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A Chasm Between Two Vanguards: Near Encounters of Russian Emigre Marxists and Dadaism in Switzerland

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In the year 1916, Switzerland was an island of peace in a sea of belligerence. Surrounded by Germany, France, and Italy, Switzerland was one of the few European counties to maintain its neutrality during the war that transformed Europe into a graveyard. It also became an ideal sanctuary for those who opposed the brutality and strident nationalism of World War I. Ever since the defeat of the 1905 Revolution in Russia, Switzerland had acted as an ideal place of refuge for members of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (the RSDLP, a Marxist party founded in 1898). This party sought to overthrow the Russian autocracy and further the cause of an internationalist revolution based upon Marxist principles of creating a society where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

1 Already in 1848, Marx and Engels define their Communist goals in the following fashion: “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, Frederick Engels, trans. and ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1906), p. 47.
In 1903, this party split into two rival factions: the Bolshevik wing, calling for a tightly-organized structure based upon committed revolutionaries, and the Menshevik wing, seeking to work within the current system and not openly incite revolution. Although these were distinct currents within the party, the split was not final until 1912, and hence there was a much greater degree of fluidity compared to later periods. Devoted to the international workers’ movement instead of jingoistic impulses, RSDLP members were appalled at the collapse of the Second International in 1914, when many members parted ways based upon national lines—thus betraying their own professed internationalist commitments and succumbing to nationalist and pro-war propaganda. Members following Vladimir Il’ich Lenin’s Bolshevik faction, within the RSDLP, waited for the time when this nationalist competition between warring nations would transform into a situation that could cause the proletariat to rise up and seize the reins of power, led by Lenin’s own revolutionary vanguard.

Not far away from Lenin and other members of the RSDLP in the Swiss city of Zurich, another vanguard of a very different sort emerged during the war. While abhorring the bloodshed of inner-imperialist rivalry that exploded in World War I, some members of the RSDLP viewed war also as a springboard to revolution, another group of avant-garde artists, led by Tristan Tzara, rued war as the ultimate triumph of irrationality over the rational. Many trace the Dada Movement back to 1915 when Hugo Ball and Emily Hemmings experimented with anti-war performance in their Cabaret Voltaire.

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3 R. Graig Nation’s *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Chicago, Ill.: Haymarket Books, 2009) contextualizes how World War I divided the parties of the old Second International based on whether collaboration with, or resistance to, the war effort, was the best course of action. The Bolsheviks were among the few socialist organizations that consistently and openly opposed the war.

designed to shock the audience. It was only in February of 1916, when Dada began to coalesce as a coherent artistic movement, that Ball and Hemmings invited artists like Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Hans Richter to join their group. Tzara’s role was particularly important in shifting Dada into a cohesive movement that used printed media instead of just performance art.

From Zurich, Dada spread to several other major cities like Berlin, Paris, and New York. In a world that seemed to be falling apart about them, Tzara and other followers of the art movement that would later become Dadaism concluded that the world that surrounded them was filled with absurdity and brutality and that Modern Art called for something new to reflect these trends.

After the war, inspired by Bolshevik techniques of agitation, Dadaism would even produce works of art that meant to shock as a sort of artistic engagement. Although the purpose of Dada from the beginning had been to disorient its audience, in cities like Berlin and Cologne many of the leading Dada artists were actually members of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), particularly at the high-water mark of 1920. Berlin artists, like George Grosz and John Heartfield, waged battles over whether or not it was necessary to protect works of high culture during a revolution, especially since the Dadaists took a stance that valued human life over works of art. They wrote pamphlets linking Dadaism with Communism and created art designed to confront the sensibilities of their audience. Indeed, Tzara identified as a Soviet sympathizer well into the late 1940s, at a time

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when the Soviet art scene was starkly dissimilar to Dadaism.\textsuperscript{8} A little after the heyday of Dadaism, leading French Surrealists, such as the poets André Breton, Louis Aragon, Benjamin Péret, and Paul Éluard, gravitated towards Marxism and even joined the French Communist Party (PCF), seeing their aesthetic, philosophical, and political commitments to Dada-inspired Surrealism and Marxism-Leninism as mutually complementary. Hence, the French and German Communist parties, at various points of the 1920s, embraced Dada and Surrealist artists.

It seems vogue in certain quarters of educated popular opinion to suggest a natural affinity between Bolshevism and Dadaism. After all, both Dadaism and Bolshevism developed in order to contest the world of capitalist exploitation and alienation, imperialist wars, rampant racism and colonialism; in short, the status quo and those complicit with it. Some of this perceived affinity goes all the way back to the movement itself.

The Dada artist Hans Richter made one of the few observations of the nearby Russian Bolsheviks. He quipped that the authorities in Zurich “were far more suspicious of the Dadaists, who were liable to pull off some unexpected stunt at any moment, than of those quiet, scholarly Russians.”\textsuperscript{9} Even in the 1920s, Hitler tended to consider modernist trends in art, like Dadaism, under the pejorative term “Bolshevik Art.”\textsuperscript{10}

One of the few books that deals directly with Lenin and Dadaism is a satirical volume, Dominique Noguez’s \textit{Lénin Dada: Essai}. This tongue-in-cheek French book follows up one absurd hypothesis with another, all accompanied with extensive footnotes that provide only circumstantial support for the book’s assertions, as it claims that “dada” originated from Lenin calling out “yes, yes” (in Russian: \textit{da},

\textsuperscript{8} Robert Motherwell ed., \textit{The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology}, Robert Motherwell, ed. 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), p. xvii. For more on Tzara and Huelsenbek’s animosities and shifting political sympathies vis a vis the Communist Party, see ibid., p. xxxvi.

\textsuperscript{9} Quoted in Dachy, p. 33.

or that Lenin had actually written the tracts of Tzara’s “Dadaist Manifesto” based upon handwriting analysis.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, deeper into the book the sense of wry satire soon gives way to a more serious critique. For instance, Noguez interprets the transformation of War Communism into the NEP\textsuperscript{12} as an embodiment of the Dadaist principle of contradiction and suggests that the brutality of the Russian Civil War is a manifestation of Dadaism.\textsuperscript{13}

It soon becomes clear that the purpose of the book is not so much a work of history as a work of dada itself, ultimately calling into question both Bolshevism and an alleged irrationalism in modernist art in general.\textsuperscript{14} In that sense, this book seems to be not all that unlike the views of Modris Ekstein’s \textit{Rites of Spring}.\textsuperscript{15} More recently, the satirical Estonian film \textit{All My Lenins} from 1997 places Lenin in a cabaret talking about Dadaism with Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp, which, like Noguez’ book, attributes the origin of the term “Dada” to the Russian for “yes, yes.”\textsuperscript{16} More recently still, a Dadaesque literary work by Andrei Codrescu uses, as its unifying image, the conception of Lenin and Tristan Tzara playing a game of chess in Zurich. However, it is rather hostile to Lenin and even goes so far as to describe Tzara as “fresh” while Lenin is “boring.”\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} In Soviet history, the period of “War Communism” (1918-1921) was characterized by strict government control of the economy in the time of the Russian Civil War, building off of total war approaches already developed in warring nations during the World War I. “The New Economic Policy” (NEP, 1921-1928) after the Russian Civil War permitted small-scale privately owned businesses in order to recover economically from the war. Ideologically, this was justified at the war’s end since Russia’s prerevolutionary past had not reached a full stage of capitalism, thus requiring an unspecified period of mixed economy.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 98-104, 113-39 (respectively).
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 141-44.
\item \textsuperscript{15} For a later 20\textsuperscript{th} century liberal critique, see Modris Ekstein’s \textit{Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age} (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Hardi Volmer, dir. \textit{All My Lenins} (Lenfil’m/Faama:1997; Laagri: Records Hulgi, 2002), DVD, (00:45:09-00:46:28).
\end{itemize}
Despite the pop-culture impressions of close ties between Dada and Bolsheviks in Zurich, this does not seem to be the case at all. Notwithstanding the seeming similarity of these two vanguards in their challenge to the status quo and their combative rhetoric, members of the RSDLP in actuality seem to have completely ignored these artistic trends happening next door, much like the rest of the world outside of the Avant-Garde milieu. In fact, when Robert Motherwell tries to locate the birth of Dadaism into the larger context of foreign radicals in Zurich in his 1951 introduction to his Dadaist source book, he is surprised to find no direct references to the close proximity of Dadaists to the Bolsheviks. Instead, he has to rely on the testimony of the Romanian and early biographer of Lenin, Valeriu Marcu, and his recollections of Lenin in Zurich. Motherwell would have clearly preferred to quote Marcu’s fellow Romanian expatriate, the Dada artist Tristan Tzara. He observes perplexedly “Lenin was in exile in Zurich during the dada days. Oddly enough, he is rarely mentioned in this anthology, despite its rebellious texts.”

Why did such silence exist on the part of the RSDLP? Were they merely silent because they did not engage with the art world of the Swiss society around them? This appears not to be the case, since there is ample evidence of Bolshevik attention to the Futurist Movement while in Swiss exile in the same period. How could the RSDLP members ignore such a leftist art movement that challenged the very foundations of what the ruling elites considered art? The following pages of this article are devoted to answering this important question of why Bolsheviks were so silent on Dadaism. In order to answer this question, we shall examine the aesthetic predilections of the members of the RSDLP in their Russian context and explore why their views would cause them to disregard Dadaism as a movement. This article will argue that even if some members of the RSDLP had

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18 Motherwell, p. xxiv. Note that the index has mislabeled this reference as p. xviii, probably a typo accidentally held over from the first edition of the book in 1951.
been aware of Dadaism (which, in and of itself, is far from certain),
their aesthetic sensibilities would have led them to question whether
the iconoclasm of Dadaism would lead merely to despair or inspire
systematic struggle for a better world.

Before Marxism had become a palpable force in Russia, the
Russian left-wing intelligentsia largely embraced the aesthetic
systems of literary critics Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), Nikolai
Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), and Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861).
Belinsky, who, starting in the 1840s, increasingly came under the
influence of French socialism, concluded that the content of a work
of art held greater value than its form. He criticized much of the
poetry and other works of his time for embracing “art for art’s sake,”
insisting instead that fine literature should deal with pressing social
problems of the day. Although he felt that true literature should not
be “preachy,” he insisted that the importance of a work of art relied
more on its main idea than its form or structure. Chernyshevsky and
his protégé Dobroliubov, claiming continuity with Belinsky’s later
work, pushed these notions still further, arguing that literature was
most important for the ways it reflected the life of the world around
them and suggested avenues for progress. Their critics accused them
(especially Chernyshevsky) of destroying aesthetics as a concept
in art and literature. Yet, Chernyshevsky’s ideas became highly
influential in Russian aesthetic thought. Even those who disagreed
with the positions of Chernyshevsky still had to react to his assertions,
especially since critics who were conservative still tended to see
themselves as heirs to Belinsky’s traditions in literary criticism, even
though they may not have always agreed with his sharp turn towards
socialism in the 1840s.

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20 Particularly Christian socialists in France and advocates of women’s rights, like
the noted author George Sand. Eventually in 1847 Belinsky visited Alexander Herzen in
Paris and had a chance to observe French culture firsthand.

21 Victor Terras, Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of
127-78.

22 Ibid., pp. 234-54. Also see Thelwall Proctor, Dostoevskij and the Belinskij
Because of this critical trajectory differing so much from the analytical tendencies of the West, Russian literary criticism played a far more active role in shaping literary talent. Critics would not only identify literary talent, but they would suggest avenues for future development of literary talent, sometimes working quite closely with authors. Since this school of literary criticism prided itself upon engaging social issues, the key to criticism was often to find what social concerns were central to the idea of the work, often leading rival critics to accuse them of merely using the work of art as a springboard to other social topics.23

Thus, another feature of this style of criticism was that it could take the interpretation of the meaning of a given work of art away from the author and instead assign this role to the critic. Although this would sometimes lead to clashes, as in the case of conservative-minded authors, like Nikolai Gogol and Feodor Dostoevsky, many other authors, such as Nikolai Nekrasov and Ivan Turgenev, appreciated the insights of critics into the meaning of their works, discovering facets that they did not realize existed.24 Although this started out as a literary trend, Vladimir Stasov soon extended these expectations to the world of music and visual arts by the mid- to late-19th century.25 In Western Europe most informed discussions of art could easily revolve exclusively around the form of the art, whereas in Russia critics gave


greater space to analyzing the content of a given work of art and its main idea.

G.V. Plekhanov, the founder of the RSDLP, was also the first to provide a Marxist critique of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, often praising Belinsky to a much greater extent for his use of dialectics. Indeed, Victor Terras sees all of Russian Marxist criticism as growing out of the Belinsky school of literary criticism, although many of its earlier exponents, like Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, and Trotsky, tended to be closer to Belinsky’s more accepting positions as opposed to the more pronounced views of Chernyshevsky.26 Plekhanov, like other Russian Marxists who followed him, agreed that despite the fact that these 19th-century Russian literary critics were not Marxists, they nonetheless had much to offer Marxism, especially in their favoring of a given work’s content over its form. This position was later upheld by most Russian Marxists: even when they wished to praise works of art that emphasized form, the work’s content had to include some definite stand on the revolutionary movement. Reacting to Plekhanov’s theories, Anatoli Lunacharsky and his brother-in-law, Aleksandr Bogdanov, built on his critique by emphasizing the need of the proletariat to create their own culture. Although Lunacharsky’s system was far more accepting of different forms and tended to favor bold colors, as we will see at the end of this article when talking about the futurists, like Plekhanov and the 19th-century Russian critics, he also recognized the centrality of content in his analysis of art. Like many others, he was very leery of pessimistic themes in art and images that were not beautiful in form.27

This preservation of 19th-century aesthetic criticism was necessary to combat what some perceived as steps backwards with the "World of Art" movement during the turn of the 20th century. This movement, headed by impresario Sergei Diaghilev and including many of the most famous artists of his day, signaled a definite break away


27 Bown, pp. 29-35.
from earlier realist trends of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and, in particular, from the "Wanderers," who in addition to their nationalist themes were deeply concerned with social issues and human suffering. Such themes made the "Wanderers" well suited to the critical approaches in the Chernyshevsky branch of Belinsky's school of literary criticism. Striking against well-established art movements that have become hollow, as often happens within the field of art, the "World of Art" movement claimed that the style of the "Wanderers" had grown outmoded due to their popularity, which had stunted their creativity. Instead, the "World of Art" movement called for a platform of "art for art's sake," thereby elevating the role of the artist and shifting the focus of art away from social engagement towards inner creative processes. Most members of the RSDLP believed this was a movement that turned its back on social concerns to focus instead upon endlessly self-referential and egotistical themes, devoid of larger social meanings. Other famous schools of art like the Symbolists and the Suprematists were also following these trends of trying to find a new voice for Russian art. When the October Revolution came in 1917, some of these artists decided to stay in the Soviet Union and found a welcoming home in the Soviet Avant Garde movement of the 1920s, while others like Diaghilev became a fixture of Western Europe's art scene in the interwar period.\textsuperscript{28}

Leon Trotsky was also highly influenced by Lunacharsky's school of Marxist aesthetics, which he first encountered while in exile following the 1905 Revolution.\textsuperscript{29} While writing his book \textit{Literature and Revolution} that took a broad view of the Soviet art scene in the 1920s, Trotsky looked at a number of different writers of his day, trying to determine the path that the future art and literature of Communism would take. He does not mention Dadaism at all, either through unfamiliarity with it or not recognizing its potential significance to the Soviet art scene. However, he does consider the writings of exiled Russians and fellow travelers, as well as many of the

\textsuperscript{29} Bown, p. 35.
artists of the Soviet Avant Garde. Although he sees each of these groups as having an influence on the Soviet art scene, Trotsky is looking for a new type of Soviet artist who is immune from the more self-indulging trends of pre-revolutionary art. Thus, he even saw enthusiastic writers, like Aleksandr Blok and Vladimir Mayakovskii, as reacting to the Revolution instead of being an integral product of it.30

Trotsky concluded that there could not be any true Soviet literature as of yet, since the Soviet proletariat still needed to develop its own cultural voice. Thus, genuine Soviet literature did not exist at the time and could only evolve with a new generation brought up with new socialist ideals. Interestingly enough, while looking at the art scene of his day, Trotsky suggests that, unlike his 19th-century counterparts who had a Belinsky to guide them to literary fruition, the proletarian writer called out for the guidance of a new “Soviet Belinsky” who would mentor them on the correct, progressive path to a true Soviet literature, encapsulating the spirit of the revolution.31 Trotsky sees Demyan Bedny as the most promising of proletarian writers.32

Perhaps, if Trotsky had not fallen from power, he himself might have fulfilled this role as a Soviet Belinsky. Instead, Bedny’s career would take a sudden turn for the worse as he fell out of favor for unwittingly writing a satire of Russian epic heroes in the late 1930s, just as the authorities were in the process of rehabilitating such heroes and imparting new ideological meanings under Stalin’s Socialist Realism.33 Even though Trotsky was open to different forms for art,
he insisted that a work of art reflect the goals of the Revolution, then it lacked a progressive character and was open to criticism.

RSDLP members living in Switzerland approached art within this same general framework. Although some like Lunacharsky, Bogdanov, and Trotsky were open to a greater variety of artistic expression, embracing Modern Art trends like Futurism\textsuperscript{34} as holding at least potential for progressive content, their reception of art nevertheless favored content over form. Many other members of the RSDLP had a hostile reception to works of art, such as Futurism, because of their experimentation with form and their negligence of content. Contrary to Noguez’ satirical essay mentioned earlier, it might be that Vladimir Lenin fell into just such an aesthetic camp in his personal views. Lenin was a great admirer of Nikolai Chernyshevsky and even named one of his own most influential political pamphlets after Chernyshevsky’s novel \textit{What is to be Done}?.\textsuperscript{35} Also much like Chernyshevsky, Lenin appears to have viewed “art for art’s sake” as deeply problematic. The issue of \textit{Iskusstvo} celebrating the 90\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Lenin’s birth in 1960 during the Thaw\textsuperscript{36} interprets Lenin’s aesthetic sensibilities as thoroughly in line with the positions of Chernyshevsky and Belinsky and at odds with trends of modern art.\textsuperscript{37} One of the recollections


\textsuperscript{34} Note that Futurism is a very broad artistic movement with many different wings. While the Italian Futurists are frequently associated with fascism, many other Futurists could just as easily identify with the political left. Thus, Lenin’s concerns about the political ambivalence of futurism had some degree of justification.


\textsuperscript{36} The Thaw is a period of Soviet History immediately after the death of Stalin when authorities permitted a greater degree of cultural expression in the Soviet Union. This could extend to criticism of elements of the Stalinist system, but nevertheless refrained from attacking the Communist Party. Due to Nikita Khrushchev’s distain for Modern Art, the impressions of the official art journal \textit{Iskusstvo} still remained skeptical of Modern Art’s value.

by the painter A. Magaram recalls Lunacharsky and Lenin meeting during a Futurist exhibition in Zurich while in Swiss exile. Whereas Lunacharsky was impressed with the artwork of the Futurists, Lenin was unimpressed by its abstract features. When someone asked Lenin what he thought of an abstract painting entitled *A Portrait of the Violinist Fritz Kreisler*, Lenin asked Lunacharsky if he would like a likeness in this style to represent him after his own death. When Lunacharsky reputedly chuckled and responded “no,” Lenin rested his case against the rebellion against realism.\(^\text{38}\) Since this recollection was included in the official Soviet art journal *Iskusstvo* in a period when Khrushchev was having his own headaches with Modern Art during the Cold War, it is certainly likely that Magaram’s recollections were at least somewhat influenced by the political climate of 1960. Yet, given Lenin’s admiration of Chernyshevsky and his aesthetic views, not to mention his admiration for the socially-engaged “Wanderers” of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\)-century, there may be some reasons to think that Magaram’s recollections are more than simply apocryphal. This is especially true since, contrary to Noguez’ tongue-in-cheek assertions, there is virtually no hard evidence of Lenin’s positive reception of Modernist Art.

Clearly there is some evidence from Lenin’s lifetime to suggest that Modern Art and Literature were not Lenin’s “cup of tea.” However, we must bear in mind that Lenin never intended to impose his aesthetic views as Stalin did. Even in his most intense polemics, Lenin still advocated for considerable philosophical and methodological pluralism in the Bolshevik movement. This comes into focus in 1908 and 1909, when he makes a strong case against Bogdanov, who tried to incorporate aspects of the “empiriocriticism” of the non-Marxist physicist Ernst Mach into Bolshevism. Despite being fiercely critical of such attempts, Lenin nevertheless affirmed that the Bolsheviks should not have any “official” position on this matter, thus allowing for a range of views.\(^\text{39}\) Although Lenin never


commented directly on Dadaism, we know that Lenin was normally not fond of Mayakovsky’s writings as a left-futurist poet. On May 6, 1921, Lenin wrote a note to Lunacharsky saying that the former should be ashamed to have voted for such a large run of 5,000 copies for Mayakovsky’s *150 Million*, because Lenin found it “absurd, stupid, monstrously stupid and pretentious.” Yet, even though it went against his aesthetic tastes, sometimes he felt that his biting satire could help to point out flaws in the party. In a later speech to the Metal Worker’s Congress on March 6, 1922, Lenin praised a recent poem from Mayakovsky in *Izvestiia*, spoofing Communist inactivity due to too much debate. Although he said:

> I do not count myself among the admirers of his poetic talent, though I fully admit my lack of competence in that sphere. But it is a long time since I have felt so satisfied from a political and administrative point of view….I do not know whether it is good poetry, but I promise you he is absolutely right from a political point of view.40

Again, ultimately, content outweighed form even in the case of Mayakovsky, from Lenin’s perspective. Instead, there is much reason to believe that Lenin, like many other RSDLP members without the openness to different forms that characterized Lunacharsky and Trotsky, tended to have personal reservations about works of art that strayed from a non-abstract representation of reality but did not try to impose their aesthetic tastes on others.

Furthermore, had Lenin been aware of Dadaism, it seems likely that the movement’s pessimistic, irrational, and thoroughly anti-enlightenment program would have caused as much offence to him and many other devoted revolutionaries. Indeed, this irrationality was the content of Dadaism, despite its revolutionary form, which most Western observers would tend to mistake for its content. If RSDLP members rejected an “art for art’s sake” position, it is all the more likely that they would have rejected an “anti-art for anti-art’s sake”

position as well. Hence, were it possible to ask the exiled members of the RSDLP today about Dadaism, it is highly unlikely that anyone would have anything good to say about it. Most of them would have seen it in the greater context of the self-absorbed positions of the “World of Art” movement and others like it. Their reception would focus not so much on the provocative form of the art, but rather on its empty, if not downright reactionary, content, making a mockery of progress, enlightenment, and rationalism. Rather than a revolution in artistic form, they would likely situate the movement as Trotsky situated the Futurists in his Literature and Revolution, as growing out of a tradition of individual artistic rebellion that, even though it challenged the bourgeoisie, lacked a positive program to effect social change. Although he did not see this as dangerous, Trotsky categorically set this apart from what he viewed as the true path for a proletarian art and literature, growing organically out of Soviet society. Compared to this inchoate view of a developing Soviet literature and art, which never actually evolved as Trotsky had envisioned it, individual artistic rebellion appeared to Trotsky much more like a petulant child lashing out at its parents instead of a mature artist. 41 Given that this is what the more inclusive voice had to say, it is doubtful that the stauncher defenders of realism would have felt much differently.

Still, even after Stalin’s rise to power, one cannot conflate all communist parties with Stalinism and its repressive and narrow standards for artistic expression. Other communists outside of Stalin’s Soviet Union approached art far more inclusively. In 1938, for example, Trotsky and Breton published their famous Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art, in which they strongly oppose any kind of top-down ideological interference with artistic freedom, calling instead for artistic pluralism. 42 Debates about how Marxists should best approach Modernist and experimental art, such as

41 Trotsky, pp. 129-32.
42 This document was official published under the names of Breton and Diego Rivera. The latter, however, was involved only in name, while Breton’s real co-author was Trotsky. “Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art” https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/works/rivera/manifesto.htm (accessed on Jan. 13, 2017).
Dadaism, Surrealism, and Expressionism, continue to the present day. Most famously, during the 1920s and 30s Georg Lukács famously fleshed out his case against more abstract art, arguing that Marxists should base their contributions instead on further developing the 19th century tradition of critical bourgeois realism. However, other important Marxist thinkers, such as Ernst Bloch, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, recognized and embraced the progressive aspects of abstract Modernist Art.\footnote{For an excellent overview of these debates, see Frederick Jameson, \textit{Aesthetics and Politics} (London: Verso Books, 2007).}

In conclusion, what many would expect to have resulted in a meeting of two vanguards in actuality is met with nothing but silence. Living just down the street from each other in Zurich, these vanguards had very little in common when it came to their aesthetic assumptions. Whether this was due to aloofness or simply being unaware of each other is uncertain, but given the RSDLP members’ reception of other forms of Modern Art, it is highly unlikely that they would have seen any more in the Dadaists than Trotsky’s description of the lone artist as a putative child rebelling against its parents. Instead, the RSDLP members called for art which contained not merely the form of agitation, but that had content that was organically a part of the revolution.