Boris Groys

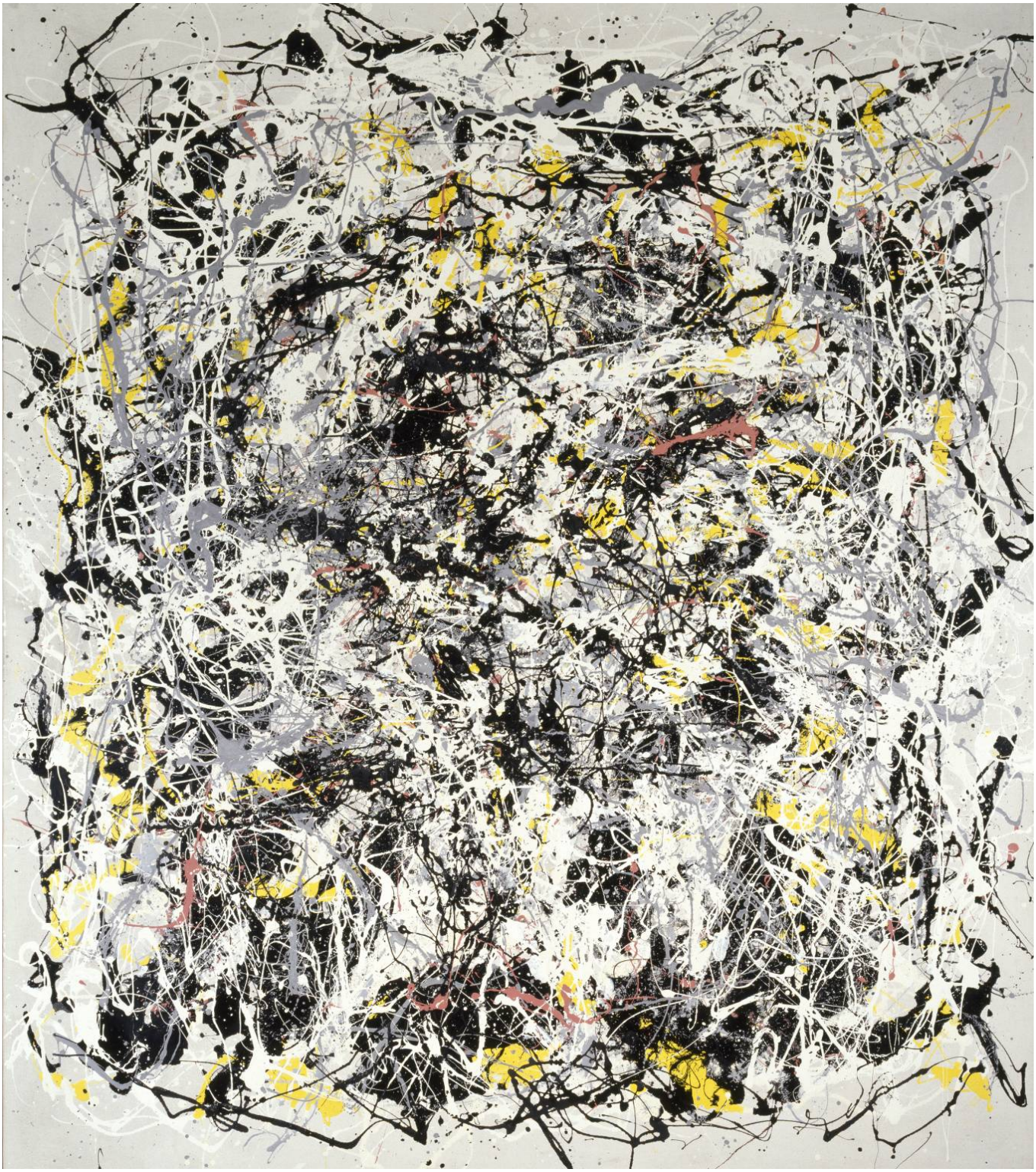
Lenin's Image

> The Time of the Takers is over; the Might of the Makers parades;
> T has fallen; M occupies the stage.
> These are the high priests of LIGHTLAND, and "Workers of the World" is their banner's device. – Velimir Khlebnikov, "Lightland" (trans. Paul Schmidt)[1]

1. Lenin as Maker

Since the time of European romanticism, we have been aware that we should judge an artwork according to its own laws. This stricture establishes a kinship between artist and legislator, between art-making and lawmaking. Indeed, there is no fundamental difference between making a state and creating a work of art. In both cases, it is a question of producing a form and placing the other inside the form – the citizen in the state, the reader in the novel, the viewer in the exhibition, the spectator in the play. The difference is that citizens are punished if they violate the laws of the state in which they live. By contrast, readers and viewers are free. They generally obey the laws of artworks of their own free will, and can ostensibly escape their power at any time by closing the book and leaving the exhibition. These similarities and differences between state and artwork defined the European political and cultural imagination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Above all, this connection explains art's fascination with revolutionaries and legislators – the destroyers and makers of states and their laws. Some writers and artists were, undoubtedly, envious of these men. The figures of the revolutionary and the statesman rarely overlapped, however. Most of the revolutionaries who led the French Revolution would fall victim to it. The statesman was Napoleon, who simultaneously consummated the revolution and buried it. The exception to this rule was Lenin, who was one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution and at the same time the founder of the Soviet state. This dual role ensured that Lenin was consistently recognized throughout the Soviet period of Russian history. Moreover, his recognition constantly increased. Under Soviet rule, history played the role of erasing memory, not preserving it; under Stalin, the memory of almost an entire generation of revolutionaries was expunged – except for Lenin. Then, under Khrushchev, the official memory of Stalin and his comrades was erased, and Khrushchev himself later suffered the same fate. Only Lenin remained unaffected by this continuous process of memory erasure. By the end of the Soviet period, his name alone vouchsafed historical continuity, so almost



Art & Language, *Portrait of V. I. Lenin with Cap, in the Style of Jackson Pollock III*, 1980. Copyright: Tate, London, 2021.

everything that could be "christened" with a person's name was named after him. Consequently, Lenin's name was erased only when the Soviet system collapsed, and the country returned to capitalism.

In its early revolutionary period, Soviet art was closely aligned with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in at least two ways. First, Bolshevism conceived itself as a working-class, proletarian movement, and in this way it differed from traditional revolutionary populism, which was rooted in the countryside. Hard on the heels of Italian futurism, Russian futurism understood and welcomed the Industrial Revolution as a radical destruction of nature's traditional guise: hills, valleys, and clouds everywhere gave way to trains, planes, and automobiles.

Traditional architecture yielded to monstrous factory buildings, and haggard, despondent city dwellers looked less and less like latter-day Venuses and Apollos. Many artists protested the Industrial Revolution by preaching a return to communal life in nature as well as embracing vegetal ornamentalism and stylized takes on ancient exemplars. Russian futurism and suprematism, by contrast, welcomed the new industrial world's advent, demanding the removal of everything that concealed its appearance by pastiching the art of the past. The Russian avant-garde had called for radically reducing art, for purging industrial forms of all superficial accretions, of all cultural and artistic superstructures. Art as a separate occupation had to be eliminated: the inherent forms of industrial, utilitarian culture per se would thus be revealed. The entire nineteenth century was marked by protest against bourgeois society's utilitarianism and pragmatism, under the slogan of saving any remnants of culture from the onslaught of capitalist entrepreneurship – of saving the "cherry orchard," if you like, from its inevitable felling to clear ground for industrial progress.

The artistic avant-garde turned the razor's edge of critcism in the opposite direction. The bourgeoisie was now criticized for not cutting down the cherry orchard consistently enough. Indeed, nineteenth-century bourgeois culture was still largely a feudal, aristocratic culture. The idea of luxury was still aristocratic, just as the notion of "true" art was shaped by an academicism based on Greco-Roman models. The avant-garde's goal was to eliminate this cultural superstructure looming over the world of technology and to thereby aestheticize it. It did not want to reject the utilitarian in art's name, but rather to view the utilitarian as artistic – to see the automobile as a work of art.

There is an obvious analogy with Lenin's conception of the proletarian revolution. First of all, Lenin was for technology and industrial revolution, and against what he characterized as backward, peasant Russia. As was said at the time, Lenin was for Americanism, but for Americanism sans the bourgeoisie. This was precisely and mainly because the bourgeoisie, as the new ruling class, modeled its lifestyle on that of the old classes, on traditional "high" (i.e., aristocratic) culture. This was especially true in Russia, where the bourgeoisie was politically and culturally weak. The Russian Revolution radically downgraded prerevolutionary society and prerevolutionary culture. First the bourgeois superstructure over the working class was dismantled: Greek nymphs were abolished along with Russian Orthodox spirituality. Society was then fashioned into a machine with no "higher purpose" than reproducing itself and continuing to function: people worked to live – and lived to work. It was this Bolshevik program of societal self-mechanization that made Lenin an honorary member of the Russian and international artistic avant-garde.

The premise for creating this new society was the principle that those who did not work did not eat, thus abolishing the traditional class society in which the lower classes worked while the upper classes consumed the fruits of their labors. Thus freed from the immediate concerns of earning their daily bread, the working classes could use their free time not only for entertaining themselves, but also for contemplating philosophical truths and objets d'art. However, in a labor society, all of whose members were involved in production, class divisions eventually all but vanished. Society was homogenized, everyone becoming useful cogs in the machine. Free time, accordingly, also disappeared. Everyone had to be useful to the revolution and to socialist construction; everyone had to completely bury themselves in their work. Lenin was no exception. According to the memoirs of his contemporaries, Lenin was always working, always active, always busy. Alexandre Kojève argued that the emergence of the "working tyrant" was a token of the end of history, conceived as the history of class struggle.[2] Kojève wrote during the reign of Stalin, and when he spoke of the working tyrant, he had him in mind. But his description applies even more aptly to Lenin. Both Lenin himself and the entire Bolshevik leadership were ascetic and hardworking. Their rule over society was not class rule, but the rule of inventors over their inventions, of engineers over machines built to their designs – and yes, the rule of artists over their works. In all these instances, dominance meant the right to modify the invention or work.

As Velimir Khlebnikov wrote, the revolution put "makers" in power, replacing the "takers."[3]

The notion of making, of creativity, is central in this case. In modern times, creativity is no longer conceived as creation ex nihilo. As Oswald Spengler wrote in 1931, the technology of modern times differs from that of previous eras in that it is not powered by man or animal. In modern times, man discovers and employs nonhuman energies: coal, oil, electricity, and nowadays, atomic energy.[4] In modern times, human creativity appropriates and employs chaotic and destructive nonhuman energies. The machine is the instrument and symbol of this human, orderly, functional use of nonhuman, cosmic energies, which are capable of destroying civilization if they get out of control.

However, nonhuman, superhuman, cosmic energies also drive human society. Knowledge of these energies is the lesson and wisdom of materialism, and Lenin was above all a consistent materialist. Indeed, humanity is inscribed in the universe as a community of bodies that have to eat and reproduce. Hunger and sexual desire integrate human bodies into the universal metabolism, making them dependent on cosmic energies. Marx had already understood that the evolution of the means of production aimed at satisfying humanity's bodily needs was, in essence, an inhuman process that was not consciously controlled.

The late nineteenth century saw the proliferation of philosophical doctrines thematizing the power of cosmic energies over man, conceived as a body, as an organism: it suffices to recall Nietzsche, Bergson's élan vital, and Freud's unconscious drivers. But if the energies operating within human society as a whole and within each individual are identified, then, naturally, the project arises to produce a machine that would be able to control these energies and render them productive, not destructive.

This is, first of all, a matter of what was called, in those years, the revolutionary energy of the masses. This energy is nothing more than the need of the masses for nutrition and reproduction. If the dominant social mechanism is able to regulate the pressure created by this need and convert it into productive forces, then everything is fine. But if the pressure is too strong, it turns from productive energy into revolutionary energy and blows up the system. The mechanics is the same as that of a steam boiler or sexual desire: as Freud showed, as long as it is satisfied, everything stays in place, but if it is suppressed and frustrated, destructive neuroses arise.

This materialistic, energetic model of revolution demonstrates quite convincingly that revolution cannot be analyzed in terms of law and ethics any more than electricity or atomic energy can be analyzed in these terms. Laws and cultural traditions function as long as society's energy balance remains stable. But when the revolutionary energy of the masses is roused, cosmic forces come into play, because humanity discovers its inner animal, which is part and parcel of the life of the world that is beyond civilization in all its shapes. Humans are animals first of all, a part of nature, and only secondarily citizens and political subjects. As they say, you may not be a citizen, but you cannot avoid being an animal. And the reason for this is simple: a person can only think and act politically if they are alive. Or, as Bertolt Brecht pointed out, "Grub first, then ethics."

You cannot make a revolution. You can only formalize it, give it a political and aesthetic design. The principle of revolutionary action was precisely voiced by Nietzsche: "Give a push to whatever is falling."[5] The old regime is already falling, but if you push it, the illusion is generated that the revolution has an author, namely, the one who pushed it. This illusion is of crucial political significance, since it gives the pusher the opportunity to create a new regime that is more effective than the previous regime at containing and redirecting the revolutionary energy of the masses. Each postrevolutionary regime is therefore more severe and restrictive than the prerevolutionary one.

Lenin famously said that communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the entire country. In other words, Soviet power is understood as a huge power plant converting the biological and revolutionary energy of the masses into electricity. Communism functions as a power converter that ensures its constant flow, since the energy of the masses does not change. The masses always want to eat and reproduce. In this sense, communism attains an energy balance unattainable by traditional class societies, which squander too much energy on luxury, art, entertainment, truth seeking, and spirituality. If we compare the energy of the masses to the flow of water in a river, communism simultaneously releases this flow and dams it to generate useful energy. In any case, communism prevents the loss of energy and the spillage of water – for example, by constructing fountains and irrigating garden plots. Not everyone is able to make such good use of revolutionary energy, not everyone is able to simultaneously release it and tame it. But Lenin succeeded, as we know.

Lenin succeeded because he made proletarizing the entire country his focal point. Subordinating human life to the logic and dynamics of industrial civilization, which in themselves do not depend on individuals, means proletarizing them. Marx had already described

this dynamic as something triggered by the conflict between the level of productive forces and the nature of productive relations. Both of these factors are "objective," i.e., independent of human will and desire. The individual, however, can be involved in these processes by speeding them up or slowing them down. Individuals accelerate them if they are proletarized, i.e., if they are incorporated into industrial production. And they slow down these processes if they waste their energy by employing it unproductively. In this sense, the bourgeoisie, which initially was a progressive class, later became a reactionary class that slowed the tempo of industrialization because it began to spend too much effort, time, and energy on consumption, on imitating the aristocracy's lifestyle. Lenin and the entire Bolshevik Party set themselves the goal of fully integrating the country's human resources into the production process. This total proletarianization of the populace was supposed to lead, ultimately, to a sharp reduction in economic inequality and the elimination of class conflicts – that is, again, to a classless society. Most importantly, in this society, there would no longer be competition. Under Bolshevik logic, competition led to a senseless waste of energy since the losers were eliminated from the economy and their strength, which could have been harnessed for production processes, was lost. Competition was to be replaced by solidarity: the combining of all the forces of the populace to implement a single, common plan.

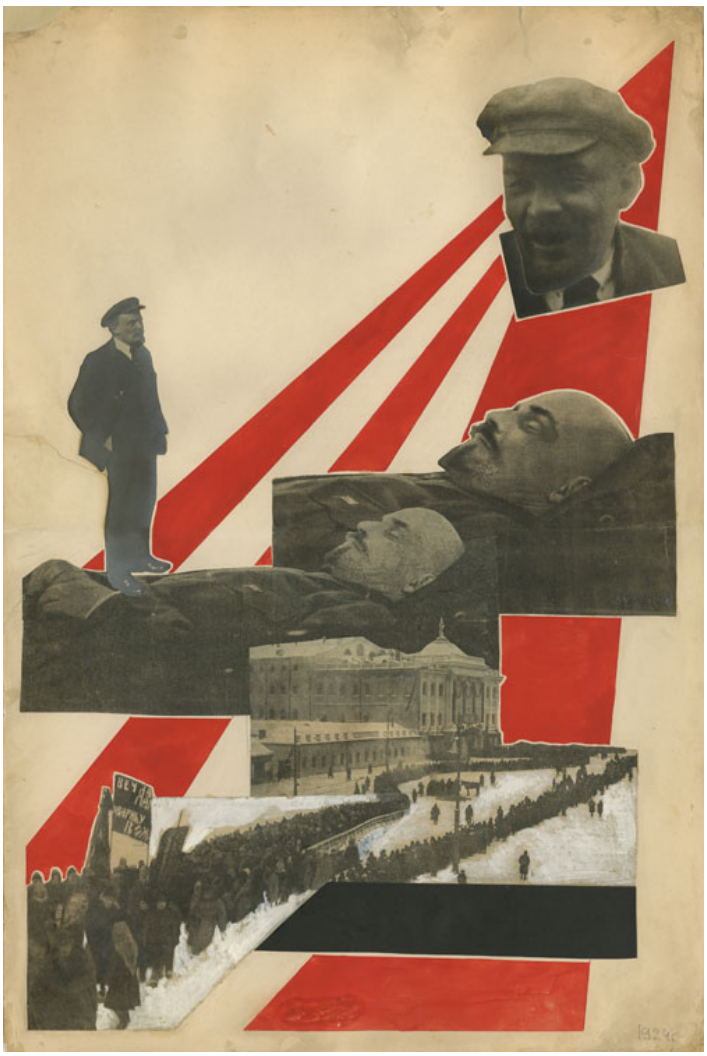
Lenin is therefore a maker and creator in the same sense as the inventors of the steam engine and electric turbine were makers and creators – they were each a power converter. But the artists of his time also considered themselves creators. They practiced the same strategy of releasing energy and using it in a new, more efficient way. The liberation of energy was carried out in a revolutionary manner, that is, by reducing and eliminating everything superfluous from the artwork, similar to the way the privileged classes who ate but did not work were jettisoned from the economy. Kazimir Malevich, as we know, brought the process to a close with his *Black Square*, which was the pure form, the minimal definition, of the painted picture, thus releasing the energy of art production. Quality control, the need for mastery, and the mission of representation – everything that impeded and complicated art production, leading to a senseless loss of time and effort – were ejected from art. At the same time, the *Black Square* acted like a dam in the path of artistic imagination, turning it away from admiring nature or aspiring to the "other world," and toward creating a new, entirely artificial world.

So, when Khlebnikov writes of replacing "takers" (*dvoriane*, "nobles") with "makers" (*tvoriane*, a nonce word that could also be translated as "creatives" or "creators"), he obviously does not distinguish among engineers, artists, and the makers of the new social reality. Nobles are those who at least pay lip service to the aristocratic code of honor. Makers and creators do not live by old codes and cannot be judged by their criteria, however. Creators deal with natural energies: the energy of oil, the natural energy of human beings. But energy is not bound by codes. It operates beyond the criteria of good and evil. The same applies to creators, who cannot be judged by the criteria of the past, if only because creators set about making when these criteria have already been abandoned, and society has been plunged into chaos, as happened to Russia during the First World War. The past for Lenin was not tsarism, but the chaos into which the tsarist government had plunged the country. Lenin's goal was to mobilize the forces of chaos and the revolutionary energy these forces had released to establish a new order – to make a new, functioning state machine. Every revolution is by its nature a counterrevolution: it is not a flood, but a dam to stop its flow, or, what amounts to the same thing, the constitution of a new power after the fall of the old. It is easy to see that Lenin's work had this creative (revolutionary and counterrevolutionary) complexion from the get-go. Lenin radicalized the revolutionary process, pushing it to an extreme and thus stopping it.

By the time of the October Revolution, Lenin and other party leaders had thoroughly studied the history of the French Revolution, from the fall of the Ancien Régime through the (Jacobin revolutionary) Terror to the Bourbon Restoration. The trajectory of the revolution was clear to them in advance. Hence, the Bolshevik leaders did not lose control of the country during the transition from one stage of the revolution to another. The onset of the Thermidorian Reaction led to the execution of Robespierre and his associates on the guillotine, but Lenin himself successfully made the transition from the (Red revolutionary) Terror to the Thermidor – in other words, to the New Economic Policy. Stalin then continued the path from the Thermidor through Bonapartism and the almost complete restoration of the prerevolutionary imperial institutions of power, turning creatives into nobles, Makers into Takers. It was Stalinist culture that finally interpreted the Bolshevik Revolution as an operation to restore order in a chaotic country.

How was it possible to turn creatives into nobles so easily? The point, of course, is that both shared a common anti-capitalist ethos. Nobles did not serve Mammon, but the State.

Creatives tried to transform the country as a whole, rather than making money on their inventions. The Soviet Union restored many elements of the old regime, but it did not restore capitalism. Private property and, consequently, the free market were still banned. Creatives did not create for themselves, but for the state, and their work was not an expression of "artistic subjectivity," but a kind of community service or even civil service. At first glance, the impersonality and anonymity of this service would seem to have expunged the role of individuals in history. In reality, however, the creatives who were able to appropriate and subordinate superhuman energies to themselves and the state became nobles and, according to Nietzsche, earned the right to bequeath their monogram to posterity. Or, more precisely, their image.



Alexander Rodchenko, *Funeral of V.I. Lenin*, 1924

2. Lenin as Auto-Icon

The issue of immortalizing Lenin's image arose in Soviet culture immediately after his death. Artists had painted portraits of Lenin during his lifetime, of course. In these portraits, he resembles a private individual or an outstanding statesman. Neither of these options obviously meshed with the image of Lenin as a superman, as the leader of the world's working class, and, above all, as a person who remained alive even after his death. After Lenin's death, Soviet art was tasked with depicting a Lenin who "is always alive and always with you."

In his commentary on Lenin's death, Malevich accurately described the new situation in which Soviet art found itself:

> His body was brought from Gorki (analogy: Gorki – Golgotha) and lowered by disciples into the crypt as the factory whistles roared. The matter of the New Testament resounded. The church bells (the Old Testament) were silent. And, indeed, they are no longer needed, a new rite has taken shape, a new mourning body of factories has taken over the religious ritual.[6]

In his earlier tract "God Has Not Been Overthrown: Art, Church and Factory" (1920), Malevich argued that Soviet materialism was not truly materialistic, since it basically sought to dominate nature and create a new, perfect man, i.e., it had set itself the same goal as traditional religion, although it sought to achieve it not by turning society into a church, but by turning it into a factory.[7] After Lenin's death, the factories finally became the new churches. Malevich pursued the analogy, seeing in Lenin's coming the second coming of Christ:

> Christ taught, "And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well," and "Love your neighbor as yourself," but to his neighbor, the proletarian, he who had dozens of clothes did not give a single one. Then Lenin was sent and punished them, destroyed churches and banks, and handed out everything to the proletariat.[8]

Malevich then writes that the image of Christ is essentially immaterial. Christ is recognized by the images of him in icons, not because someone had seen him before: he is recognized by the heart. Malevich asks, "Who will finish painting [Lenin's] portrait now? The artist-poet. But what kind of heart will serve as his model?"[9]

This is the central question, of course. One possible answer would be to dispense with the heart altogether. That is the answer that Malevich himself suggests when he writes about Lenin: "He taught us to be materialists, to trust neither religion nor art, pointing to cinema and science as two systems that record reality

beyond fiction."[10] The camera is indeed objective. It has no heart, so you can trust it.

Alexander Rodchenko also espoused photography's objectivity. In his article "Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot" (1928), Rodchenko opposes the view that portraiture is superior to photography, since it is able to sum up the artist's impressions of the model accumulated over a long period of observation, while photography captures only the instantaneous state of the model. As an example, Rodchenko cites photographs and painted portraits of Lenin, writing:

> Here is an example of the first big collision between art and photography, between eternity and the moment – moreover, in this instance photographs were taken casually, but painting attacked photography with all its heavy and light artillery – and failed miserably ... I mean Lenin. Chance photographers took his picture. Often when it was necessary, often when it was not. He had no time; there was a revolution on, and he was its leader – so he did not like people getting in his way. Nevertheless, we possess a large file of photographs of Lenin. Now for the last ten years artists of all types and talents, inspired and rewarded in all sorts of ways and virtually throughout the world and not just in the USSR, have made up artistic depictions of him; in quantity, they have paid for the file of photographs a thousand times and have often used it to the utmost. And show me where and when and of which artistically synthetic work one could say: this is the real V. I. Lenin. There is not one. And there will not be. Why not? Not because, as many think, "We have not yet been able to, we haven't had a genius, but certain people have at least done something." No, there will not be – because there is a file of photographs, and this file of snapshots allows no one to idealize or falsify Lenin. Everyone has seen this file of photographs, and as a matter of course, no one would allow artistic nonsense to be taken for the eternal Lenin.[11]

Indeed, after Lenin's death, an entire industry sprang up for churning out paintings and sculptures of the man. Of course these images did not depart from the image of Lenin which was known to the audience thanks to the photographs and newsreels that had recorded his image. The question begs itself: Why then the paintings and sculptures? Clearly, there were no photos of Christ and artists had to create (invent, if you like) his image. But why do we need traditional media to depict Lenin? It is not a matter of inventing or distorting the image of Lenin itself. The actual problem that arises when taking a photograph to preserve a deceased person's memory is well described in Siegfried Kracauer's essay "Photography."

Kracauer examines a photo of his grandmother and cannot recognize her, because everything that he sees in the photo was dictated by the fashions of her time – the scenery, the dress, her makeup, etc. All these elements are arrayed around a void: nothing remains of the grandmother herself as a particular individual who cannot be reduced to the accessories captured by the photographer.[12] This analysis was later repeated by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, in which photographs of the grandmother were replaced by photographs of the mother. The natural question for the materialist arises: What, in fact, should have remained after the death of the grandmother and mother? Their souls? Their imperishable images? According to materialism, these things do not exist and therefore could not survive. A void was left behind – and nothing more – because from the very beginning there was nothing more. But this argument, although quite fair-minded, does not take into account one simple fact: our memories of a deceased person do not exist in the context of the past, but in the context of the present. Memories inevitably abduct the deceased from the past, spiriting them into the present. This is what is meant when we say that the dead are still alive in our hearts. They seem to move from the past to the present, from the context of the past to life here and now. This is why photography is a "demonic" tool of oblivion, as Kracauer argues. It is not that photography is incapable of producing a synthetic portrait, but that memory decontextualizes and recontextualizes. Painting is able to perform these operations, but photography is not. Painting is capable of this not because it invents or synthesizes anything additional, but because it more radically reduces, removing everything random, everything too intricately linked with a certain time. So if Lenin is forever alive, if "Lenin is always alive, Lenin is always with you," then a photograph is insufficient to convey this constant presence, Lenin's ability to survive his time. The Russian artistic avant-garde believed, however, in this ability no less than Communist Party cadres.

Thus, in the editorial preface to the issue of *Lef* entitled "Lenin's Language" (1924), which featured contributions from all the pillars of Russian formalism, including Shklovsky, Tynyanov, and Eichenbaum, and was dedicated to Lenin as the creator of a new political oratorical language, we read: "Lenin is still our contemporary. He is among the living. We need

him alive, not dead. So: Learn from Lenin, but don't canonize him. Don't create a cult around a man who fought cults his whole life. Don't sell the objects of this cult. Don't merchandise Lenin!"[13] The editors of this completely atheistic journal did not notice that to claim a person who has just died is "among the living" ultimately means deifying him, making him, as Malevich noted, a new Christ risen from the dead.

It is telling that Rodchenko's photo collage *Lenin's Funeral* (1924), also produced on the occasion of Lenin's death, deploys four photos of Lenin: two photos of the dead Lenin in his coffin and two photos of the living Lenin. One of the photos of Lenin taken during his lifetime is placed in the collage's upper-right corner, from which three red rays radiate, illuminating the space of the collage with "uncreated light," as they would have called it in prerevolutionary Russia. Since the funeral scene is shown in the lower half of the collage, it appears as if Lenin is watching his own funeral. It becomes obvious that Rodchenko has attempted to solve the problem of photography described above by means of photo collage. He decontextualizes the figure of Lenin by cutting it out from archival photographs and recontextualizing it in the present, i.e., at Lenin's funeral. This operation would appear absurd if it were carried out in real, three-dimensional space. But Rodchenko performs it in the "speculative," "uncreated" space of this collage, which resembles the space of an icon painting, a space in which all times coincide and history is synchronized. In fact, we are confronted with the same "space of nothing" about which Kracauer wrote that it contains the visual elements that should represent his grandmother. In a photo collage, these elements fall apart, the space of nothing is revealed, and any fragments of past and current images can now be inserted into it. These elements float in space like the geometric figures in Malevich's suprematist paintings.

By the way, an undisputed masterpiece of the Russian avant-garde, the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square, is based on the same principle.

The Lenin Mausoleum has often been compared to the Egyptian pyramids and the vaults containing the relics of saints. It is obvious, however, that the Mausoleum is neither one nor the other. The pyramids concealed the mummies of the pharaohs, and the holy relics were also inaccessible to ordinary mortals. The mummies were displayed for the first time in European museums after Europeans looted the Egyptian tombs. The holy relics became visible as a result of the atheistic revolution. Lenin's body, on the other hand, was intended from the outset to be viewed by the general public.

In other words, the Mausoleum was originally planned as a combination of a pyramid and a museum – as a sacred site that had been desacralized. But what matters most is that the mummy is the end product of special procedures performed on the body. The mummy of the pharaoh does not resemble his body as it was in life, but this is exactly what Lenin's body is in the Mausoleum. Lenin's body seems to have been taken directly from life. It is essentially a ready-made.

Lenin's body was not subjected to any artistic intervention, any ritual or religious transformation. Thus, the avant-garde's main requirement – no artiness, no aesthetically dictated distortion of the facts – was strictly observed.

Lenin's body in the Mausoleum bears the same relation to traditional sculpture as photography does to traditional painting. We cannot help recalling that Duchamp exhibited his first ready-made in 1917. But the Mausoleum has its own secret. Egyptian mummies were protected from decay by the transformation they underwent before burial. But Lenin's body was and has been the object of constant care by an entire scientific institute that monitors its integrity and maintains it in a stable, exhibitable condition. We could say that the Lenin Mausoleum fulfills Malevich's wish to tackle Lenin's image from a scientific and cinematic, or more precisely, photographic point of view. Consequently, Lenin's image has been preserved in its materialistic factuality (free from all artistic artifices) due to the purely scientific, materialistic approach to preserving his body. But can we say that the Mausoleum displays a Lenin who is "forever living"? Rather, it displays a Lenin who is forever dead.

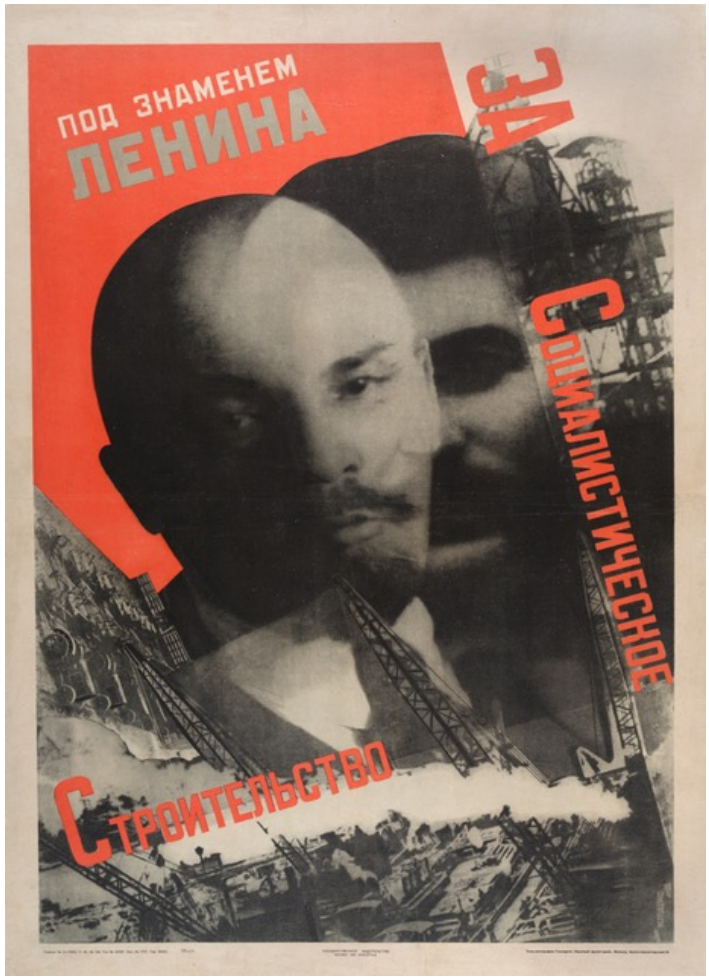
Our metaphysical imagination is still governed by the agrarian myths of the preindustrial past. According to these myths, only grain thrown into the ground will sprout. The key to resurrection is burial – or, at least, burning, if we recall the Phoenix. Even if we rule out the possibility of resurrection, burial and burning return the body to nature's bosom. The decomposition of the body reintegrates it into natural life, into the cosmic unity. By contrast, Lenin's unburied, publicly displayed body guarantees that Lenin is completely dead and will never be resurrected.

Both during its construction and later, the Mausoleum was often criticized for allegedly departing from the principles of materialism and hearkening back to archaic religious practices. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The Mausoleum's only possible predecessor was Jeremy Bentham's so-called Auto-Icon.[14] Bentham was a consistent materialist and the founder of ethical utilitarianism, which claims

that anything that contributes to the greatest good for the greatest number of people is justified.

The analogies with Lenin are clear. Bentham outlined his design for the Auto-Icon in a will written shortly before his death in 1832. According to the will, his body was to be mummified, dressed in his usual clothes, and placed in the chair in which he usually sat. The room where the Auto-Icon was installed was intended to serve as a place for regular meetings of students and disciples, as Bentham writes, "for the purpose of commemorating the founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation."[15] Bentham even carried a set of glass eyes with him in case of his sudden death. All these instructions were honored, and the Bentham mummy can still be seen seated in a special case at University College London. However, Bentham's head suffered damage during the desiccation process, and it is stored separately, while the head of the seated mummy is made of wax.

The Auto-Icon is thus purely materialistic in origin. However, Lenin's body in the Mausoleum differs from Bentham's mummy in that it is not a mummy in the full sense of the word, and therefore cannot exist independently of the technology that supports its continuous mummification. The mausoleum is a unique monument not only to radical atheism, but also to the human body's irreversible integration into the industrial process.



Gustav Klutsis, *Under Lenin's Banner: For Socialist Construction!*, 1930

3. Always Living

And yet, the Mausoleum, like Rodchenko's photo collage, situates Lenin's image in a special space, separated from the space of everyday life. This clearly contradicts the claim that Lenin is "always living" (*vsegda zhivoi*). To visualize this claim, Lenin's image had to be recontextualized in the present, rather than producing a separate, nonhistorical space for it that ultimately represented death. Soviet art staged this recontextualization in different ways. Photo collage was the earlier leader in this project. A good example is Gustav Klutsis's 1930 photo collage *Under Lenin's Banner: For Socialist Construction!* The prototype for the collage was undoubtedly El Lissitzky's famous *Poster for the Russian Exhibition in Zurich, 1929*, in which a young man and young woman gaze at the world with three eyes, the woman's right eye overlapping with the man's left eye. In the Klutsis collage, the man and woman have been replaced by Lenin and Stalin. Stalin's face is situated behind Lenin's face in such a way that Stalin's right eye can be divined behind Lenin's left eye. The collage suggests a twofold interpretation:

Stalin looks at the world through Lenin's eyes, or Lenin's view has always only been an extension of Stalin's view. In any case, it becomes clear that Stalin is Lenin today. Lenin is alive because Stalin is alive. There is a mystical connection between them: they form one body, they look at the world with the same eyes, but they are, so to speak, disembodied bodies, floating in the same transcendental emptiness.

A shift towards the standard image of Lenin can be seen in a later collage by Klutsis, *Long Live the Stalinist Tribe of Stakhanovite Heroes!* (1936). It is orchestrated so that its constituent figures seem to be situated in a shared, three-dimensional "living" space; they no longer hover in nonobjectivity. This is only a first impression, however. A closer look reveals that the collage space remains artificial and abstract, but first impressions are always important. In the center of the collage is Stalin speaking on a podium. Behind him is a bust of Lenin. The old formula is repeated: Stalin's head and, consequently, his gaze face the same direction as Lenin's bust.

Stalin is depicted as alive, while Lenin is represented by his bust. But because Lenin has become a bust, a work of art, he has remained eternally alive, since he can now be recontextualized at any time and in any place while still playing a leading, guiding role. Indeed, anyone who lived under Soviet rule will immediately recognize the bust of Lenin used by Klutsis as typical of the entire Soviet period. Identical busts stood in all district and regional party committee offices until the fall of the Soviet regime. If this bust had been "artistic" and, heaven forbid, "expressive" in the traditional sense, it could not have performed the role of "just Lenin" in the photo collage. It was the impersonality and reduction of Lenin's image that made it functional in the collage, demonstrating once again that Lenin and Stalin looked in the same direction.

At the same time, it is quite obvious that this bust of Lenin is not a "synthetic portrait," since it is purely anti-psychological. The sculptor who produced it did not synthesize, but, on the contrary, completely reduced all the psychological features of Lenin's image, something that had been a prominent fault in the well-known photographs of Lenin. The goal was to reduce Lenin's image to the minimum that would ensure its recognition. Viewers were supposed to "recognize" Lenin here and now, rather than see him in a particular situation that referenced the past. Accordingly, the sculptor refrained from any "creative" gesture that would "subjectify" Lenin's image. Lenin's image thus emerged utterly decontextualized, reduced, and anonymous – more anonymous than in any photo. In other words, paintings and sculptures of Lenin rendered his image, if you will, even more materialistic than photographs of him. That was why Klutsis used a bust of Lenin instead of a photograph of him. The use of portraits and busts of Lenin and monuments to Lenin in Soviet art, including films about the Soviet period, says more about Lenin's images than these depictions themselves.

These "secondary" images of Lenin show Lenin as ubiquitous in the Soviet space throughout the Soviet period. The Soviet Union is shown here as a place where you encounter Lenin, albeit as a painting or sculpture.

In this regard, it is also curious that the proportions between the figure of Stalin and the bust of Lenin in the Klutsis photo collage are the same as in the classic socialist-realist artist Alexander Gerasimov's 1935 painting *I. V. Stalin Reports at the 16th Congress of the VKP.* Here again, Stalin's gaze, directed to the audience, seems to be an extensions of Lenin's (the bust's) view. We can imagine that contemporaries of these works thought that the figure of Stalin dominated both the photo collage and the painting. In reality, it is controlled from behind by the gaze of Lenin, who is present here as a "stone guest." In fact, Stalin could have been replaced in this instance by any other historical figure whose gaze was guided by Lenin's. Indeed, as already mentioned, Soviet leaders came and went, but the bust of Lenin at their backs never changed. It turned out that Lenin was indeed "more alive than all the living." After all, in the real-life Soviet Union, a bust or statue of Lenin was present not as a memory of the past, but as an image of the Party – the machine that controlled, directed, and transformed the energy of the masses in the here and now. It is no wonder that Lenin statues were installed in central squares, and Lenin busts populated government institutions. None of these sites were sacred places of worship: they were centers of administration and business.

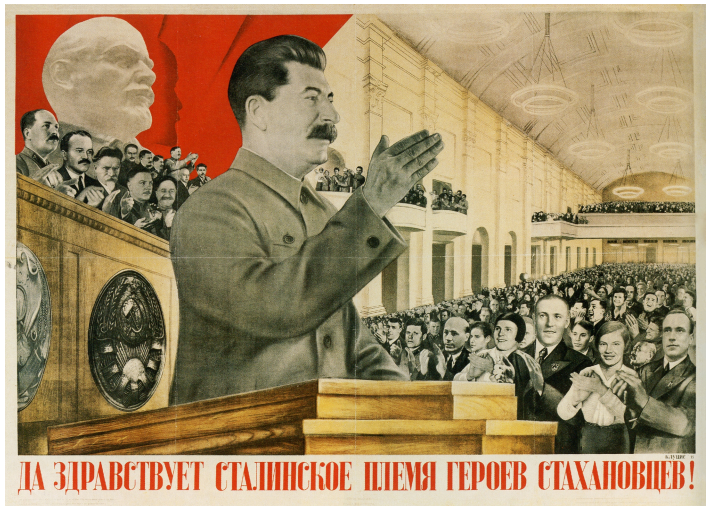
There were many squares and different kinds of state institutions in Soviet cities and towns, of course, and the demand for images of Lenin was accordingly high. The production of these images was an industry in itself that stamped them out in staggering quantities using well-established and officially approved prototypes. This does not mean that there were no artists who individually interpreted Lenin's image. There were, first of all, Soviet artists of the 1920s and 1930s such as Kliment Redko (*Uprising*, 1924–25) and Solomon Nikritin (*Snowwoman and Lenin*, 1930s), as well as Western artists from Salvador Dalí (*Partial Hallucination: Six Apparitions of Lenin on a Piano*, 1931) to Andy Warhol (*Black Lenin* and *Red Lenin*, 1987). But still, when discussing Lenin's image,

we mainly recall the standard artifacts that inundated the Soviet space. Indeed, this output is a unique phenomenon in modern history, one that has not yet been fully theorized and comprehended.

First of all, we can see this output as a revival of the kind of anonymous artistic production that existed in the precapitalist era. In the Middle Ages, artists worked mainly for the Church: the cult of artistic individualism was nonexistent, and artists were considered artisans. This was still partly true during the later era of secular patronage. But the advent of the art market triggered competition among artists, forcing each one to constantly emphasize their individual style. This competition led to extreme economic inequality in the art world: few artists were successful, and the majority barely survived. Above all, the criteria by which success in art were determined became less and less transparent over time.

Ultimately, artists were dependent on the tastes of the bourgeois public. The desire to escape this dependence led to nostalgia for times when artists were anonymous. Writing from exile in Zurich (where Lenin later lived in exile) after the defeat of the 1848 Revolution, Richard Wagner argues that the subject of the total artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) of the future should be the hero's death on behalf of humanity. Such a death, according to Wagner, finally turns the egoist into a communist.[16] And yet, the depiction of this death should be anonymous, collective. The individual artist renounces his individuality and thus symbolically reprises the hero's death.

The Soviet space was a stage on which, in keeping with Wagner's testament, the scene of Lenin's death was constantly played out. The artist's renunciation of his individuality was meant to be a reciprocal sacrifice. We can also see, in this case, a rebirth of icon painting, a tradition that had lasted in Russia at least until the revolution. While Western countries inserted religious art into the general history of European art, so that medieval religious painting progressed through all the same stages of artistic evolution through which secular painting passed, the Russian icon remained unhistorical, implementing the eternal return of one and the same image. Accordingly, iconography retained its anonymous, collective character. The canonical and replicated images of Lenin were, arguably, Soviet icons, also excluded from the history of art. But this analogy is deficient in at least two ways. First, all Soviet art was unhistorical, removed from the general history of art. Second, and more importantly, like other visual representations of the socialist period, Lenin's images were completely secular and profane: they were not worshipped, and they were completely devoid of magical properties. These images are not part of a religious tradition, but of a modern industrial and postindustrial civilization based on mass production.



Gustav Kluzis, *Long Live Stalin's Generation of Stakhanov Heroes*, 1936

The question of art's mass production was raised, as we know, by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935). Benjamin argues that in modern times, the work of art has lost its aura, which he defines as the historical place and time in which the work of art originated. Each work of art has its own original context, but it loses this context when it is reproduced. As a reproduction, the work of art finds its way into cultural contexts that are alien to it, that are remote from its original context. The same thing happens to the work of art if it travels from one exhibition to another or ends up in a museum. Exhibiting the work of art outside its historical context is tantamount to reproducing it: the work is simply transformed into a thing that lacks its original cultural aura. And yet, Benjamin argues that the aura is lost forever in our civilization. As proof of this, Benjamin uses the motion picture, which has no attachment to a specific place and is intended for reproduction and mass distribution, i.e., it is devoid of aura from the outset. Benjamin claimed that there were two opposite reactions to the loss of aura – the fascist reaction and the communist reaction. The fascist reaction consists in attempting to restore the world's aura, but under modern civilization, the only possible auratic event would be the world's destruction. Therefore, fascism seeks to restore the world's aura through war. Communism, on the other hand, accepts the loss of aura and practices art as something reproduced, standardized, and mass produced. Faced with the choice of losing the world or losing aura,

communism chooses the world.

Like the Russian avant-garde artists, Benjamin could not imagine the original deauratization of painting and sculpture, and therefore believed that under communism, the future belonged to the cinema. In reality, traditional media are capable of a much greater degree of deauratization than photography and film, which, as we have already mentioned, evince a much greater dependence on the time and place in which they are shot than painting and sculpture, which can "erase random features" and almost completely decontextualize images.

Decontextualization/deauratization was successfully applied to Lenin's image. Can we say, however, that it was completely successful? Ultimately, no. The fact is that it was localized within the Soviet space. Standard images of Lenin from the Soviet period have a powerful aura of Sovietness: it is no accident that they are used as markers of the Soviet time and place. History has auratized Lenin's images, because after the demise of the Soviet regime, they finally attained their historical time and place. Indeed, the auratization of Lenin's images was primarily due to their destruction in the post-Soviet period. This destruction of Lenin's images reprises, by the way, the destruction of images of Stalin, which was carried out much more top-down and effectively during the Khrushchev years.

The relationship between the deauratization and reauratization of Lenin's image, however, was sufficiently identified and theorized in the Cold War era. A good example of this is Art & Language's *Portrait of Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock* (1980). Charles Harrison, the group's theorist, writes in particular about this work: "The mythology of individual risk attached to Modernist painting is most compellingly associated with the style of Pollock, while the mythology of historical risk associated with class struggle is a component in the aura of Lenin."[17] For their work, Art & Language chose a "neutral" portrait of Lenin, thus shifting attention away from the painterly manner to the subject. At the same time, Harrison revives the comparison of Lenin and the avant-garde artist as individuals equally willing to take risks.

Pollock's abstract expressionism has long been a fact of history, as has the Soviet state created by Lenin. But does this mean that Lenin's version of communism is history's exclusive domain? Hardly. The project of a state based on collective property, thus overcoming the conflict between rich and poor, was formulated and thoroughly substantiated by Plato. Since his time, it has been repeatedly implemented, albeit on a limited scale, primarily in Catholic and Orthodox monasteries, but also in later religious and secular communities. However, the project was realized on the scale of an entire country for the first time by Lenin and his party. Although many regard their implementation of the project as unsuccessful, this view is historically naive. The first experiments of this kind are always short lived. After the French Revolution, democracy survived only a few years, and nearly everyone assumed that it would never be revived. The Soviet regime lasted much longer, and there is no doubt that there will be new attempts to create a classless society based on collective property. Ideas that have a thousand-year history do not vanish without a trace.

And this is all the truer, because the causes that animated the project and were described by Plato have remained the same. A society based on private property and competition produces oligarchical rule. In addition to extreme economic inequality within countries, there is also inequality among countries; they are involved in global competition, which ultimately leads to military confrontation. Of course, the majority of people enjoy competition and accept social inequality, because they tend to believe in their own strength and hope for victory and success. The same applies to nations that hope to become successful if only they gain independence and freedom. This is especially true of people and nations that have long been excluded from competition and therefore tend to be deluded about their chances of success. Over time, however, it becomes clear to all of them that there are more losers than winners in any competition.

But that is not the point. In a sport much loved by the earth's current population, the competition is conducted according to the rules. But in economic competition, as in war, there are no rules. We find ourselves at the mercy of fate: chance and luck are more important than intelligence and talent. Back in the day, Christianity arose as protest against the power of fate, which Greece and Rome recognized as the supreme power. Christianity, on the other hand, declared that the Logos was the divine authority. History thus acquired logic, meaning, and a goal: attaining the Kingdom of God. It was this historical expediency that ensured the flourishing of the arts in Christian Europe. The fact is that artists think in terms of projects and plans. All artistic work is directed toward the future. Artists can thus feel confident only when they are confident of the future – not so much their own future, but the future per se. Christianity supplied such confidence in the future, but capitalism took it away.

Anyone who has read nineteenth-century literature knows the horror that capitalism's

arrival caused among people of art. The future had vanished. Starting with Goethe's Faust, the only hope was a pact with the devil that promised success here and now. Art mutated into Baudelaire's flowers of evil. It is thus clear why Marxism as a doctrine and Lenin as a person so attracted the artistic intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marxism and Lenin proposed a collective social, economic, and political project in which artists could be involved. The end of communism meant, as Fukuyama has taught us, the end of history: the future had vanished again. In our time, we have learned to expect only trouble from the future, such as economic crises and environmental disasters. Recently, there has been much talk of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, but it is nostalgia for the future, for the project of the future, and not for the Soviet past.

We could say, of course, that the communist project is unrealizable, and this has often been said. However, it remains an open question. Marx and Lenin considered the communist project feasible due to the growing impact of modern technology, whose growth they wanted to yoke to a single, unified plan and thus free humanity from nature's dominion. Lenin saw the prerequisites for such control over technological growth in oligarchic, imperialist capitalism's emergence in the early twentieth century. After decades of middle-class dominance, we are seeing a similar process today: a few corporations like Google, Amazon, Tesla, and Facebook have concentrated historically unprecedented economic and political power in their hands. They currently function as "fate" for both the politicians and artists competing on Instagram and Twitter. But historical experience shows that such circumstances give rise to the premises for a new universal political and artistic project for the future.

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