

Title: As Like It as You Like It: The Dialectic of Art and Criticism in Modernist Art
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Abstract:

One salient characteristic of modernist art is that it is not and tries not to be like the world in which we live. Another is that it becomes ever more difficult for us to like it: I contend that before modernist art is checked by the postmodernist interventions, it seeks to compel understanding at the expense of pleasure. Conversely, criticism in the twentieth century becomes--as Paul de Man points out in his essays on Maurice Blanchot, Georges Poulet, and Jacques Derrida collected in *Blindness and Insight*-- belletristically sensible. I will argue that this tendency of art to become criticism and that of criticism to become art is rooted in the various early twentieth century theoretical responses to Hegel's critique of the Cartesian and Kantian subject-object dichotomies as presented in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) and the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1817). In the 20th century, I am working with Gustav Shpet's *Appearance and Sense* (1914), György Lukács's early writings like *Soul and Form* (1911), *Philosophy of Art* (1912), and/or *Aesthetics* (1916), and Mikhail Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1919-1921). I will propose readings of works by Mayakovsky, Kharms, and Platonov that figure the subject-object relation as the lynchpin of the aesthetic theory and the theory of representation for the modernist project in Russian literature.