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Conflict in Art

One of the profound conflicts between ideologies occurred in the 20th century. A cultural revolution in the Soviet Union was spurred on by the vitriolic political discourse between factions of the emerging communist culture. The continuing weight of conflict between not only political factions but also artists and the masses would eventually bring the consolidation of arts under one state run organization.

Pre-revolutionary culture was mostly defined as culture that was created by the intelligentsia and ruling class and therefore was considered to be part of the old ruling order. This inextricably linked it to those who were now enemies of the Soviet State and who had stood in the way of progress for the Proletariat. Socialists, for the most part, believed that bourgeois culture had no place in the new order. Lenin believed that proletarian culture should be encouraged through the state and given a unified direction. However Trotsky, in "Literature and Revolution", emphasized that there could be no true proletarian culture since by the time such a culture would naturally come into existence the proletarians would have already ceased to exist as a class (Trotsky 154).

The amount of conflict between the Bourgeois art forms and the Avant Garde is not surprising in and of itself. This conflict was basically pitting the new and constantly changing against the old and stable. The Avant Garde was co-opted by the Socialists who saw it as a forward moving progressive movement which could assist the Socialists in the quest to re-educate the backward masses with the aim of strengthening the revolutionary forces now in power. It appears that even the forward thinking Socialists had no true idea of the underlying tenets of the Avant Garde. Instead they held on to the espoused ideas concerning forward movement often in conjunction with the Machine pseudo-worship of the Futurist branch of the Avant Garde.

Futurism as a direction in art and literature embraced progress and machinery while casting aside classical art forms. The goal was the evolution of man into a better newer being, casting aside mythology and history. Speed and rashness in action were to be the order of the day while lethargy and slowness, and the ecstasy found therein were the enemy. Violence and aggression in writing was considered to be the means by which the workers themselves would be stirred to action, with revolution as the goal (Marinetti 1).

The Russian Futurist movement in the arts started in the year 1912 when a group of writers including Mayakovski issued a manifesto called "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste." This manifesto was a descendent of the Marinetti manifesto which had been published in the year 1909, but the aim was the same: to shock the public which was mired in the formalism and classicism found in bourgeois art.

However, soon enough the Avant Garde was in direct conflict with the Socialists. The old mode of questioning authority and defying a government that was constricting the process of Art

put the Avant Garde into dangerous territory. This eventually led to a draft resolution made in an attempt to rein the Avant Garde in. On October 8th 1920, Vladimir Lenin wrote these words: “...the All-Russia Proletcult Congress rejects in the most resolute manner, as theoretically unsound and practically harmful, all attempts to invent one’s own particular brand of culture, ...” (Lenin 1). With a single statement, the age of artists as completely independent creators came to an end.

Bibliography

Lenin, V.I. <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/08.htm>

Marinetti, Emilio <http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html>