the stage as his reflection. Theatre is not solely about the spiritual message which should be delivered, it's more about how actors or audience develop and express themselves with their own point of view for life. Therefore, instead of the third type, I would consider Evreinov's theory as the fourth type. With all the political factors however, the Soviet style theatre would be more likely referred as the third type as they demand the classless society, which make sense to abolish the formal idea of the audience and the performer. But due to its method in Soviet propaganda, the subject and the discussion on the stage are limited by censorship. Which means if the censorship official finds the topic sensitive or politically harmful, this genre of performance would not be allowed. Therefore only the play — which emphasis the importance of the Communist ideology, or natural and social science which are considered as real knowledge— is authorised to perform in the public, as it is essential to deliver the "correct" message to the people. Nevertheless, in Evreinov's theory, this action reevaluates not only the relationship between the different classes, but also eliminates actual solid walls of theatre, thus making it unnecessary to have such a space called "theatre." The Proletkult leads the workers to

act in their own place of comfort, like where they live and where they work. They leave the theatre space and create their own theatre in the factory, farm, boat, army base, cafeteria, storeroom, bar, basement or even on the street.

Therefore, the limits and boundaries for traditional theatre, like the stage and audience, do not exist anymore.

In the Proletkult's anti-bourgeois idea, they try to get rid of everything related to the upper-class. However, art is considered as a privilege of upper-classes, because it is an expensive entertainment. A painter needs formal education, a writer needs to study, an actor needs to be trained...etc. What's more, all of this training requires a tremendous amount of time, of which most of the working-class doesn't have much to spare. Art training therefore becomes a luxurious activity. Although the proletarians intend to develop culture and art skills, it is a challenge because they already suffer from famine, overwork, etc. How can they invest in the future of culture under such conditions? Before creating a good performance, the Proletkult has to find a suitable method of learning. Based on the Marxist principle: "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand"³⁸. In that sense, if the collective art studio can be considered as belonging to a communist society, an art studio too can consist of multiple individuals. It is through the cooperation of individuals that the art studio can be able to function and progress by itself. The Proletkult develops its own culture factory through collective studio or workshop³⁹ which are a proletarian art working place with a group of amateurs or semi-professionals from various domains. Each studio is supposed to have at least four different artistic domains: theatre, music, literature, and art. Through self-education, everyone can become an individual artist with different strengths in art, but he/she will not become the monopoliser of any particular art work. No guidance by staff or authority is needed, as everyone is invited to be

³⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, London, Penguin group, 1993, p. 265.

³⁹ This term of studio is first used as theatrical collective in Russia was in 1912, which was functioning as a school. Only till 1924 when "workers' club" officially replaced its function, as an educational and entertaining space for workers. Therefore in this essay instead of using the term of club, I use the term of studio.

part of the production. Such a collective practice provides an environment to learn from each other and helps develop individuals' artistic styles, representing a new proletarian culture. One of Proletkult's theatrical studios declared in early 1919, "The socialist theatre should be founded on the ambition to allow the proletariat to develop artistically and in full its collective 'I' in theatrical creation. The workers' dramatic studio is a free studio. Here there will be no lessons in 'acting', but only in developing and correcting the individuality of the worker actors so that they may preserve that immediacy of proletarian spirit that is the necessary prerequisite for the creation of the collective's own theatre"⁴⁰. As the studio doesn't provide lessons, the actors do not learn to act, writers do not learn to write, and painters do not learn to paint. What they do learn, however, is to create something functional and distinctive based on their own experience of life. What the workers create is considered to be pure and not merely decorative. Their talent comes from improvising ideas and from spontaneity, in response to the inspiration from workers' daily life. Theatre director and administrator of Proletkult, Valentin Tikhonovich (1880- 1951) endorses the collective way of acting, "samodeiatel'nyi teatr- translated literally as 'self-acted' or 'do-it-yourself' theatre- as a more neutral and inclusive category for all nonprofessional stages"⁴¹. Thus the "do-it-yourself" collective studio gives the nonprofessional workers a platform to self-educate, encompassing all kinds of art, with the theatre studio affirmatively becoming the basic unit of the new culture.

The Proletkult efficiently destroys the bourgeois culture and elevates the proletarian culture in Russian society in early 1920s, and exploits art to educate illiterate workers. This collective act develops a new way of learning and making cultural progress.

At this exact moment, during the Civil war and early years of Soviet Russia, the workers are given the freedom to express themselves and

⁴⁰ Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Gard Aesthetics*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet Stage 1917-1938*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.

explore knowledge through the arts. Theatre culture gives them the thirst to learn about the ideology of the Bolshevik revolutionaries. It also changes the social situation, “its cultural code proscribed exoticism, mysticism, religion, or upper-class fluff (except as objects of derision). As a counterweight it promoted a new proletarian morality based upon mutual respect and equality of the sexes; atheism rooted in science; a spirit of collective comradeship; and a vertical cult of technology and the machine⁴².” Since the working-class has been respected, all the social situations are changing as equality is playing an essential role in the community. The cultural movement of the mass in the early 1920s helps to realise the equality emphasised in the communist ideology.

⁴² Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 40.

⁴³ Everyone knows that Eisenstein recreated *The Storming of the Winter Palace* as a film for the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, under the name of *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*. However the play, *Gas Mask*, was directed before he took part of film industry.

⁴⁴ Written by Sergei Tretyakov who was a Russian constructivist writer and playwright.

⁴⁵ A Russian region which is located around the Ural Mountains, in between the East European and West Siberian plains.

Evreinov breaks the class boundary of the stage and auditorium.

Meanwhile, the Proletkult collective act helps him to not only erase the line between bourgeois and workers, audience and performers, but also between the amateur and the professional.

Since everyone can act and do so anywhere they want, it is hard to define whether someone is the professional or the amateur. In 1923, under Sergei Eisenstein⁴³'s direction, the Proletkult starts a new play project, *Gas Mask*⁴⁴, a story based on the real life of workers in gas factories. It depicts an accidental explosion which happened in the Urals⁴⁵, and in order to save the factory, the workers must unite and devote their lives in the rescue. Instead of taking the audience into a proper theatre with a stage decorated by imitations of factory elements, Eisenstein decides to combine art and actuality by setting the play in a real gas factory. Since it's an actual gas factory, Eisenstein uses real working machines as the props, and decides to have real factory bell and hammers to create the sound effects. When the stage is set, he comes up with another question; what if the actors are the actual workers? Is it possible to bring art and actuality together, making it that much more meaningful

when those actors, the workers, can actually effortlessly operate the machinery? The workers are thus assigned to be the actors, dressed in their everyday working cloths (sheepskin coats, felt boots, and overalls), and without make-up. The premiere of performance is merely the presentation of the workers. As both actors and audience are workers, and the workers are the professionals in their actual workplace, does this lead to confusion of those who are actors being the amateurs, and those who are actually the professionals? In most of the acting cases in 1920s, the collective studios consisting of the workers gather together to bring their everyday life on their own stage. One must remember the communist ideology aims to minimise the cost of props on the stage. On the one hand, this solves the professional training problem in art; and on the other hand, it allows the maximum use of material. It functionally serves as the solution to the shortage of resources.

This Proletariat concept for life and for theatre is a collective act of naturally bringing people together. In terms of education, it also helps the workers who are part of an art studio to learn, to develop individual creativity and above all to form their own culture. But it also assists the workers outside of the art studio, by educating them through the message delivered through theatre, acting as a primary school for the illiterate 80% of the population. In contrast to the capitalist and religious ideologies, the Bolshevik government values art as essential, and almost as a new religion for the Communist society. At this specific moment, art and the workers are liberated from the shackles of bourgeois culture.

“Now, as new ideas make their way through the population at large, and as people begin to see the possibilities of the new life, the broad popular classes immediately feel the call to the stage. Here they find an avenue for heir desire for a brighter life. Here they have a chance to expend their spiritual life with new and unknown experience.⁴⁶”

⁴⁶ Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet Stage 1917-1938*, *Op, Cit.*, p. 20.

Undeniably at the very beginning of Soviet Russia, from 1917 to early 1920s, the instructive value of theatre helps to create the classless society by elevating the knowledge of the working-class. It's an ironic prospect, because under the support of the Bolshevik government, the arts would never be completely free. Initially, the government claims that their intention is to develop the workers' culture, and for the workers' own good by the collective act in theatre studio. When the Bolsheviks overthrows the Provisional Government, they promises the censorship of the press will be soon over. However, the censorship only ends till the beginning of 1990s at the end of the Soviet Union. The utopian idea of collective act is supposed to be a medium of enlightening the Proletarian's life. As it claims, within the collective act, every worker is equal in participating the art work. However, the censorship still has the power over the collective studio, which eventually leads all the workers to lose their individuality through the collective work. As the dictatorship is hidden under the beautiful picture of collective act, it is clear the collective studio turns out to serve as the instrument of propaganda to the Marxist-Leninist ideology.

However, during this specific developing period, theatre transforms rapidly with the workers' collective efforts, which work in close cooperation with the government. By 1920, almost 2,000 amateur theatres, clubs and studios are in operation in the Red Army. "The Proletkult was controversial first of all because its participant believed that rapid and radical culture transformation was crucial to the survival of the revolution, a position they presented in loud and insistent term.⁴⁷" With what collective studio produces, this however, isn't enough. Lenin declares that the theatre has to be "greater than a spectacle."⁴⁸ This is the people's theatre and the masses should have easy access and involvement. The people's theatre shouldn't just be a small unit of the collective studio, which only performs in the small factory spaces. The collective studios should unite to perform for the masses, to get more people involved

⁴⁷ Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*, Oakland, University of California Press, 1990, p. xviii.

⁴⁸ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, Op. Cit., p. 41.

and to perform on a bigger scale in the public space. It then turns into a popular movement of mass spectacles in Soviet Russia in 1918-1921.

IV

THEATRICALISING
THE REVOLUTION

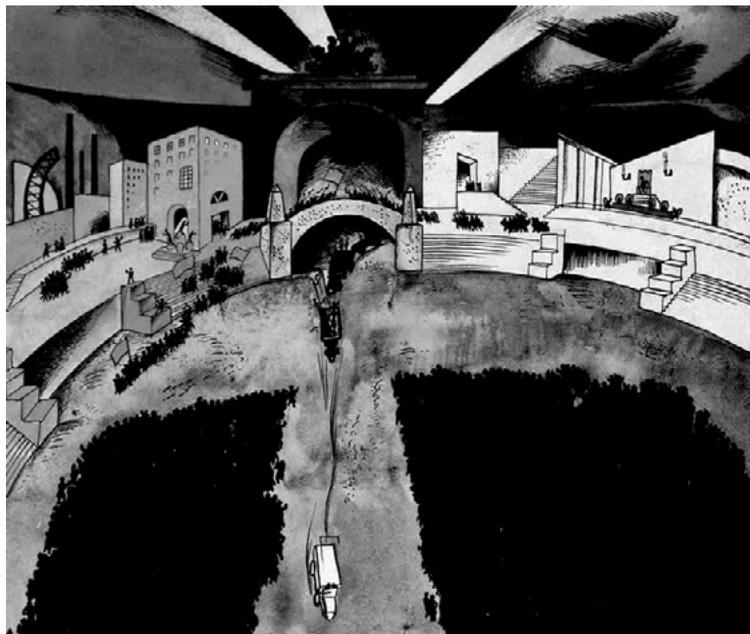
In 1920, the third anniversary of the October Revolution, Evreinov has been assigned by the Bolshevik government to re-enact the great revolution. This will end up being one of most important and well-known mass spectacles of “*the Storming of the Winter Place*,” bringing over 100,000 spectators and over 8,000 amateur and semi-professional actors. It is the first time that Evreinov realises that his “*Theatre as Life*” can be on such a gigantic scale. It is also the moment that the Proletkult is able to observe the efficacy of the worker’s collective act, something only allowed on this specific day which is celebrating and impressing on the great success of the Bolsheviks.

Although this is a re-enactment of the Revolution, it elaborates the history of the period between the February Revolution and the October Revolution, under the influence of the government. This particular re-enactment is not exactly the entirely the same as the original event

that takes place in 1917. What was originally a brutal and horrific occurrence, is this time told in a festive and joyful tone. It is more organised and even more people take part in it than the original event. The Bolsheviks use this as their advantage to promote the ideology of the Communist party, by cultivating their citizens through a new aspect of society. The collective theatre, this genre of spectacle thus becoming a school of citizenship.

The Storming of the Winter Place is presented in a collective way. There are very few independent actors that take part in this performance, yet most of the troupes who participate are rather small. The participants are actors and the spectators at the same time, acting as the proletariat, while in the same instant witnessing the great memorial celebration of the Revolution. Since it is performed only three years after the Revolution, some of the original revolutionaries actually take part in the spectacle, playing themselves as professional soldiers while simultaneously being amateur actors. The same goes for the workers, who typically are the spectators of the performance, but this time are given roles as the proletariat. In this way, the spectators (both the workers and the actors) relate to the storytelling which fuses both true and false aspects of the event, and therefore legitimises the collective way of learning through propaganda.

Adding to the similarity between the spectacle and the historical event, which takes place at the Palace Square, even the warship Aurora is placed in the exact same position as it was on that fateful day. This provides a vividly analogue setting to the actual revolution three years ago. The addition of the stages designed by the painter Annenkov, along with the decorative theatre effects give the spectator aspect of entertainment to this re-enactment. The fusion of the historical battlefield for the revolutionaries and the artificial theatre stage and props, mimics the previously discussed “*Gas Mask*” theatre in a real gas factory. It



▲ Sketch of The Storming of the Winter Palace by Yuri Annenkov.
Source: Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde (1988)

intends to give the real fear of the Revolution to those whom didn't experience it, and to recall the memory of the people who had actually lived through it three years ago. However, its festive purpose isn't ignored; through the use of ballet dancers and circus members, a sense of joy is extended to the masses. To realise Evreinov's spatial idea of breaking the invisible wall of theatre and the boundary between stage and auditorium, the spectators are placed in the middle stage (and they called it a stage as well), giving them an important, central identity in the society. Through their position, they can easily interact with the actors on the first and the third stages. This performance successfully breaks the walls of theatre in open-air space, by combining the historical surroundings and adding stages and props, and as a result creating the great illusion of believing. It manages to open the doors to the culture to the working-class through art. Through the use of the theatrical practices of setting, props, and lighting, the attention of the spectators is manipulated, moving about in the Palace Square. In addition, the Bolsheviks commands their citizens to participate the re-enactment of the Revolution. The power of re-enactment is that people are given a true(false) experience which generates compassion and a sense of relation to the original event. In this way, a limited truth can be told while also hiding the unearthly and more somber truths of the event. It obviously serves as a political propaganda by emphasising the victory of the Bolshevik.

It is in and of itself like a factory chain production: the collective studio provides the environment to cultivate the artist, enabling the artist to self-educate, the cooperation between collective studios produces the mass spectacle; and through this mass spectacle the spectators learn to act and to comprehend the Communist ideology. Lastly, the whole spectacle is intended to reproduce the re-enactment of the October Revolution. In this specific moment of the early Soviet Russia, this sort of mass spectacle is expected as an ideal instrument, which is not only

helping workers to develop their own culture through entertainment, but also for the political instructive purpose.

While Evreinov and some artist workers are realising their utopian dream of experimental theatre, it is merely a propaganda tool of the Communist Party. Although at the beginning the intention of the Proletkult is to develop workers' culture based on each members' strength of art, which is supposed to encourage the workers' individuality in the community. However, the censorship is invading into worker's art work, which decides all the result of collective studio. Most of the well-known theatrical artists as Evreinov decide to leave Russia in the end because Evreinov notices that the collective studio cannot work, that the actors have no freedom to express themselves on the stage. The new economy policy⁴⁹ which states in 1921, makes the Proletkult quickly lose the support by the Bolsheviks, as it will lose its influence in art. To continue realising art for the Communists, it is essential to comprehend the Communist ideology towards the arts, in which workers lose their individual identity completely. In other words, the workers' collective studio at this stage is under surveillance by the Bolshevik government.

This genre of mass spectacle was only popular in Soviet Russia for three years from 1918-1921, which Lenin figured out eventually "with regard to spectacles, there's no harm in them! I don't object. But it must not be forgotten that the spectacle is not truly great art, but only a pretty entertainment. Our workers and peasants really do deserve something greater than a spectacle."⁵⁰ In such situation, if this is no longer what the Bolsheviks expect, could this collective act still represent people's theatre? Or could we still consider the mass spectacle a great educational instrument? The mass spectacle became a festive form, that circus members, ballet dancers and the fireworks become the main focus of the performance. The intention to be huge and magnificent caused the

⁴⁹ The New Economy Policy (NEP) was proposed by Lenin in 1921. While most of the companies such as banks, foreign trade and large industries are own by the government, it is allowed for some small enterprises ran by private individuals.

⁵⁰ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, Op. Cit., p. 45.

lack of subtleness and refinement. Even the main point of initial instructive notions of communist ideology were lacking. So it was meant to fail ultimately. Lenin's statement urges the theatre art searching for different direction, which should present more the communist ideology. Although the mass spectacle is considered as a failure, however, the professional skill of worker is still highly emphasised at this transition of art. Constructivism, which is based on advanced technology and machinery, doesn't only serve for the architecture as Shukhov Tower, but also into the fashion, graphic design and theatre play, etc. Instead of directly using the real factory element with added props as *Gas Mask*, the workers' creation is going to another level, as they discover the feasibility of manufacturing material. For example, the costumes they wear are made by fine aluminium and glass which characteristic of these material forces the costumes to a more 3-dimensional geometric shape. And where the real machine goes? It is not a major thing to show story in a realistic way, they apply the idea of machine into transformable stage, which structure could be changed functionally. The manner in stage design alters towards in an abstract way, which distinguishes from the previous phase of theatre. However, the Proletkult's notion— constantly reminding as a Proletariat—remains in the constructivism art. It is just a part of progressing, as the evolution of the factory production, constantly elevating the quality of their product.

BEYOND THE THEATRE

The Storming of the Winter Palace was performed 3 years after the Revolution, as it seems a simple celebration for the Bolsheviks great success. Even though we are familiar with the Soviet propaganda, this spectacle is not solely about that, as it was at this specific moment when the communism was still fighting for the support from the people. The Storming of the Winter Palace was re-enacted at the exact same location and the same time as the original Revolution. The confusion of the realistic side of the re-enactment gave the spectator existent fear of the Revolution, but also showed the truth to the Proletarian, as well as a sequel out of the revolution and the achievement of the collective theatre studio.

Collective theatre studio, as a space gathering people from different domains of art, allowed them to collaborate for a theatre play. In early 1920s, collective action in theatre studio ended up as an utopian ideology in educational tool, it gave the workers a fruitful cultural life, that the proletarian were able to self-cultivate and elevate the social statues of working-class, undeniably it is. However, as its vast ambition and rapid development, lead-ed to the mass spectacle theatrical form. This mass spectacle was supposed to be people's theatre, which should base on how did workers develop their own artistic skills and have a foothold in the new classless society. Yet it transformed into the ritual theatre form, which the performance itself became a tool of bragging the authorisation of the government, and the government used it to deliver political immaterial message, which created the different principle in workers' life. At this point, the value of the spontaneity of amateur spectators' act is no longer matter, and the individuality is no more valued in collective studio. Its political intention limited the possibility of theatre, which disappointed the theatrical theory of Evreinov. But this instructive idea would be central to German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who engaged to the theory of educative theatre. In 1933, with the raise of the Nazi,

he travels often to the Soviet Union for developing Marxist society and anti-Nazi ideas into his play. In his work from 1940, *On the Experimental Theatre*, he raises a problem of political educative theatre "The enjoyment of learning is subject to social position. The artistic treat is subject to political attitude, so that it can be challenged and become accepted. But even if we consider that one part of the public that is in political agreement, we will be able to see how the conflict between the powers of entertainment and the powers of instruction becomes critical." As the same purpose of the Proletariat theatre, through the collective studio, they intend to elevate the social status of working-class. As promoting the Communism is as well important, this mass spectacle becomes a complex form of political enjoyment. But is it reasonable to put such two form together? Or it only exist in the utopian world? As what Brecht has further study on this topic, it becomes critical when the entertainment meets instruction, because the emotion is given by the entertainment would only confuse the instructive meaning behind the play. In the beginning, the Bolsheviks think this ideal school of citizenship would be the most efficient way to cultivate artistic side of workers and to educate them with the communist thinking at the same time. But eventually the failure of the mass spectacle is understandable, it couldn't function well for its educational purpose, owing to the fact that the ambition of holding a "mass" spectacle leads the instructive theatre out of control.

⁵¹ Bertolt Brecht, "On the Experimental Theatre" in *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, N°1 (September), Trans. Carl Richard Mueller, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1961.

However, the ideal concept behind the collective studio wasn't in vain, it demolished the boundaries and strict rules set from the Bourgeoisie culture. It broke the stereotyped rules in bourgeois art, as it accomplished the idea of Proletkult and the desire of creating differs to the past. It brings an experimental aspect into the theatre, which demolished the estrangement between performers and spectators. The spectators are allowed to participate the play, even they have no proper training in acting, they could still take an important role with their spontaneous creativity.

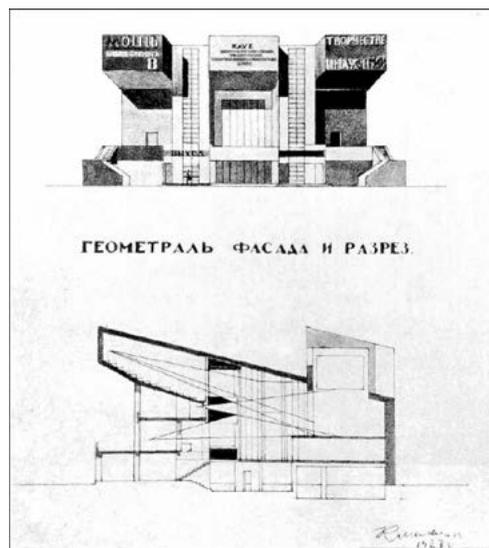
The role of theatre was no longer narrowly entertainment as workers merged their everyday life into the theatre. It became a reflection of the real society. Within the professional workers and the amateur artist, it also abolished the boundary of the professions, the

amateurs created a new aspect into art. But it didn't mean that there's no value in the professionals anymore. It might erase the distinctive difference between different professions, which was acceptable to have multi-profession, multi-identity in the society.

Theatre lead by of the Communist ideology means using the minimum material to create the maximum result out of it. It reflected the need of workers' daily life, but also a practical perspective of art. Since the collective studio brought worker's profes-

sion into art creation, the workers created art with their own knowledge of manufacturing, which led to a rational and functional purpose of art. No more than with a technical point of view, the art went into another practical level, which every art was created with the cause of technology or machinery. It influenced the future of the Constructivism art, which continually achieves the proletariat art by showing the strengthen of the proletarian, as they keep reminding themselves the importance of being proletariats. The open-air theatre couldn't satisfy Lenin and the workers as great art anymore. At that time the functional led of stage and architecture becomes a trend, as they started to rebuild the indoor theatre, for example the Rusakov Club Theatre in Moscow, which was built in 1927. It is a theatre designed for all genre of play, targeted the audience in different situation. The little rooms could be separated by its form, but also possibly to combine together for a bigger theatre space. The incline shapes of the main top rooms tend to fit the auditorium seat, the quality of spatial design is developed under form with purpose and manufactural technique, and again it minimises the source for creating maximum result. On the other hand, it wasn't only used as theatre, it was served as workers' multi-activity space, which also includes the auditorium, meeting rooms, cinema and study rooms. The instructive idea of collective theatre remained and transformed into the architecture especially for workers.

The whole utopian idea behind *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, however, enlightened the workers life through unfamiliar experience, enhanced workers' skills on art, as it explored the new possibilities of experimental theatre. The liberation from bourgeoisie art reflected the equality of functionality and technical profession happening with the development of the society.



▲ Facade and cut of the Rusakov Club Theatre.

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