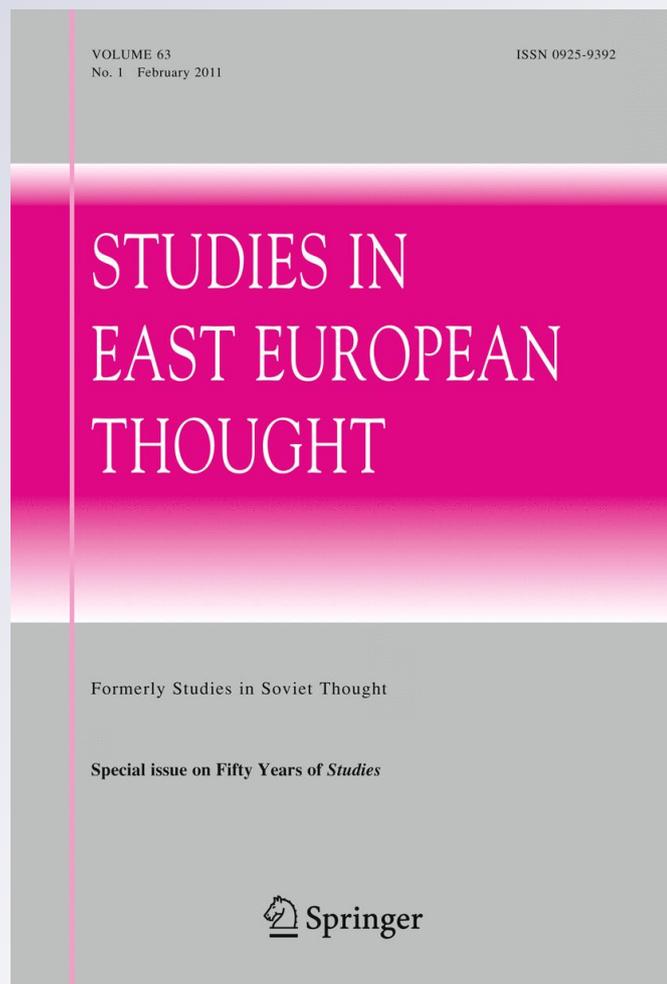


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GAKhN: an aesthetics of ruins, or Aleksej Losev's failed project

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Abstract In the course of his collaboration with GAKhN, whose task was to create a systemic 'scientific' theory of art, Losev undertook a systematic interpretation of German classical aesthetics as the historical presupposition for his own Christian, Platonist doctrine of art conceived as a dialectical universe comprising totalizing connections at all levels. This interpretation was concealed in a masterful way within the 'Commentaries' to *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy*. Independently of the significant results achieved by this revival of the classical tradition, Losev's mythologized theory of art called forth a critical reaction on the part of his GAKhN colleagues and brought to light some of the broader theoretical attitudes present among GAKhN's collaborators.

Keywords GAKhN · Losev · Theory of art · Actualization of classical German aesthetics

GAKhN as a social project

The last years have witnessed a considerable growth of interest in the heritage of GAKhN¹ on the part of numerous scholars in the humanities. In particular, a current

¹ *Gosudarstvennaja Akademija khudožestvennykh nauk* [GAKhN]—the State Academy for the scientific study of art—was founded in 1921 in Moscow. Until 1925 it was named the Russian Academy for the scientific study of art [RAKhN]. It comprised three departments: a department of mathematical physics (psychology) as well as departments of philosophy and sociology. In addition there were sections for literature,

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Russian-German research project, “Die Sprache der Dinge,”² is devoted to a close examination of the aesthetics propounded by GAKhN’s collaborators. It is not surprising that the theme should be attractive: the many works that arose within the academy clearly display a sense of an integral theory of art based on new, though not iconoclastic, foundations. To understand the phenomenon of GAKhN (failing which it would be difficult to come to grips with its fragmentary heritage), it pays to look more closely at its somewhat odd position within the socio-historical context of the period.

I. In terms of ideas, as fate would have it the interests of the Soviet State coincided at the time to a considerable degree with those of the scholars gathered under GAKhN’s wing. The twenties were an especially difficult period for Russian intellectuals life given their complete uncertainty about their future involvement in the system. On the one hand, it was a group which supported the new regime—on the whole quite sincerely—because everyone had anticipated and prepared for the revolution, and the Bolsheviks’ excesses could well be perceived as ‘growing pains’. Those who had emigrated were by far not the only active members of the intelligentsia. In fact, this syndrome characterized the left-leaning intelligentsia in the West as well, as they greeted the dawning of the totalitarian regimes. Moreover, the Russian intelligentsia was beset by a sense of guilt for its self-ascribed ‘parasitism’ and a desire to atone to the people for its sins.

At the beginning of the twenties, following the exile of the non-conformists in 1922, the State had to decide what to do with the intelligentsia and came to the decision to include them in seeking solutions for its own strategic tasks. It seems clear, then, that at the time there was something like a correspondence of the world views of the regime in power and the intelligentsia. The fledgling Soviet State considered itself to be the successor of the emancipatory socialist movements of the previous century, as reflected in the discourse of the day: liberation from the conservative tradition, from the ancien regime, from its inertness, social inequalities, its prejudices, and the absence of freedom. But what was to replace this discredited regime? In part, the positivist ethos of the nineteenth century: an efficient, socially just, collectivist state grounded not in the spiritual forces of the Church, not in myth, but in the authority of science. The keywords here became social justice, the collective, science, constructive and efficient labour. The call was for an alliance of science, technology, and social justice, guaranteed by the leading role of the Party.

For its part, the intelligentsia craved objectivity and the scientific ideal. They had enough of the former generally assumed relativity of cultural values, of bourgeois individualism ... a frame of mind that had been taking form since the last decade of the nineteenth century. The beginnings of a purge of the three demons of positivist culture became apparent: historicism, psychologism, and moral relativism. The intelligentsia was keenly aware of, and impressed by, the scientific revolution at the

Footnote 1 continued

music, theatre, painting, architecture, and graphics. In the spring of 1929, GAKhN was reorganized, that is, in fact disbanded. In 1930 it became the State Academy for the theory of art.

² Cf. the project’s site <http://dbs.rub.de/gachn/>.

very start of the twentieth century. This was followed in turn by a revolution in the arts and the humanities. The beginning of the century was marked by the remarkable upsurge of Russian art which placed the country not only in the first ranks of European culture, but in the very vanguard of contemporary experimentation in the arts. Naturally, these developments were closely observed by sensitive and youthful Russian intellectuals who responded actively to them (notable was the facility with which Russian translations of intellectual 'hits' were prepared).

For GAKhN, the significant development concerned research in the arts, viz. Konrad Fiedler's formalism and the closely related literary theory of Oskar Walzel. However, neither had abandoned positivist values. For them, the two basic realities remained the world of physical facts and that of feelings and thoughts about these facts. Science could easily embrace these disparate realities given its naturalist homogeneity, whereas a corresponding humanities variant remained very much in question. The Russian formalists and members of GAKhN, as well as such independent theorist such as V. M. Žirmunskij, read and commented these materials. But nevertheless there was a sense of disappointment with both western formalism, for its anti-metaphysical attitudes, and the formalists grouped in OPOJAZ, with their devotion to 'external' forms. In their search for complementary theories they turned to philosophical theories—to hermeneutics and phenomenology. (Though Neokantianism, in the late style of Natorp and Cassirer, had hardly lost its influence, not to mention more recent developments at the time in Western psychology.)

At first sight it seems strange that this complex symphony of worldviews somehow managed to resonate with the otherwise straightforward ambitions of the regime in power. But so it was. In both cases it was a matter of vanquishing subjectivism and constructing new forms of collectivism needed by the new sociology and the new visions of the world of mind. Nevertheless, the once influential Enlightenment dream about art as the instrument for popular consolidation and direction was revived. Behind the programs of the regime lay a very simple idea—society is a kind of machine which can be regulated once we know how it works, eliminating thereby anything inessential and disruptive. As a consequence the intelligentsia felt free to approach the regime with its own visions and projects. They too shared in the common dream of the machine as well as in a kind of refined intellect—at once that of the engineer and the humanist able to understand and manage it. (Perhaps this 'dream', which was latent in the West and explicit in Russia, contains the answer to the question why Russian formalism became so popular among scholars throughout the world, in fact eclipsing GAKhN's contributions.)

GAKhN was by no means the only institution created by the regime for the sake of the revolution in the humanities; others included Vkhutemas and the Leningrad Institute of the history of art. But GAKhN enjoyed a certain specificity—it could boast an officially supported program in fundamental theory. This did not hamper practical activities—in particular the organization of exhibitions—but nevertheless the Academy thereby acquired a certain aristocratic privilege during this exceedingly functional period, with attention ranging over a remarkable mix of phenomenological, hermeneutical, and neo-Kantian themes. And all for the sake of turning

aesthetics into a synthetic science of art applying a concrete technology for understanding, describing, and directing culture. It should be remarked in passing that to speak about GAKhN in general terms is to fall victim to an unacceptable abstraction, because GAKhN comprised not only three sections, each with its own tasks and methods, but also distinctive communities of discourse with their own strategies. One such difference in views which springs to mind immediately is that opposing B. I. Jarkhot to G. Špet. The former line can be characterized as pre-structuralist, perhaps even as physicalist with its insistence on exact scientific method. Špet's line was rather phenomenological-hermeneutic, on the one hand, and positivist, with regard to science, on the other. But there was likewise a line of thought that I would trace to Losev, involving a latent reference to the religious heritage of the Silver Age, in the first place to Florenskij and V. Ivanov.³ This 'Losev line' included V. P. Zubov, P. S. Popov, and in part B. A. Fokht. However, this was not a formally cohesive line of thought since the idea of a universal method to study art—at once formalist and functional—was sincerely shared by all members of the academy. The state supported this 'hothouse' until 1929 when the excessive complexity of such institutions began to disturb the crystallization of the totalitarian order, and when, moreover, the project of a military and political anti-European alliance with Germany—on whose science GAKhN relied—became unrealistic. The Academy was destroyed quickly and decisively, but it was less easy to wipe out the traces of its decade-long activities. GAKhN was, in the end, an unfinished structure, one, moreover, that was deliberately turned into rubble, though the ruins continue to radiate the energy of an idea which nourishes contemporary thinking.

The philosophy of art in A. F. Losev's "Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy"

One of the more interesting scholarly themes elaborated by GAKhN seems to me to be the turn to German theory of the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries, in the conviction that it contained solutions to current problems. The reception of this German heritage helps explain much about the way in which the Academy undertook its activities. One of these related to the task of creating a new scientific approach to art and involved a reinterpretation of German classical aesthetics (extending from Winckelmann to late romanticism). Thinking through this tradition and adapting it to current research—by Špet, Losev, Gabričevskij, Zubov, Fokht, Popov, and others—became a main source of inspiration for the Academy. In the following I will restrict my attention to the discussion that arose around the publication in 1927 of Losev's *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy*. It is a clear example of the turn to German aesthetics.⁴

This work was part of a series of major publications by Losev between 1927 and 1930, in fact his major works. Its place in the series marks it out as his most GAKhN-related work (together with *Muzyka kak predmet logiki*), being closely tied

³ That for GAKhN this was a genuine line of development and not a niche for marginal figures is evident from the invitation extended to Berdjajev, Vyšeslavcev, V. Ivanov, and Frank.

⁴ References are to Losev (1995).

to the research programs and discussions within the academy. It must be said though that the book lies within the aforementioned 'ruins', including, however, the ruins of Losev's own ideas. Judging by later publications (including archive materials), which continue to appear, the book in question could have been part of a project for a much bigger study devoted to aesthetics.⁵

Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy did not have the success his other publications from that period enjoyed, and it is easy to see why. The book consists of two parts of virtually equal length. The first deals with the dialectical system of categories which Losev treats in other texts in more developed, more detailed manner, such that this initial version of the dialectical system is doubtless of secondary importance. The second part consists in remarks addressed to specialists, the study of which can only be tedious so long as one does not understand why Losev undertook such a close reading of German aesthetics, that is, why he undertook such an intense dialogue with unseen opponents. But Losev's informal participation in GAKhN projects—well documented thanks to the remarkable study by Dunaev (1991) providing a full chronology of all his public presentations, the discussions, articles, etc.—provides the basis for understanding the latent 'purpose' of the book.

One characteristic feature of Losev's style (one that sometimes shocks the "normal" reader) is his ability to adapt the Soviet style without, however, forsaking very direct and pointed statements of his personal views in contexts where a superficial reader will not notice them. In the book under discussion here, references to "dialectics" and "sociology" abound, the last of which being a theme which the GAKhN researchers, as of 1925, had to study more closely. But in his remarks written in small script, Losev puts forward his understanding of the philosophical heritage, an understanding which creates the inner tension in the text both with respect to the tradition and with respect to GAKhN.

Despite their differences the various members of GAKhN shared the view that the classical German aesthetic tradition should be revived. Starting with a sympathetic analysis of German formalism of the day, they proceeded, step by step, from one impulse to the next, back to classical period of German aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century. In this way, it became clear to them that Western formalism had quickly exhausted its conceptual resources, given its overly close connection to positivism. Though having uncovered fresh new principles for the analysis of literary materials, the GAKhN theoreticians noted that this formalism was an analogue of pre-Kantian Enlightenment metaphysics. On the contrary, German classical aesthetics, which Russian adepts of Schelling had known and applied, turned out to be a vital working resource. Losev's remarks in *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy* testify to the high degree to which this tradition was reactualized.

Let me say something about the dialectics presented in the first part of the book, which presents variations on the schemes found in Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Proclus. It reveals an invariant of sorts running through all of Losev's early works. We find here an account constructed in a deductive form about the One which

⁵ This is clear from the fragments of the unwritten *Istorija estetičeskikh učenij*, as well as *Istorija antičnoj estetiki*, *Estetika Vozroždenija*, *Problema simvola i realisticeskoe iskusstvo*, *Estetika prirody*, *Problema khudožestvennogo stilja*.

manifests itself in the eidē. The many eidē realize themselves in myth, that is, in a complex meaningful narrative which tells the story of the life of the eidē. Myth in its turns is transfigured into otherness (*inobytie*), since any given ideal essence acquires the fullness of its being only when it comes to form its other as body, be it material or ideal. The outcome is the emergence of a factual dimension in which the One is manifest as Personality. The ability in turn of personality to express herself in symbols and myths is the first step to artistic form. Symbol is the way in which myth is expressed here and now, as an individual, singular fact. Personality attains full expression by acquiring a 'countenance' (*lik*) and a 'name' (*imja*), two aspects which together make up the emerging personality. Emerging—that is, from the Greek, *energeia*, or coming to be in the course of creative manifestation.

This is the scheme running through the chapters of Losev's book. It is important to discriminate the way in which his *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy* is an attempt to fulfil and answer leading questions raised within GaAKhN.

(1) The work is constructed inē the form of a system of antinomies (Losev terms it 'antinomics'). There is nothing surprising in this bearing in the mind Losev's Fichtean and Hegelian dialectical basis and the essential antinomic style of his teacher Florenskij. But in comparison with his other works, the antinomies of this text is not a device but the very core of the presentation. This is due to the fact that Losev is concerned not with a methodological but with the real antinomy in the sphere of art, with the encounter of inexpressible meaning and maximum concreteness in which this meaning seeks to express itself. For Losev, here lies one of more marked of all possible antinomies, this short-circuit of being and otherness. To formulate this Losev modifies the classic dialectical triad, transforming it into a 'tetrad', by adding a fourth element—the incorporation of the triad into factual reality. Art should enclose the higher and the lower: how this takes place in fact, we know of course, but it is no mean matter to explain theoretically.

Losev sets about constructing a specific antinomial series, where the main structuring moment is the concept of the mean, the Greek 'metaksa' (Losev 1995, 52–58). This is nothing other than the very heart of artistic form. In his other dialectical constructions the mean plays the role of a translator from one level to another, but in art the mean is not meant to be utilitarian. It is the entelechy of the entire process, its end. Any given artistic form as a symbolic energy mediates inexpressible objectness and factual expression in the work of art. Losev employs the term 'metaksa' to recall the corresponding teachings of Plato and Aristotle according to whom authentic being in this world is present not in the form of polar extremes but as a center able to unite contraries, to establish and reproduce balance. For Losev this teaching was a godsend since it provided a classical basis for the idea of the center. This means that the task of any given artistic form will be, first, to enter otherness, boldly shedding its own being and immersing itself in otherness; second, to find in this situation polar opposites; third, to take on itself responsibility for uniting the latter in some determinate fashion. In this case the symbolic incorporation of the higher in the lower is realized.

(2) Losev remarks that the artistic is realized in case what is expressed and what is embodied in the process of expression come to complete correspondence (Losev 1995, 78–79). He names this the 'absolute adequation' of meaning (that is, what

always proceeds from the higher levels of the dialectical process) and its embodiment in otherness. Losev does not conceal the fact that this is a major paradox. For normal consciousness the idea that a work of art embodies not simply a partial expression of something but the full adequation of two strata is altogether strange. Nevertheless Losev insists on the idea on the basis of the following considerations.

He holds that it is essential to distinguish the ancient 'pagan' dialectics from that which, in the Christian period starting with the Church Fathers and beyond to Cusanus, opened up a new type of understanding of the self-alienation of the One: a type at odds with the step by step weakening of emanation. The characteristic feature of the dialectics of modernity, based on this type, is the representation of those moments of being in which the highest forms are expressed in all their fullness. Not only the divine spheres involving the dogma of Christ's two natures. Losev remarks that even our sinful lower states include moments which testify to the absolute correspondence of the ideal and the factual.

There is a sense in which Losev follows Kant's lead who demonstrated the virtual coextension of nature's status and the status of freedom in art. However, he was not ready to consider this correspondence of the higher and the lower in the world as something contingent, much less illusory. What follows then is the unusual and robust thesis according to which the energy of the *eidē* has at some moment to achieve not indirect but direct realization, where that in which the *eidōs* has come to be realized as well as the meaning that arose in the course of realized embodiment are mutually satisfied. According to Losev, every work of art (not only masterpieces) displays a certain artistic fact which is not to be reduced to some one determinate meaning, which would somehow exist independently of the work; nor is it to be reduced to the material substrate in which this meaning is realized. Losev maintains, provocatively, that in authentic art the inexpressible is always expressed: if there is something inexpressible this means that the art has gone unrealized. The principle of absolute adequacy is entirely consistent with each and every style. The status of avant-garde art during the GAKhN period was also legitimated by this principle, since the adequation in question rendered it absolutely self-sufficient, or self-referential (to use current terminology).

(3) The principle of absolute adequation yields another—the essential wholeness of the work of art, that is, its status as a unique event. And this in turn gives rise to a rather extravagant claim on Losev's part to the effect that a work of art is a living being (Losev 1995, 74–77). He meant this not at all metaphorically but quite literally. What he means is best seen in the context of his dialectics, where for Losev life is any state of matter that has been illuminated by the One: matter as it were organizes itself around this pole of attraction to the One and reproduces it to highest degree possible. From its side the One dialectically appropriates matter. As soon as meaning appropriates its otherness a living form results with its own core, its quasi-“I,” its “body,” as well as a determinate inner biography of this “I,” since, according to Losev, in the wake of its creation the work neither languishes nor disappears but is the occasion for an internal dialogue of its form and content. The external manifestation of this process is the historically rooted interpretations of the work, which are often complex and interesting. (For instance, we can reconstruct

how, for example, Shakespeare's Hamlet was forgotten, revived, considered a masterpiece, a laughing stock, and the like.) But this external biography depends on its internal counterpart with its constant dynamics, determined by the successive moves of the One along the ladder of spiritual names which give rise to new types of life. This is the source of Losev's favourite expression, usually understood as a metaphor, to the effect that dialectics is not simply the description of life, but life itself. This is not mere rhetoric but rather the fixation of the systemic moment in the manifestation of the eidos' energy whereby the state of otherness is transformed into a work of art.

(4) The next characteristic moment is the doctrine of the proto-image (*pervoobraz*), one of Losev's more original innovations in his *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy* (Losev 1995, 106–112). In this case recourse to Plato's metaphors or Goethe's proto-phenomena is of no avail. In Losev's understanding the proto-image is the intuitively given essence or meaningful object which is the source of all its possible realizations in the artistic form. The paradox here is that the protoimage is not understood to be some kind of model lying outside the work of art, but is instead one of its functions. The initial category in all editions of the work is 'expressivity'. The artistic form is the state of the higher meaning when it is expressively realized.

However, every expression of meaning immediately displays two poles, the first being concrete expression in images, ideas, and, speaking generally, in symbols since symbols enable this meaning to exist in the mode of individual units. And the second pole being this very same expressivity but now manifesting its proto-image, showing the pulsations at the core of the work of art, which, in accordance with apophatic theology, remains unexpressed. Here it is very important to note that none of this has anything to do with the dynamics of representation of external reality. The proto-image is a mysterious component of the artistic whole which does not determine the work but emerges functionally only as soon as the image has been realized in the material substrate of the work; this is the irreducible pole of the absolute present in every work of art. Whether or not a given author recognizes this function of the proto-image is altogether without importance, according to Losev.

(5) The next characteristic would have in all likelihood been applauded by Foucault: in the course of the realization of the artistic form the author disappears (Losev 1995, 83–92). The author is completely without importance for two reasons. First, in the dialectic of artistic form any and every author mediates types of reality: it was not Beethoven who composed the Fifth but something brought this about through Beethoven. Second, the analysis of artistic form (and here the structuralists would approve Losev's perspective) requires neither a historical nor a psychological context (be it authorial intention or the mental life of the recipient). That is to say, the drama that unfolds in the work of art is no more and no less than the drama of the realization of meaning. The adequacy principle helps us fix the moment when this meaning emerged: when the logical and the alogical, necessarily bound to each other, appeared together in equilibrium.

The principle of equilibrium is essential in this connection. To be sure, Losev takes this principle from German aesthetics, starting with Winckelmann's theory of plasticity, and it is sharply in evidence in Goethe, though its roots lie in Plato's and

Aristotle's sense of the mean. The point is that as mediator between worlds the author achieves personhood; the dialectics of artistic form does not countenance mediators deprived of personhood. Here there is no cynicism of higher forces manipulating the author for their own ends only to abandon him later: singular individuality is all to the fore. Losev is keenly aware of the paradox that the author's expendability renders him all the more individual. The author goes missing, but loses nothing; he emerges as personality since the very core of the process can only be personality. But in the guise of a psychological, historical fact relative to time and place the author is expendable: in this regard any emerging artistic form always outgrows its author.

For the GAKhN group this was a very relevant idea because it provided an argument for the creation of a specific theory of art. Were art to be a sum of personal world views or distinctive ideologemes, then talk of science would seem to be excluded. However, if we can 'bracket' the author (meaning the space-time relative personal point of view within a particular context), then the scientific dimension comes to the fore.

From the foregoing we can see how the invariant moments within Losev's conception of dialectics include paradoxical and provocative doctrines which hardly belong to the tradition, though they do overlap to some degree with German conceptions as well as with Platonism. What we have here is the project of a new theory of art. Today it is easier to understand this novelty in as much as the period in question, the twenties, was rife with unusual aesthetic experiments. Still, theoretically, these sketchy innovations amounted to controversial paradoxes. It is worth adding here that the very lexicon of this undertaking was especially interesting and carefully construed, with key expressions added not as theoretical terms but as words of everyday natural language, though poeticized to a degree. To illustrate how an expression sets up an antonymic field, Losev resorts to two lexical devices: oxymora, as in 'unexpressed expressiveness', and inversion, involving the transposition of terms, as in 'alogical logicity' and 'logical alogicality'.

Though a reader might be irritated by this kind of usage, it is but a device to show what happens to meaning when antinomies comes into play. In the first place, meaning has to unite oppositions, without destroying them (for otherwise they will cease to be effective within the work of art). This means that the oxymoronic unification of heterogeneous meanings is appropriate. But at the same time there is here a determinate dynamic of meaning, its poles are interchanged, with verbal inversion occurring as a result. Losev found these devices in the German romantics, though later many others employed them (in part Marx who often resorted to inversions). However, Losev's use of them is more than a stylistic underpinning for understanding what happens to artistic form.

The theoretical part of the *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy* ends with the classification of the types and kinds of art (Losev 1995, 161–162), though for the contemporary reader the presentation is rather tedious. However, for Losev the system he constructs is important as an application of his theoretical investigations. It was important likewise for GAKhN: for their organizational aims Soviet bureaucrats responsible for the arts required the creation of a contemporary 'net' of the arts. But likewise for the scholars involved this practical matter was interesting, because they reverted to the idea prevalent already in antiquity that the typology of

genres is essentially the typology of being, a system of mutually irreducible types of reality. The GAKhN scholars were thoroughly convinced that considerations of genres and types provide the key to the construction of a matrix-like science of art. Hence it is evident that considerations by the GAKhN scholars about the theatre as a genre or about the novel constituted a passage to broader themes. For Losev music was just this kind of theme, but the more general classification was by no means an empty formality for him, as it announced the topics of his future research.

Losev's reconstruction of German classical aesthetics and its critical reception in GAKhN

The notes and comments which make up the second half of the book, virtually as long as the first part, are devoted essentially (starting with note 55) to the theme of dialectics in German aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century. The subject as a whole corresponds to a lecture Losev presented in GAKhN in October 1925 (Dunaev 1991, 215). He starts with Kant's philosophy understood by him as an attempt to see objects in relation to reason as well as an attempt to conceive the transcendental necessity and self-sufficiency of art. But Losev affirms that with his subjectivism and his struggle against intuitivism Kant "passed by the aesthetics of the nineties." Losev discriminates two main components of Weimar classicism: Goethe's and Schiller's Platonism tinged with Kantian inspirations and Goethe's mystical Spinozism. In addition Losev is attentive to Schiller's theory of play. For GAKhN's *Slovar' khudozhestvennykh terminov* Losev wrote a short but contentful entry 'Play' (*Igra*); and in *Dialektika khudozhestvennykh form* he sketched the contours of his version of the theory of art as play, linked to the conception of the 'disappearing author': artistic form as meaning in relation to otherness reproduces itself by playing with the components of the work. The highest level of play is attained when the proto-image plays with those of its variations which cannot become original proto-images but exist within its field and reproduce it in endless play.

The genesis of Friedrich Schlegel's views is described as the path from Schillerian classicism via Kant to mystical antinomianism. To Fichte is assigned a special role as the first "authentic" dialectician who discovered the 'universal antinomic' world view. According to Losev, the post-Fichtean period comprises three tendencies: (1) Schelling's passage from 'physicism to idealism'; (2) the mysticism of nature in the spirit of Novalis, Tieck, and Wackenroder; (3) Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion. All three currents united, according to Losev, in 1800 when Schelling announced his system of transcendental idealism which completed the development of the dialectics of the 1790s.

The reaction of Losev's colleagues to his lecture was quite revealing.⁶ There was almost unanimous agreement as to Kant's role in the emergence of romanticism. Likewise all agreed that Fichte's role in this regard tended to be exaggerated. But

⁶ The materials to which I refer are being prepared for publication in the context of the aforementioned Bochum project; cf. note 2 above.

the public was perplexed by Losev's insistence that 1800 was to be regarded as a kind of breakthrough, with reference to Schelling's system. Particularly sharp criticism came from V. P. Zubov and P. S. Popov, two recognized specialists in the question. It is possible that the parts of *Dialektika khudožestvennoj formy* which we have considered here do provide keys to understand Losev's position in these regards. Losev's treatment of Kant is critical to the point of being unjustified, something which came to light in the course of the GAKhN discussions. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to say that Losev was simply mistaken. His main task as he defined it was to show that there is no separation between the higher and lower worlds; that they stand to each other in a vital and mutually attractive relation; and that in this respect Kant is symbolically his philosophical opponent. He was not alone in this regard: Florenskij likewise engaged in a merciless and unjustified criticism of Kant. This is the expression of an inveterate tradition of reading Kant that was common in the Russian and the broader European context. The labels of subjectivism and abstract rationalism—despite the presence of serious Kant scholarship—persist to this day. As for Schelling's System, it gave Losev the means to tie together a number of themes he considered important, viz., to preserve the Fichtean dialectical mode; to free, with Schelling's assistance, the Kantian doctrine of genius from Kant's own context; to fix those elements of the philosophy of nature which in the late Schelling slipped increasingly into the background.

For Losev, German classical aesthetics constituted one great historical argument for the sake of his own view of art as an 'energetic-symbolic countenance.' His priority was to construe a dialectical universe with totalizing ties at all levels. That was why he did not fear 'reconstructing' the ideas of his day in the light of his own needs and interests. It was natural therefore that between Losev and other GAKhN members tensions, if not open conflict, reigned. By 1925 Losev already had reached his views as to what art as a whole and its genres are. They were sustained on a Christian-Platonic basis to which aspects of phenomenology were added. However, the other GAKhN members, including Špet, had a much harder time finding their ways. It was thus evident that there should have been a divide between the mental worlds of those who were still seeking and a scholar who could propose a fully formulated conception. Losev's completed mythologizing theory of art could only call forth, on the part of his colleagues, protest and occasionally fierce criticism.

It is worth noting—in lieu of a summary—that the study of GAKhN's more representative conceptions can well be a way to open an important resource of our cultural memory. In part, it would enable the reconstruction (a fragment of which is the present essay) of a particular type of relation to the classics which arose within the Academy as a result of a unique constellation of historical factors. On the one hand, GAKhN's theoreticians found themselves in the context of a Europe-wide tendency at the turn of the twentieth century—the return to rationalist sources of the culture of modernity. On the other hand, they were also caught up in the throes of the radical and unprecedented socialist experiment. All this enabled them—in their search for a new philosophy of form—to bring about an instructive, significant, and fruitful actualization of classical German aesthetics.

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