

THE ENEMY ON TRIAL

*Early Soviet Courts
on Stage and Screen*



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Most honored guests, we're tragedians ourselves, and our tragedy is the finest and best we can create. At any rate, our entire state has been constructed so as to be a "representation" of the finest and noblest life—the very thing we maintain is most genuinely a tragedy. So we are poets like yourselves, composing in the same *genre*, and your competitors as artists and actors in the finest drama, which true law alone has the natural powers to "produce" to perfection (of that we're quite confident). So don't run away with the idea that we shall ever blithely allow you to set up stage in the market-place and bring on your actors whose fine voices will carry further than ours. Don't think we'll let you declaim to women and children and the general public, and talk about the same practices as we do but treat them differently—indeed, more often than not, so as virtually to contradict us. We should be absolutely daft, and so would any state as a whole, to let you go ahead as we've described before the authorities had decided whether your work was fit to be recited and suitable for public performance or not.

—Plato, *The Laws* VII.817

INTRODUCTION

Historians of Stalin's Great Terror, Western journalists assigned to the Soviet beat, and political dissidents ordinarily describe the public trials that punctuated the first two decades of Soviet history as highly theatrical spectacles. Using terminology borrowed from the stage, they label these *pokazatel'nyi protsessy* (show trials) bad drama and expand some part of the theatrical metaphor to support their claim. Some writers express their outrage at the hand-picked audiences, the defendants' memorized scripts for confession, or rehearsals that took the form of grueling interrogation or torture. Others denounce what happened behind the scenes, the tyrannical direction of the state's prosecutor Nikolai Krylenko, and the fatal consequences of bringing down the curtain on the accused. In all of these cases, the theatrical metaphor helps to discredit show trials as legal procedure and ultimately to critique the legitimacy of the Soviet regime. Such writers downplay the denotation of the adjective *pokazatel'nyi* (model or exemplary) and instead focus on its connotations of *na pokaz* or *pokazukha* (just for show). They have equated the theater with fiction and presume that any intrusion of theatrical fiction into the realm of truth and justice makes the courtroom incapable of producing either.¹

Nonetheless, an examination of trials outside of the Soviet Union shows that drama and the law have been longtime partners in the Western legal tradition. Phenomena as diverse as the Nuremberg trials and the Scopes monkey trial show that, even in the twentieth century, adversarial law has relied heavily on drama in its determination of justice. The theatrical nature of jurisprudence alone does not undermine the legitimacy of the court, and to condemn Soviet show trials for their theatricality simply states the obvious. The use of the theatrical metaphor to denounce Soviet jurisprudence becomes even more problematic in light of the frequency with which this particular trope appears in more general discussions of the

first two decades of the country's history. It has become commonplace to refer to the "tragic" events of the civil war and collectivization, "dramatic" shifts in political alliances and associations, and the "director" behind the scenes of various Party congresses. Theater as metaphor and as cultural model has developed into what is arguably the most widespread interpretive tool not only of Soviet studies but also of cultural studies as a whole.² The ubiquity of the theatrical metaphor would seem to diminish its heuristic capacity and to take the sting out of the accusation that Soviet show trials were theatrical. If, to borrow from William Shakespeare, all the world is a stage, how can we express indignation that the Soviet courts were too?

In order to give this accusation meaning, we must stop using the theater as an archetype exempt from the vicissitudes of history and the peculiarities of culture.³ We must reconnect Soviet show trials, which indeed constituted illegitimate legal procedure, with the actual dramatic practice on stages and screens of the early Soviet period. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the proliferation of theatrical and cinematic theories and the intense vitality of stage and screen suggest a more concrete link between public trials and the theatrical terminology used to describe them. As historians have repeatedly noted, Russian culture at the time of the 1917 revolution was highly theatrical in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word.⁴ Hence, we must try to understand theater and cinema, and their respective relationships to life outside the auditorium, just as those who created the institution of the Soviet show trial did in their day. By examining the dramatic means of representation on stage and screen specific to the early Soviet period, we can see what elements of theater and cinema entered the Soviet courtroom, how they functioned in a legal setting, and why they made Soviet show trials arguably the kangaroo courts of the twentieth century.

The semiotician Iurii Lotman employs a similar approach in his studies devoted to the theatricality of the early nineteenth-century Russian gentry.⁵ Although his discussion treats neither law nor the courts, Lotman connects the diversity of theatrical activity in the first quarter of the nineteenth century to an expansion in the range of possible modes of behavior among members of the Russian upper class. In his analysis of the Decembrist uprising of 1825, Lotman shows that the interpenetration of theater and life allowed noblemen to assume a succession of social roles and to view themselves as actors on the stage of history, capable of revolutionary social change. Lotman never turns his attention to the Bolshevik revolution approximately one hundred years later; nonetheless, the 1917 coup d'état presents itself as a logical candidate for this type of analysis because

of the fusion of the dramatic and political spheres that made the earlier period worthy of discussion. However, whereas Lotman correctly defines the theatricality of the early nineteenth century as an essentially liberating force, the present study contends that post-revolutionary theatricality, as seen in the Soviet show trial, functioned in a contrary manner and actually diminished the number and fluidity of roles available to Soviet citizens in the 1920s and 1930s. The radically different understanding of drama on stage and screen after 1917, as well as the Soviet state's use of this understanding to achieve specific ideological ends, gave post-revolutionary theatricality a form and function opposite of that of the century before.

The theater and cinema that came into public trials after the revolution were part of a larger modernist movement in which art did not merely reflect or comment upon life but actually helped to reform, to redirect, and ultimately to revolutionize the lives of artists and spectators alike. Within this broad, modernist agenda, drama had particular importance, since theater did not privilege language as a semiotic system and, as a result, allowed for the reordering of all semiotic systems, which language had traditionally dominated in Western culture. Upsetting the apple cart of artistic representation, the theater at the turn of the century created a new relationship between the subject and object of perception and cognition, effectively destroying the dualism that had characterized this relationship previously.⁶ First theater and then cinema opened up the possibility of interaction between art and its audience, making drama the ideal means of mythopoesis, that is, the creation of myth with the power to revolutionize life. Bringing drama into public trials after 1917 was not intended to discredit the Soviet courtroom but rather to transform it into a powerful arena for propaganda, education, and legal mythopoesis.

Representatives of the Soviet state left an indelible ideological imprint on the fundamentally modernist conception of the drama in the show trials of the 1920s and 1930s, however. Elements from stage and screen were used to strengthen the state's case against those it deemed criminal, politically dangerous, counter-revolutionary, or some combination of all three. These enemies of the people had little or no freedom to use drama in their defense. Unlike O. J. Simpson or the Chicago Seven, the defendants in *pokazatel'nye protsessy* found themselves the victims of a totalizing script that allowed for no outcome other than guilty as charged. Originally, the avant-garde theatrical and cinematic techniques brought into the show trial were peripheral to ideological and moral concerns, but the manner in which these techniques were implemented in the Soviet courtroom resulted in an all-encompassing and ever expanding script for confession that culminated in Stalin's Great Terror. The illegitimacy of the Soviet

show trial arose not merely from its theatricality but from the severe imbalance in access to the dramatic means of representation, an imbalance that figured as one of the show trial's constituent parts from its earliest instances.

Because this study analyzes the convergence of theatrical and cinematic paradigms in show trials of the early Soviet period, it addresses neither the individual psychology of confession (as Arthur Koestler does in his novel *Darkness at Noon*) nor the vast body of archival material on individual trials that has come into the hands of scholars since 1992.⁷ Although both of these topics provide rich material for the cultural historian, they do not necessarily reveal the origins of the show trial's totalizing legal discourse and only confirm the efficacy of this discourse once it was put into place. The present study looks for the patterns that anticipated the show trial's totalizing script in a variety of popular media from the 1920s, including the Soviet and foreign press, propaganda and professional theaters, and documentary and feature films. Each of these media had its own unique form, function, and message in Soviet culture of the time; and those organizing early show trials transferred the patterns of legal propaganda from print, stage, and screen into the courtroom to make show trials comprehensible to their intended audience of millions of Soviet citizens.

An examination of legal propaganda on stage and screen reveals that theater and cinema developed overlapping models of confession, repentance, and reintegration into society during the 1920s. Propaganda theater in the form of the *agitsud* (mock trial) initially codified this tripartite paradigm, focusing on the defendant's almost religious conversion to the new way of life. Popular films and documentaries of the decade placed the threefold pattern in a specifically melodramatic context that emphasized the events preceding and following the conversion of the accused. When these two models of confession came together in actual courtroom practice, they allowed trial organizers to create a script with roles not only for court officials and defendants, but also for spectators of the trial, as we see in the first show trial of Stalin's era, the Shakhty Affair of 1928. By the end of the 1920s, the show trial had become a legal melodrama that unmasked the regime's internal, hidden enemies and hoped to compel its spectators to replicate the *samokritika* (self-criticism) of defendants on trial.

After the paradigm for confession, repentance, and reintegration into society coalesced in the Soviet courtroom, the very media that originally generated this formula were prohibited from its further elaboration. The legal melodrama of *samokritika* belonged exclusively in the actual courtroom, and commentaries on or alterations to the rigid script of the Soviet show trial were in effect banned from the stage and screen. By the 1930s,

the show trial had been firmly institutionalized, and theater and cinema could only depict the personal, emotional drama of defendants who replicated the threefold paradigm without fail, even if reintegration into society had become entirely impossible in actual trials of the day. After the Soviet court seized the dramatic means of representation and learned to wield them effectively in public trials of the 1920s and 1930s, it obscured the dramatic origins of the show trial's script and made the stage and screen return to the courtroom to regain only the smallest fraction of the mythopoetic power they had once given the Soviet show trial.

DRAMA AND THE LAW

If drama's connection to the law is not unique to the Soviet show trial, neither is it solely the property of the other twentieth-century trials mentioned above. During the last one hundred years, print and electronic media have broadcast the dramatic modeling of public trials to an audience immeasurably greater than that of any previous century. However, the connection between courtroom and stage reaches back to the very foundations of Western civilization—as this book's epigraph, taken from Plato's *Laws*, attests. Since fifth-century Greece, manuals of rhetoric have taught that the art of the lawyer is, in essence, that of the actor.⁸ In addition, the canon of western European drama, built on the foundation of Attic tragedy, regularly turns to the courtroom for its setting, to legal testimony for its dialogue, and to a trial's verdict for its dénouement. Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Kleist's *The Broken Pitcher*, Shaw's *St. Joan*, and Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, all demonstrate the remarkable frequency with which Western dramatists have turned to the law for thematic and structural purposes. As an eastern sibling in the same dramatic tradition, the Russian theatrical repertoire displays the same tendency: Kapnist's *Iabeda* (*Chicanery*), Tolstoi's *The Living Corpse*, Sukhovo-Kobylin's *Trilogy*, and Voinovich's *Tribunal* set part or all of their action in a courtroom. Whether one questions, as Plato does, or praises the theater's use of legal material, the fact remains that drama and the law share common roots and overlapping territory in Western culture.

Given this close tie between drama and the law, it is surprising that scholars of both jurisprudence and the theater have paid little attention to this relationship during an era of growing interest in cultural studies. Over the past twenty years, academia has created a small industry out of the study of popular legal culture and literature and the law.⁹ But only a fraction of this scholarly attention has focused on drama's relationship to the law, and usually this discussion treats great works of dramatic literature,

such as Euripides or Shakespeare's tragedies, to the exclusion of dramatic performance.¹⁰ The legal establishment tends to use an ahistorical, acultural model of the theater, whose dangers were noted above, in the discussion of drama's utility in the courtroom.¹¹ Only a handful of scholars, all of whom address highly specific areas of inquiry, have noted the tense and fluctuating relationship between dramatic practice and the law.¹² In spite of recent interest in the field of law and literature in both law schools and the literary establishment, the study of drama and the law has found no theoretician as its advocate in the last few decades.

We can better understand the shape and significance of the Soviet show trial's particular fusion of drama and the law if we place it within the larger context of Western legal and dramatic development dating back to ancient Greece. Law courts and the theater evolved at the same time in Athenian society and shared striking procedural, administrative, formal, rhetorical, and religious similarities.¹³ As a number of influential scholars (including Jacob Burckhardt, Johan Huizinga, and Walter Benjamin) have noted, drama and the law in ancient Greek society were both instances of agon, that is, the "contest bound by fixed rules and sacred in form, where the two contending parties invoked the decision of an arbiter."¹⁴ Like its successors in Western culture, Attic law used agon in the form of specific rhetorical strategies to determine *dike* or justice in the courts. However, ancient Greek drama both represented agon in the action of individual plays and was itself a type of agon, much like the law. A large number of surviving Greek tragedies—including Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax*, and the majority of Euripides' plays—contain scenes of rhetorical agon, which "consist of a pair of opposing set speeches of substantial, and about equal, length," and "evoke the lawcourts not only in their structure but also in their style."¹⁵ In addition to this structural and stylistic affinity between Athenian drama and law, the renowned competitions between playwrights for the feast of Dionysus were in the form of a contest using religious, moral, and rhetorical criteria to determine the best tragedies and comedies in any given year. Needless to say, the court and the theater were separate institutions in ancient Greek society; but the fundamentally agonistic nature of each made them kindred in both form and in function. The fixed rules and sacred structure of dramatic representation and competition were easily transported into the law, which, in its turn, gave ancient Greek tragedy its essentially forensic structure.¹⁶

Cementing the bond between these two institutions, Athens's theatergoing public and her juries included the same group of people, whose responsibility it was, in both the theater and the courts of law, to judge the spectacle and decide the fate of those represented on stage.¹⁷ The presence

and participation of an adjudicating audience firmly united drama and the law in ancient Greece, as it did in the European Middle Ages and continues to do to the present day. In order to understand the complex and ever changing relationship between drama and the law in Western civilization, we must focus our attention on the nature of the audience in the theater and court, as well as on the forms its participation could and did take either in ancient Greece or in the Soviet Union. The constantly shifting possibilities for theatrical and legal spectatorship become visible on the background of the law's continuous secularization in Western society. As sociologists and legal anthropologists have described, Western law has evolved from its initial identification with religious morality in ancient society toward an abstract concept of secularized justice.¹⁸ Putting the theatrical and legal spectator back into this evolutionary schema allows us to discern the distinctive form of the relationship between drama and the law in a given time and place and, consequently, to describe the nature of justice in a particular society.

The generally smooth pattern of legal evolution in Western society has been twisted by totalitarian states, such as Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. Although National Socialism and communism represent clearly antagonistic ideologies, the two regimes implemented remarkably similar judicial practices: "justice was moralized; the law was instrumentalized; and the judiciary was politicized." Rather than continuing the process of legal evolution that had pushed the law and morality farther apart, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia deliberately devolved the law, placing political ideology where religion had once been.¹⁹ In spite of this devolutionary similarity, Nazi courts used the available theatrical and cinematic models to figure the legal spectator in ways that distinguish German trials from their Soviet counterparts of approximately the same era. The courts of both regimes claimed to stand for the interests of a collective consciousness; however, the racial definition of the German *volk* resulted in dramatic paradigms and a legal audience that differed radically from those in the class-defined Soviet Union.²⁰

As this book argues, the devolution of law in the Soviet Union coincided with a deliberate attempt to devolve the Russian theater. At the same time that Soviet legal theorists began to write the new laws that embodied proletarian morality, directors in the Russian theater and cinema were consciously attempting to return drama to its collective, religious origins in ancient Greek tragedy. In both cases, those creating change made deliberate efforts to bring the drama on stage and screen into contact with the law, in order to effect the greatest social change possible. Rather than forcefully expelling the actor from the polity for distracting his audience

from the serious discussion of the law, as Plato advised, Bolshevik culture of the 1920s brought the actor into the heart of the legal sphere to complement and augment the new law's impact. Even more important than the actor, the spectator—that is, the recipient of these edifying performances—became an integral part of drama in both the theater and the court. In order to understand how audiences were intended to watch and to participate in Soviet show trials, we must investigate the modernist theories of theater and cinema circulating in Russia at the time of the 1917 revolution. Although our overview of these theories begins by necessity with Russia's avant-garde theater, it ends with revolutionary cinema's redefinition of spectatorship during the era of silent film.

REVOLUTIONARY THEATRICALITY

The professional and amateur theaters that developed after October 1917 were particularly well adapted to mixing art with life in institutions such as the show trial. Russia took part in the pan-European renovation of the theater at the turn of the century, which focused not simply on expanding the materials that constituted drama but, more important, on the fusion of real life with the theater, that is to say, theatricality.²¹ However, Soviet Russia was in a unique position to realize the usually abstract and utopian portents of the avant-garde theater because of a series of actual, political revolutions during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Unlike their western European counterparts, Russian theorists of the new drama could connect the revolutionary agenda of modernist theatricality to real events taking place in the streets, and the promises of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 became inextricably linked to those of the new theater. For the first time, the much anticipated revolution in the theater—first prophesied in the nineteenth century by Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche—took physical and political shape. Russians interested in the new theater owed a great intellectual debt to their allies on the western side of the continent; nonetheless, the peculiarly Russian realization of these originally western European ideas proved the potential and power of revolutionary theatricality.

Some fifty years earlier, in an 1848 article entitled "Art and Revolution," Wagner had described a revitalized German stage that returned drama to the religious form and function it once had in ancient Greek society. Twenty-four years later, Nietzsche amended and expanded this vision in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), placing emphasis on the inevitable triumph of Dionysian ecstasy over Apollonian reason in the revitalized theater.²² Their redefinition of drama as a synthesis of many art forms ca-

pable of forging the spirit of a modern nation (as they assumed tragedy had forged the spirit of the ancient Greeks) entered Russia and was adapted to the contours of Russian society by the turn of the century: the period between the failed 1905 revolution and the October revolution of 1917 generated countless books and articles treating the "crisis" or "revolution" in the contemporary theater and connecting it to the turbulent events taking place in the country's politics.²³ In addition to the ideas of Wagner and Nietzsche, Russian theorists of the new theater also read the latest western European works such as Romain Rolland's *The People's Theater* (1903), Gordon Craig's *The Art of the Theatre* (1905), and Georg Fuchs's *Revolution in the Theatre* (1909).²⁴ The active engagement of Russians in the pan-European discussion of the resurrection of ancient Greek drama arose out of the internationalism of avant-garde art, which allowed Russians at the turn of the century to be both the recipients and the donors of cultural exchange.

In spite of continual contact with western European treatises on the new theater and with foreign touring companies that demonstrated its practice on the stages of St. Petersburg and Moscow, the Russian version of the new theater exhibited its own peculiarities. Even in its populist and socialist incarnations, the new drama in Russia tended toward the ambitious goal of not merely forging the spirit of the Russian nation but transforming the very foundations of human society as a whole. This universal scope arose from the dramatic theories of the symbolist poet and philosopher Viacheslav Ivanov, who had first adapted Wagner and Nietzsche to the Russian scene. Before the works of Fuchs, Craig, and Rolland reached a Russian audience, Ivanov combined the country's native populism and Orthodox Christianity with Wagner's vision of the *gesamtkunstwerk* of music-drama and Nietzsche's appeal to the Dionysian spirit. Ivanov's synthesis of Russian and western European elements irrevocably affected the reception in Russia of the two German theorists, as well as the western European reformers following in their footsteps. Thanks to Ivanov, the theater's vital role in transforming the human spirit quickly became a maxim that every theorist of drama in Russia during the first three decades of the twentieth century was obliged either to proclaim or to denounce before he offered his own solution to the crisis in the theater.

Unlike his German predecessors, Ivanov explained and justified the call back to Greek tragedy using the philosophical underpinnings of Russian symbolism. Strongly influenced by the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, Ivanov based his prescriptions for the new theater on a Neoplatonic view of art, in which a fundamental duality characterizes all of existence. Ivanov defined two types of reality: a higher spiritual reality called *realiora*, and

its pale reflection in everyday life called *realia*.²⁵ Through the act of artistic creation, the artist moves *realia* ever closer to the ideal *realiora*, and the artistic process functions as an act of communication between the artist and his audience as they strive to make material reality conform to the spiritual ideal through collective mythopoesis. Although his Neoplatonic explanation applied equally to all the arts, Ivanov's aesthetic philosophy was particularly well suited to the theater since, for Ivanov, artistic creation was essentially a transcendental form of theatricality. Through symbolic representation in poetry, dance, sculpture, or drama, the artist tries to transform the representation of *realia* into *realiora*—that is, to transform reality into the vision of a mystical, Platonic ideal.

Drawing on his own studies of the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus, Ivanov labeled catharsis, which he claimed had left the modern theater long ago, the key ingredient for realizing collective mythopoesis in the theater. Restoring the cathartic effect of ancient Greek drama promised to make the theater "an active factor in our spiritual life" and to "throw a bridge from individualism to the principle of universal collectivity."²⁶ According to Ivanov, catharsis would assume its proper place in the theater only when the other arts that originally created drama's unique synthesis also returned to the stage. The reintegration of song and dance into drama would resurrect the ancient Greek chorus and ultimately make "The spectator . . . an actor, a participant in the action. The audience should merge into the choral body, like the mystical community of ancient 'orgies' and 'mysteries'" (206-7). Ivanov never described the practical mechanics of returning techniques that had left the theater some two thousand years ago to Russian stages at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, his compelling description of a Dionysian theater, characterized by collective action, audience participation, and erasing the boundary between the stage and real life, attracted not only fellow symbolists but also contemporaries working in all branches of culture.

For those writing and working in the theater, the most exciting element of Ivanov's Dionysian theater was not its resurrection of long extinct theatrical techniques but its promise to aid in the creation of a new social order. As he described, the loss of individuality in the Dionysian theater would parallel and actually stimulate a similar evaporation of social divisions outside the auditorium (196). A revitalized, synthetic drama would bring about an entirely new, organic era in human history, characterized by complete artistic and political freedom and the reintegration of cultural and social forces (195). The *narod* (people) of this era would constitute and express its identity in the new drama:

the organization of future choral action is the organization of national art [*usenarodnoe iskusstvo*], and this latter—the organization of the people's soul [*narodnaia dusha*]. . . . And only then, we will add, when actual political freedom comes to be, then, will the choral voice of such societies be the genuine referendum of the true will of the people [*volia narodnaia*]. (218-19)

In his description of this future epoch in human history, Ivanov repeatedly used terminology tied to a national agenda, for example, *narodnaia dusha* or *volia narodnaia*. However, the subtle ambiguity of the word *usenarodnoe* (an adjective meaning, literally, "all people") reveals that his agenda was not intended simply for all the Russian people but rather for all the peoples of the world. Ivanov's vision reached deep into the human psyche but simultaneously strove for the heavens: he and those who followed him believed the theater would play a leading role in a universal transformation of the human spirit.

The poet philosopher never succeeded in realizing this Dionysian vision in his own plays; even his fellow symbolists, who had practical experience in the theater, sarcastically asked, "But are we really Greeks? Should we really be eating olives and dancing around a goat?"²⁷ Nevertheless, Ivanov's heady combination of art, philosophy, religion, and revolution found advocates in a number of different movements outside Russian symbolism that wanted to restore the theater's ability to interact with the social sphere. Although Ivanov's theories were justifiably criticized as anachronistic, overly abstract, altogether divorced from the country's professional stage, they allowed Russians to look at the theater as a means for radical social transformation for the first time. Without exception, every theatrical movement that emerged in the first three decades of the twentieth century reacted in some way to the universal revolutionary mission of Ivanov's Dionysian theater, either rejecting it or adapting it to its own purposes.²⁸

Those working in Russia's professional theaters during the pre-revolutionary decades fought over the viability of Ivanov's theories in actual dramatic practice, dividing themselves roughly into two opposing camps. On the one hand, advocates of a blatantly antitheatrical naturalism such as Konstantin Stanislavskii, the director of the Moscow Art Theater, modeled dramatic art on real life and tried to re-create genuine emotion in the actor on stage. Theatrical naturalism won great success with audiences in Russia and abroad, but it confined drama to a small group of highly trained actors, whom the spectator could admire but with whom he dared not interact. On the other hand, supporters of conventionalized theatricality, such

as Nikolai Evreinov, reversed this formula entirely. According to Evreinov, theatricality was a deeply rooted human instinct that made the efforts of naturalists to bring real life onto the stage entirely meaningless; because theater already saturated all areas of human life. Evreinov supported neither Ivanov's theories nor the symbolist theater as a whole.²⁹ Nevertheless, his extreme advocacy of theatricality illustrates the vital connection between drama and everyday life, which had become a dramatic axiom in the wake of Ivanov's Dionysian theater.³⁰

The term "theatricality," as Evreinov employed it over the course of several decades, remains virtually indefinable: he sampled biology, aesthetics, psychology, philosophy, and religion in the effort to delimit the source, significance, and function of drama. As he himself admitted, theatricality defies rational explanation; we must retrace his eclectic and eccentric line of reasoning in order to grasp the term's meaning.³¹ Drawing on the works of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Evreinov called the theatrical instinct the "will to theater" or the "instinct of transformation." Such descriptions allowed him to assert that theatricality was an inherently pre-historic, presocial, and pre-aesthetic drive (30-32). As a fundamental component of the human psyche, theatricality provided the foundation of both artistic creation and primitive social institutions as diverse as war, religion, and the law (37). Although his proof lacked scientific rigor, Evreinov's belief in the theater as the foundation of human society gained a certain veracity by the sheer dint of the biological, philosophical, and religious examples he amassed.

Evreinov's search for the origins of theatricality resulted in a number of fascinating dramatic experiments, such as the staging of medieval mystery plays and Spanish Golden Age drama in St. Petersburg's Starinnyi or Ancient Theater, and the development of the concept of monodrama.³² Evreinov's constantly evolving theories and experiments culminated in what he called the theater-for-oneself (or -itself), which took drama out of the physical confines of the theater and thrust it out into real life. Echoing Ivanov's goal of human and social transfiguration, Evreinov advocated the complete theatricalization of all facets of human existence, so that the individual could "become oneself a work of art!" (55). This desire to aestheticize everyday life led to a stunning diversity of ways in which theatricality could be applied. Evreinov styled himself the apostle of theatricality in a religious cult led by the god Theatrarch (8).³³ He advocated "theater therapy," which promised to heal the actor, the individual, and society as a whole through catharsis, as he demonstrated in his most famous play *Samoe glavnoe* (*The Main Thing*).³⁴ Evreinov also believed in the utility of the stage for creating propaganda, as illustrated by his staging of the 1920

mass spectacle *Vztiatie zimnego dvortsa* (*The Storming of the Winter Palace*).³⁵ He even sounded the call for more theatrical heads of state, who could do for Russia what Napoleon had done for France: "The theater will be the new teacher. To make life theatrical—this will become the duty of every artist. A new breed of directors will appear—directors of life. Pericles, Nero, Napoleon, Louis XIV" (12). Evreinov's choice of ambivalent historical examples, as well as the fact that *The Storming of the Winter Palace* distorted history for propaganda purposes, betrays the moral indifference of theatricality as he conceived it. Much like Dostoevskii's narrator in *Notes from Underground*, Evreinov asserted that "On the stage, 2 x 2 can equal 3 or 5, depending on a greater or lesser degree of theatricality" (110). Since theatricality existed wherever there was man, drama could provide either a healing tool for the well-meaning psychologist or a political weapon for the tyrannically minded dictator.

Given the myriad uses of theatricality, it is hardly surprising that Evreinov also addressed its application to the law. In fact, Evreinov began his career in the theater after completing a legal education and publishing a thesis devoted to the history of corporal punishment and the theatrical aspects of execution in Russia. He recognized that "in legal and administrative practice . . . the success of speeches by the prosecution and defense often depend on the theatrical and oratorical hypnosis of those giving testimony." In 1921 Evreinov suggested that the theater could be used to train policemen, lawyers, and secret investigators in the young Soviet state.³⁶ This application of theatricality to Soviet security must have been, at least in part, a concession to the political powers of Evreinov's day. Nonetheless, his own dramatization of the Stalinist show trials, *Shagi Nemezidy* (*The Steps of Nemesis*—written in 1938 during exile in Paris), shows Evreinov's understanding that what he had recommended had in fact occurred and that although theatricality might be amoral in the abstract, its application had profoundly immoral ramifications in the Soviet courtroom.³⁷

Evreinov's understanding of theatricality was oddly suited to a variety of dramatic spectacles that propagated the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, only a single Bolshevik theater critic, Ia. B. Brukzon, embraced Evreinov's theories after the revolution, giving them a Kantian and Marxist lineage that Evreinov himself had never imagined.³⁸ Workers in the post-revolutionary theater were reluctant to take up the ideas of a director so closely associated with pre-revolutionary theatrical "decadence," an association that Evreinov could not escape in spite of efforts to integrate himself into the revolutionary theater. But if his religious, philosophical, and biological theories were too exotic to be adopted

directly, the practices they implied proved entirely suitable to the drama that developed on the stage and in political life after the 1917 revolution.

In spite of the clear ideological hostility between Evreinov's theater-for-oneself and Ivanov's Dionysian theater, these two visions of dramatic art came together in both theory and practice on the post-revolutionary stage. The work of Platon Kerzhentsev, the self-styled spokesman on theatrical affairs in the proletarian culture movement (appropriately called Proletkul't), performed the almost unimaginable task of melding these differing views of drama into a practical amalgam.³⁹ Kerzhentsev explained the significance of a distinctly proletarian theater in his book titled *Tvorcheskii teatr (The Creative Theater)*, which came out in five editions from 1918 to 1923 (an astonishing fact given the serious paper shortage that crippled the Soviet publishing industry throughout the 1920s).⁴⁰ By mixing the many currents flowing in the Russian world of theater at the time of the revolution, Kerzhentsev managed to merge the collective mythopoesis of Ivanov with Evreinov's theatricality, and to give concrete advice for building a theater capable of political as well as artistic revolution.

As Kerzhentsev's largest contribution to revolutionary theatricality, *The Creative Theater* filled the gap between utopian theory and dramatic practice by modeling the revolution in the theater on the revolution that had just taken place in Russia's streets. Other writers—such as the playwright and first commissar of enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii, whose theatrical writings had influenced Kerzhentsev—had described a socialist theater whose connection to actual political events was abstract and tenuous at best.⁴¹ On the contrary, Kerzhentsev wrote about a proletarian theater that was the logical product of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the new country. Just like the Soviet state, Kerzhentsev's creative theater would be built and staffed by the working class, and it would address the artistic tastes and creative needs of the proletariat. In Kerzhentsev's opinion, the cultural superstructure should reflect the new economic conditions of the first-ever socialist society, and the new theater, which so many theorists had described and praised, would finally fulfill its revolutionary promise under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In order to purify dramatic art, Kerzhentsev rejected everything associated with what he called the decadent, commercial, and bourgeois theaters of western Europe and the United States. He discarded the entire history of the Western professional theater and, instead, turned to that of the *narodnyi teatr* (people's theater) in search of precedents for proletarian drama. Repeating the catchwords of his day, Kerzhentsev listed ancient Greek tragedy, Roman spectacle, medieval mystery plays, spectacles of the French Revolution, and Japanese Noh drama as the proletarian theater's

legitimate forerunners. He proudly admitted his debt to Rolland's *The People's Theater* in this constructed heritage; nonetheless, Kerzhentsev ultimately repeated Ivanov's axiom that theatrical art must return to its religious roots with its corollaries of collective action, audience participation, and erasing the boundary between the stage and real life.

Kerzhentsev also argued that the theater provided the ideal means for educating the proletarian and peasant masses since it exploited their "own theatrical instinct." His use of this phrase drastically truncated Evreinov's understanding of the will to theater; still Kerzhentsev referred to Evreinov directly in his own explanation of the incredible strength of "the theatrical instinct in man, the thirst 'to play a role,' to create scenic images." Needless to say, the "aristocrat" Evreinov and his egocentric theater-for-oneself elicited nothing but Kerzhentsev's scorn.⁴² His desire to give credit to Rolland notwithstanding, the description of the foundations of proletarian drama demonstrates the mixture of Ivanov's collective mythopoesis with Evreinov's all-encompassing theatricality, which constitutes the creative theater.

Kerzhentsev departed from the work of Ivanov and Evreinov not only in his specifically political program but also in his patronizing attitude toward the proletariat who would supposedly make and enjoy the new theater. Like many of the shapers of early Bolshevik culture, Kerzhentsev assumed that the proletarian and peasant masses were little more than wet clay waiting to be formed by the first person astute enough to take advantage of their theatrical naiveté. For this paternalistic attitude, Kerzhentsev indeed found support in Rolland's *The People's Theater*, which argued, "a people is feminine; it is guided not solely by reason: more by instinct and by the passions; it is necessary to nourish and to direct these." Adopting Rolland's belief in the masses' extreme receptivity to theatrical representation allowed Kerzhentsev to maintain a remarkably primitive view of the theater and theatricality as pure mimesis.⁴³ He assumed, unlike Ivanov and Evreinov, that simply putting the right role models on the stage would induce spectators to replicate revolutionary behavior in their lives. Although the creative theater brought together elements of the Dionysian theater and theater-for-oneself, Kerzhentsev's adaptation of his predecessors to a political agenda entailed simplifying the relationship between the action on stage and the theater's spectators.

His overwhelming faith in the proletariat's almost childlike desire to participate in drama led Kerzhentsev to stress collectivity and spontaneity in his vision of a proletarian theater. Shunning any type of professionalism as not merely superfluous but actually harmful, Kerzhentsev stated that actors, designers, and directors must be amateurs who volunteered their

spare time away from factories to put on shows in local clubs (53–55, 78–79).⁴⁴ In the hope of fostering theatrical literacy, Kerzhentsev suggested that the audience practice watching plays just as actors rehearse their roles. As a result, spectators would become “co-actors” and would “co-act” with those on stage (48). As Ivanov, Evreinov, and countless other advocates of dramatic reform had already stated, the new theater needed not only to make the passive, bourgeois spectator active but also “to turn the spectators into actors” (47). Such a theater would teach the masses the rudiments of drama so that they could create the ultimate expression of the creative theater—that is, spontaneous, improvised, collective, open-air, mass spectacles portraying important moments in labor history. Clearly, no scripts that fit Kerzhentsev’s bill existed at the time of the revolution, and the most important task of the creative theater in the area of repertoire was to adapt old plays to new, proletarian purposes. In a Bolshevik variation of the late eighteenth-century Russian theater’s “adaptation to our tastes,” Kerzhentsev treated plays as mere scenarios, from which politically offensive sections were cut and to which new scenes of revolutionary import were added, according to the needs of the working class. Kerzhentsev even provided an example of the possibilities of proletarian repertoire in his 1921 play devoted to labor’s ongoing struggle to liberate itself, *Sredi plameni* (*Amid the Flames*).⁴⁵ Unlike those who had formulated utopian visions of the theater previously, Kerzhentsev brought the creative theater within reach of his readers by describing the workers, spectators, techniques, and repertoire of the proletarian theater in copious and concrete detail.

The educational value of the creative theater pushed drama beyond the stages of academic and amateur theaters in early Soviet Russia and into every area of daily life. Kerzhentsev gave Evreinov’s list of the applications of theatricality a Bolshevik twist and stated that proletarian theater would prove useful in primary schooling, in increasing efficiency in the workplace, in the battle against religious superstition, and in fostering self-control among proletarian youth.⁴⁶ He advocated the complete theatricalization of life to instill Bolshevik values in the Soviet populace and to inspire the conduct that such values implied. In vocabulary highly reminiscent of Ivanov’s Dionysian theater, Kerzhentsev proclaimed: “The new theater will become a majestic creator of the unity of all arts, the creator of a grandiose synthesis. It will again, as in its heyday, unite poets and artists, musicians and writers, artists of all types, in creative work” (49). As the first expression of revolutionary theatricality, the creative theater promised to liberate humanity from the confines of bourgeois life and art and to effect political, economic, and social transformation in its empowering synthesis.

As Kerzhentsev’s blend of avant-garde theatrical theories suggests, revolutionary theatricality was intended to reach far beyond the national borders of Russia and to engage the theatrical instinct of the proletariat around the world. Russia’s unique historical path had made her the world’s political vanguard; hence, her theater should blaze a trail toward new art, the new man, and a new, global society. However, as the decade after 1917 proved, innumerable practical problems inside the Soviet Union required immediate attention on the part of the government. Before implementing any plan for worldwide revolution, the Soviet state had to consolidate its support, secure economic stability, define its own ideology, and form the consciousness of the inchoate peasant and proletarian masses in whose name it ruled. Rather than following the demands of revolutionary theatricality to expand beyond the new country’s borders, the Soviet state in the 1920s looked inward and applied the lessons and techniques of the avant-garde theater to the new social institutions taking shape. Revolutionary theatricality indeed helped to modernize agriculture, reconstruct factories, teach the new socialist morality, and educate the populace on any number of practical concerns. Such a theatrical crucible of revolution provided the ideal means for reuniting drama with the law and making the Soviet courtroom a venue for legal mythopoesis.

REVOLUTIONARY CINEMATICITY

Russia’s avant-garde theater did not provide the only means for reconnecting the spectator to the spectacle in early Soviet Russia. The cinema, which according to legend Lenin called “the most important of the arts,” played an equally important role in defining the possibilities of spectatorship for the Soviet show trial.⁴⁷ Throughout the 1920s, film was a highly touted medium for Soviet propaganda, legal and otherwise, largely because of the particular advantages that those making and critiquing movies ascribed to cinema as an art form. Despite the confident and optimistic statements concerning the uses of film in the project of enlightenment, however, the actual production of Soviet films during the decade limped along under the crippling effects of a severe shortage of film stock and camera equipment, a dearth of suitable revolutionary screenplays, and fierce competition with foreign, especially American, movies.⁴⁸

In spite of these painful realities, enthusiasm for cinema and its educational potential was so strong and grew so rapidly that it threatened to erode support for film’s closest artistic relative, the theater. Although avant-garde theatrical directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Evgenii Vakhtangov, Aleksandr Tairov, and their cohorts had radically changed

the terms of the pre-revolutionary debate on the "crisis" in the theater, the discussion of film's existence as an independent art form, capable of educating the Soviet masses, revived questions of the theater's utility and viability in the society of the future. Bold declarations of film's superiority to the theater came hand in hand with statements of extreme skepticism toward the need for theater in the modern socialist state. Ironically enough, the troubling question of stage drama's survival arose at the very time when theaters across the Soviet Union, professional and amateur alike, were experiencing unparalleled growth. A massive and well-documented theatricalization of public and everyday life took place in Soviet society during the 1920s, in spite of the gloomy predictions of many filmmakers and theorists regarding the stage. Debates around the cinema as a medium of entertainment and enlightenment during the 1920s invariably mapped out terrain for an imaginary battle between film and stage drama that never materialized in actuality.⁴⁹

In fact, cinema and theater relied largely on the same cadre of workers, the same group of critics and commentators, and many of the same directors and stars throughout the 1920s. Many of the ground-breaking discoveries in cinematic montage and techniques of screen acting were first tried in the revolutionary theater, which responded, in its turn, with a cinematification of the professional stage. Sergei Eisenstein's initial (1923) declaration of "Montazh attraktsionov" (A montage of attractions) arose out of his work as a director in Moscow's Proletkul't theater; Lev Kuleshov conducted his first experiments in cinematic acting in his famed "films without film"; and Meyerhold's renowned experiments in the episodic staging of Russian stage classics such as Gogol's *Inspector General* (1926) and Griboedov's *Woe to Wit* (1928) adapted cinematic techniques to the theatrical stage.⁵⁰ If the actual relationship between cinema and the theater during the 1920s was one of relative harmony, cooperation, and shared theoretical and practical concerns, why did the discussion of the cinema as a medium of enlightenment develop such a hostile and even condescending attitude toward the theater?

Pragmatic considerations, such as the real competition between theater and cinema for scarce funding and the same audience during the 1920s, might help to explain the antitheatrical stance of those promoting film as an art form and as propaganda. But discussion of the cinema clearly distorted the actual association between these two media at the time. The definition of cinema as an art form—superior to the theater in its ability to entertain, educate, and enlighten the masses—sounded as if it had turned the clock back to pre-revolutionary debates on the "crisis" in the theater, because in fact it reproduced this debate, placing the term "cinematogra-

phy" where such formulae as "new theater," "people's theater," or "revolutionary theater" had once been. References to the technological innovations of film and the use of Bolshevik rhetoric brought the pre-revolutionary discussion into the present day, yet many of the hottest points of contention, such as audience participation and the relationship of the work of art to real life, were no different than they had been two decades before in the writings of Ivanov, Evreinov, Kerzhentsev, and their followers. Advocates of "Cinematography, that powerful agitator, a silent propagandist, a book for the illiterate," answered the "crisis" in the theater with film, thereby modifying and augmenting the concept of revolutionary theatricality with a new way of modeling life on art and art on life based on cinema, that is, revolutionary cinematicity.⁵¹

Certainly, the great practitioners and theorists of early Soviet cinema such as Kuleshov and Eisenstein quickly left the question of theater versus cinema behind, in the wake of experiments in montage and screen acting that became increasingly sophisticated during the 1920s.⁵² Yet those evaluating cinema as a means of propaganda from outside the film studio cast their discussion largely in terms of the earlier struggle for a new theater, which determined the premises of the debate and made revolutionary cinematicity an extension and refinement of earlier notions of theatricality, rather than an overall revision. The repetition of the already-twenty-year-old controversy betrayed the fact that revolutionary theatricality had ultimately failed in its bold promises to stimulate the creative energies of the masses and thereby to constitute Soviet society's new collective identity. The magical combination of collective action, audience participation, and erasing the boundary between the stage and real life had not revolutionized the social landscape of the Soviet Union to the degree it initially promised, in spite of the spread of theatrical circles across the country much like bacteria (to quote Viktor Shklovskii).⁵³ Revolutionary theatricality left too much to the whim of the spectator, whose spontaneous participation during a theatrical performance was no less troubling than his revolutionary behavior once he left the theater. Placing film in the same debate literally moved the difficult question of how the work of art transformed spectators into another medium, where terms such as "audience participation" and "collective action" had entirely different meanings.

In order to oust the theater from the debate that originally proclaimed it the art work of the future, advocates of cinema as a means of enlightenment had to prove that the screen possessed the same qualities that had initially been ascribed to the stage, but in greater quantity. In part, Soviet advocates of film propaganda continued the lively debate that had arisen in the Russian press before the revolution, in which the futurist Vladimir

Maiakovskii and others had discussed the competition between cinema and the theater.⁵⁴ Soviet theorists copied their pre-revolutionary predecessors by touting film as a more democratic medium of art than the theater, primarily because of its greater appeal to the unschooled masses as a form of popular entertainment. After 1917 even the creative theater's inventor and spokesman, Platon Kerzhentsev, admitted that cinema had outstripped theater in its attraction and popularity with the broad masses. This assertion arose from cinema's promise to deliver a variety of easily comprehensible messages to millions of citizens across the Soviet Union as a mechanically reproducible art form.⁵⁵ If the enormous popularity of foreign films during the 1920s provided any indication of the potential of cinema to reach the masses, then the case for the superiority of the movie screen over the stage was clear in this regard. When placed alongside critics' very selective descriptions of the theater as an outmoded bourgeois art form, such claims for the movies' greater democracy and potential impact made cinema—and not theater—the art form for the socialist, machine-age future.⁵⁶

Linked to the notion of cinema's greater audience appeal was its allegedly higher degree of realism. Realism during the 1920s was an ideologically loaded term, most easily defined in the realm of propaganda as a crude combination of verisimilitude and audience impact, concepts that theorists assumed depended on each other. Advocates of revolutionary cinema claimed greater realism for film than for the theater because of the camera's ability to capture and reproduce certain privileged aspects of revolutionary life, for example, massive crowd scenes and rapid leaps through time and space, both of which, according to critics, theater was incapable of realistically depicting. According to one theorist, "this ability [to make leaps through time and space] makes cinematography, which is devoid of color, sounds, relief, and words, the art form most perfect for the reproduction of life."⁵⁷ But beyond such technical specificities, the fact that cinema photographically reproduced actual human movement led most advocates of film propaganda to assert that cinema had greater proximity to reality than any other medium of art.

This assertion fueled an ongoing and passionate debate between proponents of fiction films and believers in documentary film, which found its most outspoken supporter in Dziga Vertov in the 1920s.⁵⁸ Many of the claims of those taking part in the debate tended toward amusing hyperbole. For example, Brukzon, the same critic who had given Evreinov's theatricality a Marxist twist, inexplicably wrote only a few years later that "the film reel reflects life as it is, that is, in its movement, which no theater can do." Another theorist, in the grips of a vir-

tual cinema fever, was moved to call Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* "the perfect cinema-poem." These extravagant exclamations indicate the importance of propaganda's realism in the aesthetic canon of the 1920s and hold the key to cinema's alleged superiority over the theater as a medium of propaganda.⁵⁹

Film's supposedly closer tie to reality meant that cinema would have a stronger "reaction on the viewer" than would the theater. Theorists assumed the same patronizing position toward the proletarian and peasant spectator in the movie house as they had in the theater: film viewers "simpleheartedly believe [what they see], they take a fantasy and illusion for truth."⁶⁰ The apparently childlike simplicity of the masses to which film appealed meant that spectators in the movie house would believe any story presented to them; as a result, they needed protection and guidance in the form of film censorship and propaganda. The belief in the cinema's powerful and dangerous influence on children, so strong it could draw them into vice, crime, and premature sexual development, led several Soviet cities to pass laws prohibiting children under the age of sixteen from watching films not approved for their consumption.⁶¹ In the discussion of cinema as a means of enlightenment, the proletariat and peasantry were figured essentially as vulnerable children, who needed not only defense against the decadent, alluring, and ultimately corrupting images of foreign cinema but also indoctrination with revolutionary images to develop their class consciousness. Although everyone acknowledged that film could not educate without entertaining, revolutionary cinema was "not an end in itself, but a very strong weapon in the battle for communist culture," as the 1919 manifesto for the Association of Revolutionary Cinema (ARK) stated.⁶² When taken with its mass appeal and heightened realism, the innocence and vulnerability of the cinematic spectator seemed to promise that film would provide better propaganda than the theater ever had.

Even if we grant that cinema had broader appeal and was somehow more realistic than the theater, we have not yet addressed the issue of spectator participation, which had given the new theater its greatest claim to creating social change. Advocates of revolutionary theater believed that drama transformed the spectator through direct participation in the action on stage, making theater the ideal venue for collective mythopoesis. Through the seemingly simple act of mimesis, the theatrical spectator observed revolution on stage, took part in its dramatic representation, and imitated it in real life once he left the theater. The boundary between art and life was entirely erased, allowing the art form to have a tangible impact on reality. By the standards of revolutionary theatricality, silent film regardless of its content took the active, spectating collective of the theater

and divided it into passive, silent, viewing individuals, when the lights came down in a movie house at the beginning of a film.

What in theory was a simple act of mimesis, however, had proved in practice to be very complex and highly problematic because of the unpredictability of what an audience member might or might not do in a given production of the propaganda theater. Some theorists stated that revolutionary cinema stimulated mimesis just like the theater, simply eliminating spectator participation altogether from the formula for successful propaganda.⁶³ Others kept audience involvement in the formula but explained that the participation of movie viewers took another form. The decade's ground-breaking experiments in film editing, or montage, addressed this issue head-on and proved that the cinematic viewer was not passive, as those who spoke on behalf of the revolutionary theater might suggest. Whether one preferred Kuleshov's experiments in film continuity or Eisenstein's colliding images, the cinematic spectator participated in the production of meaning by creating logical connections between individual shots in a given segment of edited film. By creatively editing raw images on film, cinema directors forced viewers to make new, hitherto unthinkable connections between images, challenging and ultimately altering the viewer's means of perception. Such participation in the production of meaning in film promised to do no less than fundamentally reshape the viewer's consciousness.

Participation in the cinema was not as easily monitored as its counterpart in the theater; yet it fulfilled the requirements of revolutionary theatricality as it simultaneously transformed them. The process of filling in the gaps between edited images constituted not only the individual viewer's participation in cinema but also that of the collective audience, joined in a common artistic act: "During the happy seances, the entire room is aroused, it creates, let us suppose, and a single general current is united by a general rhythm of the heart. The picture is only a pretext, only an illusion; and truth is brought to it by those who watch it in fascination." In this euphoric vision of cinematic enchantment, film theorists asserted that such passive group participation allowed the great masses of peasants and proletarians to take part in collective artistic creation for the first time.⁶⁴ According to this view, the cinema had finally answered the call for a revolutionary people's theater, since it alone reached a mass audience and allowed for collective mythopoesis. As far as cinema was from Ivanov's original plans for a Dionysian theater, it nonetheless fit his utopian mold during the 1920s when it was conceived as a means of Bolshevik education and enlightenment.⁶⁵ If cinema was capable of fulfilling the promises of revolutionary theatricality so much better than the theater,

it seemed only reasonable to assert, as some theorists did, that the theater would wither away and be replaced by the cinema as an art form.

The very passivity of cinematic participation constituted a major alteration in the paradigm of revolutionary theatricality from the perspective of Soviet propagandists. Theatrical participation could and indeed was checked in the propaganda theater, and often it was found severely lacking. Cinematic participation, on the other hand, neither could be readily monitored nor depended on conscious decisions or activity by the mass spectator. The viewer's mere presence in the movie house guaranteed his enlightenment, and the fact that films could be more carefully produced, controlled, and distributed guaranteed a unity of message and effect that the theater could never achieve. Although the idea of actively and consciously involved spectators had galvanized Soviet propagandists in the theater during the first years after the revolution, the problematic and chaotic reality of the 1920s made the passive and unconscious participation of the movie spectator more appealing and ultimately more useful for ideological indoctrination.

Of course, actually delivering revolutionary images to the masses in need of enlightenment proved difficult since theater was still more widespread as an art form in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, and the clubs where edifying films would be shown rarely had functioning film projectors.⁶⁶ In addition, the tremendous gulf separating avant-garde films by directors such as Eisenstein, Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Kuleshov from popular films that drew mass audiences meant that many of the truly revolutionary images on early Soviet film were never seen by their targeted audience. To make the situation even worse, the extreme popularity of foreign films such as Douglas Fairbanks's *The Thief of Baghdad*, which was the decade's biggest box-office hit, suggested that the same passive participation that promised to raise class consciousness was actually poisoning a large part of the Soviet populace.⁶⁷ These problems led to the removal of foreign films from Soviet screens by the end of the decade, but they did not diminish the enthusiasm for film propaganda or alter the formula of revolutionary cinematicity.

With the addition of sound to Soviet films in the following decade, revolutionary theatricality was entirely subsumed by its cinematic extension. As theater and film historians have documented, both media returned in the 1930s to more traditional and explicitly theatrical modes of representation with the institution of socialist realism as the country's official aesthetic doctrine in 1934. Nonetheless, the relationship between drama (either on stage or on screen) and its audience followed a cinematic model, in which viewers no longer expressed any active participation in the action

of a given movie or play. Film provided the model of the relationship between art and life, a model in which spectators passively absorbed images and sounds manufactured for mass consumption. Although the film- or theatergoer of the 1930s was intended to participate in a collective act of creation, this act was intended to be unconscious and to eliminate any freedom in its determination or direction. This cinematic mode of cultural modeling functioned not only to discipline the Soviet spectator but also to place the burden of self-discipline on the audience's shoulders. While a theatrical mode of cultural modeling continued to inform many public spectacles of Stalin's time including the show trial, such theatricality was, in fact, theatrical only in its internal aesthetic structure and cinematic in its reception. By the end of the 1920s the many spectacles—on the Soviet stage, screen, and in the court—presented theatrical sets, costumes, props, and actors to a passive but attentive cinematic audience.

The shift from theater to cinema in theories of early Soviet spectatorship had a profound impact not only on the development of the performing arts in the Soviet Union but also on the emerging institution of the Soviet show trial. Theorists of drama and film articulated increasingly narrow possibilities for spectator involvement, moving from the utopian vision of spontaneous participation to a pragmatic notion of passive absorption. Similarly, those organizing show trials during the first decade of Soviet power created legal spectacles that initially demanded the active involvement of the Soviet Union's viewing public but subsequently forced the public into the passive position of a movie audience. Although the catchphrase of spectator participation would play an important role in Soviet show trials throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the possibilities for and reality of this participation changed markedly from the first public trials held after the October revolution to the Great Terror of 1936–1938.

By realizing the theories of spectatorship in vogue in Russian theater and film, early Soviet show trials pushed both drama and the law backward on their respective evolutionary paths, in the hopes that they would collide with one another and regain a portion of the mythopoetic power they once had as primitive religious and moral institutions. This simultaneous devolution and fusion of theater and jurisprudence was intended to return agon to the Soviet court and to give revolutionary law the authority to distinguish good from evil, friend from foe, and the power to punish on the basis of such distinctions. The alliance of film with revolutionary theatricality promised to form a receptive audience for the edifying messages of the show trials, and to broadcast legal mythopoesis to the proletarian and peasant masses it was meant to shape.

By examining the Soviet show trial in light of the theater and cinema of

that time, we can effectively recuperate the theatrical metaphor and reinvest it with the heuristic power it has lost in the condemnations of historians, journalists, and dissidents mentioned above. Contrary to expectations, the theatricality of the Soviet courtroom did not undermine the justice handed down to Stalin's enemies of the people. Instead, this theatricality constituted the gruesome justice of the Soviet show trial, giving it a distinctive form, function, and undeniable force. The unique configuration of judge, criminal, and spectator in the Soviet courtroom allowed the institution of the show trial to reach across the entire country and to penetrate the highest tier of the Soviet elite by the time of the Bukharin and Rykov trials in the late 1930s. The institution of the Soviet show trial not only had its roots in Russia's theatrical avant-garde but also provided a grim realization of the avant-garde's goal of a universal transformation of the human spirit.