

# What Is “New” About “New Fordism”

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## Introduction

“Fordism” was a term coined by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci to describe the working practices of the American car manufacturer Henry Ford in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup> Ford's factories employed a system of principles that allowed the mass-production of complex, multi-part machines, such as the automobile, at rates which far outstripped those of any other producer.

The incredible increases in production that were possible under Ford's system came from three key elements:

1. The division of labour
2. The deskilling of the worker
3. The application of “biomechanical” principles

This paper will look at how these three elements operated in Ford's factories and their connection to the works of the founder of Scientific Management, Frederick Winslow Taylor. We will then look at the way in which these ideas have been developed, extrapolated and transposed into the aesthetic realm in the work of the New Fordist Organization, using historical precedents of artistic mass-production to highlight and explain elements of New Fordist ideology.

## Fordism and Taylorism

The division of labour and the atomization of the production process found in Ford's factories was not Ford's invention, neither was the idea of mass production itself. Division of labour stretches all the way back, via Sam Colt's firearms, to the industrial revolution, most famously seen in Adam Smith's description of a pin manufacturing from *The Wealth Of Nations* (1776):

“To take an example, therefore, from a very trifling manufacture; but one in which the division of labour has been very often taken notice of, the trade of the pin-maker ... One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on, is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands, though in others the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them... The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive powers of labour.”<sup>2</sup>

This atomization of the process of production resulted in a fundamental change in the role of the worker. Instead of being an employee with a modicum of independence and control

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1 *Americanism And Fordism* Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks” ed. & trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (USA, 1971), 279-318

2 Adam Smith *An Inquiry Into The Nature And Causes Of The Wealth Of Nations* <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN1.html#B.I, Ch.1, Of the Division of Labor> ed. Edwin Cannan, first pub. 1776, 5th edition (London, 1904) <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN1.html> accessed 10/04/2013

over their work, this new mode of production required considerably less skill and saw a re-location of power to the management. In the case of pin manufacturing, this is not a removal of so much autonomy, as the simplicity of the task not necessitate a large amount of managerial organization. However, to achieve the complex deconstructions of car-part manufacturing into single tasks, management needed to take on a much more organizational and invasive attitude to working methodologies than would have previously been necessary. The temporal synchronicity needed to have a certain number of actions performed on a part, ready in time to be connected to another part which had been through an independent series of processes, necessitated the relocation of responsibility to a management level and subjugated the workers' autonomy to a much larger, and centrally-controlled, formal scheme. This shift initiated a much more hands-on approach to factory management, as well as compounding the problem of a Marxian "alienation of labour". Ford described this re-location of control in his writing:

"I have heard it said, in fact I believe it is quite a current thought, that we have taken the skill out of work. We have not. We have put in skill. We have put a higher skill into planning, management, and tool building, and the result of that skill are enjoyed by the man who is not skilled."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite this protestation, it is clear that the deconstruction of the work into a set of single, simple actions removed the need for the worker to have anything but the most basic level of skill to work in one of Ford's factories:

"The length of time required to become proficient in the various occupations is about as follows: 43 per cent. of all the jobs require not over one day of training; 36 per cent. require from one day to one week; 6 per cent. require from one to two weeks; 14 per cent. require from one month to one year; one per cent. require from one to six years. The last jobs require great skill--as in tool making and die sinking."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the worker need not even be in good physical health:

"We have experimented with bedridden men--men who were able to sit up. We put black oilcloth covers or aprons over the beds and set the men to work screwing nuts on small bolts...The men in the hospital could do it just as well as the men in the shop...The tubercular employees -- and there are usually about a thousand of them -- mostly work in the material salvage department. Those cases which are considered contagious work together in an especially constructed shed...At the time of the last analysis there were 9,563 substandard men..."<sup>5</sup>

Although this division of labour required the employment of a much larger workforce, due to the increase in individual jobs, the savings in efficiency that Ford was able to make under this new system made the investment worth it, especially as the people employed need not be skilled at the job, which would necessitate a higher wage. For example, the operation of constructing the fly-wheel magneto, a job previously done by one workman, in April 1913, this job was broken down into twenty nine separate operations, each done by a different employee. This cut the time of construction from 20 minutes to thirteen minutes ten seconds.<sup>6</sup>

The division of labour and deskilling of workers was coupled with Ford's final principle designed to increase labour: the introduction of biomechanics. Whilst not referred to as

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3 Henry Ford *My Life And Work* (n.p., 1922), 56

4 *ibid.*, 77

5 *ibid.*, 77

6 *ibid.*, 58

such in Ford's writings, his attitude towards factory arrangement and organization has striking overlaps with that of his contemporary - and inventor of Scientific Management - Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Taylor sought to bring a scientific rigour to the analysis, planning and management of work in the factories of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, developing a whole system of techniques designed to increase efficiency. These included machine belting, centralized planning offices, standardized tools, equations for the most efficient speed to run specific types of metal, and optimum wage rates designed to incentivize workers. Taylor's rigorous and scientific approach to his work contrasted markedly with Ford's unsystematized methodology which was actively dismissive of "experts":

"None of our men are "experts." We have most unfortunately found it necessary to get rid of a man as soon as he thinks himself an expert-because no one ever considers himself an expert if he really knows his job"<sup>7</sup>

"The factory keeps no records of experiments. The foreman and superintendents remember what has been done. If a certain method has tried and failed, somebody will remember it-but I am not particularly anxious for the men to remember what someone else has tried to do in the past, for then we might quickly accumulate far too many things that could not be done. That is one of the problems with extensive records."<sup>8</sup>

Despite this difference in methodology the similarity in result can clearly be seen if one contrasts Ford's "principles of assembly", with the research on bricklaying done by the Taylor disciple Frank B. Gilbreth and referenced in Taylor's own *Principles of Scientific Management*.

Fordism:

1. Place the tools and the men in the sequence of operation so that each component part shall travel the least possible distance while in the process of finishing.
2. Use Work slides or some other form of carrier so that when the workman completes his operation, he drops the part always in the same place - which place must always be the most convenient place to his hand - and if possible have gravity carry the part to the next workman for his operation.
3. Use sliding assembly lines by which the parts to be assembled are delivered at convenient distances."<sup>9</sup>

Taylorism:

"An analysis of the expedients used by Mr Gilbreth in reducing the motions of his bricklayers from eighteen to five shows that this improvement has been made in three different ways:

*First.* He has entirely dispensed with certain movements which the bricklayers in the past believed were necessary, but which a careful study and trial on his part have shown to be useless.

*Second.* He has introduced simple apparatus, such as his adjustable scaffold and his packets for holding the bricks, by means of which, with a very small amount of cooperation from a cheap laborer, he entirely eliminates a lot of tiresome and time-consuming motions which are necessary for the bricklayer who lacks the scaffold and the packet.

*Third.* He teaches his bricklayers to make simple motions with both hands at the same time, where before they completed a motion with the right hand and followed it later with one

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7 *ibid.*, 62

8 *ibid.*, 61

9 *ibid.*, 58

from the left.”<sup>10</sup>

In both examples, the key is the reduction of surplus movement. In concluding the anecdote about the division of labour in fly-wheel magneto construction, outlined earlier, Ford concludes by showing the huge increases in efficiency that were made by eliminating surplus movement through raising the assembly line to waist height:

“Then we raised the height of the line eight inches – this was in 1914 – and cut the time to seven minutes [from thirteen minutes, ten seconds]. Further experimenting with the speed that the work should move at cut the time down to five minutes.”<sup>11</sup>

This is essentially the application of Scientific Management-style biomechanics to the assembly line. In Ford's factories, the assembly line itself was also biomechanically designed - it moved, reducing the need for the movement of workers. Similar dramatic reductions in production time were seen in the assembly of the car's chassis; the combination of a moving assembly line, the subdivision of work and the innovative raising of the assembly line to waist-height reduced the construction time from twelve hours and twenty-eight minutes per chassis to only one hour thirty three minutes.<sup>12</sup>

Taylor's work too, abounds with successes, but here achieved through his engineer's background and relentless experimentation. An example of this can be found in the “time studies” he developed to calculate the most efficient time in which a task could be accomplished.

“Two first-class laborers were selected, men who had proved themselves to be physically powerful and who were also good steady workers...These men were given all kinds of tasks, which were carried out each day under the close observation of the young college man who was conducting the experiments, and who at the same time noted with a stop-watch the proper time for all the motions that were made by the men. Every element in any way connected with the work which we believed could have a bearing on the result was carefully studied and recorded. What we hoped ultimately to determine was what fraction of a horse-power a man was able to exert, that is, how many foot-pounds of work a man could do in one day.”<sup>13</sup>

This data then provided the basis for calculating a law that Taylor then applied to the handling of pig-iron:

“...the law is that for each given pull or push on the man's arms it is possible for the workman to be under load for only a definite percentage of the day. For example, when pig-iron is being handled (each pig weighing 92 pounds), a first-class workman can only be under load 43 per cent. of the day.”<sup>14</sup>

This in-depth and scientific analysis helped dramatically increase efficiency (a change from 12½ tons to 47 tons per man per day) and, in this case, was implemented through a supervisor with a stop-watch indicating when the men should lift, move and rest.<sup>15</sup>

The scientifically-driven improvements in efficiency implemented by Taylor, and Ford's own try-it-and-see approach to improved productivity have primarily been ignored or badly implemented to the process of artistic production. The New Fordist Organization aims to

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10 Frederick Winslow Taylor *The Principles Of Scientific Management* (New York, London, 1911), 40

11 Henry Ford *My Life And Work* (n.p., 1922), 58

12 *ibid.*, 59

13 Frederick Winslow Taylor *The Principles Of Scientific Management* (New York, London, 1911), 25-26

14 *ibid.*, 27

15 *ibid.*, 27

correct this, drawing not only on the work of Ford and Taylor, but also through an analysis of the historical precedents of artistic mass-production discussed in the next section.

## What Is “New” About “New Fordism”?

The term “New Fordism” was primarily chosen to imply an ideology that returns, re-evaluates and renews Fordist ideas of production, yet distances itself from Post-Fordist theory and its numerous offshoots. When we talk of New Fordism, we essentially imply a new way of seeing the past.

“New Fordism” was first proposed in 2012, by the writer and cultural theorist Frederick Droppe, in an article entitled “The New Fordist Manifesto”<sup>16</sup>. In it Droppe engages in a radical re-reading of Gramsci's essay “Americanism and Fordism” to position Fordism as a viable aesthetic agenda, not only to open up a new vista of artistic expression, but also to combat the Performing Arts' increasing decline in income, known as “Baumol's Cost Disease”.

Cost Disease was first proposed by the economists William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen in their 1966 book “Performing Arts – The Economic Dilemma”.<sup>17</sup> Their contention was that, due to the interlinked nature of the labour markets, an increase in wages in one industry will cause corresponding increases in that of another. Thus, an increase in wages in the industrial sector will precipitate increased wages in the performing arts. However, whilst increased wages in industry are tied with an increase in productivity, or output per work hour; there is a physical limit to the increase of productivity possible in the performing arts. This is due to the fact that whilst, in industry, this productivity may come through improvements in technology or production techniques, requiring less people and taking less time to produce an item, it still takes the same amount of time and people to play a Beethoven String Quartet as when it was first written. To play it in more time or with less people is not possible, thus a real increase in productivity is prevented, meaning that, year on year, the performing arts will in, real terms, lose money.<sup>18</sup> However, Droppe contests this notion. The increase in productivity discussed by Baumol and Bowen is only related to visible, not invisible labour. He contended that through adopting Fordist production techniques, this invisible labour can be externalized, commodified and made profitable. Shortly after the publishing of Droppe's article, the New Fordist Organization was set up, dedicated to putting his ideas into practice.

But not everyone was impressed, the cultural theorist Piotr Zak launched a blistering broadside against New Fordism, describing it as “the cynical, intellectually-bereft attention-seeking of the worst type of immoral, money-fixated charlatans. A movement which seeks to degrade modern art through commodification, a new dark right-wing of aesthetics.”<sup>19</sup>.

Droppe riposted with an article entitled “Manufacturing Style” in which he not only laid the aesthetic groundwork for New Fordism but proposed it as the only real way for de-

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16 Frederick Droppe *The New Fordist Manifesto* <http://aces.ricercata.org/index.php?nfos=manifesto> accessed 11/04/2013

17 William J. Baumol & William G. Bowen *Performing Arts – The Economic Dilemma* (New York, 1966)

18 *Baumol's Cost Disease*, James Heilbrun, “A Handbook of Cultural Economics” Ed. Ruth Towse (Massachusetts, 2003), 91

19 Piotr Zak *An Aesthetic Which Only Comes In Black – A Critique Of New Fordism*

commodifying art.<sup>20</sup> Droppe contested that, whilst in industry, a consistent deviation in the reproduction of an object represented a failure in production and a loss in productivity, in aesthetic terms, this consistent deviation was STYLE and that, using behaviourist Pavlovian and Tayloristic techniques to control this deviation, an aesthetically coherent and new style could be produced. He also contested that, in the age of the intense economic commodification in the art market, New Fordism, with its ideology of mass-production detached and ambivalent to market concerns of supply and demand, was a way to articulate old leftist Adornian ideas about the autonomy and de-commodification of art.

“Our new vision of Fordism is not based on the utilization of tools to improve artistic productivity, but to aestheticize the process of productivity and create an art so detached and unconcerned with any type of idea of supply and demand that it achieves cultural autonomy.”

This paradox between the traditional right-wing affiliations of Fordism and its connection to the acceleration of capitalist accumulation in the early twentieth century, and the position that Droppe suggests for it, as a methodology for fighting against an increasing commodification of the art markets, is one that is inherent to the idea of New Fordism itself.

## Historical Precedents

New Fordism is not the first time that art has been mass-produced. Jean Tinguely and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio were two artists who built machines to replicate abstract expressionist paintings.

Pinot-Gallizio, a Situationist, attempted to devalue abstract expressionism by using the laws of supply and demand against the style. By flooding the market with Pollock-esque daubs, he hoped to undermine the existing art market. “Industrial painting is the first attempted success in playing with machines, and the result has been the devaluing of the work of art.”<sup>21</sup>

However, Pinot-Gallizio's lasting contribution to culture is not to be found on the walls of MOMA, or The Tate, but in the Chinese Import and export fair. “Wang Yuankang, the paintings entrepreneur at the Canton Trade Fair who received Mr. Goldberg's order, said his factory had 10 “designers” who do original paintings and 300 painters who copy these originals. Another 200 workers do the framing, he said”<sup>22</sup>. These should saturate any art market, yet prices for Pollock's work are as high as ever – a testament, perhaps, to the idiosyncrasies of the art market, which behaves like no other, and capitalism's merciless “detournment” of situationist aesthetics.

Neither Tinguely nor Pinot-Gallizio's work involved the application of Taylorist principles. Jean Tinguely's abstract expressionist machines later ridded themselves of the veiled critique of the movement and became autonomous, kinetic sculptures in their own right, whilst Pinot-Gallizio saw his industrialization of painting as a way of removing the worker from exactly the type of alienated labour that Taylorism encouraged.

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20 Frederick Droppe *Manufacturing Style* <http://aces.ricercata.org/index.php?nfos=style> accessed 11/04/2013

21 Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio *Manifesto Of Industrial Painting* (1959) Not Bored  
<http://www.notbored.org/gallizio.html> accessed 11/04/2013

22 Keith Bradsher *Own Original Chinese Copies of Real Western Art!* New York Times, July 15, 2005,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/15/business/worldbusiness/15paint.html?hp&oref=login&oref=login&r=0> accessed: 11/04/2013

Andy Warhol set up a “factory” in 1962 but it produced a relatively small number of works, considering the time it was open for. Damien Hirst also runs a factory-style set-up: “Near Stroud, he has another house with a vast studio attached, where, not that long ago, many of his 150-strong team of assistants laboured over his serial works: the spot paintings, spin paintings, cabinets and vitrines”<sup>23</sup>. However, in both cases there is no evidence that Scientific Management was applied to the working processes. It is in this respect that New Fordism attempts to renew and reinvigorate Art's relationship with mass-production, as well as taking advantage of the technologies that have developed since Tinguely, Pinot-Gallizio and Warhol's days, and that went unused by Hirst.

## Biomechanics

There is an important precedent for the aesthetic applications of bio-mechanics (which form an important component of New Fordist ideology) - the adoption of Taylorism in Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Mass-production, Russia and art have an interesting history. The art historian Matthew Cullerne Bown, in his masterful survey of Socialist Realist Painting quips that the essence of Socialist Realist Painting in Russia is that of “girl meets tractor” - yet what were those tractors which ploughed the idylls in Soviet propaganda? None but Fordsons, Henry Ford's brand of tractor, of which 24,600 were shipped over to Russia between 1920 and 1926.<sup>24</sup> “In 1929 the Soviets paid millions for the tools, dies, jigs, and fixtures needed to manufacture Ford cars at Gorky, a factory complex”<sup>25</sup>.

Despite its origination in the United States, biomechanics had a large impact upon the artistic productivity in Russia post-1917. Taylor's ideas, which were brought over via “the metalworker, trade unionist, journalist, and writer”, Alexei Gastev<sup>26</sup>, found fertile ground due to a their compatability with a current of thinking that had already incorporated non-Taylorist bio-mechanical ideas into a coherent and uniquely Russian form of Marxist aesthetics.

Alexandr Bogdanov and Antanoli Lunacharski were two thinkers who probably had the most influence on Russian Socialist aesthetic theory in this period; Cullerne Bown claims that Lunacharski's essay *Foundations of a Positive Aesthetic* (1903) is “the single most important and prophetic essay in the pre-history of socialist realist painting”<sup>27</sup>.

Both Bogdanov and Lunacharski were influenced by the German philosophers Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius who proposed philosophies that incorporated biomechanical and thoroughly materialist ideas about the role and function of the human body in the world, both developing notions about the conservation of energy and economy to explain the efficient functioning of the world.<sup>28</sup> These ideas were then developed by Lunacharski in his *Foundations of a Positive Aesthetic* which proposed “a theory of art that deviated from the

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23 Sean O'Hagan, *Damien Hirst: 'I still believe art is more powerful than money'* 11 March 2012, “The Guardian” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/mar/11/damien-hirst-tate-retrospective-interview> accessed 11/04/2013

24 Richard Bak, *Henry And Edsel – The Creation of the Ford Empire* (Hoboken, New Jersey & Canada, 2003), 114

25 *ibid.*, 114

26 Julia Kursell *Piano Mécanique and Piano Biologique: Nikolai Bernstein's Neurophysiological Study of Piano Touch* Configurations, Volume 14, Number 3, Fall 2006, 246

27 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 30

28 *ibid.*, 29

orthodox materialism of [earlier Russian Marxist and aesthetic theorist, Georgi] Plekhanov by including the biomechanical nature of man as a key factor in aesthetics".<sup>29</sup> The aesthetic implications of a biomechanical conception of humanity are worth quoting at length (partly due to the scarcity of translations of the original article):

"Lunacharski discussed beauty, with particular emphasis on the visual. The principles of life-enhancement and the least expenditure of energy was central to his analysis of abstract visual qualities. He wrote, 'Experience teaches, without any doubt, that regular forms are pleasant to the eye and irregular forms are unpleasant', [120] and warned against 'broken lines, an irregular circle, sharp and angular forms of bodies and so on', because they 'require the eye to change directions many times and expend a mass of energy'. [121] Rhythm, of which symmetry was a special case, he considered to be fundamentally important: 'everything rhythmic is easily perceived, rhythmic movements are easily produced, therefore rhythm is the basis of formal aesthetics', [122] When it came to colour, he was in favour of strong hues: 'The so-called saturated colours are the most beautiful, that is those which consist of single elements, without the admixture of others.' [123] He pointed out that 'Warm colours put the mind in a state of excitement'. [124] Overall, he was for a maximum of visual excitement: 'an abundant diffusion of energy in the eye, swift rhythmic work in the visual nerves and the corresponding centres of the cerebrum, stimulates a general raising of the life-tone; like loud music, vivid visual impressions strengthen the exchange of matter, the whole organism, as it were, attunes itself to a more energetic harmony'. [125] Such images were contrasted to gloomy, unclear, 'scarcely nuanced images', which appealed to a 'sick organism'. [126] As he put it, 'a tired decadent winces at any kind of loud sound or lively colouring; he needs grey tones, quietness and nuances because his body organs are of low strength'. [127] In this contrast he saw 'the root of two kinds of art: the vital and cheerful and the calming, healing'. Many of Lunacharski's principles – the emphasis on regular forms, on rhythm, on the rousing quality of warm colours, and the corresponding depreciation of broken and irregular forms, were to enter organically into Soviet painting."<sup>30</sup>

The essay which the above extract references was republished at least once after the October 1917 revolution<sup>31</sup> and its principles were undoubtedly widely defused via Lunacharski's role (between 1917 and 1929<sup>32</sup>) as head of the *Commissariat for Public Enlightenment* (or NarKomPros)<sup>33</sup>, the organisation responsible all state involvement in cultural matters<sup>34</sup> in the Bolshevik government until 1936, when the *All-Union Committee for Art Affairs* took over<sup>35</sup>. As Cullerne Brown also points out:

"The biologism at the root of Lunacharski's thinking received a filip in the mid-twenties with the publication of works such as Ivan Pavlov's *Twenty-Year Experience...* (1924), Vladimir Bekhterev's works on reflexology and Konstantin Kornilov's work on 'reactology', which led to attempts to provide an aesthetics based on a mechanical materialism that rejected the role of consciousness"<sup>36</sup>

Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), based at the Institute of Physiology at the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1924<sup>37</sup>, produced work on conditioning which has its conceptual twin in the biomechanical ideas of Bogdanov and Lunacharski and their views about the ways in which art could manipulate human behaviour.

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29 *ibid.*, 29

30 *ibid.*, 31

31 *ibid.*, 32

32 Boris Schwarz *Music and Musical Life In Soviet Russia* (London, 1976), 111

33 David Elliot, *New Worlds: Russian Art And Society 1900-1937* (London, 1986), 18

34 Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art* (New York, 1973), 318

35 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 134

36 *ibid.*, 107

37 E. Ellis Cashmore & Bob Mullan *Approaching Social Theory* (London, 1983), 6

Pavlov's ideas found favour with Marxist philosophers because of their “materialist” foundation – he presented not a speculative philosophy, but one based on experimental evidence; as Trotsky wrote in *Literature and Revolution*: “It is clear to anyone, even to the uninitiated, that the work of our physiologist, Pavlov, is entirely along materialist lines. But what is one to say about the psycho-analytic theory of Freud? Can it be reconciled with materialism [?]...”<sup>38</sup>

The idea of materialism, specifically that of the dialectic kind, was one of the criticisms of many socialist philosophies in early twentieth century Russia. Bogdanov himself, and the writings of Mach and Avenarius were brutally attacked in a 1909 book by Lenin on Bogdanov's Empirio-monism entitled *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*:

“Bogdanov (like the rest of the Russian Machians) has never looked into the idealist views originally held by Mach and Avenarius, has never understood their fundamental idealist premises, and has therefore failed to discover the illegitimacy and eclecticism of their subsequent attempts to smuggle in materialism surreptitiously”<sup>39</sup>

The strong opposition against Bogdanov's philosophy by the head of the Bolshevik government would seem to imply that his ideas did not find favour at the executive level of power, and, therefore, their influence on the later Stalinist policies would be negligible. However, it is important to note that part of Lenin's opposition to Bogdanov arose from the fact that Lenin saw in him a competitor for power.

As head of the *Proletkult* proletarian culture movement, Bogdanov's organization was taking away power from the centralized art policies of the Communist Party (by the beginning of 1920 there were some 300 Proletkults with around 80,000 people active in their studios<sup>40</sup>). The same year Proletkult independence was revoked by the *Central Committee of The Russian Communist Party* and made subordinate to Lunacharski's *Commissariat for Public Enlightenment* (or *NarKomPros*)<sup>41</sup>, the organisation responsible for art until 1936, when the *All-Union Committee for Art Affairs* took over<sup>42</sup>.

The combination of Mach's and Avenarius's biomechanical philosophies and the way in which Lunacharski and Bogdanov integrated them into a materialist Marxist aesthetic theory, combined with the ideas of Taylor and the behaviourist experiments of Ivan Pavlov, created a perfect storm for the adoption of biomechanics as an aesthetic. These ideas were widely distributed through Lunacharski's role as the head of *NarKomPros* and Bogdanov's as the head of the powerful *Proletkult* proletarian culture movement, to the extent that by the mid-1920s “the ideas of both Lunacharski and Bogdanov had now entered fully into the philosophy around painting”<sup>43</sup>. This created a fertile set of interactions that allowed not only the later adoption of the repressive “Socialist Realism” as the official style of the Soviet Union, following the *First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers* on 29 October 1934<sup>44</sup> but also the flourishing of a school of bio-mechanical aesthetics in the early 1920s.

The theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold coupled a bio-mechanical view of humanity with

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38 Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art* (New York, 1973), 194

39 Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Monism* Chapter 1, Part 2

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/one2.htm> Accessed: 08/09/2010

40 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 51

41 David Elliot, *New Worlds: Russian Art And Society 1900-1937* (London, 1986), 18

42 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 134

43 *ibid.*, 107

44 *ibid.*, 140

Pavlovian psychology to create a type of machine-like acting completely stripped of intuition.<sup>45</sup> His work in this area seems to have left its main mark as a set of études, first publically performed in 1922<sup>46</sup> and still in use, designed to improve actor's physical abilities:

“Initially, Meyerhold advanced biomechanics as the theatrical equivalent of industrial time-and-motion study and compared it to the experiments in the scientific organization of labour by the American Frederick Winslow Taylor and his Russian follower Gastev. However, the resemblance was superficial and exaggerated by Meyerhold in order to show that his system was devised in response to the demands of the new mechanized age, as opposed to those of Stanislavsky and Tairov, which were unscientific and anachronistic.”<sup>47</sup>

Meyerhold elaborated on his ideas in a small number of essays and lectures in the early 1920s:

“The methods of Taylorism may be applied to the work of the actor in the same way as they are to any form of work with the aim of maximum productivity.

The conditions (1) that rest is embodied in the work process in the form of pauses, and (2) that art has a specific, vital function and does not serve merely as a means of relaxation, make it obligatory for the actor to utilize his time *as economically as possible*. Art is allocated a specific number of time units in the worker's timetable which must be utilized to the maximum effect. This means that one must not fritter away 1½-2 hours in making up and putting on one's costume.

The actor of the future will work without make-up and wear an overall, that is, a costume designed to serve as everyday clothing yet equally suited to the movements and concepts which the actor realizes on stage.

The Taylorization of the theatre will make it possible to perform in *one hour that which requires four at present*. [my emphasis]

For this the actor must possess: (1) *the innate capacity for reflex excitability*, which will enable him to cope with any emploi within the limits of his physical characteristics; (2) 'physical competence', consisting of a true eye, a sense of balance, and the ability to sense at any given moment the location of his centre of gravity.

Since the art of the actor is the art of plastic forms in space, he must study the mechanics of his body. This is essential because any manifestation of a force (including the living organism) is subject to constant laws of mechanics (and obviously the creation by the actor of plastic forms in the space of the stage is a manifestation of the force of the human organism).

The fundamental deficiency of the modern actor is his absolute ignorance of the laws of *biomechanics*.<sup>48</sup>

Notice, in the above paragraph, how the reduction of time that it takes a work to be performed has clear parallels with the New Fordist ideology of preventing Baumol's Cost Disease and also how the phrase “the innate capacity for reflex excitability” clearly draws on the lexicon of Pavlov's behaviourist experiments, elaborated later in the essay when he claims that “All psychological states are determined by specific psychological processes.”<sup>49</sup>, meaning perhaps, that “When actors place themselves physically in certain situations, they produce reflexively certain emotions in themselves and in the audience; for example, when they move as if they were running from a dog, they will become afraid, and so will the audience.”<sup>50</sup>

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45 David Elliot, *New Worlds: Russian Art And Society 1900-1937* (London, 1986), 18

46 Vsevolod Meyerhold *Meyerhold On Theatre* ed. and trans. Edward Braun (Chatham, 1969), 185

47 *ibid.*, 185

48 *ibid.*, 198-199

49 *ibid.*, 199

50 Julia Kursell *Piano Mécanique and Piano Biologique: Nikolai Bernstein's Neurophysiological Study of Piano Touch* *Configurations*, Volume 14, Number 3, Fall 2006, 246

Although Meyerhold's ideas about biomechanics and the way they were implemented seem more as a way of setting up a rhetorical extreme against existant forms of theatre training and methodology, here a clear aesthetic integration of Taylorist and Pavlovian ideas were attempted. New Fordism aims to take Meyerhold's unrealized, yet theoretically articulated version of a Pavlovian and Taylorist theatre and fully realize its potential, incorporating many of the developments in biomechanics and behavioural conditioning that have occurred in the intervening period.

The biomechanics of art was also to be seen in other artistic fields, such as the experiments of the physiologist Nikolai Bernstein and psychologist Tatyana Popova into piano playing technique carried out at The State Institute for Musicology in Moscow in the mid-1920s.<sup>51</sup>

This line of thinking eventually developed into one of the main tenets of Socialist Realism, articulated most famously by the cultural commissioner Andrei Zhdanov who, at the *First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers* declared that "Comrade Stalin has called our writers 'engineers of human souls'"<sup>52</sup>, an idea which clearly would not have existed without the distribution of Taylor's works by Gastev, the importance of Ford's tractors in Bolshevik farm collectivization, the biomechanical ideas of Avenarius and Mach which made their way into Russian Marxist aesthetic ideology through the writings of Lunacharski and Bogdanov, and the transformation of these ideas into practice by artists such as Meyerhold and researchers such as Bernstein and Popova.

## Externalization Of Labour

New Fordism is defined not only in its relationship to the works of Ford, Taylor and Pavlov and the application of their ideas, but also as the extension of an idea of externalized labour which can be found in performance art and relational aesthetics, as well as an extension of the quasi-paternalistic aspects of personal development highlighted in Gramsci's writing on Fordism.

A unique characteristic that distinguishes New Fordism from its precursors is the externalization of hidden labour. One of Henry Ford's greatest achievements was the popularization of the barbeque. In the production of his cars, Ford found that there was much wood scraps and sawdust left over as a waste product of the production process. In order to increase profit, he transformed these scraps into charcaol briquettes, simultaneously created an artificial demand for them by popularizing the barbeque. This ingenious transformation of a waste product into commodity is a key idea in any type of Fordist thinking.

Many of the works that have been discussed so far have large amounts of waste. Not in the form of physical by-products of the artistic process, but in the invisible, un-commodified labour that go into their production. This waste is hidden labour. With a painting, the labour that goes into its creation is hidden from the public, and only the finished object is presented, just as in Meyerhold's theatre, the rehearsal process is obscure from view. This hidden labour could be turned productive by transforming it into a performance, which can be commodified.

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51 *ibid.*, 246

52 Andrei Zhdanov, *Soviet Literature – The Richest In Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature* (Speech from the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress)

[http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit\\_crit/sovietwriterscongress/zhdanov.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwriterscongress/zhdanov.htm) Accessed: 26/07/10

Performance art and Relational Aesthetics are two of the few fields in which this externalized labour is made profitable. The work of Santiago Sierra is a fantastic example of Fordist ingenuity at work. Sierra's work is a clear extension and elaboration of the hidden labour that was always built into the system of artistic production (Duchamp's readymades were essentially a celebration of mass-production). Being concerned with the issues of labour, wages and their assessment and level of remuneration within capitalist regimes, Sierra often works with people left at the periphery of politics, such as ethnic groups, and politically, socially or otherwise disadvantaged, minorities, hiring them to perform menial tasks, usually in art shows, galleries or museum settings. By proceeding to redistribute invested capital and making this process public as a part of his practice, the vast majority of the work remains visible enabling him to achieve an admirable level of parsimony.

Similarly, in the work "Faith Moves Mountains", the Belgian artist Franciz Alys asks 500 volunteers to move a shovel of sand, one step at a time over a dune, from one side to the other. The work is recorded on video and later a "making of" film is presented, in which parts of the production process are also revealed. Thus, most of the artistic labour behind the piece is either externalised or visible.

New Fordism aims to externalize all of the hidden labour of a work and translate into a commodifiable performance.

## **New People For A New Art**

The final component that distinguishes New Fordism from its precedents is its re-engagement with the social implications of Gramsci's critique and placing of it within a larger context of historical movements which attempted to forge strong connections between art, work and society. This re-engagement draws especially on philosophies and practices of art in Russia just after the 1917 revolution - their connections to behaviourist forms of thinking typified by the work of Ivan Pavlov - and the role that the recently-formed Christian sect "The Church Of New Art" may play in defining the social milieu needed for New Fordism to take root.

In Gramsci's analysis in *Americanism and Fordism*, he highlights the way in which American society constructed legislation (alcohol prohibition) to create the ideal worker for the Fordist/Taylorist factory, and the way in which this way of working reflects back upon society itself (in his consideration of the "sexual question").

The prohibition of alcohol in America, between 1919 and 1933, created a sociological condition that allowed Taylorism and Fordism to flourish:

"In America rationalisation of work and prohibition are undoubtedly connected. The enquiries conducted into the workers' private lives and the inspection services created by some firms to control the "morality" of their workers are necessities of the new methods of work. People who laugh at these initiatives (failures though they were) and see in them only a hypocritical manifestation of "puritanism" thereby deny themselves any possibility of understanding the importance significance and objective import of the American phenomenon, which is *also* the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and man."<sup>53</sup>

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53 *Americanism And Fordism* Antonio Gramsci, "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" ed. & trans. Quintin

The key idea here is that of the creation of “a new type of worker and man” better suited to the highly rationalized work of the new factory regime. The “enquiries conducted into the workers' private lives”, referenced above, clearly refer to the work of the “Sociological Department” set up in Ford's factories following the introduction of the five-dollar day. The description of their function given in Richard Bak's *Henry and Edsel* is worth quoting at length in this respect:

“The Sociological Department implemented Ford's ideas about self-help. Between 1913 and 1921, as many as eighty investigators at a time fanned out to visit workers' homes, interview neighbors, and examine personal documents, all in an effort to determine wage increases and discharges. “Employees who cannot remain sober and industrious will be dismissed,” explained [WHO HE IS] Couzens, “but no one will be let out without being given every possible chance to make good. No one will be discharged until we find that he is of no use to us in any way whatever.”

“Ford, like all automakers, actively recruited immigrants for his factory...Foreign-born employees were enrolled in an Americanization program that stressed instruction in reading, writing, and speaking English, and were given lessons in civics and personal hygiene as well. Upon successful completion of the seventy-two session program, graduates participated in an elaborate commencement ceremony that culminated with their symbolic passing from the model of an immigrant ship into a giant melting pot...

“Although intrusive, the company's sociological program generally was viewed favorably, particularly by immigrants, many of whom were patiently taught how to use a toothbrush, change a diaper, or clean a sink. In addition, thousands of boys were given a practical education at the Henry Ford Trade School, another rehabilitative effort administered by the Sociological Department.”<sup>54</sup>

This intrusive sociological engineering was also seen upon the implementation of Ford's five-dollar day, “put into operation in January 1914, a kind of profit-sharing plan in which the minimum wage for any class of work and under certain conditions was five dollars a day”<sup>55</sup> only certain workers were eligible for this new minimum wage:

- “(1) Married men living with and taking good care of their families.
- (2) Single men over twenty-two years of age who are of proved thrifty habits.
- (3) Young men under twenty-two years of age, and women who are the sole support of some next of kin.”<sup>56</sup>

These restrictions also extended to living conditions, “The man and his home had to come up to certain standards of cleanliness and citizenship”<sup>57</sup> and “We had to break up the evil custom among many of the foreign workers of taking in boarders--of regarding their homes as something to make money out of rather than as a place to live in.”<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, however, the reasoning for these measures came not from paternalism “Nothing paternal was intended!”<sup>59</sup> but - in accordance with Gramsci's lucid analysis - the need for a new worker to better integrate with the new rationalized system of work, summed up pointedly by Ford as: “A man who is living aright will do his work aright.”<sup>60</sup>

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Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (USA, 1971), 302

54 Richard Bak, *Henry And Edsel – The Creation of the Ford Empire* (Hoboken, New Jersey & Canada, 2003), 72-73

55 Henry Ford *My Life And Work* (n.p., 1922), 87

56 *ibid.*, 88

57 *ibid.*, 88

58 *ibid.*, 89

59 *ibid.*, 88

60 *ibid.*, 88

This “paternalism” does not seem to have been borne out of a real concern for worker's well-being, as both Ford and Taylor had notoriously low opinions of their workers. Ford prevented unions from organizing in his factory, even directly going against federal law to do so (the National Labour Relations (Wagner) Act in 1935)<sup>61</sup>. As well as the use of a benign paternalism to transform the workers, similarly invasive but much more violent measures were used to prevent unionization at Ford's factory, such as the network of “service men” working under Ford executive Harry Bennett who intimidated, spied on and physically assaulted unionists and workers.<sup>62</sup>

Ford's contempt for his workers is also evident in his writing:

“Repetitive labour--the doing of one thing over and over again and always in the same way--is a terrifying prospect to a certain kind of mind. It is terrifying to me. I could not possibly do the same thing day in and day out, but to other minds, perhaps I might say to the majority of minds, repetitive operations hold no terrors... The average worker, I am sorry to say, wants a job in which he does not have to put forth much physical exertion--above all, he wants a job in which he does not have to think. Those who have what might be called the creative type of mind and who thoroughly abhor monotony are apt to imagine that all other minds are similarly restless and therefore to extend quite unwanted sympathy to the labouring man who day in and day out performs almost exactly the same operation.”<sup>63</sup>

which is paralleled in some of Taylor's own views, he describes the worker “Schmidt”, one of the pig iron handlers mentioned earlier, as “a man of the type of the ox, - no rare specimen of humanity, difficult to find and therefore very highly prized. On the contrary, he was a man so stupid that he was unfitted to do most kinds of labouring work, even”<sup>64</sup>

“Now one of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation is that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox than any other type. The man who is mentally alert and intelligent is for this very reason entirely unsuited to what would, for him, be the grinding monotony of work of this character. Therefore the workman who is best suited to handling pig iron is unable to understand the real science of doing this class of work. He is so stupid that the word “percentage” has no meaning to him, and he must consequently be trained by a man more intelligent than himself into the habit of working in accordance with the laws of this science before he can be successful.”<sup>65</sup>

However, Taylor's most famous pronouncement on the intelligence needed to undergo the desiccated processes of scientifically managed labour was as follows:

“The first illustration is that of handling pig iron... This work is so crude and elementary in its nature that the writer firmly believes that it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be.”<sup>66</sup>

In relation to this reference to the “untrained gorilla”, Gramsci explains that:

“Taylor is in fact expressing with brutal cynicism the purpose of American society – developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing

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61 Richard Bak, *Henry And Edsel – The Creation of the Ford Empire* (Hoboken, New Jersey & Canada, 2003), 221

62 *ibid.*, 157, 221-230

63 Henry Ford *My Life And Work* (n.p., 1922), 73

64 Frederick Winslow Taylor *The Principles Of Scientific Management* (New York, London, 1911), 30

65 *ibid.*, 28

66 *ibid.*, 18

productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect. But these things, in reality, are not original or novel; they represent simply the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialisation itself. This phase is more intense than preceding phases, and manifests itself in more brutal forms, but it is a phase which will itself be superceded by the creation of a psycho-physical nexus of a new type, both different from its predecessors and undoubtedly *superior*. A forced selection will ineluctably take place; a part of the old working class will be pitilessly eliminated from the world of labour, and perhaps from the world *tout court*.”<sup>67</sup>

The idea of “automatic and mechanical attitudes” breaking up a “psycho-physical nexus” clearly owes a large debt to the work of Ivan Pavlov and his conditioning experiments, which introduced into intellectual consciousness the idea that the repetition of stimuli could be used for conditioning human reactions at a deep and unconscious level. Gramsci here seems to be drawing a parallel with the conditioning of a psychological reflex, claiming that through the reduction of work to brutal repetition, a new psychological formation will be created.

This drive to create a new type of person better suited to rationalized society also has its parallels in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia. There the idea of the “New Person”, constructed through the post-revolutionary political framework and the organizatory powers of art was embedded into the dominant artistic ideologies.

This idea is first found in the utopian “theurgy” of the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900)<sup>68</sup> and then occurs in a more concrete and developed form in Nikolai Cherneshevski's novel *What Is To Be Done?*, later in official ideology as the *New Soviet Person* and finally as the *Stakhanovite* for whom there was an *All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites* in 1935.<sup>69</sup>

It reaches its artistic peak between 1924-8, especially in the works of the painter Deneika<sup>70</sup> and can be found in Lunacharski's writing about what kind of art an “active soul” should make “they depict the perfect person, either from the physical point of view of his emotions, in music, or tell of him, in poetry. They also depict a person striving for perfection”<sup>71</sup>. In Bogdanov's writing, his “theory of empiriomonism” “emphasized overcoming the duality of spirit and matter as a necessary condition for creating a supreme human being fit to live in the ultimate human collective”<sup>72</sup>.

The apex of this drive towards the “New Person” was reached in the idea of the Stakhanovite – a concept which resonates with those contained in Taylor's writings. Stakhanovism was a worker-led movement which created increases in productivity through intelligent divisions of labour.

“Stakhanovism had its origin in the record, set by Alexei Stakhanov, a coal miner, who on August 31, 1935, cut 102 tons of coal in six hours. This was not achieved by greater effort on Stakhanov's part as previous forms of socialist emulation had relied upon, but through a rationalisation of his working methods and technique...Stakhanov's innovation at the Trmino mine in the Ukraine involved the simple separation of two processes: coal cutting and propping timbers. This eliminated the necessity of changing from one operation to another and thus

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67 *Americanism And Fordism* Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks” ed. & trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (USA, 1971), 303

68 Irina Gutkin *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1880-1934* (Illinois, 1999), 7

69 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 133

70 *ibid.*, 100

71 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (Singapore, 1998), 31

72 Irina Gutkin *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1880-1934* (Illinois, 1999), 23

enabled picks and mechanical drills to be continuously utilized throughout the shift.”<sup>73</sup>

Stakhanov's innovation led to a worker-driven movement increasing productivity by improving techniques, throughout the whole of Russia.

“Stakhanovism spread rapidly: Stakhanov made his record at the end of August 1935, by the 1st Nov., 15.5% of those employed in the oil industry were working with new methods and by 1st August, 1936, the number reached 57.7%+By the end of August, 1936, Stakhanovites comprised between a third and a half of the workforce in many industries.”<sup>74</sup>

The movement led to levels of productivity which outstripped even Ford's:

“The vice-president of "Autolite" confirmed that Stakhanovites making electrical equipment for motor tractors surpassed the U.S. productivity rate 1.5 times. In the “Molotov” motor-car factory at Gorki the average time for production of a valve was 2.7 minutes compared with 3.4 at Ford works; a piston, 2.8, compared with 5 at Ford...”<sup>75</sup>

The Stakhanovite was seen as the latest version of the “New Person” concept which had underwritten so much Russian Marxist aesthetic theory, an idea put best by Stalin, describing Stakhanovites as “new people, people of a special type.”<sup>76</sup> However, although Stakhanovism seems to have Tayloristic qualities to it, it is important to differentiate between these two movements, which have fundamentally different concepts of the role of management. Taylor asserted that improvements can only be implemented scientifically from above, whilst Stakhanovism was a movement in which the workers initiated the improved working practices, often working in ways which exceeded accepted scientific norms (e.g. casting iron faster): “Stakhanovism is distinct from Taylorism in that Taylorism is imposed from above and requires a non-thinking worker whereas Stakhanovism is based on the inventive genius of the workman himself.”<sup>77</sup>

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, the idea of art as a transformative medium for creating a new person suitable, not to an increasingly industrialized Russia, but to a utopianly socialist one, had infected many aesthetic ideologies. The Russian futurist Tret'iakov claimed that “production of the new man, by means of art as one of the few tools of such production, had been futurism's compass from its infancy”<sup>78</sup> and Vasily Kandinsky wrote that “Painting is art and art is not, on the whole the senseless creation of works that diffuse in a void, but a purposeful force; it is intended to serve the development and perfection of the human soul”<sup>79</sup>.

The writer Maxim Gorky's view of art also seems to be in tune with this idea. He seems to view art as a civilising way of taming the baser instincts in humanity, as can be seen through these remarks made in his “Untimely Thoughts” columns, printed in the Petrograd

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73 Graham, Donald, "The Nature and Origins of the Stakhanov Movement" (1978). *Open Access Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 5555., 53

74 *ibid.*, 66

75 *ibid.*, 55

76 Josef Stalin, *Speech at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites - 17 November 1935* <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1935/11/17.htm> accessed 15/04/2013

77 Graham, Donald, "The Nature and Origins of the Stakhanov Movement" (1978). *Open Access Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 5555., 102

78 Irina Gutkin *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1880-1934* (Illinois, 1999), 55

79 Vasily Kandinsky *The Spiritual Value In Painting* from 'Soviet Art 1920s-1930s' Ed. Vladimir Leniashin (New York, 1988), 55

Newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life) from 1 May 1917 to 16 July 1918:<sup>80</sup>

“Obscene 'literature' is especially dangerous, especially contagious precisely now when all the dark instincts are aroused in people, and feelings of indignation and insult are still persistent-feelings which give rise to vengefulness.” (27 April, 1917)<sup>81</sup>

“...Our artists should at once invade the chaos of the moods of the street with all the power of their talents, and I am sure that the triumphant invasion by beauty of the soul of a somewhat crazed Russian would allay his anxieties, subdue the turbulence of certain not-very-laudable feelings-as, perhaps, greed-and would generally help him become more humane.” (9 May, 1917)<sup>82</sup>

“The task of culture-to develop and strengthen a social conscience and a social morality in man, to develop and organize all personal abilities and talents-can this task be fulfilled in times of widespread brutality” (9 June, 1917)<sup>83</sup>

Though Gorky's comments seem to symbolize a view of culture that helps to civilize humanity, it could also fall into Maynard Solomon's analysis of Soviet aesthetic as a tool primarily to further an antisexual aesthetic.<sup>84</sup> Gramsci understood the importance of sexuality in the make-up of the Taylorist or Fordist worker, dedicating a section of his essay in *Americanism and Fordism* to the “sexual question”, an idea only quoted and briefly mentioned in Dr. Droppe's analysis:

“It seems clear that the new industrialism wants ... the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of "excess" is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism.”<sup>85</sup>

Gramsci sees this as a logical outcome from the Taylorization of working processes, yet its implications for the Taylorization of art are only tantalizingly hinted at by Droppe:

“New Fordism requires the complete subsumption of sexual desire to the creative act. To this end, New Fordism proposes the extension of the existing Church of New Music to become the Church Of New Art – an organization premised on a religious fervour, commitment, and vow of celibacy.”

Here Droppe makes reference to the Church Of New Art (CoNA), a recently formed Christian sect whose doctrine explores the point of crossover between the spirituality of art, the formalism of religious regulation and the dedication, focus and zeal which characterizes both undertakings. Led by the elusive Reverend Eli Firmaments, and refusing to assert a web presence, CoNA preaches a message which extends many biblical ideas into the realm of artistic production. Advertising is frowned upon as “the devil's artform”, promoting “greed, vanity and fornication”. A work of art is seen as a gift given from God “inspiration is God speaking to you”, and as such, is an activity that should be carried out with deference and respect. The biblical story of Jesus and the money-lenders is seen as an allegory for the role of money in artistic creation, which is a holy act – by letting your work engage in a market, you sully the Lord's gift. Similarly, “every single work of art that goes

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80 Maxim Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts* trans. Herman Ermolaev (London, 1968), viii

81 *ibid.*, 21

82 *ibid.*, 36

83 *ibid.*, 55

84 Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art* (New York, 1973), 238-241

85 *Americanism And Fordism* Antonio Gramsci, “Prison Notebooks” pg 305

unsold is a gift to the Lord”.<sup>86</sup>

The most interesting thing about CoNA, in relation to our contemplation of “the sexual question” is its restrictions upon sexuality. Onanism and any type of fornication are thoroughly discouraged as they are seen *almost in biomechanical terms* as activities which divert energy away from the praising of God through the act of working – and specifically of working on art. Also interesting to our consideration of New Fordism is the fact that the church advocates an extremely progressive view of the type of art created, refusing to condemn even those works that may traditionally be considered blasphemous. One reason for this is the distinctly anti-market approach that the sect takes towards artistic creation, seeing it as a holy activity and gift to and from God which should not be sullied by a contamination with a market that promotes vanity and greed. The content of the work is seen as irrelevant due to the focus on the holiness of the act of working, and the fact that “He knows what is in your heart”, re-locating judgements of morality from the mortal to immaterial realm.

Given the importance that the “New Person” has in the ideology of Fordism, it seems that the New Fordist Organization may see in CoNA a tool for the transformation of the egotistical, vain and greedy figure of the modern artist, needlessly expending biomechanical energy through fornication and onanism, into the “New Person” best suited to the rationalization of artistic production promised with New Fordism.

## **The Shock Of The New Fordism**

New Fordism aims to build upon and develop the many historical precedents for the application of Fordist, Taylorist and biomechanical principles onto the production of art. By using Gramsci's insightful analysis of the Fordist and Taylorist phenomena, the New Fordist Organization hopes to develop a new way of working which uses the process of mass-production as a way of embedding style into artistic works. By using the writings of the four key conceptual figures of New Fordism - Henry Ford, Antonio Gramsci, Frederick Taylor, and Ivan Pavlov – combined with the latest technology and a re-imagining and extrapolation of the historical precedents (particularly those from 1920s Russia), New Fordism aims to function as a new way of working, taking onboard the economic realities of 2013 and re-purposing them to its own ends.

David Pocknee  
24/04/2013

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<sup>86</sup> All quotations from the author's correspondances with Eli Firmaments (March-April 2013)