

# THE CULTURE AS SYSTEM, THE SYSTEM OF CULTURE

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In my paper, I shall, first, focus on Bogdanov's systems theoretical understanding of culture and highlight the tektological foundations of culture. In this part, I shall analyze his tektological account for culture. *Tektology* will be interpreted as a study of social dimensions of culture and a study of cultural dimensions of society. Second, I shall discuss the term of proletarian culture, its definition and its role in Bogdanov's theory of socialism. I argue that Bogdanov's vision of a future socialist society is connected with establishing a socialist culture. He considers the proletariat as a bearer of socialist ideology and deduces this unique political role of the proletariat from its unique position in the system of social knowledge. With his idea of proletarian culture, Bogdanov drafts a program of the proletarian evolution which challenges Lenin's program of the proletarian revolution. My last step concerns Bogdanov's account for proletarian art. I argue that in order to understand Bogdanov's concept of art properly, we should differentiate between the terms 'culture' and 'art'. The category of culture appears to be a form of life of a social group, and the category of art is a form of aesthetic self-understanding and self-expression of a social group. My analysis focuses on the proletarian art as a form of ideology of the working class.

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Bogdanov, Eisenstein, and the Proletkult

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## Tektological Foundations of Culture

Amongst Bogdanov's numerous scientific and philosophical texts, *Tektology*, the universal organizational science, is undoubtedly his most significant contribution to world culture. This work is usually considered as the first fundamental variant of general systems theory and as a precursor of cybernetics.<sup>1</sup> In my book on Bogdanov's philosophy, I argue that it is also the first *project of total socialist modernization of society on a scientific basis* with its own tactics and strategies (Soboleva 2007: 146–172). Now I like to stress one more aspect of this work, namely, its relevance for the theory of culture. The key word of my approach can be formulated as 'culture as a system'.

The tektological account for culture has some distinct features which must be articulated. First of all, there is no contradiction between the terms 'nature' and 'culture' here. Bogdanov argues: "Nature is the first and the greatest organizer; and a human being is only one of its organized creations. The simplest living cell, observable only when magnified a thousand times by a microscope, far exceeds everything that man is able to organize in terms of the complexity and perfection of its organization. Man is just the student of nature, and so far a poor one" (Bogdanov 1996: 7). So, nature in general and human being in particular are organized phenomena. Therefore the means of spontaneous organization in nature and the methods of conscious organizational work of human beings can be subject to the same scientific generalizations.

*Tektology*, which Bogdanov conceived as the 'science of sciences', is primarily concerned with discovering a *formal unity* of the world – that is, a unity of the laws of organization. Accordingly, the whole universe is supposed to consist of complexes which in turn consist of elements inter-related and organized in specific ways. The term 'complex' is Bogdanov's synonym for the modern term 'system'. It means the way things exist, whereupon existence is a process and, at the same time, a result of organization. The term 'complex' refers to an *unspecific generalization* which can be applied to the description of all possible material and ideal objects with inner structure.

Bogdanov introduces a *dynamic model* of the world that describes it as an eternal, continual organizational process, as an infinitely unfolding canvas of forms of different types and levels of organization – from the simplest elements of inorganic nature to human collectives and cosmic systems. One important aspect of this tektological ontology is that a complex cannot be separated from its

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<sup>1</sup> Sadovskiy 1995; Biggart 1998; Pustil'nik 1995; Dudley & Poustilnik 1996.

environment; moreover, it can be differentiated and defined only against the background of its environment. A complex is not a constant substance but rather a changeable structure which can belong to different systems depending on the researcher's point of view. Thus, Bogdanov's ontology can be characterized as a *structural ontology* that deals not with individual objects but with the underlying structures of these objects, including their inner and outer formations.

Bogdanov's holistic, monistic and formal understanding of the universe is the reason why *Tektology* is aimed at the discovery of the *general laws of organization*. It does not describe and explain the details of isolated phenomena but rather studies the complex structures taken in their totality and their dynamic interactions with each other. That is why Bogdanov's new science aspires to work out a *universal methodology*, and it does not make any sharp divisions into branches and disciplines. *Tektology* is interdisciplinary and embraces not only chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics, but also economics, cultural theory, education, psychology, medicine, linguistics, sociology and political sciences. Every phenomenon can be analyzed from the organizational point of view – that is, as a system of organizational and de-organizational processes.

In my reconstruction of Bogdanov's conception of culture, I like to stress that his account of culture is founded on *functionalist presumptions* and implies that culture is a special organizational complex that can be understood by means of general scientific methods. The theory of organization can, hence, contribute to the cognition of cultural phenomena as a special case of the organizational activity of humanity. The *tektological definition of culture* can be based on the premise that culture as a system possesses its own standards of logical consistency and semantic congruence, and it is essentially connected with the social and economic organization of society. According to the proposed definition, culture finds its objective reality in the interactively established and coordinated collective representations and depends upon the social orientations and social structures that influence these representations.

Bogdanov's understanding of social organization is sometimes regarded as a *scientist's or even naturalist's version of cultural reductionism* that tries to explain different phenomena in virtue of homogeneous structural-functional methods. From this perspective, he was criticized, for example, by Johann Plenge (1874–1963). In his book review of the German translation of *Tektology* published in 1925, Plenge excoriates Bogdanov for the universalism of his theory which gives “an inorganic picture of the mechanical-materialist reality of

universal organization” (das “unorganische Bild einer mechanistisch-materialistischen Gesamtwirklichkeit universaler Organisation”) (Plenge 1927: 24). Its shortage is the “unlimited generalization” and the “simplified view of reality” (Plenge 1927: 20). In contrast to Bogdanov, Plenge develops his own theory of organization not as “a general structural theory of all being”, but as a social science. He claims: “The real theory of organisation needs a foundation in a living spirit” (“Die wirkliche Organisationslehre braucht das Fundament des lebendigen Geistes”) (Plenge 1927: 24). According to him, the task of this theory is “to centralize human will and to activate it as a whole” (“menschlichen Willen zur Einheit zusammenzufassen und als Einheit zu betätigen”) (Plenge 1965: 28–29).

In defence of Bogdanov against this criticism one could say that the tektological approach does not rule out the dialectic of the general and particular. In conformity with this dialectic, every system – natural or social – operates according to its own particular structural laws. When applied to culture, *Tektology* changes its focus: it becomes a study of *social dimensions of culture* and a study of *cultural dimensions of society*. It assumes that the cultural system is determined by socio-structural organization, and it is aimed at exploring the complex connections between culture and other social systems such as a type of organization of labour. The same is true of the assumption that cultural traditions and cultural entities are objective only insofar as they represent developing social structures. By accenting the importance of culture for the organization of society, *Tektology* made a significant contribution to Marxian philosophy.

Bogdanov stresses that the sphere of culture has a logic of its own and describes this logic in terms of “social causality”. The category “social causality” must demonstrate the dependence of cultural phenomena (conceptions, norms, traditions, worldview) upon social and labour practices, methods and relations. In his short historical excursion into social epistemology, Bogdanov highlights the correlation between organization of thinking and organization of labour. In the sphere of labour, he differentiates mental and manual labour as well as organizational and executive forms of actions. For him, labour specialization connected with the separation of organizers from those who carry out orders determined some historical models of social cognition, which was based upon epistemological individualism, authoritarianism, conservatism, traditionalism and pragmatism. Correspondently, knowledge had a fragmented character and could not satisfy the developing society; therefore, such a cognitive situation should be overcome. In his

analysis, Bogdanov stresses that cognition and cultural praxis, knowledge and culture reflect social experience, whereupon organization of labour impacts the structure of knowledge and the cultural landscape of historical society. He uses the term “sociomorphism” to describe this correlation between representations and underlying labour activity.<sup>2</sup>

Bogdanov’s universal mechanism of organization of cultural experience is “substitution”. The substitution can be seen as a complex, stepwise, expanding process of constructing symbolic reality through the subordination of some mental complexes to other or, in other words, by means of a consistent building of a picture of the world, proceeding from a set of initial simple statements. In general, ‘psychic phenomena’ become ‘physical phenomena’ through the substitution, which means that the immediate sensitive perceptions of individuals become intersubjectively<sup>3</sup> organized, meaningful things. A certain sum of elements is selectively combined, corresponding to the needs and interests of different social groups. Therefore, the social experience and knowledge are always conditional and relative.<sup>4</sup>

Identifying knowledge and culture with collective experience, Bogdanov moves to a social epistemology that is a radical departure from classical individualistic epistemology. He holds a *constructivist view* on cognition in general and on culture in particular. His *epistemological constructivism* means that socially structured human activity discovers, causes and sustains scientific facts and cultural norms, and justifies truth about the world. He argues:

“The organized nature of human collectives is determined by all things that give them the unity of the practical direction of thoughts and attitudes. And this is done not only by the formal organizations. The organizing form is much wider and more general, and without it those organizations would not even be possible. This is the whole intellectual culture of the collective: the combination of its customs, morals, laws, its knowledge and its art, immersed in one

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘sociomorphism’ can be traced back to the ‘basic metaphor’ of Max Müller that stresses the universal application of anthropological patterns in cognition of the world. According to Bogdanov, “the basic metaphor is the embryo and prototype of the unity of the organizational point of view of the Universe” (Bogdanov 1996: 16).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in his work *Empiriomorphism* Bogdanov analysed the concept ‘objectivity’ and argued that ‘objective’ means “concordance of experience” (“soglasovannost’ opyta”) (Bogdanov 2003: 15) and “intercourse with other people” (“obshchenie s drugimi lyud’mi”) (Bogdanov 2003: 19).

<sup>4</sup> A significant research into the term “substitution” is delivered by Daniela Steila in her paper “From Experience to Organisation: Bogdanov’s Unpublished Letters to Bazarov” in (Oittinen 2009: 151–172).

and the same world-outlook specific to it – its outlook on life and its method of constructing life” (Bogdanov 1990: 136).

The term ‘organization’ builds the quintessence of Bogdanov’s constructivist approach to cognition in particular and to culture in general. Everything – sensual data, everyday meanings and theoretical concepts – are products of the social organization of collective experience based on working conditions. Bogdanov is convinced of the social nature of knowledge.

His approach to cultural studies combines structural functionalism and historical methods.<sup>5</sup> He posits society as an organising institution and defines culture as a developing system of normative beliefs, as “ideology” that is represented by historical social groups and institutions. The scope of ideology is very broad; it embraces theoretical and practical knowledge, religious and moral norms, aesthetical ideas and worldviews. The practical problem that Bogdanov confronts is the heterogeneity of cultural patterns within a class society depending on what groups are legitimate bearers of ideological states like knowledge or religious belief. According to him, the cultural split within society is an important limiting factor for its progressive development. Therefore *Tektology* is expected to pursue its practical agenda by transforming the culture of the modern society from capitalist to socialist.

### **Bogdanov’s Idea of Proletarian Culture**

Assuming that culture is a form of systematization of social cognitive experience and that every social group desires to organize the world in accordance with its own purpose, Bogdanov concludes that culture plays an essential role in the organization of social life. For the modification of cultural systems, the organizational structure of society must be changed. However, this doesn’t exclude that, in turn, the system of culture can induce social transformations.

Bogdanov’s vision of a future society is connected with establishing a socialist culture. He considers the proletariat as a bearer of socialist ideology and an executor of the socialist reorganization of society.<sup>6</sup> He deduces this unique political role of the proletariat from its unique position in the system of *social knowledge*. He argues that, given its involvement in the highly

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<sup>5</sup> This claim can be proved by analysis of such works as Bogdanov 1904, 1918.

<sup>6</sup> One has to differentiate between the real working class and the concept ‘proletariat’ in Bogdanov’s works. According to him, the real working class in Russia is not socialist because of its mixed social origin and technological backwardness. In his theoretical argumentations, Bogdanov uses the concept ‘proletariat’, i.e. he means the ideal proletariat.

technological process of production, the proletariat is becoming the most educated part of modern society. Moreover, the concentration of industry caused the proletariat to acquire a collectivist mentality, solidarity and cooperative behaviour, making it the most integrated and educated part of society. Bogdanov tries to substantiate these qualities *ontologically* in the very nature of the working class which is defined by the methods of its work. He argues that the very logic of cultural and scientific-technical development determines that the proletariat cultivates both collectivist and rational thinking. And because of its scientifically founded rationality and solidarity, the proletariat can play a leading role in the political transformation of society. It spontaneously expands the norms of rationality on all spheres of social life, including politics. The ability of objective and collectivist thinking makes the proletariat a ‘universal class’ that can represent the interests of the whole society. It is quite obvious that the term ‘proletariat’ in Bogdanov’s theory is not just a social-economic and political term used to describe the class of wage-earners in a capitalist society whose only possession is their labour-power. Rather, it is a term of *social epistemology* that defines the proletariat as a bearer of the norms of scientific rationality and the collective consciousness which will influence the cognitive processes and practical activity.

Bogdanov’s most famous contribution to the theory of culture is the concept of proletarian culture. I think that his program of proletarian culture is signified through three tasks which are working out a) a scientific ideology, b) a rationality based on the “norms of expediency” and c) a “conscious collectivism”. Proletarian culture should prepare the modern industrial, rationally regulated society for the peaceful conversion of capitalism into socialism. In this way, Bogdanov moves the revolutionary problems from the field of economy and politics into the field of ideological structure.<sup>7</sup> These ideas can be evaluated as the modernization of Marxism. Instead of the proletarian revolution, Bogdanov drafts in his texts on proletarian culture a program of the *proletarian evolution*. According to this conception, the working class must create and adapt proletarian culture, whose essence is a collectivist and rationalist consciousness and comradely relationships, *before* the revolution. To Marx, ‘communist consciousness’ was a *product* of the social revolution, not its *prerequisite* (Marx & Engels 1974: 44). To Bogdanov, proletarian

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<sup>7</sup> This opinion is also represented by Rullkoetter (Rullkötter 1974: XIV).

culture is not a consequence but a *condition* of socialist modernization of society.<sup>8</sup>

The debates over proletarian culture continued in the period between 1905 and 1932. Bogdanov's most significant opponents were Trotsky and Lenin. In contrast to Bogdanov, Trotsky believes that "there is no proletarian culture, and that there never will be any and in fact there is no reason to regret this. The proletariat acquires power for the purpose of doing away forever with class culture and to make way for human culture" (Trotsky 1960: 185–186). According to him, the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat is temporary, and it is necessary only for the transition from one social system to another, from capitalism to socialism. There are many political and economic problems that must be solved during this transition period. Trotsky is convinced that "at any rate, the twenty, thirty, or fifty years of proletarian world revolution will go down in history as the most difficult climb from one system to another, but in no case as an independent epoch of proletarian culture" (Trotsky 1960: 190). According to him, what marks this transition period is the coexistence of different types of culture.

In Trotsky's opinion, "such terms as 'proletarian literature' and 'proletarian culture' are dangerous, because they erroneously compress the culture of the future into the narrow limits of the present day" (Trotsky 1960: 205). Instead of the term 'proletarian culture', he suggests to use the terms 'revolutionary culture' and 'socialist culture'. The first is to be applied to the contemporary period of time; the latter describes an ideal future society. Trotsky's rejection of the term 'proletarian culture' can be explained by his understanding of culture. He defines culture as "the organic sum of knowledge and capacity which characterizes the entire society, or at least its ruling class. It embraces and penetrates all fields of human work and unifies them into a system. Individual achievements rise above this level and elevate it gradually" (Trotsky 1960: 200).

For all discrepancies between Bogdanov and Trotsky in understanding of the notion 'proletarian culture' – for the former proletarian culture is a *necessary condition* of socialism, and for the latter it is a *consequence* of socialism – there are some points which unite them. It is, first of all, an understanding of culture in general as *ideology* that influences a mass consciousness and underlies and penetrates all social structures and social praxis. The term 'culture' implies the way people relate to the world and to each other. In the sense of Bogdanov and Trotsky, the concept of culture refers to a

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<sup>8</sup> Marx uses the terms 'proletariat' and 'working class' as synonyms. For Bogdanov, working class has a goal to form itself as 'proletariat'.

consciousness, a dominant worldview and a lifestyle (praxis); it refers to the forms of knowledge, skills, values, dispositions and expectations. Using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, culture in Bogdanov and Trotsky's theories can be characterized as a *habitus* of a dominant social group.<sup>9</sup> The habitus of an individual appears to be a result of the objectification of a social structure at the level of individual subjectivity. Therefore, in order to renew a human being the whole social structure must be renewed. The creation of proletarian culture demands the creation of new elements of socialism in the proletariat itself, in its conditions of life and in its internal and external relations.

As is well known, Lenin's attitude to proletarian culture was very different. According to him, the task of the proletariat was not to create a new culture *within* capitalism, but rather to overthrow capitalism through a revolution for a new socialist culture. He admitted that the October Revolution had political character and saw the most important task of the Bolshevik party in the creation of supporters for the Soviet regime by means of forming a specific mentality and specific morality amongst the people. In his uncompleted draft "Concerning the mixing politics and pedagogics", he writes: "In the political activity of the social-democratic party there is and will be a certain element of pedagogics: we must educate the working class toward its role as a fighter for freedom of humanity from exploitation ... The social-democrat who would forget this, would not be a social-democrat" (Lenin 1967: 357). It is obvious that he promotes the idea of *political pedagogics*. Lenin's attention to the proletarian culture movement after the October Revolution can be explained through his vision of establishing a new political-pedagogical space.

In fact, the proletarian culture movement fulfilled the functions of social-political pedagogics aiming to transform Russian inhabitants into Soviet citizens (in terms of Andrey Zhdanov). The Proletcult movement did not just advocate a new popular art by opening studios, theatres, clubs, workshops and artistic classes, by creating a new language and new forms of aesthetic expressions. It dedicated itself to literacy, to adult education, to matters as elementary as proper hygiene, family relations, the struggle against alcoholism and the struggle for a civil everyday life. The movement for proletarian culture spread across Soviet Russia in the early years of the revolution and acquired a complex social and intellectual character. It was most directly inspired by the ideas of Bogdanov,

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<sup>9</sup> Trotsky expressed this idea as following: "Style is class, not alone in art, but above all in politics." (Trotsky 1960: 206)

who believed that the proletariat had to build a new cultural system – that is, to promote a new morality, a new politics and a new art in order to succeed in the building of socialism. But this new movement proved to be very far removed from Bogdanov's original project of a social, cultural and moral renovation of the working class.

Bogdanov's reaction to the October Revolution was very critical. In his open letter to Bukharin in 1921 he admitted: "During the Bolshevik communist turn I split with the party on an important theoretical question: it considered the world revolution coming out of the war as socialist, but I came to the different conclusion." (Bordyugov 1995, 1: 204–205) For him the social reality after the October 1917 was a "disgusting caricature arising out of the war and the old system" (Bogdanov 1990: 104). The essence of this caricature is a "state capitalism". As a "political organization of the military democracy" and a "perverted form", the new Soviet Republic (Bogdanov 1990, 1: 199) was an antipode of Bogdanov's idea of socialism. He contrasted *regress* as a law of the present socialism with *progress* as a law of his ideal socialism (Bogdanov 1990: 79). The present socialism was "first of all, a special form of social consumption, the authoritarian organization of mass parasitism and destruction"; on the contrary, the ideal socialism "is, first of all, a new type of cooperation – the comradely organization of work" (Bogdanov 1990: 87). For the present socialism, an authoritarian and even religious way of thinking was inherent; for the ideal socialism, a free and scientific way of thinking is intrinsic (Bogdanov 1990: 76).

There is a strong correlation between what Bogdanov thought the Bolsheviks' socialism was and how he viewed the real proletarian culture in Russia. It seemed to him that the revolution's failure stemmed from organic weaknesses in the working class itself, its ideological immaturity and a lack of ideological autonomy. He believed that the working class was inevitably unprepared for or even unworthy of its revolutionary role. This conviction in the cultural backwardness of the working class can explain Bogdanov's attitude toward the real Proletcult. There were definite limits, produced by the objective historical conditions, to his engagement. Bogdanov's participation at the Proletcult can be seen as a compromise. Nevertheless, he worked toward the cultural, political and moral education of the working class. In his article "The Program of Culture" (1917), Bogdanov recommends to the proletariat "to direct all its efforts toward mastering of the organizational means and their systematic working out according to the scale of the problems" (Bogdanov 1990: 332). He repeated constantly that the working class, because of its exploited and oppressed condition and because it was

culturally deprived, would not come forward politically if it does not collect organizational experience and adopt organizational tools.

## Proletarian Art

Bogdanov's conception of proletarian art is mostly formulated in such articles as "Is Proletarian Art Possible?", "Proletariat and Art", "On Art Heritage", "Critique on Proletarian Art" and "Simplicity or Subtlety". It includes two important insights for the theory of culture: *tektological foundations of art* and *its organizing role in society*. In his article "Is proletarian Art Possible?", Bogdanov argues that art is not just a "decoration of life", but that it is "one of the ideologies of a class, an element of its class consciousness; therefore, it is an organizational form of a class life, a way of association and consolidation of the class forces" (Bogdanov 1990: 413). Thus, he stresses the social function of art. Assuming that art is a form of organization of collective experience, he reasons that every social group must have its own art.

To understand Bogdanov's concept of art properly, we should differentiate between the terms 'culture' and 'art'. The category of culture appears to be a form of life of a social group, and the category of art is a form of aesthetic self-understanding and self-expression of a social group.<sup>10</sup> According to Bogdanov, there must be a correlation between these categories.

Culture and art are also a means of social self-identification of a social group and a sign of its political maturity and autonomy. Therefore, if we assert that the proletariat should be a dominant and politically self-sufficient social group, we should expect that it must have its own culture and its own art. Bogdanov demands that the post-revolutionary working class create its own proletarian art, which will be a part of a new proletarian culture directed to the building of a socialist society. He emphasizes that "the proletariat needs collectivist art which would bring up people in the spirit of deep solidarity, comradely cooperation, a close brotherhood of fighters and builders connected by the general ideal" (Bogdanov 1990: 422).

The main issue of proletarian art is, hence, a specific *ideal*. This ideal must correspond with the ontological nature of the working class that consists in the ability to organize the world's society on the new ideological and scientific fundament. For Bogdanov, the proletariat organizes an external matter in a product through its work, it organizes itself in a creative and fighting

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Bogdanov writes in the paper "O khudozhestvennom nasledstve" (1918a: 39) that poetry is a part of the self-awareness of this class.

collective by means of cooperation and class fight and it organizes its own experience in a class consciousness in order to be able to organize the whole mankind for harmonic life. The ideal which proletarian art should promote must be, hence, “all-organizational”. Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, who accented the necessity of class struggle and encouraged a military spirit in the proletariat, Bogdanov believes that “the working class goes to his ideal through the fight, but this ideal is not destruction, but the new organization of life” (Bogdanov 1918a: 67). Thus, his ideal of proletarian art is constructive and positive. The socialist re-organization of society requires the ideal of the collectivist consciousness and “comradely relationships”.

Some authors, like Lynn Mally, who are engaged with studies of Bogdanov’s works, thematize only one aspect of his theory of culture – namely, the aspect of struggle of exploited workers against the bourgeoisie (Mally 1990). But this approach contradicts the key idea of the tektological worldview which is consequently developed by Bogdanov in all his texts. He resists the reduction of art to communist propaganda. He criticizes the one-dimensional understanding of art as just a ‘civil art’ focusing on agitation and propaganda and representing and protecting class interests. He advocates the broad content of proletarian art: “The whole life and the whole world” should be the content of proletarian art because its main task is to organize the “soul of the proletariat” (Bogdanov 1990: 423). He writes: “In thousands of poems calling for a class struggle and glorifying victories in that struggle, in hundreds of stories denouncing capital and its servants, everything else is submerged. This must be changed. The part should not be taken as being the whole.” (Bogdanov 1918a: 67) He appeals for the “comprehensive deepening into life”, for the “comprehensive understanding of life, its concrete forces and its ways” (Bogdanov 1918a: 67). Everything can be the content of proletarian art; there are no restrictions for it.

One more prejudice about Bogdanov’s account for proletarian art must be dispelled. It is connected with his attitude to the bourgeois culture. Bogdanov is often associated with radical intellectuals who define proletarian culture as unique and justify an absolute rejection of cultural heritage. This image is absolutely wrong. On the contrary, Bogdanov outlines the necessity of cultural conditions and traditions, created by prior social formations, for the development of proletarian art and negates claims that proletarian art can emerge without cultural grounds. Opposed to the view of rejecting tradition and the past and creating something new in one’s own mind, Bogdanov advocates studies of the culture of the past,

making it one's own by creating a new content. The bourgeois culture has to be adopted in such a creative way that it becomes enrichment for the proletariat. The proletariat should study from previous generations, but its study must be accompanied by reflection about its own social perspective.<sup>11</sup> Adapting a traditional culture, the proletariat should not “obey”, but “rule”. “The new logic has to transform all these old things, to give old things other images ... But one must have this new logic, that is one must develop it.” (Bogdanov 1990: 420) Against the left-radical orientated propagandists of an autonomous proletarian art, Bogdanov argued that “we live not only in the present-day collective, we live in a *collaboration [sotrudnichestvo] between generations* [Bogdanov's emphasis]. This is not to be confused with collaboration between classes, which is a contrary idea.” (Bogdanov 1990: 425) Thus, the proletariat's attitude toward non-proletarian art should be not contradictory but complementary. In this respect, Bogdanov, Trotsky and Lenin seem to share the same opinion.

But there is a radical difference between them concerning the political attribution of art. For Lenin, art must become not just proletarian, it must become party art. He formulated this principle for literature (Lenin 1967: 48). However, he was not referring to literature in the narrow sense of the word, but in terms of a wide range of artistic activity in general. For Lenin, any idea of the absolute autonomy of literature, art for art's sake, or the absolute freedom of writers, is simply an anarchistic bourgeois concept and reactionary rhetoric. In opposite to him, Bogdanov distinguished the terms ‘sociality’ and ‘party policy’. He recognizes the collective forms of aesthetic production as an integral element in the process of social change, which demonstrate the class character. In Bogdanov's words: “The artistic talent is individual, but creation is a social phenomenon: it emerges out of the collective and returns to the collective, serving its vital purposes” (Bogdanov 1990: 425). Proletarian art should provide a scientific Marxist understanding of natural and social phenomena that would allow workers to play a leading role in a society. But, at the same time, Bogdanov stresses that “organization of our art as well as organization of our science has to be constructed on the basis of the comradely cooperation” (Bogdanov 1990: 425). The party model of organization of art, suggested by Lenin, is unacceptable to him because of its structure

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<sup>11</sup> James D. White has the same opinion. He writes: “In older cultures there were elements that were useful to the proletariat, but there were also others that were harmful. This being the case, the proletariat had to learn to distinguish what was beneficial from what was harmful and alien to it in the heritage of the past” (White 2013: 34).

which is of an authoritarian type and is founded on the domination–submission hierarchy, which will inevitably give rise to authoritarian tendencies in the ordering of the whole society.

According to Bogdanov, proletarian art must be free and objective. He points out: “As the organizer of life, art has to be, first of all, consequently sincere and truthful; whom and what can it organize if nobody trusts it?” (Bogdanov 1918a: 69) He stresses that, playing its organizational function, art should not forget that “the spirit of labour collectivism consists primarily in objectivity” (Bogdanov 1918a: 71). The perception of the world from the social perspective, that is from the perspective of the proletarian ideal, does not exclude that the human life has many aspects which are all-human. What Bogdanov suggests can be interpreted as a balance between human and social. From this point of view, the *content* as a matter of values *should be the main concern of proletarian art*.

In Bogdanov’s opinion, art and literary criticism is a necessary organizational tool which helps to develop proletarian art.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the proletarian literary criticism should teach the working-class writers how to maintain the class position and class interest in their works. Bogdanov expects from the proletarian literature that it should depict life not from a subjective and naive point of view, but against the background of a deep understanding of social context and collective goals. In works of art, the individual should represent the typical; this is a means for working out the proletarian class-consciousness through the mechanism of identification of an individual with an ideal.

And last, but not least, is a question about the form of proletarian art. It is curious to see that even pure aesthetics are founded in Bogdanov’s theory on the tektological basis. In *Tektology*, he claims: “The principles of a work of art are agreement and harmony, and therefore organization” (Bogdanov 2003: 3). Later, he repeats that beauty is “organizedness” (Bogdanov 1990: 426). He propagates the correlation between form and content. He proposes to look for the forms, which correspond with genuine proletarian activity, with aesthetics of industrial working process and scientific technology.<sup>13</sup> Such a form must be simple, direct, constructive and expressive. It must be economic and, at the same time, it must exhibit the content of an artwork clearly. Form must express the

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<sup>12</sup> This is the topic of the paper “O khudozhestennom nasledstve”. We should differentiate between Bogdanov’s understanding the proletarian criticism as a means of improving a quality of proletarian art and Lenin’s idea of control about art in terms of party’s censorship.

<sup>13</sup> In the works of his favorite painter and sculptor, Constantin Meunier, Bogdanov finds these features.

rhythm of a new proletarian art which corresponds to proletarian labour activity. Bogdanov speaks not only about the “rhythm of sounds”, but also about the “rhythm of images and ideas”. Form and rhythm should build a unity to be able to bring out the content in a best way. Summing up his position, I can say that Bogdanov represents a *constructivist view on art*. After October 1917, this account of art met almost immediately a response and stimulated a wide variety of experiments in Russia.

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