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Iambic Tetrameter  
in the Service of Revolution: Notes  
on the System of Art and Literary Education  
in Post-revolutionary Russia

In 1919, the poet Aleksei Gastev, initiator of the Institute for Scientific Organisation of Labour and one of the most important theorists of the *Proletkult*<sup>1</sup> movement, proclaimed:

“We do not want to be prophets; yet, nevertheless, with proletarian art we must undertake a stunning revolution in artistic devices [...]. Futurism has raised the problem of ‘Word-Creation’, and the proletariat will in turn inevitably raise it as well, but it will reform the word itself not only grammatically: the proletariat will take the risk of a complete technicalisation of the word. The word, taken in its everyday sense, is clearly already insufficient for the productive goals of the proletariat. Will it be sufficient for such a sophisticated and novel kind of creative activity as proletarian art? We do not predetermine the forms of technicalisation of the word; yet it is clear that it will not involve merely the strengthening of verbal sound. The word as such will be slowly severed from its living bearer—the man. Here we closely approach some really new Combined Art, in which purely human manifestations, wretched contemporary theatrical performances and chamber music will all be pushed aside. We are now moving towards an unprecedented objective demonstration of things, mechanised crowds and a staggering open grandeur, which knows nothing of the intimate and lyric.”<sup>2</sup>

“New art” for “New Man” [“Chelovek”] was proclaimed as an agenda for many art movements in post-revolutionary Russia, but few of these movements

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1 Proletkult [Пролеткульт] is the portmanteau for Proletarskaia Kul'tura (Russian for “proletarian culture”), a grouping of “proletarian cultural and educational organisations”, which existed during the first post-revolutionary years; it was founded in 1917. Active members of Proletkult included A. Lunacharsky, A. Bogdanov, F. Kalinin, V. Polyansky and others. The main goal of the movement was the creation and promotion of so-called proletarian culture and the theoretical development of its major principles.

2 Aleksei Gastev, On the tendencies of proletarian culture [Гастев А., О тенденциях пролетарской культуры] *Proletarian Culture* [Пролетарская культура] 9–10 (1919): 26. In Russian.