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REVIEW ARTICLE

STITCHING THE PAST TOGETHER: MONTAGE IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND VISUAL ARTS

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Il'ia Kukulin, *Mashiny zashumevshogo vremeni: Kak sovetskii montazh stal metodom neofitsial'noi kul'tury*, Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, Moskva, 2015.

Serguei Oushakine (Ed.), *Formal'nyi metod: Antologiya russkogo modernizma*, Tom 1-3, Kabinetnyi uchenyi, Ekaterinaburg-Moskva, 2016.

Alexander Burry and Frederick H. White (Eds.), *Border Crossing: Russian Literature into Film*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2016.

In September 2016, the Shabolovka Gallery, located in the Khavsko-Shabolovskii model housing estate (an area of severely functionalist brick medium-rise, built between the early 1930s and the 1970s), opened an exhibition in which Maiakovskii and Bulgakov featured together. As the title, “Bulgakov vs Maiakovskii”, emphasised, this was not a sober appraisal of the two writers’ (in fact rather tenuous) connections, or a meditation on the context

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and the city in which they lived and wrote. Rather, it was a dramatic collision of pictures, posters, and artefacts, a standoff between Bulgakov's mahogany secretaire and Maiakovskii's streamlined pale wood desk, purchased from Mosdrev.¹

Open for just over a month, and with no catalogue to accompany it, but with a lavish, designer-styled presentation, "Bulgakov vs Maiakovskii" might provoke reflections on contemporary museum practices and the subsiding importance therein of *nauka* as opposed to cool or the wow factor. Or indeed, one might meditate on the role of culture in current municipal image-making (among the exhibition's sponsors was the Moscow City Department of Culture). But it is the nature of the collision between writers that preoccupies me here. Temporarily removed from the pious, holistic historicism of the "writer's museum" and "memorial apartment", Maiakovskii and Bulgakov were placed in a new conjunction.

The reason why I recalled this show when I was reading Il'ia Kukulin's important new book is not just because both Maiakovskii and Bulgakov are granted some attention in it, but because the creation of new and unexpected relations is a fundamental effect of the process that he discusses: montage. Certainly, unlike the Shabolovka exhibition (produced by a venue that veers from new British fashion one month to city planning the next), Kukulin's book is a scholarly project, in which the disinterment of relatively little-known figures (such as the eccentric writer Pavel Ulitin [1918-1986]) is testament to "research" in the classic sense. But the book is not a standard academic monograph. As well as a study of unexpected conjunctures and radical, hierarchy-free assemblages, it is itself an original and, in the best sense, controversial discussion that depends on unexpected conjunctures and radical, hierarchy-free assemblages – on putting together what is usually kept separate. What is more, the focus on such issues of collision and conjunction is characteristic of work on Russian culture at the moment, as scholars, as well as artists, writers, and readers more broadly, look afresh at earlier phases of Russian modernism, evoking its pertinence for later generations as well as its historical significance. This essay will attempt a first response to these new directions, placing Kukulin's book alongside two recent multi-handed collections with a similar focus on unsettling collisions.

Both the subtitle and the author's note at the beginning (which refers to "filling a gap that has opened up in the humanities over the last quarter century"; 2015: 7) present the main purpose of *Mashiny zashumevshogo vremeni* as the tracing of relations between the modernism of the early twentieth century and its revival in the last four decades of the century. (Kukulin is one of those who holds that "post-modernism" is a sub-variant of modernism, rather than a wholly autonomous movement.) However, *Mashiny zashumevshogo vremeni* is considerably more ambitious than this would

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