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Wassily Kandinsky's Terminology Project: Its Origins and the History of Its Institutionalisation

Abstract: From the turn of the century onwards, Wassily Kandinsky accompanied his pictorial work with theoretical and terminological reflection. It had its origins in readings of classical art treatises in Munich at the turn of the century. According to Kandinsky, the problem was mainly related to the lack of precision in the terminology used in the writings on painting. To resolve this, he turned to music theory and began to study counterpoint theory in particular. For Kandinsky, the development of a terminology was the prerequisite for building a theory that would be a true science of painting. In the post-revolutionary context, his terminology project became topical and interacted with other terminology and encyclopedic projects that had emerged in other circles. While David Shterenberg and artists from the radical left advocated a sociological approach and research based on art materials, Kandinsky's project, rooted in centuries-old artistic tradition, entered into dialogue with the project conceived by Ivan Zholtovskii for architecture and one by Evsei Shor, that was open to philosophical aesthetics. We argue that at the origin of this project, the encyclopedic ambition belonged to the philosophers, while the terminological research was desired mainly by representatives of the visual arts, who were dissatisfied with the state of terminology in art theory.

Keywords: Wassily Kandinsky, Evsei Shor, artistic terminology, elements of arts

Origins and Early Development of Kandinsky's Terminology Project

In the 1870s, Rudolf Eitelberger founded the *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, a collection of written sources on art history and the techniques of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This was a foundational moment in the establishment of the Viennese school of art history and, at the same time, a major event for art-

ists in the German-speaking world (Podzemskaia 2023: 176–179). The books in the collection gave them a sense of belonging to a long and important tradition. However, technical knowledge is only part of an artist's training; what remains is what we call the compositional processes. But when it comes to discussing these, we are in the dark. This was how Wassily Kandinsky felt at the turn of the century when, as was the case with his friends in Munich who followed Böcklin's example, he began experimenting with painting technique.

Interested in the possibility of obtaining better colours than the industrial colours commercially available, Kandinsky took part in experiments in Marianne Werefkin's apartment together with his Russian classmates at Anton Ažbe's school and frequented the Munich State Library to study treatises on Renaissance painting techniques (Podzemskaia 2000: 40–53). In Paris between 1906 and 1907, he continued his research, broadening the spectrum of his interests to include writings not only on painting techniques and colour, but also on other issues related to the theory and history of painting.¹

But when Kandinsky began writing his first theoretical works discussing compositional processes in painting, he turned to music theory. No doubt, he was struck by the lack of precision in the terminology used in the writings on painting. It was in fact in music theory textbooks that he sought a model for developing his theory of composition. The question of terminology took on great importance in Kandinsky's mind during his work on stage compositions with Thomas von Hartmann in the winter of 1908–09. Kandinsky's comparative work on the components, or elements, of different arts indeed led him to the need to define them. During this period, Kandinsky, guided by his friend Hartmann, studied the basics of counterpoint and transcribed its definition from Adolf Marx's manual (Marx 1893: 279–280), which had been given to him by his friend. A corpus of annotated drawings from 1909–12 bears witness to his efforts to use musical terms to describe the process of composition in painting. In his archives, we find several lists of terms in German and Russian dating from the pre-war years, many of which come from music. And it

1 Kandinsky's personal library preserved in Paris, his books which are part of the Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, and the bibliographic lists from 1906–07 compiled in Paris at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève show that in the early years of the twentieth century, Kandinsky undertook systematic research on art literature, focusing on technique, theory and art history. The bibliographic list from 1906–07 is published in Podzemskaia 2000: 233–235.

was precisely then that he wrote his first important theoretical works, *Farbensprache* and the first German version of *On the Spiritual in Art*.

In 1908–09, Kandinsky wrote in German, but by the autumn of 1910, he had already translated his text into Russian. The constant work that Kandinsky carried out until 1921 on each version of this treatise, in Russian and German, undoubtedly provided a fertile ground for the development of terminological reflection. A comparative study of the Russian and German versions reveals, in effect, the artist's sustained attention to the equivalences between terms in both languages and their translations. The prime example of this attention is a concept that was most important to Kandinsky at that time, "colour", rendered in German throughout his texts by the generic word *Farbe*. This relative lexical poverty could undoubtedly be due to the fact that Kandinsky's German, despite its excellence, was not his mother tongue: the same could be said of his use of the generic words *Inhalt* (content) and *Form*, his use of *geistig* (mental/spiritual) by analogy with *dukhovnyi*, etc.

Translating into Russian allowed Kandinsky to work on the precision of his language. In the first Russian version of *On the Spiritual in Art* from 1910, he introduces a distinction between two words for "colour", *kraska* and *tsvet*: «Мне представляется более правильным говорить почти везде о краске, а не о цвете. Так как в понятие краски, кроме абстрактного цвета, входит и материальная ее консистенция именно в том виде, в котором ею оперирует художник» (Kandinskii 2020a: 49 note).²

And in successive Russian versions, he changed the plural form of *kraska* to the singular form of *tsvet* in a few key places. At the same time, he changed the plural form of *forma* to the singular form of *risunok* (drawing). Thus, the title of the central chapter of the treatise (Chapter VI), "Formen- und Farbensprache" in the 1911 German version, evolved into "Iazyk form i krasok" (literally, "Language of Forms and Paints") in the 1913 Russian version and then into "Iazyk risunka i tsveta" ("Language of Drawing and Colour") in the last Russian version of 1920. This development reflects the implementation of a process aimed at achieving both greater precision and abstraction in language. It is interesting to note that the list of works proposed for trans-

2 "It seems more correct to me to talk almost everywhere about paint rather than colour, since the concept of paint includes not only abstract colour but also its material consistency in the form in which the artist uses it." Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine. – N. P.

lation in 1918–19 by the Fine Arts Department (IZO), which we will discuss below, includes, undoubtedly on Kandinsky's initiative, *Malmaterialienkunde als Grundlage der Maltechnik* by the chemist Alexander Eibner, founder and director of the Institute for Research into Painting Techniques in Munich. It contains a reflection that was bound to interest him, on the polysemy of the German word *Farbe*. Eibner proposed that this word should only be used in its most general sense of *colour* as an optical phenomenon, and that the terms *Farbstoff* and *Körperfarbstoff*, meaning “paint” and “pigment” respectively, should be introduced for broader use.

Although in his theoretical writings from 1908–09 onwards, the definitions of terms are still scattered, by 1914, we find traces of Kandinsky's genuine terminological project. These consist of two fragments, in German and Russian, entitled “Definierungen”/“Opredeleniia” (“Definitions”), which present a list of terms with their short definitions.³ The concepts chosen by Kandinsky largely fall within the general domain of the creative process and composition, such as inner necessity, internal turmoil, graphic work, movement, harmony, disharmony, tension, external and internal incompleteness, material, internal and spiritual plane, internal and external balance, etc. Undoubtedly, this choice was linked to Kandinsky's interests at the time. It should be noted that in the lists later prepared by Kandinsky at the Institute of Artistic Culture (INKhUK), the choices would be different.

In the same collection of manuscripts to which these two lists of definitions belong, there is also a simple list of terms spreading over six pages.⁴ These terms are simply listed in alphabetical order; they are quite heterogeneous and have no visible connection between them, making this list resemble absurdist poetry. This connection does not seem insignificant to us, given the painter's intense poetic practice during all those years.⁵ Kandinsky's poems in German and Russian are indeed another expression of his sensitivity to the pure sound

3 The fragments are part of the bilingual corpus “Über das Materielle in der Kunst / O material'nom v iskusstve” (“On the Materiality in Art”) held in the Kandinsky collection at the Centre Pompidou. The German version of this list has been published; see Kandinsky 2007: 619–622.

4 This list in Russian is a part of the corpus “On the Materiality in Art” kept in the Kandinsky collection at the Centre Pompidou.

5 See the poems of 1885–1914 in Kandinsky 2007: 510–546.

of words, which is undoubtedly an important part of the same process that led to his quest for terminology.

Kandinsky's Terminology Project in 1920–21

This terminology project, which had been in the works for years, found fertile ground in Moscow in the aftermath of the revolution. In all his lectures on art science delivered during the organisation of the Russian Academy of Art Sciences in 1921, Kandinsky emphasised the need for terminological work.

In the March 1921 meeting of the commission responsible for creating the Institute of Art Science, Kandinsky began his lecture entitled “O metode rabot po sinteticheskomu iskusstvu” (“On the Method of Work in Synthetic Art”) by listing the terms used for the concept of “sinteticheskoe iskusstvo” (“synthetic art”): in addition to the term “monumental’noe iskusstvo” (“monumental art”), “monumental’naia arkhitektura” (“monumental architecture”) and “monumental’naia skulptura” (“monumental sculpture”) are also used. In his decision to use the term “synthetic art” in his lecture, he relied on its use at the Bauhaus (Kandinskii 2020d: 575–576).

On 21 July 1921, in his lecture “Plan rabot Sektsii izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv” (“Plan for the Work of the Visual Arts Division”), he announced that one of the tasks of the Division should be “to review existing terminology and establish specific terms” («проверка существующей терминологии и установление определенных терминов»), stating that a special dictionary would be compiled (Kandinskii 2001b: 73). He added that in order to develop the terminology, important bibliographic works would be required.

In his last major scientific lecture “Osnovnye elementy zhivopisi” (“Basic Elements of Painting”), delivered in Moscow on 1 September 1921, Kandinsky begins by stating:

Терминов в науке об искусстве почти совершенно не существует. Вследствие этого при обсуждении, при выслушивании докладов, нужно стараться вникать в смысл данного термина в самых общих чертах, не конкретизируя по возможности термин, который до сих пор не установлен.

(Kandinskii 2020e: 592)

Terms in the science of art are almost completely non-existent. As a result, when discussing or listening to conferences, one must try to understand the meaning of a given term in the most general terms, without specifying, if possible, a term that has not yet been established.

In the summary of his lecture, Kandinsky explicitly notes and comments on a few terms: «Пространственные и временные искусства. Тоже неточное деление»; or: «Изобразительные искусства – неточный термин – например, поэзия, музыка, танец тоже изображают» (Kandinskii 2020f: 632).⁶ He then lists a few terms in German: “Tonkunst, plastische Kunst, Raumkunst, Bild, Plastik, musikalisches Bild, Farbenmusik, Kolorit”⁷.

In his lecture on 1 September 1921, Kandinsky announces that he expects a special terminology commission to “begin work and remove one of the biggest obstacles to working in the arts”.⁸ The creation of this special commission, as well as a bibliographic and questionnaire commission, was approved by the Academy’s Presidium on 26 August, undoubtedly thanks in large part to Kandinsky.⁹

To get an idea of how, in practical terms, this terminological work, so insistently advocated by Kandinsky, was conceived and could be organised, we must refer to the minutes of the meetings of INKhUK’s Monumental Art Division, headed by Kandinsky. It was there, between July and October 1920, that a series of working meetings devoted to artistic terminology were held for the first time, in which Kandinsky and Nadezhda Briusova took a particularly active part.

It is clear from these minutes that terminological work was considered from the outset to be an integral part of the research on the elements of

6 “Spatial and temporal arts – also an inaccurate division”; “Изобразительные искусства (‘figurative arts’) – an inaccurate term – for example, poetry, music and dance are also representational [can figure]”.

7 “Music, visual art, spatial art, painting, sculpture, musical work, colour music, colour harmony”.

8 «[...] начнет работать и устранил с дороги одно из самых крупных препятствий в работе по искусству» (Kandinskii 2020e: 592).

9 See: RGALI. F. 941 (GAKhN). Op. 1. Ed. khr. 1. L. 3.

the various arts. This latter was designated by Kandinsky as the main objective of the science of art to be developed at INKhUK (Kandinskii 2001a: 46).¹⁰

Thus, at the meeting on 21 July 1920, after discussing the issue of terminology and elements of art, the following was agreed on: «Одной из задач секции является установление точной терминологии, насколько это оказывается возможным» (Protokoly 1920: no. 11).¹¹ Afterwards, they discussed copyright issues on terms. On 1 September, a detailed examination was made of the model for a terminology card on which everything had to be noted: the author of each definition, whether or not it has been accepted by others, any changes made during the discussion, etc. (Protokoly 1920: no. 17). Kandinsky proposed that authors write a summary of their contributions accompanied by a precise definition of the terms used, and that they add any other material deemed necessary, and submit all these documents to the INKhUK archives. It was then decided to set dates for the joint reading of terms already defined and kept by the Division; the task of compiling the Division's dictionary was entrusted to Varvara Stepanova. At the meeting on 1 September, the process of transcribing meeting minutes was discussed: Stepanova proposed having two notebooks, one for the "zhurnal zasedanii" ("meeting journal"), instead of minutes, and the other for discussions (ibid.: no. 19). It was planned that each member would be able to write their comments in the margins of the notebook dedicated to discussions, which would therefore need to be sufficiently large.

In October 1920, important conferences were held on the comparative definitions of terms in painting and music. On 6 October, Briusova's definition of time was heard and accepted as an individual definition; at the same time, the term "protiazhennost'" ("extension"), introduced by Shenshin, was retained as "an adequate generic term defining space and time".¹² Both Briusova's definition of "time" and Shenshin's definition of "extension" can be found

10 «Целью Института художественной культуры является наука, исследующая аналитически и синтетически основные элементы как отдельных искусств, так и искусства в целом» ("The objective of the Institute of Artistic Culture is to conduct research that examines, both analytically and synthetically, the fundamental elements of both the individual arts and art as a whole").

11 "One of the tasks of the Division was to establish precise terminology, to the extent possible".

12 «Нашли, что протяженность является родовым понятием для двух ее видов: времени и пространства» (Protokoly 1920: no. 22).

in the corpus entitled “Terminologiiia seksii Monumental’nogo iskusstva INKhUKa” (“INKHUK Monumental Art Section Terminology”).

This “Terminology”, preserved in the Omar Khan-Magomedov family archive, consists of around thirty small stapled sheets with 29 typed entries, one entry per sheet. On the folder cover, it is written in brackets that the terminology has not been discussed. This clarification shows that Stepanova’s proposal to organise a reading of the terms in the Division remained at the project stage. With a few exceptions, the names of the authors are indicated at the end of each entry. Among the authors are Nadezhda Briusova, on time and intonation; Aleksandr Shenshin, on “extension” and “lad” (“harmony”); Varvara Bubnova, on movement in the static arts, volume, stain, plane, and faktura; but also Vladimir Markov (Voldemārs Matvejs, 1877–1914). Kandinsky is the author of the largest number of entries; there are twelve entries on different colours, construction, composition, and plane. Another model of a terminology card, typed on a sheet of paper, which groups together several term definitions signed by Kandinsky (form, drawing, composition, construction, etc.), can be found in the Aleksandr Gabrichevskii collection (Olga Severtseva’s family archive collection). The definitions signed by Kandinsky summarise what he had written during his Munich period, particularly in his treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*.

Private Status of Kandinsky’s Project and the Problems of Its Institutionalisation

The inclusion of Kandinsky’s terminology project in the programme of the newly established Academy of Art Sciences in 1921 was not a matter of course, for it meant the transformation of his personal project into an institutional one. Moreover, this terminology project was also a part of a wider science of art.

Indeed, at the end of 1920, Kandinsky’s project on the science of art looked like his personal project and, in this status, opposed other projects presented on 19–25 December 1920 in Moscow at the First All-Russian Conference of Heads of Art Departments. In anticipation of the reform of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), it was intended to bring order to this overly sprawling, chaotic and cumbersome organism by separating administrative and artistic-scientific functions. Unlike other speakers repre-

senting various subdivisions of the Narkompros, Wassily Kandinsky spoke at this conference on his own behalf as “artist Kandinsky”. This must be considered in the context of the conflict that had intensified at that time between him and the Fine Arts department (IZO), represented at the Conference by Osip Brik.

Generally speaking, this “private” status reflects a very particular and crucial moment in Kandinsky’s Soviet period career, when he completely changed his social milieu. In the winter of 1920–21, he distanced himself definitively from the young radical left-wing artists gathered around Aleksandr Rodchenko, and he left INKhUK in February 1921.¹³ At the same time, Kandinsky became close to a circle gathered around Aleksandr Gabrichevskii: Aleksei Sidorov, Evsei Shor, Aleksandr Shenshin, Gustav Shpet, Robert Fal’k – those who would form the core of the Academy of Art Sciences in 1921. But in the winter of 1920–21, it was still a “private” circle of friends who meet at each other’s homes, often at the Gabrichevskii’s, arguing and having fun.¹⁴ Their goal was to establish an institute dedicated to the science of art and to find a place for it in the new academic landscape that would emerge following the Narkompros reform. To this end, they sought to win over and enlist the support of the People’s Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii. Their efforts, which intensified in February 1921, led to the establishment of the Postoiannaia Nauchno-Khudozhesvennaia Komissiiia (Permanent Commission for the Science of Art) in the summer, which in the autumn took the name of the Russian Academy of Art Sciences (RAKhN, and GAKhN after 1925), with Kandinsky as its first vice-president.¹⁵

The transcript of the lecture “Nauka ob iskusstve i INKhUK” (“The Science of Art and INKhUK”), given by “the artist Kandinsky” in December 1920, is preserved in the archives of Narkompros.¹⁶ This is an exceptional testimony

13 See the chronology of the activities of the Monumental Art Division of INKhUK and of the work of Kandinsky in it, compiled on the basis of the private archive, in Khan-Magomedov 1981.

14 See the unpublished memoirs of Gabrichevskii’s wife Natal’ia Severtsova, an excerpt of which is quoted in Severtsova 2020: «Между собой, все мы уже назывались ‘родственники’, тем более что настоящих, кровных, у нас почти не осталось» (“Among ourselves, we already called each other ‘relatives,’ especially since we had almost no real, blood relatives left”).

15 On the circumstances of establishment of this Commission in the spring 1921, see Podzemskaja 2020a.

16 The transcript is published in Kandinskii 2020c.

that gives us direct insight into Kandinsky's personal vision at that time on the central question of the nature and methods of the science of art. And indeed, his vision is that of a painter who takes as his starting point the theoretical knowledge of art accumulated over centuries and passed down from one generation to the next, usually as part of art education, from master to pupil. He distinguishes between two types of this artistic knowledge: technical knowledge and compositional knowledge.

But in the mid-nineteenth century, Kandinsky argues, this centuries-old tradition seems to have been interrupted. While in Russia the rupture caused mainly by the Ambulants movement was a radical one, in the West, he continues, it was merely a shift in direction, since art theory had first turned, with the Impressionists, to the question of light, and then, with the Neo-Impressionists, to that of colour. Later, the new trends that Kandinsky refers to as Expressionism, which also include Futurism and undoubtedly other movements such as Fauvism, declared that the representation of nature was not a fundamental and necessary element but rather accidental, and placed definitive emphasis on the purely pictorial method of representation. From there, per Kandinsky, it was only a logical step to painting without objects. Once the object has been excluded from painting, only purely artistic means remain, namely, "tsvetovaia forma" ("colour form") and "risunochnaia forma" ("drawing form"). Now dealing only with these two forms of pictorial expression, the artist, according to Kandinsky, realises that he cannot rely solely on intuition and inspiration, but must also base his work on precise theoretical foundations. This is where his aspiration for the science of art originates, an aspiration that must respond not only to an artistic need to create works that are constructed rather than random, but also to the universal human need to understand the reality around us (Kandinskii 2020c: 561–563).

The conviction that the new type of creation required a more conscious approach than previous painting had been a driving force behind the development of Kandinsky's theory of painting since 1904, when he began writing his first texts on "Die Farbensprache" ("The Language of Colours"). But in December 1920, this idea was presented as the culmination of an entire historical journey of art, whose beginnings have to be traced back to distant centuries. The importance of artistic tradition is underlined by the fact that Kandinsky considers the theoretical renewal in art in the second half of

the nineteenth century to be a “return to theoretical tradition” (“vozvrashchenie na put' teoreticheskoi traditsii”).¹⁷

This statement is surprising, given the anti-historical nihilistic approach that prevailed at the time. Characteristic of some of the futurist avant-garde before 1914, it was fully adopted by the IZO department from 1918 onwards. Although Kandinsky's discourse was not acceptable by radical artists in the IZO department, it found fertile ground among other colleagues with whom he had been working since 1919 in the various commissions and sub-departments of the IZO department, where everyone crossed paths. In his work at the Zakupochnaia komissiiia (Purchasing Commission) and the Muzei Zhivopisnoi kul'tury (Museum of Pictorial Culture), as well as in the Literaturno-Khudozhestvennyi podotdel (Sub-department of art literature), Kandinsky found himself collaborating with numerous art historians and museum curators from the Muzeinyi otdel (Museum department). It was with the latter that he succeeded in establishing a rich and fruitful dialogue.

Evsei Shor's Role in the Institutionalisation of Terminological and Encyclopedical Project

In establishing this dialogue, the decisive role belongs to Evsei Shor (1891–1974), whose name and work were ignored and obscured for decades due to his emigration to Germany in 1922, even though many of the cultural and artistic activities that took place in Moscow in the 1920s and, to some extent, in the 1930s, had been initiated by him in the early years of the revolution.

Kandinsky had met Shor in June 1913 in Moscow. Then a student of mathematics and art history, he had founded the publishing house *Iskusstvo* (Art) together with his partner, translator Grigorii Angert, and had undertaken to publish a Russian translation of *On the Spiritual in Art*.¹⁸ Both men worked in the editorial department of *Betkhovenskii Institut*, or *Betkhovenskaia studiia* (Studio Beethoven), founded by Evsei's father, the pianist David Shor (1867–1942), whose cultural activities were inspired by the ideas of utopian univer-

17 See the abstract of the conference published in *Kandinskii 2020b*: 557.

18 On all the circumstances and destiny of this unrealized project see *Podzemskaiia 2020b*.

salism.¹⁹ This marked the beginning of Kandinsky's friendship with Evsei, a friendship based on the conviction that art is the ideal vehicle for universal understanding, as well as of their close collaboration between 1918 and 1921. In 1922, following the painter, Evsei Shor left for Germany, and in 1933, he went to Palestine. Until the beginning of the Second World War, he corresponded regularly with the artist.²⁰

At Narkompros, Shor served as secretary of the Artistic College in the IZO department and as assistant to the powerful architect Ivan Zholtovskii at the *Arkhitekturno-Khudozhesvtvennyi otdel* (Architectural Art department). As a result, he found himself at the heart of artistic policy, with the opportunity to launch and support projects in the field of art science.²¹ In a letter written from Freiburg im Breisgau, presumably in early 1923, to his father, who was still in Moscow, Evsei Shor reflects on his own activities after the revolution. He says that between 1918 and 1922 at Narkompros, he was driven by a sense of the "possibility, perhaps illusory, of building artistic culture".²² He confided to his father his thoughts on the nature and character of his commitments, which shed light on the true role he played in Russia's cultural activities in the years following the revolution.

Ведь смешно сказать, почти все, что за время революции сделала в области теории искусства университетская молодежь (Габричевский, Шервинский, Сидоров и др.), было сделано ею в порядке выполнения заданий Архитектурно-Художественного отдела, по моей инициативе и согласно мною разработанным планам. Мои отношения с ними не

19 The same utopian universalist aspiration that took the form of "universal Zionism" by David Shor would later lead his son Evsei to combine his reflections on Jewish culture with Russian religious philosophy. Evsei translated several Russian philosophers into German, notably Viacheslav Ivanov (*Die russische Idee*, 1930) and Nikolai Berdiaev (*Das Schicksal des Menschen in unserer Zeit*, 1935), etc. See Podzemskaia 2024.

20 Kandinsky's letters and copies of Shor's letters are preserved in the David and Yehoshua Shor Archives, The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Arch. 4° 1521, file 75. The first thirteen letters from 1922–23 were published in Segal-Rudnik 2023.

21 The development of artistic policy in the department headed by Zholtovskii was in the hands of his assistants Ivan Fidler, Aleksandr Poliakov and, above all, Evsei Shor. See Kazus' 2009: 43, 62, 65, 66, 212, etc.

22 «[...] возможность, быть может, иллюзорная, строительства художественной культуры».

ограничивались тем, что я стимулировал их работу; в то же время я старался ставить их в такие условия, что работа — несмотря на тяжелое революционное время — могла быть рационально оплачена и, значит, серьезно выполнена. В тяжелые минуты ко мне приходили они за материальной поддержкой, которую мне удавалось им оказывать благодаря моему официальному положению. Меня всегда соблазняла такая помощь людям, которая способствует реализации самых лучших возможностей их, способностей и дарований, и такая организация какого-либо дела, при которой — благодаря удачному использованию и распределению людей — эти дарования и способности дают удесятенный эффект, такое отношение к делу было, пожалуй, единственным стимулом к работе за эти трудные годы; ведь работать без увлечения невозможно, личной же работы осуществлять я не мог. (Shor 1923?)

After all, it is funny to say that almost everything that university graduates (Gabrichevskii, Shervinskii, Sidorov, etc.) did in the field of art theory during the revolution was done by them in fulfilment of assignments from the Architectural Art department, on my initiative and in accordance with plans I had developed. My relationship with them was not limited to stimulating their work; at the same time, I tried to put them in such conditions that their work, despite the difficult revolutionary times, could be rationally remunerated and, therefore, seriously carried out. In difficult times, they came to me for financial support, which I was able to provide thanks to my official position. I have always been tempted by helping people in ways that contribute to the realisation of their best opportunities, abilities, and talents, and by organising things in such a way that, thanks to the successful use and distribution of people, these talents and abilities have a tenfold effect. This attitude towards work was perhaps the only incentive to work during those difficult years; after all, it is impossible to work without enthusiasm, and I could not do my personal work.

The Architectural Art department had barely been established in March 1919, when an article entitled “Narodnaia arkhitektura” (“People’s Architecture”), published in the newspaper *Zhizn’ iskusstva* (*Life of Art*) on 10–11 May 1919, already announced the publishing activities of this department. We learn that Serlio and Vasari’s treatises were being translated and that

a “spetsial’nyi slovar’ arkhitekturnykh terminov” (“Special Dictionary of Architectural Terms”) had already been compiled (Kazus’ 2009: 369–370, doc. 42). In 1920, the magazine *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn’* (*Artistic Life*) published an article on the editorial work of the Architectural Art department, which, it said, was designed with educational and artistic objectives in mind (Anonymous 1920). It included impressive lists of texts, classified as general, historical, theoretical and technical works, already translated or in the process of being translated. Among these works are Vitruvius’s “I dieci libri dell’architettura. Roma” (marked as currently being translated); Palladio’s “I quattro libri dell’architettura” (marked as translated) and “Antiquitates urbis Romae” (currently being translated); Vasari’s “Le vite de’più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti” (largely translated); Charles Blanc’s “Grammaire des arts du dessin” (currently being translated); “L’art de bâtir chez les Egyptiens” by Auguste Choisy (translated), and others.

This editorial project is linked to Kandinsky’s activities at the IZO department, where he oversees the work of the “masterskaia reproduksii” (“Reproduction Studio”) and operates within the Art Literature Sub-department of the IZO. In the winter of 1918–19, an ambitious publishing programme was developed there, as detailed in the department’s report signed by its head David Shterenberg (1919: 67–68). It refers to works on painting technique, including a translation of the Eibner manual mentioned above. A separate section is devoted to classical art literature. These are Russian translations of treatises by Vitruvius, Cennini, Alberti, Palladio, Delacroix’s *Journal*, etc.

Significant similarities between this list, compiled with Kandinsky’s participation, and the one mentioned earlier, which was drawn up by Shor for Zholtovskii’s Architectural Art department shortly after it separated from IZO, suggest that they were in fact part of a single joint project, developed while Zholtovskii was still part of the IZO.

In the winter of 1918–19, all three (Kandinsky, Shor, Zholtovskii) appeared alongside poet Vadim Shershenevich (Shor’s brother-in-law) at a Collegium dedicated to preparing the *Ėntsiklopediia izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv* (*Visual Arts Encyclopedia*), established by the IZO (*Iskusstvo* 1919, 3 (1 February): 4). The Encyclopedia was to include general articles on the visual arts, as well as terminology and biographical and bibliographical notes on painters, sculptors and architects. Roman Jakobson’s involvement in this project is attested by his

interview with Krystyna Pomorska. According to Jakobson, he was supposed to write an article on semiotics in painting, and Kandinsky was to explain the meaning of semiotics as a concept to others (Jakobson/Pomorska 1980: 124–125).²³

Until recently, our knowledge of the *Visual Arts Encyclopedia* project was limited to the small notice published in the IZO newspaper *Iskusstvo* and to Jakobson's interview, but today we can provide some additional details thanks to the discovery of two documents in the Narkompros archives.²⁴ They are filed among the minutes of meetings of the Kontaknaia komissii (Contact Commission) established for the organisation of the Museum of Pictorial Culture, of the Lektsionnyi podotdel (Sub-department of public lectures) and other bodies of Narkompros, relating to the year 1919.

The first page, containing an unsigned typed text, indicates that it is an "Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Presidium of Artistic Collegium No. 10 on 5 February 1919". It contains a "Plan obshchei chasti Ėntsiklopedii Izobrazitel'nykh Iskusstv" ("Plan for the General Section of the Encyclopedia of Visual Arts"), Section II, Philosophy of Art (Aesthetics). The following points are listed: the aesthetics of Antiquity, from the Archaic period to Longinus, Philostratus and Plotinus; the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, French and English modernity, but above all German modernity from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, up to the "aesthetics of content" (Friedrich Vischer, Rudolf Hermann Lotze, Karl Rosenkranz) and the "aesthetics of form" (Johann Friedrich Herbart, Robert von Zimmermann, Eduard Hanslick). But it is above all contemporary aesthetics that is covered in detail: the shift towards empiricism and psychologism (Fechner), normative aesthetics (Hermann Cohn, Johann Georg Hamann, Jonas Cohn, Benedetto Croce), psychological aesthetics (Hermann Sibeck, Robert Vischer, Theodor Lipps, Wilhelm Worringer), and experimental aesthetics (Gustav Fechner,

23 Aleksandr Parnis suggests that some of Jakobson's articles published in the newspaper *Iskusstvo* may be linked to the Encyclopedia project, particularly the texts entitled "Futurism" and "Cubism", although it has not been proven that they were written by Jakobson ("Futurism", in issue 7, 2 August 1919; "Cubism", in issue 6, 8 July 1919). On the question of authorship, see Aleksandr Parnis's comments in Jakobson 1987: 417–418.

24 GARF. F. A 2306 (Ministry of Instruction of the RSFSR). Op. 23. Ed. khr. 50. L. 9, 10. See their publication in the Appendix to my article.

Wilhelm Wundt). A section on Russian aesthetics and a bibliographic index were also planned.

The second document, a typewritten text of which only the last part, signed presumably by Evsei Shor, has been preserved, is devoted to art history. It lists the major artistic traditions from Italian art in the fourteenth–eighteenth centuries to contemporary art: post-impressionism, expressionism, cubism and “art without objects”; oriental art is also mentioned. These two independent documents with a different form of enumeration seem, however, to belong to the same plan for the Encyclopedia and testify to the scale of the project, conceived as an interdisciplinary work open to philosophical aesthetics.

The spirit of this project is radically different from that of an Institut izucheniia iskusstv (Institute for Arts Studies) promoted at the same time in the IZO department by David Shterenberg and Vladimir Khrakovskii.²⁵ This latter project was undoubtedly drawn up at the time when the first documents were being drafted to regulate the activities of the Free State Art Studios in the autumn of 1918. A document entitled “Instruktsiia izucheniia iskusstv” (“Instruction for studying arts”) was published in the *Spravochnik* (Directory) of the IZO department among other documents devoted to the first reform of art education.²⁶ Strongly influenced by sociological discourse and focused on the study of materials in contemporary art production, this project considered the science of art solely from the perspective of the “history of artistic culture”, which was to replace “subjective aesthetic evaluation”.

Thus, as early as the winter of 1918–19, two alternative projects on the science of art were already present within the same IZO department of Nar-kompros: that of Shterenberg/Khrakovskii, which around 1921 would develop into a platform for productivist constructivism in Rodchenko/Brik’s INKhUK, and that of Shor/Zholtovskii/Kandinsky, which would be taken up by RAKhN. We believe that this genealogy of the Encyclopedia project is important, as it

25 A friend of Maiakovskii, a student of Tatlin at the Second Free Art Studios in 1918–19, and, from 1920 onwards, a teacher at Vkhutemas, Khrakovskii was actively involved in IZO in reflecting on the theory and methods of art education for children, analysing in particular its sociological aspects. See Smekalov 2016.

26 We owe valuable information about the authors of the anonymously published Instruction to Aleksei Sidorov, who, studying the origins of RAKhN in his memoir on the first three years of the Academy, refers to the first mention of the Institute project in the documents of the IZO department, dating it to the end of 1918. See Sidorov 2017: 25.

reveals the names of its true initiators and, through these names, the lines of its filiation.

One of these lines leads back to the years before the First World War, to the circles around the *Obshchestvo svobodnoi éstetiki* (Society of Free Aesthetics). According to Fedor Stepun (1990: II, 269–277), those who had known each other since then continued to meet after the Revolution at the home of Nikolai Berdiaev and in the apartment of pianist Aleksandr Solomonovich Shor, Evsei's uncle and Ol'ga Shor's father. There they discussed Oswald Spengler's book, the destinies of Russia and Europe, and their civilisation and culture (Volkov/Shishkin 2013: 245–246): these subjects were later taken up at RAKhN. Should these private meetings be seen as the nucleus of attempts to institutionalise “academies” that were undertaken in the aftermath of the Revolution? Alongside RAKhN/GAKhN and the *Vol'naia akademiia dukhovnoi kul'tury* (Free Academy of Spiritual Culture, VADK) in Moscow, we might mention the *Petrograd/Leningrad Vol'naia filosofskaia Akademiia* (Free Philosophical Academy, VOL/FILA) and the *Rossiiskaia/Gosudarstvennaia Akademiia istorii material'noi kul'tury* (Russian/State Academy of Material Culture History), as well as the famous publishing house that took the name Academia. In her research on the institutional history of GAKhN/RAKhN, Iuliia Iakimenko (2018) studied these academies, which were similar not only in composition²⁷ but also in certain ambitions and modes of operation.²⁸

The initial editorial project established in the winter of 1918–19, largely initiated by Shor and Kandinsky, had three main focuses: the programme of translation and annotated publication of art treatises, the encyclopedic project, and the terminology project. As the relationship between the latter two projects was rather vague, the titles “Encyclopedia” and “Dictionary” were

27 As for the composition of these academies, the example of the Moscow Section of VOL/FILA is interesting: it was organised in September–October 1921 with the active participation of Gustav Shpet and Mikhail Gershenzon. In the minutes of the first meeting of the Moscow Section Council on 29 September 1921, Kandinsky's candidacy is mentioned. The list of candidates also includes Pavel Florenskii, and among the members of VOL/FILA are RAKhN members Dmitrii Nedovich and Leonid Sabaneev. See the minutes of the first meeting of the Moscow Section Council on 29 September 1921 (Belous 2005: 208–210, 217).

28 Iakimenko (2018) notes that while Kandinsky and Shor did not succeed in opening a branch of RAKhN in Berlin, Berdiaev, towards the end of 1922, founded the *Vol'naia filosofskaia akademiia* in Berlin, which was joined by those who, in 1921, had been members of RAKhN for a few months (Frank, Vysheslavtsev, Stepun).

used interchangeably. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to distinguish between these two projects, as they stem from two different, albeit related, pursuits: the first was to synthesise knowledge into a universal and systematic body, and the second was to enable the appropriate linguistic use of terms in a specific field. It is clear that appropriate terminology is the prerequisite for the constitution of any science and, even more so, any encyclopedia. Logically, therefore, these two projects correspond to successive stages in the development of science. The confusion between them in the years 1918–20 shows that they arose from two different contexts. Indeed, in light of the document described above, we could assume that the “encyclopedic” ambition belonged more to the philosophers gathered around Shor. The need to carry out work on artistic terminology was demanded mostly by artists, Zholtovskii for architecture and Kandinsky for painting. Indeed, the first mentions of the terminology project concern architectural terms, as we saw in the article published in May 1919 in *Zhizn' iskusstva*. As for Kandinsky, it is true that he mainly sought to introduce the terminological work into INKhUK in 1920 and into RAKhN in 1921. However, it is significant that his three texts from 1919, which were undoubtedly written as part of the editorial project conceived together with Shor, are more encyclopedic in nature.²⁹

Regarding the progress of Shor's encyclopedical project, it must be said that in the spring of 1921, he worked alongside Kandinsky, supporting him in his efforts to convince Lunacharskii to create a new Institute of Art Science, parallel to INKhUK. Shor's place alongside Kandinsky during this crucial phase is confirmed by famous photographs in which he is seen standing or sitting among the group surrounding the artist, alongside Aleksandr Shenshin, Robert Fal'k, Evgenii Pavlov and Nikolai Uspenskii. It was therefore natural that in August 1921 he took up the position of scientific secretary of the Physico-Psychological Department. In 1922, he was still a member of the Department's Presidium. But that's not all...

In his memoir “Tri goda Rossiiskoi akademii khudozhestvennykh nauk 1921–1924” (“Three Years at the Russian Academy of Art Sciences, 1921–1924”),

29 These are the autobiographical note published in German in the Potsdam magazine *Das Kunstblatt* and the texts “O tochke” (“On the Point”) and “O linii” (“On the Line”), which appeared under the general heading “Malen'kie stateiki po bol'shim voprosam” (“Very Short Articles on Big Questions”) in *Iskusstvo* in January–February 1919.

Sidorov refers to Shor “who, as one of the heads of the Architecture Section and a key figure in the Academy’s administrative affairs, played a prominent role there”.³⁰ In 1921–22, Shor was indeed extremely active at the Academy, where he was a member of the administrative team. He attended Secretariat meetings and helped to organise the First All-Russian Exhibition of Artistic Industry in 1922. By May 1922, he had accumulated so many positions at RAKHN that he resigned from his post as Scientific Secretary of the Physico-Psychological Department.³¹ The Architecture Subsection of the Visual Arts Division was created at RAKhN in January 1922, just after Kandinsky’s departure. Administratively, its integration into RAKhN was personally managed by Shor. In one of his 1922 publications, Sidorov praised it and placed it “in first place in terms of the number and quality of lectures that have recently been given there”, attributing these successes explicitly to Shor’s leadership, “with the close participation of the greatest architects of our time”, Zholtovskii and Shchusev.³²

After Shor’s departure, the RAKhN Architecture Subsection (which inherited the publishing programme of the Architectural Art department headed by Zholtovskii in from 1919 to 1921) continued the activities he had initiated: editing the *Dictionary of Architects* and the *Dictionary of Architectural Art Terminology*, as well as translating and preparing for publication the classic treatises on architecture (Kazus’ 2009: 400, doc. 64).

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30 «[...] который как один из руководителей Архитектурной секции и близкий участник административной жизни Академии сыграл в ней видную роль» (Sidorov 2017: 41).

31 See RGALI. F. 941 (GAKhN). Op. 12. Ed. khr. 1. L. 10.

32 «[...] по числу и достоинству прочитанных за последнее время докладов на первом месте надо, пожалуй, поставить Секцию архитектурную, умело руководимую Е. Д. Шором при ближайшем участии таких крупнейших архитекторов современности, как И. В. Жолтовский и А. В. Щусев» (quoted in Sidorov 2017: 41, note 113).

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