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MYTH AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY SOVIET CULTURE

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Given this doctrine of experience, united with that of symbolism, every religion, even that of paganism, must be held to be true.

Pope Pius X, Pascendi Gregis
September 1907

If truth is only an organizing form of human experience, then the teaching, say, of Catholicism is also true.

V. I. Lenin, Materialism and Empiriocriticism
April 1909

Marxism, the ideology of the most progressive class, must reject absolute knowledge in any system of ideas, including its own.

A. A. Bogdanov, Vera i nauka
1910

Early Soviet culture, like Bolshevism, was deeply divided. We may define this division in a number of ways: party versus proletariat; heroism versus utopianism; Leninism versus left Bolshevism; Jacobinism versus syndicalism; consciousness versus spontaneity; Narkompros versus Proletkult; organization versus experience; vanguard versus collective.¹ All such divisions ultimately come down to a central Bolshevik disagreement as to whether a socialist society should be grounded in myth or authority.

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In speaking of myth and authority as two antagonistic and complementary poles of early Soviet culture I am distinguishing between two fundamental ways of organizing our experience: first, by finding personally satisfactory answers to ultimate questions; second, by accepting socially satisfactory answers to secular needs. This is in part a distinction between culture and politics, and when we speak of Bolshevism as culture we blur that distinction in a significant way. It is also a distinction between the religious and the secular. The most useful myths evolve from mass, popular experience upward to the elite, reflecting historical values, beliefs, and traditions, that are expressed through culture, notably, science, religion, art, and literature. Legitimate authority is established from above by power and persuasion, justified by historical events, sacred texts, or periodic popular elections. We believe in myths, but we accept authority.

Myths in which we believe form a part of our culture; authority which we accept forms a part of our politics. But both culture and politics may make claims upon the other, preferring total transcendence or transformation to shared autonomy. Early Soviet culture reflects just this tension between cultural myth and political authority. For decades Russian intellectuals had anticipated a new era of cultural or spiritual transcendence in which politics and economics would be merely derivative of a more profound shift in values and consciousness. Likewise, Russian

political revolutionaries anticipated a new society in which culture would be merely derivative of politics or economics. This difference in emphasis became most acute in the Bolshevik debate over the nature of "proletarian culture"; was it an ideological tool for organizing the masses through useful myth, or was it a far-off stage of historical development to be achieved only after one social class had taken control of the means of production from another?²

In considering Bolshevism as culture we should remember that Lenin and the other Bolsheviks were Marxists who considered culture to be a product or reflection of the dominant class in society: the bourgeoisie under capitalism, and the proletariat under socialism. This view did not make clear whether a proletarian culture was to evolve over a long period of time as a consequence of a transformation in social and economic relations, or to emerge rapidly out of a revolution and serve as a means for that transformation. According to Lenin's copy theory of reality, culture merely reflected class struggle and would change very slowly; according to A. A. Bogdanov's view, culture could be reorganized almost immediately and serve to inculcate values conducive to greater energy and labor on the part of the proletariat.³ Both Lenin and Bogdanov recognized the importance of consciousness in organizing experience, but they disagreed profoundly about whether consciousness should be imposed by party authority or organized by

a collective of intellectuals. Put in its simplest terms, the difference in emphasis between Lenin and Bogdanov on cultural matters is the difference between power and ideas, or between force and persuasion. For Lenin culture was a useful adjunct to party authority; for Bogdanov the party was a useful means for organizing cultural myth.

Authority was central to Lenin's political vision laid down in What is to be Done? (1902) and other writings. Authority meant the imposition of consciousness upon spontaneity, the party upon the proletariat, organization upon experience. For Lenin, Marxism was a kind of gnosticism, a special theory of knowledge that provided a scientific explanation of the world and a quasi-religious faith to sustain him in inactivity and guide him in his actions.⁴ The key to revolution was not the proletariat but the party, whose omniscient authority derived from its correct interpretation of the writings of Marx and Engels. Authority was based on authorship, an orthodox interpretation of correct texts.

Myth was equally central to a Bolshevik cultural vision articulated in essays and novels by Bogdanov, A. V. Lunacharsky, and Maxim Gorky after 1905. For these other Bolsheviks, Marxism was a useful myth to be revised as needed under changing historical circumstances. But the useful myth of the "god builders" derived not only from Marx, Engels, Feuerbach, and Kautsky, but from a broader utopian tradition in Western thought, from Condorcet and

Comte through Edward Bellamy and H. G. Wells. The "god building" vision of a socialist future involved not only politics and economics, but a culture, designed for, or created by, the proletariat. For them culture was both a secular means for the conquest of power, and a religious vision of the conquest of death.⁵

The distinction between myth and authority is useful in analyzing four areas of Bolshevik culture: science, religion, art, and literature. In science we distinguish between heuristic devices such as working hypotheses for experiments that the scientist finds convenient to assume hold true, even if experimental data modifies or negates that assumption, and laws of nature whose truth seems not relative, but absolute. In religion we distinguish the pragmatic notion of a personal will to believe from faith in a revealed truth presided over by a priesthood and contained in sacred texts. In art we distinguish the expression of an artist's inner vision, however distorted or atonal, from talent and technique to be compared with masters from the past, the romantic from the classical, avant-garde experimentalism from academy or salon training, the movement from the school. Finally, in literature we distinguish form from content, the free play with words and syntax from the grammatically correct, literary expression from literary excellence.

In the end, myths are relatively true for those who believe

them, and authority claims absolute truth for those who hold that authority. In this lies the difference in emphasis between Bolshevism and Leninism, overlapping but not identical ideologies whose differences run through early Soviet culture and whose ultimate fusion helped create Stalinism.

I.

The idea of the conservation of energy in all its transformations expresses the basic general condition of machine production, the constant need to obtain energy for such transformations from specific resources.

A. A. Bogdanov, Iz psikhologii obshchestva
1906

The transformation of energy is regarded by science as an objective process independent of the minds of men and of the experience of mankind, that is to say, it is regarded materialistically.

V. I. Lenin, Materialism and Empiriocriticism
1909

Dogmatization in science, religion, social life, or art is the entropy of thought. What has become dogma no longer burns; it only gives off warmth--it is tepid, it is cool.

E. Zamiatin, "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy and Other Matters," 1923

As an offspring of Marxism, Bolshevism claimed to be scientific. But for Lenin and Bogdanov "science" meant two quite different things. For Lenin science was a means of knowing the natural laws of the world in order to act, and such laws were true absolutely; for Bogdanov science, especially medicine, was the means by which our mind organizes experience into useful, but always changing, hypotheses. Lenin used science to justify authority; Bogdanov found in science a useful myth to increase worker efficiency, a source of technology, and a supposed means of achieving immortality.

Marxism was rooted in nineteenth-century science. One of the

appeals of Marxism in Russia in the 1890's, in addition to its prediction of revolution and its relevance to industrialization, was its supposed scientific method. According to Marxist thought, history, like the natural world, exhibited certain laws and regularities that could be known and acted upon; all history was the history of class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie leading to the inevitable revolutionary triumph of the former over the latter. Both history and nature could be explained as matter in motion along the coordinates of an absolute framework of space and time. The data of experience and experiment could be organized scientifically to arrive at a true description of the world on the basis of which an individual or social class could take conscious steps to facilitate the progress of history toward its inevitable final goal. Behind Marxist claims of scientific authority lay an optimistic and omniscient view of science that was eroding at the end of the century. Around 1900 to be a Marxist and to be scientific were increasingly diverging claims.

Science after 1900 increasingly recognized the role of the observer in an experiment. The scientist was not so much a seeker of truth depending on accepted scientific authority, but a creator of hypotheses. The authoritative truths of physics were falling one by one: the existence of an ether and an ether wind to the Michelson-Morley experiment; the immutability of chemical elements to the discovery of radioactive decay; the impenetrability of

matter to the discovery of the nucleus and the x-ray; classical Newtonian mechanics to relativity theory. Authority was becoming myth in science in the sense that the notion of absolute truth was giving way to hypothesis and thought-experiment. The Austrian physicist Ernst Mach was particularly important in encouraging the view that we know the world only through our sensations and ideas, and that science consists of economical shorthand statements about a world whose very reality is a mental construct, symbol, or hypothesis.⁶

As Lenin was quick to note, one victim of modernism in science was materialism.⁷ Marx and Engels, like most nineteenth-century thinkers, accepted the view descended from Greek philosophy that the world was composed ultimately of hard bits of matter, atoms, and that knowledge of the material world could explain the world of ideas and ideals. Feurbach's anthropomorphic materialism which saw all culture and religion as a projection of man's material needs also deeply affected Marxism. The scientific view that most threatened Marxism around 1900 was a combination of relativism and energetics, the view that "absolute" space-time frames of reference varied depending on the position and velocity of the observer, and that the world was composed not of matter, but of energy.

Modernism in science attracted the attention of Marxist intellectuals in Europe after 1900 who sought to reconcile the new view of science with the inherited materialism of Marx and

Engels. Among them were the Austrian socialist Friedrich Adler and the Russian Bolshevik Alexander Bogdanov.⁸ While the major influence on them was Mach's sensationalism, they were also deeply impressed by the "energetics" of Wilhelm Ostwald and the Darwinian "monism" of Ernst Haeckel. For Lenin's mid-nineteenth-century mind the world consisted of matter and spirit, the real and the unreal, truth and falsity, materialists and idealists. But for Bogdanov the world consisted of a series of mental constructs that organize our sensations and experience into useful hypotheses and myths; there is no sharp boundary between self and other, mind and matter, but only a single, unified world whose essential substance is energy. Science does not provide absolute truth, but only relatively true hypotheses about a world we can know only by its traces on our consciousness.

The distinction between Lenin's materialism and Bogdanov's "empiriomonism" reflected a major shift within science. The scientist was to be concerned not with measuring empirical data to verify natural laws, but with framing intelligent hypotheses to explain anomalies, or to predict phenomena.⁹ If Marxism claimed to be scientific, then it would have to incorporate the new relativism of science itself. And if Marxism claimed to be materialist, then it would have to incorporate the consequences of the laws of thermodynamics, the discovery of radioactivity, and the new emphasis on energy, rather than matter. Within science

truth and matter were giving way to hypothesis and energy; Bogdanov and some other Bolshevnik intellectuals were accepting this new science, and Lenin was not.

As an element in early Soviet culture, then, science inherited two opposing views from Bolshevism: Lenin's "scientific" interpretation of Marxist materialism and Bogdanov's "organizational scientific" interpretation of Mach's empiriocriticism, Ostwald's energetics, and Haeckel's monism. What was at stake was more than the nature of science, it was the legitimacy of Marxism. For Lenin, Marxism represented scientific truth; for Bogdanov, Marxism represented convenient hypothesis. In the first case, Marxism legitimized the party as the keeper of materialist truth; in the second case, Marxism organized the proletariat into a source of energy. Both Lenin and Bogdanov accepted the importance of consciousness in transforming society, but Lenin sought to impose it from above and Bogdanov to evoke it from below. Finally, Bogdanov's vision of the power of culture went far beyond Lenin, to incorporate a vision of the ultimate conquest of death by scientific medicine.

II.

The teachings of socialism contain the material for a new religion.

Joseph Dietzgen, The Religion of Social Democracy

Communism places man in his proper place. Man as collectivist is immortal. Only the individual is mortal.

A. V. Lunacharsky, 1918

From the outset the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to religion as a central cultural component in the society they sought to destroy. Through the 1920's the party sought by various means to weaken religion and substitute its own rival faiths, such as the "Living Church" movement and the Lenin cult. Western critics have often seen in Bolshevism a kind of surrogate religion, Jesuitical fanaticism, protestant ethic, or occult movement.¹⁰ But the Bolsheviks themselves were the first to suggest that if and when they came to power they would create a new socialist religion of humanity whereby the Christian belief in personal immortality would give way to socialist belief in immortality through the collective. The object of that belief would not be an individual (Christ) or a projected individual (God) but a collective: the proletariat, the masses, or Man. Ironically, the major critic of this "god-building" tendency within Bolshevism, Lenin, became the immortal individual hero of the surrogate religion they helped devise.¹¹

To many Bolsheviks after 1900 Marxism was not a science but a religion. In the 1860's a friend of Marx, Joseph Dietzgen, a German tanner and self-taught philosopher, wrote a series of essays in which he compared socialism with religion, a new gospel for the coming kingdom of social justice; Dietzgen criticized the dualist division of the universe into mind and matter, characteristic of a two-class society, and substituted his own "monist" view supposedly more suited to a classless society. The world was a unity of all experience into which the self dissolved. Dietzgen's views were revived after 1900 by European socialists seeking a less dogmatic and pseudo-scientific interpretation of socialism with which to appeal to workers. Among those who rediscovered Dietzgen's writings were Friedrich Adler and, through him, Ernst Mach.¹²

Both Mach and Dietzgen suggested that in a world made up of a single substance or of all our experiences, the self would not exist. That is, the individual self was a useful fiction of bourgeois society, which required its heroes, gods, and inventors. Under socialism, individual interests would be sacrificed to the whole and a new kind of collectivism would replace bourgeois individualism. In terms of religion, the belief in the possibility of personal immortality would no longer be tenable, but would be replaced by a belief in collective immortality; the individual would die, but the proletariat would endure. The

dissolution of the self in a world of sensations ultimately led Mach in old age toward Buddhism and a vision of Nirvana.¹³ But for the Bolsheviks it suggested a more manipulative technique whereby they could inculcate collectivist myths in a socialist society.

Religious seeking was common during the Silver Age in Russia. The Symbolists often dabbled in the occult or in eastern religions, including Buddhism, and were equally enchanted by such derivative western doctrines as theosophy and anthroposophy. The search for divine wisdom through culture characterized the transcendental music of Scriabin, the abstract painting of Kandinsky and Malevich, and the poetry of Andrei Belyi, all of whom were attracted to theosophy. In 1909 it was even pointed out at a public lecture that Bolshevik "god building" had in common with theosophy and Buddhism a sense of the insignificance of the individual in a world of experience and sensation.¹⁴

In the wake of the revolutionary failure of 1905, many socialists also turned to religion, as a radical strategy if not as a personal commitment. Father Gapon had mobilized the masses more effectively with his icons, robes, and gospel than had Marxist agitators. For years V. D. Bonch-Bruевич had studied the Russian sectarians and Old Believers; both he and Lenin saw in religious dissent a useful weapon against the state, and the first Bolshevik journal, Razsvet, was aimed at various heretical and sectarian

religious groups. In addition, Maxim Gorky, a crucial Bolshevik patron, had in his 1908 "Confession" suggested a need for "building god" in a socialist religion of the future. Thus when Bogdanov and Lunacharsky joined Gorky at his home on Capri in the spring of 1908, they shared a common interest in the possible intersection between socialism and religion in keeping Bolshevism alive.¹⁵ Collective myth, rather than Lenin's personal authority, was to maintain the party.

A. V. Lunacharsky was the most explicit in connecting socialism and religion. Between 1908 and 1911 he urged the creation of a collectivist religion and culture that would teach the masses to sacrifice their individual "I" to the common "we" of socialism.¹⁶ Politically, Lunacharsky was simultaneously enamoured of syndicalism, and Lenin was aware that "god building" had an enthusiasm for general strikes, parliamentary boycotts, and direct action that he felt were no longer applicable to Stolypin's Russia. In his Materialism and Empiriocriticism (1909), Lenin vigorously attacked both Bogdanov's philosophy of "Machism" and Lunacharsky's "god building" as examples of heretical idealism in contrast with orthodox Marxist materialism. But in fact both Bogdanov and Lunacharsky were pragmatists who sought to utilize religion as surrogate myth under socialism, and at the time could equally well lay claim to the mantle of Bolshevism. Again, the central distinction was whether quasi-religious myth designed by

intellectuals or party authority would be the determinant of a future proletarian culture.

Early Soviet culture exhibited not only the quasi-religious vision of socialism as useful myth, but also the religious symbolism of pre-revolutionary Russian culture. Intelligentsia culture continued to utilize Christian metaphor, especially the vision of an apocalyptic end of the world described in the Revelation of St. John. The sense that Babylon had fallen and the old world was being replaced by the New Jerusalem pervades a number of cultural visions--Kandinsky's "blue rider" and impending "epoch of the great spiritual"; Blok's twelve Red Army men following Christ through the snowstorm of revolution; Malevich's theosophic sense that the mystical square and cube constituted the proper forms for his own painting and Lenin's tomb; Petrov-Vodkin's red horse and Zamiatin's dragon; Fedorov's anticipated resurrection of the dead through science. For Mayakovsky, Christianity provided the vision of future resurrection, and Buddhism and Hinduism the sense of individual dissolution in the all, or of transmigration of souls from one body to another. As satire Zamiatin's crystal dome and walls of a dehumanized New Jerusalem in We transforms metaphor into mockery.

Early Soviet culture combined this inherited Christian symbolism and mysticism with a more manipulative view of religion as useful myth. In both cases there was a promise of victory over

death, the physical resurrection of the dead anticipated by Fedorov and Bogdanov, and the collectivist immortality of living memory espoused by Lunacharsky. Finally, the same "god builders" who anticipated a religion of the collective helped design the cult of Lenin--tomb, refrigerator unit, sarcophagus, and all.¹⁷ The anticipated collectivist myth turned into an authoritarian cult of personality.

III.

The view that Lenin's death is not death, that he is alive and eternal, is symbolized in a new object, taking as its form the cube.

Kazimir Malevich, 1924

In the arts the distinction between myth and authority took the form of the tension between the avant-garde as a self-styled youth movement of rebellious and visionary artists, and the Academy of Arts or the Communist Party as the guardian of an artistic orthodoxy.¹⁸ After 1905 the cultural radicalism of various art movements--futurism, cubofuturism, acmeism, suprematism, constructivism, and productivism--was generally antagonistic to accepted artistic taste and fashion. Various manifestoes claimed to originate useful myths about a visionary artistic future that an esoteric elite would control. Artistically the avant-garde tended to employ symbols, often of an apocalyptic or mystical nature, or to portray an abstract world of geometric shapes, swirling colors, or juxtaposed objects. In contrast the authority of the Academy and the Party demanded artistic realism, the mimetic conformity of art to reality. Seen in this context the avant-garde was an interlude between the realism of the nineteenth century and the Socialist Realism of the 1930's.

The tension between the individual and the collective also characterized the arts in early Soviet culture. Artistic individualism and the rage for innovation and public recognition

were characteristic of the avant-garde. The Futurist poets and painters carried this to an extreme with plays and movies about themselves, obsessive use of the word "I", public antics, and oracular manifestoes. But at the same time there was a powerful sense of belonging to a larger group or movement that anticipated the future, and of dehumanizing art by removing the individual as the subject. The attack on the individual and the immersion of self in the collective characterized the Proletkult movement and many art schools in the 1920's, and mass art became an enthusiasm and source of employment for many artists. Unsigned poems by a collective, paintings of revolutionary crowds, collective orchestras without a bourgeois conductor, and films with the masses as hero all reflected a collectivist myth that was based as much on spontaneous enthusiasm and diversity as on party authority. After the cultural revolution of 1928-1932, the art of the Stalin era restored individualism in the form of the cult of personality, incentives and rewards for individual achievement, and the revival of interest in Russian historical figures.¹⁹

Artists also had their own concerns with immortality. Artistic achievement and posthumous reputation encouraged that concern, but it ran deeper. As a youth movement the avant-garde agonized over its ultimate fate, aging and death, and exhibited a remarkable concern with its own self-destruction, martyrdom, and immortality. The influence of the philosopher-librarian

N. F. Fedorov and his vision of ultimate resurrection of all the fathers was considerable upon artists and intellectuals associated with the "victory over death" movement in the 1920's.²⁰ The theosophic promise of eternal life in another dimension or on another plane held great appeal for the painters Kandinsky and Malevich, as well as the composer Matiushin and the writer Belyi. The Christian hope of resurrection was embedded in Russian culture, and many artists were touched by it. Here again there was a distinction between their own religious faith and their utilization of religious themes for artistic or political purposes. The persistence of the immortality theme testifies both to the personal concerns of the individual artist and the more manipulative appeal to a mass audience in which religious sentiments were thought to be still prevalent.

Artists were thus crucial to early Soviet culture for their individual artistic visions and experiments, and for their contribution to the legitimizing of Bolshevik authority through useful myth. The poster, the cartoon, the film, the ROSTA window, and the play reflected both individual talent and agitprop manipulation. Many artists either emigrated or played no role in legitimizing the revolution. But those who did found that their search for artistic immortality helped create a political authority that ultimately would not tolerate their individualism or their dissent.

IV.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The Revelation of St. John
22:18

If the proletarian-sectarian demands the word 'devil' in his speech, then identify this old concept of an evil principle with capitalism, and identify the word 'Christ' as a concept of eternal good, happiness, and freedom with socialism.

V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, Razsvet, 1904

Bolshevism as literature illustrates the tension between myth and authority in terms of double meanings. The Bolsheviks were prolific writers, and for them literature was a continuation of politics by other means. On the surface their writings exhibited the authority of Marxist quotations; a length sufficient to qualify a work in the eyes of the censor as literary or scholarly, rather than political; and an Aesopian language of allusion, indirection, and innuendo aimed at the alert reader. In literature there were always two meanings, overt and covert, in the tradition of Saltykov-Shchedrin and Chernyshevsky, two of Lenin's favorite writers.²¹ In daily underground correspondence, there was always plaintext and ciphertext, on the surface

ordinary jargon and beneath it, hidden meaning. In literature the line between culture and politics disappeared, since books hid political messages and Marxist politics required literary expression.

Aesop language in literature derived from the very existence of censorship. The discovery in the 1890's that long, dry, statistical tomes could pass the censorship even though they contained politically subversive passages or implications led to a "legal Marxist" style that pervades Bolshevik writing.²² For "monism" the alert reader substituted Marxism, for "philosophy" politics, for "energy" violence; in correspondence a "hospital" was a prison, an "illness" an arrest, and "beer" copies of Iskra. In 1905, Gorky and other Bolshevik writers employed "legal Marxist" techniques to get their ideas across in Novaia zhizn' and other "legal" journals, ostensibly cultural or literary, but always beneath the surface political. In Materialism and Empiriocriticism, Lenin's attack on Bogdanov's philosophy of Machist relativism contained a second level of discourse aimed at Bolsheviks drifting politically in the direction of Syndicalism. Problems with censorship confronted any writer in Russia, as Mayakovsky discovered in 1915 when he had to change a title from "The Thirteenth Apostle" to "A Cloud in Trousers"; Kandinsky in 1913 had to excise sections on theosophy from his Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Nor did censorship disappear after the revolution, as Boris Pilniak's

allusion to Mikhail Frunze's murder in "The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon" (1926) reminds us.

The point is that early Soviet culture inherited a tradition in which literature was political both by intent and by circumstance. Books were deliberately used to conceal and convey political messages, both by allusion and by ciphers defining the letters on a specific line and page of an agreed book.²³ The result was a situation in which text always had context, and words were political labels. Here again there was the tension between Lenin's view of literature as a realistic portrait of society subject to party control, a view later enshrined in Socialist Realism, and Bogdanov's view of literature as a means of organizing class consciousness. Yet both lived in a world of double meanings where literature always implied politics, and the reader found meaning between the lines. Materialism and Empiriocriticism was a political attack on syndicalism in the guise of a philosophical polemic against Mach and Bogdanov; Bogdanov's Red Star (1907) and Engineer Menni (1911) were political tracts on syndicalism and socialism in the guise of science fiction utopias.²⁴ Under War Communism (1918-1921) these works were reprinted and found wide readership.

Bolshevism as literature, then, involved a continuous battle of the books. Authority derived from authorship, the exegetical interpretation of Marx, orthodox or revisionist. Myth implied

double meaning, and the faithful could always see in the fable a political lesson. Put in another way, censorship represented authority, political control over authorship, and Aesopian language represented literary myth as a cultural camouflage for political statements. For Lenin the texts of Marxism were a source of party authority; for Bogdanov the utopia of proletarian culture was a source of myth. Bolshevik literature in either case became a plaintext in which the reader had to conduct a cryptanalytical search for the hidden ciphertext.

V.

The European is the leader (vozhd) and master (khoziain) of his thought; the man of the East is the slave and servant of his fantasy.

Maxim Gorky, "Two Souls", 1914

Myth and authority thus formed a creative tension within early Soviet culture that helps us distinguish Bolshevism and Leninism. Within Bolshevism, Lenin aspired to the triumph of political authority over cultural myth, whereas Bogdanov viewed cultural myth as an essential precondition to the establishment of a new political authority. But culture and politics were often interchangeable under Russian censorship conditions. The Bolshevik who employed culture to disguise politics also read into culture a political meaning. Culture carried political implications, and politics sought cultural disguise. Proletarian culture was closely connected with syndicalism, the general strike, and workers' control of industry. Both Lenin and Bogdanov recognized this connection between culture and politics, but for Lenin culture was merely political disguise and for Bogdanov culture was a transforming key to politics.

What is significant to note is that three of the major figures in early Soviet culture--Gorky, Bogdanov, and Lunacharsky--had, often in opposition to Lenin, been articulating a theory of culture for more than a decade before 1917. Since 1904, Bolshevism

had depended heavily on Gorky's money and social contacts, as well as his writing and reputation, and on the philosophical and literary work of Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. What Lenin often denigrated as their "god building" or "Machism" was an attempt to define a future "proletarian culture" under socialism that would not simply reflect social and economic change, but serve to transform a capitalist society into a socialist one, a society in which individuals would come to lose their sense of individual self-importance or "I" and gain a sense of the collective "we". Early Soviet culture, including the Lenin cult, reflected not so much Lenin's ideas on culture but those of his Bolshevik rivals. For them culture derived not from party authority but from ideology as myth. Indeed culture posed threats to political authority: relativism, religion, experimentalism, and syndicalism. After 1917, Bolshevism as culture was thus neither autonomous nor authoritative, but a temporary alliance between cultural myth and political authority, both of which helped establish and legitimize the young Soviet regime, neither of which could triumph without the other.

The tension between Leninist authority and Bogdanov's myth of proletarian culture thus runs far deeper than the institutional rivalry between Narkompros and the party, on the one hand, and Proletkult, on the other. For it reflects a deep division within Bolshevism as to the very relationship between culture and politics.

For Lenin, science was the source of truth, religion the opium of the people, art the imitation of reality, literature the disguise of politics; for Bogdanov, science was convenient hypothesis, religion useful collectivist myth, art an organizing tool, and literature a utopian dream. In the world of power, politics cannot ultimately tolerate the autonomy of culture; in the world of creative expression, culture cannot ultimately tolerate the strictures of political authority. There is delicious irony, finally, in the fact that Lenin the authoritarian individual became the deity of a surrogate religious myth created by the god-building movement he sought to suppress, and that Bogdanov the collectivist myth-maker may have died while seeking individual immortality by transfusing his own blood.

FOOTNOTES

¹Two recent studies that emphasize the distinctions between Bolshevism, Leninism, and Stalinism are: Stephen Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," in Robert Tucker, ed., Stalinism; Essays on Historical Interpretation (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 3-30; James C. McClelland, "Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: The Proletarian Culture Debate," Slavic Review, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 1980), pp. 403-425.

²On the difference between the Lenin and Bogdanov views of proletarian culture, see Peter Scheibert, "Lenin, Bogdanov, and the Concept of Proletarian Culture," in B. W. Eissenstat, ed., Lenin and Leninism; State, Law, and Society (Toronto, London: D. C. Heath, 1971).

³The best survey of Bogdanov's thought is Dietrich Grille, Lenins Rivale: Bogdanov und seine Philosophie (Cologne, 1966).

⁴A recent and stimulating interpretation of Leninism as gnosticism is Alain Besancon, The Rise of the Gulag: Intellectual Origins of Leninism (New York: Continuum, 1981), especially pp. 9-19.

⁵Robert C. Williams, "Collective Immortality: The Syndicalist Origins of Proletarian Culture, 1905-1910," Slavic Review, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 1980), pp. 389-402.

⁶For an excellent interpretation of the influence of Mach on the physics of his day, see Gerald Holton, "Mach, Einstein, and the

Search for Reality," in his Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 219-259.

⁷See especially V. I. Lenin, Materializm i empiriokrititsizm (Moscow: Zveno, 1909).

⁸On the influence of Ernst Mach on Friedrich Adler and others in Zurich after 1890, see Lewis Feuer, Einstein and the Generations of Science (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁹The shift in scientific thought around 1900 is described in Erwin N. Hiebert, "The Energetics Controversy and the New Thermodynamics," in Duane H. D. Roller, Perspectives in the History of Science and Technology (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 67-86.

¹⁰On the analogy between Soviet culture and religion, see especially Rene Fuegoep Miller, The Mind and Face of Bolshevism (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927).

¹¹The role of the "god builders" Lunacharsky, Gorky, Bonch-Bruевич, and Krasin in creating the Lenin cult and designing the mausoleum is described in Nina Tumarkin, "Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult," Russian Review, Vol. 40, No. 1 (January 1981), pp. 35-46.

¹²Joseph Dietzgen's essays were collected and translated as Some of the Philosophical Essays on Socialism and Science, Religion, Ethics and Critique-of-Reason and the World at Large (Chicago, 1906). See also H. Roland-Holst, Josef Dietzgens

Philosophie in ihrer Bedeutung für das Proletariat (Munich, 1910); P. G. Dauge, Iosif Ditsgen (Moscow, 1934); Williams, pp. 393-394, footnote 14.

¹³Mach's interest in Buddhism is described in Chapter 18 of John T. Blackmore, Ernst Mach; His Work, Life and Influence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

¹⁴On the role of theosophy in Russian artistic and intellectual life, see Robert C. Williams, "Concerning the German Spiritual in Russian Art: Vasilii Kandinskii," Journal of European Studies, Vol. 1, No. 4 (December 1971), pp. 325-336; Artists in Revolution; Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde, 1905-1925 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 102-107, 123-124. The connection between "god building", theosophy, and Buddhism was pointed out by Viacheslav Ivanov at a 1909 talk to the Religious Philosophical Society by Anna Kamenskaia, secretary of the Russian Section of the Theosophical Society; Anna Kamenskaia, Teosofia i bogostroitel'stvo (St. Petersburg, 1909).

¹⁵Williams, "Collective Immortality," pp. 396-397.

¹⁶A. V. Lunacharskii, Religiia i sotsializm (St. Petersburg, 1908 and 1911, 2 vols.).

¹⁷The connection between the design of the Lenin mausoleum and the search for a "victory over death" is described in S. Frederick Starr, Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 245-250.

¹⁸Williams, Artists in Revolution, passim.

¹⁹On the cultural revolution, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

²⁰Williams, Artists in Revolution, Chapter 8.

²¹On Aesopian language in Chernyshevsky's writings, see B. I. Lazerson, "Ezopovskaia rech v publitsistike Chernyshevskogo," in E. I. Pokusaev, ed., N. G. Chernyshevskii; stat'i, issledovaniia i materialy, Vol. IV (Saratov, 1965), pp. 61-82.

²²The role of censorship before 1917 is discussed in Benjamin Rigberg, "The Efficacy of Tsarist Censorship Operations, 1894-1917," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1966), pp. 327-346.

²³The use of specific books, including the works of Gorky and Bogdanov, to encipher illegal messages was commonplace; having agreed on a certain page, then two numbers could define a specific letter in a specific row. How to do it is described in V. Bakharev (Vladimir Akimov), O shifrakh (Geneva, 1902) and A. Bundovets (P. I. Rozental'), Shifrovannoe pis'mo (Geneva, 1904).

²⁴A. A. Bogdanov, Krasnaia zvezda (St. Petersburg, 1907) and Inzhener Menni (St. Petersburg, 1911).

