Building the Modular Body: Gender, Labor, and Trauma in the Work of Aleksei Gastev

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Dickinson College, 2013

Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2020

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2023

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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2023

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University of Pittsburgh, 2023

This interdisciplinary dissertation contributes to literary and historical scholarship on early Soviet culture by focusing on representations of gender, labor, and embodiment in the writings of poet, metalworker, and theorist Aleksei Gastev. Gastev's work has been little translated to English, often regarded as a peculiar entry in the already quixotic utopianism of the early Soviet avant-garde. Beyond situating Gastev's work in its Soviet literary and sociocultural context, the dissertation seeks to make Gastev legible as a cultural theorist whose ideas reverberate in unexpected ways with more recent post-humanist critical theory practices developed in the past two decades. This research has been informed by Donna Haraway's writings on intersubjectivity and collective consciousness, which formed the backdrop for the dissertation's approach to Gastev's mechanized collectivism; Jane Bennett's writings on human-machine assemblages as "confederations of actants" with diffuse agency; and McKenzie Wark's "low theory," which challenges cultural theorists to think in interdisciplinary terms to make creative connections. Gastev's utopian vision for human embodiment and human-machine interaction has high potential to provide insights about 21st century human optimization projects–e.g., Noom, the Quantified Self, Fitbit.

Table of Contents

Title Page .... **i**

Committee Membership Page .... **ii**

Abstract .... **iv**

Table of Contents .... **v**

Acknowledgements .... **vii**

1.0 Introduction: Who is Aleksei Gastev? **1**

1.1 Methodology **15**

1.2 Chapters **20**

2.0 Science, Sex, and Radical Love: *What Is to Be Done?* and the Roots of the "Accursed Question" **23**

2.1 Introduction **23**

2.2 Chernyshevsky's Politico-Literary Landscape **24**

2.3 Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* **36**

2.4 Radical Sex and Radical Love in Tolstoy and Bogdanov **56**

2.5 Conclusion **70**

3.0 The Tragedy of Consciousness: Sex, Gender, and Trauma in "The Accursed Question" **72**

3.1 Introduction **72**

3.2 "The Accursed Question" **79**

3.3 The Tragedy of Consciousness 103

3.4 Conclusion 117

4.0 The Working Organs: From Human Subject to Proletarian Unit 126

4.1 Introduction 126

4.2 A Sedimentation of Violence 129

4.3 The Violence After Violence 149

4.4 Interobjectivity 163

4.5 Conclusion 172

5.0 A Provenance of the Modular Body Project 174

Bibliography 181

Acknowledgements

To Volodia Padunov, without whose encouragement this project would not have grown the way it has, whose insights and challenges I miss, and who could not be here to see it completed.

1.0 Introduction: Who is Aleksei Gastev?

Even his fellow revolutionaries considered Aleksei Gastev[1] to be peculiar. He was short, intense in his dealings with both himself and others, severe to the point of awkwardness. Unlike some of his revolutionary peers, Gastev had extensive experience as a factoryworker. He lived for many years entirely on his earnings from this work. The futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov[2] praised his poetry for bringing the language of the factory into the arts, calling Gastev a "fragment of labor conflagration in its purest form" (qtd. in Vaingurt "Poetry of Labor and Labor of Poetry" 210). He eventually came to be known as the Soviet Taylor,[3] finding his passion, one might say, in time-

[1] This project will use the Library of Congress transliteration system for modern Russian (without diacritical marks). In cases where a particular transliteration in English has become standard (e.g., Gorky, Chernyshevsky, etc.), the text will default to that. Texts translated by the author will be cited in transliterated Russian in the bibliography.

[2] Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922), a Futurist poet who experimented with what he called "trans-sense" language that operated through phonetic and rhythmic analogy. He is known for, among other things, his participation in drafting "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" ("*Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu*"), the Russian Futurist manifesto published in 1912, and the prologue of the play *Victory Over the Sun* (*Pobeda nad solntsem*).

[3] Frederick Winslow Taylor was an engineer who conducted a series of time studies in which a job was divided into distinct steps, each of which was timed using a stopwatch; steps deemed nonessential were eliminated while the remainder were streamlined to optimize efficiency. Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*, published in 1911, was the result of these time studies. In it, he describes a crisis of national efficiency, writing that employers and managers are searching for a "readymade, competent man" but that "our duty, as well as our opportunity, lies in systematically cooperating to train and to make this competent man" (Taylor 6). Taylor proposed that Scientific Management could solve the problems of class struggle by aligning the interests of workers with those of management,

and-motion studies and calculating the most efficient arc of the hammer to the anvil. He was also an ascetic, who never spoke of his personal life and, by all accounts, abhorred emotional expression in his interpersonal relations. His early work dealt extensively with the "Woman Question," as it was often called, and the intricacies of gender relations. By the time he came to be known as the Soviet Taylor, however, questions of gender, sexuality, and love had been almost entirely excised from his work.[4] They are, in fact, so wholly absent that this absence acts as a ghostly structure underlaid beneath these later writings. His second short story, self-published in 1904, deals entirely with the messy questions of what he elsewhere called "intimate life," indicating that there was some distance to travel from revolutionary love to the ring of the hammer as it met steel.

This dissertation project has the dual goal of situating Gastev in his historical and sociocultural context as well as of reintroducing him to a wider readership as a theorist with valuable insights relevant to contemporary discussions on the intersection of technology, labor, and the body. Gastev is an intriguing cultural figure because his work spans a variety of genres: he was a metalworker, a poet, a theorist, a union organizer, a political agitator, and many other things during his life. As such, I attempt to situate him at the intersection of multiple historical, literary, and sociocultural contexts—among them, late imperial literary culture and early Soviet political history; early Soviet cultural trends and labor history; the shift from issues related to late imperial gender and sexuality to the early Soviet reconfigurations of the same; among others. The dissertation examines a wide range of Gastev's writings, from his early literary production to his

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though many contemporaries, particularly among the trade unions and socialist movement, criticized his theory as exploitative.

[4] Other writers of the same period were, of course, discussing and debating these questions vigorously. Aleksandra Kollontai and her work with the *Zhenotdel* come to mind immediately, but she was hardly alone in this work.

journalism while in Paris to, finally, his labor theory, in an effort to articulate the development of his views on the human body and the role of embodiment in producing individual subjectivity.

Gastev's mode of thought, as this dissertation seeks to demonstrate, constructs a linkage between gender, labor, and trauma. Each of these concepts is implicated in the others throughout his writings. Gender is an attribute that comes into being as an experience of trauma in Gastev's early works; labor eventually comes to be the tool by which gender is excised from the body, converting the trauma of gendered embodiment into a new bodily experience defined in terms of process, and of which labor is the expression. Labor, in Gastev's late work, is what liberates the body from 'nature' and thereby gender, allowing the body to then define itself in terms of its usefulness or productivity. In this way, Gastev's work repurposes the trauma of gender—as gender is, in the theoretical framework he constructs, inherently traumatic—into a purposeful step on the way to the body's transformation from man or woman into proletarian unit.

This aspect of the dissertation was informed by Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, where she elaborates on the difference between the tool and the weapon, writing: "What we call a 'weapon' when it acts on a sentient surface we call a 'tool' when it acts on a nonsentient surface. The hand that pounds a human face is a weapon and the hand that pounds the dough for bread or the clay for a bowl is a tool" (Scarry 175). Gastev's work portrays the 'biological,' 'natural' state of having (doing, being) a gender as violence that over time sediments into trauma; to take Scarry's terminology, gender is, in Gastev's writing, a weapon acting on the sentient surface of the human body. Gastev's labor theory, and the concept of what I call interobjectivity that undergirds it, turns the trauma of gender from weapon to tool. The "acute suffering" of pain—in Scarry's writing, physical pain; in Gastev's, physical or psychological—becomes "self-regulated and modest suffering" through the process of labor. Labor, for Scarry, is a "diminution of pain," in which the

“*aversive intensity* of pain becomes ... *controlled discomfort*” (Scarry 171, italics in original). For Gastev, labor is the pathway to liberation from the alienating disorder of the organic body, a disorder that reaches its most acute state of pain in relation to the ‘biological’ demands placed on it by gender.

By the time Gastev’s writing shifted from literature to labor theory, the logic underlying his work had moved away from a critique of gendered, individualist subjectivity to the construction of a collectivity that appears to eschew gender and subjectivity altogether, opting instead for what the dissertation defines as interobjectivity. The final chapter of the dissertation explores this term in order to determine whether interobjectivity entails a dissolution of selfhood altogether or its reconfiguration into something else; it is possible that this question cannot be answered definitively. Ultimately, the Gastevian model of the human-machine complex, a term that he often employed, provides another vision for human collectivity that can productively add to contemporary discussions on the utility of individual selfhood and the structure of human existence in the era of the Anthropocene, one that has not previously been available to a wider English-speaking audience. Because Gastev remains understudied and therefore potentially unfamiliar to English-speaking academics, it is best to start with a simple question: who was Aleksei Gastev?

Gastev is most typically discussed as one of the early stars of the *Proletkul't* movement and as the face of Soviet Taylorism. His first book of poems, *Poetry of the Worker’s Blow* (*Poeziia rabochego udara*), was first published in 1918 and subsequently reissued in at least six editions. Gastev is a surprising and intriguing cultural figure. He joined the Social-Democratic Party in 1900 and went on to become a professional revolutionary and operative working in concert with the party’s Bolshevik wing. His political career began in earnest, however, in 1902 when he was expelled from the Moscow Teachers College following his participation and organizing role in a

student demonstration to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the death of Nikolai Dobroliubov.[5] The expulsion came just before he was to have taken his final exams and earned his degree; it was after this that he devoted himself entirely to his political activities.

He was arrested again in 1903 for spreading "illegal propaganda" among the textile workers in Naro-Fominskoe and sentenced to three years' exile in Vologda, which he spent in Ust'-Sysolsk', Vizinga, and finally Iarensk, from which he escaped in 1904.[6] He was apparently quite the bother for authorities even there, organizing demonstrations among the other exiles to protest police brutality; writing to the regional governor to complain that a significant portion of his subsistence allowance had been confiscated by corrupt officials; and even applying to be a tutor, a request that was denied in no uncertain terms as, evidently, he took these sessions as opportunities to engage older students in politics.[7]

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[5] Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861) was a literary and social critic who published along with Nikolai Chernyshevsky in *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*). Among other things, he is known for his review of Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* titled "What is Oblomovism?" ("*Chto takoe oblomovshchina*?") which, like many of his writings, extolled the values of Russian realism as both artistic technique and method of social critique. As a member of the *raznochintsy* discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, Dobroliubov presented a challenge to the established social order and political dominance of the nobility, and was a vocal proponent of radical social change before his untimely death in 1861. As such, he became an iconic figure in Russian letters and, like his contemporary Chernyshevsky, would go on to wield a great deal of political and philosophical influence on subsequent generations of aspiring revolutionaries, like the young Gastev.

[6] According to Kurt Johansson in *Aleksej Gastev: Proletarian Bard of the Machine Age*, he escaped by train after spending only ten days in Iarensk, despite the nearest railroad being about 120 miles away, and seemed to have encountered little difficulty in evading tsarist authorities during this time (Johansson 14).

[7] "Gastev cannot be permitted to engage in pedagogical activities," one official report stated bluntly (Johansson 13).

It was in June of 1904 that Gastev left Russia for Paris. He began to attend evening courses at an institute organized by Russian emigres, where he started to study French, eventually learning to speak it fluently. He also found work during this period as a fitter in a factory. Evidently, he was also in contact to some extent with Lenin during this time, as he wrote at least one letter to him under the pseudonym Popovich that fall. By the end of this same year, he had arrived in Geneva, where he self-published the short story "The Accursed Question" ("Prokliatyi vopros") using the pseudonym A. Odinokii.[8]

He had returned to Russia by the early days of spring 1905, arriving in Iaroslavl', where he was sent by the central committee of the Bolshevik wing of the RSDRP and placed at the disposal of the Northern Workers' Union (*Severnyi soiuz*).[9] By now, Gastev had grown into the role of professional revolutionary. He was active in the cities of Iaroslavl', Kostroma, and Ivanovo-Voznesensk organizing and participating in strikes in the textile industries there throughout 1905. The goal of these demonstrations was to improve the material conditions of the workers: their working day was at least 11 hours long; they had no protection against random firings; and no form of old-age pension or insurance in case of accident, injury, or death. These pursuits mark Gastev as among the faction within the Bolshevik wing of the RSDRP dubbed the "economists," who considered the concrete improvement of workers' conditions as a necessary and worthy goal, although he spoke both for and against this position at different points throughout this period. For

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[8] "The Accursed Question" is actually Gastev's second published work; a short story titled "Behind the Wall" ("Za stenoi)" had been printed in the newspaper *The Northern Edge* (*Severnyi krai*) under the penname I. Dozorov during his first exile in Vologda.

[9] A socialist organization originally founded in Saratov that disseminated revolutionary literature and participated in the strikes of 1905.

his part, Lenin opposed the economists' approach and argued enthusiastically for political agitation and organization as the party's primary goal. While Gastev helped to organize striking workers throughout 1905, he also spoke out in favor of Lenin's position (Johansson 13-17).

Gastev spent the majority of 1905 between Iaroslavl', Kostroma, and Ivanovo-Voznesensk engaged in strike organizing. But at some point, he moved to Rostov. It was during December of this period that he allegedly infiltrated the 48th Artillery barracks in Rostov, dressing in uniform and even rooming with the soldiers, as part of an attempt to spread the ideas of the RSDRP among enlisted men and to procure weapons for party combat detachments (Johansson 19). In letters from this time, he expresses the belief that arming the workers was necessary in their struggle for better conditions, and he is known to have been involved in the party's Kostroma combat detachment as well.

At the beginning of 1906, Gastev was still in Russia, splitting time between Kostroma and Rostov. In June of that year, he was arrested for the third time and sentenced to another three years of exile, this time in Arkhangel'sk. He fled to Paris for the second time after only a month, but his stay appears to have been short as he was back in Russia by November. By 1907, he was living under assumed names in St. Petersburg, working variously as a tram operator and on assembly lines. He does not seem to have been particularly active as a writer during this time but was instead becoming interested in Russia's trade union movement. In April 1907, he joined the St. Petersburg Metalworkers' Union and was nearly arrested at numerous meetings, each time evading police as his false papers were in order (Johansson 22-25).

In his writings from the period of 1910-1913, Gastev expressed a deep disappointment with the failure of the 1905 revolution. He blamed the shortfalls of 1905 largely on the system of party politics, whereby a small faction, often long removed from the factory floor and the realities of a

life spent engaged in industrial labor, imposed its will onto the masses of the people. Considering that he withdrew his membership from the RSDRP sometime between 1907 and before 1910, these views do not seem to be a label he retroactively applied to describe his opinions at that time. By 1910, his views were far more closely aligned with syndicalism. Some quirk of the tsarist censorship system permitted the publication of syndicalist literature after 1905; this was probably how Gastev first encountered these ideas. In short, syndicalism maintained that the most effective method for breaking down capitalism and improving concrete conditions for workers was the general strike. Its theories tethered the breakdown of capitalism with the improvement of workers' lives in a way that one can see someone like Gastev finding appealing. Moreover, as a movement it was anti-hierarchical: there was no need for a small vanguard class to lead the proletariat to revolution, but the proletariat was itself capable of social revolution and the establishment of a socialist society based on trade union structures.

After 1910, if not earlier, Gastev was not officially affiliated with any political party. He was active in the trade union movement—eventually becoming secretary of the St. Petersburg Metalworkers' Union—and a writer of incisive social commentary for the St. Petersburg syndicalist journal *Life for All* (*Zhizn' dlia vsekh*)[10] about the intersection of technology, labor, and the body. He would not join the Communist Party—postrevolutionary successor to the Bolshevik faction of the RSDRP—until 1931.

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[10] *Life for All* was a radical journal published by the St. Petersburg journalist Vladimir Posse (1864-1940), known for his socialist leanings and radical social critiques. He founded a syndicalist cooperative called the Labor Union (*Trudovoi soiuz*) in 1906 which was eventually shut down by tsarist authorities for disseminating radical literature. From 1910 to 1918, Posse and what remained of his cooperative published *Life for All* monthly. It included fiction, poetry, literary criticism, and social critique from an anarcho-syndicalist perspective.

Eventually, Gastev moved for the third time from St. Petersburg to Paris, where he lived and labored from 1910 to 1913. While in Paris, he found work in metal fabrication and briefly drove a taxi (Johansson 34). He is also known to have participated in the Proletarian Culture League set up by Anatoly Lunacharsky[11] and Fedor Kalinin[12] during this last stay in Paris, and continued his participation in the trade union movement, joining the Russian faction of the Metalworkers' Union in France and becoming the first secretary of the Paris workers' club. By the end of 1913, he returned to Russia and in 1914 was sentenced to his fourth term of exile to Narym, this time for four years. He returned to St. Petersburg (then Petrograd) after the revolution in 1917, having spent the interim time evading police as he bounced from place to place between Tomsk and Novo-Nikolaevsk.

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[11] Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) would go on to become the first people's commissar of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*) after the 1917 revolution, serving in that post until 1929. He was a close associate of both Maxim Gorky and Aleksandr Bogdanov, developing along with them the ideas behind what would become the Proletarian Culture movement in the post-revolutionary era. He helped to organize the two Proletarian Culture party schools in Capri (1909, with Bogdanov and Gorky) and on Bologna (1910-11, with Gorky) that sought to tutor worker-students in Marxist ideas, raise their level of revolutionary consciousness, and encourage the development of a truly proletarian style of art.

[12] Fedor Kalinin (1882-1920) studied at the Capri Party School in 1909, where he met Lunacharsky and Bogdanov. He was a member of the *Vpered* group of which Gorky, Bogdanov, and Lunacharsky were founders. He was first secretary of the League of Proletarian Culture in Paris in 1913. In 1917, he was elected to the central committee of *Proletkul'ʹt* and served on the editorial board for the *Proletarian Culture* (*Proletarskaia kulʹtura*) journal. He also was chair of the Department for the Assistance of Independent Class Educational Organizations in the Commissariat of Enlightenment from 1917 until his death from illness in 1920.

Gastev's pre-revolutionary biography paints him as a man of eclectic experience and immense, frenetic drive. In addition to his revolutionary activity and artistic pursuits, Gastev had worked variously before 1917 as a lathe operator, a fitter, a taxi driver, a tram operator, and on factory assembly lines, among other things. It is perhaps fitting that someone with such a varied career and eclectic interests, who was interested in revolutionary change, would eventually settle into the hybrid role of vocational trainer and labor theorist, as he did after 1920. As early as his time at the Moscow Teachers College, he was learning the ins and outs of mechanical maintenance, tinkering with machinery. He was also known to have greatly enjoyed watching jugglers, acrobats, magicians, and the like perform, regarding their masterful, dexterous movements[13] as the "proof that the muscles and reflexes could be trained to perform phenomenal feats of precision and agility" (Johansson 104).

The first known physical description of Gastev was issued by the Vologda governor after his first escape from exile: "Age 22 years; height 2 *arshins* and 5 *vershoks* [approx. 5'5]; gray eyes, wears glasses; hair, eyebrows, moustache and beard light brown; nose, mouth, and chin average; ... wears pants tucked into bootlegs ... ; no distinguishing marks or characteristics" (qtd. in Johansson 14). Other contemporary accounts describe him as a "tightly wound steel spring," energetic, "strong-willed," demanding in his relations with both himself and others (104). He was known to be an articulate yet impassioned speaker and an exacting debater. When he performed his poetry on the factory floor after the revolution, he did so with a booming voice and cadence

[13] For more on the importance that late imperial and early Soviet culture placed on physical prowess and skill, see: Harte, Tim. *Faster, Higher, Stronger, Comrades!: Sports, Art, and Ideology in Late Russian and Early Soviet Culture*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2020.

reminiscent of the chants that were once to be heard in Orthodox church services. Intense and "strong-willed" though he may have been, contemporaries often also described him as "friendly and considerate" (Johansson 104).

Even his peers, then, were not exactly certain what to make of him. Aleksandr Bogdanov, controversial Bolshevik philosopher and co-originator of the *Proletkulʹt* movement of which Gastev was part, praised Gastev as a perfect example of a talented worker-poet[14] while also dismissing him as a theoretician of any ability.[15] Numerous works of literature[16] from the 1920s engage, directly or indirectly, with Gastev's Scientific Organization of Labor (*nauchnaia organizatsiia truda*, or NOT, often referred to as Taylorism), the movement to which he dedicated himself in full after 1921. Many of these satirize his vision derisively or craft a dystopian setting

[14] In a 1918 article titled "What is Proletarian Poetry?" ("Chto takoe proletarskaia poeziia?") Bogdanov cites Gastev's poem "Factory Whistles" ("Gudki") as an artful deployment of the "lyric 'we,'" which he takes to represent the "spirit of creativity" within the comradely collective of the proletariat (Bogdanov "What is Proletarian Poetry?" 25).

[15] He published a direct rebuttal to an article titled "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture" ("O tendentsiakh proletarskoi kulʹtury") that Gastev wrote for the June 1919 issue of *Proletarian Culture*, which is discussed at length later in the dissertation. In this rebuttal, Bogdanov accuses Gastev of being a machine "fetishist" (Bogdanov "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture (A Reply to A. Gastev)" ["O tendentsiakh proletarskoi kulʹtury (Otvet A. Gastevu)"] 49). He goes on to dismantle Gastev's argument from the preceding article point by point, ending by writing: "He oversimplifies the issue [of the nature and development of proletarian culture] itself, on the one hand, and his own calculations on the other" (52). As is often the case with Bogdanov, he makes some good points.

[16] Evgenii Zamiatin's *We* (*My*) and Yurii Olesha's *Envy* (*Zavistʹ*) may be the best known among these.

based on the supposed principles of his theory. Even some of the literary critics who tended to support his work thought at times that his vision went too far.[17]

Gastev's Central Institute of Labor (*Tsentralnyi institut truda*, or the TsIT), at which he would come to put his ideas on the Scientific Organization of Labor into practice, was founded in 1920, receiving full support from the fledgling Soviet state beginning in 1921. He abandoned literature in favor of pursuing his Taylorist agenda at the Institute, publishing no further fiction or poetry after this time. Instead, he produced pamphlets and manuals intended to aid in streamlining workflows in Soviet heavy industry and textile manufacture and, most interestingly, to economize the movement of working bodies to ensure the most efficient expenditure of energy. In this endeavor, he was highly influenced by Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor, whom he regarded as pioneers of progress and modernity whose insights could be used to bring the RSFSR into the industrial present.

Gastev's Taylorist vision, however, went farther than that of his American counterparts. It was ultimately to be a total-life management system, whereby each movement, moment, and bodily process of the worker would be accounted for and optimized. In practice, this reordering of time, space, and human operations within them was to have resulted in a maximization of the worker's leisure time. Much of Gastev's writing, however, seems to belie this idea, as he writes

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[17] Fedor Kalinin praised Gastev's poetry, saying of it that it left "no place for the individual I or the spirit of individualism," but instead depicted "a many-faced, immeasurably large, incalculable 'we'" that inspired the proletariat (qtd. in Naiman 71). This same Kalinin would later respond to Gastev's "On the Tendencies" article in profoundly negative terms: "Gastev fetishizes technology. One must not forget that the life of the worker is not determined by his profession; he has a complex and varied life beyond the factory which is also determined by his class position" (Kalinin "Proletarian Culture and Its Critics" ["Proletarskaia kulˈtura i ee kritiki"] 3).

about human-machine union and the obliteration of individual selfhood in ecstatic, often almost sexual terms.

Perhaps the most famous and oft-repeated quote comes from his 1919 piece "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture" ("O tendentsiakh proletarskoi kulˈtury"), published in the journal *Proletarian Culture* (*Proletarskaia kulˈtura*). Here, he writes about the new "mechanized collectivism" to be found within proletarian psychology:

> The manifestations of this mechanized collectivism are so alien to personality, so anonymous, that the movement of these collective-assemblages [workers and their machines] approaches the movement of things in which there no longer exists an individual human entity, instead only even, normalized steps, faces devoid of expression, soul, scoured of lyricism, emotions measured not by screams, or laughter, but by the pressure gauge and tachometer (*manometrom i taksometrom*). (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 45)

The piece posits this cultural uniformity as a positive development in the psychology of the industrial working class. Gastev later goes on to describe a global proletariat united as if by one "world-brain," in which everyone has access to each other's thoughts and operates as one unified mechanism. In other articles of the period, he calls this scouring away of the "lyricism" ("*dusha lishennaia liriki*") that attends human endeavor a form of "levelling" (*nivellirovanie*) in which the uncertainty and messiness that define humanity will be reforged in the image of the machine. The 1919 article mentions sexuality precisely once:

> Normalizing tendencies (*normirovochnye tendentsii*) are currently infiltrating the militarized aspects of the workers' movement, such as strikes and sabotage, but they also will come to be found in social art (*sotsialˈnoe tvorchestvo*), alimentation,

> habitation, and, finally, even in intimate life, all the way to the aesthetic, intellectual, and sexual demands of the proletariat. (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 43)

In his writings from 1921 onwards, Gastev avoids mention of sexuality or gender almost entirely, a stark contrast from his work in earlier years. Many of his contemporary critics took exception to the above passage in particular—Bogdanov, for instance, cites it directly in his rebuttal as an example of gross authoritarianism—and readers may certainly find it off-putting.[18] Bogdanov and Kalinin were not the only ones to criticize him. Platon Kerzhentsev and the League of Time (*Liga vremia*)[19] formed the Central Institute's direct competition for primacy of place in the Scientific Organization of Labor movement. They took him to task for his pedagogical methodology and the time-motion studies, which they often couched as frivolous and a waste of the state's time and money. Ultimately, however, Gastev's view of the Scientific Organization of Labor won the day —and the support of Lenin and other prominent Bolsheviks of the period.

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[18] In fact, Zamiatin and Olesha both devote a good portion of their novels satirizing this very point.

[19] Kerzhentsev formed the League of Time, according to the article he published in *Pravda* on July 18, 1923, in response to another of the usual delays before the start of a committee meeting. His American colleague supposedly commented that a loss of 7,000 hours of labor time was equal to the construction of one airplane (Brunnbauer 461). Management of time, then, had a clear relation to productivity. The League of Time was organized shortly thereafter and remained in existence until 1925. Like Gastev's Central Institute, Kerzhentsev's League sought to reform the exhausted, inefficient Soviet worker into a New Soviet Person who lived according to a systematized rubric and whose energy intake and expenditure was optimized for best performance. For more on the League see Brunnbauer, Ulf. "'The League of Time' (Liga Vremia): Problems of Making a Soviet Working Class in the 1920s." *Russian History*, vol. 27, no. 1-4, 2000, pp. 461–95.

When placed on a continuum with Gastev's larger body of work, the "gross authoritarianism" for which Bogdanov castigates him becomes rather fraught and complex, begging the question of what, precisely, is so threatening about "intimate life" that it must be so regulated and controlled? Surprisingly—or perhaps not—investigating the fraught position that Gastev assigns to sex and gender in his early writings leads to the intersection of labor and the body in his later work.

1.1 Methodology

This interdisciplinary dissertation contributes to literary and historical scholarship on late imperial and early Soviet culture by focusing on the representation of labor, gender, and embodiment in the varied writings of poet, metalworker, and theorist Aleksei Gastev. In addition to situating Gastev's work in its late imperial and Soviet literary and sociocultural context, the dissertation also seeks to make Gastev legible—especially for English language readers—as a cultural theorist whose ideas reverberate in unexpected ways with the post-humanist critical theory school that has developed in the past two decades. This research has been informed by Donna Haraway's writings on intersubjectivity and collective consciousness, which formed the backdrop of the project's approach to Gastev's mechanized collectivism; Jane Bennett's writings on human-machine assemblages as "confederations of actants" with diffuse agency; and McKenzie Wark's concept of low theory, which challenges cultural theorists to think in interdisciplinary terms to make creative and unexpected connections.

Considering that Gastev's life and career were in themselves eclectic and covered a lot of disciplinary ground, so to speak, it follows that his work has been discussed in a variety of contexts and from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives. For many years, it was primarily social scientists who devoted attention to Gastev. Kendall Bailes has written about early Soviet debates over Taylorism, of which Gastev was a staunch supporter, discussing the pitfalls that proponents of the adoption of Taylorist management methods faced and how they sought to differentiate Soviet Taylorism from its capitalist counterparts.[20] Zenovia Sochor has discussed Gastev's work from the vantage point of labor history, detailing the competition Gastev faced from Platon Kerzhentsev and the League of Time as well as the criticism his vision of a workers' collective received for being too similar to a "militarist drill" (qtd. in Sochor 258). Richard Stites has investigated Gastev's poetry and the Scientific Organization of Labor as another aspect of early Soviet attempts to create the New Man.[21] Gastev's labor theories, then, have been thoroughly analyzed as artifacts of the early Soviet approach both to the cultural and political concept of a workers' collective and to the economic need to improve productivity in the early half of the 1920s.

Before he became a labor theorist and vocational trainer, however, Gastev was a poet. His poetry has also received its fair share of analysis in the realm of early Soviet cultural and literary studies. Julia Vaingurt has analyzed Gastev's concept of biomechanics, which entailed eliminating bodily movements that wasted energy unnecessarily, and inculcating instead new habits of movement and reflexes to establish paths through the world composed of straight lines and right

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[20] Bailes, Kendall E. "Alexei Gastev and the Soviet Controversy over Taylorism, 1918-24." *Soviet Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1977.

[21] Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 1989.

angles. Gastev's poetry, as he himself put it, set itself the task of "technicalizing" (*tekhnizatsiia*) the word,[22] severing it "from its living human carrier" (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 45). Vaingurt captures this sentiment perfectly when she writes that Gastev sought the help of poetry in "the conversion of the excessiveness of the human body into the restraint and control of the machine" (Vaingurt "Poetry of Labor and Labor of Poetry" 210). She makes the further observation that Gastev also sought a kind of universal language in both poetry and labor, hoping to "expel everything he associated with Russianness[23] (disorder, weakness, wastefulness)" and to "transcend the concept of nationality" by adopting the order of the machine.

In *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s*, Vaingurt investigates Gastev's place as a theoretician of technology and the body in discourses that include thinkers like Dziga Vertov. For Vertov, she writes, the New Soviet Man was "an assemblage of perfect parts harvested from various bodies," meaning that he should regard the violence done to his body by technology "merely as a kind of industrial reassembly" (Vaingurt *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde* 35). In comparison, Gastev's approach is more "optimistic," as his theory posits that "the body itself is a machine that can ... be utilized as a tool" (35). This

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[22] One can read this as additional evidence (to what is discussed in the dissertation's final chapter) that Gastev himself saw his transition from art to labor theory as the continuation of a kind of 'total art project,' rather than a break. For more on this, see Groys, Boris. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond.* Princeton University Press, 1992.

[23] He, like many others of the time period, including Lenin, often laments Russian 'oblomovism.' In the labor writings, his tone can often dip into condescension when addressing the Russian worker who, more often than not, was a newcomer fresh from the provinces in need of enlightenment in the ways of industrial time.

project also investigates Gastev's treatment of the body-as-machine, and the role that violence and fragmentation play in forming and improving this machine.

Other scholars have touched on Gastev's place in the early Soviet discourse on gender, particularly the politics of sexuality and what might be deemed the 1920s cult of universal masculinity. Eliot Borenstein discusses the early Soviet equation of femininity with nature and reaction, and masculinity with technology and progress. In literature of the first decade of Soviet power, female characters are "under the ever-present threat of transformation into bodiless abstractions" (Borenstein 3). When many early Soviet literary works discuss a collective social body, its characteristics are invariably masculine (Borenstein n.79, p. 289). Eric Naiman, in *Sex in Public*, describes the gendered tension that pervades the collective social body that *Proletkul'	t* wished to construct. He quotes from Gastev's poem "The Tower" ("Bashnia"), which depicts the proletariat drilling into the earth to erect a tower, and the fear the proletariat still feels on reaching the top: "This moment ... reveals the extent to which the Proletkul't saw its phallic self always threatened and at war with the feminine embodiment of nature, with a biological *reality* ever capable of exposing the illusory dimension of Revolutionary transformation" (Naiman 69, italics in original).

Gastev's work has been little translated to English and is often regarded as a peculiar entry in the quixotic utopianism of the early Soviet avant-garde. This project seeks to situate Gastev's work in its historical context as bearing the influence of late imperial and early Soviet economic and social upheavals, while also taking it seriously as cultural theory that has distinct relevance to the contemporary moment. Gastev's utopian vision for human embodiment and human-machine interaction has the potential to provide insights about twenty-first-century human optimization

projects—e.g., Noom, the Quantified Self,[24] Fitbit. The dissertation makes the case for why a Soviet theorist presents a model of selfhood and human interconnection that has tremendous relevance for the contemporary cultural moment, prompting a reevaluation of the structure of—and necessity for—the discrete individual self as it is presently known.

By analyzing the wide scope of Gastev's writings—from poetry to prose to labor theory and less commonly read archival materials—this project hopes to provide a fuller picture of Gastev as writer and theorist, one situated within his historical and sociocultural context but with potential for great insight when placed in conversation with contemporary theorists of trans- and posthumanism. Moreover, it seeks to spotlight the Gastevian theory of the body, the tension this theory identifies between gender, embodiment, and individual selfhood, and how it seeks, in the later labor writings, to solve the problem that it sets itself.

Ultimately, Gastev emerges as a thinker for whom the supposed biological imperatives of gender presented a profound and painful conflict. Although mentions of gender are largely absent in his later labor theories, their absence is a structuring one: the proletarian unit—a being that is constructed, ostensibly, through the operation of Gastev's labor theory—overtakes the gendered body and replaces it. The proletarian unit is defined by its capacity for movement and interconnection, defined by its instrumentality. Insofar as the individual self remains a concept in Gastev's late work—something of an open question, as the dissertation demonstrates—it is transformed from attribute to process. By investigating the linked roles of gender, labor, and trauma within Gastev's theories, I hope to shed some light on how his proletarian unit is built, to

[24] See https://quantifiedself.com/ for more information.

what ends, and how his concepts can productively interact with contemporary trans- and posthumanist writings on models for selfhood in the Anthropocene.

1.2 Chapters

Chapter One lays the groundwork for the analyses that follow. This chapter focuses on Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What is To Be Done?*, the influence of which can be seen throughout Gastev's writing, but most acutely in his early fiction. While *What is To Be Done?* forms the central text of the chapter, it functions as the conduit through which changes in the social fabric of late imperial Russia can be synthesized and discussed. *What is To Be Done?* acted as a flashpoint in the culture of its time: Chernyshevsky's novel dealt with advances in medical science and the way these changes reconfigured conceptions of the body; it dealt centrally with the so-called "Woman Question," a burning topic at the time, and whether women were, in fact, capable of agency and self-determination; and, finally, with the material effects of love, integral to Chernyshevsky's revolutionary program.

Stylistically, Gastev's early writing especially resembles Chernyshevsky's. Chapter Two examines the 1904 short story "The Accursed Question," in which Gastev depicts a protagonist who could easily stand in as a young Rakhmetov prior to the action of *What is To Be Done?* The story follows protagonist Vasilii as he struggles with the moral permissibility of his carnal urges, and his anxiety regarding his own corporeality. However, this work also explores other deep and troubling questions: first, that of whether (heterosexual) masculinity and its sexual appetites are

inextricable from violence; second, of whether there is a ‘way out’ of male embodiment. The story presents Vasilii’s experience of masculinity as inescapably material: his body imposes a set of seemingly biological urges and compulsions onto his mind that terrify and alienate him from himself. Gender, and masculinity specifically, is, in the world of the story, a threat. This intense focus on the materiality of gender stands in stark contrast to the conspicuous absence of sex or gender in Gastev’s later work.

Chapter Three looks at Gastev’s Scientific Organization of Labor and its attitude toward the body, tracing the evolution of these ideas from his earlier fiction and poetry. Rather than repeat earlier work done by social scientists, this chapter has a different focus. In Gastev’s work, psychology is often physiological, and therefore what he called his social engineering programs focused on the inculcation of productive habits. His 24-hour timecards were one example of social engineering: by adhering to the schedule dictated by the timecard, the user could refashion their relationship to time through the generation of new, more productive habits. In the long term, this submission was intended to rewire the brain in such a way as to make workers more regimented and efficient in their performing of tasks and use of time. It was the inculcation of a control regime into the neural fabric of the body that liberated the worker—from disorder, chaos, and, ultimately, subjectivity. At the center of Gastev’s theory is the human body, a troubled cultural text and site of conflict on which technology operates to alternatively construct or disassemble a self.

The conclusion ties together the preceding strands of the dissertation, centering on the human body as their common concern and as the conduit through which ideas are communicated. The interaction of technology and the body often leads to anxiety (and sometimes euphoria) about the demarcation between the natural and the constructed; the existence of a self-possessed, free-thinking subject; traditional hierarchies of being. This was true at the turn of the century in pre-

revolutionary Russia and during the years following the revolution, much as it is today. The conclusion makes the case for why Gastev and his theory ought to be included in trans- and posthumanist inquiry as valid and insightful theoretical contributions, ones that can and do elaborate an alternative to individualized consumerist selfhood.

2.0 Science, Sex, and Radical Love: *What Is to Be Done?* and the Roots of the "Accursed Question"

2.1 Introduction

In order to talk about the attitudes towards sex, gender, and sexuality that prevailed in late imperial Russia—for purposes of this project, this refers to the 1880s up until the eve of the October Revolution—and later went on to inform the early Soviet approach to the very same, one has to investigate the roots of these positions in nineteenth-century politics and culture. When, in 1912, Gastev writes for the St. Petersburg syndicalist journal *Life for All* that the "woman worker and the prostitute are sisters in our time," and goes on to state that it is impossible to talk about one without talking about the other, he is tapping into a decades-long debate about women's labor, capacity for self-determination, and role in public life (Gastev 450). So, how does the cultural discourse develop in such a way as to lay the groundwork for this sort of statement by 1912?

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the nineteenth-century roots of the early twentieth century's destabilization of the heteronormative sex and gender matrix in Russian and later Soviet culture. Gastev's vision of the genderless proletarian world-brain does not simply appear out of thin air, so what are the ideas threaded through the soil from which it grows? As it attempts to answer this question, this chapter looks at one of the most famous utopian socialist novels of nineteenth-century Russia—Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat'*)—and later texts written in the wake of its influence. It is difficult to overstate the impact made by Chernyshevsky's novel. It served as a prism through which many major social concerns

of the day were refracted—namely, physiology as a burgeoning science and its implications for bodily autonomy, as well as the "Woman Question" and its relation to both the institution of marriage and the problem of sex work. Before delving into an analysis of the text, these introductory comments provide a broad picture of the political and literary landscape in which Chernyshevsky was operating.

2.2 Chernyshevsky's Politico-Literary Landscape

Chernyshevsky wrote *What Is to Be Done?* over a span of four months during his 1862 incarceration at the Peter and Paul fortress in St. Petersburg. It was first published serially in issues 3-5 of *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*)—the journal for which Chernyshevsky himself had served on the editorial board prior to his arrest—in 1863. In many ways, it was a direct response to Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* (*Otsy i deti*), published by the journal *Russian Messenger* (*Russkii vestnik*) in January of 1862. Turgenev's novel, among other things, details the philosophical rift between the "men of the '40s" and the "men of the '60s," whom the novel broadly deems nihilists. Though that term had been in use prior to the publication of *Fathers and Children*, its appearance there led to a widespread proliferation in its usage that later acquired a negative social connotation.

Who, then, are the "men of the '40s" that feature as the titular fathers in *Fathers and Children*? After the failed Decembrist Revolt of 1825, progressive gentry intellectuals in Russia found themselves disappointed with the prospects of revolutionary political action and turned to

matters of philosophy instead. Andrzej Walicki writes in *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* that the crackdown on political expression in the wake of the uprising, philosophical pursuits performed a "compensatory function for men of intellectual vigor living in a society where public life was almost totally paralyzed" (Walicki 116). Hegelian philosophy in particular was welcomed as providing a counterargument to the "irrationalism and conservatism" of romanticism, represented in Russia by the Slavophiles (Walicki 116).[25] The Slavophile position maintained that Russia, having been excluded from the "pagan rationalism" of ancient Rome, had been founded on purely Christian principles that resulted in Russia being truly united in universal community, whereas Western Europe, despite having the appearance of unity was in fact atomized and divided (Walicki 94). The Slavophiles contrasted the atomized individualism of the West with the Orthodox Christian concept of *sobornost'*, a "'free unity' of believers that precluded both self-willed individualism and its restraint by coercion" (Walicki 96).

In the Slavophile view, the gentry intelligentsia's superfluous man was the result of too close an identification with the cultural and political values of Western Europe as opposed to traditional (peasant) Russian values. Ellen Chances describes the superfluous man as "an ineffectual aristocrat at odds with society" who can recognize the presence of social ills and political backwardness but is unable to summon the courage to take action to combat them (Chances "The Superfluous Man" 112). Arguments can be made both for and against whether this

[25] For a thorough overview of the philosophical and ideological conflict between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers in nineteenth-century Russia, see Walicki, Andrzej. *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, Stanford University Press, 1979.

figure was represented positively or negatively in literature[26] of the time, but for the present project such assessments are irrelevant. Rather, the superfluous man is significant as a figure in literature of the mid-nineteenth century because he reflects the cultural and political pressures of the post-Revolt period leading into the reforms of the 1860s. Ultimately, the superfluous man is a schismatic figure torn between opposing polarities: on the one hand, he is completely impotent; on the other, he frequently possesses tremendous insight and wisdom. He is stuck between East and West, city and country, tradition and progress, etc.

In the post-Decembrist context, many viewed the Hegelian thesis that "the rational is real and the real is rational" as a potential solution to the torments of the superfluous man, part of a necessary "reconciliation with reality" among the progressive Russian gentry. According to this thesis, "the 'reason' of social reality is the law governing the movement of the Absolute, a law that is unaffected by the subjective pretensions of individuals" (Walicki 122). The individual's revolt against "historical Reason" is, therefore, motivated by an incomplete understanding, rendering it subjective and ultimately irrational. Walicki writes of the critic Vissarion Belinsky's[27] 1837 interpretation of this thesis, who took it as a "dispensation from the moral duty to protest," enabling him to "reject the heavy burden of responsibility." As he wrote in a letter to Nikolai Stankevich, reconciliation with reality meant "accepting that 'freedom is not license but action in accordance

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[26] See Chances, Ellen B. *Conformity's Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature*. Slavica Publishers, 1978; Clardy, Jesse V. *The Superfluous Man in Russian Letters*. University Press of America, 1980.

[27] Belinsky was not a member of the gentry but had achieved fame as a literary critic and gained entry into gentry circles through this method, in a singular instance of uplift, rather than the mass entry into upper rings of society as represented by the *raznochintsy*, discussed below.

with the laws of necessity'" (Walicki 122). In the aftermath of failed political revolt, that entailed, for the moment, a withdrawal from the realm of politics into that of idealist philosophy.

Eventually, however, some thinkers and activists believed that the time had come to reevaluate this stance. The "reconciliation with reality" did not provide an opportunity for the liberal intelligentsia to reintegrate into society, to overcome the alienation attending the superfluous man, but rather intensified its sense of isolation. This frustrated desire precipitated a shift from the philosophy of reconciliation to a philosophy of action. By 1841, Belinsky was searching for a "vindication of *active* participation in history" (Walicki 123, italics in original). If the philosophy of reconciliation maintained that "everything existing" was rationally and historically justified, therefore requiring the individual to adapt to things as they were, then the philosophy of action represented a change in perspective. Now, for Belinsky and others of his persuasion, general historical development itself was rational, rather than whatever resulted from the maintenance of the status quo. After 1841, Belinsky began to conceive of "progress as a law of history enacting itself in unremitting criticism and negation of fixed, anachronistic social patterns," which reenabled protest against the authoritarian policies of the tsarist state (124).

The clash between the superfluous men of the '40s and the radicals of the '60s came about on account of two major disagreements. First, although both groups did oppose the absolute authority of the tsar, the gentry liberals were interested in gradual reform—an *evolution* of policy. By contrast, the radicals favored immediate, overwhelming change—a *revolution* in policy. Second, the liberals favored idealist philosophers like Hegel, whereas the radicals were adherents of materialist philosophy, disciples of thinkers like Feuerbach and later Nietzsche. Ultimately, it became clear that the differences between these two camps were too great for them to say they were working in service of the same goals. *Fathers and Children* deals with this split; the character

of Bazarov is quite obviously a "man of the '60s," clearly one of the "children" indicated in the title.

Discussing the "men of the '60s" necessarily entails an examination of class dynamics. Educational reforms of the late 1850s made university schooling accessible to a slightly wider array of estates than had previously had access. Whereas prior to these reforms it was, by and large, only the (male) nobility who could reliably pursue university education whether in Russia or abroad, afterward, as Irina Paperno states in *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior*, it became accessible to slivers of the social strata outside of the nobility like the petite bourgeoisie and the clergy (Paperno 6). By the late 1850s, according to Richard Stites in *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*, women—of noble birth or non-noble but of means—were also allowed to audit university courses despite still being barred from receiving university degrees (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 52). Members of this new stratum of university-educated men from non-noble backgrounds were called *raznochintsy*.[28] While members of the clerical class or the petite bourgeoisie had been absorbed into the social ranks of the gentry in the past—Belinsky, for example—it was not until the 1860s that people from these social strata invaded the drawing rooms of the nobility *en masse*.

One of the core features of this new social group's experience was isolation—both from their class of origin and from the nobility-dominated 'polite society' into which they had entered by virtue of their education and political leanings. As Paperno puts it, "unequipped for even routine

[28] Elise Kimerling-Wirtschafter has translated this as "people of various ranks" in *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia's "People of Various Ranks."*

forms of salon interaction, the socially unrefined, awkward sons of provincial priests and village doctors faced innumerable social situations that were new to them and that were not covered by any preexisting system of rules." The rules of the polite society through which the nobility moved dictated that one had to have a solid command of French, including an impeccable accent, as well as have some familiarity with European music, art, and dance (Paperno 76). While this was standard in the upbringing and education of the gentry, the *raznochintsy* received no such training. As such, their entry into the homes and salons of their noble acquaintances often resulted in embarrassment and humiliation.

Members of the *raznochintsy* were not universally welcomed (or comfortable) in these spaces. Jokes about ex-seminarians became quite popular (Paperno 77). Even in progressive literary circles where support for the educational reforms was widespread, gentry writers were often quick to ridicule these newcomers. Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Druzhinin, some of the gentry contingent of *The Contemporary*, called Chernyshevsky, the son of a country priest, a "bedbug-stinking gentleman" in a move worthy of *Mean Girls* (qtd. in Paperno 77). Despite the chilly reception due to their lack of refinement, provinciality, and awkwardness, the arrival of the *raznochintsy* as a social group in the salons of the nobility heralded a sea change in Russian imperial society. Moreover, although much of the contemporary criticism focused on their uncouthness, their philosophical and political leanings marked them as distinct from the gentry in more important ways that signaled an end to the dominance of gentry liberalism and the dawn of something new.

The "naturalist materialism" of Ludwig Feuerbach proved tremendously influential for the thinkers of the '60s (Paperno 65). In his later writings, Chernyshevsky played an important role in synthesizing and disseminating Feuerbachian ideas inside Russia, making a huge impact on the

intellectual development of many subsequent generations of revolutionaries. The appeal of Feuerbachian materialism, for Chernyshevsky and many others, lay in its insistence on the "essential inseparability of spirit and matter" (Paperno 66). In Feuerbach's philosophy, this entailed a rejection of Hegel's concept of the Absolute; for Feuerbach, "man himself was the only absolute value" (Walicki 191). By extension, the "'supreme good, the divine being'" that humankind had heretofore called God was life[29] itself which, in its turn, individuals could be said to possess. Therefore, insofar as divinity existed, it was to be found in man, the possessor of 'life.'[30]

Feuerbachian philosophy also rehabilitated the individual, in the sense that it challenged the Hegelian view that "only ideas are truly real" while "individuals seen in isolation from the 'universal' (the Idea or Spirit) are pure abstraction" (Walicki 193). In the Feuerbachian conception, the opposite was true. This was part and parcel of Feuerbach's insistence on the interconnectedness of spirit and matter. If matter and spirit are inseparable, then the ontological status of matter must be raised to the level of spirit, making the individual, a material construct, an entity of importance that in the Hegelian framework it was not.

This stress on the material furthermore rested on a "cult of sense experience," which posited that everything was perceptible by humankind—if not immediately, then with the aid of tools (Paperno 66). Proceeding from this linkage of sensory experience and reality, Feuerbach also argued that "the body was the basis, the subject of personality; only by the body is a real personality

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[29] For extensive discussion on the development of "life" as a structuring concept in medicine of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Cartwright, Lisa. *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

[30] In the most basic terms, from Hegel to Feuerbach to Nietzsche, the evolution of Western philosophy can be charted like this: God is God → Man is God → God is dead.

distinguished from the imaginary personality of a specter ... the ultimate reality in human life was corporeal."

One might wonder how people were expected to be able to distinguish between their individual feelings and external reality. For this, Feuerbach privileged the concept of love (including, in keeping with the position of French utopian socialists like Charles Fourier, its expression through sex) as "the ontological proof of the existence of an external object, the only true criterion of reality and actuality" (Paperno 66). For thinkers of the '60s like Chernyshevsky, love came to occupy a place of central importance in their philosophical and political outlook.

The materialist turn in philosophy was accompanied by developments in the field of physiology that led to a rearticulation of philosophy's mind-body split wherein the concept of the soul was reconceived as materially based. That is, the soul, among adherents to Feuerbachian ideas like the nihilists of the '60s, was thought to be the product of physiological processes that occurred within the human body.[31] This rearticulation contributed to a rise in biologically based explanations for human thought, emotion, and behavior, particularly in the realm of gender relations. The "Woman Question," the issue of women's emancipation and right to self-determination, began to be discussed in more biological terms. As such, it soon became inextricably tied to the problem of sex work as a public health issue during this time.

In 1843, Nicholas I established a medical inspection bureau "designed less to control the practice [of prostitution] than to minimize its contagious effects," but sex work did not gain serious

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[31] Paperno writes that after the publication of Ivan Sechenov's *Reflexes of the Brain* (*Refleksy golovnogo mozga*) in 1863, the title of the book "became, in the vocabulary of the nihilists, a regular replacement for the outdated concept of 'soul'" (66).

public attention as a social and economic issue until the early 1860s, when a series of alarming medical reports on venereal disease were published (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 60). A study from the time demonstrated that in St. Petersburg, for example, the number of registered sex workers had grown by twenty percent between 1853 and 1867, despite the fact that the city's total population had only increased by six percent. Moreover, three-fourths of these registered sex workers were recorded as suffering from syphilis or other sexually transmitted infections. This study did not include the ranks of unregistered sex workers, of which there were no doubt many, and so could only be regarded as a partial portrait of the state of the sex trade in the city (60).

Sex work was, lastly, a profession that crossed boundaries of class, although as a social issue it was certainly exacerbated by poverty. According to Stites, a "rough profile" of St. Petersburg sex workers showed that they derived relatively equally from the petite bourgeoisie, the ranks of soldiers' wives and daughters, and the peasantry, with gentry nobility forming a much smaller proportion (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 61). The moral panic surrounding sex work coincided with a moral panic about the role of women in society more generally. At the core of each lay the question: who is a subject capable of self-determination under the law?

Undergirding the sex work panic and, by extension, the debate over the "Woman Question" more broadly, were two fundamental preoccupations. First, that of whether there existed, or ought to exist, separate public and private spheres. Second, participants in these debates disagreed on which citizens could be said to possess a capacity for self-determination, thereby determining who would be subject to criminal law, and who would be relegated to the administrative apparatus of the police. As Laura Englestein writes in *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*: "In principle, legal experts distinguished between the function of the

courts, which penalized actions that violated written laws, and that of the police, which disciplined behavior thought to promote criminal activity but not criminal in itself" (Engelstein 86). Functionally, this arrangement was a relic of the eighteenth-century custodial state that posited itself as the guardian of the citizenry's moral health and virtue. To be subject to the jurisdiction of the police effectively indicated exclusion from the body politic, that the state had determined a citizen to be incapable of self-determination; exposure to punishment by the criminal courts entailed recognition of one's status as rational, thinking subject (Engelstein 73).

All female sex workers fell under the purview of the police. By contrast, male sex workers were always subject to criminal prosecution, except in very specific instances. Englestein points out a wrinkle in the criminality of homosexual anal intercourse:

> The antisodomy statute made it impossible for the passive partner to consent to penetration. In assuming a female sexual posture, the 'victim' thus acquired a female subject-position before the law ... Except when engaged in conduct that mimicked vaginal penetration ... grown men were allowed to define their own relation to sexual experience in a way that grown women were not. (84)

This quirk of the antisodomy statute is relevant, beyond its juridical significance, in that it so clearly demonstrates the integral role that heterosexuality, its performance, and maintenance played in the constitution of a male gender identity and subject position in the popular imagination of the time. The same could be said in reverse, of course: that to occupy a female subject position entailed submission to male authority, both in the form of administrative regulation by the paternalistic state, and, more literally, by performance as a sexual object that yielded to male penetration.

In addition to the issue of sex work, the traditional family structure and the institution of marriage were in a state of crisis during this time. Numerous contemporary accounts discuss the problem of parental despotism and gentry women's efforts to escape their families and the demands and strictures of marriage. Despotism is an accurate word for describing the arrangement of family life as sanctioned by nineteenth-century imperial Russian law. As enshrined in the civil code, the patriarch was the final authority within the household, wielding complete control over both his wife and his children. Women were not allowed to leave their households or to take on paid work without the permission of the husband or father. Moreover, the law did not sanction the family patriarch for domestic abuse except that which resulted in "severe bodily injury." There were no formal provisions governing spousal separation and divorce was barred except in certain special circumstances, one of which was adultery. It was furthermore extremely arduous to obtain a divorce due to the mandatory court procedures that were both invasive and humiliating and often riddled with fraud. Lastly, no child, regardless of age or gender, could marry without the permission of parents or "other appropriate authorities" (Engelstein 32).

Is it any wonder that many women, particularly after university courses were opened to them for audit in the late 1850s, sought to escape the absolute authority of the patriarchal family structure?[32] In the absence of other avenues, the fictitious marriage became a popular tool of

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[32] The education available to women was, in the first instance, extremely limited by social class. This was doubly true before the educational reforms. In the second, the education traditionally available to women of the nobility was essentially vocational training to prepare them for "modest wifehood, motherhood, and domestic concerns" (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 3). Given the family patriarch's absolute authority over the household, access to university courses would be dependent on the father or husband's support of progressive ideas surrounding women's education.

liberation. One woman who escaped her domestic situation in this manner, Anna Evreinova, who was to become the first female doctor of law in Russia, describes it thusly: "'We were seeking people like ourselves, warmly devoted to a cause and whose principles were identical to ours, who would not so much marry us as liberate us'" (qtd. in Paperno 31). In general, the fictitious marriage ended shortly after the wedding and the spouses would go their separate ways. Sometimes they would live together with the understanding that the husband would not exercise his "conjugal rights." If the wife found her husband in this fictitious arrangement to be falling short of his obligation to "provide a meaningful common life dedicated to the cause," she could consider herself justified in leaving him (Paperno 32).

Some of these arrangements were, of course, more successful than others. As Stites has pointed out, they commonly ended in long, drawn-out divorces when one or the other spouse decided they wanted to marry someone else, for love or whatever other reason. It was not infrequent that during the period of the fictitious marriage one or both spouses would have children with someone else, who would then be illegitimate in the eyes of the law. For those who had been 'nihilists' in their youth but later returned to the conventional moral framework of the day, these scenarios could be quite painful. Moreover, the liberation afforded a woman in a fictitious marriage went only so far as the goodwill of the husband, and there were many who decided that, in fact, they wanted to avail themselves of their "conjugal rights" after all (Paperno 107). Therefore, while a useful means of escape, the fictitious marriage was in the final tally an imperfect tool born from desperation.

When *The Contemporary* published Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* in 1863, it essentially struck a match to dry kindling. That the imperial censors permitted the novel to be published at all was a great oversight that allowed the spark to catch and light a fire that would

leave its mark on Russian society for decades to come. The novel represents a timely synthesis of a number of the main issues on the minds of the intelligentsia of the period—the materialist turn in philosophy, the role of women in public and private life, and what truly constituted autonomy and self-determination for the human individual.

2.3 **Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?***

What Is to Be Done? had a polarizing effect on the reading public of imperial Russia. From the point of its initial publication, it enjoyed a long and controversial afterlife for many decades. Dostoevsky mocked the novel directly in *Notes from Underground (Zapiski iz podpolʹia)* published in 1864, and referenced it in numerous other works, where he wrote in characters that parodied Chernyshevsky in unflattering ways (*Demons* [*Besy*], *The Idiot* [*Idiot*]). He was far from the only prominent Russian writer to take Chernyshevsky's ideas to task in criticism and literature: Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* includes many critical allusions to *What Is to Be Done?* and Turgenev commented that the writing inspired "physical revulsion in him" (Paperno 26). Even supporters of the novel like Georgy Plekhanov conceded it possessed few aesthetic merits (Paperno 28). Nonetheless, it is difficult to overstate the influence Chernyshvesky's novel had on successive generations of revolutionaries, including, for example, Lenin, who claimed it as his favorite book and used the same title for his classic work.

What Is to Be Done? and the responses to it are a good barometer for the tensions and anxieties in the social fabric of mid-nineteenth-century tsarist Russia which subsequently form the

ground from which Aleksei Gastev emerges in 1904 with the short story "The Accursed Question," the subject of the next chapter. Three social issues of tremendous concern to the educated, engaged public of the time converge in Chernyshevsky's novel: the rise of the materialist worldview as represented in the burgeoning science of physiology; the "Woman Question"; and, in a fusion of the two preceding concerns, bodily autonomy as a necessary component of 'freedom,' in which both the institution of marriage and the persistent problem of sex work featured prominently as points of strife.

For those unfamiliar with the novel, *What Is to Be Done?* is a *bildungsroman*[33] that traces the social and intellectual awakening of Vera Pavlovna Rosalskaia, an intelligent young woman trapped in a despotic petite bourgeois household (her mother is a pawnbroker, her father a clerk) and threatened with marriage to the good-for-nothing libertine Mikhail Ivanovich Storeshnikov. As the son of her family's landlady, whose late husband was a Councilor of State,[34] Storeshnikov represents an attractive opportunity for social advancement and financial security, even wealth, despite the shortcomings of his character. For this reason, Vera's overbearing mother and, at the

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[33] A term in literary criticism describing the novelistic genre of the coming-of-age story that follows the development of a naïve character as they grow up and gain life experience and knowledge about the world, coming into themselves as human beings. Though initially appearing in Germany—hence the term—this literary form has spread throughout the world since the nineteenth century.

[34] Councilor of State is the fifth rank in the Russian Imperial Table of Ranks. Introduced in 1722 by Peter the Great during his struggles with the hereditary nobility, the Table of Ranks was a formalized hierarchic list of positions in the government, military, and court of imperial Russia, in which fourteenth was the lowest and first the highest. The Table of Ranks was designed to create a class of state servitors and ultimately elite whose standing and power resulted from its service to the tsar, thereby binding it to the executive and consolidating power with the ruler.

urging of his wife, her indolent, apathetic father, pressure her into accepting Storeshnikov's hand in marriage. She is finally delivered from this nightmare by a proposal from her brother Fedya's tutor, the medical student Dmitrii Sergeevich Lopukhov, who offers her a fictitious marriage in which they will live as platonic partners. She accepts this proposal, and they live together in this manner.

Vera's marriage to Lopukhov provides her with a stable and supportive environment in which she can pursue knowledge and develop herself as an individual subject without the demands placed on her in other environments by virtue of her class position and gender. While with Lopukhov, Vera starts a sewing cooperative—a representation of Chernyshevsky's ideas on the proper organization of labor and the economic path to women's emancipation—that comes to see great success.

Having been provided with social support and having achieved some of the financial stability that secures her independence from Lopukhov, Vera begins to think more deliberately about her wants and needs. It is during this process of self-actualization that she comes to realize she is in love with her husband's best friend from medical school, Aleksandr Matveevich Kirsanov. While with Lopukhov Vera feels deep admiration, gratitude, and respect, but passionate love and attraction remain absent. Instead, she finds those missing components in Kirsanov, which leads her to a moral crisis. The solution to this crisis comes in the form of Lopukhov faking his own suicide to allow Kirsanov and Vera to marry and live happily together in a 'true' marriage that nevertheless retains many of the egalitarian elements of the initial marriage between Lopukhov and Vera.

Ultimately, Lopukhov returns to Russia under an assumed name and ends up marrying a wealthy heiress named Katia Polozova, to whom his personality is much better suited. With the

help of a few serendipitous coincidences—Kirsanov, as it turns out, is called in to treat Katia Polozova when she is direly ill—Lopukhov and Katia make the acquaintance of Vera and Kirsanov and hit it off. By the novel's final pages, the two couples have moved into a joint apartment and manage a successful chain of workers' cooperatives, maintaining themselves as the social center of a group of young political radicals. The story concludes with what is likely a depiction of Chernyshevsky himself and his wife Olˈga Sokratovna Vasilˈeva,[35] with vague intimations about the imminent arrival of revolution.

The story makes clear from the first introduction of Kirsanov and Lopukhov that they are intellectual luminaries working on the cutting edge of physiology via the repetition of a few key images and references. Among the first things the reader learns about the pair is that they are medical students specializing in the study of the nervous system and are "both working on their doctoral dissertations, using up an enormous quantity of frogs" (Chernyshevsky 93). The motif of the dissected frog had, by the time *What Is to Be Done?* was published, acquired immediate recognizability as shorthand for the discipline of physiology. Bazarov, the young protagonist of *Fathers and Children*, has a habit of dissecting frogs in the spirit of scientific inquiry that contributed to his portrait as a nihilist that the critic Pisarev found "'astonishingly accurate'" (qtd.

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[35] Nikolai Gavrilovich and Olˈga Sokratovna married on the 29th of April 1853, against the wishes of Chernyshevsky's mother and only shortly after his father's funeral. Contemporary accounts of Olˈga Sokratovna describe her as effervescent and even frivolous, a persistent flirt with little interest in her husband's political and academic pursuits. (Readers may do with this information what they will.) More than one compares her to Vera Pavlovna, suggesting that she served as inspiration for the character. She and Chernyshevsky remained together throughout his many years of incarceration and exile, however, and when he was finally permitted to resettle in Astrakhan in 1883, she moved there to join him and remained until his death in 1889. She herself passed away in Saratov in 1918.

in Paperno 14). Moreover, Bazarov's frog dissections were "instantly recognizable" to the reading public as characteristic of the nihilists, so devoted to the natural sciences as the ultimate arbiter of the real.

While the initial critical reactions to *Fathers and Children* and the figure of Bazarov specifically were largely negative among the new generation of '60s critics, many of the so-called nihilists did come to perceive him as a model for their real-life behavior. Pisarev, the lead critic at the journal *Russian Word* (*Russkoe slovo*), contributed to Bazarov's reclamation by the younger generation with an article in which he recast Turgenev's nihilist in a positive light. For Pisarev, the youth of the day was pierced with "the deepest respect and love for the dissected frog," and, in fact, "that very same frog [formed] the key to the salvation and revitalization of the Russian people" (Pisarev 354). This was a nod to the direction in which medical science was heading, and to physiology as a materialist scientific discipline that could reveal fundamental, biological truths about the functioning of the human organism, a kind of precondition for the sort of atomizing gaze that Gastev's work would come to apply to the working body in later years.

Chernyshevsky also sought to rehabilitate Bazarov and to provide a positive image of the nihilist to counteract Turgenev's negative depiction. He offered "not a negatively defined image, but a coherent and all-encompassing positive program of behavior, from important social actions to minor details of domestic arrangement" (Paperno 15). Kirsanov and Lopukhov can be viewed as counterpoints to the figure of Bazarov. Like him, they are devoted to the natural sciences and have a rational, positivist approach to the world. They are initially introduced as representative examples of the following new "type" of medical student:

> They drop medicine and take up one of its auxiliary sciences—physiology, chemistry, or something of that sort ... In the name of their beloved science (they

> delight in abusing medicine, even though they devote all their efforts to it), they reject wealth, even prosperity, and, you see, they sit in hospitals making interesting scientific observations. They dissect frogs, cut open hundreds of corpses a year, and at the first opportunity they outfit themselves with a chemical laboratory. (Chernyshevsky 92)

Kirsanov and Lopukhov are among the new type of student who eschews private practice of medicine in order to devote themselves to scientific research in the name of a better future for humanity. The references to frog dissection serve to designate them specifically as physiologists, as, in accordance with the above, the dead, dissected frog had by that point become something of a mascot for the discipline.[36]

Later, after Lopukhov has exited the scene, the book links Kirsanov directly with physiology by placing his name in company with the foremost physiologists of the time:

> There was a certain man named Virchow who lived in Berlin, one named Claude Bernard who lived in Paris, and ... these Virchows, Claude Bernards, and others were the luminaries of medical science ... It was this very same Claude Bernard who'd spoken respectfully about Kirsanov's work when the young student was still completing his studies. (Chernyshevsky 214)

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[36] A famous photograph of the physiologist Ivan Sechenov taken in 1861 (the same year that Turgenev completed *Fathers and Children*) shows him seated in front of a row of three dead frogs suspended from laboratory clamps. Sechenov achieved fame after the publication of *Reflexes of the Brain* in 1863 when, according to Michael Holquist, he and his work were linked in the public imagination to the figure of Bazarov. As he writes, the image was "less the portrait of an individual man more than it [was] the icon of an era" (qtd. in Paperno, "Introduction" n.27).

Who were these "luminaries of medical science" that Chernyshevsky felt were important enough to link to the innovative medical students he had crafted in *What Is to Be Done?* Rudolph Virchow[37] is best known as the father of cellular pathology, credited with, among other things, being the first to identify leukemia cells and giving them their clinical name. He was also, however, a progressive politician and participated in the failed revolution of 1848 in Germany. It is difficult to separate Virchow's political activities from his medical practice, as illustrated in an episode from shortly before the revolution when he was commissioned to investigate a typhus epidemic in Upper Silesia. In his concluding report from the field, he stated that the epidemic had been caused by the desperate poverty in which the people of the region were forced to live. He noted that "the cure for their affliction was democracy, education, freedom, and prosperity," specifying such radical treatments as the "separation of church and state, and transferring the burden of taxes from the poor to the rich" (Miles, J.D., et. al. 670). Virchow, like Chernyshevsky and other Russian radicals of his persuasion, identified poverty and lack of access to education as public health issues that required political solutions in addition to medical treatment of their symptoms, like typhus.

Elsewhere in his work, Virchow pushed back against contemporary medical convention. In 1845, only two years out of medical school, he delivered a series of lectures in which he challenged the then-accepted standards of medical research. He claimed that medical research ought to be based on "objective data provided by physical examination, chemical evaluations," experimentation on animal subjects, necropsies, and microscopy. He came out against the popular

[37] Virchow was a student of Johannes Müller, another well-known physiologist of the era based in Berlin. Müller also taught Hermann von Helmholtz, who, in his turn, was a teacher of Ivan Sechenov. Sechenov would go on to teach Ivan Pavlov (Crary *Techniques of the Observer,* "Subjective Vision and the Separation of the Senses" n.51).

theories of the time that posited "humors" as the origins of pathologies. Finally, he posited that the cell was the "basic unit of life"[38] and advocated that the study of diseases ought to focus on that (670). The appeal to Virchow is an appeal to the cutting edge of medical science of the time, one founded upon the collection of empirical, observable data from which conclusions about pathology were to be drawn. Essentially, by linking Kirsanov to Virchow, Chernyshevsky demonstrates to the reader that Kirsanov is part of the vanguard of medical science that was reconceiving of the body as a physiological system, organizing it and parceling it out to make the study of it more efficient and effective.

Claude Bernard was perhaps the most famous physiologist of his era, now often referred to as the father of experimental medicine (Lanska, D.J. 413). As Lisa Cartwright discusses in *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*, Bernard became known for the extensive use of animal vivisection during the course of his research, which he referred to as "experiments of destruction" (Cartwright 26). The rise of physiology as a discipline on the whole marks a shift in the understanding of the scientific actor's role in experimentation: from detached observer to active interventionist. Claude Bernard might be the best candidate for representing this change. By the time Chernyshevsky was writing *What Is to Be Done?* Bernard had achieved international fame. He had received the *Grand Prix* in physiology from the French Academy of Sciences in 1849, 1851, and 1853 for outstanding discoveries in his field, been appointed Chair of Medicine at the Collège de France in 1855 and elected to the Academy of Medicine in 1861 (Lanska, D.J.

[38] One can easily see the influence of Virchow in Aleksandr Bogdanov's science fiction work *Red Star* (*Krasnaia zvezda*), as well as in the philosophical treatises he later wrote on tektology and physiological collectivism.

413). For those interested in cutting-edge physiological research, the name of Claude Bernard would have been extremely well-known.

As one might infer from his usage of the term "experiments of destruction" in describing his laboratory practices, Bernard's approach to research was interventionist. He contrasted the act of observation against that of experimentation in his work. As Cartwright relates, observation consisted of "'noting everything normal and regular'" whereas experimentation acknowledged the "'variation or disturbance that an investigator brings into the conditions of natural phenomena'" (26). Bernard describes this dynamic himself in the following manner:

> Anatomy has taught us that two principal nerves diverge in the face: the facial (seventh cranial) and the trigeminal (fifth cranial); to learn their functions, they were cut, one at a time. The result showed that section of the facial nerve brings about loss of movement, and section of the trigeminal, loss of sensation... (qtd. in Cartwright 26)

The normal functioning of the experimental object—in this instance, a face—must be interrupted in order to extract information that identifies the precise mechanisms of its functioning. As a result of that interruption, the object is often destroyed. Ultimately, then, the function of a particular part of the object is only able to be deduced by its absence in the aftermath of intervention. The object becomes "a body stripped of its capacity to perform the function in question" (27). The evidence of the action persists as a trace, like an afterimage.

Bernard insisted on the necessity of direct physical access to the object of experimentation. In his 1865 treatise *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine,* Bernard wrote that "experimenters must be able to touch the body on which they wish to act, whether by destroying it or by altering it" (qtd. in Cartwright 28). Independent of whether this access to the experimental

object is unmediated—the direct touch of a hand, for instance—or with the aid of technology—incision with a scalpel or examination of a biopsy beneath a microscope—the act of touch alters the object under study. A continuous line of action from experimenter to experimental object establishes itself in this manner, and the experimenter is now implicated in the life of the object. This continuity, writes Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, is emblematic of a change taking place in the medical and scientific communities of the era, wherein the observational apparatus—consisting of "both the viewer's sensory organs and their activity" and whatever tools extend their reach—become "inextricably mixed" with the object being perceived (Crary 72).

The work of scientists like Virchow and Bernard prepared the ground for researchers and theorists like Gastev and Bogdanov by the turn of the century. One can view both Gastev and Bogdanov as drawing on this heritage of scientific inquiry in their efforts to reorganize and systematize the body, turning it into an object of study as well as the 'home' of human cognition. The mixture of perceiver and object of perception is especially evident in Gastev's labor theory, as he sought to remodel the human being on the model of the machine to ameliorate the inefficiencies of the functioning of the organic body, and to bring some of 'thingness' of objects into the individual human subject's psychological life.

After linking Kirsanov to the likes of Virchow and Bernard, *What Is to Be Done?* then takes a brief detour through the story of the reformed sex worker, Nastya Kryukova. Kirsanov and Kryukova meet when she accosts him on the street and propositions him for sex and alcohol. Although he declines, she insists and ends up following him to his home, where he offers to examine her for illness while nonetheless steadfastly refusing sexual intercourse. During this visit, he informs her that her alcoholism is detrimental to her health and that she is, in fact, pre-

consumptive. Through Kirsanov's efforts, Kryukova manages to free herself from an exploitative madame[39] and becomes, essentially, an independent contractor for a time. Eventually, she renounces sex work, and it is only then that she and Kirsanov start a romantic relationship. Although her health improves for a time, ultimately, she does become consumptive and passes away from health complications that were too advanced to treat with current methods.

The novel presents Kryukova's story as a positive tale of redemption and demonstrates one of Chernyshevsky's social proposals: that sex workers were not inherently, biologically predisposed to sex work, and that, given other work, educational opportunities, and the ability to provide for their basic needs, could be reformed and reintegrated into society. Unlike many of his contemporaries, "Chernyshevsky denied that sexual difference played any role in the realization of oneself as a thinking subject and, as such, believed that rational thought was not inherently exclusive to either sex" (Wurl 119). Given the opportunities afforded to men, and absent the societal frameworks that forced them into the role of sexual object, women could also become rational subjects capable of directing their own lives.

Kryukova's alcoholism is presented as a tool that she uses to numb the reality of her situation. As she says to Vera Pavlovna, "What? Not drink? ... That's not possible for the likes of us!" (Chernyshevsky 223). Once the stressors—the debt to the madame, the economic need that commercial sex alleviates—have been removed, Kryukova begins a journey of self-actualization that allows her to become a contributing member of society, as by the time she is relating her story she has been working at Vera's sewing cooperative for some time. Therefore, while she does

[39] She tells Kirsanov at first that she is unable to stop working, as she owes the madame a debt of 17 rubles, which he offers to pay.

experience negative physiological effects as a result of her participation in sex work, the story makes it very clear that Kryukova does not engage in sex work because of her biological predisposition towards it. Chernyshevsky untethers the 'biological' attribute of sex from certain predispositions and drives in a way that provides an early model for the interrogation of 'natural' and 'biological' sex and the behaviors that supposedly inherently attend it that Gastev later performs in early writings like "The Accursed Question," to come in the next chapter.

Kryukova's transformation flies in direct opposition to the beliefs of many physicians, politicians, and jurists of the time, who favored biological explanations for the moral degeneracy[40] of sex work. One internationally known proponent of the state's regulatory system for sex work, Veniamin Tarnovskii, saw the female sex worker as a "retrograde type." Far from a victim of male depravity and the economic pressures of poverty, she was instead "part criminal, part insane ... an enterprising and resourceful figure responding to commercial opportunity" (Engelstein 134). Engelstein points out that one component of the panic around sex work was the perceived destabilization of 'natural' gender roles. A female sex worker was leaving the feminine sphere of the home to "compete in the marketplace for gain," using the most sought-after commodity available to her. While it was acceptable—even natural—that men should behave aggressively in pursuit of commercial and labor opportunity in the marketplace, in keeping with the 'masculine' energy of industrialization, for women to do the same was a pathological aberration. By engaging in commercial enterprise of this type, they were coopting 'male' characteristics that were unnatural for them.

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[40] For a discussion on the initial resistance of the Russian medical community to biological explanations for social pathologies and their eventual mixed adoption of them, see Engelstein 128-30.

Critics like Tarnovskii often claimed that women who engaged in sex work were genetically defective, predisposed to vice due to their "psychophysical constitution" (Engelstein 136). Some critics claimed that signs of sexual perversion were anatomically visible,[41] though others scoffed at this idea and argued vehemently against the notion that the practice of vice left "physical marks" on the body (Engelstein 131). Although the Russian medical establishment, particularly when the second moral panic around sex work and sexuality exploded in the 1880s, borrowed heavily from physiological theories of deviance popular in Western Europe it also resisted purely biological explanations for vice.

Drawing on the work of Cesare Lombroso, the leading forensic psychiatrist of the era, Veniamin Tarnovskii staunchly maintained that female sex workers were innately morally deficient but also admitted that environment and socialization played a role in the manifestation of their deviant traits. He insisted that the predisposition to sexual deviance was inborn but remained latent in women until "unfavorable conditions" activated their potential (Engelstein 136). This is how he explained the comparatively low numbers of "educated and well-bred women" to be found in brothels and plying the sex trade on the streets. Middle- and upper-class women in possession of the congenital defect that predisposed them to sexual vice were inoculated against its manifestation by "'the influence of family, the surrounding environment, upbringing, and intellectual development'" (qtd. Engelstein 135).

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[41] By the 1920s, there was "at least one doctor" in the Soviet medical apparatus who stated that sex workers could be determined by their "clitoris type," making the problem of sex work an entirely medical one that was also unfortunately untreatable (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 373). This sort of position has its roots in the rise of the biomedical approach to behavior and the body that accelerates in the mid-nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

If sex work was such a stain on the social organism and female sex workers were depraved criminal elements, what of female sexual desire on its own? Lombroso maintained that the "normal" woman "tolerated intercourse only for the sake of motherhood" and therefore had no sexual appetite of which to speak (Engelstein 148). There were, of course, critics who disagreed with this assessment of women's sexual attitudes. Praskovˈia Tarnovskaia, internationally recognized physician working in the field of criminal anthropology and wife of the aforementioned Veniamin Tarnovskii, insisted that there was nothing inherently pathological in female sexual desire (Engelstein 145). She claimed that "female self-assertion and sexual desire" were signs of mental health. Instead, she linked the lack of sexual interest with pathology that could lead to lesbianism, the lowest form of sexual desire in the hierarchy that she developed, and even murder (Engelstein 148-52).

The figure of Kryukova, Chernyshevsky's entry into the trope of the reformed fallen woman, presents readers with a model of non-pathological sexual desire contrasted with the brute economics of commercial sex. When beholden to the madame, Kryukova's experience of sex is so traumatizing that she needs to be drunk to cope with the reality of her situation. Once freed from the madame's yoke, she is able to determine which men she receives. She tells Vera: "I received only certain acquaintances, those men I knew to be good, who wouldn't abuse me. And I didn't drink" (Chernyshevsky 224). Although she is still tied to sex work by virtue of the yellow card,[42] she has a larger degree of economic freedom that allows her to be more selective in choosing

[42] Between 1843 and 1917, when this policy was abolished by the revolutionary government, the state mandated that sex workers carry a "yellow card," which functioned as a combination identification card, residence permit, license to ply their trade, and medical history. Once assigned a yellow card and therefore determined by the state to be a sex worker, it was difficult if not impossible to rid oneself of it.

clientele. This period is an intermediate step on her pathway to full redemption. Freed from debt and the acute coercion represented by the madame, Kryukova's immediate material conditions improve. The improvement of her material conditions prompts her to take steps towards moral regeneration, like quitting drinking.

While independent contracting, for lack of a better term, liberates Kryukova from the direst strictures on her freedom, she is nevertheless still oppressed by the moral putrefaction supposedly inherent to commercial sex. As long as she engages in sex work, her body remains a commodity, an object for sale to be consumed by others, thereby precluding any true autonomy.[43] What ultimately saves Kryukova is reciprocal erotic love, which she finds with Kirsanov, entirely removed from the demands of the market. When she and Kirsanov first become intimately involved, as she recounts to Vera, she recoups her lost innocence and reconnects to her own emotionality: "After my life, Vera Pavlovna, it was strange to be acting like an innocent young maiden, but that's what happened" (Chernyshevsky 225).

Directly following this statement, Kryukova talks about how she was inspired to quit sex work, suddenly finding her previous way of life intolerable. She goes on to describe the experience of love in the following manner: "Naturally, when you feel that kind of love, how can you look at

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[43] Tolstoy, particularly in his late writings, was also extremely concerned with the commodification of women's bodies under the auspices of industrial capitalism as it was then developing in Russia. By the 1880s, certainly, he had begun to write of sex and sexuality as a kind of violence that resulted in the complete objectification of the woman as the receiving partner and a mirrored but different sort of objectification on the part of the man-as-actant in penetrative sex. The next chapter discusses this in further detail. Ultimately, however, Chernyshevsky was far from the only writer to critique imperial Russian society's attitudes toward women, nor to link their legal and cultural subjugation to their economic position.

anyone else except the man you love? You yourself feel that it's impossible. Everything else disappears, except that one man" (225). Naturally, economic conditions dictate that Kryukova still needs to make money, but the redemptive power of love has, in contrast to the positions of those like Tarnovskii, activated her latent moral rectitude. She ultimately goes on to describe her relations with Kirsanov in glowing terms, insisting that whereas she felt ashamed and humiliated when engaging in sex with her previous (paying) partners, with him, despite the similarities of the physical acts, she feels entirely unashamed (226). The lack of commodification, and her ability to exercise her own free will in choosing to be with Kirsanov independent of economic considerations make this relationship an example of the transformative power that love wields in the Chernyshevkian ethos. The tangible, material effect on Kryukova's life is that, inspired by this love, she abandons sex work and devotes herself to 'honest' work at the sewing cooperative.

Kryukova's story is the first overt depiction of the tangible, positive benefits of love that *What Is to Be Done?* presents to its readers. Elsewhere in the text, however, Kirsanov and Vera discuss the material effects of love as well after they have married. During one of these reportedly frequent discussions, Vera enumerates the ways in which her romantic entanglement with Kirsanov has quantifiably improved her life, remarking that through her association with him she has received emotional support and managed to self-actualize and become financially, spiritually, and intellectually independent of her husband. The advantages brought to her by the union are fairly obvious from her perspective, but she struggles to see what benefits Kirsanov gains from the relationship. He explains that her love "gives my nerves a strong, constant, healthy stimulus that inevitably leads to the development of my entire nervous system ... Therefore, both my intellectual and moral strength grow as a result of my love" (Chernyshevsky 356). What is notable in this explanation is the way that Kirsanov ties emotion to physicality, an echo of the Feuerbachian

materialism that was so influential for Chernyshevsky. This simple explanation turns the abstract emotion of love into a material force that produces physiological effects in the subject experiencing it.

Paperno writes of Chernyshevsky's unusual treatment of the common metaphors of head and heart in his personal diaries: "In the accounts of his emotional life, the term 'heart' is demetaphorized. He frequently treats 'heart' (*serdtse*) not as a metaphoric representation of feeling, but literally—as an organ, a physiological agent of emotion" (Paperno 70). He frequently reported on the "outward physical signs of emotions" in others, jotting down notes on how their breathing became labored and they began trembling when speaking in a state of excitement (Paperno 71). The physiological sign is the ontological proof of the existence of emotion, a demonstration of the Feuerbachian conception that spirit and matter really are inseparable. It also endows love with the power to alter the physiological state of the subject who experiences it, as demonstrated first explicitly with Kryukova and second with Vera and Kirsanov.

According to Kirsanov, speaking again to Vera, true love "consists of promoting someone else's development and of developing oneself" (Chernyshevsky 357). Chernyshevsky here is performing a rehabilitation of the notion of desire, which goes hand in hand with his concept of rational egoism as laid out in the novel and elsewhere in his writings, in that he demonstrates that "the realization of desire is synonymous with the higher development of the individual" (Wurl 135). True love, then, is a project of reciprocal influence and development that inspires transformative change for the better in both participants. This materialist conception of love also prompts a reevaluation of sensuality and eroticism, elevating it from vice or sin to a collaborative act in the journey of self-development and -actualization.

If Chernyshevsky did not allow for biological difference between the sexes as a basis for women's inferiority, it did inform the details of his social program for sexual health and well-being. In discussing Chernyshevsky's marriage to Olʹga Sokratovna Vasilʹeva, Paperno writes of how his views on marriage informed his position on sexual relations and sexual health. Stites also describes how Chernyshevsky's "personal 'program'" for marriage called for his "submission to his wife, full freedom of action for her, and unflagging fidelity for himself" (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 90). According to Chernyshevsky, due to women's state of abject subordination to men in the society of the day, it was necessary to 'overcorrect' in a bid to reach an eventual equilibrium between the sexes. As part of this 'overcorrection,' Chernyshevsky "was prepared to offer his wife the freedom that he would deny to himself—inconstancy and adultery" (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 90). Paperno states that, like his approach to marital relations, Chernyshevsky's stances on "physical hygiene" were "dominated by the idea of role reversal" (Paperno 129). It is here that biological sexual difference becomes most obviously inscribed into the body in his writings.

Based on his diaries, Chernyshevsky evidently linked men's sexual activity to "an excessive expenditure of physical energy, which would lead to premature physical decline and early death" (Paperno 129). By contrast, sexual abstinence in women was damaging for their health. Paperno writes that Chernyshevsky's views on this matter stem from Enlightenment attitudes towards sexuality that maintained that "sexual deprivation causes 'vapors or hysterical afflictions' in unmarried girls and widows," and that, therefore, women ought to be granted sexual license for "purely humanitarian considerations" (Paperno 129). He was hardly alone in this view—it was also in keeping with the attitudes of the French utopian socialists like Fourier who had so influenced him—but neither was it so popular as to supplant among the masses the more

traditional view of the naturalness of male promiscuity and female sexual continence. For Chernyshevsky, these were physiological truths as opposed to moral or spiritual ones. By that logic, there had to exist some quantifiable evidence within the body that would indicate them.

While *What Is to Be Done?* does not deal directly with the healthfulness (or lack thereof) of sexual abstinence, the framework that enables these attitudes is present throughout the novel. Vera and Kirsanov, notably, discuss the specifics of female "resilience" in decidedly literal, physiological terms. Kirsanov states: "Indeed, a woman's organism is more resilient; it can better resist destructive material forces such as climate, weather, and unsatisfactory food ... The average life expectancy of a woman is greater than that of a man. From this it's obvious that the female organism is more resilient" (Chernyshevsky 340). As they continue their discussion, Kirsanov goes on to add that "the resilience of the organism is very closely connected with the strength of the nervous system. It's most likely that a woman's nerves are more elastic and more durable; if that's so, they ought to tolerate distress and painful feelings with greater ease and endurance" (Chernyshevsky 341).[44] Given Kirsanov's already demonstrated ideological alignment with leading physiologists like Claude Bernard, it is safe to interpret this comment regarding nerve elasticity literally.

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[44] He goes on to state that women, in fact, do not appear able to tolerate distress and painful feelings more easily. Both he and Vera ultimately account for this by pointing to the barriers between women and education, self-determination, and self-actualization that keep them in an underdeveloped state. This could be thought of as an aside to the nineteenth-century supposition that environmental factors could alter one's genetics. Women's lack of tolerance for stress is artificially induced by the state of the culture; if given the right environment and tools to succeed, perhaps they would be more resilient, as the necessary elements for such resilience are already present in their bodies.

The logic at play in this section indicates that 'female resilience' could be traced back to the particular structure of a physiological component in the female body. It is an instance of the logic of fragmentation that comes to be so central to the discipline of physiology, applied here in the social construction of biological sexual difference. The supposed elasticity of nerve tissue in women is a tiny component of a larger biological system that says more about the nature of the female body and female psyche (as a material consequence of the function of the brain) than any spiritual or philosophical explanation that decenters the body. Here, the body comes first as the determiner of meaning.

In discussing Xavier Bichat's[45] studies of death, Crary points out how the core of physiology came to be the fragmentation and systematization of the body and its processes: "[Bichat] identified death as a fragmented process, consisting of the extinction of different organs and processes… If death was thus a multiple, dispersed event, then so was organic life" (Crary 78). In this manner, Bichat decentralized "'the notion of life,'" incarnating it "'in the parts of organisms'" (qtd. in Crary 79). Crary points to Bichat as the beginning of the "progressive parcelization and division" of the body into "separate and specific systems," each of which ultimately come to signify more about the organism in question than said organism's self-

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[45] Marie-Francois-Xavier Bichat (1771-1802) was a French physiologist who pioneered the use of animal vivisection in experiments and in teaching. Though a proponent of vitalism, for which much of his research was later discounted, he is known for determining that "tissues combined to form various organs" (Fye 760). He catalogued 21 different types of tissue based on appearance, texture, elasticity, etc., without the benefit of a microscope. This was the ground he used in order to argue that tissues formed the bases of all organs and structures in the body. Later, with the aid of the microscope, scientists like Virchow extended Bichat's work, which became the basis for the disciplines of histology and cellular pathology.

assessments. Although Chernyshevsky's appeal to this logic in *What Is to Be Done?* and elsewhere is designed to promote reassessment of gender roles and equality between the sexes, other concerned parties (Cesare Lombroso and Veniamin Tarnovskii come to mind) did not turn to physiology for the same purpose.

What Is to Be Done? was among the most influential novels of nineteenth-century Russia, certainly among the radical youth. It drew together a number of burning social questions and cultural flashpoints, refracting them back into imperial Russian culture at large with tremendous lasting impact. The next section of this chapter examines two literary works written in the wake of the novel's influence: Tolstoy's "Father Sergy" ("Otets Sergii") and Aleksandr Bogdanov's *Red Star* (*Krasnaia zvezda*). How did these stories deal with these same questions of gender and sexuality, personal autonomy, and the role of the body in determining each?

2.4 Radical Sex and Radical Love in Tolstoy and Bogdanov

"Father Sergy" opens with an account of how protagonist Prince Kasatsky, to the surprise of everyone in St. Petersburg, breaks off his engagement with the beautiful Countess Korotkova, gives his estate over to his sister, and joins a monastery. The story then guides readers through Kasatsky's childhood, where he is described as a brilliant student, healthy, attractive, with a talent for mathematics and exemplary performance in military drills and horseback riding at his academy. This distinguished child does, however, exhibit one flaw: "The ... fits of fury to which he was subject and during which he lost control of himself and became like a wild animal" (Tolstoy

"Father Sergy" 237). This is the first mention the story gives of Kasatsky's capacity for base physicality. Significantly, it associates his loss of control—even as a child—with a loss of humanity that brings him down to the level of a beast.

Tolstoy wrote "Father Sergy" in 1898, situating it firmly in his post-conversion body of work. Much has been written[46] regarding the shift in his literary production in his later years, particularly around the themes of reproduction, sexuality, and the changing role of nature in the Tolstoyan worldview. Tolstoy's approach to the body has also been covered extensively.[47] Olga Matich has written that Tolstoy's attitudes on sex dovetailed with those of the psychopathologists of his day, like Cesare Lombroso. When discussing the body, "he typically deployed a discourse informed by obsessive repetition and fetishism" (Matich 29). Tolstoy's views differed from the vast majority of his psychopathologist contemporaries, however, in that he ascribed the roots of modern depravity to immorality rather than heredity. Particularly in his later years, as his attitudes toward sexuality and the body became more caustic, representations of the body in Tolstoy's writing became more fragmented and violent. The body part came not to represent a unified whole but the disintegration and displacement of that whole, functioning instead as "an instrument for controlling bodily excess," anchored in a fear "of pathology and physiological decay" (Matich 31).

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[46] See, for example, Gustafson, Richard F. *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger (A Study in Fiction and Theology).* Princeton University Press, 1986; Medzhibovskaya, Inessa. *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845-1887*. Lexington Books, 2008.

[47] See Kokobobo, Ani. *Russian Grotesque Realism: The Great Reforms and the Gentry Decline*. Ohio State University Press, 2018; Sobol, Valeria. *Febris Erotica: Lovesickness in the Russian Literary Imagination*. University of Washington Press, 2009.

The catalyst for Kasatsky's break from secular life and turn to monastic order comes when he learns that his bride-to-be, Korotkova, was previously the tsar's mistress (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 240). Prior to this unfortunate revelation, the story aligns Kasatsky with "those men of the eighteen-forties, now no longer to be found" who regarded all unmarried women of their acquaintance as possessing "ideal and angelic purity" (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 240). Tolstoy contrasts Kasatsky's position with "young people today who see in every girl merely a female seeking a mate," a direct and unsubtle indictment of the nihilists of the '60s and their heirs (241). Before Kasatsky learns of his fiancée's 'immoral' sexual past, he is head over heels: "He was particularly in love that day, but did not experience any sensual desire for her." The lack of sensuality present in Kasatsky's love for Korotkova is, in the world of the story, a positive element. By this point in his philosophical development, Tolstoy had come to view even procreative sex within the confines of marriage as deviant.[48]

Kasatsky's nonsexual posture can be read as an example of the late Tolstoyan text's overt desire to "disincarnate the natural," divorcing love from the body and the natural cycles of birth, life, and death (Matich 34). The revelation that Korotkova has had sexual intercourse with another man—more than once!—and, furthermore, that that man is the tsar places Kasatsky in a dire quandary. The perceived violation of Korotkova's body by another, more powerful man forces Kasatsky to reckon with the "unresolvable conflict between desire and moral reason" (Matich 32). Even if, as the story states, he does not experience a sexual attraction to her, the fact that she has

[48] In a private letter written in 1890, Tolstoy advises the family tutor to live with his wife as "brother and sister," going on to claim that struggling against sexuality is "life itself" (Matich 51). By this point in his philosophical development, there was no configuration, in Tolstoy's view, that could succeed in making sexuality a positive force.

been ‘possessed’ by another man renders Kasatsky himself unable to also possess her. Hence, his conceptions of love, desire, and morality are unable to weather intact. While in early writings the solution to this issue might have been found in nature, which, for early Tolstoy, proved that “beyond the world of artificial social convention there was a ‘real’ life,” Kasatsky’s only recourse is to turn to religion. Even this, however, does not liberate him from his own problematic body.

Ani Kokobobo has described Tolstoy’s late work in terms of the “realist grotesque” (Kokobobo 165). The grotesque, as Kokobobo writes, is a mode of artistic production that resists categorization by its very nature. She points out that even the foremost theorists of the grotesque—Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin—disagree on what constitutes its style. While Kayser views it as “ominous distortion,” Bakhtin portrays it as comedic upheaval (Kokobobo 164). Ultimately, the grotesque could best be characterized by its insistence on monstrosity produced by hybridization and the violation of boundaries, metaphoric or literal (Kokobobo 166). In the realist grotesque that Kokobobo attaches to Tolstoy, “it is bodily degradation, rather than supernatural deformity, that breeds hints of monstrosity.”

Severed, fragmented body parts are scattered throughout the narrative of “Father Sergy,” reducing the characters to whom they belong to isolated bits and pieces of beastly physicality. When describing human beings, the author ensures that they are portrayed in base, unflattering ways: “The abbot ... having freed his short plump hands from beneath his chasuble ... had folded them over his fat body and protruding stomach” (Tolstoy “Father Sergy” 247). The narrative separates the abbot into a pair of hands, a heavy stomach, and, further on, a “red face and bald head,” never bothering to stitch these pieces together into a coherent image. Matich states that the narrative “uses grotesque, fetishistic detail not only to dismember the body but to dissolve higher meaning” (Matich 35). Father Sergy flees secular life in an effort to escape its fleshly temptations

and petty demands, but rather than integrating into a divine, unified whole within the church, he finds only further fragmentation and alienation.

The most famous scene of dismemberment in the story comes in the form of Father Sergy's symbolic self-castration, when he literally chops off his finger as he attempts to resist the advances of the noblewoman Makovkina. It is worth quoting in full:

> Taking up the axe with his right hand he laid the forefinger of his left hand on the block, swung the axe, and struck with it below the second joint. The finger flew off more lightly than a stick of similar thickness, and bounding up, turned over on the edge of the block and then fell to the floor… He heard it fall before he felt any pain, but before he had time to be surprised he felt a burning pain and the warmth of flowing blood. (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 257)

Father Sergy resorts to this shocking act of self-mutilation because it is ultimately preferable to succumbing to temptation and debasing both himself and Makovkina with what the story presents as the inherently brutal act of sex. There are two potential violent acts to choose from in this passage, according to the story's logic: sexual intercourse or self-mutilation. Significantly, there is no means to escape from violence entirely. The choice lies only in the purpose of the violence to be enacted: will it be degrading or purifying?

Sergy's choice of physical mutilation supposedly functions to spare him the spiritual mutilation he—and by extension Makovkina—would undergo during sex. To an extent, the amputation functions as a rebuke to the vulgar materialism of the nihilist idealogues who had reduced the soul to the firing of electrical impulses within the meat of the human brain; Sergy manages to subjugate his flesh to the will of the spirit.

That said, it is a pyrrhic victory. Writing about how music stimulates Pozdnyshev's sexual agitation in the *Kreutzer Sonata* (*Kreitserovaia sonata*), Matich states that, by this period, "Tolstoy was no longer interested in distinguishing between thought and action, having become preoccupied with eradicating carnal desire itself" (Matich 49). The same could be said of "Father Sergy." Tolstoy couches Sergy's supposed momentary victory over earthly temptation in brute, physical terms. The narrative's intense focus on the movement of the severed finger once again emphasizes the importance of the part over the whole, refusing to coalesce into a coherent image. Simply by experiencing temptation, Sergy has already failed to master his animalistic flesh.

The brute physicality and bodily disintegration in "Father Sergy" are, in part, an indictment of consumerism and modernity. The economy of desire within which Sergy is trapped—whether before he enters the monastery with Korotkova, or after, with Makovkina—can only operate, in Tolstoy's view, through objectification and possession. The consumerist ethos that accompanies modernization has even affected the female body: women, like Makovkina in particular, participate in their own objectification to command a good price on the sexual and romantic marketplace. Sergy is both tormented by these women's advances and himself a pawn in this sexual marketplace. Whether object or consumer, to exist within this sexual economy is, for him, a form of torture.

Both consumerism and modernity, then, are cancers that have spread throughout the whole of Russian culture, metastasizing even within the tissue of the church. One need only call to mind the ruddy face and plump body of the abbot from the beginning of the story or the way that church authorities prevent Father Sergy from doing manual labor much later in the story (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 261). Although they critique the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and the consumerist ethos it promotes, Tolstoy's late works do not go so far as to permit the "emancipatory

potential of industrial labor" (Ivanilova 6). So, while writers like Chernyshevsky and others saw the root problem of the "Woman Question" as women's exclusion from the labor market, for Tolstoy the problem was the labor market itself.

Female disenfranchisement was a subsection of the larger problem of the commodification of all relations within society and of male desire in particular, "which [Tolstoy] considered a culturally manufactured desire to consume other bodies ... fueled by the very logic of the market" itself (Ivanilova 6). Therefore, even Sergy's symbolic self-castration is only a partial solution to the problem of temptation. Later, it becomes clear that it was not even particularly effective, as the finger has itself become a fetish object, a locus for desire in another, mutated form: "He had retained his purity and had chopped off his finger. And he lifted the shrivelled stump of that finger to his lips and kissed it" (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 267). The severed finger becomes a commodity in itself, providing physical evidence of Sergy's resilience in the face of temptation that he later uses in a self-congratulatory manner to absolve himself of responsibility for his own sinfulness.

Eventually, however, he is deprived even of this feeble solution to the problem of his own desire. Sergy's inability to even chop his own firewood prevents him from resisting temptation later in the story in the way that he had with Makovkina. Unable to cut off another of his fingers, he instead snatches up a pair of scissors and cuts off his hair (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 269). This does not solve the problem of temptation or spiritual emptiness, however. He remains in much the same position as before entering the monastery: "Sergy felt his own inner life was wasting away and being replaced by external life. It was as if he had been turned inside out" (Tolstoy "Father Sergy" 260). Given Tolstoy's emphasis on bodily incoherence and degradation, there is no need to shy away from the brutality of this simile. Try as he might, Sergy is unable to find a way out of

the spiritual emptiness of modernity, nor is he able to conquer the demands of the flesh. By story's end, he is an emaciated, mutilated wanderer for whom there is no salvation in sight.

If the disintegration of bodily integrity and coherence in "Father Sergy" is negative, in Aleksandr Bogdanov's work it is the vehicle by which true collectivity will be established. Throughout his numerous philosophical writings, Bogdanov refers to the state of the individual under capitalism as one of alienation. In *The Philosophy of Living Experience* (*Filosofiia zhivogo opyta*), he writes that, due to the development of market relations, "the individual is torn away from the social whole, and no longer even sees it: he is now a thing *all his own*, the private proprietor of his own assets and personal experience, his own small, particular world, pitting himself against other people and the whole universe as a separate, autonomous 'I'" (Bogdanov *The Philosophy of Living Experience* 63, italics in original).[49] Far from being the 'natural' human tendency anterior to culture, the individual subject is the product of commodity exchange.

Society-as-community becomes for this creature completely unthinkable; instead, society is a field of competing threats seeking to subjugate the weak in order to expand their own "small, particular world." In a piece from 1905 in *The New World* (*Novyi mir*), he writes of the experience of the individual who asks who they are within the confines of the capitalist system:

> Is this not the most natural of questions for an arm ripped from its body? 'What is my purpose?' ... How could a living part, having lost connection to its vital whole,

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[49] In the Russian, Bogdanov uses the word *otryvat'sia* (to be ripped or torn away) to describe this separation. In *The New World* (*Novyi mir*) articles, he describes isolation as *otorvannost'* (the state of having been ripped violently away from a whole and separated). These word choices say a great deal about how Bogdanov views isolation; it is not simply a state of separation, but a traumatic and violent experience of tearing or ripping that results in a jagged edge, in contrast to, say, a surgical severing and cauterization.

> ask anything else? ... There, where a tear in the living tissue has separated an organ from its body, there exists a torturous, incomprehensible pain. (Bogdanov "The Accumulation of Human Beings" ["Sobiranie cheloveka"] 32)

Two things immediately become clear in this passage. First, isolation from the collective is a source of pain. The self-styled "autonomous 'I'" of capitalist societies is, for Bogdanov, a pitiable, tortured creature that cannot even comprehend its own agony. Second, the relationship of the individual to the collective is like that of a cell to its body; the individual cannot truly survive outside the confines of the body to which it belongs. In capitalist societies, the individual, much like the literal cells within the literal human body, is unconscious of their relation to the "vital whole." By contrast, in a socialist society—which, in the Bogdanovite view, is essentially one in which labor is most rationally organized—the individual cell is fully cognizant of its relation to the larger body. This awareness enables it to see how its own interests align with those of the social whole.

Bogdanov's science fiction novel *Red Star*, published in 1908, paints a picture of what his rationally organized socialist utopia would be like. This novel also demonstrates what his ideas on what a positive disarticulation of the individual body would entail through the vehicle of what he calls "physiological collectivism." For purposes of this project, it is enough to say that physiological collectivism transposes the logic of the permeable cell membrane to the social sphere: all material resources are shared among the denizens of *Red Star*'s Martian utopia, including the blood.

In a conversation between the protagonist, the earthling Leonid and his soon-to-be love interest Netti, she explains that the Martians perform "mutual blood transfusions," whereby multiple people exchange blood with each other in order to raise life expectancy and "thoroughly

regenerate" their tissues. The novel makes sure to state that the blood of each person "continues to live in the organism" of the others, mixing with the host's blood until there no longer remains any functional difference (Bogdanov *Red Star* 85). As Netti goes on to point out, in keeping with the collective organization of all Martian society, these "comradely exchanges of life" extend from the ideological dimension and into physiology (86).

Several things are happening here. First, there is a transposition of the metaphorical onto the literal that is quite characteristic of Bogdanov's mode of thought. Metaphor is an act of tektological[50] substitution whereby different types of knowledge migrate from discipline to discipline, breaking down intellectual and creative barriers and generating new productive modes of thought (Wark 45). If individual cells within the body can exchange information with each other through their permeable membranes and even break apart to create new cells without sacrificing the integrity of the old, then why should not the same be possible on a larger societal scale?

In keeping with that view, the exchange of blood sheds light on Bogdanov's thoughts on genetics. Although, as David Greenfield has written, Bogdanov was aware of and acknowledged Mendel's theory of genetics when rediscovered in 1900, he nonetheless insisted on the Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics (Greenfield 624). As blood, in Bogdanov's view, carries the "structural imprint" of all the body's tissues, it is one important method of transmitting desirable acquired characteristics from person to person (Bogdanov "Tektology" 210).

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[50] Tektology is what Bogdanov referred to as the "universal organizational science," which is essentially what it sounds like. Philosophy, a means for *reflecting* on the state of the world, would, in Bogdanov's aspirational view, ultimately be replaced by Tektology, a means for *intervening* in the state of the world for human benefit.

The comradely exchanges of blood reflect and extend the collective organization of Martian society. In addition to social collectivity, Martians have shed the notion that their bodies are individual, and so they have given up the "autonomous 'I'" endemic to capitalism. This has far-reaching physiological effects. Senescence, "like the market struggle ... is a result of systemic contradictions, gradual divergences in the tempo and strength of vital functions" (Greenfield 625). By eliminating economic and social competition, Martian society has also been able to eliminate physiological competition, represented by the aging body. The more rational, cooperative organization of their society allows the Martians to focus on carving out a space for themselves, in search of what Bogdanov elsewhere called "dynamic equilibrium," as a singular social organism up against an inhospitable natural world.

The social organization of Martian society coupled with its practice of mutual blood exchange, that is the mixing together of the tissues and hereditary characteristics of all its citizens, results in other, outwardly noticeable physiological changes. On first meeting the Martians, Leonid mistakes all of them for men, noting that "they all looked exactly alike." He is also struck by their apparent youthfulness: "the absence of beards, mustaches, and wrinkles on their faces almost erased even the age differences among them" (Bogdanov *Red Star* 35). It is a function of his less-developed capitalist consciousness, the Martian style of dress, and the physiological similarities between genders that leads Leonid to conclude that his newfound friends are all male.

Eventually, he comes to realize that both Netti and Enno, another scientist with whom he develops a friendship, are women. On a trip to an art museum with Enno, he notices the similarity of build in Martian men and women compared to those on Earth:

> The women have relatively broad shoulders, while the narrow pelvis and a certain tendency to plumpness in the men make their muscles less prominent and tend to

> neutralize the physical differences between the sexes. This, however, is mainly true of the most recent epoch, the era of free human evolution ... It is evidently the enslavement of women in the home and the feverish struggle for survival on the part of the men which ultimately account for the physical discrepancies between them. (Bogdanov *Red Star* 75)

This passage explicitly links physiological sexual difference to gender inequality. As a result of eliminating gender inequality, Martians have also effectively eliminated sexual difference. This is in keeping with Bogdanov's idea that the ultimate goal of a collectively organized society was to strengthen the human position in contrast to the forces of the natural world, which he viewed as inherently threatening to humanity's survival. While the goal was not necessarily to subjugate nature, despite the vehemence of Bogdanov's rhetoric,[51] humankind certainly needed to establish itself on an equal footing with it.

His usage of the phrase "free human evolution" in the above passage indicates the importance of bodily autonomy in the struggle against nature. As much as nature is a collection of forces against which humankind must unite in the interest of self-preservation, it is also present within the body itself. So long as the shape of the individual body is determined by the forces of

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[51] As I have written elsewhere: Helbing, Felix. "Comradely Exchanges: Aleksandr Bogdanov's Physiological Collectivism and Community Reimagined." *Russian Literature*, vol. 138-139, 2023, pp. 85–103. For more on Bogdanov's philosophy and work on mutual blood exchange, see the following: Bogdanov, Aleksandr. *The Struggle for Viability: Collectivism through Blood Exchange*. Translated by Douglas W. Huestis, Xlibris, 2001; Krementsov, Nikolai. *A Martian Stranded on Earth: Alexander Bogdanov, Blood Transfusions, and Proletarian Science*. University of Chicago Press, 2011; White, James D. *Red Hamlet: The Life and Ideas of Alexander Bogdanov*. Brill, 2018.

genetics without the conscious, directed input of the human being then the struggle for self-mastery and equilibrium with nature is lost.

Enno later recounts the story of her relationship with Menni, the brilliant scientist whom Leonid first meets on Earth and who decides to bring him to Mars. She tells of how she had loved Menni, wanted to have children with him, and asked Netti to run some tests to determine if it was, in fact, possible. Netti explains that Enno and Menni will never be able to have children together, as he had "matured too late from boyhood into manhood and had thrown himself too early into the intense life of a scientist and thinker. His vigorous, overdeveloped intellect had from the very beginning undermined and irreparably stifled the vitality of his reproductive faculty" (Bogdanov *Red Star* 101). While Enno is devastated, Menni himself "was evidently not conscious of any loss in his private life." Even though this disjunction proves the end of Enno and Menni's romantic relationship, the novel does not permit that there is anything particularly tragic about this. Rather, they are simply biologically unsuited for each other.

What proves most interesting in this episode are the details of Menni's maturation "from boyhood to manhood." The implication is that the Martians have acquired such control over genetics and the process of evolution that they are evidently able to delay puberty in the individual body, should they so wish it. In his philosophical writings, Bogdanov, clearly drawing on the work of religious philosopher Nikolai Fedorov,[52] compared the onset of puberty to acute physiological

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[52] Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903) was a Russian religious philosopher whose *Philosophy of the Common Task* formed the cornerstone of Cosmism, a school of thought which, in short, held that the goal of scientific progress was the abolition of death and subjugation of nature to human will, in its turn unified to the will of God. For Fedorov, as Irene Masing-Delic describes in *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth Century Literature,* the entire reality of decline and death was a result of the Fall as described in Genesis. Physical, sexual reproduction was entirely

crisis and bodily decline. Greenfield writes: "the collapse of the body ... starts with the sex organs and their functions" (627). Elsewhere, Bogdanov compared puberty to capitalism, in which growth is both aimless and unchecked. If in the capitalist system excessive production of goods creates waste products that negate the benefits of development, so in puberty does the excessive production of hormones lead to decline that hastens the onset of senescence and death.

Menni's inability to sexually reproduce is furthermore no great loss for the Martian physiological collective. Eventually, sexual reproduction would become only one form of reproduction for the continuation of the species. In "Tektology of the Struggle Against Old Age," *Outlines of Organizational Science* (*Ocherki organizatsionnoi nauki*), and elsewhere Bogdanov wrote of the different types of "conjugation" (*kon''iugatsiia*) that would be available to take the place of traditional sexual reproduction.[53] Perhaps the most interesting and outlandish is what he referred to as the "conjugation of experience," which included communication via "speech, mimicry, and other methods of expression ... produced by a variety of neuro-muscular apparatuses" (Bogdanov *Outlines* 119). He refers to how spouses who have spent many years together can come to physically resemble each other as evidence for how shared experience can transmit adaptive changes from one individual to another (Bogdanov "Tektology" 207). Greenfield writes that the model for this initially "psychic union" is the "exchange of fluids," that human interactions are liquid, in some sense; one system can influence another in the same way that adding additional fluid to a previous mixture will alter its composition (627).

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a result of man yielding to "sexual seduction and the consumption of other creatures." Prior to the Fall, reproduction was an artistic act, "resembling the emanation of Christ and the Holy Spirit out of the Godhead" (Masing-Delic 88).

[53] Bogdanov's concept of conjugation bears a close resemblance to Fedorov's conception of pre-Fall artistic reproduction.

Sexual reproduction is not necessary for the continued existence of the Martian collective. That said, in a sentence reminiscent of Chernyshevsky's revolutionary eroticism, Leonid thinks: "the ideal of this other world in advance of our own was Love incarnate—pure, radiant, all-triumphant Love, serenely and proudly aware of itself" (Bogdanov *Red Star* 76). It is another conjugation of experience, but, freed from biological necessity and the strictures of gender inequality inherent in capitalism, sex on Mars can be engaged in without coercion, domination, or possession.

2.5 Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, traditional societal structures were undergoing monumental changes. As this chapter has demonstrated, the question of women's role in public life became an open debate as women chafed under the demands of the traditional family structure, escaping the roles as wives and mothers that they had previously been relegated to by whatever means they could find. The fictitious marriage as a pathway to personal freedom and education helped, however imperfectly, to destabilize standards of male-female relations as they had been established for many years. Expanded access to education, not only for women but for men of lower social strata, shifted political attitudes and helped to lay the groundwork for more radical political ambitions among the educated youth.

Moreover, scientific and technological developments had begun to seriously alter the way that people conceived of the body. Far from being simply the seat of the scientific observer, the

living human body became a subject of study—and pathologization—in a way that it had not been before. Scientific developments had shaken the authority of the human gaze similar to the way that social change had undermined the authority of the family patriarch. This confluence of social change, particularly as related to gender, and the newly atomized scientific gaze, enabled by things like the proliferation of the microscope, shook the foundations of the heteronormative sex and gender matrix that had governed social relations until this point.

What Is to Be Done? synthesized these many trends, attempting to present a revolutionary social program that could act as an example to emulate. After its appearance in 1863, all sorts of aspiring radicals and revolutionaries began to adopt it. Certainly, by the early 1900s it had seeped into the cultural fabric of imperial Russia such that even if one had not read it, one knew of it. The effects of Chernyshevsky's novel reverberated throughout literature in the latter half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, for better or for worse, catapulting issues of sexual and gender inequality to the forefront of people's minds.

Furthermore, the materialist turn in philosophy and the rising discipline of physiology sparked new debates around the concepts of free will, self-determination, and autonomy that took on a decidedly body-oriented character. The image of the dismembered, disarticulated body in Tolstoy's work, for example, echoes the dissected frog hanging from the laboratory clamps behind Sechenov in his famous portrait. The mind-body split so familiar to philosophy became far more incarnated in the wake of *What Is to Be Done?* and the popularization of physiology.

This is the cultural context in which Gastev produced "The Accursed Question" in 1904. The story's articulation of the pain of gendered embodiment and its quest for a solution to that pain emerged from the gradual erosion of the heteronormative sex and gender matrix that had governed imperial society until the mid-nineteenth century.

3.0 The Tragedy of Consciousness: Sex, Gender, and Trauma in "The Accursed Question"

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the short story "The Accursed Question," one of Aleksei Gastev's earliest published creative works. He self-published the story in 1904 during a stopover in Geneva while fleeing Russia to evade one of his sentences to internal exile. Gastev used the pseudonym A. Odinokii, which translates to something like "The Solitary One" in English. It is tempting to view "The Accursed Question" as straightforward and derivative, though, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, this conclusion would be a mistake. In some ways, it is firmly a *fin-de-siècle* piece that reflects the broad cultural concerns of the time in a standard way. It overflows with anxiety surrounding the perceived immorality of sex, the maintenance of normative masculinity, the position of women in relation to men, to mention the most obvious. In its descriptions, it employs a fragmented logic reminiscent of the realist grotesque that Ani Kokobobo ascribes to Tolstoy's works of the same period.

All of this notwithstanding, "The Accursed Question" represents a unique entry into the literature of the time period as well as an important articulation of Gastev's early views on sex and gender that shed light on the conspicuous absence of both in his later work. In parsing the analysis to follow, it will be helpful to delve deeper into the contours of the sex and gender anxiety as it manifested prior to the 1905 revolution, since it is this anxiety from which "The Accursed Question" sprung. Gastev (and Tolstoy, for that matter) was far from the only writer working from

the 1880s through to the aftermath of the 1905 revolution who was concerned with questions of sex and gender.

The 1880s and 1890s saw, in fact, a shift in the composition of the "Woman Question" that had so occupied the "men of the '60s" noted in the previous chapter. Whereas previously the "Woman Question" had been largely framed in terms of women's access to education and their capacity for self-determination, by this time sex work as a dual problem of public health and women's inequality and exploitation had come to dominate the discourse. Moreover, the issue had been recast as a relational problem: surely, the (overwhelmingly male) clientele took some share of the blame for the abject condition of the female sex worker. The scientific gaze of psychopathologists like Veniamin Tarnovskii had now shifted to include men and their sexual appetites. Would sex work even exist, if not for the uncontrolled libidinous energy of aimless young men?

Engelstein writes that, though present before, concern regarding the sexual habits of young men and boys intensified after a period of student unrest in 1899 (Engelstein 232).[54] Notably, this concern had a prominent class element. It was educated young men and boys—coming from the ranks of the gentry, the clergy, and the petite bourgeoisie—whose appetites gave cause for concern. As was typically the case, contemporary psychopathologists viewed the sexual habits of the peasantry as representative of an ancient, natural order that more advanced Russia had lost as it became more 'civilized' and 'artificial' (Engelstein 227). Insofar as sexual deviance was to be

[54] Incidentally, this is also the year that Gastev entered the Moscow Teachers College. He would be expelled in 1902 and arrested for his political activism.

found among the peasantry, the pernicious encroachment of urban culture onto the idyllic village setting was surely to blame (238).

Ultimately, then, the problem was clearly thought of in terms of social control. The future cultural elite's unrestrained or poorly managed sexual urges could have disastrous consequences for the public and the nation. The disaffected elite youth's lack of an outlet for political expression meant that their abundance of energy, instead of being employed in the service of civic virtue, spent itself in maladjusted, socially harmful ways (Engelstein 216). Many sympathetic contemporary observers looked back on the revolution of 1905 as a time when "libidinous impulses had shattered existing constraints but were effectively subordinated to the cause of constructing a new political order" (Engelstein 217). In the aftermath of 1905, the frustrated forces of youthful male desire found new, maladapted outlets for release: hooliganism, vulgar commercial sexuality, masturbation, and homosexuality, among other things.

Numerous factors combined to produce this renewed anxiety around sex work and male sexual depravity. Among these was the rise of boulevard culture in the urban environment:

> As the site of commerce and exchange, [the city] was governed by desire, driven by psychological and material need and selfish interests. Like the marketplace, the city challenged established social hierarchies with new and transient relations of wealth ... On the boulevard strangers rubbed shoulders; prostitutes strolled; shops, cafes, and dance halls offered pleasures for a price. (Engelstein 359)

The boulevard, then, was a site of exchange and mixture. Boundaries between classes were blurred there, representing a danger to traditional hierarchies. It became furthermore synonymous with "cheap amusements and commercial sex," which took place in public establishments as well as literally on the street. The boulevard offered a space for activities divorced from the strictures

of family life and difficult for authorities to control. Not only did it provide opportunity for women to engage in 'manly' activities like selling their labor for a wage, but it also offered "a network of impersonal relations at once intimate and anonymous" for a wide variety of other purposes (360).

Returning for a moment to Kokobobo's realist grotesque, the boulevard threatened precisely because it violated boundaries to generate monstrosities (Kokobobo 166). The boulevard represented a space in which boundaries of all sorts could be blurred or broken: gentry could rub shoulders with workers and peasants; sex workers could ply their trade in a literal economy of desire that would be torturous for a protagonist of late Tolstoy; queer and gender non-conforming people[55] could exist publicly here in some limited form. It was this erosion of the strict hierarchies of imperial society that threatened to generate so-called monstrosities. No one could predict what might come of this melting pot, except that, since it lacked the benevolent guiding hand of authorities, it would be resistant to control by either the state or cultural elites. For young men lacking an outlet for political expression, so the argument went, the boulevard was the place to which they would direct their energies. The unruly vulgarity of the boulevard and its denizens would then corrupt the moral fiber of these young men, bringing out an inherent tendency toward animalistic violence that would have supposedly otherwise remained dormant.[56]

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[55] For more on queer life in late imperial Russia, see Healey, Dan. *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent.* University of Chicago Press, 2001; Petri, Olga. *Places of Tenderness and Heat: The Queer Milieu of Fin-de-Siècle St. Petersburg*. Cornell University Press, 2022.

[56] Rather like Tarnovskii's explanation for why upper-class women tended not to be found among the ranks of sex workers from last chapter, the logic that underpins this argument brings together social and biological causes for depravity. The morally upstanding environment of an upper-class woman with an inherent biological flaw that might lead her to sex work would ameliorate her natural tendency towards depravity. For educated young men with a similar

Feminist physician Mariia Pokrovskaia, tireless campaigner against sex work in any form, regulated or not, often employed rhetoric that likened men who visited sex workers to beasts. In her view, chastity was "the necessary condition for women's equality with men," and she stressed the responsibility of the clientele for moral depravity rather than the sex workers themselves (Engelstein 223). In 1908 at a meeting of the feminist congress in St. Petersburg, she stated that "women must 'act in concert to obliterate the conditions that turn young men into beasts.'" Her formula for doing so was, at this time, for families to provide sex education to their sons at home, and to eradicate sex work and pornography from the public sphere (Engelstein 224). By 1912, her rhetoric had grown even stronger, and she had made a connection between young men's deviant sexual appetites and their supposedly deficient physiology: "'Early sexual activity is largely responsible for the fact that the vast majority of our male students are nervous, debilitated, sickly, and suffer from various mental abnormalities. When they mature, they become veritable beasts and moral monstrosities!'" (qtd. in Engelstein 225).

The onus of responsibility and the stain of moral turpitude had shifted to include the disorderly male body and its elemental urges. Whereas the figure of the female sex worker had previously been invoked in public discourse largely as a diabolical one, she was now often recast as an unfortunate victim of unjust social circumstance and the deviant desires of her predatory male clientele.[57] The young male students of the empire were "nervous, debilitated, [and] sickly"

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dormant inclination, the lack of viable outlets for political expression would prevent them from channeling their excess libidinous energy into civically responsible pursuits, instead leading them towards the cheap amusements and sexual deviance of the boulevard.

[57] This may explain the intensification of concern regarding juvenile sex work, among young girls specifically, that happens in this period. The phenomenon of child sex trafficking became a lightning rod for conflict during the 1890s

as a direct result of their sexual maladjustment. The sexual comportment of individuals had far-reaching effects for the entire social body, as, in keeping with the then-widespread ideas of Lamarckian genetics, the "physiological consequences" of sexual vice could be passed down through the generations (Engelstein 245).

Sexual deviants, from masturbators to homosexuals and everything in between, supposedly developed "deformed personalities and weakened bodies." The results of their lack of self-control and indulgence in vice were supposedly written into their bodies and diminished their ability to function normally in society. The St. Petersburg physician Aleksandr Virenius wrote of the (male) masturbator that he "'easily ruptures the bonds of love and friendship, soon cools to his intimates and becomes a vicious egotist, ready to sacrifice everything and everyone to his own individual self'" (qtd. in Engelstein 235). The problem with non-procreative sexuality, whether partnered or solo, lay in its perceived individualism. The masturbator, by indulging excessively in sexual

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and in the immediate aftermath of 1905. The image of the child sex worker, particularly girls, was a popular tool in the arsenal of both those psychopathologists who argued that the scourge of sex work was social in origin as well as for those who were convinced it resulted from an inherent flaw in the biological makeup of the sex worker herself. There are numerous sensationalist accounts of brothels from this time in which female child sex workers feature prominently. This figure worked well as a tool to shock and horrify precisely because she represented the brute transformation of the supposedly private, sacred state of female chastity and childhood innocence into a public commodity to be traded for the best market price. See Chapter Seven, "End of Innocence and Loss of Control" in Engelstein's *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia.*

pursuits, forgot his duty to the larger community. He supposedly became isolated and selfish, unable to conceive of himself as part of a social body.[58]

Virenius furthermore claimed that evidence of sexual deviance could be seen in the size of the penis: "the civilized penis was a clean one, the product of scientifically prescribed intervention," whereas that of the chronic masturbator "grew in size; the scrotum withered" (Engelstein 235). The sexually continent man, the paragon of civic virtue and responsibility, would have a small penis that was "almost atrophied, in proportion to his restrained sexual urge."

All of this is to say that by the turn of the century, the atomizing scientific gaze had turned to dismantling the male body in search of its weaknesses and pathologies in addition to those of the 'morally deficient' female sex worker. Her patrons could now also be morally deficient in their own right. Moreover, scrutiny surrounding individual sexual practices and their consequences for the collective social body intensified in relation to political discontent and anxiety about the social and cultural changes wrought by the expansion of cities, industrialization, and the market economy.

In the view of Dmitrii Zhbankov, a progressive *zemstvo* physician who wrote in support of women's rights, including access to education and issues of public health, by this time, "sex had become an arena of violence ... not only because the brutality of civil conflict encouraged aggression of every kind but because the movement for political change had called into question the nature of personal relations as well as the organization of public life" (Engelstein 267).

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[58] In some ways, Virenius's concerns about isolation and the breakdown of community bonds echo Bogdanov's views from the last chapter, in articles written around the same time. Their conclusions regarding the cause of these problems are obviously quite different, but the problems themselves are similar.

Masculinity specifically had become linked in the popular discourse with disorder and violence; implicitly, to be a man was to be in danger of succumbing to one's 'natural' predatory sexual urges. To be a 'civilized' man, then, entailed constant vigilance and the discipline to maintain self-restraint. In this version of the discourse, in contrast to that of earlier decades, women figured as passive victims of male desire. Male desire, in all its beastliness, could only function in terms of predator and prey.

3.2 "The Accursed Question"

The previous chapter touched on dismemberment and the fetish as metaphors for the alienation of the individual subject under capitalism. In the case of Bogdanov's *Red Star*, following in the path of Chernyshevsky, the solution to this problem lay in Marxism and the proliferation of love without ownership. In Tolstoy's "Father Sergy," industrial labor offered no relief from the objectification of the human body and of women's bodies in particular; the solution rather lay in abstinence and the rededication of one's spirit to God. One could certainly approach "The Accursed Question" from the same perspective. There are aspects of the story that echo Bogdanov's writings on the fetish and the experience of capitalist isolation as akin to amputation. Like Tolstoy's Father Sergy, the protagonist experiences sexual desire as moral agony. That said, it is perhaps more interesting, in light of Gastev's later work, to interpret the sense of bodily disconnect and fragmentation that plagues the protagonist of "The Accursed Question" literally.

Gendered embodiment forms the key to this chapter's analysis of "The Accursed Question." The gendered body in this early text is a site of conflict, the protagonist's experience of existing as this gendered body an unrelenting source of trauma. This chapter seeks to investigate the ways in which the "The Accursed Question" depicts the social construction of the gendered body, its heavy and intrusive materiality, and the performative rituals demanded of the protagonist in maintaining his gendered subject position, regardless of his personal thoughts on the matter.

Within the world of the story, gender is both a series of actions to be performed, reminiscent of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and a socially constructed identity marker nonetheless written into the body by medical and scientific discourses in a manner that calls to mind the work of Paul Preciado. The chapter engages with both of these contemporary theorists in greater detail throughout its analysis of "The Accursed Question," and so will put investigation of their works aside for now. For the moment, it will be useful to address the linked status of gender and embodiment—what precisely these terms mean here, and how they intertwine. To put it in simple terms, the gendered body is both socially constructed *and* wholly and materially 'real'; that is to say, the social construction of gender and the ritualized performance it demands do not negate the lived experience of embodiment. They do, however, determine the horizons of possibility for understanding one's own gender and how that is in some sense either encouraged or foreclosed by the materiality of the body.

Gayle Salamon writes that "the same social forces that constitute a body as culturally legible or illegible also shape the very feelings of embodiment that would seem to be most personal, most individual, and most immune to regulatory injunction" (Salamon 77). Much of the protagonist's conflict in "The Accursed Question" involves precisely this tension between social expectation and its encroachment into even the most intimate, ostensibly 'natural' feelings of being

a body in the world, of which sex and gender certainly form a fundamental part for many people. The story explores what it is to live within the space created by that disjunction, investigating how the forces of social obligation and the lived experience of an embodied subject can combine to produce a tense and fractured sense of self.

"The Accursed Question," then, is in many ways a story about the "tension between the historicity of the body and the immediacy of its felt sense," which is the location of "bodily being," according to Salamon (77). It explores the heavy cost of inhabiting this tense space, of living through the process of fragmentation by which normative gender is constructed and maintained, without recourse to the self-aware and considered theoretical rhetoric employed by thinkers like Butler, Preciado, and Salamon. Indeed, the story's protagonist grapples with the effects of a "power that is nonlocalized and dispersed," recognizable only in the traces it leaves behind on his body and the network of his social relationships (Salamon 79). Some of his struggle lies in his inability to articulate the stakes and terms of said struggle.

In the analysis that follows, it is important to keep in mind that one's 'bodily sense'—that is, one's awareness of one's own body in the everyday acts of living such as eating, sleeping, etc.—does not typically occupy the forefront of one's mind. Conscious self-awareness of the bodily sense would, in fact, make daily functioning effectively impossible; many of the protagonist's problems in "The Accursed Question" implicitly highlight this. The protagonist essentially becomes 'depersonalized,' the schism between his mind and his body deepening to make the state of the body and its actions more bearable to the mind tethered to them. He thus inhabits, however maladaptively, the body and individual subjectivity available to him by solidifying the fragmentation already done to his body and selfhood by the strictures of gender in an effort to circumvent the pain of this imposition.

"The Accursed Question" is, then, the tale of a rebellious body imposing itself and its desires upon an unwilling consciousness. The consciousness—protagonist Vasilii—experiences this imposition as terrifying, schismatic, and, ultimately, gendered. In order to fully appreciate the structuring absence of sex and gender in Gastev's later work, it is necessary to grasp the intricacies of gender, sexuality, and the overwhelming materiality these things possess in his early work.

The story follows events in the life of Vasilii, a university student from a loveless petite bourgeois family, as he struggles to come to terms with the development of his sexual appetites and the materiality of his own body and its supposed gender. At the center of Vasilii's conflict lies a frustrated desire for emotional intimacy that he hopes but fails to achieve by repeatedly engaging in acts of heterosexual intercourse that seem, ultimately, only to exacerbate the disjunction between his consciousness and his body, inscribing into him an alienating maleness that never quite fits. There are, then, two linked components that combine to produce normative gender within the logic of the story: first, the physical body and its attributes and drives; second, the act of sex, particularly heterosexual sex, which, though fraught and disturbing to the protagonist, is necessary for the solidification of his male identity.

The story begins by detailing Vasilii's preoccupations with romance during his schoolboy years: "'Living' for him came to mean 'loving'; woman with her unfamiliar but wondrous world, her deep, peculiar, subtly sensitive and tender soul began to occupy all his dreams and aspirations" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 4). He directs these desires toward a woman of a similar age with whom he has developed a deep, nourishing platonic friendship. The narrator lists all the reasons why it is only logical, in Vasilii's mind, that his friend should return his romantic desires, not least of which is that he is more knowledgeable, spiritually developed, and in possession of a more worldly perspective than she ("The Accursed Question" 4). When she rebuffs his romantic

overtures, Vasilii decides to rededicate himself to his studies and to banish love from his mind entirely.

In this early series of interactions, the narrator establishes two things regarding the protagonist. First, he is fascinated by women not solely for their bodies or their souls, as Vasilii and the narrator both frequently reiterate. His interest goes beyond that to the "unfamiliar but wondrous world" of women; that is to say, he seems to wonder about the experience of being a woman almost as much as he desires to experience being with a woman as a man. Even as he appears to wonder what it would be like to experience female subjectivity, he is acutely aware that it is inaccessible to him by virtue of his body's maleness. His material difference from women is baked into the syntax of his musing: by definition, woman's world is "unfamiliar" to him, but he is nonetheless obsessed with accessing it.

The meaning of 'access' is key to thinking through this passage—the access of 'being' vs. the access of 'visiting.' One method of access would be emotional intimacy, whether romantic or platonic. Another method, and one which comes to dominate the thoughts of the protagonist as the story progresses, would be sexual intimacy. Neither of these approaches, however, promise the sort of 'access' to which the protagonist aspires. He is unable to articulate the difference or to recognize what exactly it is for which he is looking.

His musings on the wondrous world of women are not devoid of desire; rather, the desire contained within them is multifaceted. It is through this complex desire—to experience being with a woman and, sub-textually, to inhabit the female subject position—that the troubled contours of Vasilii's maleness begin to take form. Embodiment is relational and collaborative, "a project that can only be undertaken in the presence and with the recognition of other embodied beings" (Salamon 46). This first experience of desire establishes the boundaries of Vasilii's body and,

specifically, delineates it as a male body in relation to female ones. Furthermore, these gendered boundaries also produce the separation and isolation from the love object that he will later come to lament. If, as his musings imply, he is looking to merge subjectivities with another person, he will shortly be disappointed in sex as a tool towards this end. While at this early stage, the narrator only hints at this desire, the distinction becomes clearer as the story progresses.

These early interactions also reveal Vasilii's thoughts about romance and interpersonal relations more broadly; they reveal a bizarre mixture of dispassionate scientific affect and youthful naivety. Of less interest is the content of Vasilii's reasoning regarding his love object—which could easily be chalked up to the naïve self-absorption of first love—than the method in which his thoughts are reported to occur. The narrator states, in describing Vasilii's mental process: "If this is called love, then let there be love ... But she also ought to have been feeling the same stirrings..." Later in the same paragraph, the narrator reiterates that Vasilii's numerous positive attributes and the tenor of the sum of their interactions to date "should have inspired in her the same strong, irresistible attraction to further intimacy" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 4). Vasilii seems to be thinking of this woman as a system that functions according to the logic of 'if *x*, then *y*.' This is significant first in that the logical framework producing these sentiments about love is quite reminiscent of the 1860s nihilists' 'scientific' approach to love,[59] influenced by their admiration

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[59] Richard Stites points to Andrei Gieroglifov's essay "Love and Nihilism," written around the same time that Chernyshevsky was finishing *What Is to Be Done?* as emblematic of the '60s nihilist position on love. Gieroglifov argued that love was no more than "the awakening of the reproductive instinct, however innocent it might appear" and that "love was not to be seen as a purely personal and individual pleasure" (Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement* 102). Rather, according to Gieroglifov, there was no "'participation by the individual will of man'" in the rituals of mating, courtship, and all the feelings which attended them (qtd. in Stites *The Women's Liberation Movement*

for figures like Bernard, Virchow, and Sechenov. This language situates Vasilii among the population of university students who are likely to be interested in materialist philosophy and sympathetic to revolutionary causes.

Second, and more importantly for this portion of the discussion, the flattened affect prefigures the emotional and bodily struggles to come later in the story. Vasilii's musings in this section read as peculiarly depersonalized, or hypoemotional. That is to say, his thoughts establish a distance between himself and the love-object, on the one hand, and himself and his own emotionality on the other. The concept of hypoemotionality is useful here in its following definition as a difficulty imbuing "perceived objects or concrete situations with emotional feeling, rather than a general inability to experience emotional states" (Sierra et al. 1524). Vasilii's turn to logic highlights a certain discomfort with the potentially irrational and messy vulnerabilities that attend feelings of love in particular and emotionality in general.

The narration's turn to the language of "should have" in Vasilii's first failed romantic venture highlights the gap that exists between Vasilii's actions within the world and his understanding of his own desires and the self that ostensibly experiences these desires. Notably, the story does little to emphasize why, precisely, Vasilii is drawn to this nameless woman or what the sensation of love actually feels like. Rather, the reader is simply informed that the emotion is present in the protagonist's mind and that, based on his fulfillment of certain criteria, it ought to be present in the mind of his desired object as well. Of course, Vasilii finds that love does not

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103). Nihilists were capable of love, Gieroglifov stated, because their logical faculties did not "'negate feeling.'" That said, they had to "recognize love's relationship to nature," in keeping with their materialist ethos and veneration for the natural sciences as, increasingly and vehemently, the final arbiters of truth.

function in the logical manner that he had initially supposed when his friend rejects his romantic overtures, stating she loves him as a brother but nothing more.

After this first rejection, he throws himself into his studies to forget the “intimate wound and eternal estrangement from someone dear to him” that results from it (Gastev “The Accursed Question” 5). Vasilii clearly experiences the dissolution of this relationship as far more catastrophic than a simple breakup warrants, even allowing for the typical drama attending a first love’s end. Instead, it is a permanent loss. One might expect such a loss to be couched in language likening it to the death of a loved one. In this case, however, the severed connection figures more like an amputation. Where previously there had been, according to his ‘rational’ assessment of the situation, a linked system in which he and this unnamed woman were submerged in one another, the end of the friendship and foreclosure of romance with her has effectively gouged part of him away. Recall for a moment Bogdanov’s writings on capitalist isolation from the previous chapter, where he compares the life of the individual subject in a capitalist system to the experience of an arm being violently ripped away from its body and expected to live on its own. The gravity of Vasilii’s response to the breakup makes more sense when considered in this light.

The connection that has been severed is not between two separate but linked systems; rather, a boundary now divides two sections of what the protagonist initially perceived as a continuous organism. The word choice underscores this point: *otchuzhdenie*, typically translated into English as ‘estrangement,’ has its roots in the word *chuzhoi*, which translates into English as ‘other.’ In the Russian, however, the concept of *chuzhoi* is in some sense oppositional, counterposed to that of *svoi* which, while not possessing a direct English equivalent, can loosely be thought of as ‘of myself.’ The prefix *ot-* denotes movement away from something, whether literally (i.e., “Where do you *come from*?”; “I walk *away from* the wall”) or metaphorically (i.e.,

in the sense of disgust or revulsion). The phrase "eternal estrangement," then, implies that a part of what had previously been 'of Vasilii's self' has now become forever and irrevocably othered.[60] It is by this logic that the protagonist experiences the dissolution of this first love as a sort of metaphorical severing, or amputation, of a portion of himself.

Vasilii's subsequent interest in women takes a decidedly physical turn which comes to eclipse his interest in the "mutual interpenetration of the soul" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 5). This shift exacerbates his sense of personal schism, as evidenced by the narrator's emphasis that the increasing physicality of his desire is involuntary and menacing. This physicality further alienates Vasilii from himself, becoming both traumatic and resulting in his own bodily discomfort: "He knew what it meant: this passion, this turbid brain, this weakening will, this painfully inflamed labor of the imagination, this blood pounding in the temples, these clouded eyes, burning with fervid heat, these parched lips, this freezing and scorching fever in the body." The physicality of his desire "laid on his soul like a heavy, oppressive brand," taking on a terrifying materiality that sets him against himself (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 6). At this point in the story, Vasilii's desires are not directed at any specific woman, but rather at either an abstract woman or whomever he happens to see passing by on the street. It is during this section that the

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[60] Moreover, the use of the word *chelovek* is interesting here. The English equivalent for this word is "person." While grammatically masculine in Russian, it is gender neutral in content. The narrative has already established, of course, that Vasilii's love object in this period is female, but the recourse to the gender-neutral "person" emphasizes that this estrangement has far-reaching effects. This first instance of estrangement is a microcosm of his larger, equally eternal estrangement from the societal collective.

narrator relates that Vasilii has "undergone"[61] sexual intercourse two or three times in his life, a choice of words that underscores the traumatic nature of these experiences.

This section first establishes that Vasilii is so at odds with himself that he is essentially split into two protagonists: Vasilii's Body, and Vasilii's Consciousness. Notably, this schism is first directly articulated in the story when Vasilii is forced to grapple with the reality of his gendered embodiment as a result of his failure in love.[62] The list of sensations that precede Vasilii's sexual encounters are both physiological conditions that a body could be said to have (i.e., "clouded eyes," "parched lips"), as well as slightly more nebulous processes that straddle the line between the mind's immaterial thoughts ("passion," "weakening will") and the body's physical calls to action ("turbid brain," "freezing and scorching fever").

This schism between Vasilii's conscious mind and his physical body when it comes to sex is, finally, literally described by the narrator as "involuntary," a "torturous battle" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 6). When Vasilii succumbs to the desires foisted upon him by his body, the narrative describes the process as follows: "He didn't even surrender, he just malfunctioned, losing volition and consciousness." Even the act of submission to desire, then, is not a conscious decision on the part of Vasilii the thinking subject, but rather a breakdown in which the physiological system that is Vasilii overpowers what the narrator would probably deem his 'soul.' His body, and

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[61] In the Russian, the narrator uses the word *perezhit'*, which implies a process of survival ("living through" or "suffering") that significantly transforms the person undergoing the experience. This is in contrast to other neutral words that would get across the same message—undergoing an experience—but without the implication of intense, irrevocable change.

[62] Alternatively, as a result of his failure to reproduce heterosexuality thereby fully establishing himself as 1) human, and 2) *properly* male.

its inconvenient and terrifying drives, is by now more like a separate organism with which he must contend as opposed to part of himself.[63]

Second, the list of sensations in this section focuses on different body parts and their experiences, localizing feeling in the body part itself as opposed to connecting back to a brain that can interpret it as part of a whole mind-body experience. The disjointedness of this description is the first explicit indication in the story of how the protagonist experiences his own body. Where prior to the end of the relationship with the nameless woman of the preceding section, Vasilii had been a complete, unified organism, he has now fallen to pieces. It makes sense that the description of his body's sensations should be so fragmented because Vasilii's body is itself now a collection of pieces that refuse to coalesce into a coherent whole. As discussed earlier, He is at odds with himself, essentially two protagonists occupying the same coordinates and battling for control of them. Vasilii is more akin to a makeshift machine cobbled together from unruly parts, sparking and spitting at each other when forced to life by the flip of a switch than a holistically functioning organism.

All of this can be productively read as what Paul Preciado has described in *Countersexual Manifesto* as "heteropartitioning" (Preciado 25). He writes:

> Western human nature is a product of social technology that reproduces the equation "nature = heterosexuality" on our bodies, architectures, and discourses. The heterosexual system is an epistemic regime and social apparatus that produces femininity and masculinity and operates by dividing and fragmenting the body: it

[63] In this way, "The Accursed Question" is quite reminiscent of Tolstoy's writing, which frequently depicts sexual desire in a similarly schismatic way, discussed further in a later section.

> cuts out organs and generates zones of high sense and motor intensity (visual, tactile, olfactory), which it afterward identifies as natural and anatomic centers of sexual difference. (24)

On the one hand, the heterosexual epistemic regime described by Preciado interpellates Vasilii as a man by virtue of the "natural and anatomic" maleness that it has itself written onto his body. On the other hand, it also calls on him to reproduce heterosexuality through a (proscribed, rote) type of sexual intercourse that establishes him as a gendered subject in both time and materiality. Vasilii's desire for sexual intimacy with women is just as fragmented as his experience of his body. While he is overcome with a need for this intimacy, such that he cannot think of anything else, he also experiences this desire as involuntary, physically uncomfortable, and menacing. The "heteropartitioning" (fragmentation) takes place both in time and in the body. It is a series of actions that Vasilii must perform (penetrating women during sexual intercourse) as much as it is a collection of attributes his body possesses (the biological markers that supposedly designate him as a man). Because so much of his gender is tied up in the performance of sexuality, the penis becomes a tool integral to the construction and maintenance of a male subjectivity.

The division and fragmentation of Vasilii's body by the heterosexual epistemic regime results in a fragmentation of experience as well. Although Vasilii is very firmly enmeshed in the heterosexual system as Preciado describes it, he clearly struggles with the demands it places on him as a subject. The interpellation of his maleness is so distressing that the fragmentation which produces it goes awry. It goes too far, in a sense, and results in a fractured selfhood. In this instance, the self as defined by the heterosexual system chafes and fractures under the space it is assigned to occupy and the gender it is compelled to perform. While Vasilii 'is' a man, in accordance with Preciado's partitioning, he must also constantly 'do' maleness, in the Butlerian sense, in order to

shore up his claim to this subject position, the only one available to him regardless of how ambivalent towards it he may seem.

This disjunction between Vasilii's consciousness and Vasilii's body is the poor weld where both pain and opportunity can be found. Judith Butler has written that "the abiding gendered self [is] ... structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *dis*continuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192, italics in original). That is to say, the heterosexual system which both produces and demands normative gender identity, while posing as a stable ontological field, is far more precarious than it appears. A normative cisgender male identity is constructed and requires maintenance, during the course of which opportunities for disjunction and destabilization arise.

Vasilii once again becomes drawn to the "world of women" in a manner that runs counter to the kind of coarse, perfunctory sexuality in which he is compelled to engage as part of the maintenance of his heterosexual male identity. His thoughtful curiosity about what it might be like to inhabit a female subject position reappears:

> Woman, her nebulous image, her world, in general everything 'womanly' began to command all his attention, imagination, thoughts, and dreams. Often, he caught himself daydreaming about women during lessons: what their faces were like, whether they were prettier than men, healthier, why they had such pleasant, tender voices, whether they were generally softer, kinder, and more sincere, why he was more drawn to them than to men, and what it was about them that so drew him. (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 8)

While not necessarily devoid of sexual interest, sexual attraction is not the main thrust of his daydreaming. Instead, Vasilii's interest appears to focus mainly on the mechanics of female embodiment. The language once again turns to a kind of organic fragmentation: he wonders about their voices, faces, the general physical characteristics of their bodies, whether there is a sort of feminine temperament, etc. None of these characteristics are linked together to create a full picture of any particular—or even representative, abstract—woman; rather, these women appear to him in pieces.

His musings on femaleness here are a rearticulation of the schismatic experience of arousal he lives through earlier in the story that comes to delineate his fractured embodied self. Despite the fragmented quality of these thoughts, there is a notable lack of distress and violence in them. While Vasilii's experience of his male embodiment fills him with terror and unwanted physiological sensations, his conception of female embodiment seems not to carry the same sort of baggage. The trauma of fragmentation, then, appears to be located not so much in the metaphorical dismemberment itself, but rather in the gendered quality of the subject it produces. Judith Butler's work is again useful here for thinking through this fragmentation. She writes of the role of pain in producing the gendered self:

> If ... pain has a delineating effect, i.e., may be one way in which we come to have an idea of our body at all, it may also be that gender-instituting prohibitions work through suffusing the body with a pain that culminates in the projection of a surface, that is, a sexed morphology which is at once a compensatory fantasy and a fetishistic mask. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 65)

Throughout the story, Vasilii's loneliness and isolation are discussed in light of his maleness. His solitude is physiologically produced by the problematic but unavoidable desires of

his male body. He desires connection with women—and with people in general, as becomes clear—but is denied this connection by virtue of the awkward 'biological' fact of his maleness. He comes to understand his own gender through the pain of his problematic desire for the female body and seeks relief from this desire, perceived as a physiological force that his rebellious body imposes on him. The narration consistently links masculinity with pain, loneliness, and violence while juxtaposing femininity as connection, openness, and vitality.[64] Regardless of what Vasilii's consciousness wants, he is condemned to masculinity on account of his inconvenient and unpleasant materiality.

This section of the story concludes on a final instance of bodily fragmentation, a depiction of Vasilii's increasingly frenetic attempts to grapple with his own desire. To keep himself from "succumbing" to the sexual impulse, Vasilii instead finds excuses to brush against women on the street, as if by accident, touching their hands, dresses, waists. The narrator goes on:

> Vasilii was also drawn to lurk in spaces where one might be able to glimpse a more intimate view of a woman, less draped with clothing—a lady's bare leg or some other seductive sight brought him to such furtive delight and sweet tremors! And not a drop of awareness [in him] of the sinfulness and vulgarity of such behavior... (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 10)

Here, his dismantling gaze is redirected from his own body to that of his love object, whoever she may be—or, more accurately, whichever part of her it may be. The thought process described is that of the classic fetishist, where a part comes to stand in for the whole and to take on a significance that ultimately comes to supersede the whole. The invocation of the "lady's bare

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[64] In this way, it is very much standard fare of the *fin-de-siècle* period.

leg" is a particularly salient example of this, an explicit indication of Vasilii's increasing sexual maladjustment. His inability to contend with his own urges leads him to become further alienated both from himself and from those around him. As he is unable to conceive of himself as a unified, whole organism, so now he is unable to confer that status onto the objects of his desire, instead viewing the women he lusts after as cobbled-together collections of isolated organs. Significantly, this passage directly precedes his descent into coarse boulevard sexuality at the urging of his male classmates, a journey that culminates in intense physical self-disgust.

In this next section of the story, Vasilii's university classmates tell him about the existence of "marvelous women ... [with whom] you can do anything that strikes your fancy" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 11). These "marvelous women" are to be found on the boulevard, notorious in the popular imagination for its low-brow entertainment, vulgarity, and licentiousness. Obviously, these women are sex workers. At first, Vasilii is taken in by the freedom to touch that he has so long been denied—"It was true, you could sit near them, close, so close, and even kiss, embrace them"—but he soon finds that the contours of this sexual experience are not that for which he has been yearning.

He and his classmates make several visits to the boulevard, but "he did not get what he'd been expecting: the rude, cynical speech of the women and his classmates, the presumption, uncivility ('*razviaznost'*')—all this disillusioned ('*razocharovalo*') Vasilii and even stirred up in him some unpleasant sensation, something repulsive and nauseating" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 11). These visits to the boulevard do nothing to alleviate his alienation and isolation. They instead intensify it. Vasilii goes to the marvelous women of the boulevard in search of intimacy and connection, but instead finds, in the perfunctory, mechanical sex on offer there, that sexual union might not lead to the kind of "mutual interpenetration" he so desires.

Even the language serves to underscore how thoroughly his expectations are dashed. The prefix *raz-* in this instance would translate in English to dis- (as in, dis-regard; dis-illusion), though, depending on context, it could also be translated as un- (as in, un-tie; un-do). It is a prefix used to describe a process of separation, a pulling apart. So, its presence in this scene serves to specifically highlight how Vasilii enters these encounters with the expectation of establishing connection and is shocked and disgusted when they instead deepen his isolation and loneliness. This series of encounters ends in his running away without having had sex with anyone.

This section of the story concludes on Vasilii finally 'successfully' having sex with one of the boulevard women, after the incessant scorn and mockery of his classmates pressure him into giving this version of sex another chance. His classmates' behavior illustrates quite clearly what Butler means when she writes that normative gender operates through prohibition and guilt (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 65). Vasilii is singled out by the other boys as performing masculinity unsatisfactorily and urged, cruelly, to 'do better.' The very fact that one's way of 'being' a man can fall short makes clear that masculinity exists only in comparison to some ideal. The criteria that it demands be fulfilled are contingent, the identity that their fulfillment bestows conditional and aspirational.

Participation in commercial heterosexual intercourse figures here as the measurement for manhood, the tool by which Vasilii is to become a proper man in the eyes of his peers. As discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary depictions of sex work from this period emphasized the perfunctory, transactional nature of the exchange: the male client extracting pleasure from the body of the female sex worker the same way one might find pleasure in a good meal. In this framework,

the female body is essentially alimentation to be consumed[65] in pursuit of a particular effect. The consumption of her body, and at least the appearance of enjoyment in that consumption, produces the normative masculinity that establishes Vasilii's position as a proper male within the social group of his peers. The sex worker is dehumanized as an effect of this process, certainly, but so too is Vasilii himself. In order to 'become' a man, he engages in what the story portrays as an act of violence against both women and himself.

The story describes Vasilii's experiences of boulevard sex once again as traumatic, accompanied by both mental and physical symptoms of distress: "He fell ... unconscious of the deed he was committing ... his blood boiled inside him, his head grew foggy, his will weakened and in swooped something demonic, indomitable, which inexorably drew him down into the depths..." (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 12). This moment perfectly communicates the dragging weight of desperation and loneliness that Vasilii's isolation within the demands of the heterosexual epistemic regime produces. Though he performs the act of heterosexual re-inscription demanded of him, it is at the cost of obliterating his own consciousness ("he fell ... unconscious"). His return to lucidity is attended by symptoms of what sounds suspiciously like a panic attack ("his blood boiled," "his head grew foggy"). Once again, the story interweaves psychological malfunction ("his will weakened") and physiological distress. The dual protagonists of Vasilii's consciousness and body make another appearance with the demonic force that possesses him and drags him into the depths.

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[65] In a manner reminiscent again of Tolstoy's writings on the modern economy of desire, Gastev's depictions of boulevard sexuality also implicitly critique the commodification of women's bodies under the auspices of burgeoning industrial capitalism. His work here, however, also concerns itself with how this sexual-economic arrangement objectifies the male client in turn, and the psychological state that this objectification produces in him.

His experience of his body is as a separate entity with malicious intentions. He is once again depersonalized, having "lost the sense of [his] body as the experiencer, as that through which the world is experienced" (Colombetti and Ratcliffe 147). Vasilii perceives his body's boiling blood and foggy head in a manner that highlights their "merely physical and 'thing-like'" quality (Colombetti and Ratcliffe 148). While he is aware of being in his body, in that as it succumbs once again to the temptation of sex he is carried along with it, he perceives it as something separate from his own identity, external to himself. While it demonstrates physiological signs of distress, Vasilii 'himself' is simply along for the ride. The sexual urge to which his body is vulnerable is entirely divorced from the life of Vasilii's consciousness.

The story returns to Vasilii after about a ten-year gap. He is now "thirty some years old," having been unable to find love due to the anxious and unstable quality of his life (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 14).[66] Despite his apparent unsuitability for love, Vasilii remains locked in battle with his physical desire which, if left unsatisfied, prevents him from functioning, working, even thinking. It drives him to sit at the window for "entire hours" trying to catch a glimpse of women in the courtyard or on the street who have lifted up their dresses high enough to accidentally reveal some ordinarily covered-up part of their "seductive bodies" (14). Later in the same paragraph, the narrator recounts how the pressure of Vasilii's sexual desire drives him to shout himself down, to fight as if against "some other interior voice" quietly whispering to him that he will not have the strength to practice what he preaches. What he preaches is, presumably, the

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[66] His sexual maladjustment has led to his social isolation and the development of a neurotic temperament, in accordance with the predictions of ideologues like Virenius and Pokrovskaia.

mutual interpenetration of the soul that the story posits as an ideal from the very beginning. By this point, the protagonist despairs of whether or not this type of intimacy is achievable in life.

In thinking back on his previous sexual experiences, Vasilii recalls the physiological sensations that accompanied his psychological distress, as in earlier instances in the story, but this time with more detail: "He experienced a feeling of nausea, disgust, his hands seemed to him as if they were covered in blood, and for several days he couldn't bring them near food. He was opposed to himself; he saw himself as forever lost and stripped of the right to gaze upon the godly world" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 16). Vasilii's recollections of these events are as a perpetrator of some kind of violent act, at least metaphorically. This violence that he has performed on his sexual partners—as this impersonal heterosexual intercourse is, in the framework the story posits, violent by definition—also reverberates into his own corporeality.

Are the sensations he feels when he recalls these moments of sexual union psychological or physiological? His hands, for example, only seem *as if* they are covered in blood. Nonetheless, the perception of their filthiness, both moral and otherwise, is so strong as to prevent Vasilii from being able to eat food for several days. He furthermore experiences nausea, a physical symptom, as a result of his moral disgust with himself, something purely psychological. In the end, then, these sensations occur somewhere in between the physiological and psychological, uncategorizable to one or the other realm. They are united only in their pathology and the pain they cause the protagonist. Physiology and psychology have been essentially opposed to each other throughout all the preceding events of the story. Why does the narrative bring them together now?

Earlier, the narrator relates that Vasilii's sexual acts and urges weigh on his soul like an oppressive brand. According to Preciado, the process of heteropartitioning produces "natural and anatomical" sex by cutting up (always metaphorically, but quite often literally) the body in order

to force it to conform to a predetermined cultural notion of male or female. "Natural" sex is localized in the genitalia that heteropartitioning creates. That said, the heterosexual epistemic regime makes further demands of its charges. If heteropartitioning functions in the body, heterosexual intercourse functions in time to further produce a subject.

Butler describes this in terms of performativity: "'Performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 95). Vasilii's body is therefore continually obligated to undertake the ritual of heterosexual intercourse, whether Vasilii's consciousness desires to or not. If he does not perform this act, his body will not become properly 'male.' Furthermore, the "shape" of the act is predetermined by the heterosexual epistemic regime. Any sex not of the sort explicitly demanded and condoned by that regime will not 'count' when it comes to the production of human subjectivity. It may even do harm.[67]

This is where Butler's discontinuities come back into play: "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely ... in ... a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192). In the case of Vasilii, the "de-formity" is in his

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[67] One can look back to the antisodomy statute discussed in the previous chapter, wherein the receiving male partner, regardless of whether the sexual act took place between two consenting adults, was treated under the law in the same manner as a female sex worker and subjected to the care of the state administrative apparatus. By contrast, the penetrating partner was subject to criminal prosecution. The sexual position of either male partner ultimately determined their effective gender in the eyes of the state. To submit to penetration was, essentially, to become female, and therefore incapable of self-determination and agency.

inability to immerse himself in the rote heterosexual sex he is compelled to perform. While this de-formity in Vasilii's gender performance might lay the groundwork for transformation, it also results in discordance and pain. As it articulates the appearance of a coherent cisgender male identity, his performance of these gendered acts exacerbates the schism between his consciousness and corporeality. The schism creates a state of excruciating incoherence that finds its expression in his pathological sexual behavior (the fetishistic way that his gaze partitions women's bodies as he lusts after them), physiological symptoms of illness that he experiences before and after 'succumbing,' and, finally, his inability to form or sustain intimate relationships with others, platonic or otherwise.

Near the end of the story, Vasilii accosts a woman passing by on the street, and they end up agreeing to have sex at her home. As before, he is overwhelmed with shame and self-disgust, but, unlike in his previous encounters, his attention is far more focused on the woman than himself. He feels "all the falsity and artificiality[68] of his position" as they discuss, obliquely, what they are about to do and she looks him coldly and dispassionately in the eyes (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 21). His acknowledgement of the unnaturalness of the encounter and of his sexual partner's cold lack of interest shows a level of self-awareness and consciousness that his previous encounters lack. Is this perhaps a moment that could create space for a gender transformation of the sort Butler describes?

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[68] Sexual activity that fell outside the bounds of the narrow band of heterosexual penetrative intercourse for the purposes of procreation—from masturbation to homosexual anal intercourse to bestiality—was often referred to with the catchall designation of "artificial" in the popular discourse of the period.

Whereas in the previous encounters, he has been uncomfortably cognizant of his body and its terrifying physiological responses, his focus is now so firmly on his partner it is almost as if his own body is not even present. This shift away from terror and hyperfocus on embodiment to indifference and depersonalization occurs at the same time that he perceives the artificiality of his sexual pursuits. Each aspect of the encounter is described in perfunctory, dispassionate terms that illustrate a kind of passive apathy. The narrator describes Vasilii's sexual desire as a "murky wave" that washes over him and pulls him to the depths, rather than as an act he engages in of his own will. This time, however, he greets the experience with the same indifference as his partner. The woman undresses in preparation for the sexual act exactly as if she were by herself and, though Vasilii is afraid to look at her directly, he acknowledges that "he needs this body" in a final concession to the base physical desire that his own body foists on him.

This final sexual interaction of the story is notably devoid of the anxiety and metaphorical violence that attends each previous instance of sexual intimacy. It is rather as though Vasilii has become inured to the terror of this act by turning himself into as much of an automaton as the woman herself appears to him to be; sex is an input required by the machine of his body that can be extracted from the body undressing before him. This perfunctory, impersonal sex, despite not being accompanied by the abject terror of the previous encounters, ultimately solidifies Vasilii's lack of humanity, as his sexual partner "saw in him a beast, and not a person" (Gastev "The Accursed Question" 22). While she sees a beast in Vasilii, he sees in her that "everything was so lifeless, cold, vacantly smacking of sluggish apathy." They participate in a mutual dehumanization of each other, a ritual of self-obliterating violence, in direct opposition to the mutual interpenetration that the story posits as the ultimate goal of sexual intimacy and love.

He somehow manages to survive the shame of this sexual encounter with less psychological and physiological agony than the others. “The Accursed Question” concludes, in its final section, that the solution to this agony of heterosexual male subjectivity is to abstain from any sexual encounter that does not also involve a true unity of souls: “Closeness, striving towards mutual interpenetration, a merging and materialization of one within the other ... Only a united soul, [Vasilii] thought, can make a united body possible and natural” (Gastev “The Accursed Question” 23). Heterosexual coupling therefore only becomes possible and natural when it is accompanied by the “merging and materialization” of one partner’s soul within the other’s. The open question is then whether and by what means it is possible to effect a merging and materialization of the bodies and consciousnesses of distinct individuals.

Instead of addressing this question, the story closes on Vasilii's promise to overcome the battle between “consciousness and desire,” as he vows to himself: “He would rise above his desires, above this battle ... a human being would always prevail and be resurrected within him in these difficult moments” (23). Vasilii, so the logic of this statement implies, cannot be anything but a beast if he indulges his body’s sexual urges because male sexual urges are supposedly inherently violent. To become human, he must abstain from sexuality, mastering his body and subjugating it to the will of his consciousness.

This purported solution, however, rings hollow. While throughout the story the perspectives of the narrator and the protagonist appear to be closely linked, here the narration seems to split away from Vasilii’s perspective. The vow that the narrator reports him making to himself preserves the gendered schism between body and psyche that has tormented Vasilii for the past thirty or so pages. The agonies of gendered embodiment are not solved by this conclusion, merely deferred, to be taken up in Gastev’s later works in a different form.

3.3 The Tragedy of Consciousness

Tolstoy's "The Devil" ("*Diavol*" 1889) is ultimately a tale about incoherence and disconnection: the protagonist Irtenev's search for a moral framework that will save him from his own bodily urges is constantly frustrated, resulting in catastrophe for all involved. In another example of Tolstoy's post-conversion preoccupation with eradicating sexual desire, Irtenev externalizes his struggle with sexuality and desire by displacing it onto the peasant woman Stepanida, with whom he has sex in exchange for money, ultimately killing her or himself, depending on the version, to conquer his lust. On its surface, "The Devil" has a great deal in common with "The Accursed Question." Both stories recount the struggles of a tortured male protagonist and his inconvenient desire to access women's bodies. Both present relations between men and women as fraught, riddled with moral complexity and shadowed by the potential for violence. Each employs imagery and narrative techniques that emphasize disconnection and fragmentation, posing questions about how individual identity comes to be constituted, and what role gender plays in this process.

That said, the scaffolding supporting each tale of sexual temptation and tortured subjectivity is decidedly different. This section examines "The Devil" as a counterpoint to Gastev's "The Accursed Question," seeking to differentiate the Tolstoyan strain of sexual anxiety to what can be found in Gastev's work. As such, this analysis focuses on the depiction of how subjectivity is constituted, the narrative's posture in relation to male desire, and the ways in which it communicates bodily fragmentation in contrast to the fragmentation that Vasilii undergoes in "The Accursed Question."

Much like in “Father Sergy,” dismembered body parts proliferate throughout the narrative of “The Devil.” In introducing the protagonist Evgeny Irtenev, the narrator relates that Irtenev is “strongly built, with muscles developed by gymnastics, full-blooded with glowing red cheeks, bright teeth and lips, and fine, soft, curly hair” (Tolstoy “The Devil” 193). He has only one “physical defect,” his nearsightedness which, the narrator states, “he had himself developed by using spectacles.” This short description makes several things clear immediately.

First, it employs a list-like format that emphasizes each of Irtenev’s characteristics as separate entities. They exist near each other, in relation to each other perhaps, but they are not pieced together to produce a coherent image of a man. Tolstoy uses each of these physical descriptors in terms that strongly emphasize its physicality. Irtenev is “strongly built,” a fairly common turn of phrase meant to convey that someone is healthy and sturdy looking. It is specifically his muscles conditioned by his work at gymnastics, however, which lend him this look; the state and function of the muscles are of primary importance in creating the appearance of health. Similarly, it is the blood flowing throughout his body that creates the redness in his cheeks and contributes to the impression he produces. All of this to say: the functioning of the physical systems that make up his body is what ultimately produces the qualitative impression of Irtenev the man.

Juxtaposed with these descriptors of Irtenev’s physical robustness is his one “physical defect,” his nearsightedness. Significantly, this physical defect is manufactured. He develops it himself through his dependence on spectacles. The narrator goes on to add that Irtenev can no longer get by without a pince-nez, which has left a permanent indentation across his nose. This single, throwaway aside is in keeping with other indictments of industrial modernity to be found throughout Tolstoy’s body of work.

Second, the mention of gymnastics implies an interest in self-regulation and an orientation towards the body as a project in need of attention and maintenance. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, gymnastics movements developed throughout Europe as a tool in the effort to consolidate and strengthen national identities in places under imperial rule (in the territories of what is now Germany and Czechia, for example). The coordinated movements in mass gymnastics demonstrations were specifically designed to foster a sense of group identity that extended beyond the abstract concepts of nation or people and could instead be felt as physical fact within the body itself (Jannarone 18-19). The synchronized group performances in gymnastics obviously mimic the functioning of a singular organism: each part of the body moves in harmony with its counterparts. The individual becomes submerged within the social body, transcending the bounds of their singular physical body to become part of a communal whole. Another way to think of this is in terms of connection. Irtenev, rather like Vasilii, is in search of a connection to something outside himself that he can feel, physically manifested, within his body.

The rise in the popularity of gymnastics furthermore coincides with the changing scientific approach to the body as detailed in the previous chapter. The atomizing scientific gaze that perceived the body as a collection of interconnected, cooperative systems necessarily meant that these systems could be disentangled and isolated for study. As such, the human being became a piece in an interlocking puzzle of systems and bits as opposed to an 'inhabitant' of the discrete unit called the body on the lines of what it had been in pervious periods. The body, itself a hodgepodge of different elements, combined to form a complex system that affected and was affected by the additional complex system of the mind. Irtenev's participation in gymnastics indicates, via simple shorthand, that he attempts to pay attention to the needs of his organism,

improving the functioning and fitness of his body as part of an optimization project that ought to have an impact on the hygiene of his mind as well.

As a young man living in St. Petersburg, Irtenev "was not a libertine but neither, as he himself said, was he a monk." He only indulged in sex "in so far as was necessary for physical health and mental freedom" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 193). Sexual activity is, by this logic, simply another aspect of the body to be managed as part of the whole organism's routine maintenance. In contrast to later in the story, Tolstoy discusses sexuality in untroubled terms here, almost clinically. The logical framework undergirding this statement is reminiscent of Vasilii's experience with sexuality in "The Accursed Question" as something his body is compelled to desire and to enact. In contrast to "The Accursed Question," however, the narrative and protagonist Irtenev are, for the moment, entirely unbothered by this dispassionate approach to sex.

There is a class dimension to the lack of distress surrounding Irtenev's habits while in the urban context. John Kopper points out that the only taboo that the society of Tolstoy's gentry characters would allow "is the stricture against ... having affairs with women of noble birth who have never married. This line seems so fixed to Tolstoy that he rarely brings a character to cross it…" (Kopper 170). By contrast, social convention permits men of Irtenev's class position to access the bodies of lower-class women so completely that it is seen as a natural course of events—something unworthy of acknowledgement as an event at all. Within this framework, Irtenev has conducted himself in a manner that leaves him completely above reproach: his dalliances in St. Petersburg remained within the bounds of acceptable upper-class comportment. Tolstoy makes sure to point out that he has "never once been infatuated" with any of his partners, nor has he ever contracted a disease (Tolstoy "The Devil" 194). The only negative that appears in this description

of his sexual proclivities is an aside about a seamstress he "had had" who "got spoilt" such that he jettisoned her.

The way the narrative describes Irtenev's sexual escapades in St. Petersburg reveals that neither he nor the women with whom he involves himself possess a vibrant interior life. The narrative highlights the key points in the manner of items on a grocery list. The implicit judgment is that Irtenev has not managed any kind of meaningful connection with any of his partners and, in fact, is not looking for it. One would not, for example, fall in love with the sack of potatoes purchased at the store. Essentially, Irtenev here is an isolated consumer among a sea of objects waiting to be activated for consumption by his desire. St. Petersburg is "a society awash with commodities (including human bodies)" which can only offer the right to choose goods and services as a method for self-actualization and personal development (Ivanilova 10). Rather like Bogdanov's "separate, autonomous 'I'" of the previous chapter, Irtenev, having only access to the vocabulary of consumerism, is unable to even conceive of the extent of his own isolation, to recognize that his position is one of pain and deprivation.

Moreover, once again returning to Bogdanov, the individual capitalist subject is produced and maintained by division, which it must also constantly disavow as it moves through a "virtual world of unsatisfied desires" (Ivanilova 10). The arm torn from its body is constantly asking after its purpose but misidentifying this question as an unfulfilled want for goods or services. Irtenev's desire for women is a classic symptom of commodity fetishism in that his desire arises not as a reaction "to material objects but as a desire for the abstract concept of an object" (10). While in the city, he is able to chase fulfillment easily, as the supply of goods for consumption is seemingly inexhaustible.

It is not until he arrives in the countryside that this becomes a problem: "Now he was living in the country for the second month and ... compulsory self-restraint was beginning to have a bad effect on him ... he needed it, it really became a necessity, and he felt that he was not free and that against his will his eyes followed every young woman" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 194). Like Vasilii's in "The Accursed Question," Irtenev's desire has become compulsive; his body desires "against his will" and his mind follows along as if taken hostage. Like Vasilii, he "involuntarily" brings conversation "round to women, and when it turn[s] to women he [keeps] it on that theme" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 194). The diminished supply of goods has revealed that his desire drives him as opposed to his will.

It is this compulsive drive that spurs Irtenev to broach to the huntsman Danila the topic of acquiring a village girl for sex. Danila procures Stepanida, whose husband is away working in the city, and thus begins the sexual and economic arrangement that leads to degeneration and death by the story's end. Irtenev's struggles with sexual desire are also struggles with capitalist modernity that encourages flight into "various forms of excessive consumption," foreclosing "upon the option to live a life of service to others" where true spiritual and emotional nourishment might be found (Ivanilova 2). As Irtenev's relations with Stepanida drag on and he becomes more entangled with her, he—paradoxically, perhaps, since these relations are all about physical intimacy—cements his own loneliness and isolation.

His isolation is compounded by his society's inability to see that his behavior is in any way immoral. The conflict of the story "is built upon [the] society's collective failure to understand that anything of significance is happening" (Kopper 163). Danila, of course, facilitates Irtenev's initial encounters with Stepanida. His own moral position is effectively nonexistent: he both obliquely

disparages this sort of behavior while in the next breath excusing it as harmless and even ultimately beneficial, resulting in profit and satisfaction for all involved (Tolstoy "The Devil" 195).

When Irtenev confesses his "shameful secret" to his uncle later in the story, after he has married Liza and is trying to resist temptation to sin again, his uncle's sole response is to ask whether Stepanida is pretty (Tolstoy "The Devil" 227). His efforts to find "a boundary to acceptable behavior" are constantly stymied, leaving him to find a "private solution, since his culture does not provide a distinct moral field within which to operate" (Kopper 163). Irtenev's attempts to erect barriers to prevent himself from succumbing to temptation are all doomed to fail, as he, like the severed arm from Bogdanov's writings, is incapable of even articulating the reality of his dilemma.

"The Devil" features fragmented bodies in a style similar to that of "The Accursed Question." Irtenev himself is initially described in a fragmentary manner, hinting to the schismatic experience he will undergo as the story progresses. Both Liza, his wife, and Stepanida, his mistress, are also described in disjointed terms. Stepanida's fragmentation is dynamic, bursting with vitality and movement, emphasizing her sexual allure. When Irtenev finds himself once more in need of sexual release after his first meeting with Stepanida, "his restlessness this time was no longer impersonal, but suggested just those same bright, black eyes and that deep voice, saying, 'ever so long', that same scent of something fresh and strong, and that same full breast lifting the bib of her apron" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 199). Later on, when she begins to appear on the grounds of the estate without his prior knowledge or consent, the fragmentation takes on a more sinister tone: "a red skirt and red kerchief appeared from round the corner, and she went past him swinging her arms and swaying her body" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 213). Her clothing here defines her first, her body only delineated in terms of its tantalizing movement. As in the earlier description, she is not a

coherent set of characteristics that come together to make a human being, but rather separate, disjointed traits. The descriptions reduce her to the status of a thing defined primarily in terms of the traits that make it appealing for use.

Liza, though also depicted in pieces, lacks sexuality entirely. Irtenev's reasoning for marrying her initially resembles the logic of the fictitious marriages of the 1860s: "One reason was that she was not a very rich heiress such as his mother sought for him, another that she was naïve and to be pitied in her relations with her mother, another that she was not a beauty who attracted general attention to herself, and yet she was not bad-looking" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 202). Compared to his musings about Stepanida, Irtenev's thoughts regarding his wife are entirely devoid of sexual desire. He goes on:

> Liza was tall, slender, and long. Everything about her was long; her face and her nose, not prominent but longish, and her fingers, and her gait. The colour of her face was very delicate, creamy white and delicately pink; she had long, soft, and curly, light-brown hair, and beautiful eyes, clear, meek, and trusting. (202)

Liza is as much an object to Irtenev as Stepanida, but she performs an entirely different function. The description of Liza also presents a series of disconnected pieces, united by the overarching characteristic of "long." She is delicate, not inspiring in Irtenev the same torturous sexual arousal that he experiences when confronted with Stepanida. She lacks the peasant vitality of her husband's mistress, and even the force of will that accompanies the presence of an independent personality. Furthermore, in contrast to Stepanida, Liza is presented as effectively stationary: she miscarries because of a carriage ride when the horse becomes overexcited; a fall during a walk in the garden threatens another miscarriage later in the story; even when she is running to fetch cream for her mother, Irtenev's mother Mariia Pavlovna admonishes her that rapid

movements are dangerous for her (Tolstoy “The Devil” 213). If Stepanida’s peasant womanhood is robust, full of movement and vitality, Liza’s upper-class womanhood is constrained, delicate and sickly, in need of careful stewardship.

Structurally, the story presents the conflict of a man trapped by the pull of two opposing objects: Liza, representing the chaste, respectable life; and Stepanida, representing indulgence, sin, and abandon. The true conflict, however, lies in Irtenev’s inability to successfully navigate the economy of desire in which he finds himself enmeshed. It is helpful to think in terms of threat: Liza’s womanhood is non-threatening, while Stepanida’s is terrifying. It would be easy to make the argument that the assessment of threat directly correlates to whose womanhood is ‘under control’—namely, subordinate to the patriarchal family structure—and whose is not. Liza’s sexuality is harnessed to domestic ends, her labor serving to reproduce the basic units (family, children) of the larger patriarchal society. By contrast, Stepanida’s sexuality is ostensibly set to work in pursuit of her own ends and satisfaction.[69] She has committed the grave sin of exercising sexual self-determination and autonomy, engaging in sex for purposes other than those of procreation. Her sexuality ultimately comes to usurp Irtenev’s own will, and he becomes dominated by the allure of Stepanida’s body—sexual in a manner completely divorced, in his eyes, from the safe-making effect of motherhood—a transgression that finally leads to violence and death.

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[69] For example: “Her conception of any sin in the matter had been quite obliterated by the influence of the money and her family’s approval” (Tolstoy “The Devil” 200). She has been corrupted by the allure of the market, selling her very body for profit, therefore having fully transformed into an individual subject, incapable of obliterating her selfhood for a life of service.

It is Irtenev, however, who commits the ultimate sin of the narrative: he has the hubris to try to claim for himself a subjectivity. This attempt at self-actualization is, however, dominated by the "elemental forces" of society, to borrow the Bogdanovite parlance, that mandate the vocabulary of consumerism as the sole language available to its would-be subjects (Bogdanov "The Accumulation of Human Beings" 30). As such, it operates by the negative logic that structures the "virtual world of unsatisfied desires" in which Irtenev lives: his "'I' is a subject juxtaposed against everyone else as 'objects'" (Bogdanov "The Accumulation of Human Beings" 30). He only can pretend to be a subject when there is an object against which he can define himself as 'other.' Whatever security or power that he might hope to find in this position, then, is at best flimsy. The negative construction of the 'I' lays a trap for him that he was never capable of overcoming. Irtenev's search for internal coherence is doomed to failure precisely because his identity is produced by a logic of separation and division. He acquiesces—unconsciously but submitting nonetheless—to his own metaphorical dismemberment by capitalist modernity, which demands separation as the price for identity.

Despite having access to multiple objects to consume, against which he can define himself, Irtenev remains unsatisfied and restless. This restlessness manifests as lust which, as the story goes on, is discussed in terms that highlight his increasing alienation: "a passionate lust scorched him as though a hand were seizing his heart ... As if by someone else's will he looked round and went towards [Stepanida]"; "he felt that he was conquered, that he did not have his own will but that there was another power moving him" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 216). His body ceases to heed the commands of his mind: "'Do not think about her,' he ordered himself. 'Do not think!' and immediately he began thinking and seeing her before him" (Tolstoy "The Devil" 217). The more

he seeks to liberate himself from the economy of desire, the more he is dominated by the very objects he wanted to use to illustrate his own subjectivity.

For Bogdanov, Irtenev would remain unsatisfied, acting out the same drama and asking the same pointless questions because of capitalist alienation:

> The hopelessness of these questions stems from the fact that no answer can or should satisfy the individualist consciousness. These questions simply express the torture of the fractured life—and while that life remains fractured, no answer will soothe the pain because there can be no response to such pain. Everything here is useless; even when developments in criticism show that these questions are incorrectly posed, make no sense, are based on false assumptions—even then, the individualist consciousness will not cease to ask, because criticism does not have the power to reshape this consciousness, does not have the power to transform this consciousness from a sliver of a life into something whole. (Bogdanov "The Accumulation of Human Beings" 33)

The narrative of "The Devil" ultimately punishes Irtenev for having the audacity to aspire to subjectivity in the morally corrupt social framework within which he is constrained to operate. The only version of subjecthood available within Irtenev's capitalist framework requires the commission of violence; he can only acquire subjecthood by reducing others to objects. Rather like the boulevard sexuality that torments Vasilii in "The Accursed Question," so the sexuality of "The Devil" is defined by a logic of extraction and violence. Like Vasilii, Irtenev subjects his female partners to the inherently harmful—within the world of the story—trauma of sex in order to solidify his own subject position. Like Vasilii, he bristles against the sexuality in which he feels compelled to engage yet is unable to furnish himself with an escape from the harmful cycle of

behavior. He can identify his own dissatisfaction but is unable to articulate the root of this dissatisfaction and so unable to alleviate it. As with Bogdanov's "individualist consciousness," Irtenev cannot see beyond the bounds of his enclosure.

In the end, Irtenev exchanges the metaphorical violence of sex for the literal violence of murder or suicide. As Kopper writes, "of the original sexual impetus, only its violent component survives" (Kopper 168). This is because violence always laid at the core of this sexual impetus; the sexuality is, in a sense, incidental in that it is really a tool for creating divisions that delineate objects and subjects, such that they can be, within the permissive moral framework of capitalist modernity. The story of "The Devil" is that of a man bristling against the "social totality" in which he is enmeshed, seeking various solutions to the pain that this conflict produces within him. The only sliver of a solution that he is able to find eventually is to remove himself from his "diseased context" (Kopper 168). The society itself is unable to provide the structure and discipline that might conceivably lead to spiritual fulfillment. For Tolstoy, the satisfying life could only be found in the obliteration of the individual self within the collective, through labor and service to others. Even Irtenev's ultimate solution of suicide preserves his individualism: a private solution for a private, unrecognized pain.[70]

There are a number of similarities to be found between "The Devil" and "The Accursed Question." Namely, each story follows the trials of a man tormented by his own sexual impulses, who seeks some escape from the impositions of sexuality and desire. Each story deals with the

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[70] In the alternate ending where Irtenev murders Stepanida, he is sentenced to church penance and then becomes a hopeless drunkard. He is prevented even from removing himself from his "diseased context" in an exceptionally bleak turn of events, doomed to remain adrift in a pervasive emptiness that forecloses any possibility of fulfillment or connection.

objectification of women by the economics of sex work and the role of the male client in furthering this objectification. Each draws a clear line between male sexuality and the perpetration of violence, making, in varying ways, the claim that normative heterosexual sex within their contemporary cultural framework is inherently violent to women. Last, each poses questions about how the perpetration of violence, which dehumanizes and objectifies the one to whom the violence is done, also dehumanizes and objectifies the perpetrator in turn. The only solution that Irtenev can find in "The Devil" is literal self-annihilation. Even committing the ultimate violence of murder against Stepanida does not provide him with the moral structure and discipline he seeks; if anything, it only cements his entrapment in the virtual world of desires from which he wishes to escape. Although Vasilii's ending in "The Accursed Question" strikes a far more optimistic tone, the narrative's proposed solution for his torment feels undeserved, like an answer to an entirely different problem.

It is in this particularity that the conflicts of "The Devil" and "The Accursed Question" starkly diverge. While each story features fragmented bodies and sexuality distilled into violence, the focus of the fragmentation and the violence differs. While the narrative of "The Devil" fragments Irtenev's body when it introduces him at the beginning of the story, the reader gains very little access to his felt bodily sense throughout the remainder of the text. Even that first occurrence of fragmentation is imposed onto him by the narrator, as opposed to a description of his own feelings of bodily incoherence. Throughout the rest of the story, it is Irtenev's gaze that dismantles others while his own body stays in the background except in instances of sexual arousal. In those instances, the narrative describes Irtenev's bodily sense in terms that highlight the disconnect between will and desire, as in when because of his "passionate lust" he feels as though "a hand were seizing his heart." Even in moments like this, however, the narrative does not dip

into extensive descriptions of Irtenev's bodily state; his fragmentation and bodily alienation, insofar as the narrative permits them to exist, remain firmly rooted in the realm of metaphor. They are external descriptions rather than internal sensations.

By contrast, "The Accursed Question" spends extensive time on Vasilii's bodily disconnect and the terror that results from those moments when his consciousness is forced to confront his own gendered materiality for the act of sex. The depictions of the lived experience of embodiment are just as important in Gastev's text as their metaphorical function, which is similar to the purpose they serve in "The Devil." If in the Tolstoyan text, the problem identified by the narrative is a maladaptive or inadequate masculinity, in the Gastev text masculinity in any form seems suspect. Irtenev is driven by his desire to use women's bodies for his own pleasure while simultaneously tormented by this urge because, at its core, this urge is violent and destructive. If the values of his social totality were less 'permissive,' he might be a better man. The materiality of his maleness is functionally insignificant.

For Vasilii, it is the physiological fact of his maleness and the supposed biological imperatives that result from it that constitute the conflict. He is compelled to commit violence (sex) because of his male body and also required to perform this violence to prove that he deserves his male subject position to his social totality. Whether he wants to occupy that position is irrelevant, if only in the sense that any other option is foreclosed by the inconvenient fact of his body. At story's end, the hopeful resolution of Gastev's protagonist reads more like a plea flung out into the universe than an actual answer to the problem of his pain. The juxtaposition of "The Devil" and "The Accursed Question" seeks to highlight two approaches to the issue of sex and gender during this period. While each contains elements of fragmentation, sexual anxiety, and violence, "The Accursed Question" exhibits a concern both with the way gender is socially performed and with

how it is materially written into the body. The question remains whether it is possible, within Gastev's body of work, to have (or do, or be) a gender absent pain.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter opened with a brief discussion of the increased scrutiny with which the imperial Russian medical community had begun to view male sexual practices during the later decades of the nineteenth century. Concern over the social and public health threat of sex work intensified along with rumbling political anxieties, fears over the changing economic and social landscape, and uncertainties about what the future might bring. The scope of the pathologizing medical gaze expanded from the female sex worker, alternatively deviant psychopath and passive victim of socioeconomic circumstance, to include her male clients. Thus, some of the blame for her abject state and the moral decay of society shifted to his shoulders. The male body could now be scrutinized and studied for signs of depravity, the sin of lust written into the size or shape of his genitals, his sickly pallor or rosy cheeks, his nervous tics, shyness, sociality or lack thereof. The man who experienced desire had always to be on the lookout for any spark of his inherent 'beastliness,' lest it overcome his will and he descend into the depravity that his 'natural' heterosexual impulse was always on the verge of producing.

The importance of regulation, discipline, and control to this discourse is obvious. In each text analyzed in this chapter, the conflict revolves around the opposing forces of desire and discipline. That foundational dichotomy explains the presence of others, like the clash of the body (matter) and consciousness (spirit/will), or the foils of Liza and Stepanida in "The Devil." In each story, however, these dichotomies malfunction, and what is left in the wake of their breakdown is

a space of both pain and opportunity. The failure of the governing structures of normative sexuality and gender to map onto the protagonists' bodies and minds leaves them adrift. Although neither story manages to find a satisfying outcome to the questions it poses, the ugly, liminal space produced by the asking is where the most interesting work can take place.

The fragmentary and traumatic experience of gender in "The Accursed Question" makes for a depiction of the body that fits poorly within its assigned social mold—a poor fit both in time and in materiality. The story follows the protagonist Vasilii as he attempts to live within the tension produced by the incongruence between his embodied self, the social demands placed on it by virtue of his perceived gender, and his will or consciousness, which chafes under the position he is assigned to occupy. The trials of the protagonist and the unsatisfying, simplistic resolution the narrative provides for his pain really function as the beginning of a longer journey. The end of the story simply poses the question of what comes next.

"The Accursed Question" operates in the domain of what Judith Butler has described as the "radically unthinkable" (Butler *Bodies That Matter* 94). The "radically unthinkable" is that which lies beyond the boundaries of the conceptual framework that confers 'humanity' upon a body, with all of the attendant notions of its rights and dignity. To be "radically unthinkable" is not simply to be "difficult to imagine," but rather to be unrecognizable, inexpressible, made mute and invisible. There are many ways to be unthinkable, but Butler goes on to describe the constraints managing unthinkability in terms of sexuality: "the radical unthinkability of desiring otherwise, the radical unendurability of desiring otherwise, the absence of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others, the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities, panic, obsessional pull, and the nexus of sexuality and pain" (Butler *Bodies That Matter* 95). Although the events of Gastev's short story describe ostensibly heterosexual desire, which ought to be permitted by the

heterosexual epistemic regime, the protagonist's desire does not fit seamlessly into the mold he is required to occupy. Even as he attempts to perform the sexuality demanded of him, he continues to "desire otherwise," which, as the story's traumatic depictions of sex indicate, he finds radically unendurable. It is that unendurability which might explain the neat but unsatisfying 'happy' ending into which he flees.

Building on Butler's work, Preciado elaborates on the unthinkable body, which is also at play in "The Accursed Question." The unthinkable body is the non-normative body, deemed illegible by the dominant cultural framework within which it is forced to live by virtue of its gender, disability, or any number of other things:

> The body becomes human only when it has been sexed; a sexless body, like a disabled body, is considered monstrous, nonhuman ... The sex organs are not only 'reproductive organs,' in the sense that they make the sexual reproduction of the species possible but also, most importantly, 'productive organs' that give coherence to the properly 'human' body. (Preciado 107)

The body that lacks identifiable markers of gender is an illegible one. To be illegible is to be relegated to the realm of the unthinkable, denied the designation of the fully human and rendered both invisible and silent. Viewed in this light, the agony that Vasilii undergoes throughout the story makes perfect sense. It is not only that he "desires otherwise," but also that he desires to *be* otherwise, in the dual sense that his consciousness experiences his own embodiment as alienating and traumatic and that he longs to escape the boundaries of his isolated, singular body to merge with another consciousness. While the radically unthinkable sexuality acts within and through time, the radically unthinkable body is heavily and densely material. One can imagine

how the distance between the unthinkability of the non-normative body[71] and the physiological, material reality of it, its continued and persistent existence despite the injunction that it not, could produce schism and trauma of the sort to be found throughout the story.

The cost of individual identity is the "loss and degradation of connection" (Butler *Bodies That Matter* 114). The command to be and to maintain an individual subjectivity, which includes, in "The Accursed Question," the need to perform gender and sexuality, requires the obliteration of community. Two questions then remain: first, that of whether the prize of individual subjecthood is worth the price of isolation; second, whether that subjecthood can be something other than individual and, if so, might that not be good enough. Vasilii's focus on the "mutual interpenetration of the soul" throughout the story, and the correlation of his pain with his loneliness, suggests that Gastev's answer to the first question is no, but that, at least at the time of writing in 1904, the answer to the second is still unclear. Although "The Accursed Question" ends with the narrator's musings on the benefits of something like intersubjectivity—after all, what is a "true merging of souls" if not that— Gastev's writings shortly thereafter take a decidedly different turn.

After publishing "The Accursed Question," he began to write about the proletariat in terms of what he would later describe as a "mechanized collective," where the relationship between the

[71] It is important to note that the "non-normative body" need not be immediately, externally perceptible as "non-normative," as in the case of those with invisible disabilities or queer or trans people not immediately identifiable as such ('passing,' in the colloquial parlance). For more information, see Harder, Henry. "Invisible Disabilities." *International Journal of Disability Management*, vol. 4, no. 1, Apr. 2009, pp. ii–ii. *Cambridge University Press*; Hughes, Cayce C. "Not Out in the Field: Studying Privacy and Disclosure as an Invisible (Trans) Man." *Other, Please Specify*, University of California Press, 2019, pp. 111–25.

working body and the machine is a model for a new mass psychology. So, if in 1904, his writing espoused something that looks like intersubjectivity, by 1910 he was writing about something that could be deemed interobjectivity. In an article from 1911 that he wrote for the journal *Life for All,* Gastev discusses the growing impersonal, mass psychology of the proletariat that had resulted from increased automation in the workplace: "It's not the machine [that serves] the human being, but the human being [that serves] the machine. The person in the blue shirt is just an automaton ... Has he not already adapted not only his muscles, but even his psychology to that simple hammering beat of the machine?" (Gastev "Working World: The Power of Machinism" 392). He is hardly the only author of this period to write about the relationship between worker and machine—after all, Marx had already written about the dead labor of machine technology—but Gastev muses on the possibility of erasing the boundaries between the machine and the body in a way that is not clearly metaphorical.

In this same article, he looks toward the future, to the advent of a new proletariat "brought up by" ("*vospityvaemyi*") machines: "Since machines are all related to each other in their mechanical structure, in their 'spirit,' is it not clear that a proletariat brought up by the machine ought to grow—and indeed is already growing—to be a quantity in the highest degree precise and, moreover, equalized ("*nivellirovannaia*"), standardized?" (Gastev "Working World: The Power of Machinism" 392). Machine technology, in this formulation, directs the growth of the human mind and body. Human beings resemble the machines at which they work, emulating the efficiency and rationality of their tools. Even more importantly, the passage implies that machines by their structure and, underlying that, their identical "spirits," share a collective nature that affords them a degree of unity and capacity for cooperation that the present organic humanity lacks.

This aspect of Gastev's thought resembles Aleksandr Bogdanov's ideas on the disorganization of human evolution under capitalism, though it substitutes the uniformity of mechanical structures for the organic example of cell division on which Bogdanov rests his theories. In the final tally, however, he is posing a similar question—that of what new type of life and consciousness might become possible if humanity abandons disorganized individualism and remodels itself on collective lines, taking, in this case, the uniform collectivity of industrial machine technology as its example. He would come to call this proletarian mass psychology "mechanized collectivism," and his descriptions of it contrast sharply with the intersubjectivity that Vasilii longs for in the short story of 1904. If the question of whether a collective subjectivity (along the lines of what Bogdanov sought) could serve as a model for the organization of proletarian life remained open in 1904, by 1919 Gastev appeared to have fully determined that interobjectivity was the better path for the proletariat.

The poem "Factory Whistles" depicts the life of the workers in the era of human-machine collaboration, where the exploitation of labor under capitalism is just a memory: "Once, we labored in squalid factories/ And started our workdays at different times in the morning" (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* [1918] 81). The issue that the poem presents is not the labor itself, but the conditions of the workspace and the lack of connection between workers as they go to their jobs. Their staggered arrivals communicate their social isolation. Now, however, the factory whistles sound each morning for "an entire million" workers, who begin their day moving in unison "minute by minute," picking up their hammers at "one and the same instant." When the mass of workers swings their hammers, each hits the work surface at the same time. The resultant crash of noise is enough to reverberate through the entire world. In contrast to the disorganized individualism of the capitalist epoch, the workers in "Factory Whistles" act as though they form a singular

mechanism united in labor. The call of the whistles—"the morning hymn of unity"—functions rather like the "world-brain" of which Gastev wrote so ecstatically in his 1919 article "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture," ordering the lives of the impersonal mass of workers.

The disorganization, pain, and confusion that haunts the protagonist of "The Accursed Question" is nowhere to be found in the above poem, nor is the existence of the individual subject. The discordant, painful lyricism of the individual human subject has been replaced with the far more measured and predictable tempo of the machine. Three years after the publication of the first edition of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*, Gastev abandoned his artistic endeavors and journalistic writing to devote himself to the Scientific Organization of Labor, seeking to address the shortage of industrial workers and skilled labor in the newly formed RSFSR. The focus of this work was, of course, to address the concrete needs of the new state and its populace, but vestiges of his earlier philosophical thought can be found throughout his new labor theory.

As part of his work with the Scientific Organization of Labor, Gastev elaborated two linked theories: the "dismemberment of production" ("*raschlenenie proizvodstva*") and "functional dismemberment" ("*funktsional'noe raschlenenie*"). The first of these focused on the streamlining of the production process,[72] which entailed the division of labor into primary and ancillary processes as well as the Taylorist severing of specific tasks into their most basic steps

[72] At the collective level, the dismemberment of production entailed the reorganization of the factory floor by which workers were arranged according to their proximity to the "fundamental" task ("The Stakhanovite Movement and the Organizational Rearmament of Enterprise" ["Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie i organizatsionnoe perevooruzhenie predpriiatii"] 6). In an automotive factory, for example, the workers performing the most fundamental task would be those interacting directly with the assembly line. All others would be arranged around these based on a 'scientific' calculation of their relevance to the central process.

(Gastev "The Stakhanovite Movement and the Organizational Rearmament of Enterprise" ["Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie i organizatsionnoe perevooruzhenie predpriiatii"] 2). "Functional dismemberment" extended this logic to the movements of the individual working body. Gastev's many pamphlets from this period contained, in addition to the expected instructions on proper workspace maintenance, instructions on the most efficient methodology for chewing food, and for the construction of external supports to ensure proper posture at the workbench (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 96, 30). This intense gaze focused on the working body to fragment and then rearticulate it as a set of modular parts.

As a solution to the pain of loneliness, the functional dismemberment of the Scientific Organization of Labor would require the destruction of individuality, originality, and all "personal, lyrical, 'intimate' cultures" (Gastev "Working World: The Power of Machinism" 395). Far from the drab industrial landscape that his critics often imagined when depicting Gastev's utopia of mechanized collectivism, in Gastev's rendition this utopia was conveyed in ecstatic, almost erotic terms. The dawn of the "collective being" (*kollektivnyi chelovek*) would create "waves of enthusiasm," accompanied by endless reverberations of mass creativity (Gastev, "Working World: The Power of Machinism" 395). This collective being could never be born but had to be made. It would know "neither personality nor individuality," but rather than a lack, this would be the result of "mutual understanding" and a "deep kinship of experience" the likes of which had never before been seen by humankind.

"In the mad, joyful pursuit" of this new collective being, Gastev wrote, no one would "remember or know about themselves" (Gastev "Working World: The Power of Machinism" 396). Instead, everyone would merge into one, knowing "only one objective, great, blossoming world harmony tremulously sensed by all." It might seem strange to talk about the severing of "lyricism"

and personality from the human individual, the effective obliteration of selfhood, in such ecstatic, orgasmic terms. The next chapter investigates Gastev's two-pronged labor theory both in terms of its practical applications and influences and its theoretical workings, how it operates on the body, and why the disciplinary tempos of industrial machinery are the vehicle by which transformation is to be achieved. For now, it is enough to say that where the gendered fragmentation of "The Accursed Question" is depicted as trauma, the excision of gender and subjectivity through the functional dismemberment of the Scientific Organization of Labor is conceived of as liberation—from nature, from subjectivity, from the 'tragedy of consciousness.'

4.0 The Working Organs: From Human Subject to Proletarian Unit

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the complexities of gendered embodiment as depicted in the 1904 short story "The Accursed Question." The story tells of the protagonist Vasilii's struggles with sex and gender and how these structure his relations with himself and others. The protagonist's experience of sex and gender is traumatic, even violent, preventing him from forming any holistic sense of self and turning his own body into a hostile entity that he must manage in order to live any semblance of a life. He is left instead with a fragmented 'bodily sense,' in that his body (and those of others) appears to him in pieces that he is unable to connect to form a whole. One could say that both his body and his psyche are metaphorically dismembered, separated from each other and broken into disjointed fragments within themselves as well. While the story ends with the protagonist's vow to abstain from any sexual act not accompanied by feelings of love, thereby implying that the solution to Vasilii's personal turmoil surrounding sex and gender would be solved should he find the right partner, Gastev's later writings veer away from this solution.

Ultimately, "The Accursed Question" forms the root of a preoccupation with embodiment that comes to structure Gastev's theoretical writings on labor and the body even decades later. If the organic, gendered fragmentation of "The Accursed Question" is traumatic, why and how is the machinic fragmentation of Gastev's later labor theory conceived of as positive? This chapter explores this and other questions as it traces the evolution of Gastev's ideas on embodiment from 1904 to his mature writings of the 1920s and into the 1930s, examining the particularities of the Scientific Organization of Labor in both its practical concerns and theoretical underpinnings.

Many critics of the period lauded Gastev as one of the best, perhaps even the best, of the proletarian poets. *Proletkul'‌t* chose to make *Poetry of the Worker's Blow* the inaugural book in its series of proletarian poetry in 1918, the goal of which it summarized thusly:

> The old system of feelings, moods, and norms is still strong. It wound itself tightly round us since the first days of our birth. The proletariat must unfurl before humanity the endless prospects of harmonious development; it must reconsider the movement of human thought and make it bolder and more expansive, it must create its own morality, its own art, to illuminate the universe with a bright light, where the rays of the old world's individualist thought will drown in the radiant dawn of social life. (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 3 [1918])

The themes that populate Gastev's poetry—and, unsurprisingly, his non-fiction writing—dovetail seamlessly with the stated goals of *Proletkul't*'s proletarian poetry series. Throughout *Poetry of the Worker's Blow,* particularly in the sixth and most complete edition,[73] the violence and horror of the "old world" is put beneath a microscope. Much of Gastev's pre-revolutionary

[73] The sixth edition of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow* was published originally in 1925 (reprinted in 1971). This is the most complete version of the book, which was ultimately issued in eight editions, as it was frequently performed in factories and enjoyed substantial popularity in the years following the revolution. This edition is arranged in four sections: *Romance* (*Romantika*), *The Machine* (*Mashina*), *The Gates of the Earth* (*Vorota zemli*), and *The Word Under Pressure* (*Slovo pod pressom*). Each represents a different phase of the workers' movement. *Romance*, from which "Springtime in a Workers' Town" comes, tells of the struggle of labor under capitalism. *The Machine* depicts the triumph of industrialism and ascendancy of the working class. *The Gates of the Earth* describes life in the world "transformed by revolution" (Johansson 73). The final section, *The Word Under Pressure*, provides a portrait of the fully realized mechanized collective and its life in the "technicalized" world of the future.

writing also investigates how the violence of industrial capitalism shapes not only the worker's body—loss of life or limb in industrial accidents, the slow changes in posture accrued through a life of hard labor—but also how such unrelenting exploitation alters the contours of the mind.

Rather than shying away from the brutality of this world, Gastev's poetry dives into it, seeking "among the sea of tears and blood that flooded the earth" the means by which the site of exploitation can be transformed into one of hope (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 3 [1918]). His works locate this means within the machines at which the factory workers labor, describing them almost anthropomorphically as creatures with moods and souls like their human counterparts. His eventual utopian vision included a metaphorical fusion of the machine and the human laborer, a painful process of adaptation but one that would result in a harmonious worldwide collectivity that would entwine the best of the human being and the best of the machine to the benefit of both.

Given that Gastev's poetry was so well-received and widely disseminated, why did he abandon literature for his work at the Central Institute of Labor in 1921? He answers this question himself in the foreword to the sixth edition of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow* from 1925: "It seems to me that ... The Central Institute of Labor at which I have come to work is at one and the same time both a scientific construction and an artistic legend, for which everything I have done up until this point had to be sacrificed" (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 17 [1925]). For Gastev, then, the turn to labor theory and labor process was a continuation of his previous artistic pursuits rather than an end to them. Elsewhere in the foreword, he himself mentions that *Poetry of the Worker's Blow* contains the first hints of what would become the project of the Central Institute of Labor, indicating that the border between the artistic and the practical was not an entirely stable one. The Scientific Organization of Labor might then be read as a kind of total art project that had the immediate goal of improving labor discipline and productivity and the long-term goal of the

"biological reformulation" of modern people, by which Gastev meant a kind of reflexology that trained people to become more like machines (17 [1925]).

If Gastev is taken at his word regarding this final work of art, then it stands to reason that his fiction and poetry, journalistic writings, and labor theory can be productively viewed on a continuum as opposed to as separate and distinct periods of production. As such, this chapter examines texts from each of these different genres in view of how they contribute, in one form or another, to the utopian ends of the final work of the Central Institute of Labor, wherein the human has finally been reforged into an organic machine scoured of lyricism, desire, and need.

4.2 A Sedimentation of Violence

In 1910, Gastev returned to Paris for the third and final time. He remained there for about three years. It was in 1910 that he began to write for *Life for All.* While he had always been concerned with the well-being of the worker and the deplorable labor conditions in the turn-of-the-century factory, his writings from this period are particularly interesting for present purposes because they demonstrate an increasing focus on the effects of labor on the body. In this sense, they can be viewed as a bridge between the short story of 1904 and other early writings (such as early versions of stories and poems that would eventually appear in *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*) and his post-1921 labor theory.

Many of the writings from the period between 1910 and 1913 describe the deplorable living and working conditions of factory laborers. Often, the factory itself is described in threatening, ominous terms. Sometimes the threat is due to the social conditions that the organization of labor produces, as in the article "Working World: The Power of Machinism," with which the previous

chapter closed. This piece opens with a description of a shareholder visit to the factory floor: “The shareholders arrived at the factory to feast their eyes upon ‘their’ little factory and the accumulation of their wealth. Closely shaven, with three or even four chins, hands behind their backs, with canes or whips, cigars in their teeth...” (392). Their arrival disquiets the workers, many of whom “involuntarily” burst forth with insults, calling them parasites and other names. He goes on: “The shareholders strolled, stopping in certain places, touching the machinery or the manufactured goods with their little fingers, then they exited. This was enough work for them. They drove away in their car to have breakfast and dream about golden mountains of capital.” The article later contrasts the ambling, frivolous behavior of the shareholders with the monotonous labor of the workers. The shareholder penetrates the closed system of the factory—a sealed loop between machine and worker—simply to ogle and to disrupt the standardized rhythm of labor, providing no benefit at all to the production process. Indeed, they simply reap the rewards of the proletarian’s labor and use it to fund their leisure pursuits.

The beginning of the article highlights the inherent inequality of the capitalist economic structure by juxtaposing the material prosperity and, for lack of a better term, liveliness of the capitalist with the material deprivation and sullenness of the workers. After the capitalists have driven away in their car to have a leisurely breakfast, the workers remain in the factory where the atmosphere is “unhappy and gray,” and everyone is silent and gloomy (“Working World: The Power of Machinism” 392). The workers are “riveted to the soulless, cold, eternally moving machines.” The article goes on to describe the way that this riveting has altered the proletarian psychology, leading to a standardization and mechanization of the proletarian mode of thought which, depending on the economic and social structure that governs the workers’ lives, can be either a boon or a curse. Although, as detailed in the conclusion of the previous chapter, Gastev

had already begun to discuss the possibility of a worldwide machine collective by 1912, "Working World: The Power of Machinism" focuses largely on the social structure of the factory and its detrimental effect on the working population as opposed to the factory itself as a source of threat or discomfort.

Many of his other writings from this period, however, present the factory under capitalism as inherently threatening in itself, independent of the social structures that determine the organization of labor within it. "Springtime in a Workers' Town" ("Vesna v rabochem gorodke"), written in 1911 and published in the sixth edition of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow,* tells the story of a strike organized in a capitalist factory. When one of the organizers is jailed for his role in the strike, his mother dies, and the other workers arrange a funeral for her. The funeral serves as a catalyst for a workers' revolt and her coffin becomes a symbol of the transformative power of the labor movement. The story begins with a bleak description of the factory floor:

> The sounds of the boilers blanketed everything: the machinery, the fitters, the blacksmiths, all labor, every sigh, fits of exhaustion and despair--everything was buried beneath this hell of cutting, interpenetrative sound. Someone somewhere was moaning, someone else was sobbing, another prayed, as if there were hundreds and thousands of strained voices, someone's heart was bursting ... Nothing, nothing could be heard: everything human was drowned by the dense lava of iron noise, and the whole factory, it seemed, rumbled imperturbably over the human being dying at their labor. (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 36 [1925]).

The menace of the factory itself is obvious in this passage. The noises of the industrial machinery drown out "everything human" within the space. Moreover, all the sounds the humans are producing are sounds of emotional and physical pain—moaning, sobbing, etc. Elsewhere in

the passage, an old man (*starik*) is fatally injured while on the job; presumably management fires him, as he later dies of starvation outside the factory gates (36). This industrial landscape brims with deprivation, danger, and despair; it is pitiless and inhuman, maiming and killing its workers. In this respect, it is rather standard realist literature for the time.[74]

That said, a few things mark this moment in the story as unique. First, the passage describes the "hell of crashing noises" as blanketing the entire scene: industrial noise drowns out the sounds of humanity but, interestingly, the machines themselves also compete for the privilege of being heard. The chaos of the entire enterprise hints at a problem that will later come to the forefront of Gastev's labor theories—the disorganization of the production process that leads to the breakdown of both machinery and worker in equal measure. In other writings from *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*, such as "Joists" ("Balki") and "Iron Pulses" ("Zheleznye pulʹsy"), the machines themselves appear to have a sentience and agency of their own, one that, barring the system of capitalist exploitation that reigns over the factory floor, would align with the wellbeing and desires of the workers who operate them. Elsewhere in the above passage, the narrative describes the deprivation and chaos that presses against the factory from the outside world as well, beginning with the portrait of the old man dying at the factory gates: "In convulsions, he withered away of hunger outside the factory gates; nearby, a jobless skeleton sold the shirt from his very back so he could have his last drink (*vypitʹ poslednuiu sotku*[75]); a spiteful, faithless beggar slipped his hand into the factory window ... " (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 36 [1925]). If inside the factory, there is nothing

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[74] Stylistically, in fact, it is quite similar to Gorky's *Mother* (*Matʹ*), which was first published in Russian in 1907, four years before Gastev wrote "Springtime."

[75] A *sotka* is an old measurement equating to a hundredth of a bottle; in this particular instance it refers to a vessel of this size.

but a hellish cacophony of industrial noise that effectively deprives workers of their voices, outside the factory there are only the detrimental effects of the disorganization of capitalist production, translated into human suffering that even affects the machines' ability to function at optimal capacity.

During the strike itself, when the factory is shut down for lack of laborers, the story's tone is melancholic:

> Through the gates, one could see the dark, motionless depths of the heavy vaulting; the abandoned girders and pipes stood in mute wonder. The echo of years-long, even-tempered songs could still be heard from the machines, but their motors skulked and hid away. They were resting. The connecting rods of the cylinders had frozen in a tired, overtaxed run; infrequently, but each time deeply, the cooling boiler would snort. Dense, metallic dust fell from the beams, and silence reigned over this terrible, dark kingdom. (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 47 [1925])

When the deafening din of industry is finally quieted, the silence of the idle machines is menacing in a new way. Instead of the cacophony of before, the still silence of the factory now inspires something like pity or longing. The echoes of the decades-long songs of the machinery can still be heard across the grounds, the boiler snorts and snores even while it rests, the rods of the cylinders are frozen in an "exhausted, overtaxed run." This is detrimental to the overall service life of the machinery; capitalism, having forced the workers to abandon the factory for their own wellbeing, has left the machines locked in positions that are harmful for them as well. Like the workers themselves, the machines have a certain sentience; they, too, are exhausted by the disorganization and exploitation of capitalist industry. While the 'living' factory is hellish, the

‘dead’ one is almost worse, its sorry state tugging at the heartstrings of the laborers who have been forced by capitalist exploitation to abandon it.

The complexity of the narrative’s description of the ‘dead’ factory shows the seeds of what Gastev would later call mechanized collectivism. As much as conditions in the functioning factory were a source of pain, the workers are nonetheless connected to the machinery within it. At the beginning of the story, the narrative describes how the old timers (*stariki*) who have worked at the factory for decades have grown immune to the mind-numbing hell of industrial noise: “In their round, dirty glasses, attached around the back of the head with a cord, they were forever busy with their labor and, it seemed, they would die quietly and imperceptibly at their work stations” (*Poetry of the Worker’s Blow* 37 [1925]). The standardization and mechanization of proletarian psychology that about which Gastev wrote in such glowing terms in “Working World: The Power of Machinism” is evident here in the old timers’ complete disregard of the cacophony that surrounds them. They are so deeply occupied by their labor that nothing will distract them from it.

This is not to say, of course, that the union of machine and worker is always positive, as the end of the passage indicates. Although they appear to have achieved some version of the mechanized psychology that Gastev believes to be a positive, given certain circumstances, their work is effectively making them ill, sucking the lifeforce from them, leaving them likely to die in service to the exploitative machinations (pun intended) of capitalism. Given Gastev’s writings in later years, discussed below, it is reasonable to wonder what effect he imagines that this human exploitation will produce within the machine itself. Under capitalism, the structure of the relationship between machine and worker, mediated by the capitalist exploiter, is that of parasitism. In other circumstances, it could perhaps be something mutually beneficial.

"Springtime in a Workers' Town," belonging as it does to the first section of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow,* which details the trials of the labor movement during its formation, does not go on to describe the machine utopia that later writings present. It is a story of struggle, pain, and desperation. It does, however, contain a peculiar moment of hope that sheds light on a lynchpin of Gastev's later labor theories. In contrast to the eerie, melancholic tone the narrative takes on when describing the silent factory, the description of the funeral for the arrested strike organizer's mother is bizarrely optimistic. The peal of bells draws the crowd of funeral goers from the church to the graveyard:

> No one heard the peal of the bells as funereal, or sorrowful; no, the bells didn't signal a burial, but a birth. They gave birth to the spring that that sang all around, and to this new town, and the people who were as if not these ones, but other people, and each one understood that not one person, not two, but that the great, immense mass had given birth to a new person, a titan. (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 59 [1925])

The death of the old woman provides both the impetus for a gathering and an opportunity for rejuvenation, as the (somewhat hackneyed) invocation of the blooming of spring surrounding the workers suggests. Her death is the sacrifice that revives their vigor and commitment to the cause of labor. In fact, her coffin itself becomes the material symbol of this renewed drive for a better life:

> The coffin ... floated slowly, constantly bobbing from the changing pallbearers. It was carried by young workers who had just entered into life. The coffin was their first goodbye, this sadness the first shroud cast across their hopes. But the black coffin, bedecked with green conifer needles, beckoned them. They vied with each

other for it, hearts trembling with impatience. (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 61 [1925])

Although they also clearly feel the sadness of the death, the coffin carrying this deceased mother becomes the central point around which the workers rally. The coffin seems almost to direct the workers, flowing slowly forward on the sea of hands that seek to bring it to its final resting place. The young workers, drawn to it and vying with each other to touch it and carry it to the cemetery, find motivation in what becomes a collective loss.

The story goes on to emphasize this directly and unambiguously, describing the transformation of the coffin in the minds of the workers:

> Its first steps were heavy and clumsy, but then it was as if [the coffin] gave the pallbearers wings so that it seemed as though farther out, there, through the needles, past the oaks and cedars of the cemetery there was a floating path, and that the coffin itself was about to rush out to hover on the horizon and rise up, like a banner of mourning giving a call to battle. (61 [1925])

Through the pain of loss, the workers are transformed. The story ends with the funeral turning into a protest, and the crowd of mourning workers into an undifferentiated human wave that overwhelms the police who have surrounded the cemetery. Pain—in the sense of grief here—serves as the catalyst that unites the individual workers into a collective proletarian mass with the power to find a path out of the deprivation and despair that had heretofore defined their daily

existence. The triumph of this piece is not the alleviation of grief or struggle, but its instrumentalization.[76]

Gastev's early writings—from the period between 1904 and 1917, at the very least—take an ambivalent attitude towards industrial labor. One the one hand, they demonstrate a fascination with the power of machinery and the sounds and movement of the mighty tools of industry. Moreover, they display a keen interest in the interrelation between the human body and its machine counterpart within the factory. They also seem to acknowledge that there is a certain threat of violence baked into the routine operations of heavy industrial machinery. The possibility of physical pain[77] and harm cannot be entirely avoided in this type of labor; these can only be minimized and controlled. On the other hand, the disorganization of the production process, management's lack of care for the well-being of its laborers, and the predatory nature of the capitalist economic structure make factory work unendurable, effectively a slow death in a cold, dimly lit nightmarish landscape.

The article "Old Timers" ("Stariki"), published in *Life for All* in 1911, the same year that "Springtime in a Workers' Town" was written, paints a portrait of three different laborers who had been working at a French factory outside Paris for decades. The article combines Gastev's growing interest in the long-term effects of industrial labor on the working body with his incisive social commentary and concern for the improvement of workers' material conditions. It first introduces

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[76] This is a common theme throughout much of Gastev's writing, whether it be his fiction and poetry or his later theoretical writings. In "In the Trolley Park" ("V tramvainom parke"), the first entry in the *Romance* section of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*, the gruesome death of a laborer who is ripped apart by a tram serves as the catalyst for another workers' revolt.

[77] Emotional and psychological pain, however, are a different story, as will be seen later.

an emery grinder, a man who is over seventy years old and who arrives at the factory every morning at seven to begin his tasks. For readers who are unfamiliar with metal fabrication, it should be noted that emery is a type of mineral that was used in the nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries as an abrasive for grinding and polishing hard metallic surfaces. It could come in a powder form or in the form of a wheel. Emery, as it is not a particularly hard mineral and emits considerable dust, has fallen out of fashion in contemporary metal fabrication and has been replaced with more efficient, human-made compounds. In general, emery would have been used for polishing metal surfaces of goods produced in the factory or for grinding down metal seams.

The article paints a vivid picture of the difficult, unpleasant environment: “In one corner of the factory there is a cage fenced in by glass walls. The glass is dusty ... As soon as you open the door, a cloud of sharp, dense stone dust will fill your mouth and nose, and cut at your eyes” (Gastev “Old Timers” 81). As it has become difficult for him to stand for long periods in his later years, the emery grinder grabs a stool and gets to work. As with the old-timers in “Springtime,” he has become inured to the conditions that accompany his labor, not even trying to move aside when the hot sparks that fly off the emery wheel hit him right in the legs, nor turning his head when the cooled dust blasts him directly in the face. Instead, he swallows the “dry, revolting stone dust,” prompting Gastev to wonder just how much of this revolting dust he must have taken into his lungs over the past month alone (Gastev “Old Timers” 81).

Undoubtedly, the aim of this passage is to provide an image of social injustice, as it questions how a “republic of the twentieth century” could so harshly “condemn” a man in his seventies to this fate (Gastev “Old Timers” 81). There is an element of shock that the intimately detailed physicality of the labor and of the dust brings to the fore, an affront to morality that an ‘egalitarian’ society could be organized in such a way as to treat its elderly in this fashion. It is a

good example of harsh realism as social commentary and can be included in any number of catalogues of other such articles and short stories making use of this stylistic technique. That said, when placed within the larger context of Gastev's work, the detailed physicality of the dust itself and its interactions with the grinder's body clearly stem from a preoccupation with the body as such and foreshadow his growing interest in the interaction of the working body and the machine. The emery grinder's body has been entirely re-formed by the harsh environment of the factory, and his particular role within it, leaving physical traces of it on his flesh and specifically in his lungs. When the motor of the wheel is shut off all that can be heard is the grinder's rough wheezing: "he no longer even breathes, it's more as if something is groaning and straining itself within his chest" (Gastev "Old Timers" 82). Gastev clearly views the degradation of his body as a direct result of his many years working at this demanding job in the harsh environment of the poorly organized, exploitative factory.

Gastev provides some additional background on this man, fleshing out the full image of him for the *Life for All* readership:

> He's a soldier. He fought against Russia in the Crimea, served in the Franco-Prussian war, and after the war he entered the factory and has been working here for forty years already! There were no cranes in the factory before, and the huge machines were moved by hand. It was he who installed them. Then he was transferred to the emery wheel. And now it's been thirty years, nonstop, that he's been working at this wheel, sitting here in this dusty cage. (Gastev "Old Timers" 82)

In later years, many of Gastev's critics took him to task for what they perceived as the dehumanizing and unfeeling quality in his approach to labor organization and the role of the

worker within the production process. Here, however, he provides the full contours of a life, a history of this man's journey through the years that has culminated in his condemnation to a slow death hunched over the emery wheel. The point, one assumes, of furnishing this progression through time to readers is, in fact, to humanize him. It also illuminates even more starkly the injustice of the capitalist socioeconomic structures that reigned at the time. The supposedly egalitarian republic of twentieth-century France has demanded everything from this worker: his youth, his health, his dignity, and ultimately his life.

The next worker that the article profiles is the operator of the bridge crane that was installed with the help of the grinder many years before. The crane operator's manner is starkly different. He is sixty years old, short, thin, and "very merry, extraordinarily friendly and cheerful, always in high spirits" (Gastev "Old Timers" 83). The crane operator's lot could not be more different than that of the grinder. Every morning when he arrives, he enters the cab of the crane and remains there until five minutes before the final whistle blows, signaling the end of the workday. From the cab, he has an unobstructed view of the entire factory—he sees and knows everything, as he has for the entirety of the twenty-two years that he has been at this work. His labor appears to have had less of an obvious impact on his body than that of the grinder, being less physically demanding, but his personality has been shaped by his job duties and the isolated experience of sitting in the cab all day. He is marked by his lack of social contact—an effective silencing of his voice—the way the grinder has been marked by the emery dust.

This is in keeping with some of Gastev's other musings on the transformative potential of the crane in both a practical sense, in terms of the manpower it can replace to free workers from the worst of the backbreaking heavy labor they have heretofore been forced to perform, as well as in a theoretical sense, in terms of its ability to alter humanity's relation to space and time. In a

piece from 1925, Gastev describes how the crane solves a purely social problem in technical terms (Gastev "The Social Engineering Machine" ["Sotsialˈno-inzhenernaia mashina"] 7-23).[78] If, he claims, in various social systems, the factory is generally studied as an arena of class struggle in which one group is pitted against another, then the introduction of the crane into the industrial setting allows for a "colossal social problem" to be solved by technical means, transforming the nature of the work itself. Effectively, the crane does this by eliminating the flashpoints for conflict between the different parts of the workforce: "If before, these 98 people entered into some set of relations among themselves then the crane, by replacing them with itself, solves the problem of social conflict very simply"[79] (Gastev "The Social Engineering Machine" 7-23). It eliminates conflict by removing the burden of heavy labor that previously fell on the backs of its human comrades. The crane does a lot of heavy lifting—pun entirely intended—in Gastev's later theories.

Later in this same piece, Gastev describes how the crane revolutionizes movement within the factory: "As soon as cranes appeared in factories, the assembly floors began to astonish with their extreme speed. Since then, movement within factories has expanded and includes not only the horizontal axis, but also the vertical one" (Gastev "The Social Engineering Machine" 7-23). If

[78] Due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, my citations for this and other archival documents used in this dissertation are ranges from a transcript of the original documents given to me by a colleague. The pagination between my transcript and the original folio from the Russian State Archive (*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii*, or GARF) do not correspond.

[79] It is this sort of thinking, among other things, for which Bogdanov would criticize Gastev. Automation was a hot topic in the early years of the RSFSR in the debates over whether to adopt Taylorist reforms as a matter of state policy. The problem of what those ninety-eight people who were to be replaced by the crane would do was an open theoretical question, regardless of the practicalities on the ground.

the factory of the past was a fortress, Gastev claims, the factory of the future is a pathway. The installation of the bridge crane within the factory ought to have alleviated the misery of its workforce, easing some of the most backbreaking demands of heavy industry. Unfortunately, in the absence of more egalitarian social and economic arrangements, the crane only serves to provide the crane operator with a bird's eye view of the misery of capitalist labor.

Despite his happy manner, then, the knowledge that his vantage point at the top of the factory gives the crane operator produces in him a kind of apathetic fatalism. His chronicle of the history of the factory consists of an accounting of all the workers that have been killed or maimed by the machinery throughout the years (Gastev "Old Timers" 83). He carries red wine up into the cab with him that he drinks throughout the course of each workday. When a "young syndicalist" asks him to participate in a protest on behalf of workers' rights, the crane operator responds in the negative. "What do you think will come of this? They'll give it to us anyway; otherwise even if you slice open your belly, they'll have no mercy on you" the crane operator shoots back at him (Gastev "Old Timers" 83). It is not quite that he is afraid, as the syndicalist alleges, but rather that he views the current capitalist socioeconomic arrangement as practically a law of nature.

The final portrait concerns a lathe operator (*tokar'*), in the factory's employ for forty-two years. He is told by management that the factory will no longer be hiring old men like himself to work at the lathe, so he is the last. It is perhaps the saddest portrait of the three. Whereas the image of the emery grinder emphasizes the breakdown of his body after his decades at heavy labor, and that of the crane operator showcases his alcohol dependence and ultimate despair, manifested in his fatalism, the lathe operator's image is one of total isolation and dysfunction:

At first, he worked for a daily rate. Now, he's been given a piece rate.[80] In order to meet his quotas, he works himself to the bone. He's hunched over, blackened, always covered in dirt. He often wanders around the plant. But that accursed habit of 'always keeping busy' is present here, too. He pops some tobacco in his mouth, chewing on it, and starts scavenging for various old washers, brackets, discs. He might stumble on a piece of steel, picking it up. He never says anything, always alone. He just chews and chews on his tobacco. He leaves the factory, wanders quietly, fumbles for something in his pockets, looking sidelong through his glasses before his gaze once again plunges downward ... That's how he moves—sorrowful, hunchbacked, abandoned, the last... (Gastev "Old Timers" 84)

This worker's breakdown is both physical and emotional. The years at the lathe have inscribed themselves into his body in the way that the emery wheel has marked the body of the grinder and the isolation of the cab has marked the mind of the crane operator. In contrast to the grinder, however, who is known to release torrents of verbal abuse against anyone who comes to

[80] Piece-rates were an important component of the Taylor system as introduced in the United States, retained when it spread to Europe and Russia. In contrast to the standard daily wage, workers were paid 'by the piece'—hence the name—which tied their wages directly to their productivity levels. Typically, there was a daily quota to be met; if workers failed to meet this quota consistently, they would be considered unproductive. In Taylor's vision, this would incentivize workers to budget their time efficiently and to dedicate themselves to their tasks while on the job. It would have the added advantage of culling the herd, to put it crudely, by forcing those workers unable to meet the quota to quit due to unsustainable wages or providing management a justification to fire them. While Gastev mentions piece-rates in the "Old Timers" article, he neither condemns nor praises the concept. It is, however, important to note that he enthusiastically advocated for the introduction of piece-rates into Soviet factories while general secretary of the Metalworkers' Union in 1917 and 1918.

bring him extra work, the lathe operator seems even to have been robbed of his voice. Like the workers trapped in the hellish din of the factory at the beginning of "Springtime in a Workers' Town," this laborer has also been silenced by the harsh factory environment. The description of his pathetic wanderings portrays him as a scavenger who shies away from contact with others, even glancing sidelong through his glasses and unwilling to lift his gaze from the ground for long. The tale of the lathe operator acts as a synthesis of the preceding two stories. The bodily degradation of the emery grinder and the psychological fatalism of the crane operator combine in the lathe operator to present an image of a worker who has been so completely destroyed by the long years of exploitation that he retains few identifiably human characteristics.

"Relentlessly," the article concludes, "these old timers stand: lungs full of emery, waiting for the grave; cheerful nihilism, gazing down upon the unchanging world of violence; and a mute, 'final' silence, cutting short the songs of hope" (Gastev "Old Timers" 84). Essentially, what this piece lays bare to its readers is the deep, unrelenting brutality of the world in which workers lived and labored at the turn of the century. The dismantling and piercing gaze that the narrator of "The Accursed Question" employs on the body of the protagonist Vasilii is echoed here in Gastev's non-fiction prose. The world of this factory in the outskirts of Paris is vividly and clinically constructed: the choking, stifling clouds of emery dust settling in the grinder's lungs; the crane operator's cheerful nihilism; and, of course, finally, the sullen muteness of the lathe operator. The article as a whole is a portrait of trauma, of the effects of a sedimentation of violence that has occurred throughout the years and has infused the minds and bodies of those subjected to it, and of how natural and eternal such a violence can come to seem.

In "The Chimes" ("Zvony"), at the midpoint of the *Romance* section of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*, the exploitation of laborers under industrial capitalism is again at the forefront.

The opening lines of the poem tell of the arrival of spring: “The earth breathed with the fresh dew;/ The first life-giving rain of the spring came at night” (*Poetry of the Worker’s Blow* 69 [1925]). The doors of invisible temples are thrown open, releasing the sounds of bells to the birds: “High, high in the sacred depths, the doors of invisible, chime-filled temples were thrown open,” tidings of their songs delivered to “the messenger of the spring feast—the birds.” The birds then carry the news to all the far-flung corners of the land, eventually arriving at the hulking figure of the factory, which juts “restless” from the ground like a “black cliff,” a whistling apparatus of “steel and stone” (70). So far, the poem echoes the tenor of the other writings in *Romance* and presents the same harsh, foreboding image of the factory as described in “Old Timers” and “Working World: The Power of Machinism.” The menace of the factory is only heightened by its juxtaposition with the “messengers of the spring feast” and the living earth breathing with the fresh moisture of the first rain.

The speaker goes on to ask of the birds: “What’s the good news?/ What spring message will you bring to our house, this dwelling of labor and bondage?” (*Poetry of the Worker’s Blow* 70 [1925]). As in the previous pieces, the interior of the factory is dark and uninviting. The workers are burdened with the “the chill of the past” and “the sinister twilight” that reign under the factory’s vaulted ceiling. The chirping birds that manage to pierce the factory’s skin and reach the “human sea” trapped within awaken the workers, who now grow noisy with “new chimes” (“*shumiashchee zvonami novymi*”). As in “Springtime,” spring clearly functions more metaphorically than literally here; it is a call to political awakening and revolutionary consciousness. Interestingly, the machines themselves are at least as ambivalent about their labor as the workers: “With a creak, the gears lazily got started.../ The motors howled with a melancholic song...” (*Poetry of the Worker’s Blow* 70 [1925]). The factory is restless because the machines at work within it are overtaxed and restless

in the same manner as their human counterparts. That said, the murmurs of spring have disquieted them. They begin to rumble amongst themselves: "The shafts whirled round, whispering about something ominous and disturbing, while the belt on the pulleys often sobbed" (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 70 [1925]). The poem goes on in this manner, describing how the anxious machines in the restless, eternally laboring factory discuss the coming storms of spring. In a very human manner, they fear change as much as they dislike their current state of ceaseless exploitation. The poem devotes an entire stanza to the sobbing and groaning of the machines as they receive the birds' news.

Until this point, the poem has maintained the perspective of an individual human speaker. He is the one who begins the narrative, telling readers that he "searched and listened" for the source of an anxiety troubling the hearts of many (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 69 [1925]). While the journey that the poem charts—from the sacred heights to the oceans, to the birds, and beyond—is expansive, the narrative anchors itself to this individual male speaker who refers to himself in the first-person singular. Directly after the stanza depicting the machines' disquiet, the lyrical subject shifts. Previously, the speaker periodically positions himself as an individual subject, as in the beginning when he searches and listens, or after the birds deliver the news of spring, when his "soul is pierced" by the "life-destroying" chimes. The perspective abruptly switches, however, once the machines have heard the news: "The chain hoists descended, laid down, and once again were taken up./ And like a deep pain, a familiar pain they entered his heart, tore it apart/—the clanging of the shackles" (71 [1925]). The jingling of the shackles has entered the heart of the poem's former lyrical subject; now *his* heart is torn apart by the jingling of the shackles and tormented by a deep, familiar pain. The question becomes with whom or what has the poem's perspective aligned itself now?

The images that come after this switch illuminate just which perspective might have taken the place of the individual subject. The remainder of the stanza proceeds in the following manner:

Reluctantly, the machines ran at the factory.[81]

With a groan, the cutters of the lathe operators leapt to action,

the routers gnawed angrily on metal,

the chisels of the planers snorted with shavings.

The factory was unwell that day. Drill tips kept breaking, the chisels tore

everything, the routers crumbled with a crack.

The transmissions grew hot, the bearings howled, the rivets

were out of whack, the hammer kept falling, the saw wouldn't catch.

With a final moan, the heartrending, exhausted

ring of the broken alarm whistle ran through the factory...

(*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 71 [1925])

After the abandonment of the individual human 'I' that begins the poem, focus has now shifted to the machines themselves. They labor in the factory "reluctantly," like their human counterparts. The phrase in Russian is fairly standard, operating on two levels. First, it describes the kind of ongoing, but non-specific functioning of a mechanism; it is 'in operation,' one might say, without going into detail about what precisely that entails for any particular mechanical

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[81] The Russian phrasing, "*nekhotia shli na zavode stanki*," is ambiguous. The word *stanki* (machinery, tools, or factory bench) implies the presence of a human being working at a machine or with a tool, but the focus of the sentence is on the *stanok* (machine or tool, singular) itself, making the human being with whom it is working an accessory to the object. In the Russian, the human element is absorbed into the word *stanki*, making it somewhat difficult to preserve the ambiguity in translation.

device. Second, it implies the presence of a human operator as well, someone who turns on and monitors or guides the functioning of the machine. For present purposes, the intrigue comes from the fact that linguistically the sentence proposes the machinery itself as the site of agency (however attenuated). It is the machinery's unwillingness that concerns this portion of the poem, while the human beings 'attached' to it are subsumed within the sentence structure. Their existence is implied here, but of secondary importance.

"The factory was unwell that day," the stanza goes on. None of the tools seem to be in a good mood; instead, they are breaking, grumbling, and clattering to the floor. For example, in the case of the hammer that falls to the floor, the poem focuses on the object. The hammer that falls is visible; the worker who has dropped it is absent. This is also true of the drill tip that breaks and the teeth of the saw that cannot find a good grip. The absence of the human agent who directs the movement of the machine, save for their implied presence near the beginning of the stanza, emphasizes the shift from individual human worker as the poem's lyrical subject to something else. Perhaps the subject has instead transformed into a machine collectivity into which human workers are integrated, foreshadowing much of what Gastev would come to write from the period of 1918 onward.

The poem concludes with the threat of a coming storm. The factory is overrun with a human wave of workers and it freezes under their noisy onslaught, armed as they are with "new chimes, free chimes, stormy chimes" (*Poetry of the Worker's Blow* 71 [1925]). In another nod to their alignment with a machine collectivity, the workers have taken on the metallic chimes of the bells with which the poem begins. Gastev describes the storm on the horizon, though clearly threatening harm, in positive terms: "Across a sky afire with lightning, storm clouds swam up to us,/ and the new spring chimes bellowed with thunder—booming, vital, exhilarating" (71 [1925]). Despite the

potential chaos contained within the storm's ominous clouds, its arrival signals a rebirth and renewal of the sort the workers have been craving, like a baptismal cleansing by water. Moreover, the poem refers to an "us" in contrast to the "I" of the beginning and the "him" of the middle, emphasizing the new collective mindset that the awakened workers have acquired. Although the factory was the site of their previous suffering, the worker-machine relationship in this and Gastev's other early writings is a complex one. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the machinery is itself included in the newly formed "us" that awaits the coming storm, especially considering where Gastev's work goes next.

4.3 The Violence After Violence

When tsarist Russia entered World War I, its infrastructure proved incapable of meeting the demands of a drawn-out conflict with major industrial powers like Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire. Russia's economic and political collapse began during the war and was hastened by the revolutions of 1917. The railway system, for example, buckled under the pressure of supplying the war effort, which was a special problem considering the importance of rail transit in connecting the various parts of the empire and transporting troops, weapons, goods, raw materials, and food throughout. The Bolsheviks' promise of "peace, land, and bread" drew many workers and peasants to their cause in 1917. Many had hoped that ending tsarist rule would end their economic exploitation, society's submission to the meaningless violence and death of war, and their desperate need for inaccessible basic necessities of life such as food and fuel. Moreover, working class supporters particularly hoped to be able to organize their own lives in meaningful ways through the exercise of political power in the soviets, factory committees, and trade unions.

Unfortunately, these hopes went unfulfilled. Despite the convergence of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary agenda with that of the working class, the realities of the post-revolutionary landscape drove a wedge between these two groups; the Bolshevik government and the working class disagreed about the best routes towards achieving the goals of the revolution and, in the end, the very nature of those goals. While the hope of the Brest-Litovsk treaty of 1918 had been to reverse the country's economic collapse, it in actuality hastened it (Chase 14). In response to this rapidly deteriorating situation and the "disintegration of the proletariat," the Bolshevik government resorted to draconian measures in an attempt to assert control, to improve economic productivity, and alleviate the most acute hardships affecting the daily lives of its citizenry. These policies came to be known as War Communism. Many times, they were unsuccessful in achieving their desired aims and only served to inflict more harm on the already traumatized and desperate populace. They were greeted with dismay and resistance from the working class and some of its representative organs in the trade unions and soviets. The period from 1918 to 1921 proved to be yet another gauntlet of war, deprivation, and unrest that the exhausted population of first Russia and then the newly formed Soviet state had to endure after having already weathered the horrors of World War I.

Gastev abandoned his artistic pursuits as a proletarian poet to devote himself to what he called the Scientific Organization of Labor in 1921, shortly after he penned his most famous piece on his vision of the mechanized collectivism that he hoped would come to reign across the earth. As his views on labor and the body were beginning to solidify during this especially traumatic period, it is impossible to truly understand the full contours of his vision without considering the context in which that vision was tempered. As Gastev was living and working in Moscow and the surrounding region during this time, this overview of the immediate post-revolutionary period

focuses on the conditions in the city and the surrounding area, as opposed to the country at large. What was life like for the people Gastev sought to mold into an efficient, machine-like industrial workforce and what were some of the concrete obstacles that he faced in his task?

First and foremost, the collapse of Moscow's economy was precipitated by the collapse of the railway system on which it depended. By 1917 the nation's transport system was in a state of disrepair and decline[82] that had started during World War I and that was exacerbated by the revolutionary activities between 1917 and 1918. Furthermore, with the advent of the Civil War, Bolshevik control of the functional portions of this network that remained shrank steadily until 1920 as the White Army won victory after victory during this conflict. For example, in November of 1917 the city expected to receive more than 2,000 trainloads of food, but only 981 arrived, and in December only 439 arrived. By February of 1918, that number had shrunk to only 139. Complicating this situation further, by late 1918 only half of the locomotives under Bolshevik control were in working order and by 1921 even this had contracted to a fraction of the 1918 level (Chase 17-20).

The collapse of the city's supply lines had predictably far-reaching consequences. To begin, the dwindling number of food deliveries via the rail system resulted in severe and widespread shortages. In 1916, during the war, the tsarist government instituted a policy of food rationing which the Provisional Government had continued into 1917. This policy did little to help alleviate the situation: the amount of food available continued to plummet, prices rose sharply, and

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[82] This fact sheds light on some early Soviet literature, like, for example, Andrei Platonov's "The Motherland of Electricity," the story about a confiscated White Army motorcycle repurposed to provide electricity for a remote village, which focus on the souls of machines and how they must be cared for, encouraged in Soviet modes of thought, and lured away from anti-revolutionary mindsets that incline them to sabotage.

black-market speculation grew. By 1918, the average Moscow worker was consuming only 1,700 to 2,000 calories a day when the recommended daily requirement for someone engaged in heavy labor was 3,600 per day. As people do in situations of extreme need, the inhabitants of the city developed strategies to help them survive these hardships.

Workers who still had connections to the village left in large numbers to return to the provinces where food was thought to be in better supply. Others sent their families back while they remained to continue working in the city.[83] Some engaged in speculation, becoming what were known as *meshochniki*,[84] selling goods produced in their home villages or on family garden plots for exorbitant prices on the black market. Due to inflation, money became practically worthless, so one needed something to trade in order to have any hope of supplementing the meager state rations with black market produce. Some women—primarily engaged in textile and other such 'light' industries that were assigned smaller rations—resorted to sex work to secure themselves and their families basic necessities like flour or shoes (Chase 20-21). (Thus, rather than solving the 'epidemic' of sex work discussed in previous chapters, the economic collapse intensified it.) Theft was also rampant, increasing dramatically between 1917 and 1921. Workers stole tools, raw materials, and equipment from their workplaces to exchange for food on the black market. When Soviet writings refer to 'sabotage' during this period, this is often what they mean.

In addition to food shortages, the city also experienced fuel shortages during this time. In November of 1918, the city had only 12.5 percent of the coal and peat and 29 percent of the wood

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[83] In some cases, workers with countryside connections and claims to newly reappropriated land sent their families back to stake out said claims while they would follow along at a later date.

[84] This can be translated as "bagmen," or something to this effect, so-called for the bags in which they transported their many products.

it typically received, which was only enough to heat the city for two or three days. By 1920, this had become a cascading problem: "industries ceased or reduced production; railroads halted; city services were curtailed; and residents had to endure the brutal cold of three Russian winters without sufficient heat," while hundreds of trainloads of food "sat rotting at the railroad yards" due to lack of fuel. Even in the factories that had not halted production, workers abandoned their posts to escape the freezing cold and continued hunger. Office workers joined them in droves. When they did come in, workers spent much of their workday producing goods like "primus stoves, candlesticks, and kerosene lamps" that could be exchanged in the villages for food or help them keep their own living spaces warm and illuminated (Chase 18-19).

The lack of fuel for home heating also exacerbated a burgeoning housing crisis as city inhabitants dismantled dwellings both occupied and unoccupied, carting off just about anything that could be burned for heat—from doors and floors to fences and the wooden crosses that marked graves in cemeteries. A commission formed by the Moscow city soviet had, between 1918 and 1919, authorized 903 residential buildings to be razed for heating fuel. Despite this effort to meet the needs of freezing citizens, however, demand outstripped the commission's address. In 1919 alone, residents dismantled 2,500 such buildings to repurpose as heating fuel for their frigid homes (Chase 29-30).

This destruction occurred in a city whose housing stock had already been decimated by war and revolution, when construction and maintenance halted due to lack of funds. As of 1920, the heating systems in many apartments throughout the city were inoperable, causing the pipes to freeze and burst and walls to grow moist and moldy. Unable to repair this damage, due to lack of funds or tools or skills, the city soviet could only move residents into other apartments. Considering that the supply of inhabitable apartments was constantly dwindling, this compounded

the housing crisis by forcing people into cramped, crowded conditions in subpar dwellings. This, in turn, created its own problems.

The death rate in Moscow skyrocketed after the revolution, with epidemic diseases accounting for an estimated one-fifth of deaths in 1918. Whereas in 1917 it had been 23.7 per one thousand residents, the next year it had risen to 29.9. Diseases that had been a threat or endemic in tsarist times, such as cholera, typhus, and scarlet fever, reached epidemic levels following the revolution. By 1919, the death rate had risen to 45.4. In addition to these epidemic illnesses, tuberculosis, respiratory illnesses, and "deficiency diseases" like rickets, scurvy, and hunger edema made significant contributions to this stark statistic. The rapid deterioration in quality of life that prompted mass exodus to the countryside, the toll on the population of Red Army enlistment to fight the Civil War and defend the revolution, and, finally, the haunting specter of death all served to empty Moscow of many of its residents. By 1920, only 1,027,000 inhabitants remained in the city, fewer than had lived there in 1897, and a drop of nearly one million in the three years that had passed since 1917 (Chase 31).

Although it may seem odd, it is against this backdrop of widespread suffering and despair that Gastev writes, in 1919, of his mechanized collective in his clearest and most visionary terms. "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture" appeared in an issue of the *Proletarian Culture* journal. It concerns the nature of proletarian art. As he often does in his non-fiction works, Gastev rails against those theorists who he feels have underestimated the capabilities and perspectives of the proletariat:

> Typically, when ideologues speak about proletarian art, they not only simply settle the matter themselves, but consider its deliberate simplicity to be the fundamental characteristic of proletarian art ... Even if we are not talking about the proletariat,

> but, say, about modern people in general, who have survived the crucible of technology, war, and revolution, we must not approach them with that kind of naive simplicity ... (Gastev "On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture" 45)

He effectively challenges his invisible interlocutors here to approach the working class with a bit more complexity and respect than they have heretofore done, questioning the equation of proletarian expression with "naive simplicity."[85] Instead, he argues, do not the people who have survived the "crucible of technology, war, and revolution" deserve to be approached with a mindset that takes their artistic expression more seriously? Might it not be the critic whose perspective needs adjusting?

The vision of proletarian psychology that Gastev describes in the article is, at first reading, jarring for its inhumanity. It earned him criticism and provoked backlash even among many of his contemporaries. When he begins this section of the article, Gastev first discusses how industrial wage labor has altered proletarian psychology in such a way as to standardize and segment it. He writes:

> The psychology of the proletariat is already transforming into a new social psychology where one human complex works under the direction of another, and where often that "director," in terms of labor qualifications, stands below the complex being directed and quite often is a complete stranger on a personal level.
>
> This psychology is unveiling a new working collectivism which appears not solely

[85] It is not clear exactly when the poems in the *The Word Under Pressure* section of *Poetry of the Worker's Blow* were written, but it may have been as late as 1920. These poems, however, make a good case for Gastev's decoupling of simplicity and naivety. They are his shortest poems, filled with repetitions and verbs that appear only in the infinitive form; they look simple, but it would be a mistake to dismiss them as such.

in human-to-human relations, but also in those of cohesive groups of people to cohesive groups of mechanisms. This sort of collectivism could be called mechanized collectivism. (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 45)

Although he does later employ the term "human" ("*chelovek*"), Gastev begins this explanation with the distinctly depersonalized term "human complex" ("*chelovecheskii kompleks*"). The "human" element of this phrase, linguistically, becomes an adjective that modifies the inanimate term "complex," deemphasizing the human subject and turning it into a linguistic appendage that provides context for the primary mechanistic term "complex." In other writings from the same period, Gastev frequently employs the term "complex." It can mean anything from the human being as a biomechanical system, as in the above quotation, or a collection of mechanisms[86] that come together to manufacture a product, or the factory[87] that houses them. The word "complex" first necessarily implies a collection of separate components. Second, these components must either combine or function together in service of a goal, whether that be the manufacture of a garment or the movement of a hand to swing a hammer. Effectively, they create a system or, to use Gastevian terminology, a complex.

Two distinct features of the Gastevian complex are its dynamism and its modularity. The above passage quickly cycles through several scales and types of relations when discussing the

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[86] For example, in an article that was written at least after 1920: "The modern machine, especially machine complexes, has its own laws of temperament, communication, and rest that are not in alignment with the rhythms of the human organism" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 24).

[87] On the modern factory, in a piece from 1925: "...they are valuable not in the sense that they have walls and corners—that is, limits that stem from the understanding of the word 'house' or 'hut'—but in that they contain within themselves an entire complex of pathways..." (Gastev "The Social Engineering Machine" 7-23).

"new labor collectivism" revealed by proletarian psychology. At first, the narrative's gaze is microscopic, focusing on the individual relations between one human to another. Then it quickly zooms out to encompass relations between whole groups of human beings to other groups. Finally, it shifts in kind rather than in scale, claiming that collectivist proletarian psychology has even come to shape how entire groups of people relate to entire groups of machines. The narrative has structurally flattened each of these relationships onto one plane by juxtaposing them so abruptly and in quick succession. It flits between vastly different scales and vastly different types of relationship as though they are entirely interchangeable. In the coming mechanized collective that Gastev describes elsewhere in the article, they will be just that. This linguistic flattening reveals the underlying logic of modularity and interchangeability that structure his developing labor theories and the importance of movement and process in how Gastev will attempt to redefine the body within these theories.

The above passage already hints at the importance of fragmentation in this developing worldview. Interestingly, while the organic fragmentation the protagonist of "The Accursed Question" experiences is traumatic and destabilizing, the machinic fragmentation of the worker within the mechanized collective is actually a strength. Gastev discusses the role of fragmentation within the "montage of production," as he deems it, and defines it in expansive terms:

> The proletariat, gradually divided by the new industry into particular 'types,' or 'kinds,' into people of a certain 'operation,' into people of a certain gesture, absorbs into its psychology, on the other hand, the whole grandiose montage of the enterprise that passes before its eyes. This is, in the main, the open and fully visible montage of the factory itself, the sequence and hierarchy of operations and fabrication and, finally, the general form of all production expressed in the

subordination and control of one operation to another, of one fabrication to another, of one 'type' to another. (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 44)

The choice of the word *razbivaemyi* (shattered) is curious. The prefix *raz*- denotes some kind of division. Specifically, it refers to something which was at one point in a state of togetherness or unification but has now undergone or is now undergoing decoupling. This decoupling can be as mundane as the untying of a shoelace or as significant as the loss of a limb, depending on the context and the verb to which the prefix is appended. The verb *bivat'/bit'* essentially means to strike, as in to hit or beat someone or something. As such, even when used metaphorically, it carries with it an intensity that can imply violence, the sort of experience that might have traumatic reverberations within the subject who has received the striking or beating. The plate that shatters, for example, which could be described as *razbitaia posuda,* can never be reconstituted in the exact image of itself prior to the shattering; it will always bear the mark of the incident that broke it.

This article does not, however, permit that the fragmentation of the proletarian psyche is a tragedy. It is the necessary condition for integration into the human-machine assemblage of the future mechanized collective. Moreover, this fragmentation is precisely the thing that provides the proletariat with a unique perspective on production and a unique ability to embed themselves seamlessly into its workflows, exactly as though they themselves were a machine. What was a wound in "The Accursed Question" becomes now a point of connection. The workers need not be reconstituted exactly as they were prior to their shattering if the fragmentation performed on them by industrialization can be made useful. In the mechanized collective, to be useful is the greatest gift. Given the "crucible" through which the Soviet people—and, as Gastev states, all modern

people—have just recently passed by 1919, is it any wonder that the question of how to repurpose fragmentation would be of great theoretical and even practical concern?

Successive wars, starvation, cold, and disease had, by 1921, decimated the population of Moscow. This led to a transformation within the working class that had initially partnered with the Bolsheviks to bring about the revolution in 1917. The decline in population, whether through death, flight to the countryside, or enlistment in the Red Army, resulted in a dearth of laborers generally and of skilled laborers in particular. In 1917, Moscow's industries had employed 190,000 workers; in August of 1918, only about 140,000 remained. By 1921, that number had dwindled to a mere 81,000. Nearly every factory between the period of 1918 and 1921 saw its workforce shrink to a fraction of pre-revolutionary levels. In the Guzhon metalworks, for example, which had employed 3,688 workers in 1913, only 825 were employed in 1921. Of these 825, "fewer than half" possessed the necessary "production skills and experience" (Chase 33). The labor crisis thus took on a new dimension.

Many of the laborers making up the workforce in 1921 were "'yesterday's peasants'" (qtd. in Chase 33). This is to say that either they had only recently arrived in Moscow from the provinces or maintained close ties to their home villages and the agrarian way of life. Some of them had been conscripted or recruited, while others had cut village ties to pursue life in the urban center. The portion of the remaining workforce not from the countryside tended to be made up of the spouses and offspring of workers who had left production, whether due to death, enlistment, or work for the state apparatus.

This shift in the composition of the available workforce led to changes in the culture of the factories themselves. While the decline in "labor discipline" had been an ongoing trend since the

revolution,[88] with the shifting make-up of the workforce this issue grew worse. The concept of labor discipline involves a variety of traits, from minimizing absences to respecting machinery, products, and materials, to conscientiously listening to the instructions of foremen and managers, among other things. Many workers, when they did show up to work, "preferred card games, revelry, and drinking to production, and consciously and unconsciously damaged machines" (Chase 36). Additionally, many would use their working hours and workplace machinery to produce survival goods to either sell on the black market or for their own personal use, lowering productivity even further. These new laborers had to be trained in both production skills and the cultural mores of industry.

While Gastev founded the Central Institute of Labor in 1920, it did not gain significant state support and funding until 1921 (Johansson 105).[89] Perhaps it was the confluence of the Civil War's winding down and the new state's intensifying labor crisis that precipitated the change in funding and support. Whatever the case, it was in 1921 that Gastev abandoned his pursuits in proletarian art and dedicated himself completely to the Scientific Organization of Labor and the Institute. A section of a pamphlet published that same year titled "Our Tasks" ("Nashi zadachi") explicitly illustrates the aims of Gastev's vision:

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[88] Lenin, in 1918, famously said that "the Russian is a bad worker compared with people in advanced countries" citing the Russian worker's lack of technical education and poor labor discipline (Lenin 27: 259).

[89] Johansson quotes from a letter Gastev addressed in 1920 to the Central Institute's parent organization, the Central Trade Union Soviet, in which he writes that many of his colleagues have been forced to abandon their work at the Central Institute due to his inability to guarantee them housing or "even a bare minimum of footwear," citing one man whose shoes "literally lack soles."

> Russia differs from the West in that it is either lazy or simply impulsive; its population generally demonstrates little tenacity, labor discipline... We would like, in accordance with the power of our apparatus of influence, to inculcate a culture of labor for its own sake, independent of its pleasantness; we would rather like to show that appended to this culture is a certain severity, a delayed gratification, something which might be called vocational training. (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 29)

In the context of declining productivity in industry, this statement makes sense, although one might wonder at Gastev's condescending description of the Russian worker as "lazy," given the circumstances. When one recalls that a significant portion of the reason for the decline in productivity was due to the lack of food, housing, heating fuel, the raging epidemics, and other such maladies, it reads as callous. But from his perspective, it was not unrealistic. Gastev was certainly familiar with the troubles that workers in Moscow were experiencing at this time; he and his colleagues were suffering them as well. Despite the severity of the above rhetoric, the pamphlet goes on to provide practical tips for maintaining a clean and productive workspace and conserving energy while on the job. Some of the tips are basic task analysis: how to conceptualize a task in its entirety, then break it down into manageable, sequential steps to ensure its successful execution and a quality final product (*How Work Must Be Done* 29). Others specify the necessity of taking frequent breaks to eat lunch, to smoke, or to have a cup of tea (*How Work Must Be Done* 30). Most interesting, however, is the pamphlet's focus on both mental and physical self-restraint (*vyderzhka*), which it presents in the context of preserving energy and maintaining a standardized, even-tempered pace of labor throughout the day (*How Work Must Be Done* 30).

It helps to recall the old lathe operator of the 1911 article "Old Timers" here. The lathe operator, by the time Gastev wrote about him, had effectively been both mentally and physically 'shattered' by his years of hard labor. He began his career getting paid a standard rate by the day, regardless of the amount of product he managed to manufacture, but ends it earning piece-rates. In that article, Gastev makes it a point to note that the lathe operator completely exhausts himself attempting to meet and exceed his daily quota, implying that the ruin that has come to his body and mind is a result of his frantic efforts to produce enough goods to satisfy his bosses and to make a living wage, in that order. Considering that during his work at the Central Institute of Labor Gastev came to advocate for the introduction of Taylorist methods into Soviet industry, it stands to reason that it is not the concept of the piece-rate in itself to which he objects in that article. It may instead be the lack of organization and training within the factory that leads to workers exhausting themselves, which has a cumulative negative effect on both production and said workers.

In an early section of his 1921 pamphlet "Our Tasks," Gastev writes of how the primary incentive for labor "in the era of bare existence" stemmed from need—such as hunger—desire, or the threat of danger (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 29). His efforts to establish a culture of 'work for its own sake' can be read, then, as an attempt to divorce need (such as need for food, of which there was none) and desire (such as the violent, biological impulse for sex in "The Accursed Question") from labor. Moreover, perhaps the social problems of deprivation and trauma could be solved technically. The machine, with its even temperament and steady rhythm of labor, did not struggle with problems like need, deprivation, or desire. The new Soviet citizens, by reforging themselves in its image, could aspire to leave such concerns behind as well.

4.4 Interobjectivity

This project seeks to investigate Gastev's work primarily from the standpoint of posthumanist cultural theory. To do so well, it is necessary to place his work within its historical context, which was largely the aim of the preceding two sections of this chapter. In contrast to "The Accursed Question," a story that focuses intently on the painful intricacies of sex and gender in constructing and maintaining an 'acceptable' selfhood, questions of sex and gender are almost entirely absent from Gastev's later writings.

Gastev first uses the term "mechanized collectivism" in the 1919 article published in the journal *Proletarian Culture*, discussed earlier. His writings from the period of the Central Institute of Labor are far less explicit in their vision, focusing instead on optimizing the working body and the labor processes in which it is embedded and takes part. It is, however, useful to think of the vision described in the 1919 article as a guide, an expression of the long-term goals and vision for Soviet life that the Central Institute would become the tool for constructing. Gastev describes his vision of the proletariat within the fully developed mechanized collective in the following way:

> Although an international language does not yet exist, there are rather international gestures, international psychological formulas possessed by millions. It is exactly this trait that imparts to proletarian psychology its striking anonymity, allowing each discrete proletarian unit to be classified as A, B, C, or 325.075, O, and so on. (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 44)

The vision put forth in that essay is understandably shocking for many, as it was for many of Gastev's contemporaries.[90] The "striking anonymity" of the future "proletarian unit" implies a dissolution of selfhood entirely. Someone like Vasilii of "The Accursed Question" would not exist in this new world. Nor would his conflicts and agonies. An important aspect of the proletarian unit that Gastev presents in this article is what he calls its "dynamism," which is to say the spontaneity of thinking that allows it to quickly adapt to changing situations. He naturally explains this by referring to the industrial setting and production needs, saying that the proletarian units have "only general psychological formulas that respond with the rapidity of an electric shock to the first hint of production and complete it in a complex, standardized template" (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 44). Clearly, dynamism and spontaneity mean something quite specific in Gastev's vocabulary. He is here describing the ideal proletarian unit who has amassed enough of what he elsewhere calls "installations" ("*ustanovki*") that it can react instantaneously to any changing demand of labor without wasting time on deliberation and rumination.

Mechanized collectivism as Gastev presents it in the 1919 article is effectively a network of proletarian minds that stretches across the face of the planet, each proletarian unit embedded in an interlocking architecture that plugs into a central node (the so-called "world brain" of the quote below). He says as much:

> In ... the psychology [of the proletariat], from one end of the world to the other, move powerful, heavy psychological streams for which it is as if there are no longer

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[90] One does not have to think very hard to see the references to Gastev's work in Zamiatin's dystopian novel *My*. Olesha's *Zavist'* also engages with Gastev's work, although less directly than Zamiatin's novel, satirizing the sexlessness of the mechanized collective and, more broadly, the 'universal masculinity' of the early Soviet period.

> a million brains, but a singular world-brain. In the future, this tendency will imperceptibly preclude the possibility of individual thought, transforming into the objective psychology of an entire class with systems of psychological inclusions, disconnections, and closures. (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 44)

Anyone would be forgiven for feeling shocked and repulsed by the image of such a 'utopia.' When Gastev's work is criticized for its dehumanizing and bleak quality, it is often this article to which detractors turn.[91] It is certainly depersonalized. That said, when this conception of a utopia is placed on a continuum with Gastev's other works, especially "The Accursed Question," and his vision that the standardization of machinery will be international, a more complex picture emerges. Recall that the protagonist Vasilii spends the story longing for a "mutual interpenetration of souls," what one might now call intersubjectivity,[92] and he variously tries to achieve this merging of souls through the act of sex. His own experience of subjectivity is a series of recurrent episodes of dissociation and trauma that produce a schism within his mind and body; sex is the catalyst for many of these episodes. While that story ends on the hopeful note that true love will resolve the trauma of subjectivity by, essentially, widening his singular subjecthood into an expanded collaborative project with his beloved, that solution rings hollow because it is only a partial one. Beyond the loneliness of individual subjecthood, desire as a biologically motivated bodily need also torments Vasilii. The sort of mutual interpenetration that "The Accursed Question" poses cannot account for the problem of desire.

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[91] I leave it to others to write these analyses.

[92] The influence of Bogdanov's physiological collective as a kind of society-wide collaborative project of collective self-creation is evident in this early work as well.

Mechanized collectivism apparently can. There is no longer such a thing as an individualist subject in the mechanized collective. There is furthermore no room for variation amongst the units that form it, at least none beyond those that come from their different occupations within their particular corner of the machine complex that is their home factory. If the vision of collectivism hinted at by the "mutual interpenetration" of "The Accursed Question" might be thought of as a form of intersubjectivity, the mechanized collectivism of Gastev's later work is better conceived of as a kind of interobjectivity. One can think of this as a realignment of interiority and exteriority in which any disconnect between the two is eliminated to such an extent as to be nonexistent. In effect, the proletarian unit would be so perfectly integrated into the larger collective body that it would have access to all other parts of that body, and vice versa, eliminating both the need and opportunity for an autonomous subject to emerge. As all elements of the collective body will be harmoniously organized, there is simply no longer any use for individualist subjectivity. Whether this collective realignment results in the abolition of selfhood entirely, however, remains something of an open question.

Gastev's writings about the Scientific Organization of Labor from his time at the Central Institute of Labor onward do not reach the same romantic, poetic heights that his earlier work does. They focus on the immediate issues of the reorganization of industrial processes and the optimization of the working body to be integrated into the flow of these processes. That said, these writings are informed by the same logic that undergirds the utopian vision of the 1919 article. They act as a sort of roadmap that, given enough time and effort, was to culminate in the construction of the mechanized collective.

To begin to understand how the theory of the Scientific Organization of Labor connects to Gastev's vision of mechanized collectivism, it is necessary to understand his reconfiguration of

the concept of culture. As he defines it, culture is "the sum of a people's habits, its ability to labor, the sum of its processing capabilities" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 51). As Julia Vaingurt has written, Gastev "redefines culture by removing any associations with intellectual knowledge, artistic achievement, or refined taste and limiting its meaning to social customs and patterns of behavior ... culture is the ability to train one's body to perform systematic actions, and to break with previous cultural patterns" (Vaingurt "Poetry of Labor and Labor of Poetry" 222). It is an accumulation of habits within the larger social body ("*narod*") that also manifests within the individual units of that body. Therefore, the culture of the social body at large can be altered by the inculcation of new habits within the individual units that form it. When understood against this backdrop, Gastev's concepts of the social engineering machine (*sotsial'no inzheniernaia mashina*) and biomechanics (*biomekanika*) lose some of their mystery.

The social engineering machine is the factory of the future ("The Social Engineering Machine" 7-23). It is both a physical place (the factory) and an experimental process unfolding in time (what Gastev sometimes refers to as a "laboratory of experience").[93] He discusses the social engineering machine in the article of the same name, describing at certain points the evolution of the factory itself and at others the evolution of the worker. For example, where factories of the past (and the imperfect, disorganized factories of his present) were a collection of walls and corners, they ought to develop into arenas of free movement: "As soon as the factory started shifting from its static state into an almost limitless kinetics, it began to avoid corners ... The idea of continuous movement is forcing modern factories to gradually move away from right angles to circles" (Gastev "The Social Engineering Machine" 7-23). Gastev's ideas on the proper organization of

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[93] By 1927, Gastev had identified some thirteen different laboratories of experience throughout his life (Johansson 9).

the physical space of the factory bear the heavy imprint of his fascination with the new avenues of movement that the advent of the bridge crane had made possible. The proliferation of this technology meant that the entirety of industry could be transformed, with far-reaching effects for how buildings might be constructed and, indeed, how human beings themselves would be able to move through space and time. The bridge crane represented not only a concrete improvement in labor processes—saving the worker from the most back-breaking aspects of heavy labor and reducing the energy expenditure of the entire production process—but also an opportunity for the transformation of proletarian consciousness.

As the physical site of the factory was to evolve, so too was the worker within it, reforged within the social engineering machine and made part of it. The "Central Institute method," Gastev writes in 1924, initially began as vocational programming for workers designed to provide them with the technical education that they lacked. As time went on, it became clear that a "united installation synthesis" was needed that would create "from disorganized human raw material the precise living unit needed for the goals of production" (Gastev "The Formation of the Worker" ["Formirovanie rabotnika"] 27-37). The reformulation of the human being into a "living unit" would establish a harmonious fusion extending from worker to machine to machine-complex. This is the goal of Gastev's biomechanics. Because culture is, in his view, an accumulation of habits, the way to reforge the human being into a proletarian unit is to inculcate each unit with new habits. Teaching the proper way to swing a hammer is thus doing double-duty in this formulation: it both introduces the basis for establishing technical expertise and begins the work of rewiring the brain in ways better suited to the construction of a mechanized collective.

These biomechanics reach beyond the factory floor, however. In a 1923 pamphlet, Gastev writes that the sustenance of the human organism must be treated in the same manner as the science

of fueling steam engines or electric motors. He goes on: "the expenditure of human energy should be measured to a one thousandth of the smallest calorie, and the regulation of the labor of the human organism should be constructed according to a system of carburetors that feed heat engines" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 47). However farfetched this idea may seem to some, it indicates a desire to instrumentalize the messy biological necessities of the human body, thereby making them useful. It also seems to acknowledge that the hungry workers of the Civil War years worked very poorly. Furthermore, Gastev's vision integrates the human body into a larger mechanical system, regulating its functioning in the same way that the steam engine or electric motor is regulated. This systematization of the body and its functions unlocks, theoretically, new modes of organization for the social body as a whole.

Time also figures into this reorganization of human life. The Central Institute of Labor devised timecards[94] that aspiring proletarian units could use to schedule their days. Time was divided into two categories: objective, such as train schedules and working hours; and subjective, such as time spent sleeping, eating, attending to personal hygiene, etc. Objective time was divided into "precisely delineated blocks of time" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 67). By contrast, subjective time depended on the "flighty, often capricious will of the individual person." The timecards were intended to address this disconnect between the organized, compartmentalized units of objective time and the disorganized, "capricious" chaos of subjective time. As with the regulation of the proletarian unit's food intake and bodily movements, these timecards operated

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[94] The Central Institute of Labor was not the only organization to do this. Platon Kerzhentsev and the League of Time were the Institute's direct competition in these efforts. For more information on this group, see Brunnbauer, Ulf. "'The League of Time' (Liga vremia): Problems of Making a Soviet Working Class in the 1920s." *Russian History,* vol. 27, no. 4, 2000.

on multiple levels. First, there was the immediate issue of how to inculcate labor discipline (including arriving to work on time and cutting down on truancy) into a labor force made up overwhelmingly of erstwhile peasants unused to the rhythms of urban, industrial life. Second, the regulation of subjective time, currently unavailable for inspection by the social body at large, would have the effect of drilling discipline into the individual unit thereby prompting them to properly organize their own lives in harmony with the rhythm of the larger community. Essentially, given enough time, this would occasion the dissolution or reconfiguration of the individual self.

Far from being an essential "attribute" of human experience, then, individual selfhood in Gastev's ethos is instead a collection of habitual behaviors that can be trained out of the organism with the right approach. With the disappearance of individual selfhood, the human being is able to more properly function as an organic machine, with "even, standardized steps," and "souls devoid of lyricism" (Gastev "On the Tendencies" 45). Gastev's rhetorical amputation of individual selfhood from the human organism, and its body's subsequent transformation into organic machine and proletarian unit, causes this body to then function as the first and last level of human experience. That is to say, its interior life realigns with the life of the extended social body, eliminating, in the final tally, any discord between the two.

Elsewhere in the writings that he did while at the Central Institute, Gastev refers to the body of the worker as a collection of organs, some of which are engaged in the active process of labor while others are not. For example, in the 1929 book *Standardization and Labor* (*Normirovania i truda*), one finds:

> The measurement of mechanical labor carried out by the working organs generally already has a widely adopted technique, especially in cases when the working organ is performing motions of a similar type in a straight line or precise circular

> movements. The difficulty begins when the labor movements carried out by the human organs do not possess precise, defined directions, and the movements themselves have no evident standard. (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 278)

The body of the worker is here dissected into a collection of parts and movements. There is a certain margin of error when the organs of the human worker and the machine are not in proper alignment. Most interesting in this passage are not the problems that arise in attempting to "measure mechanical labor," but rather the linguistic treatment of the human worker. By this late period, Gastev's language has evolved to place both worker and machine on the same plane, simply two different types of mechanism in a symbiotic relationship. Each one can still be optimized (after all, the mechanized collective has not appeared on earth yet), but part of this optimization must include the dynamic relationship between them.

The worker's body is further atomized in this formulation, subject to disassembly and reassembly like the machine with which they labor: "Here, once again, the nervous system plays a huge role, conditioning the laborer to fully demobilize certain organs while at work" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 281). In the swinging of a hammer, for example, certain fingers on the hand engaged in the movement are "demobilized," in the sense that they are neither tensed nor participate in the action of the swing. This section of the book goes on to elaborate how the participation or "demobilization" of certain parts of the body when engaged in different types of work essentially come together to form an expenditure of total energy that can be minutely calculated to determine the working body's labor capacity, the amount of sustenance it needs to function, and the proper duration of what is elsewhere called the "recovery period" ("*vosstanovitel'nyi period*") (278).

The above metaphorical disassembly of the working body reads as the incarnation of the human-machine convergence that Gastev describes in a 1918 article published in *Metalworker's Messenger* (*Vestnik metallista*): "Future society will be managed by special 'production complexes' wherein the will of machinism and the force of human consciousness will be fused in an unbreakable weld" (qtd. in Stites *Revolutionary Dreams* 151). The human worker has been mechanized, perhaps not literally fused with the machine but broken down and reassembled according to its need. The mechanistic movements of the human being's "working organs" function like an assemblage, in communication with the various modular pieces of their own body and extending into the body of the machine with which they labor.

4.5 Conclusion

This conception of the human-machine assemblage calls to mind Jane Bennett's confederations of vibrant matter, which she describes in the context of a mass blackout that occurred in the United States in August 2003: "There is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed (the blackout) as a doing and an effecting by a human-nonhuman assemblage. This federation of actants is a creature that the concept of moral responsibility fits only loosely" (Bennett 28). Much like Bennett's assemblage, Gastev's mechanized collective is a federation of human and nonhuman matter that is capable of action without the need for subjectivity. Moral responsibility does not quite fit Gastev's collective either. The mechanized collective attempts to bring the human closer to the object as a model for existing in the world. Through the creation of a human-machine assemblage, humans are able to, firstly, escape subjectivity; and, secondly, enter into community with the nonhuman, inorganic matter with which they live.

Bennett's federations of vibrant matter are instances of what she calls thing-power, which is "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience" (Bennett xvi). Gastevian interobjectivity, by contrast, tries to bring the human into the realm of the 'thing.' The proletarian unit of the mechanized collective is a person aspiring to full thinghood, an escape from the messy demands of subjectivity into the world of the object. It is, ultimately, despite his attempts to eradicate human lyricism, a bizarrely romantic and quixotic effort to alleviate the anxieties and deprivations of human existence, solving the problems of loneliness and isolation that seem to inevitably accompany life inside a singular body.

5.0 A Provenance of the Modular Body Project

The seeds of this dissertation were planted in the spring of 2013, when I was doing research for a final paper in my senior year of college. As I was looking for information on Valentin Kataev's *Time, Forward!* I stumbled upon some brief mention of Aleksei Gastev in the footnotes of a book, the title of which I no longer recall, that touched upon the time-motion studies at the Central Institute of Labor and his dreams of mechanized collectivism. Although the topic of time-motion studies was not remotely relevant to the paper I was then writing and I had very little extra time, I began searching for anything and everything I could find written on Gastev in English. My Russian at that time was intermediate at best, so I was relegated to what partial translations there were available of his work. I ended up devoting a significant portion of that paper to Soviet Taylorism, Gastev, and the Central Institute of Labor, undoubtedly producing a somewhat incoherent final product. I have carried that interest in Gastev's work with me since that time. When I began my PhD studies, I knew that I would return to the Scientific Organization of Labor in my dissertation.

This project has gone through several phases before arriving at its current state. My initial research questions were deceptively simple: what does Gastev have to say about labor and how are his contributions relevant to the labor landscape of the United States today? My efforts to explore these questions led me to identify fragmentation and division as central aspects of Gastev's labor theory, which I then compared to the numerous life-management tools to be found among consumer products today—services such as Noom, the famously defunct previous incarnation of WeWork, or fitness watches like the FitBit. Each of these products, in its own way, encourages people to think of their time, their bodies, and their lives in terms of projects to manage, tasks to

complete, and processes to optimize. The connections between Gastev's writings and the contemporary life management product landscape are a subject to which I will return in more detail in the expanded version of this project.

Once I had noticed and researched this aspect of Gastev's work, coming to understand the importance of fragmentation and division as organizing elements in his thought process, I arrived at an additional question: who or what was the object to be subjected to this fragmentation and division? While certain aspects of the Scientific Organization of Labor concerned effective time management and the arrangement of the labor process, others focused minutely and intently on the working body itself. Generally speaking, prescriptions for the body were grouped in Gastev's thought under the category of biomechanics; however, as I researched the topic I found that his use of terminology could be fast and loose, which is to say that a given concept could mean different things at different points. The body, in Gastev's writings, was conceived as a set of interactive systems, each of which had different needs and purposes. Each of these systems, it seemed, had to be catalogued and studied in isolation from the others, to the extent possible, in order to quantitatively determine that system's precise energy requirements and the corresponding output it might produce should it be properly fueled.

I then began to wonder to what extent this process of fragmentation and division was metaphorical and to what extent literal. The distinction between the two in Gastev's linguistic choices can at times be unclear. Surprisingly perhaps, for a writer so concerned with precision and measurement, Gastev's language makes room for a great deal of ambiguity. His fiction and poetry often spotlight violence—in the form of gruesome workplace accidents—as both catalyst for transformation and source of unrelenting despair. His labor writings make use of language which could be considered violent or disturbing—his recurrent use of the word "dismemberment"

(*raschlenenie*), for example—but strictly metaphorically, for the most part. As I began to read more of Gastev's pre-revolutionary creative writing, I became interested in investigating the connection, if any, between that early work and his writings from his time with the Central Institute of Labor.

Ultimately, this line of inquiry brought the project to its present form. As I began to sift through Gastev's early work, I noticed that sex (in the sense of both the act and the 'attribute') and gender appeared in the work of that period as serious problems in need of a solution. This surprised me. The preponderance of sex and gender in the early work was very much in contrast with Gastev's post-revolutionary work, particularly from 1920 onward when he began in earnest to work on the Scientific Organization of Labor, in which sex and gender are strikingly absent. I reformulated my research question: what happens to the body between Gastev's early and late work? does it become de-gendered and, if so, how, and why?

In attempting to investigate these questions, I sought to examine how gender, labor, and trauma are interwoven in Gastev's larger body of work. In the case of Gastev's early short story "The Accursed Question," the experience of gendered embodiment is one of violence (metaphorical or otherwise) and coercion. The gendered body is produced through a process of fragmentation that has its roots in the act of sex. If that is so, how peculiar that the machinic fragmentation of the body in the labor writings should be presented as positive. What is the difference between the organic fragmentation that produces sex and gender and the machinic fragmentation that produces the proletarian unit of the mechanized collective? Each can be viewed as an act of violence that breaks down the body and the psyche to then restructure them according to a new, more 'optimal' schematic. The key seems to lie in the purpose and direction of this violence.

It is here that the concept of interobjectivity comes into play. Gastev's early writing—"The Accursed Question" especially—links sexuality, gender, and trauma together in striking and explicit ways. It is in many ways also a critique of individualist, bourgeois subjectivity. Gendered embodiment is inextricably linked to individual subjectivity, which is presented as a painful experience of isolation and disconnection. "The Accursed Question" ends by proposing that love is the means by which subjectivity can be expanded, excising its individualist bourgeois aspect, and thereby establishing connection and community between bodies of different genders. In some sense, this would solve the problem of gendered embodiment as well by providing access to the interior life of the love object and allowing the lover to inhabit that subject position in addition to the one afforded by his or her own gendered body.

The didactic influence of Chernyshevsky is clear here. The first chapter discusses how *What Is to Be Done?* addresses many of the issues plaguing imperial society at the time of its publication: the question of women's autonomy and capacity for self-determination; the role of sex work in this discourse; economics and class; new developments in science. Widely derided even at the time of its first publication for its lack of literary style and finesse, the novel nonetheless delivered a clear social program designed to address and alleviate the persistent social problems that concerned imperial society. It resonated with many young people who would later go on to become revolutionaries. Moreover, the novel is something of a spiritual ancestor to Gastev's early writings, with its peculiar mixture of 'rational' scientific affect and implicit argument for the supposed 'materialist benefits' of love.

The revolutionary power of love, bearing the mark of Chernyshevsky's influence, that "The Accursed Question" proposes as the solution to the trauma of individual gendered embodiment appears by the 1920s to have proven inadequate. One wonders, judging by the conspicuous

absence of any significant mention of gender in Gastev's works of this later period, if he had determined that gender and subjectivity were fundamentally linked in some way. By this period, he was writing of the human being taking on the characteristics of the industrial machinery in the factory that had fascinated him from at least as early as his time at the Moscow Teachers College and his work in France. The transformation of the human being into the proletarian unit appears to also involve adopting the 'thingness' of the machine.

By this 'thingness' I mean those consistent, unchanging qualities of the inanimate object as well as its tireless capability for labor: it is scoured of "lyricism," a term that Gastev employed as a catchall for emotionality; its needs, insofar as they exist, are quantifiable; its service life is extended or diminished as a direct result of its proper maintenance, which is also quantifiable; finally, its purpose is clearly defined by its usefulness. Moreover, the machine exists within a network (what Gastev called a "complex"), one node operating as part of a unified whole in service of a goal. It has neither the capacity nor the need to ask the question that the individual bourgeois subject is always seeking to answer, as Bogdanov wrote in "The Accumulation of Human Beings": what is my purpose?

The reformulation of the human organism along these lines as presented in Gastev's post-revolutionary body of work is what I have come to call interobjectivity and spend the third chapter exploring. Gastev's linguistic ambiguity strikes again here. In its practical goals, the Scientific Organization of Labor was intended to reorganize how laborers spent their time during the workday, as well as to streamline the labor process itself to increase productivity without sacrificing—and indeed safeguarding—the health of the workforce. At certain points throughout his writing during this period, Gastev laments the Soviet population's ignorance about how to properly distinguish between work and rest. He writes about needing to establish a "science of

rest" (Gastev *How Work Must Be Done* 55) in addition to the "science of work" that he was developing at the Central Institute of Labor. Therefore, while much of Gastev's terminology can come across as startlingly depersonalized, it is not entirely clear whether the interobjectivity of his mechanized collective was an obliteration of selfhood entirely or an effort to transform it into something new—something more dynamic and flexible, opening up avenues of connection instead of foreclosing them.

In writing this dissertation, I had several goals. First, I hoped to be able to make Gastev's work available and comprehensible to a wider English-speaking audience. Heretofore, available English-language studies have tended to examine him from the vantage point of the social sciences or have analyzed him as a *Proletkul't* worker-poet. I wished to investigate the entire scope of his work—including his early fiction, the journalistic writings in Paris, the poetry, and later labor writings—in an effort to both chart the evolution of his thought through the years and to excavate his theoretical and philosophical positions. By doing so, I hope to bring Gastev's work into contemporary theoretical conversations within the fields of trans- and posthumanist inquiry, much in the way posthumanist cultural theorist McKenzie Wark has written about Bogdanov in recent years.

Second, I hope to make a contribution to the study of early Soviet gender and sexuality by closely examining the fluctuations in Gastev's treatment of gendered embodiment in his writings throughout the years. The transition from gender's overwhelming presence in his early work to its overwhelming absence in later writings formed the kernel of this impulse. While I have not arrived at a definitive simple answer—which, I think, is not the primary task of scholarly inquiry—I hope to have succeeded in asking some useful and thought-provoking questions about the construction of sex and gender in this period.

In subsequent iterations of this work, I plan to place Gastev's approach to "total-life management" in conversation with contemporary versions of the same, looking at twenty-first-century life-logging movements like the Quantified Self and the 'new and improved' League of Time,[95] a modern permutation of Platon Kerzhentsev's organization of the same name that advocated time management in the 1920s. While researching the dissertation, I have also been lucky to receive challenging questions about the historical context of Gastev's work. As I continue to develop this project, I plan to investigate early Soviet society's treatment of the body wounded, whether by war or by industrial accident, to explore further how this context influenced Gastev's thinking on labor discipline and interest in fragmentation. For the time being, however, this dissertation constitutes a first entry into my larger endeavor of excavating Gasteviana for a new audience.

[95] See https://tmliga.ru/ for more information; the site is in Russian.

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