
VERBAL AND VISUAL TRANSLATION OF MAYAKOVSKY'S AND LISSITSKY'S For Reading Out Loud

Martha Scotford Lange
School of Design
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695

Full understanding of visual poetry created by a linguistically different culture poses particular problems. Translations of selected poems from Vladimir Mayakovsky's For Reading Out Loud (1923) are presented here. In addition, an attempt is made at transposing the visual wordplays found in the original Cyrillic typography into the Roman alphabet. The English reader is able to enjoy the verbal/visual dexterity of El Lissitzky's typographic presentations of Mayakovsky's poems. Analysis of the design process and some historical background provides a context for fuller understanding of Lissitzky's innovative work.

Visible Language, Volume XXII Number 2/3
Spring 1988 Martha S. Lange, pp 195-222
©Visible Language
Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, RI 02903

El Lissitzky's book design and typographic illustrations and settings for Vladimir Mayakovsky's poems in For Reading Out Loud (sometimes literally translated For the Voice), published in Berlin in 1923, have been studied and revered for their inventiveness by several generations of graphic designers. The physical form of the book is innovative, incorporating the use of the thumb index, with shortened title and visual symbols arranged alphabetically, to enable the reader to find the poems easily and quickly. This is a significant and functional addition to the standard codex book form known for centuries.

The book is of even greater interest typographically. Only a few years after the Italian Futurists had overturned the Latin-based traditions for writing and typesetting literature, especially poetry, and the Dada group in Switzerland and Germany had then thrown out any remaining rules, Lissitzky, from Soviet Russia, used all the resources of the typecase to typeset, to illustrate, and most importantly, to give visual expression to Mayakovsky's words and ideas.

Since the earliest years of the new century, artists in Russia had been aware of the newest artistic developments in Western Europe, through art works brought back, participation in exhibitions and their own travel and study. Art and literature were closely connected in ideas and in personnel. Artists experimented with many of the new ideas, mixed with and reinterpreted through Russian traditions. The work of the Russian Futurists, or Cubo-Futurists as the visual artists were sometimes called, was a synthesis of the two western movements (Cubism and Futurism) in which they perceived similarities. Book design was an area in which the artists and writers were able to collaborate. Mayakovsky was a member of both groups, for as the 'Poet of the Revolution' he wrote verses, but he also wrote the copy for and illustrated many propaganda posters and even collaborated with Rodchenko in advertising work.

The Russian avant-garde was composed of many overlapping groups, whose artistic ideas did not develop in any linear fashion. Rather different members continued to experiment in a variety of directions. Some movements were more Russian than western: Suprematism, first created by Malevitch, was the reduction of painting to geometric shapes, nonrepresentational planes and volumes, and finally without color; the goal was a universally understood expression of feeling. Constructivism, lead by Tatlin, was first a three-dimensional form, concerned with volume more

than plane. As explored further, for some artists it became a working process; others applied its principles to two-dimensional projects for functional as well as expressive goals.

El Lissitzky was trained as an engineer and architect; later he taught at the same school as Malevitch. He evolved a personal synthesis of Suprematism and Constructivism, first explored in paintings and later in his graphic and typographical works. The poster "Beat the Whites with the red wedge" from 1920 and the Russo-Polish war¹, is among Lissitzky's best known works. Other posters, propaganda pieces and publications of the period show that he was employing widely the nonrepresentational shapes, ambiguous and dynamic spatial relationships, experimental typography and symbolic color of his particular synthesis. His experiments in typography involved the mixing of different typefaces, sizes and weights; the setting of words at contrasting and dynamic angles; the sharing of letters between words; the visual emphasis on the initial letter.

Another work can be considered somewhat preparatory to For Reading Out Loud: the book Of Two Squares, designed in the Soviet Union in 1920 but only published two years later in Berlin. This work further develops Lissitzky's visual language of nonobjective but symbolic forms; the typography consists of a variety of typefaces, weights and sizes set at angles to relate to the images, but outside of the square field of the illustrations. The content of the book was a thinly disguised political tale for children. In this book and in For Reading Out Loud Lissitzky is working in a Revolutionary context.

Late in 1922, Mayakovsky came to Berlin to work with Lissitzky on the book of his poems. During the next year that the book was designed and published, Lissitzky wrote about typography:

- ♣ 1 The words on the printed sheet are learnt by sight, not by by hearing.
- ♣ 2 Ideas are communicated through conventional words, the idea should be given form through the letters.
- ♣ 3 Economy of expression—optics instead of phonetics.
- ♣ 4 The designing of the book-space through the material of the type, according to the laws of typographical mechanics, must correspond to the strains and stresses of the content."²

For Reading Out Loud is made up of thirteen of Mayakovsky's poems, written at different times in response to different political and personal events. He wrote hymns for the Russian civil war which he called 'marches', and appeals which he called 'commands'. The selected poems, among the most popular of his works, range from revolutionary provocation to humorous descriptions of city life. Because they were frequently quoted, Lissitzky gathered them in a small (7.5 x 5.25 inches, 19x13.5 cm) and easily portable volume with the thumb indexed format to improve accessibility. The title suggests a communal and participatory activity to be associated with the poetry. Alan C. Birnholz adds to this: . . .the size, color, and organization of letters change both to make the book more interesting visually and to push the viewer beyond reading silently to himself and toward declaiming in public. One does not just read these poems; one speaks them out loud and, when the typography suggests, begins to shout as well."³

The propagandists for early Soviet Russia attempted to solve the problem of communication with a largely illiterate populace which spoke many different languages by presenting ideas orally and visually using speeches, parades, plays, posters, agit-prop boats and trains. ('Agit-prop' comes from the words 'agitational' and 'propaganda'.) The modern use of these public forms was based on Russian folk traditions and an oral tradition; the content was new. When boats, train and streetcars were used, their flat sides became the support for painted images and slogans. All, and opposing, visual modes of expression were used, from the various avant-garde movements to the conservative and tradition.⁴ Mayakovsky and others often gave public readings (or shoutings) of their poetry. In *For Reading Out Loud*, Lissitzky is linking the oral and visual, as they would be linked in a performance, by visually presenting what is

audible to the listener. The design works as 'report' or expression of this event as well as a 'script' for the event.

El Lissitzky has described his work on this book in 'Typographical Facts':

"This book of poems by Mayakovsky is meant to be read aloud. To make it easier for the reader to find any particular poem, I use an alphabetical index. The book is created with the resources of the compositor's type-case alone. The possibilities of two-color printing (overlays, cross-hatching and so on) have been exploited to the full. My pages stand in much the same relationship to the poems as an accompanying piano to a violin. Just as the poet in his poem unites concept and sound, I have tried to create an equivalent unity using the poem and typography."⁵

The book format introduces each poem with a 2-page composition that consists of an 'illustration' on the left-hand page made of typecase elements: letters, rules, dingbats, standard decorative rules; and on the right-hand page, the title of the poem and the first words, phrases or stanza. The poems continue on the following spreads, treated, however, in a traditional typographic manner except for a pointing hand and a few words in red. Lissitzky drew the typographic arrangements for each opening composition; these were set by a German typesetter who knew no Russian, working at the Berlin branch of the Soviet state publishing house.

On the left-hand pages, Lissitzky created images that relate directly to the subject of the poem and often used a simplified representational mode: a recognizable stick figure and hat, or a boat. For other poems, the images are more symbolically related to the poem and treated more non-objectively. There are frequently letters and words along with the typecase elements that make the images.

On the right-hand pages, the title and some of the poem have been rendered 'expressively' in large letters, arranged loosely, vertically or at a diagonal. Often heavy bars will be placed with the lines of type or at angles to the type. Type 'furniture' has been used to construct some of the larger letter forms in solid shapes or in outline. Different typefaces are also used for contrast and a variety of form. Words and letters are presented singly, in phrases, boldly and colorfully: the book is printed in two colors, black and red. Though red was (and is still) the most frequently used second color in printing during this period, there is obviously a political/symbolic connection in its choice here. And there are also wordplays: sounds, and letters can be shared, the meanings expanded. Here Lissitzky integrates completely the verbal form and the visual form: the specific choices of letterforms as found in different typefaces, sizes and weights relate to meaning and to oral/aural perception.

This is the locus of the 'problem' for the translator and for the non-Russian reader of these poems, as designed in this book: how can both the literature and the art, which are so inextricably connected here, be translated and transposed into another language which is written with a different set of symbols.

Obviously, to read, understand, and appreciate fully the literature of another language and another culture, one must learn the language or have a superb translator. This gives the reader the *words* to ponder. But there are visual aspects of the written word, which, when consciously presented in order to expand the meanings and connotations of the words (as here in Lissitzky's work) need also to be translated and preserved in the new language. Consider the problems of translating the Italian Futurists' "Parole in Liberta" or Apollinaire's "Calligrammes" for the English reader. Individual words can be translated accurately and substituted in the visual arrangements

with some success. It is reasonably easy to understand the change of

VELOCITA to SPEED

or to have 'i become 'i

l	t
	s
p	
l	r
e	a
u	i
t'	n
	i
	n
	g'

because (1) we are dealing with the same visual form of alphabet and because (2) in most cases the visual message/content is in the form *given* to the words rather than in the form *inherent* to the letters or words. It is interesting to consider that in the above example 'it's raining' is the traditional translation, though 'it rains' would be a better formal match (that is, the same number of letters) in addition to being accurate linguistically. This is a good example of the balances and compromises encountered in attempting verbal/visual translations. There are, however, occasional cases in Apollinaire where the shape of the letter is quite important to the image; in the Futurists, the general shape/length of a word frequently makes some difference.

However, Lissitzky, working with the Cyrillic alphabet, was concerned with and fascinated by the arrangement of words to enable them to share sounds/letters in various positions: initial, medial and final, and by the

expressive qualities found in letterforms. Thus Lissitzky as visual designer *shows* the reader the puns that the writer has provided for his listeners by showing a single letter placed next to the other (unshared) letters arranged in a stack, or by differences in size or weight, or by printing in red, in contrast to the standard black. Each of these is a visual equivalent of the verbal pun; in the latter the listener hears two sounds/words, in the former the viewer perceives two forms/words.

The question remains: can the non-Russian reader see and understand this work to any extent comparable to the Russian reader's experience? By a careful process of investigation, deconstruction and reconstruction of the work as an integrated composition, the non-Russian reader can see and hear the poetry and can begin to appreciate the care with which Mayakovsky has chosen his words and the inventiveness with which Lissitzky has visually expressed them.

This is the problem that intrigued me as a graphic designer and as a teacher of graphic design history and typography: how to translate it all, the literature *and* the design for the English reader. I proposed this design problem to a graduate studio in graphic design at the School of Design, North Carolina State University.⁶

We enlisted the help of Professor Elisabeth Jezierski of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at North Carolina State University. She provided background materials, translations (both published by other translators and her own), frequent consultations and enthusiasm throughout the project.

Information about the author, the designer, literature and design during this period of Soviet Russian history was gathered and brought to our discussions. We studied other examples of visual poetry and attempts to translate

it. The work closest to what we have attempted and which proved to be quite instructive is *Apollinaire, Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913–1916)* translated by Anne Hyde Greet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) which presents the translations in the original configurations. We decided, however, that this presentation is flawed in that not enough attention was paid to matching typefaces, letter sizes and weights, and to the exact positioning of letters and elements. In this case, the language structure compromised the visual structure.

The students analyzed the parts of their selected spreads (they chose four out of the thirteen; we intend to proceed with the remaining ones). Available published translations were consulted and compared along with suggestions by Professor Jezierski, providing a range of verbal options (the two accepted versions of the book title indicate this possibility). The major work of translation (Marshall, Herbert, trans. and ed., *Mayakovsky*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1965) does not include translations of those typographic constructions which are not within the poetry texts; for these we depended on Professor Jezierski. In addition to finding the areas which required no changes (nonverbal), the student designers had to analyze what kinds of changes would have to be made in the verbal part: easy one-letter substitutions, more difficult word changes, most difficult letter/sound overlaps. Our goal, throughout this process, was to make as few compromises as possible; that is, to try to give the best verbal translation while at the same time maintaining all of the visual relationships: to be so comprehensive in the translation of all parts that the original Russian composition would not be required to understand the full meaning of the poem.

Our discussions included an issue which is raised frequently: to what degree is it appropriate for others

to visually interpret or express the verbal or literary work of an author? Is this not an imposition upon one creative person's ideas by another? In this particular case, however, the issue is moot: Mayakovsky asked Lissitzky to be both illustrator and book designer; the work is a collaboration.

The results of our work are presented here, with an explanation of the translation and design process for each. The poems are presented in their original alphabetical order which also happens to be in the order of increasing difficulty for the dual translations. I am indebted to the notes and comments of each student designer for this discussion.

LEFT MARCH

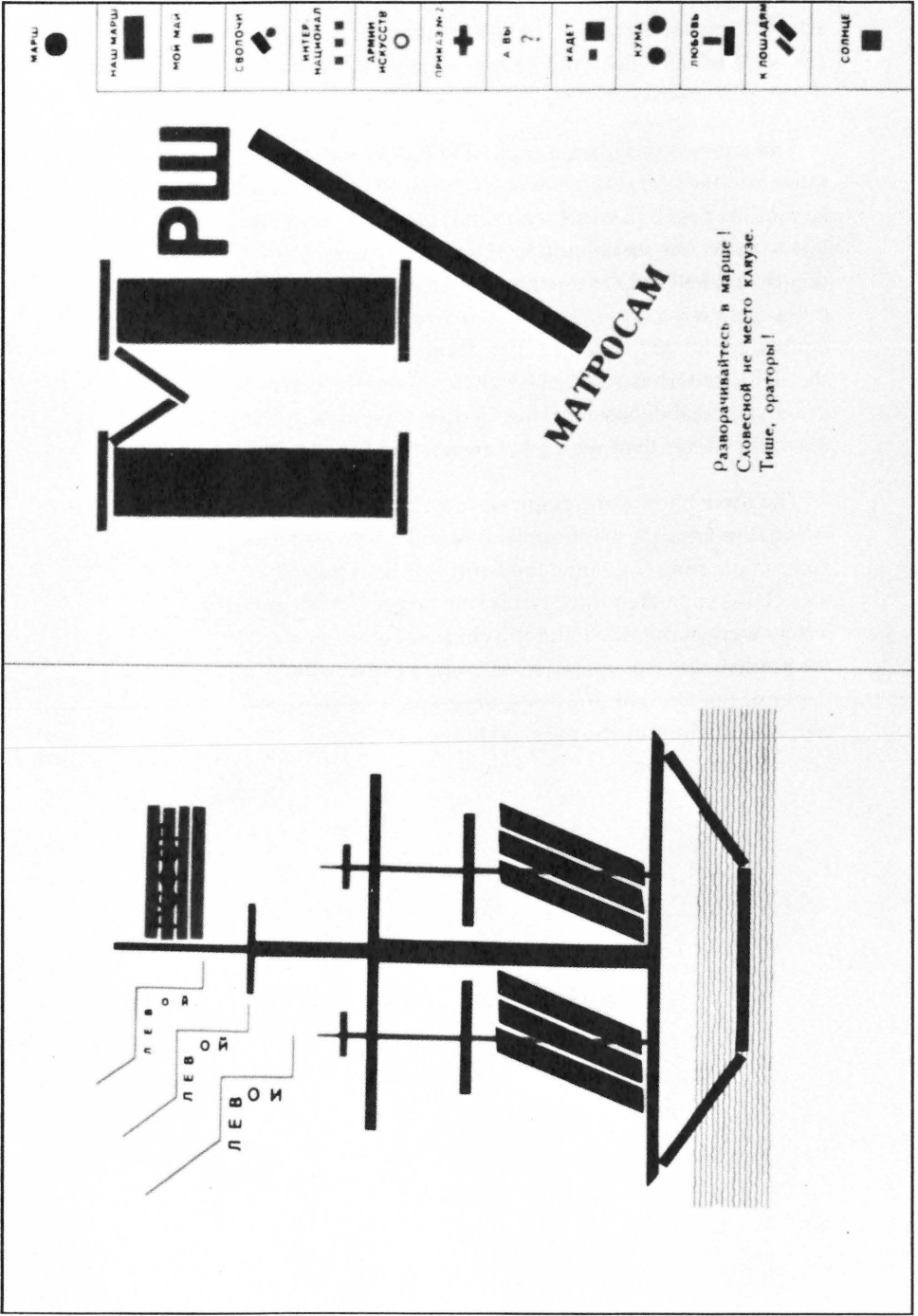
The left-hand page is primarily pictorial: a ship in the water with masts and flag. The characters on the flag translate literally into the abbreviation of the Russian Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The word repeated three times and broken is the word 'left'. To compensate for one less letter in English, the letterspacing was increased as well as the point size of the letters. A formally matching typeface was selected. The right-hand page includes the title of the poem, 'Left March' plus its dedication 'For the Red Marines' or 'For/To the Sailors' and the first three lines of the poem. Again, 'left' has four letters to the Russian five and several which are narrower. The size and weight of the letterforms were matched and the letters spaced out.

For 'March', the 'M' and the 'A' are the same; however the two Cyrillic letters РIII had to become three letters 'RCH'. A stroke had to be added to the original 'P' to make it a Roman 'R' and the remaining wide Cyrillic letterform was cut into two narrow letterforms with the intention that they would look strong and as if they were marching, to reflect some of the expressive flavor of Lis-

sitzky. The designer sees this as a weakness, in Russian the word is more clear and direct, in English, the narrow 'C' may be distracting.

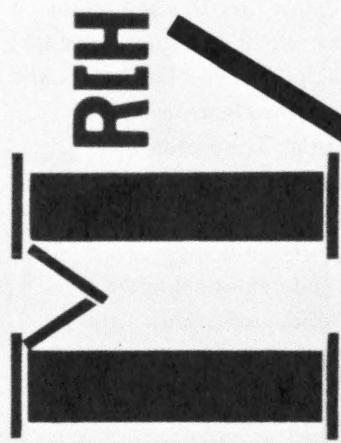
The one-word dedication 'MATPOCAM' was translated into the literal three-word version 'For the Sailors' so that the first two words could be stacked next to the last to make one visual unit as the Russian does. The length and height of the original were matched, though the weight was not. Further search is required to find an equivalent Roman typeface. The designer has noted here that for a better visual translation, wherever possible she drew an alphabet based on the Cyrillic typefaces used by Lissitzky rather than search for an existing font.

The three lines of the poem were a simple translation into English, using some of Marshall's translation and maintaining the same line lengths. The typeface was chosen to match the Cyrillic, the larger initial capital letters were maintained and the choice of all caps for the English text was intended to imitate the Cyrillic flavor of the original. All three designers used the same typeface (Melior) as the basic text typeface for the English translations.



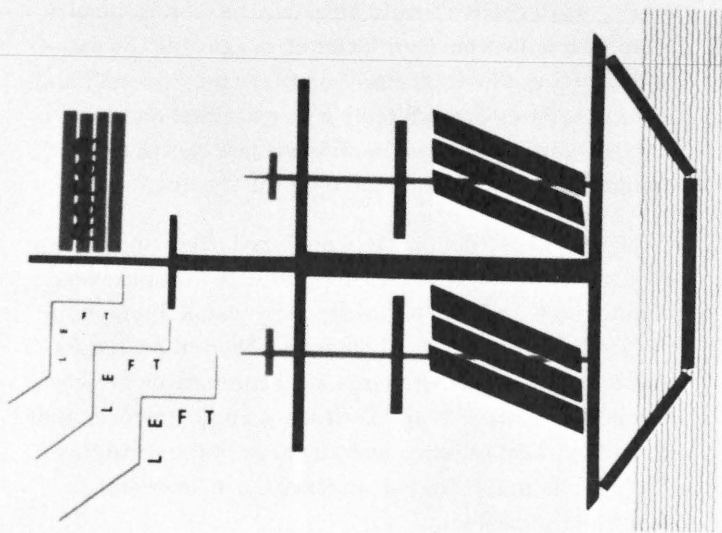
Reprinted with permission of the publisher, Thames & Hudson.

MARCH	●
OUR MARCH	■
MY BAY	!
LOWLIFE	◀
INTER-NATIONAL	■ ■ ■ ■
ARMY OF THE ARTS	○
COMMAND NO	+
& YOU	?
CADET	■
GOD-MOTHER	● ●
LOVE	!
TO HORSES	≡
SUN	■



FOR THE SAILORS

RALLY THE RANKS INTO A MARCH!
NOW'S NO TIME TO QUIBBLE.
QUIET, ORATORS!



OUR MARCH

On the left-hand page is a large red square for which no translation was necessary. Below this, floating on the diagonal, is a Russian wordplay which combines Бей and Бой and depends on the sharing of first and last letters in semantically related words. The word Бей means 'beat' and Бой means 'fight' or 'struggle'. The words are simple and direct; the reader easily distinguishes the two. The designer searched English synonyms and found two pairs of words which carried similar meanings, were as crisp in sound as the Russian, and contained letter duplications: 'beat' and 'bout' and 'strike' and 'strife'.

An analysis of the visual forms of each English pair was made. In the 'beat/bout' pair, an extra letter is added in the center, the focus of the wordplay. The designer sees this as unwanted 'visual noise' precisely in the place where the clarity of distinction is most desired. When the letterforms are considered, the initial Б in Cyrillic is close to the lowercase Roman 'b' but a 't' is far from the й in form. An alternative would be to use the more geometric 'T' to match the final Cyrillic letter, suggesting the use of 'B' in order not to draw attention to the mix of upper and lowercase letterforms. Finally it was decided that the English words presented in all lowercase except for the 'T' would be the best visual match for the Cyrillic.

The 'strike/strife' pair was analyzed. Here, in the focal area, there are single letters to provide the simple, clear distinction found in the Russian. Any visual distraction by 'STR' is kept outside of the focus. These three letters may keep the reader from making a comparison between the unlike forms of 'I' and Б which is good; however, they do add extra noise to the overall shape of the wordplay. The final 'E' in the English matches the й in overall shape and precision.

While the 'beat/bout' pair would seem to be the most obvious choice, due to more similar number of letters and the match of letter shapes, the designer decided to use the 'strike/strife' pair. In this solution, the uncluttered, punctuated wordplay of the original Russian is best reproduced in English. The designer matched the size and weight of the Cyrillic with Roman letterforms, some of which were distorted to increase their similarities with the Cyrillic (the 'K' for example).

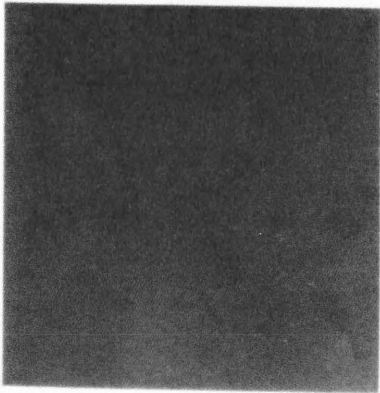
The right-hand page begins with the poem title, which provides more of a visual challenge. The designer observed the directions of the letterforms, the repetition of letters and of formal elements within the letters, the interaction of adjacent letters, the effects of variations in the weight of letters and the effects of color change. The original words of three and five letters shared two letters; in English one is shared, but not in a visually useful place. Therefore, the problem here was to use the formal elements of the letterforms, and the visual nature of the strokes which make up the letterforms, to integrate dissimilar letters while at the same time creating two separate words. Admittedly, some of the rhythm of the strokes in the original is lost. In this case, in particular, the color distinction between the two words is critical for the English.

The stanza of poetry at the bottom was translated using a combination of several published versions and the help of Professor Jezierski. As before, the appearance of the Cyrillic was matched by the use of Melior with large initial capital letters and smaller capital letters for the rest of the text.

- НАШ МАРШ 
- МОИ МАР 
- СВОЛОЧИ 
- ИНТЕР
НАЦИОНАЛ 
- АРМИИ
ИСКУССТВ 
- ПРИКАЗ N 7 
- А ВЪ 
- КАДЕТ 
- КУМА 
- ЛЮБОВЬ 
- КЛОШАДАМ 
- СОЛНЦЕ 

НАША
МАРШ

Бейте в площади бунтов топот!
 Выше гордых голов грядя!
 Мы разливом второго потока
 переносим миров города.



Б
е
о
й

Reprinted with permission of the publisher, Thames & Hudson.

OUR MARCH



MY MAY



LOW LIFE



INTER NATIONAL



ARMY OF THE ARTS



COMMAND NO. 2



A YOU



CADET



GOOD MOTHER



LOVE



TO HORSES

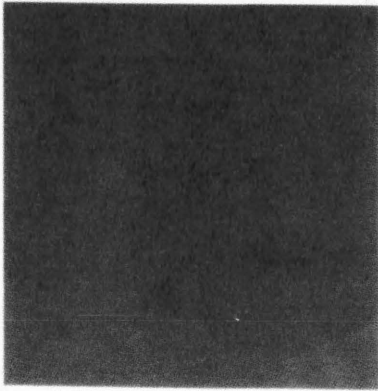


SUN



MARCH

BEAT INTO THE SQUARE THE THUMB OF MUTINIES!
HOLD YOUR PROUD HEADS HIGH!
WE WITH THE FLOOD OF A SECOND DELUGE
WILL SCRUB THE CITIES OF THE WORLD CLEAN.



HE
T
S

LOWLIFE!

The title of the poem can be translated literally as 'scum', 'riffraff', 'rabble', 'swine', or as Marshall has it, "On Trash". The opening spread is not really the beginning of the poem, but rather an introduction to it, and often not translated in publications.

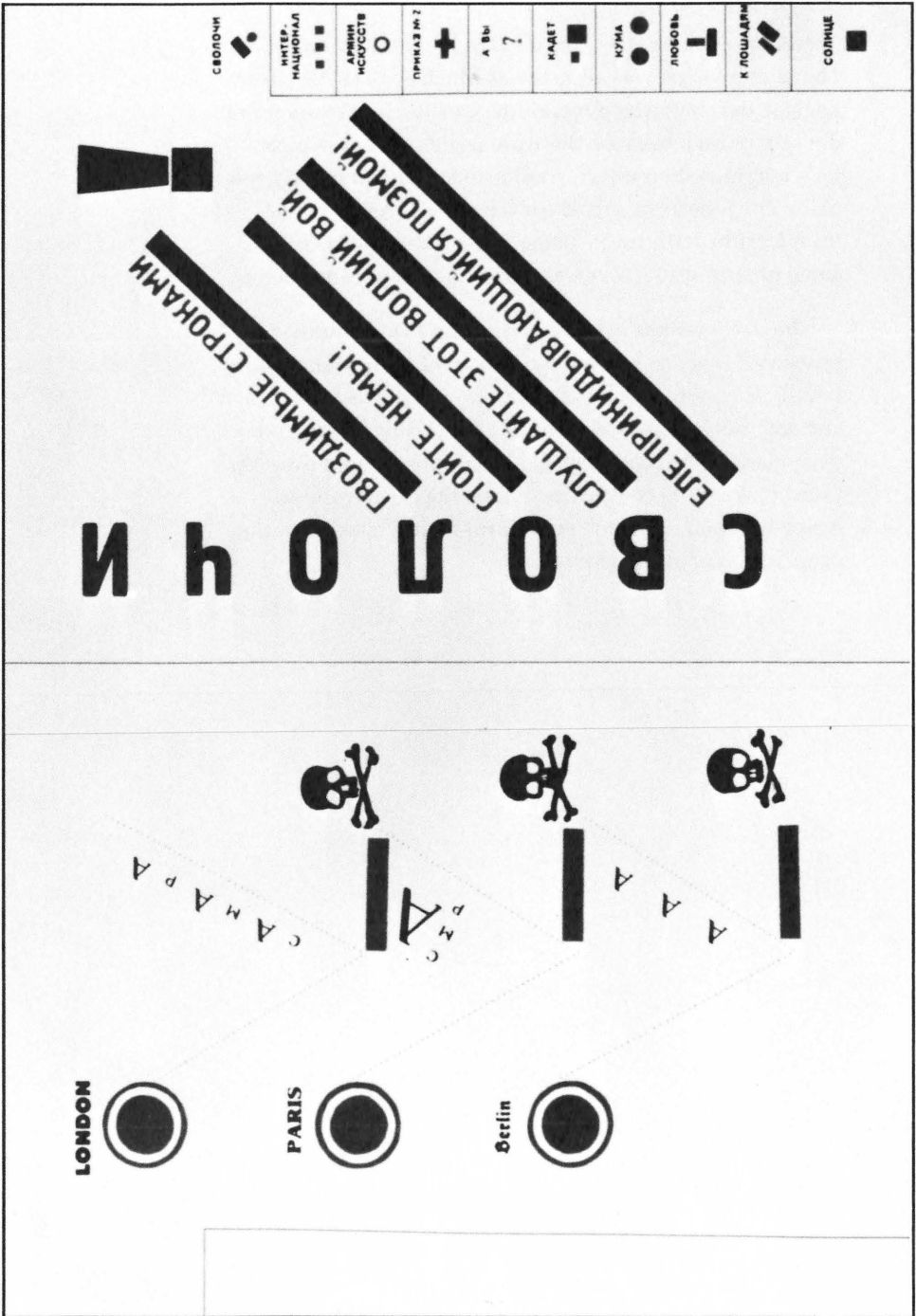
The left-hand page has few changes in translation; the city names remain in the different connotative type faces chosen by Lissitzky. The other geographical name, CAMAPA, becomes 'SAMARA' requiring only two letters to change; the designer chose the typeface Cheltenham Bold for the replacements. The meaning of this page is somewhat obscure and requires some knowledge of Soviet history. Samara (renamed Kuybyshev in 1935) was the scene of several tribal attacks in the 17th century; it was also the seat of the anti-Bolshevik provisional government and the constituent assembly of Russia in 1918. The illustration refers, possibly, to a scene of death and to the connections of the White Russians with western political capitals.

The right-hand page contains the poem title and four lines of poetry. The word 'lowlife' was chosen for the title because it has both the denotation and connotation of the Russian word and the same number of letters. The letterforms were drawn by the designer, basing the shape and weight on the Cyrillic letters, as this afforded a much closer match than could be found among existing typefaces. The seven letters were spaced optically to appear as evenly spaced as the Russian word.

The designer reports that the very literal translation of the four 'spiked verses' nailed to the corpus of 'Lowlife' was given by Professor Jezierski. Although not the ideal solution from the purely linguistic-poetic point of view, it has the visual advantage of having four lines with approx-

imately the same respective lengths in both languages. The letterspacing was adjusted as much as possible to emphasize the similarity. Overall the Cyrillic letters are more densely packed because there are more of them, which may heighten their effect, similar to lethal and bloody red nails. The letterforms used for the verses were created from Cyrillic letterforms using some direct substitution, some upside-down reversals, and some new construction.

The designer has commented: "I find this doubly-translated piece to be linguistically confusing and obscure; I doubt the verbal translation can transcend its time period and say much of anything intelligible to the average modern reader. The *visual* aspect of the translation, however, I find much more compelling. Here, the greater literalness employed, the more successful the translation of the original flavor and expression."



Reprinted with permission of the publisher, Thames & Hudson.

L O W L I F E



SPIKED VERSES
 STAND MUTE!
 LISTEN TO THIS WOLF'S HOWL.
 BARELY FEIGNING TO BE A POEM!

- LOWLIFE
- INTER-NATIONAL
- ARMY OF THE ARTS
- COMMAND M2
- & YOU
- CADET
- GOD-MOTHER
- LOVE
- TO HORSES
- BUN

LONDON



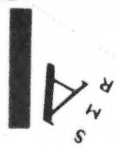
PARIS



Berlin



S A M A R A



A A A



FRIENDLY REGARD FOR HORSES

This poem is unusual in the collection in that the visual construction spreads across the top of both opening pages. The words are taken from the first stanza of the poem (repeated at lower right). The poem both verbally and visually reflects the rhythm of horses' hooves; the Russian words sound like 'grib, grab, grob, groob'; and the large letterforms echo the shape of the horse's head, legs and hooves.

The designer reports: "This was the most difficult part of the poem to duplicate since the word chosen had to meet the following requirements: (1) it had to have four characters; (2) it had to have three characters that remained constant while one changed; (3) it had to retain meaning as each character changed; (4) it had to contain letterforms that looked horse-like; and (5) verbally the words had to make sense in the poem while retaining the rhythm".

It should be pointed out that one part of the richness of the Russian language could not be retained in this form of translation. The Russian words/sounds also carry some other associations and suggestions: 'grib', mushrooms, fungus; 'grab', stolen, robbed; 'grob', coffin, grave'; and 'groob', rude, coarse.

By choosing the word 'slip', two of the original Cyrillic letterforms could be retained, though one had to be flipped. Only the 'S' had to be created from the available, rather crude, letterforms, which explains its squared-off form, and which the designer found horse-like. In the poem the horse slips on some ice, an additional semantic and aural connection for the words 'slap, slop, slup'. The added 'p' in 'slap' even serves to emphasize the terminal consonant sound and provides an accent note in the rhythm. In the Russian, this extra letter in the second word

becomes an unvoiced 'p' sound at the end of the other three words. The elements resembling dashes and the sign for approximate equality are retained from the original.

On the lower left-hand page is the poem title. Several published translations were consulted which provided some variety: 'a friendly attitude to horses', 'human attitude to horses', and 'kindness to horses'. For the visual translation of the phrase, the second letter of the first word and the first letter of the second word must be common. The designer chose the phrase 'friendly regard for horses' as the best match semantically and visually.

The common letter for this title is 'R' which, though different in form from the 'O' used by Lissitsky, does carry the form of the horse into this area of the composition. In the original version, the shared letter is larger, bolder, and softer than the surrounding rather square letters. The designer discovered a softly formed 'R' and manipulated the space around it to match the original relationships. Our research revealed that typefaces of this nature were used frequently by the Russian Futurists in their books.

In the original, the word for 'horses' is a larger and bolder form of the typeface used for the rest of the title. The designer found and used Record Gothic Extended as a match for the geometric quality and stroke width of the smaller words, and the Bold version for 'horses'.

On the lower part of the right-hand page is the beginning of the poem. For the English version, the words used were chosen from several translations to match the number of Russian words. Here again the typeface Melior is used in two sizes of capitals to resemble the Cyrillic. The four words which repeat the featured section above are set in a sans serif typeface similar to the original, and the dashes are retained.

И
А
О
У

Б

Х
О
ТНОШЕНИЕ
К
ЛОШАДЯМ

Х

О

ТНОШЕНИЕ

К
ЛОШАДЯМ

И
А
О
У

Б

Били копыта

пери буато:

— ГРИБ

ГРАБЬ

ГРОБ

ГРУБ —

ЛОШАДЯМ

СОЛНЦЕ

S I L

FR
RIENDLY
REGARD

FOR HORSES

I A O U P

HOLDERS BEATING
SOUNDING LIKE
— SLIP
— SLAP
— SLOP
— SLUP —



As stated earlier, the main impetus for this project was the frustration felt when confronted with literary and design work that could not be fully comprehended and appreciated. Solving this problem in an educational setting provided many benefits for the teacher and the students. Pedagogically, this project served several goals: (1) a vehicle for learning more design and typographic history; (2) a way to appreciate the inventiveness of Lissitzky; a contemporary twist on the methodology of copying the Masters; (3) an exercise in form analysis, matching and creation; (4) an opportunity for collaboration among designers, and with others outside of design toward the solution of a common problem.

In conclusion, the English translations of these four poems should and will undergo further refinements as the project proceeds with the rest of the collection. At this time, however, the student designers feel that they have captured the drama, rhythm and content of the originals, as they have interpreted them. If any compromises have been made here, as one designer said, "Perhaps we did El Lissitzky proud, but slighted Mayakovsky". Having made this start, now knowing the possible pitfalls, further and closer collaboration with linguists should allow the project to be completed.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The historical context of the poster has been changed from the Civil War, as previously believed, to the Russo-Polish war. The 'whites' in this case may be general reactionary forces or the Poles associated with the White Russian General Wrangel. The context change was suggested by Peter Nisbet and commented upon by Yve-Alain Bois.
- 2 'Topography of Typography', *Merz*, #4, Hanover, July 1923, Kupperts-Lissitzky, (Trans. 1968, p. 359.)
- 3 Alan C. Birnholz, 'El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation', in Barron and Tuchman, p. 99.
- 4 Background from Szymon Bojko, 'Agit-Prop Art: The Streets Were Their Theater', in Barron and Tuchman, p. 72-77.
- 5 *Gutenberg Festschrift*, 1925, Lissitzky-Kupperts, 1968, p. 95.
- 6 The students and their work: Michelle Stone, 'Left March' and 'Lowlife'; David Urena, 'Our March'; Sherry Blankenship, 'Friendly Regard for Horses'.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THIS PROJECT

- Bois, Yve-Alain. 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', *Art in America*, April 1988.
- Bojko, Szymon. *New Graphic Design in Revolutionary Russia*, New York: Praeger, 1972.
- Barron, Stephanie and Maurice Tuchman. (Eds.). *The Avant-Garde in Russia 1910-1930*. Cambridge: MIT Press and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980.
- Greet, Anne Hyde (Trans.). *Apollinaire, Guillaume, Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Janecek, Gerald. *The Look of Russian Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

- Lissitzky–Kuppers, Sophie. *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1968.
- Marshall, Herbert (Trans. and Ed.). *Mayakovsky*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1965.
- Mayakovsky, Vladimir. *Poems*, trans. by Dorian Rottenberg. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972.
- Nisbet, Peter. 'An Introduction to El Lissitzky', *El Lissitzky*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 1987.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Poets of Russia 1890–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.



For Reading Out Loud in Context

A template assists desktop publishers to make typographic decisions on the desktop, but does not necessarily provide sound design. Even simple modifications can render a template ineffectual.