Form, Production and Transknowledge in Soviet Modernity (Vienna, 25-26 Sept 24)

Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Universität Wien, Sep 25–26, 2024
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The Actuality of the 20s: Form, Production and Transknowledge in Soviet Modernity. International Conference.

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The materialist turn that came into force in Russia after the revolutions of 1917 encompassed knowledge and social politics, which simultaneously mutated into constructivist biopolitics and social control. As a turn in art, it was reflected in the reorientation of art and art theory makers towards the primary relevance of material-economic conditions, the data of scientific research and the reformatory discourses based on Marxism and Anarchism. The artistic practices of form-building turned to the exploration of natural resources, industrial technology and materials, energetic and physiological processes, as well as new forms of institutionalization according to the horizontal principles of the workshop and the laboratory. In the highly active intellectual landscape, transdisciplinary drafts emerge that go beyond the framework of the classical cogitatio universalis and aim at the fundamental reorganization of social life on the new principles of equality, non-alienated labour and social participation, permanent revolution of the forms of living. E.G. Kazimir Malevich, who saw the revolution as a further step towards the realization of the energetic dynamics of the world, defined it as a stage of a universal process that lies deeper than the utilitarian interests of individual classes and consists in overcoming the "objectification" of the world in images and representations. An energetic-materialist explanation of the world required a renewal of the understanding of art. The socialist path of art, according to the "proletarian monism" of Boris Arvatov, consists in the "complete immersion of art in life", in the "creation of an incessantly created being".

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the historical origins of materialist anthropology in the age of industrialization, with its questions about the relationship between material and thought, about free will and suggestibility, about the integration of individuals and groups in systems of energy and information exchange, etc. The relevance of these questions prompts us to turn to the transdisciplinary projects of the early Soviet period, where the materialist doctrines were realized not only in scientific-philosophical and social-utopian thinking, but also in social production. The topicality and challenges of some of the artistic, theoretical and scientific projects launched after the revolution are only gaining visible contours today. Russian philosopher of feminism and knowledge Alla Mitrofanova writes: "What seems to me important in these almost for-

gotten discussions is their resonance with contemporary philosophical attempts to construct new approaches to ontology, with notions of the historical materiality of the natural, and with the impossibility of separating nature and culture..." Together, we can expand this list: the epistemologically and ontologically motivated critique of the central perspective and individual subjectivity, the questioning of the documentary status of image media and the truth value of representation as such, the performative turn in theatre and agitative activism, the orientation of the arts towards the neurological processes in the body or the problematization of the systemic interconnectedness of material-energetic processes in nature and social production. The practice of epistemological actualization of historically earlier models and languages of knowledge also becomes possible.
As Pavel Florensky remarked in a letter about his own project of "concrete metaphysics", some concerns take 100 years to gain academic validity. Soviet modernism received its first productive reception in Western Europe and the USA as early as the 1970s. More recent editions and research show the new round of attention, which seems to be symptomatic. Ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Caucasus and new dictatorships are once again sharpening the contrasts between light and dark in this new exploration of the past. What can we learn today from the discussions and experiments of the 1920s?

The international conference in the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna collects original contributions from researchers in all relevant disciplines. The 30 minutes presentations could be oriented towards the following lines: form and critique, theory and laboratory, matter and movement, institution and mobility, energy and politics etc. We welcome explorations that deal with pictorial and artistic works, as well as with new forms of creativity that were bubbling up in the immanent plane, in which thought, labor and organization belong to artistic activities.

Please send abstracts no longer than 700 words (English or German) and a short CV by 20 May 2024 to: natalia.ganahl@univie.ac.at

Notifications and Information will be sent out at the beginning of July, 2024.

Reference:
CFP: Form, Production and Transknowledge in Soviet Modernity (Vienna, 25-26 Sept 24). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 22, 2024 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/41490>.