

## The Transfiguration of 'Russian' Lewis

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Philip Head

The cupoled churches of Moscow  
With their Italian-Russian souls,  
Are like Aurora's apparition  
– But with a Russian name, and wrapped in furs.

Osip Mandelstam<sup>1</sup>

In his 'intellectual autobiography' *Rude Assignment* (1950) Lewis noted that for a time before the First World War he was 'for some years spiritually a Russian – a character in some Russian novel' (RA 161). How then, if at all, does a non-Russian become spiritually a Russian? And which, among the Tsar's multi-ethnic subjects at that time, were unequivocally possessed of a 'Russian spirit'?

In the period of which Lewis spoke, Russian culture – art, literature, theatre, and music – had begun to acquire a hitherto unprecedented prestige in Western Europe, a prestige later destroyed for many Westerners by the 1917 Revolution (an event which, for others, opened the way to a new international, political, and social enlightenment). In England the new interest in Russian literature focused on the so-called 'Dostoevsky Corner' at Limpsfield, on the Surrey/Kent border. Here Edward Garnett (a publisher's reader) and his wife Constance (a translator of Russian authors) came to live in 1896. The Garnett home became a kind of proto-Bloomsbury centre of 'progressive' ideas.<sup>2</sup> The guests notably included (in the present context) Ford Madox Ford (then Hueffer), Joseph Conrad, and the aristocratic Russian philosopher of anarchism, Peter Kropotkin, who lived in England from 1886 until 1917 with a wide circle of English friends. Lewis records, in *Rude Assignment*, that he had met Kropotkin 'many years ago' and 'detected no sign that he remembered that once he had been a Prince [...] when he went into a most honourable exile' (RA 25).

Lewis distinguished the political aspects of the Revolution from the force of Russian ‘spirituality’. Seventeen years afterwards, in the essay “‘Detachment’ and the Fictionist’ (1934), he paid a continuing tribute to the ‘joined-up’ quality of the Russian (or Slav) mind, its ‘unquiet and piercing’ (*CHC* 222) vision lacking in English public life, and in his autobiography he reiterated that this Russian mental capability ‘revolutionised my technique of approach to experience’ and ‘did not [...] quickly fade, as most things do’ (*RA* 156). A Stoic *apatheia* and/or Stoic *autarkeia* could thus manifest an enduring and ultimately triumphant resistance to a ‘merciless’ regime.

At the heart of the matter of ‘Russian spirituality’, though it is not the whole of the matter, lies the historical difference between the Western and Eastern variants of Christendom and their concepts of ‘spirituality’ – differences which the avowed materialism of the Russian Revolution did not substantially or immediately alter. The French historian Fernand Braudel comments:

The word for “truth”, in Greek and still more in Slavonic, means “that which is eternal and constant, really existing, outside the created world” as our reason perceives it. So the word *Pravda* means both “truth” and “justice” as distinguished from *istina* or “earthly truth”. The Indo-European root *var* has given the Slav language the word *vera*, meaning “faith” – not truth. In Latin, on the other hand, the word *veritas* [...] in its legal, philosophical or scientific sense always means “a certainty, a reality for our reason”. Likewise the word *sacrament*, in the West, involves a religious hierarchy which alone can administer it; whereas in the East it means above all a “mystery” – “that which transcends our senses and comes from on high” directly from God.<sup>3</sup>

In defining himself as ‘spiritually a Russian’ Lewis identified with the pre-Revolutionary Russian ‘intelligentsia’, the educated part of the population, not necessarily persons of high intelligence, who purveyed cultural ideals. In pre-Revolutionary days the concept of the ‘intelligentsia’ often overlapped with that of a cultural ‘avant-garde’. In military terms the purposes of an avant-garde, or storm-troop, would completely disrupt the defensive organization of its opponents. After the Revolution, in Russia, avant-gardism bespoke a tendency to unhealthy counter-revolutionary sentiments. On the other hand, the

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term intelligentsia achieved an official and uncomplicated respectability so long as it bespoke membership of a Soviet intelligentsia who – in the official laudation on the death of Stalin – were at one with the workers and collective farmers who ‘steadfastly pursue the policy mapped out by our party, which is in conformity with the vital interests of the workers, and pursues the continued consolidation of the might of our Socialist motherland.’<sup>4</sup>

### **Lewis’s *Coup de Foudre***

Early in the 1900s Lewis came across French translations of the classic Russian novelists of the mid-nineteenth century; these half a dozen authors, all born between 1799 and 1828, provided him, as he acknowledged, with an intellectual *coup de foudre* (thunderbolt), described thus by C. H. Sisson: ‘in a curious and unprecedented way this shapeless wind from the steppes blew into his mind and agitated the precise shapes seized by his painter’s eye [...]. A chasm of nihilism was opened and he never recovered, so to speak, from what he saw in that glimpse.’<sup>5</sup> Orlando Figes notes that ‘the great artistic prose works of the Russian tradition were not novels in the European sense’:

they were huge poetic structures of symbolic contemplation, not unlike icons [...] and, like a science or religion, they were animated by the search for truth [...]. Alienated from official Russia by their politics, and from peasant Russia by their education, Russia’s artists took it upon themselves to create a national community of ideas through literature and art.<sup>6</sup>

The stage designer Alexander Benois found the ‘heroes and heroines in the novels of Pushkin and Lermontov, Turgenev and Tolstoy’ to represent ‘the class that created the delights of the characteristic way of life’ in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. ‘All the subtleties of the Russian psychology, all the nuances of our characteristically Russian moral sensibility arose and matured within this milieu.’<sup>7</sup> For Lewis, these novelists, and their peers, produced ‘works of great philosophical range and penetration’ in contrast to those English novelists ‘content to be merely chroniclers or moralists’ (*CHC* 215). Also important to his acquisition of a ‘Russian sensibility’ were the writings of a later Russian

author, Anton Chekhov, of whom he wrote that if in Paris he had not had Chekhov in his pocket, he would not have ‘enjoyed my Dubonnet at the “Lilas” so much or the beautiful dusty trees and beyond them the the Bal Bullier’ (RA 159).

Benois’s comments about the novelists of mid-century Russia did not apply to the generation of Chekhov (1860-1904) for whom the ‘delights of the characteristic Russian way of life’ had become increasingly nostalgic in a modernising world. For the translator of Chekhov’s plays, Michael Frayn, we find ourselves therein ‘seeing not Chekhov’s world, but the world of his characters. We inhabit them as they inhabit themselves, completely and without surprise. [...] It’s like the experience we have in dreams, where one is taking part in the action and looking down upon oneself as a dispassionate observer’.<sup>8</sup>

### **Russian Identity**

We can see Lewis’s becoming ‘spiritually a Russian’ as a matter of self-identification with a Russian intelligentsia as depicted among the characters of the great psychologically astute Russian novels. By the time of Chekhov (and of Lewis) an Asiatic Mongol element had, over the centuries, mingled with the indigenous Slav population who had settled along the river networks between the Baltic and the Black Sea, later joined by Vikings from the North, who adopted Slavonic names and helped to form the first ‘Russian’ state, Kievan Rus (Christianized in AD 988). Many distinguished Russian families of the nineteenth century (and thus after) had Mongol antecedents, including those of the writers Turgenev, Bulgakov, and Akhmatova.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the ethnic diversity of indisputable ‘Russians’, the Tsar’s domains included other Slav peoples, often of a different religious persuasion (Poles and many Ukrainians) and such ethnically distinct people as Balts and Jews. One ethnic Pole, born in the Ukraine, transformed into the English novelist Joseph Conrad, whom Lewis numbered among the few English writers to bear comparison with the classic Russians, albeit less ‘political’ (notwithstanding the perceptive comment made in *The Secret Agent* (1907) that ‘the terrorist and the policeman come from the same basket’). Conrad had met Ford Madox Ford in 1898 at the Limpsfield home of the Garnetts. Already the author of three English-language novels of limited popular success,

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Conrad became a literary collaborator with Ford for several years. Ford's biographer, Arthur Mizener, comments that, from his own knowledge and contacts, Ford supplied Conrad 'with much useful information about anarchist activities' for Conrad's 1907 novel.<sup>10</sup>

### **The 'Social Novel'**

In *The Social History of Art* (1962), Arnold Hauser clarified the differences between the 'social novel' in England and Russia, on lines broadly compatible with Lewis's arguments. The classic Russian novel, Hauser stated, was in essentials 'the creation of the Russian intelligentsia'; an 'intellectual elite which renounces official Russia and interprets literature as meaning above all social criticism'. For Russians, the novel 'as mere entertainment or pure analysis of character, with no claim to social significance and usefulness, is unknown until the beginning of the [eighteen] eighties.'<sup>11</sup> For Hauser, '[t]he miracle of the Russian novel consists in the fact that, in spite of its youth, it not only reaches the heights of the French and English novel, but takes over the lead from them and represents the most progressive and most vigorous literary form of the age'.<sup>12</sup>

Of the Russian authors of the classic 'social novel', Dostoevsky became critically the most closely associated with Lewis's writings – in particular his first published novel *Tarr* (1918). Lewis himself played down the comparison. *Tarr*, he said, 'did not conform to the traditional wave-length of the English novel' (*BB* 88), but he had 'not taken Dostoevsky for a model' (*BB* 89). In *Rude Assignment* he suggests: 'It is probably Dostoevskyan only in the intricacy of the analysis of character and motive, and a comprehension of that never failing paradox, *the real*, in contrast with the monotonous self-consistency of what man invents without reference to nature, in pursuit of the ideal' (*RA*).<sup>13</sup>

If the publication of *Tarr* (in its original version) and its critical recognition (rightly or wrongly) as Dostoevskyan brings to an end the formative phase of Lewis's 'Russian spirituality', its qualities persisted thereafter in a transfigured (historically, 'post-war' and/or 'post-Revolution') variant, with this corollary; for Lewis 'Russian spirituality' had provided a liberating force at a climactic moment of Edwardian civilization and – as he soon recognized – he had to acclimatize to an era when the destruction of the Edwardian world had become clearly

visible.<sup>14</sup> Lewis's felt need in 1928 to bring out a rewritten version of *Tarr* reflects that perception.

### **Spirituality, *Geistigkeit*, and Incogitability**

'Russian literature made its way in the West through the most accessible, most translatable genres – the story, the play, but above all the novel', but, in so doing, the great novels (themselves 'huge poetic structures of symbolic contemplation') tended to follow upon 'the innovations, the doors opened and passed through, of poetry', and, one step away, of religious consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

The novelists' own spiritual development reflected the Byzantine tradition of monasticism, as revived in the nineteenth century at the monastery of Optina Pustyn, south of Moscow, visited by 'all the greatest writers of the nineteenth century – Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy among them'.<sup>16</sup> One of these notable visitors, Konstantin Leontiev, criticized the dead-end quality of contemporary Western culture, in ways not unlike those of Lewis's critical writings of the 1920s and 1930s, such as *Men Without Art* (1934). Modern Western civilization, in the later nineteenth century, for Leontiev, showed all the symptoms of advanced decay. Bourgeois aspirations to material prosperity and the social ideal of equality had brought about an 'aesthetically impoverished, monotonous cultural sameness'.<sup>17</sup>

Lewis's participation among the teaching staff of the Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario, during his enforced stay in Canada in the early 1940s, had some parallels with the Russian writers' contacts with Optina Pustyn, and possibly found some reflection in his later novels. Although in communion with the Russian See, the College followed the Basilian Order, the Rule adopted by the monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church, and notable for its contribution to a 'profound and exact intellectual statement of Christian doctrine'.<sup>18</sup> For Lewis, the Basilian Fathers 'did not mind my not being Catholic. They accept me as a well-wisher', one who was 'disposed to particular sympathy for the Catholic habit of thought', although not amenable to all the Church's practices.<sup>19</sup>

If Dostoevsky provided a link, however imperfect, between Lewis the author and Russian spirituality, a comparable link, equally imperfect but no less significant, aligned him through the Russian painter Wassily

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Kandinsky. Figs speaks of literature and art as the twin tools towards creating a 'national community of ideas', and he observes that 'Russians pray with their eyes open – their gaze fixed on an icon [...] the focal point of the believer's religious emotion [...] a sacred object in itself'.<sup>20</sup> Lewis encountered his initial experience of 'Russian spirituality' from French translations of the original Russian novels, themselves composed in a language whose main power, Joseph Brodsky suggests, 'lies not in the statement but in its subordinate clause'.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, a visual art object involves no such transformation. Kandinsky's pamphlet *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, first published in Munich in 1912, provided an influential introduction to the contemporary discussion on 'the spiritual in art'. An English translation by Michael Sadler appeared in 1914 as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, later reissued as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Sadler spoke in his translator's introduction to the volume of the 'conflicting claims of Picasso and Kandinsky' as successors respectively to Cézanne and Gauguin to 'the position of the true leader of non-representative art'.<sup>22</sup>

Having studied law and economics in his native Russia, Kandinsky, thirty years old and reacting against 'a nightmare of materialism', decided to pursue a career as an artist, moving to Munich, where he soon became a leading figure in the city's large, cosmopolitan, artistic community at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a student at Moscow University in 1889, Kandinsky studied the beliefs of the Finno-Ugric tribes in the remote Komi region, long identified by anthropologists as 'a meeting point between Christianity and the old shamanic paganism of the Asiatic tribes', where 'the people's every action is accompanied by secret magic rituals'. Here he 'learned to look at art' and 'how to turn oneself around within a painting and how to live in it'.<sup>23</sup> Colin Rhodes notes that Kandinsky's early work in Munich was 'replete with images drawn from Russian folklore and religion, executed in a style that owes as much to Russian icons and *lubki* [popular woodcuts] as it does the Munich version of Art Nouveau'.<sup>24</sup>

Kandinsky's move to Munich brought him into close contact with German culture (he was effectively bilingual) and hence with the German concept of *Geist* and close to the idea of an 'inner necessity', the force that compels a purposeful action (or prevents it). By then, *Geist* had lost its original theological meaning and acquired a diversity of loosely 'spiritual' meanings, and a quasi-scientific methodology, *Geisteswissenschaft*, a system of belief whose followers, *die Geistesgen*, fulfilled a



role, in a different social context, approximating to that of the Russian intelligentsia.

By 1900 *Geist* broadly stood for ‘the imposition of a human pattern on the world through understanding and activity’.<sup>25</sup> The sociologist Georg Simmel depicted ‘*das Geistleben*’ (spiritual life) as essentially the world of art, literature, religion, of values; a defence of the ‘soul’ against the encroachments of the social world, ‘the defence of individuality, the consistent personality, against adaptation to external social pressures’.<sup>26</sup>

The ‘purposeful striving of the human soul’ provided Kandinsky with the basic principle of pictorial activity as something which ‘no longer takes fire from the things of the visible world, but from human states of mind’. His temperament gave these states of mind ‘an obviously Russian, even Asiatic, ring’, and so directed attention to ‘the quite different makeup of the Russian soul with its restlessness, its anarchism, its mysticism’. The picture field ‘becomes the stage for the freest psychic improvisation’.<sup>27</sup> In that way the visual artist possessed of a ‘Russian temperament’ is equipped to tackle resolutely an overshadowing incogitability – the ‘cloud of unknowing’.

### **The Total Work of Art**

The idea of the ‘total work of art’, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, provided a (possibly chimerical) ambition for the artistic imagination of many innovative minds in the early twentieth century, influenced to greater or lesser extent by the earlier purposes of Wagner. Kandinsky’s prominence in Munich’s extensive artistic community at the beginning of the twentieth century brought him into contact with the Munich Artists’ Theatre, founded in 1908 and equipped with ‘advanced lighting apparatus, utilizing five colours, including blue, and with unique gradations of light and dark’, facilitating the development of an ‘expressionist theatre’ in which the ‘concept of dramatic production as a complete unity from the moment of inception was central’.<sup>28</sup> Kandinsky’s highly developed synaesthetic sense responded to this opportunity. He had already, from 1907 onwards, produced a series of woodcuts on the theme of *Klänge* (Sounds), and in the 1912 *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, of which he was the joint editor, he provided the scenario for a performance-



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work, a totality of stage movements and effects, under the title *Der Gelber Klang* (The Yellow Sound). Its 'Prelude' reads:

On the stage it is dark-blue dawn, which at first is whitish and later becomes intense dark blue. After a while, at center stage, a small light becomes visible and becomes brighter as the color deepens. After a while, orchestra music. Pause.<sup>29</sup>

Like other experimental pieces of this kind, Kandinsky's scenario remained unperformed at that time, but in Russia a group of Russian Futurists successfully mounted in St Petersburg in 1913 a 'supersensory' piece of performance art, *Victory Over the Sun*, a joint compilation by the painter Kasimir Malevich, the composer Mikhael Matiushin, and the poet Alexi Kruchenikh. In March 1914 the Italian Futurists mounted a piece, *Piedigrotta*, by Francisco Canguillo, distinguished from earlier Futurist *serate* (evening events) by the unified effect: 'sound poetry for several voices was accompanied by the noise of the [cacophonous, home-made] instruments, the design of costumes, lighting effects, and the smell of the firecrackers.'<sup>30</sup>

Against that context we can place Lewis's performance-work, *Enemy of the Stars*, a text published, and advertised, in the first issue of *BLAST* in 1914 as 'VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME' (B1 55), thus successfully sidelining the issue of performability. The text – extensively capitalized in the original – provided for a dialogue, an intermittent argument between 'TWO HEATHEN CLOWNS' (B1 55), and prescribed the accompanying scenic effects: 'RED OF STAINED COPPER PREDOMINANT COLOUR. OVERTURNED CASES AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTA HAVE BEEN COVERED, THROUGHOUT ARENA, WITH OLD SAIL-CANVAS' (B1 60). Lewis provided no indication of a musical score, but prescribed 'MASKS FITTED WITH TRUMPETS OF ANTIQUE THEATRE, WITH EFFECT OF TWO CHILDREN BLOWING AT EACH OTHER WITH TIN TRUMPETS' – not far removed, perhaps, from the 'furious cacophony' of 'home-made instruments' stipulated by Canguillo, or Matiushin's music, reported as 'noises and cries'.

### **Vorticism and Kandinsky**

Apart from the publication of the text of *Enemy of the Stars*, *BLAST* included an editorial critique of Kandinsky. Lewis would have seen some of Kandinsky's paintings, but he appears more concerned to direct his attention to Kandinsky's theoretical purposes, those of an artist 'too much [a] theorist[]' (*WLA* 66) and 'anxious to render his hand and mind elastic and receptive' in pursuing an 'unreal entity into its cloud-world, out of this material and solid universe' (*WLA* 69), as he put it in 'A Review of Contemporary Art' (1915). In later years he did to some degree temper that opinion. In 1919 he referred to Kandinsky as 'probably the most logical of the artists directing their attention to abstract experiment', albeit with 'too much of the vagueness [...] that all spirit drawings have' (*CD* 107). By 1921, when Lewis had distanced himself from abstract art, he saw abstraction 'at its best [...] in Kandinsky's expressionism, or in the experiments of the 1914 Vorticists' (*WLA* 188), in that sense bracketing Kandinsky with his own earlier artistic endeavours. Kandinsky had returned to Russia in 1914 and, after the 1917 Revolution, played an important role in developing the ideas of a post-Revolutionary art education in the Commissariat of Popular Culture until, disillusioned with subsequent developments in the Soviet art 'establishment', he moved back to Germany in 1921 and joined the teaching staff of the Weimar Bauhaus. At the Bauhaus, Kandinsky helped foster a gradual shift in the emphasis of its teaching programme towards a constructivist approach. In so doing, Charles Harrison suggests, he achieved a 'self-transformation into a successful pan-European modern artist'.<sup>31</sup> For Michel Seuphor, Kandinsky's work in the 1930s in Paris also referred back 'to the Nizhni-Novgorod fair under the Czars.' He thought Kandinsky had about him 'something of the fair's sleight-of-hand artist who miraculously pulls objects out of his hat.'<sup>32</sup>

Lewis, having turned his attention to his writing, did not attempt to achieve a comparable self-transformation as a painter. In 1934 he spoke retrospectively of Vorticism as having been a substitute of architecture for painting, 'peculiarly preoccupied with the pictorial architectonics at the bottom of picture-making – the logical skeleton of the sensuous pictorial idea' (*CHC* 248). But, like the antecedents of Nizhni-Novgorod which Seuphor found in the work of Kandinsky, Lewis's art also had a propensity towards a 'white magic'.

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The importance of the human will to Lewis's thinking about political tyranny has a parallel in artistic creativity. For Kandinsky the spiritual in art lay essentially in the artist's 'inner necessity'. In turn the concept of inner necessity impinges on that of *Kunstwollen*, the idea of 'artistic intention' or 'will-to-form' (variously translatable and variously interpretable) associated initially with the Viennese art theorist Alois Riegl. A will-to-form may originate in external constraints (abstract like the traditional principles taught in 'classical' art, or manifest in the compulsive power of an institutional authority). Such a 'will-to-form' can readily constitute (as Sir Ernst Gombrich has said) a 'will-to-conform'. In distinction we also find a 'will-to-artistic freedom', or a will to express a compelling 'inner necessity'. Even so the artist's sense of inner necessity may originate in an inbred or circumstantially acquired unconscious 'will to conform' – that is to say (in such a case), the inner necessity comes about ultimately from an external constraint. In that context Lewis's mature observations on the 'pictorial architectonics' of Vorticism have a particular relevance. Beyond that, perhaps, 'neither language, nor mathematics, nor logic are anything but free creations of the human will imposing an order on reality [...] a shadow cast upon the world by our voluntarily created forms of representation or "mathematical reflections"'.<sup>33</sup>

### **Mythopoeia and White Magic**

Mythology and magic, though distinct forces in the processes of artistic understanding, have in common a concern with the nature of theurgical exploration, a point brought out in a Russian context in Werner Haftmann's description of Marc Chagall's painting *I and the Village* (1911) where 'our eye runs off the successive phases of the memory and rediscovers *the totality of the legend in the magical space of the picture*'.<sup>34</sup>

The Russian mythology underpinning much of Kandinsky's art came partly from the Byzantine religious tradition and partly from Russian paganism. For the Byzantine mystics 'myth is the concrete narration of an event which has taken place in the spiritual world in the depth of being' and through its symbolic content 'remains true for all facts of consciousness that express "the depths of being"'.<sup>35</sup> To quote Elizabeth Warner, the other mythological element, more uniquely Russian, came from 'a world that scarcely recognized the rational boun-

daries between animate and inanimate, man and nature, the real and the supernatural, the living and the dead; a world in which every aspect of the mundane [...] was touched by an awareness of sacral dimensions in all their positive and negative manifestations'. Warner continues: "The Christianization of Russia did not lead to eradication of the old religion and the old myths and their replacement by the new. Rather, old subsumed and transformed the new [...] producing that peculiar symbiosis of pagan and Christian that is sometimes referred to as "folk Orthodoxy"<sup>36</sup>

To augment his experience of that 'folk Orthodoxy' Kandinsky also explored the more sophisticated mythologies of his day, such as permeated the works of Rudolf Steiner and exponents of contemporary theosophy – pioneers of 'new thought' who contributed also to the developing artistic ideas of such initiators of abstraction as Piet Mondrian and František Kupka.

In the conventional Jungian approach to mythopoeia:

Non-objective art draws its contents essentially from "inside". The "inside" cannot correspond to consciousness, since consciousness contains images of objects as they are generally seen, and whose appearance must therefore necessarily conform to general expectations [...]. In contrast to objective or "conscious" representations, all pictorial representations of processes and effects in the psychic background are symbolic. They point, in a rough and approximate way, to a meaning that is for the time being unknown.<sup>37</sup>

By his own account Kandinsky had 'learned to look at' art in the primitive environment of Komi. Lewis in his younger years had encountered the 'primitive Breton' and depicted him in his early short stories. But Brittany – by then 'the favourite summer destination for art students from the teaching studios of Paris', where 'the village women expected to earn extra money through modelling' – offered a less compelling way of 'learning to look at art' through primitive eyes than Kandinsky had transformationally experienced.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Lewis found no difficulty, in the 1920s, in putting forward a theurgical argument in his contention that 'a *magical* quality in artistic expression' could tap 'the supernatural sources and potentialities of our existence' (*TWM* 188). Hence, '[i]f you say that creative art is a spell, a talisman, an

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incantation – that it is *magic*, in short, [...] I believe you would be correctly describing it' (*TWM* 187).

In 1927, Lewis attributed the manifest 'subjectivity' of much contemporary art at that time to a shift in society from a public towards a private way of thinking and feeling, in which '[w]e have no common world into which we project ourselves and recognize what we see there as symbols of our fullest powers' (*WLA* 254). Between 1927 and 1944 the theme of the 'Creation Myth' – the artist in communication with beneficial spirits – appears frequently in Lewis's graphic work.<sup>39</sup>

### **Bourgeois Bohemians – West and East**

The heightened Western interest in things Russian at the end of the nineteenth century emerged most strongly in France, where the political-military alliance of 1894 encouraged cultural exchanges, including an *Exposition de l'Arte Russe* mounted in Paris in 1906 by the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev, which brought both traditional and more contemporary Russian art to the notice of the West. His ambition to be the premier purveyor of artistic newness found a vehicle in the *Ballets Russes*, which he brought to the West initially in 1909.

In Britain Virginia Nicholson, a descendant of Vanessa Bell, records the emergence of a coterie believing that Edwardian England 'was fast becoming an intolerable place to live', anxious to get away 'for their artistic and personal salvation to Russia'. For those less mobile, 'Bohemia was intoxicated by Russian literature, Russian cigarettes, Russian clothes and of course the Russian ballet'.<sup>40</sup>

The role of the *Ballets Russes* in fostering a sea-change in the values of Western 'Bourgeois Bohemia' immediately before the War, notably through the Stravinsky ballet scores, continued after the War with decreased emphasis on Russian exoticism and more on Western chic, and did much to characterize the revival of the temporarily war-constrained 'Bourgeois Bohemia'. Lewis dismissed the *Ballets*, in their 1920s manifestation, as 'the most perfect expression of the High-Bohemia' (*TWM* 30), which 'stressed and advertised everything that the half-caste world of Riches and Revolution desires and imagines' (*TWM* 33) with the wilful trivialization of 'the splendid material of artistic invention' (*TWM* 32) for commercial ends.

To speak of a pre-war 'Bourgeois Bohemia' in Russia requires some terminological approximation. As Abbott Gleason points out:

Broadly speaking, the ideological conflicts in Russian culture at the turn of the century were paradoxical. In the forty years or so since the end of the Crimean War, Russia's political leadership had reluctantly and unevenly embraced an economic project that later scholars would call "modernization". But [...] the economic policies of late tsarism recall those of Peter the Great earlier (and to some degree of Stalin later): force industrialization from above, but make as few concessions to "liberal" points of view as possible, socially or politically.<sup>41</sup>

After the Revolution the old village culture of the Russian peasantry and its 'proletarian' peasant-worker offshoot remained, with the Bolshevik variant of radical intelligentsia. The 'middle ground' had no clear or enduring presence.

### **The Art of the Commune**

In the cultural politics of the immediate post-revolutionary period, the concept of an outmoded 'bourgeois' or bourgeois-inspired culture still had a place. The reason lay partly in the international dimension of the debate, not least the Marxist-International dimension, in which the Russian Revolution merely presaged the expected World Revolution – a hypothesis which did not fade into the background until around 1922. Such patronage as avant-garde artists in Russia had received before 1917 had come largely from a social stratum that approximated to a 'Bourgeois Bohemia' representing a 'non-Bolshevik cultural left'. The comment of one Russian art journalist in 1911 – 'everyone tries to scream, as loudly as possible, to appear as modern as possible' – captures the flavour of some of that audience for whom modernism centred mainly in the loosely-organized Russian Futurist grouping of writers and artists.<sup>42</sup> Their 1912 manifesto, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, set the tone. After the October Revolution in 1917 most Futurists supported the Bolsheviks. In the drive for a new post-revolutionary art in the crisis years 1918-20 they enjoyed some state patronage and public

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exhibition of their work (much of it politically propagandist) compensating for the current loss of private patronage.

Russian Futurism thus provided a thread of continuity between the last phase of pre-revolutionary avant-gardism and the chaotic conditions of the immediate post-revolutionary ferment in which, John Milner suggests, 'art, as it had been known, gave way to construction and took upon itself an inevitable, but new, dimension of social awareness'.<sup>43</sup> In the resultant arguments about the nature of revolutionary art, the disputants had to confront the basic problems of 'art under socialism' that, in Britain, had exercised William Morris and his associates, rather abstractly, in the nineteenth century, with a key issue: 'What business have we with art at all if we cannot all share it?' The issue in practice – and it permeated the ethos of the Edwardian Arts and Crafts Movement – had resolved itself then in more immediate economic terms – the artists' need for active patronage – which meant mainly from the 'enlightened bourgeoisie'.

In Russia the journal *Iskusstvo kommyny* [*Art of the Commune*] published nineteen issues in 1918-19, dedicated 'to every new word in the field of artistic creation, work and construction', which, Christina Lodder argues, 'played a role in the crystallization of avant-garde attitudes and ideas that is out of all proportion to its life-span'. It demonstrated 'a profound commitment to the most advanced aesthetics' which 'undermined the idea [...] that the new art should be realist and comprehensible to the masses'.<sup>44</sup> Its joint editor, Nikolai Punin, wrote in December 1918: "Futurism" is not a state art but the only correct path for the development of universal human art', an implicitly totalitarian outlook that arguably helped to ease the way to the later totalitarian 'state art' of Socialist Realism.<sup>45</sup> Later the Futurist poet-propagandist Vladimir Mayakovsky asseverated: 'we retain the name futurism because this word is for many a flag under which they can gather together', with the proviso 'when our consciousness is also the consciousness of the masses, we shall give up this term'.<sup>46</sup>

In 1921 Lenin introduced the regime's New Economic Policy, which had the side-effect of re-establishing the possibility of personal patronage of art by newly-rich entrepreneurial individuals who were not, by and large, as aesthetically adventurous as the old, discredited, pre-revolutionary 'bourgeoisie' had often been. Mayakovsky described the cultural effect of this change thus: 'When the capacity for buying cultural objects is weak, the measure of demand often compels people in



the arts willy-nilly to adapt themselves to the execrable tastes of the NEP bourgeoisie'. At the same time, he argued, 'some workers in "proletarian" art' were 'vacillating, crave instant recognition and are less armed with culture than anyone else'.<sup>47</sup>

Mayakovsky's critique has a particular resonance inasmuch as he had sought to express a post-Revolutionary variant of the Russian sensibility, and sought to do so in 'Russian Futurist' terms. Before the First World War he had 'felt that Futurism was his form of art because it wished to get rid of the past and create a new kind of life'. Maurice Bowra argues that in him 'the great, subdued forces of the Russian people found a significant voice for its abundant vitality and its simple outlook on life'.<sup>48</sup> In 1922 Mayakovsky identified his poetic art with the whole Russian people:

150,000,000 speak through these  
Lips of mine.

This was, Bowra argues, his 'last attempt to combine Futurism with political poetry'. Thereafter, 'Futurism of Mayakovsky's kind was no longer appreciated'.<sup>49</sup>

Mayakovsky's account of the competing forces in artistic production in Soviet Russia in the 1920s, and his summary of the general position there as a 'total morass' that threatened 'to achieve its pre-war magnitude', read appropriately enough, even if delivered from the partisan perspective of a long-standing Futurist who, as he later said (with regret), had been engaged in more than a decade of 'literary snout-bashing'.<sup>50</sup> One consequence of the wider perception of a 'morass' was the emigration in the early 1920s of many of the artists who had supported the Revolution initially. As well as Kandinsky's departure for Germany, others who had participated actively in the official drive for a new artistic education in the Soviet Union, such as Marc Chagall and Ivan Puni, and later Alexandra Exter, left the country, for Berlin and Paris in particular.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Whitechapel Connection**

Earlier emigrations from Tsarist Russia had been prompted by political pressures on Jewish families living in the Western parts of Greater

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Russia, especially Poland, the Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. Many of these families moved to Britain in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They included children (with others born in Britain) who were brought up and educated there, including several who attended the Slade. This group came to public notice in 1914, when an *Exhibition of Modern Art* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery included a separate 'Jewish Section' of 54 works, assembled largely under the initiative of David Bomberg, who also exhibited (along with, notably, Mark Gertler, Isaac Rosenberg, Alfred Wolmark, Joseph Kramer, and Bernard Meninsky). How far these young men perceived themselves primarily as Jewish, East European, or British (or simply cosmopolitan) artists doubtless varied from one to another. Bomberg and Kramer both exhibited in the 1915 Vorticist Exhibition in London; Lewis commended the work of both (as also Gertler).<sup>52</sup>

Bomberg was to visit Russia in 1933 under the auspices of the fellow-travelling Society for Cultural Relations Between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR, notionally to look at the conditions under which Soviet artists then worked. On his return he concluded that 'where the painter departs from the actual life around and strives for Socialist Realism the paintings do not inspire in the way they are meant to [...]. The theory and the tactics of the Revolution is one thing and the creation of a work of art is another. They have little in common'.<sup>53</sup>

### **Bourgeois Culture Upturned**

Had Bomberg perused the official Soviet journal *Iskusstvo* [*Art*] five years later, in 1938, he would have learned that '[e]nemies of the people, Trotskyite-Bukharinite rabble, Fascist agents, who have been active on the Art front [...] have been unmasked and neutralized by our Soviet intelligence service', opening the way 'to a new wave of enthusiasm among the entire mass of artists'. Among those unmasked was Nikolai Punin, who had in 1918 called Futurism 'the only correct path for the development of universal human art'. By the 1930s he had become officially one of the 'most dyed in the wool and reactionary apologists of rotten, decadent, bourgeois culture'.<sup>54</sup>

Although Futurism had proved not to be the enduring art-style of the USSR, out of it emerged two indigenous 'Revolutionary' art move-

ments, Suprematism and Constructivism, both self-consciously opposed to the 'bourgeois culture' of the past, and to that extent possible vehicles for expressing *de novo* a post-revolutionary sensibility or 'spirituality'. Did that sensibility contain within it a Vorticist-inspired element? Paul Edwards comments that, in Lewis's 'work of the period, in the reproduction it received in *BLAST* and then in 1915 in [the Petrograd journal] *The Archer*', Lewis 'seems to have provided a stimulus to Malevich, Suprematism, and hence to Constructivism' (*WLPW* 132). Of that, more later.

A difficulty here is that Suprematism and Constructivism, in their formative periods, both had a propensity for what Charles Harrison described as 'blather', accentuated by the muddled political circumstances of the time. They rivalled each other as bellwethers of a definitive 'art of the commune', and neither self-evidently fulfilled the needs of a purposively 'proletarian' society. In 1919 Varvara Stepanova suggested that 'Suprematism needed to find a better technique than the application of paint to a canvas in order to carry the Suprematist method to its logical conclusion'.<sup>55</sup> The nature of such a 'logical conclusion', and whether Constructivism possibly provided it, need a more detailed look.

### **Suprematism – Pure Feeling of Perception (and/or Nothing)**

In the Introduction to the Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* exhibition in 1956, Lewis controversially claimed that 'Vorticism, in fact, was what I, personally, did, and said, at a certain period. This may be expanded into a certain theory regarding visual art' (*WLA* [451]). In a comparable sense, Suprematism was what Kasimir Malevich did, and said, at a certain period (a year or two later) with the difference that, as 'an art purified from all representation' that was 'independent of all content and material objectives', 'an expression of a pure sensation of energy [...] and idealistic spiritual superstructure', Suprematism and blather had a natural affinity.<sup>56</sup> With such an artistic purpose, what would be its 'logical conclusion'?

In the short term the logical conclusion (within the terms of conventional painting) can be seen in Malevich's 1918 *White Square on White*, which 'offers no contrast, and admits neither aesthetic nor mystic ideals'.<sup>57</sup> In a longer perspective Lewis, in his last critical book *The*

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*Demon of Progress in the Arts* (1954), depicted the 'logical conclusion', not specifically of long-defunct Suprematism, but of comparable works that were being created and exhibited in the 1950s. Among the 'innovative' painters of that period the American Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) explored minimalism in all-white and all-black works purposively permitting the absence of visual imagery to establish the canvas (or other physical support) as a space for an autonomous activity such as the movement of the viewer's shadow, not as a field for expressing pictorially, in some way, a real or imaginary object. Lewis had no difficulty in defining the 'logical conclusion' of such endeavours: 'It is quite simple; beyond a certain well-defined line – in the arts as in everything else – beyond that limit there is *nothing*. Nothing, zero, is what logically you reach past a line, of some kind, laid down by nature, everywhere' (*DPA* 32). In more philosophically ambitious terms, such a pictorial zero equates with 'an absolute boundary of painting, which was on occasion formally reduced to such an extent that it is almost impossible to maintain the difference between an ontologically pure picture and the status of a simple object'.<sup>58</sup>

Ironically, in 1958, a year after Lewis's death, a group of Düsseldorf artists first exhibited under the name ZERO, with the slogan 'ZERO is silence, ZERO is the beginning'. A further irony lies in Edward Lucie-Smith's description of one of the works produced by the ZERO group, Heinz Mack's *Light Dynamo* (1963): 'It is not the surface itself that holds our attention so much as the disturbance of the light rays which are reflected back to us – these seem drawn into a vortex, then spilled out again'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Constructivism – Affirming the New**

We can see in Suprematism – at least in Malevich's terms – a post-Revolutionary reformulation of 'Russian spirituality'. Constructivism's artists had a mission as 'engineers of souls' – 'the organization of a Communist existence through making the Constructivist man', an aim not so different from the belief that Christian art (icon, painting, ecclesiastical architecture) could help the spiritual struggles of Christian man, except that it rendered everything unto Caesar.<sup>60</sup>

One account of Constructivism in part defines it as an 'aesthetic which arose in Russia based on the Futurist cult of the machine and first

expressed in the “Relief Constructions” of 1913-17 by V[ladimir] Tatlin. Its ideas became crystallized and assumed the importance of a movement in 1921/2.<sup>61</sup> Unlike Suprematism, which was confined mainly to Russia, Constructivism became part of the mainstream international modernist art of the 1920s, along with Dutch neo-Plasticism and French Purism, and other local variants. Outside Russia the ‘movement’ was less strongly ‘political’. The Purists, for example, suggested that ‘Purist syntax is the application of a constructed and modular means. It is the application of laws which control pictorial space’ – in short, a codification of the ‘correct’ principles of design.<sup>62</sup> An implicit ‘spiritual’ purpose behind Purism rests in the belief that ‘architecture was an open expression of the humanity of man, of the distance he could travel from nature by means of his mathematical and mechanical intelligence’.<sup>63</sup>

From around 1925 we can thus identify a broad international ‘constructivist mode’ in art, architecture, and design, which in Russia retained a significant ‘political’ presence until the eventual imposition of a comprehensive ‘Socialist Realism’. Lewis had by then sidelined his artistic career in his concentration on authorship. But in 1919 he had faced a post-war world seemingly not altogether different from that facing artists in post-Revolutionary Russia, and in *The Caliph’s Design* he wrote that ‘[t]he painter stands in this year in Europe like an actor without a stage. Russia is a chaos; whether a good one or a bad one remains to be seen’ (CD 120). He identified the most urgent remedial step in terms not unlike those being voiced in Russia: ‘The energy at present pent up (and rather too congested) in the canvas painted in the studio [...] must be released and used in the general life of the community’ (CD 11-12) – an ‘art of the commune’, so to speak, adjusted to Western circumstances. That brings us back to the question earlier noted: whether Vorticism had some impact on Russian Constructivism. Lewis himself made no such claim. Writing in *The Kenyon Review* in 1940, he spoke of ‘three “abstract” movements in Europe in 1913-14’ – one associated with Mondrian (i.e. neo-Plasticism), ‘one the Vorticist movement’, and ‘there was a third [unspecified] in Russia’ (WLA 356). The unspecified Russian movement would most probably refer to Tatlin’s ‘Relief Constructions’, so Lewis sees the three movements as independent innovators at the key dates 1913-14. Others have suggested a more direct line of influence. Richard Cork speaks of ‘radical Russian artists [...] both aware of and enthusiastic about BLAST No 1’.<sup>64</sup> Susan

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Compton has also recorded that *BLAST* 'became widely known in Russia', and James Hall says 'the Russian avant-garde felt a close affinity with the British Vorticists', though he does not enlarge on the evidence, which in general seems inconclusive.<sup>65</sup>

### **A Bourgeois Expropriation?**

In his study *The Cubist Epoch*, Douglas Cooper argues that 'Cubism played some part in the technical experiments and stylistic adventures which constitute virtually all the *avant-garde* developments in western art between 1909 and 1914'. Its influence, 'though greatly diminished', he says, 'after 1925, certainly continued to affect the pictorial methods of most major artists until about 1940.'<sup>66</sup> Taking 1925 as the pivotal date, a diversified 'International Constructivism', thereafter, largely displaced 'International Cubism' (from which it was itself partly a derivation) as 'the most potent generative force in twentieth-century art', which 'transformed our western ideas concerning the purpose and possibilities of pictorial representation'.<sup>67</sup>

In this role of 'generative force', International Constructivism influenced, in the second half of the 1920s, the development of the style that became known as Art Deco, although at the time more often referred to as '*Moderne*'. In one recent account of Art Deco:

Traces of the influence of the Constructivist idea are apparent in many images readily associated with European design during the 1920s. The fact that Constructivism, de Stijl [i.e. neo-Plasticism] and later Bauhaus ideas were expressed in a strongly geometric formal language only serves to heighten the sense that during the 1920s at least, the abandonment of unnecessary ornament in *avant-garde*, but obviously not all modern, design came to be seen as a powerful design system.<sup>68</sup>

It was a design system strong on presenting contemporary chic and weak on expressing any spiritual content, hence ideally suited to commercial advertising and the presentation of high fashion to the 'discerning consumer'. It does not really misrepresent the position to say that Art Deco, in some part, constituted a bourgeois expropriation of Russian Constructivism. Elizabeth Guffey identifies a similar circum-

stance in the 1960s and 1970s when ‘the increasingly apolitical popularity’ of ‘the art of the revolutionary avant-garde’ ensured that ‘the imagery of the Russian Revolution’ became ‘part of the capitalist retro-revival’.<sup>69</sup>

### **Russia (and Lewis) Between West and East**

The poet Joseph Brodsky has said that the ‘notion of a world culture is distinctly Russian. Because of its location (neither East nor West) and its imperfect history, Russia has always suffered from a sense of cultural inferiority, at least toward the West. Out of this inferiority grew the ideal of a certain cultural unity “out there” and a subsequent intellectual voracity toward anything from that direction.’<sup>70</sup>

Among the many post-Revolution exiles from Soviet Russia, the debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers that had dominated nineteenth-century Russian political thinking took on a new aspect – an embittered condemnation of the ‘pretentious universalism of the “Romano-Germans”’ for imposing European values on non-Europeans, an attack notably developed in N. S. Trubetskoï’s *Europe and Humanity*, published in Sofia in 1920.<sup>71</sup> Inside Soviet Russia a not dissimilar criticism found expression in Alexander Blok’s much translated poem, *The Scythians*, written in Petrograd in 1918, and published in Paris in 1920:

You are but millions – we are an infinite number.  
Measure yourselves against us, try.  
We are the Scythians, we are the Asians  
With slanted and greedy eye [...]  
We’ve held a shield between two hostile races -  
Europe, and the Mongol Hordes ...<sup>72</sup>

After the War, for many Germans, the Slavic East represented ‘not only the geographical but the ideological antithesis of the liberal Anglo-Saxon West’.<sup>73</sup> For them a new orientation for the German *Volk* ‘might divert German culture from the disastrous past of Western materialist decadence’. This post-war mood of pervasive Western decay found its cardinal expression in Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (2 vols, 1918-1921) [*The Decline of the West*]. Lewis dismissed Spengler’s



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philosophy as 'an intoxicant for herd-consumption' (*TWM* 283) but acknowledged that 'Asia has produced plastic art of a far higher order than Europe, in many ways more complex, mature, sensitive and beautiful' (*TWM* 287), excelling in its use of line, a view of fineness of Eastern art that he reiterated both in *Paleface* (1929) and *Rude Assignment*. Michel Seuphor's observation about the Parisian *Circle et Carré* group exhibition in 1929 – 'the circle and the square were the sky and the earth as symbolized by the ancient Oriental religions [...] as a kind of rudimentary alphabet by means of which everything could be expressed with the most limited means' – brings to mind not only the ideas lurking behind Malevich's Suprematism, but also Lewis's own search for 'a visual language as abstract as a musical score' (*WLA* [449]).<sup>74</sup>

For Harold Osborne, '[t]he ideal of the Chinese artist was to reproduce nature by working as nature works, making himself a channel through which the cosmic Tao flows and is made manifest', concerned with 'all those qualities of things for which no exact words exist and which are for that reason sometimes loosely said to express the "spirit" or "essence" of the thing'.<sup>75</sup> Sir Ernst Gombrich complements that analysis in *Art and Illusion*: 'Chinese art theory discusses the power of expressing through *absence* of brush and ink [...]. There are things which ten hundred brushstrokes cannot depict but which can be captured by a few simple strokes if they are right'.<sup>76</sup> The Chinese maxim 'i tao pi pu tao' becomes translatable as 'idea present, brush may be spared performance'.

Lewis's participation around 1909 in the 'British Museum Circle' at the Vienna Café in Bloomsbury had brought him into contact with the Oriental Scholar and poet Laurence Binyon, whose *Painting in the Far East* had appeared in 1908. Paul Edwards suggests that the original title, *Creation*, of Lewis's painting known as *Kermesse* (apart from its significance for Lewis's long-term interest in creation myths) 'was probably suggested by a passage in Binyon's *Flight of the Dragon* (1911), a small book on Oriental art that decisively influenced the artistic avant-garde'.<sup>77</sup> Binyon's book may also have suggested the title of Lewis's multi-media *Dragon in a Cage*, first blocked out in broad outline before 1914, but updated and signed '1950'. If, as Lewis suggested in 1926, '[t]here is no possible "better" than the productions of the great periods of chinese [*sic*] art' (*CHC* 147), we must recall also that he wrote that 'a God that swam in such atmosphere as is produced by the music of a Bach fugue, or the stormy grandeur of the genii on the Sistine ceiling,

[...] would be the highest we could imagine' (*TWM* 370). Those two observations require a synthesis.

### A Synthesis

Whether or not Lewis was ever 'spiritually a Russian', he had something of a Russian temperament. In his biography of Diaghilev, Richard Buckle observes that 'Russians have a tendency to plot, of which the corollary is to believe oneself plotted against', a comment that seems applicable to some parts of Lewis's career, but, even more appositely, the 'restlessness, anarchism and mysticism' that Haftmann found characteristic of the 'Russian soul' in Kandinsky seems no less appropriate to Lewis.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps even more markedly Lewis was dramaturgically Russian, like a self-projected character from a play by Chekhov, with whose dramatic *personae* he would have been a contemporary. (In *The Cherry Orchard*, written in 1903, Anya's age is given as 17, and Vanya's as 24. Lewis himself was then 21.) Hugh Kenner speaks of Lewis's 'vocabulary of dramatic gestures', and his flamboyant dress and manner led Augustus John to describe him as an incurable Romantic in flight from himself.<sup>79</sup> In *The Apes of God* (1930) Lewis speaks of the people who cannot be blamed 'for their attempts at self-creation' (*AG* 294). His own 'self-creation' rested in a large part on the Russian writers imbibed in his early years coinciding with a time when the novelty of the impact of Russia on the Western arts reached a peak of fashionability. Lewis's personal 'crisis' of 1917 lay less in the distant, half-understood rumblings of the Revolution than in his experiences in an artillery observation post in no-man's-land in Flanders (see *BB* 154-59).

Lewis's gradual progress towards a synthesized internationalism of cultural outlook received an early indication in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), where he wrote, commending 'in the abstract' the 'sovietic system', because it had 'spectacularly broken with all the past of Europe: it looks to the East, which is spiritually so much greater and intellectually so much finer than Europe, for inspiration' (*ABR* 320). Two decades later, he wrote that 'Western Europe was what I recognised as the home of my mind. [...] I have now extended that cultural habitat in all directions', a 'more comprehensive synthesis' (*RA* 208). In so doing he had also moved towards the position of a 'world culture' identified by Brodsky as 'distinctly Russian'. Lewis himself said

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of the great Russian authors that they contrived a 'new world of the spirit', made up from a 'half-Western, half-Eastern, ethos; which, among other things, gives them a peculiar value – like everything about Russia' (RA 158).

In his mid-career autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis introduced himself as a Renaissance type of 'portmanteau-man' of diverse interests (BB 3). But he was a portmanteau-man, like Mandelstam's apparition of Aurora in the epigraph to this essay, 'wrapped in furs', a spectral denizen of the hypothetical Petrograd from where, in 1917, he remitted his *Imaginary Letters*, rather than a *cortigiano* from a luminous fifteenth-century Urbino where, in Ezra Pound's words, 'the vortices of social power coincided with the vortices of creative intelligence'.<sup>80</sup>

## Notes

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The transliteration of Russian names above follows widely understood practice, but may not conform to prevailing academic conventions.

<sup>1</sup> Translation cited by Olga Carlisle, *Poets on Street Corners: Portraits of Fifteen Russian Poets* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 47.

<sup>2</sup> The Garnetts' son, David (1892-1981), became a central figure in 1920s 'Bloomsbury'. As Literary Editor of *The New Statesman* he rated among Lewis's journalistic 'enemies'.

<sup>3</sup> Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations* (1963), trans. Richard Mayne (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 534.

<sup>4</sup> 'Death of Mr. Stalin. Moscow Broadcast this Morning. "Life of Unselfish Service to Communist Cause"', *The Times* (6 March 1953), 8.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Sisson, 'Introduction', in Wyndham Lewis, *Enemy Salvoes*, ed. C. J. Fox and introd. C. H. Sisson (London: Vision Press, 1975): 7-18, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), xxvii.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>8</sup> Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. and introd. Michael Frayn (London: Methuen, 1993), xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, 361.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Mizener, *The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford* (1971; New York: Carrol and Graf, 1985), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), vol. 4, 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> According to Lyndall Gordon, T. S. Eliot ‘learned from Dostoevsky (whom he read in Paris, in French translation) to exploit personal problems in his writing’ and to enter ‘a genuine and personal universe’, enabling him ‘to articulate what he alone knew’ – perhaps an analogy with the genesis of *Tarr*. See Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot’s Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>14</sup> A theme repeatedly voiced by Lewis, notably in his article ‘The Children of the New Epoch’ in *The Tyro* No. 1 (1920): ‘We are at the beginning of a new epoch, fresh to it, the first babes of a new, and certainly a better, day’ (*WLA* 195).

<sup>15</sup> David M. Bethea, ‘Literature’, in Nicholas Rzhevsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 169-212, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 292.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Coates, ‘Religious Writing in Post-Petrine Russia’, in Neil Cornwell (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2001): 49-63, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), 40.

<sup>19</sup> Catharine M. Mastin *et al.*, *The Talented Intruder’: Wyndham Lewis in Canada, 1939-1945* (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1992), 73.

<sup>20</sup> Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 299.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 160. Brodsky says of the Russian language: ‘This is not your analytical language of “either/or” – this is the language of “although” [...] and there is nothing its syntax loves to couch more than doubt and self-deprecation [...] and in Dostoevsky’s writing we witness an extraordinary friction, nearly sadistic in its intensity, between the metaphysics of the subject matter and that of language’ (160).

<sup>22</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. and introd. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Press, 1977), xix.

<sup>23</sup> Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 358.

<sup>24</sup> Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 43.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), 298.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

- <sup>27</sup> Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Praeger, 1976), vol. 2, 129.
- <sup>28</sup> Erdmute Wenzel White, *The Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), 69.
- <sup>29</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, 'The Yellow Sound' (1912), in Klaus Lankheit (ed.), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974): 207-25, 210.
- <sup>30</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 236.
- <sup>31</sup> Charles Harrison, 'The Ratification of Abstract Art', in *Towards a New Art: Essays on the Background to Abstract Art, 1910-20* (London: Tate Gallery, 1980): 146-55, 154.
- <sup>32</sup> Michel Seuphor, *Abstract Painting* (New York: Dell, 1964), 109. Nizhni Novgorod (renamed Gorky in 1932), a city in Central Russia, founded in 1221, became for a time the second most important urban centre in Russia. Its annual fair, founded in 1525, reflected its position as a major centre of trade.
- <sup>33</sup> P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 102.
- <sup>34</sup> Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, 97, emphasis added.
- <sup>35</sup> Helen Diner, *Emperors, Angels, and Eunuchs: The Thousand Years of the Byzantine Empire* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939), 59.
- <sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Warner, *Russian Myths* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 78.
- <sup>37</sup> Carl G. Jung, 'Picasso' (1932), in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (13 November), translation reproduced in Marilyn McCully (ed.), *A Picasso Anthology* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981), 182.
- <sup>38</sup> Belinda Thomas, *Gauguin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 42 and 44.
- <sup>39</sup> Michel's catalogue *raisonné* lists seven instances, and other works differentially titled have similarities.
- <sup>40</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (New York: William Morrow, 2002), 227.
- <sup>41</sup> Abbott Gleason, 'Ideological Structures', in Rzhevsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*: 103-24, 115.
- <sup>42</sup> Vassily Malishev, editor of *Novye Puti* [New Roads], quoted in Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Praeger, 1965), vol. 1, 193.
- <sup>43</sup> John Milner, *Russian Revolutionary Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), 5.

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- <sup>44</sup> Christina Lodder, 'The Press for a New Art in Russia, 1917-21', in Virginia Marquardt (ed.), *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997): 63-99, 77-78.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 81, quoting Punin in *Iskusstvo kommuni* no. 4 (December 1918).
- <sup>46</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, transcript of a speech on 'Futurism Today' (3 April 1923), cited in *Plays, Articles, Essays* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1987), vol. 3: 174-75, 175.
- <sup>47</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, editorial in *Novy LEF* (1927), in *ibid.*, vol. 3: 212-13, 212.
- <sup>48</sup> Cecil Maurice Bowra, *The Creative Experiment* (New York: Grove Press, [1948]), 97 and 99.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 127. In 1921 the semi-autonomous 'Organisation for Proletarian Culture' (Proletcult), dedicated to promoting a mass-culture, had passed a resolution '[a]s we consider Futurism an ideological trend of the last period of imperialistic bourgeois culture, we proclaim it antagonistic to the proletariat as a class' (*ibid.*, 123).
- <sup>50</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Address to Krasnaya Presnya Komsol Club* (30 March 1930), cited in *Plays, Articles, Essays*, vol. 3: 235-68, 235.
- <sup>51</sup> Ivan Punin became the French painter Jean Pougny.
- <sup>52</sup> Reviews reprinted in *WLA* 86-87, 394, and 405.
- <sup>53</sup> Quoted in William Lipke, *David Bomberg* (London: Evelyn, Adams, and Mackay, 1967), 123.
- <sup>54</sup> Igor Golomstock, quoting from *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1934), 40, and 3 (1947), 4, in *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, trans. Robert Chandler (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 112-13 and 146.
- <sup>55</sup> Quoted in John Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (eds), *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova* (London: Royal Academy of Arts), 334.
- <sup>56</sup> Extract from 'Suprematism' (by Hajo Düchting) in *The Prestel Dictionary of Art and Artists in the Twentieth Century* (Munich: Prestel, 2000), 313.
- <sup>57</sup> Jeannot Simmen and Kojka Kohlhoff, *Kasimir Malevich: Life and Work* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 93.
- <sup>58</sup> Extract from 'Post-Painterly Abstraction' (by Martin Schulz) in *The Prestel Dictionary of Art*: 262.
- <sup>59</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, *Late Modern: The Visual Arts since 1945*, second edn (New York: Praeger, 1976), 185.

- <sup>60</sup> Statement by Olga Chichagova, a student of Rodchenko, quoted in *Contemporary Artists*, ed. Colin Naylor *et al.* (London: St James Press, 1977), 815.
- <sup>61</sup> Nikos Stangos (ed.), *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 84.
- <sup>62</sup> A. Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, 'Le purisme', published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1921), translated in Eve Blau and Nancy J. Troy (eds), *Architecture and Cubism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 197.
- <sup>63</sup> Christopher Green, 'Léger and L'Esprit Nouveau', in *Léger and Purist Paris* (London: Tate Gallery, 1970): 25-82, 59.
- <sup>64</sup> Richard Cork, catalogue note to exhibit of a copy of *The Archer* (Petrograd 1915) in *Vorticism and its Allies* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974), 58.
- <sup>65</sup> Susan Compton, 'The Spread of Information Leading to the Rise of Abstract Art in Europe', in *Towards a New Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 1980): 178-98, 196; James Hall, *The World as Sculpture: The Changing Status of Sculpture from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999), 286. Richard Humphreys refers – as does Hall – to the interview about Vorticism which Ezra Pound gave to Zinalda Vengerova in 1914 for *The Archer*, and comments that 'Vengerova and, it would seem, most of the rest of Russia were not particularly impressed by Pound's beliefs'. See Humphreys's 'Demon Pantechnicon Driver: Pound in the London Vortex 1908-1920', in Richard Humphreys (ed.), *Pound's Artists: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris, and Italy* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1985): 33-80, 67.
- <sup>66</sup> Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1971), 12.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Art Deco* (Hoo, Kent: Quantum Publishing, 2003), 23.
- <sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Guffey, *Retro: The Culture of Revival* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 149.
- <sup>70</sup> Brodsky, *Less Than One*, 130.
- <sup>71</sup> Jane Burbank, 'The Intelligentsia', in Edward Acton *et al.* (eds), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): 515-28, 524-25.
- <sup>72</sup> Alexander Blok, *The Scythians* (adapted by Rose Styron), cited in Carlisle, *Poets on Street Corners*, 33.
- <sup>73</sup> Gary D. Stark, *Entrepreneurs of Ideology: Neoconservative Publishers in Germany, 1890-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 177.
- <sup>74</sup> Seuphor, *Abstract Painting*, 98.



<sup>75</sup> Harold Osborne, *The Art of Appreciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 126-27.

<sup>76</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1983), 174-75.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 84.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 106.

<sup>79</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen, 1954), 3. Kenner notes that Lewis's propensity towards the mode of 'self-creation' subsequently draws a battleline 'between the human appetite to perceive what is, and the forces that would forbid or embarrass that perception' (146). He also applies to Lewis (6) the analogy of the magician's 'rabbit from the hat', used by Seuphor (see note 32, above) to describe Kandinsky's artistic methodology, so as to explain Lewis's 'strategy of excluding the past from view so as to enhance the sensationalism of the present'.

<sup>80</sup> Ezra Pound, *Essay on Arnold Dolmetsch* (1918), quoted in John Alexander, 'Parenthetical Paris 1920-1925: Pound, Picabia, Brancusi and Léger', in Humphreys (ed.), *Pound's Artists*: 81-120, 115.