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Vladimir Tatlin's Social Art and the Reception of His Works by Critics and Artists

Revolution, new life, utopia: this project focuses on Vladimir Tatlin's art, examining the place of the artist in the new Soviet society from a novel theoretical base. The focus is the oeuvre of Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), one of the founders of Russian Constructivism. Tatlin's ideas gave birth to some of the most important projects in Russia at the time.

The core research question is, how did Tatlin's social utopia integrate with the revolutionary idea of building the Soviet everyday life?

My hypothesis is thus, Soviet art is treated as vehicles of a new sensibility that takes shape within the general framework of a fulfilled socialist Utopia. Jacques Rancière's aesthetic theory serves as a starting point for the main questions of the project. I am appealing to Rancière's theory with the goal of shedding new light on the old regarding Western academic questions about revolution, utopia, representation, art and politics in connection to avant-garde. There are such avant-garde themes, such as rethinking art institutions and realizing the utopia where art and life are united.

The phenomenon of Russian avant-garde with its re-definition of artistic, social and political identities is strongly associated with Rancière's aesthetic concepts such as "aesthetic mode", "distribution of the sensible", and "aesthetic unconsciousness". It presents an interpretation of art and politics based on the conception of equality, sensitivity and commonality. These notions further expand the debate around Russian avant-garde aesthetics in general and Tatlin's ideas in particular.

Key words: *avant-garde, contemporary aesthetics, Revolution, art and politics, Soviet ideology, art critiques.*

Project in brief

Vladimir Tatlin's ideas gave birth to some of the most important and revolutionary projects in Russia at the time. Also, he is a bright example for the interrelations of the Soviet regime and the avant-garde movement. The avant-garde endorsed the Soviet system but fell victim to its totalitarian nature when the "only true art conception" was established: socialist realism.

Tatlin represented a new taste and new ways of understanding art. Moreover, his idea of *Counter-Relief* (1914), *The Monument to the Third International Tower* (1920) brought him recognition as a revolution artist. The Tower was a monument representing the Soviet Utopia at the beginning of the Russian Revolution. His sculptural flying machine, *Letatlin* (1930), is also a utopian product epitomizing a mythological individual freedom.

However, Tatlin's work remains understudied. There are at least three reasons for this. First, Tatlin has not written manifestos about his works as other major artists during the avant-garde period. Second, many of his artistic works have been lost and are only now being reconstructed based on notes, sketches, and photographs. Third, from the mid-1930s, the Stalinist reactionary politics put an end to both progressive political tendencies and many artistic initiatives. In addition, the several years ban of avant-garde in the USSR made Russian research on what can be called "the Russian golden heritage" impossible.

The present research project therefore breaks new grounds by analysing Tatlin's work in relation to three themes:

1. Tatlin's work in the context of his time
2. Tatlin's work as an object of contemporary aesthetic
3. Tatlin's work in the mirror of critique and contemporary art

The first aim is to reconstruct Tatlin's concepts through the context of his time, since the majority of his objects have been lost and the artist himself did not write in detail about his works.

The second aim is to place Tatlin's ideas in new theoretical perspective. Novelty here is the approach: analyse art practice in general for avant-garde concepts but not by usual logic of interpretation certain art works. There are such avant-garde themes, such as rethinking art institutions and realizing the utopia where art and life are united.

The third aim is to demonstrate the impact of Tatlin's ideas in post-avant-garde period.