Fueleop-Miller, R.

Theatricalized life


Staff and students of the University College London are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

* access and download a copy;
* print out a copy;

Please note that this material is for use ONLY by students registered on the course of study as stated in the section below. All other staff and students are only entitled to browse the material and should not download and/or print out a copy.

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University College London.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

This is a digital version of copyright material made under licence from the rightsholder, and its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Please refer to the original published edition.

Licensed for use for the course: "SEESGH13 - SEESGH13 : The Soviet Cultural Experiment I 1917-1945".

Digitisation authorised by June Hedges
As soon as the Bolsheviks recognized the great importance of the theatre for purposes of propaganda, they made increasingly strenuous efforts to extend the suggestive force of the stage to the greatest possible number of people. Thus they arrived at the idea of giving performances which should not be confined to the limited capacity of a building, but should be visible to an infinitely greater number of spectators. They tried, by the introduction of great festive mass-performances, to make the streets themselves the arena for dramatic events, and to link up parades, processions, and national festivals, so as to form an ordered and systematically organized total effect. In the slogan "Theatricalize life," the dictators of revolutionary art saw a possibility of evolving with scenic means a propaganda such as could never be attained within the theatre itself. By this means the "collective man" was also to celebrate his glorification in a solemn and magnificent way. It was no wonder that the Bolshevists began to regard the "theatricalization of life" as a task of high political importance. Even in the period of greatest confusion and distress, as much attention was devoted to such representations as to the most ticklish political problems. "Congresses for the Preparation of Theatrical Workers' and Peasants' Festivals" were held, and "National Celebration Commissions and Sub-Commissions" were appointed, which were entrusted with the designing of emblems, flags, posters, and other street decorations. In a special "workshop for the collective elaboration of mass festivals," producers, actors, painters, authors, and stage-hands worked under the direction of the State Theatrical Department in order to fix the character and form of such celebrations.

The content of these representations was mostly connected with revolutionary and present-day Bolshevik events. Thus festivals of this kind were used for the First of May celebrations or the anniversary of the storming and capture of the Winter Palace. Of actual problems of the day, the rationing of food, the electrification of Russia, the requisitioning of houses, the introduction of
motor ploughs in the country, and the alliance between peasants and workers were treated in this way. But not only were the past and present of the proletariat made the subject of spectacular representation; the happier future dreamed of was painted in symbolic pictures; festivals were held in honour of the machine and the mechanized age, and similar festivals were planned in honour of the State of the future for which they longed, and others again to celebrate in advance the anticipated triumph of Bolshevism over the whole earth.

But if the politicians expected from these pageants a revolutionizing of the masses, and a more intensive penetration of their souls with the communist watchwords of the time, the Soviet aesthetes hoped for the birth of a new style, new forms, and new rhythms which must evolve from the living improvised mass plays. Almost all the artists in the whole of the Empire took the liveliest interest in these events, and studied such things as the various shades of red to be used at the May Day festival. Hundreds of designs were devoted solely to methods of using the emblems of the Republic, the sickle and the hammer, in the festive arena in the most impressive manner possible, or in wreathing them with garlands of flowers.

A great staff of writers, producers, painters, sculptors, and musicians worked feverishly at grandiose schemes and scenarios for mass performances, for, as it was universally held that this was work of the highest proletarian culture, the State treasury made every conceivable sacrifice to enable the most extensive schemes to be carried out.

The artistic dictators had in mind a sort of imitation of those festivals organized by the Egyptians, the Roman emperors, the princes of the Renaissance, and the leaders of the French Revolution. But, of course, the achievements of the communist proletariat were far to surpass those of the past, and also to show a new content conforming to the spirit of the new age, the ceremonious intensifying of proletarian life, the struggle and the triumph of the revolutionary masses.

The first years of the Revolution, in particular, were marked by mass representations of this kind, which took place on the great historic squares of Moscow and Petersburg, and in which workers, whole regiments of regular troops, armoured cars and warships took part. Their importance as propaganda, according to Bolshevik assertions, was enormously great. But all these efforts were but a small part of the original programme. We can only get a true picture of the intentions of the "artists" if we consider the designs, scenarios, and sketches for these mass festivals, which were later carried out only partially or not at all.
In order to understand the peculiar idea which is at the root of all these ceremonies, we must first familiarize ourselves with the Russian tendency, that is completely alien to the European, to seize on every opportunity of passing from the real to the theatrical, and to improvise a spectacular performance on every possible occasion. This trait is specifically Russian, and it is a proof of the extraordinary cleverness of the Bolshevik authorities that they contrived to utilize this peculiarity of the people on the largest scale for their own purposes.

In Russia art has not yet become detached from its original sense; it is still allied in all its phases with those deep and elemental processes in the human soul, through which it receives its ultimate and strongest expression. There is a sort of primitive religious consecration about everything theatrical in Russia, and it would almost seem as if they still felt all artistic creation as a sacred process, and the actor as a social hierophant. Russian audiences, too, do not adopt a passive attitude to the theatre; they are almost physically connected with all the dramatic events; they stand, riveted by a play, within the magic circle of the stage action, as if they were gazing at the ceremonies of a deeply affecting religious cult.

The theatre for the Russian is something that touches him very closely; it is for him a necessity of life; for the inner liberation of the soul, the heightening of vitality, come to him only from active sharing in creation. Thus the play is for him a collective act of spiritual liberation, as Church services are to religious people. In this point, his Asiatic devoutness has a creative power. This power is therefore never limited to the stage and the platform; it appears everywhere, in all manifestations of life, on the street, in his own home, on every occasion when events cause an inner tension which can only be expressed by creation.

If a Russian recounts an incident in company, in his political club, or even in the street, he does not for long confine himself to verbal description. Suddenly, he sends a gesture into space, like an arrow from a bow, at the same time giving the cue to another in the circle, who immediately becomes an actor in the drama. Though at first the whole thing looks like a very excited discussion, soon many emphatic gestures and words creep in and an increasing number of the bystanders begin to take part in the scene. Suddenly the recital takes living form: chairs and tables are shifted with a few touches, and soon stand in a particular relation to each other and to the events being enacted. Men and things are now subject to new and different laws. Those taking no part look on in astonishment.
and soon become an audience, just as the story, which was at first merely related, becomes reality and attains complete actuality in the people acting and the improvised scenery. Actors, spectators, and objects are lifted above their former everyday ordinariness, and serve to create a play, a comedy, or a tragedy, as the case may be. This lasts as long as the anecdote enacted, then the company at once returns to ordinary life; a moment later the tables and chairs are back in their old places, and the members of the circle sit smoking and talking again in their former quiet tones as if nothing had happened.

If an improvised play of this kind takes place on the street among a group of chance-met passers-by, then everything which passes, pedestrians, vans, and motor-cars are drawn into the action and must take part in the play. No one is surprised after the first minute nor refuses when chance involves him suddenly in an improvised dramatic scene.

You have frequent opportunities of observing the same thing in the country too. If two peasants start to chaff one another, a play immediately results with impromptu singing. Such happenings among the rural population go by the name of “chafchushski.” But whether in the town or the village, it is always as if the everyday were transformed by the spark of a chance word or gesture into drama, into a play whose content is determined by the conversation that precedes it. Tempo and rhythm result quite naturally from the situation, the scenery springs up of itself from the surroundings that happen to be there, from the objects more or less at hand.

Here we have plainly to do with a primitive artistic instinct in the population: the improvised play is a national characteristic, and the natural co-operation between the actor and the public is a Russian trait. It is true that there is something naive at the bottom of it all. Abstract conceptions make very little appeal to the Russian; he has to act and create in order to make himself completely understood. There were certainly good reasons why the religious play, as systematically developed by the orthodox Church, exercised so great an influence on the masses in Russia, an influence which would never have been accomplished by theoretical, abstract explanations. If the Bolsheviks had not also adopted the methods of scenic representation for the propagation of their new ideas, the spread of communism on a large scale would have been unthinkable.

Demonstration forms the framework of all Bolshevik mass festive performances. In Moscow and Leningrad, advantage is taken of the most trifling occasion to arrange a demonstration, and you can no
CARICATURE OF TROTSKI
(Drawing by Deni)
Theatricalized Life

Theatricalized Life

The public officials specially released from work for the purpose co-operate in such demonstrations, the most important singers and actors of the classical and modern theatres take part. Lectures are held, revolutionary songs are sung, the orchestra plays operatic music, the ballet from the "Great Theatre" is requisitioned. The great poets of the day recite their latest efforts to the populace; from the balconies of the Government offices, from the platforms, and from the roofs of motor-cars the People's Commissars address the masses. A swarm of flags and banners makes gay the houses and the swaying crowd; radio concerts, torchlight processions, and cinematograph performances are held. The speeches are broadcast for immense distances by means of loud speakers, while on the roofs of the tramway-cars moving punch and joky shows are given for the children.

The tone and form of all these pageants are naturally in every way adapted to the political understanding of the masses, and are, therefore, quite naive and clumsy. The mass man, for whose applause all these strenuous efforts are made, consists of many thousands of proletarians and peasants, and all political slogans must be communicated to them in the simplest and most obvious form possible.

Thus the enemy of the moment is always mocked at and fought in a symbolic form on the streets, and the masses themselves are incited to take part in this play. Further, the contrast of past and present in the form of crude pictures is popular; for example, tsarist soldiers first appear in blue uniform with fixed bayonets leading a group of political prisoners through the streets; they are followed by red gendarmes escorting chained white police officers. Or a motley crowd of parsons, generals, and profiteers is brought on and exposed to public mockery, with a thick rope round their necks to contrast with their very elegant dress. In a demonstration against England, a doll was set up in the middle of the square intended by its violent gesticulations to represent an English diplomatist in the act of presenting a note. An enormous workman's fist put an end to this act with a clout on the nose of the foreign statesman. On a similar occasion the Englishman was again represented by an
enormous doll in frock coat and tall hat, which was carried round on the roof of a motor-car. If the speaker was talking about England he addressed the doll directly, then he turned to the crowd with threatening gestures against the doll. The "Englishman" promenaded up and down, distinguished and arrogant, with a monocle fixed carelessly in his eye, until a Bolshevik worker, swinging a hammer, leapt on to the roof of the motor. The figure immediately sank on its knees begging for mercy, whereupon the workman turned to the crowd and asked if the "Englishman" should be spared. Of course, the mass roared with one voice "Strike him down!" whereupon the workman swung his hammer and brought it whistling down with all its weight on the head of the puppet. One of the crowd lifted the muddied and battered top hat, collected the fragments of the monocle, and, showing them to the crowd, announced triumphantly: "This is all that is left of our enemy."

The public is enlightened about the position of labour and industry in the country by remarkable masquerades, in which all the industries try to symbolize the nature of their products allegorically. These "production scenes" usually take place on the roofs of motor-cars, and, in the opinion of their promoters, besides their instructive effect, will train the workers in "artistic understanding."

The most curious things are to be seen on such occasions. Thus at one of these industrial festivals, a file factory brought on an enormous diagram representing its output for the last few months. On the roof of another motor-car could be seen barrels of all sizes, which were intended to represent statistically the output of a brewery. The workers of the Sorokumov fur factory placed dolls to represent Mussolini, Lloyd George, and other political magnates in a big cage and conveyed them through the streets with the inscription: "The skins of the world's beasts of prey, dressed and prepared by the Sorokumov fur factory." In another big cage was a gigantic spider labelled "Capital." Later the prison was opened, the spider brought forth and burned amid the jubilation of the crowd. The employees of the Association of Chemists carried a huge tablet on which was written in gigantic letters a receipt: "For the sick proletariat of Western Europe: one part general strike, one part united front, and one part Soviet Republic. Ordered by Dr. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. Dose: Quantum satis."

The Russian aeroplane factory, "Aika," fitted up a large aeroplane on a platform erected on the roofs of motor-cars in which the representatives of the various nationalities of Russia sat in their variegated costumes; this was intended to express the readiness of all the Federal States to promote the Russian air fleet. The factory of the "Red Soapmaker" arranged on a motor a fully equipped soap-making plant, with vats, evaporating boilers, and funnels. On
two other motors the fight between Labour and Capital was represented; this, of course, ended in the victory of Labour, whereupon Capital was borne away in a coffin. The publishing house, "The New Village," showed a pretty thatched cottage; another wagon carried a smithy with sparks flying from it; later came a procession of amazons on horseback, followed by one of miners with picks and other tools. On the spinners' wagon could be seen a huge bobbin as big as a factory chimney. Another motor carried a great altar formed of ploughs and sowing machines, another a threshing machine surrounded by ears of corn and field flowers labelled "Machines and Tractors for the Peasants!" In accordance with their tried and effective method of always introducing contrasting examples, almost all the achievements of the present were contrasted with the out-of-date tools of earlier times; for example, the agricultural machinery was followed by a funeral procession in which the old style of plough was solemnly "cremated." Sometimes political satirical pictures were interspersed among the economic and technical representations; thus the Colonial Office showed on a manure cart, besides dung and garbage, a general, a police officer, a capitalist, a vodka distiller, and the devil with horns and tail. So that the children might not be forgotten in these national jollifications there is almost always a crowd of comic turns, clowns and jugglers, who tum somersaults among the vehicles, dressed up as turnips, sunflowers, or cucumbers.

The hygienic enlightenment of the people is also carried out in Russia by means of dramatic representations. While in Europe we try to fight syphilis, tuberculosis, and other diseases by means of pamphlets and broadsheets, in Russia theatrical performances are given for this purpose; particular mention should be made of the so-called "trial scenes," whose influence on the masses is considerable.

Thus weeks in advance great posters announced the case against the prostitute Zaborovna for infecting the soldier Krest'ianov, a case which is specifically Russian in all its extraordinariness. The names of the parties were symbolic: Zaborovna means "hedge rambler," Krest'ianov is derived from the word "krest'ianin," "peasant." All the usual formalities of a lawsuit were strictly observed: in a great court-room you could see the members of the Bench, the public prosecutors and defenders, witnesses and experts, while the public had to serve as a jury. The case was opened in the name of the Republic, and then the accused and the witnesses were heard, particular regard being paid to the social motives which contributed to the commission of the crime. The Public Prosecutor and the defender
engaged in long-winded expositions and discussions, the experts gave their opinion, the accused spoke her "final word," the court retired to deliberate, and finally pronounced sentence in the name of the Republic.

Such symbolical legal proceedings are by no means uncommon; by preference official judges, State solicitors, and advocates are called in to co-operate, while the other parts are taken by famous actors. All this naturally increased the interest of the public in these matters, so that social, cultural, and artistic problems, and especially the political events of the day came to be "discussed in this dramatic way." In Moscow there was "a suit against the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg," "a session on the illiterate," a "case against the superstitious woman," and a "case against Wrangel." The last was carried out with particularly elaborate paraphernalia, since it dealt with a political subject of the highest importance. Ten thousand red soldiers who had fought against Wrangel took part. After the opening of the session, the military assessor read an indictment, in which the general was charged with oppressing and putting to death red workers and peasants, with betraying the country to the French capitalists, and with a secret alliance with Poland. Soldiers from the White Army, workmen, and large estate-owners were summoned as witnesses, and only the last, as members of the exploiting class, spoke in favour of Wrangel and gave an account of the benefits he had conferred on the capitalists. An actor, made up as Wrangel, brought forward absurd arguments in his defence and kept getting involved in contradictions, and thus made the case for the prosecution as easy as possible. After the final speeches of the prosecutor, the defender, and the accused, sentence was pronounced as follows: "Wrangel must be annihilated! The sentence shall be carried out by all the working population of Russia." After the announcement of the verdict the "prisoner Wrangel" was led away in chains.

Discussions of events in theatrical life are also almost always carried on in Russia in the form of trial scenes. If a well-known producer has brought a new production before the public, "legal proceedings" on the new work are instituted immediately. One of the company plays prosecutor, another defender, a producer or an actor acts as judge. The unfortunate, who is guilty of the new setting, sits in the dock and has to answer for it. All the formalities of an ordinary law trial are carried out in the regular way, and before a most attentive audience; all the arguments for and against are weighed, and finally the "judge" gives his verdict. But it is not only theatrical matters, but also other problems of a literary and artistic nature that are publicly discussed and settled in this way.

The "burial of the massacred books," which took place in
Theatricalized Life

Leningrad in 1919, must be characterized as the most extraordinary of these dramatic representations. A little while before, the counter-revolutionary troops had forced their way right up to the gates of the city, and in their advance had everywhere confiscated the libraries left behind by the communists, and destroyed the greatest part of the books. When the rebellion was quelled, the Bolshevik authorities were faced with the melancholy remnants of these burnt and torn writings. They had these carefully collected and used them as the occasion for a national festival. All the remains of the destroyed libraries were laid in a great coffin, which was placed for several days on one of the most frequented squares in the city, and then carried solemnly to the grave, with full funeral pomp, accompanied by the authorities, the military, and the trade unions. A "prosecution of the enemies of the books" was also held. The buyers of stolen books, the bibliophiles who exported rare works abroad, and other similar dangers to the book market, were indicted. Here, too, all the accused were represented by actors. In connection with this trial, a petition was forwarded to the authorities asking that the crimes dealt with in this case should be made liable to actual legal penalties.

All the improvised theatrical performances have their chief nursery in the barracks of the Red Army. There, too, a work was performed which, in the view of the Russian revolutionaries of the theatre, deserves to be numbered among the "most important creations of collective art." This piece, as is almost always the case with such productions, was meant to glorify the victory of labour over capital. The first act depicted conditions under capitalist government: workers are engaged in decorating a castle, the owner, meanwhile, on the other hand, does not know what to do for boredom. A poet reads his works aloud to entertain him, but in vain. Suddenly news comes that the workers have refused to perform any more forced labour. The owner of the castle first commissions a priest to restore order; when this means fails, he devotes himself to wearing down his slaves by starvation; in this way he succeeds in breaking their resistance. The second act takes us into the miserable room of one of the workers, who is absorbed in plans, for he dreams of becoming an architect. Some of his friends visit him; he tells them of his "Tower of the Commune," but finds no real sympathy. Suddenly, the rumour spreads that revolution has broken out in the city; the worker proceeds to join the rebels. The representation of the Revolution next invades the auditorium, and the audience sees how the workers are victorious after strenuous fighting.
The third act brings the realization of the plan on which the hero had brooded in the second act: the “Tower of the Commune” is dedicated. The workers thank the builder of the monument, songs are sung in his honour, and he is handed a banner which he unfurls on the top of the tower amid the enthusiastic singing of his comrades.

Another piece of this kind, the play *The Red Year*, was also produced in the Army dramatic workshop. Its action begins with the Revolution of 1905, then depicts that of 1917, the fights at the barricades, and the dethronement of the tsar, and finally ends with the October upheaval, the triumph of Bolshevism. In this piece, special stress is laid on the co-operation of the public, who, in the end, are faced with the decisive question: “Who is for the Soviets?” Not until all the audience rise from their seats as one man at this question is the downfall of reaction held to be sealed. The public is also called on to take a part in the play, *The Overthrow of the Monarchy*, when it comes to the point of freeing the mutineers from prison.

But it was not only the Moscow and Leningrad garrisons which engaged in such performances, the troops at the front and in the halting-places also produced similar pieces. On the Eastern Front, the *Battle of the Red Urals* was played, the work of a cobbler from the trenches; in Astrakhan, a composition in the Tatar language, *Sacrifices for Freedom*, was given, and, in the halting-places, a piece called *For Our Soviets*; this last produced the astounding result of making five hundred deserters appear and request to be allowed to return to the Front again. In the year 1920 the attempt was begun to develop on a larger scale these mass festivals, which up to then had either taken the form of demonstrations, or been performed in the somewhat narrow framework of barracks or public buildings of a similar kind; the “theatricalization of life” was to be brought to its highest point. As the arena of the events, the favourite choice was the great historic squares, on which the Revolution had been enacted, the squares before the Winter Palace and the Exchange.

In the summer of 1920 the first attempt of the kind was made in Leningrad at a May Day celebration, when a piece called *The Liberation of Labour* was played. It was under the direction of the painter Annenkov. In all, in addition to numerous professional actors, two thousand of the military took part. In spite of the great resources used for this mass pageant, only a part of the original plan could be realized; the scenario shows that it was conceived on a much more magnificent scale.

“‘The scene is a wall,’” so states the original plan, “‘in the middle of which is an enormous golden gate. Behind the wall strains of joyful music sound, bright beams of light in all the colours of the
Theatricalized Life

The First of May in Moscow
Group from a Procession

rainbow dart hither and thither; the wall hides a world full of joyous life. Before the closed door stand cannon to prevent entrance into the radiant realm of freedom, equality, and fraternity.

"On the steps in front of the door are slaves engaged in heavy work, driven on by overseers with long knouts. On all sides moans and groans may be heard, the clang of rattling chains, and whistling knouts, the curses and shrieks of the slaves and the savage mocking laughter of the overseers. For a little while this terrible noise of human misery is silenced, and the bewitching strains of the distant music become clearer. The slaves stop work, excited by the notes which come through the gate, some slaves express their longing for the unattainable country of happiness by joyful shouts, others by prayer. But the overseers seize their knouts again, the noise of them makes the music inaudible and silences the cries and prayers of joy. Again the sound of fear and misery is heard, again the slaves resume their work in deep dejection while their torturers rejoice.

"With shrill noise fanfares announce the coming of the rulers, the oppressors. These are surrounded by bodyguards, jesters, priestesses, executioners, female attendants, astrologers, and dancers male and female. The procession of the rulers halts in a gay crowd on the steps of the stairway, where the festive banquet is to be held. In front, the Emperor of Byzantium is borne in on a litter, clad in magnificent garments, and with the triple crown of gold on his head; his face expresses boundless arrogance and the consciousness of his "divinity." Behind him steps a fat, well-nourished king in a fantastic costume, supported under the arms by attendants; his long hair flows loose on his shoulders and is adorned by a golden crown. His face with its long moustaches and pointed beard shows traces of sensuality, debauchery, and evil living. Chinese slaves carry a palanquin in which a mandarin is enthroned motionless as if made of porcelain. He is followed by a planter in a blue coat with gold buttons, tight-fitting yellow trousers, high top-boots, and broad-brimmed hat, with a thick stick in his hand; slaves hold an open parasol over his head. The King of the Exchange wears rings set with jewels, and is dressed in a black frock coat and a top hat. His motionless face betrays greed and cruelty, pieces of gold fall continually from his pockets. Behind him trails a merchant in boots too big for him; he wears a brightly coloured shirt and a cap, his elbows are supported by the shop-boys who swarm about him. A five-litre bottle sticks out of his fur coat. Before him dances a priest with an accordion in his hand.

"The whole company of rulers sits down to table. Splendid dishes are brought in. Musicians play delightful music, dancers display their art to amuse the guests. None of the partakers in the feast troubles about the splendid kingdom which stretches behind
the high wall, for the rulers are very well off already. Their cries, their drunken shouts, drown the sound of the music coming from behind the gate. In moments, when there is silence for a little space in the circle of the rulers, the strains from the kingdom of the future sound strongly, as if they wished to call the slaves to it. Stimulated by this, they begin to murmur and make threatening gestures. The bacchanalia of the rulers cannot long persist against this unearthly music, soon single soft voices echo, which swell and at last unite in a mighty all-conquering choral song. The feasting guests jump up from their seats, a foreboding of the coming catastrophe fills them with terror. The slaves raise their arms rapturously, as if in prayer, towards the golden gate, which is to open the way into the land of freedom.

"The revolt among the slaves gains ground: they cast away their work and proclaim war against the exploiters. There shines, at first but flickeringly, a red flame, which soon becomes a general blaze. The masses stream in a disorderly way towards the steps of the stair which leads to the rulers' table, but the bodyguard easily repels this attack. A better organized strong column now proceeds to storm it: these are the Roman slaves under the command of Spartacus, who himself waves a red flag. After this attack is also shattered, a swarm of peasants armed with scythes tries to storm the road to the golden gate. The rulers succeed with great difficulty in fighting off this attack too, which is led by Stenka Rassin. To the strains of the Marseillaise new hordes march on the stair, waving red flags and wearing Phrygian caps on their heads. The soldiers of the bodyguard, seized with panic, take to flight, and the victory of the rebels seems assured, when the cannons in front of the door begin to boom, and again the storming forces are repulsed. The working masses are willing to give up in despair, but at that moment the flaming star of the Red Army rises in the East. The crowd follows its rising with joy, until finally trumpets sound, revolutionary songs resound, the first columns of the red troops appear, and in close ranks push their way through the crowd drunk with victory to the golden gate. Music sounds, one mighty effort, and... the gate flies open.

"With a clap of thunder the high wall falls back: the kingdom of peace, freedom, and joyous work has dawned. There is the great tree of freedom wreathed in red ribbons; now the Red Army lays down its arms, and exchanges them for sickles, scythes, hammers, pitchforks, and other tools. All the nations join in a joyous dance, in an apotheosis of fraternity. The International sounds forth in mighty strains, and the whole stage is covered in a rain of fireworks."
This detailed scenario, which is here reproduced almost textually, clearly shows the principles on which such mass festive performances are composed. By calling in thousands of men, the achievements of the Revolution are glorified in primitive symbolism but without any trace of the creative according to our ideas. The one original feature is perhaps the mixing up of utterly different periods and civilizations, but even this innovation does not give the impression of being the result of artistic intuition. It is clearly even more difficult than the revolutionaries thought to build up a dramatic structure without heroes, and to replace individual characters by the increasingly vague notion of the “mass man.” In the view of the Bolshevik theorists, however, the representation of a whole class instead of the fate of an individual is an important advance, and the reformers regard this as the greatest success of their performances.

On the 19th July of the same year a similar mass festival took place to celebrate the International. Under the direction of Andreev, Marzhanov, Petrov, Solovëv, and Petrovski, workers’ clubs, soldiers, sailors, and dramatic pupils, four thousand men in all, took part in this representation. The action of the piece resembled the above described performance very closely; the arena was the same, the flat space in front of the Exchange Buildings; the lighting was provided by the searchlights of the Fortress of Peter and Paul and the minelayers on the Neva. Again, you saw at the bottom of the stairway the slaves, and at the top, the rulers. Again the slaves tried to force their way up, but this time a start was made with a representation of the French Revolution. The soldiers of the king, adorned with blue ribbons, stood at the head of the stairway, and the fight ended with the overthrow of the communists. Soon dense clouds of smoke arose, which were shot with purple light by the beams of the searchlights, the funeral dance of the women followed immediately. Then the “representatives of the Second International” appeared, bald-headed old gentlemen who carried books of improbable size under their arms. All at once trumpets and posters proclaimed war. Immediately a great red flag was waved from hand to hand, but the servants of the ruling class tore this to pieces and scattered the tatters to the four winds.

The next picture represented the war of 1914. Soldiers marched on, the army service corps and the artillery filed past. The discontent of the people increased visibly; speeches were made to the troops, and finally they came to a halt and joined with the crowd in storming the “height.” Motor-cars rattled on, a universal tumult.
arose. Finally, the imperial eagle on the front of the Exchange Buildings fell, and was replaced by a poster of the Soviet Republic.

Suddenly, the scene of action was extended in a peculiar way; the square in front of the Exchange no longer represented a stage, but the whole of blockaded communist Russia. Life and movement prevailed everywhere, the searchlights in front of the building sent their shafts of light afar, troops poured over the bridge against the enemy, who were supposed to be stationed behind the spectators on the other bank of the river.

Immediately through the darkness of night was heard the shrieking of sirens; the cannon thundered from the Fortress of Peter and Paul, and finally the victory of the Red Army was proclaimed. Now girls with golden trumpets appeared in the pillared hall of the Exchange Buildings; over the bridge came cavalry, artillery, and infantry; the victorious returning army passed over the square. The blockade too was now lifted; ships came up the Neva; the nations of the whole world in their national costumes went on board, and amid a fireworks display a great dance was performed. A great part of the town was also represented with extreme realism. Cavalry attacked the rebels; entrenchments were thrown up; artillery and infantry fired on the enemy, who were supposed to be stationed behind the spectators on the other bank of the river.

It is clear that an attempt was made here to pass directly from the illusion of dramatic action to reality: a great part of the town was used as the stage of the events; real troops appeared, and the representation of the whole world was so far realistic in that it actually consisted of representatives of the various party organizations.

The fight between the red and the counter-revolutionary troops was also represented with extreme realism. Cavalry attacked the rebels; entrenchments were thrown up; artillery and infantry fired with all their might. The public took part in the parade, in the sense that the audience, formed in ranks, joined the procession of the troops.

Still more peculiar was the plan for a celebration of the International, which, for obvious technical reasons, was never carried out. In accordance with the design of this pageant the names of all the squares would first have had to be changed and be given the names of the various sciences. There was to be a "Geography Square," an "Astronomy Square," a "Political Economy Square," and other curiosities of the kind. The main part of the celebration was to take place outside the city on the "Field of the International," where it was planned to place a radio station and an aeroplane landing-stage. Only the prologue of the scheme was actually worked out in detail: the festival was to be opened by the sounding of all the factory sirens, and the proceedings, and the theatrical action began simultaneously. One of the two platforms, which was to be the camp of the "Whites," was suddenly lit up brightly. On a raised stage could be seen the Provisional Government with Kerenski at their head, receiving the ovations of the former courtiers, generals, and great capitalists, while the orchestra discordantly played a distorted form of the Marseillaise. On the "red" platform, the masses were master, at first in darkness, grey, impersonal, and unorganized, but becoming ever more active, more united, and more powerful. In the distance sounded softly the strains of the International, coming ever nearer, until finally hundreds of voices broke out into a cry of "Lenin!

Soon the masses on the "red" tribunal were transformed into the proletariat rapidly crowded round their leaders, red flags waved. Meanwhile, on the "white" platform, the comedy of unsystematic government was continued.

Then an actor came forward who was an excellent imitation, down to the smallest detail, of Prime Minister Kerenski; he asked the crowd for closer attention, and then delivered a speech, supported by rich gestures, which was followed, as in reality, by a storm of ovations. Officials with backs assiduously and humbly bent, presented their petitions; then came the money-givers with great sacks, and after them the nobles. Kerenski's famous Battalion of Women
appeared, and a group of war disabled with a big placard inscribed, "We wish to carry the war to a victorious end!' Meanwhile, the masses on the "red" platform had organized, and were striking up revolutionary songs and loud appeals to the Soviet Government, which were taken up by thousands and thousands of voices. Simultaneously, the general attack on the "white" platform began; some of the defending troops went straight over to the revolutionary side. In the meantime, Kerenski's ministers, as before, sat quietly and peacefully round their table, nodding their heads like Chinese dolls.

The bitter struggle which was now fought out on the bridge between the "white" and the "red" tribunals, ended, after much exchange of blows, and in accordance with the real history of the communist upheaval, in the victory of the Bolsheviks, who were now opposed only by the cadets and the women's battalion. After the red troops had captured the "white" tribunal, Kerenski's adherents fled to hide in the Winter Palace itself. But the pursuers were already hard on their heels; armoured cars and cannon clattered over the square; the air echoed with the salvoes of the cruiser Aurora on the Neva, and with the rattle of musketry and machine guns. Then the members of the "white" Government appeared at the lighted windows of the Palace, whereupon the Bolsheviks immediately proceeded to storm this last bulwark of the counter-revolution, and after a brief struggle forced their way into the Palace. Amid the crackling of innumerable rockets and singing from many thousand throats, the victory of communism was at once celebrated.

The fight and victory of communism would have found even more effective expression in a mass festival performance which Mayerhold planned to celebrate the third congress of the Communist International on the Khodinskaia field; but it could not be carried out. This scheme gives us the best notion of the ideas which the Bolsheviks had in mind in representations of this kind. Two hundred riders from the cavalry school, two thousand three hundred foot soldiers, sixteen guns, five aeroplanes with searchlights, ten automobile searchlights, several armoured trains, tanks, motorcycles, ambulance sections, detachments of the general recruiting school, of the associations for physical culture, the central direction of military training establishments were to take part, as well as various military bands and choirs.

In the first five scenes the various sections of the revolutionaries were to have combined to encircle the capital fortress, and, with the help of artillery corps, to surround it with a curtain of smoke. Concealed by this dense screen, the tanks were to have advanced to the attack and stormed the bastions, while the flamethrowers were giving out an enormous fireball of changing outline.
Theatricalized Life

The silhouette of the illuminated smoke would finally have represented a factory with the watchword of the fight inscribed on the walls: "What work has created shall belong to the workers." After a great parade of troops, the gymnastic associations on motor-vans were to have shown the people of the future engaged in throwing the discus and gathering the hay into sheaves. Then a general dance, with the motto "Hammer and sickle," was to introduce motions representing industrial and agricultural work, the hammer bearers from time to time crossing in a friendly way their instruments with the sickles of the other group. Rhythmic movements performed by the pupils of the public training schools were to have symbolized the phrase, "Joy and strength—the victory of the creators"; now nearing, now retreating from the tribunal, they were finally, in conjunction with the troops, to have been effectively grouped in the "city of the future." The final items of the performance were to have been provided by a display of flying by aeroplanes, with searchlights, fireworks, and a great choral singing, accompanied by the orchestras.

Another performance arranged to celebrate the Congress of the Third International is also important for the development of mass festivals. On this occasion, Maiakovski's piece, *Mysterium Buff,* was performed in German. The programme was as follows:

"*Mysterium Buff,*" a heroic-ethical and satirical image of our time written by Vladimir Maiakovski. Setting, construction, and decorations by A. Granovski, N. Altmann, and Ravdel, translation by Rita Rait, taken part in by three hundred and fifty actors. 

'*Mysterium Buff*' signifies our great Revolution, compressed into a stage performance. 'Mysterium' means everything great in the Revolution, 'Buff,' its grotesque and ridiculous elements. Thus the verses of this composition contain the slogans of the congresses, the noise of the street, the voice of the newspapers; its action is the life of the masses, the class war, the strife of ideas, a copy on a small scale of the great world within the frame of the theatre. There can be no complete delineation of the Revolution, which demolished everything; therefore the 'Mysterium Buff' is merely the scaffolding of a theatrical piece, continuous motion, which is altered daily by events and is perpetually reforming itself out of new happenings. 

"The whole universe is drowned in the deluge of the Revolution," states the scenario of this curious composition, "the only dry spot left is the Pole, and it already has a hole in it. An Eskimo tries to stop the hole with his finger. The rest of humanity surviving from the old settled world, driven by the waves of the upheaval,
THE "THEATRICALISED" STORMING OF THE WINTER PALACE.
Lorries with "revolutionary troops" pass the door.

SCENE FROM THE "THEATRICALISED" STORMING OF THE WINTER PALACE.
"THE BOURGEOISIE".

Lorries with troops stop before the Winter Palace.

Kerenski's Women's Battalion on the "White Stage".
The Mind and Face of Bolshevism

crowd round the Pole: seven couples of clean bourgeois, seven couples of unwashed proletarians, a few compromisers, who want to mediate between them, and some other people. Since there is very little room, the intruders kill the Eskimo, who has been keeping the hole plugged. Immediately the fire of Revolution pours out of the opening; they all try to extinguish the flame, and finally succeed in closing the opening again. Then the washed ask the unwashed to do something for the common safety; whereupon these proceed to build an ark.

"The second scene represents their journeyings in this ark. The stage is transformed into the deck of a ship ruled by the Negus of Abyssinia. This is followed by the democratic republic of the bourgeois, until this is also thrown overboard, and the hungry and unwashed seize power. They want to eat and sleep, but the ark splits in two. Then the survivors are illuminated by the consciousness of the need to struggle; they throw away the fragments of their wrecked ship, and rush over masts and yards through the clouds, confidently trusting in their own strength.

From mast to mast, from yard to yard,
On the paths of the sun and the rainbows.

"Then the priests drag in Hell to block the way of the unwashed. But no Beelzebub can terrify men who have seen the hell fire of white-hot metal in steel foundries. With the song:

Devils and hell,
With your fists strike down!
The flames dispel!
Storm on! Storm on!

the unwashed lay Hell in ruins.

"The fourth scene represents paradise, the disembodied life of divinity, as extolled by the proclaimers of joys in the world to come and the partisans of gradual reforms. But the marchers have set themselves a different and higher goal, and they rush over the ruins of paradise ever onwards:

Wheel and swing! No stepping back
Machines bring the happiness we now lack.

"The fifth scene shows the ruins left to the unwashed after war and revolution. It seems almost a hopeless undertaking to try to build anew a happy world on this abode of misery; but the unwashed overcome all obstacles because they see already the dawn of a fairer future rising from the coal pits and petroleum wells.

"The sixth scene finally depicts the commune. Joy and amaze-

THE "STORMING OF THE WINTER PALACE": THE "RED STAGE"

THE "THEATRICALISED" "VICTORY OF THE RED TROOPS BEFORE THE WINTER PALACE"
ment of the unwashed over the marvels of the new world, which rises behind the Hills of Labour. A joyful song ends the piece:

We the song of victory singing,
Loudly, heartily rejoice:
The International is bringing
To the whole world freedom's voice!

It would require a very considerable amount of preconceived enthusiasm to see in this and the other mass festival performances already described, anything but a completely naive symbolism, which keeps turning in a circle on the same spot, or to regard them as anything but the manifestation of an amateurish lack of taste, represented with a colossal supply of external resources. It would be an annihilating criticism of the possibilities of socialist art to say that the level of taste in these performances corresponds to the level of the proletariat, as the Bolsheviks maintain. These "compositions" are not, however, the work of proletarians; they originate entirely with the intelligentsia, and merely betray what a poor opinion Bolshevik leaders have of the level of this "mass man," to whom, in the same breath, they assign the sole right to artistic production. All these symbols, all the laboriously thought-out effects of these mass festive performances unmistakably bear the stamp of the artistic, and thus, it may be unconsciously, betray that their authors are not proletarian poets, but in the highest degree Bolshevik aesthetes. Perhaps the "mass man" has the capacity for new artistic creation in him; but, in order to develop it, he must be free of himself to create, without regard to the political desires of the Government. Under such conditions something of real value may well be produced one day, but whatever it is, it will have to be very different from everything which the politicians in Russia to-day offer to us as "proletarian form."