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“THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE AND RADICAL MODERNISM” An Introductory Reader, By Ayse Dietrich*, Published by: Academic Studies Press, Boston. Edited by Dennis G. Ioffe and Frederich H. White. Year of Publishing: 2012. Subject Area: Literature. Book Type: Literature, Literary Criticism, Literary History. Total Number of Pages: 486. ISBN: 978-1-936235-29-2

This book is a collection of articles on the Russian Avant-Garde and Radical Modernism which give the reader a historical perspective on the last phase of the modernist creative history of the Russian Avant-Garde. Divided into six chapters, this collaborative work begins with a section that provides background information on the Russian Avant-Garde and Radical Modernism.

In the first two decades of the 20th century developments in Russia created a climate favorable to revolutionary ideas which, in turn, helped stimulate the development of an artistic avante-garde. Rapid industrialization in the period after the failed revolution of 1905 created economic and social conditions in Russia that were similar to those found in the industrial, urban societies of Western Europe. These new conditions helped foster interest in artistic developments in Western Europe and resulted in Russian artists being influenced by progressive ideas from Germany, France and Italy.

Symbolism, seeking a new spiritualism and hidden realities, was the first phase of European modernism, and its influence in Russian can be found in the writings of Maximilian Voloshin, Valery Briusov, Mikhail Kuzmin, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Aleksandr Blok, Vyacheslan Ivanov, and Andrey Bely. However, the initial radical phase of the Russian Avant-Garde and Modernist movement is seen in Futurism and Cubism. Emerging from Italy, international futurism had an indirect influence on the development of Russian Futurism, as seen in the works of the Russian Avant-Garde poets Vladimir Mayakovsky and Velimir Khlebnikov. Seeking to shock the middle class into making changes in society and politics, Russian Futurists pursued a radical agenda in their public activities. One result of the futurists’ efforts to integrate new art forms that were compatible with daily life in a revolutionary culture into their vision of an innovative society was that they rejected revered Russian cultural icons such as Pushkin, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.

For the Russian avant-garde the tumultuous period between 1914 to 1917, marked by social and political upheaval, marked its apex. Among the major artistic movements of this time were Rayonism, Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism and Constructivism.

The first of these movements, Rayonism, was a radical development of abstractionism and made its appearance in 1911. Inspired by Marinetti's lectures in Moscow on Futurism, Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova combined the forms used in Cubism, the dynamic movement of Futurism and Orphism's use of color to create Rayonism.

The following year, 1912, saw the emergence of Cubo-Futurism, a movement advocated by such artists as Alexander Archipenko, the Brothers Burluk, Alexandra Ekster, Natalia Goncharova, Ivan Klyun, Mikhail Larionov, Lyubov' Popova and Olga Rozanova. Cubo-Futuristic art is characterized by the intersection of spatial planes, the alteration of contours, the contrast of colour and texture, the alteration of contours, the breaking down of forms and the displacement or fusion of various viewpoints.

In 1914 the painter and art theoretician Kazimir Malevich established Suprematism, regarded as an important movement of the Russian Avant-Garde. Suprematist paintings are characterized by formless, geometrical abstraction.

The last of the Russian Avant-Garde movements was Constructivism which emerged in 1921. Strongly influenced by both Futurism and European Cubism, the principles of Constructivism are seen in both architectural design and art. Constructivists were intrigued with technology, geometrical objects, machines, industrial materials etc. Some of the major proponents of Constructivism were Naum Gabo, El Lissitzky, Ivan Leonidov, Konstantin Melnikov, Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Vesnin.

Many of these movements of the Russian Avant-Garde came to be seen as examples of decadent bourgeois art when Socialist Realism was adopted as state policy in 1932. Since proletarian civilization was expected to produce its own culture, following the state's artistic principles meant that Russian radical modernists would have to abandon their own artistic production.

The Russian Avant-Garde movement's final representative was the OBERIU-group, made up of underground poets and writers. Members of the group were forbidden to publish or distribute their works; for example, the only works by Daniil Kharms that were published by the Soviet press were his children's books.

In the second section of the book the second chapter *Hylaea* from Vladimir Markov's book *Russian Futurism* is discussed. This section introduces the Hylaea group which was initiated at the end of 1912 by David Burluk and his brothers. Later Vasily Kamensky, Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksey Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, Kazimir Malevich, and Olga Rozanova join this group; and they issue a manifesto entitled *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu).

The Hylaea section also includes sub-sections which deal with the Russian Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov characterized as a timid Futurist; the Russian Futurist poet Mayakovsky as Literary Critic who saw the Futurist art as the new art of the new proletarian state; translated texts of Russian

Futurist Vasiliï Kandinsky, Natalya Goncharova, David Burliuk, Ilya Zdanevich, Mikhail Larionov, Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky and program declaration of KOMFUT and analysis of the Russian Futurism David Burliuk, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov.

The third section encompasses Russian Suprematism and Constructivism and includes sub-sections Kazimir Malevich and his creative path; Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s; the birth of Socialist Realism from the spirit of the Russian Avant-garde and Russian art of Avant-Garde translated texts.

In the fourth section the last Russian Avant-Garde OBERIU Circle, Daniil Kharms, Aleksandr Vvedensky and some philosophical positions in some OBERIU texts are introduced.

The fifth section is devoted to Russian experimental performance and theater which included the Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Culture of Experiment in Russian Theatrical Modernism in the OBERIU Theater and the Biomechanics of Vsevolod Meyerhold.

The sixth section Avant-Garde Cinematography includes Eisenstein's Biography, an analysis of Vertov's Three Songs of Lenin as a Stalinist Film.

At the end of the book there is a Concluding Addendum which discusses the tradition of experimentation in Russian culture and the Russian Avant-Garde.

This introductory book provides comprehensive analysis of the radical artistic movement Russian Avant-Garde and Radical Modernism, included well written biographical articles, critical analyses and collected samples of the Russian Avant-Garde and Modernism. It is a remarkable resource for not only researchers but also students who study Russian literature and culture, particularly the movement Russian Avant-Garde and Modernism.

***Ayse Dietrich** - Professor, Part-time, at Middle East Technical University, Department of History. Editor and the founder of the International Journal of Russian Studies. e-mail: editor@ijors.net, dayse@metu.edu.tr, dietrichayse@yahoo.com

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