

Title: The Agit-Flights of Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Pil'niak

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The paper will offer readings of essays by Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Pil'niak that issued from 1925 agit-flights to the Russian hinterlands, in particular: B. Pil'niak, "Rossiia v polete" (M-L: Moskovskii rabochii, 1926) and the short pieces in the section "Probegi i prolety" in V. Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii schet* (Leningrad: Izd-vo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1928). Scott Palmer's recent study of aviation and culture in the first decades of the Soviet Union shows how Russian and especially Stalinist culture tapped into--and in certain respects diverged from--the mythologizing power of the still relatively new technology of flight to capture the popular imagination and instill a powerful (and appropriately delimited) modernizing impulse (Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006]). The historian Robert Wohl has offered wonderful accounts of the assimilation and influence of flight in European popular culture and high modernist art in the first decades of the twentieth century (A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918 [New Haven: Yale UP, 1994]; The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950 [New Haven: Yale UP, 2005]). Palmer relates in brief how Shklovskii and Pil'niak (among others) participated in a highly organized, officially mandated project to impress the hinterlands through contact with airplanes, and to then publicize the experience. Close attention to some of the resulting works suggests that they may complicate the larger story scholars tell about aviation and popular culture. By the mid-1920s, it appears to have been a challenge for these avant-garde writers to talk about airplanes and flight in ways that satisfied the mandate underwriting the journalistic project without resorting to already hackneyed formulations. The pieces they wrote do satisfy the propagandistic demands placed on their authors, but they also undermine some of the conventional understandings of airplanes and flight on which the whole project depends.