The Opening of ROSTA Windows

“Mayakovsky Style” and the Culture of Soviet Posters

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Presentation Outline

• Introduction
• Research questions + hypotheses
• The transition of Mayakovsky’s poetic language style 1919-1921
• Fieldwork & visual materials
• Contemporary application
• Work-in-progress: Mayakovsky - the new fashion?
Introduction

Mayakovsky

Soviet Poster

ROSTA Windows
Main questions

• To which importance we should define the “ROSTA” period in Mayakovsky’s work? Why?

• What is the “Mayakovsky style”, and how does it influence the style of Soviet posters? (visual design application)

• How do we read Soviet poster style as a collective text? *

*work-in-progress (data collection)
Language style - transition: 1919-1921

- ROSTA Windows: a watershed between Mayakovsky’s early-later writing period?
- Examples
- Explore the significance: why we study ROSTA?
Mayakovsky has made a lifelong commitment in:

- innovative forms of language and poetry
- popularisation of poetry

... write for the mass!
Watershed
1919-1921
ROSTA period
"Imagination of the target audience"

Песня рязанского мужика. Роста б/№

1. Не хочу я быть советск<ай>.
   Батюшки!
   А хочу я жизни светск<ай>.
   Матушки!
   Походил я в белы страны.
   Батюшки!
   Мужичков встрецают странно.
   Матушки!

2. Побывал у Дутова.
   Батюшки!
   Отпустили вздутого.
   Матушки!

3. Я к Краснову. у Краснова -
   Батюшки!
   Кулачище - сук сосновый.
   Матушки!

4. Я к Деникину, а он -
   Батюшки!
   Бьет крестьян. как фараон.
   Матушки!

5. Мамонтов-то генерал -
   Батюшки!
   Матершинно наорал.
   Матушки!
   Я ему: "Все люди братья".
   Батюшки!
   А он: "И братьев буду драть я".
   Матушки!

6. Я поддался Колчаку.
   Батюшки!
   Своротил со скул щеку.
   Матушки!
   На Украину махнул.
   Батюшки!
   Думаю, теперь вздохну.
   Матушки!
   А Петлюра с Киева -
   Батюшки!
   Уж орет: "Секи его!"
   Матушки!

7. Видно, белый ананас -
   Батюшки!
   Наработан не для нас.
   Матушки!

Не пойду я ни к кому,
   Батюшки!
   Окромя родных Коммун.
   Матушки!
ROSTA Windows (visual materials)

- Baghdad, Georgia
Characteristic:

1. Colloquial - language used in daily conversation; easy to understand. (*target readers)

2. “Visual impact”

Target readers -> style formation
“Meme” of the Soviet time?
Contemporary application

• Case study: “Soviet Visuals”

• Textuality of culture: decoding “Soviet posters” as a collective symbol

(or “why сгущенка became запрещенка”)


“Visuals from behind the Iron Curtain. Soviet (and bits of pre/post-Soviet) photography, architecture & design. USSR propaganda art.”

Facebook: over 161,9k likes; Twitter: over 85,7k followers. (last access 19 October 2017)
It has been 25 years after the collapse of the USSR…

East ("real" SU)

West ("fake" SU)

Soviet-in-fashion?
BIG OCTOBER SALE

UP TO 70% OFF
Cultural space can be defined as the space of general memory, that is, a space in which certain general texts can be preserved and actualized. And their actualization takes place within the framework of a certain invariant, allowing us to say that despite the variance of interpretations, the text preserves identity with itself in the context of a new era.

(Lotman 1985)
• Decoding “Soviet posters”…

The addresser - The addressee
The audience - cultural tradition
The reader - The reader him/herself
The reader - The text
The text - Cultural tradition

(Lotman 1990)
**Sign** - condensed milk ad in blue and white

**Signifiers** - an image of “traditional” Soviet style

**Signified** - case by case

1. condensed milk which are still in production today
   (condensed milk as a symbol of “pure flavour”)

2. condensed milk image in Tartu graffiti
   (condensed milk as “forbidden”, sign of violence)
Mayakovsky as a sign system

Sign system in culture(s)

Culture in sign system: interpretation and re-interpretation
“Soviet-Mayakovsky style” as the new fashion?

Rodchenko / Mayakovsky, Advertising poster for Moser's watches at GUM, 1920s
Will you buy this?
Thank you! :)

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Stick in, douce folk. — Pineaipple, feesant’s breast: stuff till ye boke, for then is your last feast!