

major choreographic work, the second act of Dmitry Shostakovich's first ballet *The Golden Age* (1930), Ross does a beautiful job at bringing back to life the look and texture of lost ballets.

Throughout his career, Yakobson was locked in a permanent battle with the Soviet cultural watchdogs. Even though his ballets were censored, forbidden, or quickly removed from the repertoire for their artistic iconoclasm, his story is a fascinating lesson in artistic survival. Determined to bring modernity to the Soviet ballet stage, Yakobson consistently worked on the kind of contemporary topics the authorities were desperate for, but which few choreographers were drawn to. This is why the authorities both feared and needed Yakobson.

Given the central role of Yakobson's ongoing struggle against censorship in this story, it is regrettable that Ross relied primarily on conversations with Yakobson's widow, Irina Yakobson, and other interviews in her account of Yakobson's struggles. A much richer picture could have been given had Ross consulted the relevant records in the archives of St. Petersburg, namely the records of the Kirov Theatre at TsGALI and of the relevant local party organs at TsGAIPD. Ross's treatment of the actual censorship process is often vague, or in the case of Yakobson's prime venue for creation in the 1950s and 1960s, the Kirov Theatre, incorrect (p. 328). The Kirov's artistic council was not an ad hoc body formed anew for each separate performance, but a permanent body. Representatives of the party and government were invited to vet new productions, but the day-to-day working composition of the artistic council pivoted around the theatre's artistic leaders and representatives of its different sections (orchestra, opera, ballet, and so on). This is important because the Kirov's opposition to Yakobson's work reflected not just political or ideological concerns, but also the different, conservative artistic philosophy of the ballet leadership.

Ross's book is also a story of Jewish resistance through art. Her account of the anti-Semitic persecutions of the late 1940s and Yakobson's decision to start working on Jewish themes at one of the most dangerous moments for Jews in Soviet history offers a crucial key into this artist's psyche, but more care should have been taken not to overemphasize this theme. It is misleading to call the *zhdanovshchina*—the all-out assault on cultural life after the war “Zhdanov's anti-Semitic campaign” (p. 171). Also, Yakobson was indeed the victim of an anti-Semitic denunciation in the Kirov's newspaper in 1951, but while he was not choreographing for the theatre for almost four years afterwards, there was hardly anyone else who was: between 1951 and 1955 the Kirov Ballet staged only one new ballet, while there was not a single ballet premier at the Bolshoi between 1950 and 1953.

But these criticisms should not deflect from the book's major achievements. The best chapter of the book deftly uses interviews with dancers and spectators, memoirs, and an analysis of rare film material to bring back to life the spontaneous, brilliant, and torturous labor behind the brilliant works Yakobson created for his own company, Choreographic Miniatures, toward the end of his life, and their reception by Soviet audiences. Soviet ballet is usually seen as an officially sanctioned, compliant celebration of national culture, but Ross convincingly shows that “Yakobson's work reveals dance as the ultimate stealth art form—his ballets can appear complacent and docile on the surface while just below they display an aggressive aesthetic that challenges the status quo” (p. 3). Russian intellectuals were drawn to Yakobson's inventive, unorthodox work because it represented “moral bravery,” “intellectual courage,” and “a beacon of moral strength in those bleak times” (p. 47). Ross's dedication to her subject has helped to resurrect a lost master and his works and to bring his story to a Western audience.

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Gan, Aleksei. *Constructivism*. Translated by Christina Lodder. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. xcv + 77pp. \$32.50. ISBN 978-84-939231-2-9.

The art historian Christina Lodder's English translation of Aleksei Gan's theoretical manifesto, *Constructivism* (1922), represents a long-awaited resource for scholars of Soviet visual, cultural, and political history, as well as an invaluable text for the neophytes only venturing into the field.

The book imitates the original format of the manifesto and participates in the intellectual retrieval of Gan from relative obscurity. Lodder's introductory essay masterfully sets the historical context into which the manifesto was born, elucidating its more challenging terms, such as “tectonics,” “*faktura*,” and “construction,” to name a few, while fleshing out the nuanced differences between Soviet and Western Constructivist aesthetics. By highlighting the artistic historical importance of a “valuable monograph” by Alexandr Lavrentiev and a novel exposition of Gan's “life and work” by Kristine Romberg, Lodder additionally familiarizes the readers with some of the most serious and current research on “this enigmatic cultural figure” (p. ix).

The multifaceted nature of Gan's talents, according to Lodder, embodied the “inter-disciplinary” quality of the movement itself (p. xi). Through his own writings and in Lodder's analysis, Gan emerges as an intellectual polymath: an artist-engineer and an ardent Marxist ideologue, who contributed to virtually every aspect and medium of Constructivist theory and design, comprising theater, architecture, sculpture, film, and typography. Lodder poignantly reminds her readers, however, that Gan was never a withdrawn doctrinaire, despite his copious theorizations. Instead, as “an agitator, publisher, activist and promoter,” he physically inserted himself into the production of Constructivism, seeking to forge a “Communist expression of material structure” (pp. xi, 53).

The format of Lodder's introductory essay, printed on a white, smooth paper-stock and punctuated with exceptional photographs of Gan captured at work, in addition to the reproductions of his graphic designs produced for Soviet art journals, among other imagery, differs from the architectonics of the manifesto, constituted by the ivory-toned, grainy paper-stock against which the variegated typography in black conceived by Gan appears. This shift not only draws a tangible temporal line between the two texts but also demarcates a physical transfer into the Constructivist era.

Within the manifesto, Gan's typographic choices enact the vociferous, militaristic nature of the author's polemics in defense of Constructivism and its scientific-technological penchants at the time when the Soviet state initiated its turn away from the avant-garde experimentation toward more traditional forms of expression (figuration, realism, and so on). Gan modulates the form of his address to the reader by manipulating the material of the text. He changes fonts according to the messages, bolds and/or enlarges lettering to amplify the volume of his voice, unexpectedly orients the words diagonally on the page, transforming entire sentences into kinetically charged projectiles, or dedicates certain pages to a schema-like distribution of words associated with technical manuals. Gan prefers to compact the larger body of the text into dense matter (at times interrupted with black, solid bars/rectangles), as in the chapter, “Art is the product of the social life of ‘crippled’ generations” (p. 23). This visual experience reinforces the compulsive urgency of his appeals, the sheer quantity of his thoughts, and transforms the crammed but organized bulk of his writing into a unified mass of letters—a literary (if not literal) incarnation of a cohesive Communist-Constructivist collective for which Gan yearned. Undoing, what Gan called “the chronic incapacity in action,” the feverish staccato of Gan's words, the tightly packed typescript, and the dynamic textual graphics ultimately manufacture an experience of a united and univocal crowd, readily equipped for mass-action. Gan's “Constructivism,” on the level of both content and form, transfigures into a weapon of agitation. The experience of reading of this text-object, then, will not only be intellectually enriching, but also will reify one of the most fundamental aspirations of the group, that is, an elision of the boundary between art and life.

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Semenenko, Aleksei. *The Texture of Culture: An Introduction to Yuri Lotman's Semiotic Theory*. Semiotics and Popular Culture. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. xvi + 177 pp. \$85.00. ISBN 978-1-13700-714-8.

I should warn the readers, first of all, that my evaluation of Alexei Semenenko's book would be subjective. It needs to be subjective: the book is dedicated to the theories of my friend and colleague