

Art as Refuge: Jewish Publishers as Cultural Brokers in Early 1920s Russian Berlin

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Berlin as the chief centre of Russian publishing

During the years 1921 to 1924, Berlin saw the rise of a vibrant Russian publishing landscape that was largely based on the mediation of agents from the metropolitan centres Moscow and St. Petersburg. Their transcultural agency turned the German capital into the chief centre of Russian publishing, with more books appearing in Russian than in German. The outsourcing of Russian publishing to Berlin was a consequence of the Bolshevik literacy campaigns, along with paper shortage, obsolete print technologies, and the lack of skilled labour in Soviet Russia. Moreover, Russian publishing endeavours profited from Berlin's position as a centre of publishing excellence and low-cost printing and postage during the German hyperinflation.

Publishing projects accommodated the various aspirations of Russians who stayed in Berlin either as declared emigrants or as travellers from Soviet Russia; they offered discursive spaces that enabled both groups to share or dispute their respective views outside their homeland. Publishing thus emerged as a medium that not only accommodated cultural otherness and a variety of intellectual traditions. It also enabled adversaries to step out of the isolation that war and revolution had inflicted on them, and to disseminate their manifestos through a number of multilingual editions and reviews, to audiences world-wide, with a particular visibility in the art sector. Art, it seemed in the aftermath of Russia's Blockade, was powerful enough to surmount linguistic barriers¹ and to offer a bridge between Russia and Europe, past and future. Accordingly, art reviews were seen as "thundering trumpets revealing to the astonished western world the glamour of Russian art and scholarship,"² as the Berlin-based theatre review *Teatr i zhizn'* [Theatre and Life] put it in 1922. At the same time, it provided to the emigrant communities a refuge from the painful present, and a tool to attract the interest and commitment of a global audience for solidarity and protest.

¹ Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 17–31, 30.

² Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, "Zdes' i tam," 4.

The present article will look behind the scenes of these processes and shed light on its facilitators: Jewish publisher-entrepreneurs and editors who stayed in Berlin during the period under discussion, and acted as intermediaries between the new Russia where the Bolshevik regime was still weak, and the Old Russia, which lived on among the growing community of Russians in the centres of emigration. In keeping with Jaspert's categorization, these intermediaries are henceforth called "the others." They contrast with a second group of agents, "the emissaries," who had travelled to Berlin on the instruction of the Soviet commissars. The latter mediated between Soviet institutions and the German publishing sector, where the Jewish presence was also very prominent, and society at large, primarily German Berliners in the immediate environment of the Russians, but also European and global readers.

As it turned out, in 1924 the majority of emissaries moved from preliminary to permanent emigration, whereas a third group, the "go-betweens," also sent by the Soviet commissars to share Russian culture with German, European, and global audiences, mostly returned to Russia to commit themselves to further Soviet assignments both at home and abroad.

Using the paradigm of "cultural brokerage,"³ this article will reveal how the alliance between Soviet institutions, Russian creativity and Jewish publishing expertise—transferred to Berlin—triggered an unprecedented intensity of communication between Russia and the West. Its central thesis is that the transcultural agency of Jewish publishers, through their "sacred craft," multilingualism of the press, entrepreneurship, and intellectual tradition, was able to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers as a prerequisite for bridging political and ideological objections after the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War, and thus to contribute to the emergence of an international Russian culture in Berlin that stimulated the city's rise to a world metropolis.

The "sacred craft"

Since the invention in Europe of metallic type printing in the fifteenth century, rabbinic leaders had praised printing and publishing as the "sacred craft" and a powerful tool for the dissemination of knowledge—one of the most important commandments in the Jewish tradition. Published portfolios among Jewish communities tended to be of a pedagogical nature. Without the institutions of a state, Jewish life in the diaspora had to rely on education as one of the two

3 Jaspert, "Mendicants, Jews and Muslims," 107–147.

most important and effective means for the transmission of Jewish culture to future generations, the second being publishing. Hence followed the didactic mission to target a mass Jewish readership.

Originally, Jewish presses emerged as a child of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment embodying the first phase of a rapid secularisation and modernisation of Ashkenazi Jewish culture. Early *Haskalah* presses appeared in Hebrew and combined Jewish tradition and philosophical enquiry among narrow circles of scholars, the *maskilim*. They established themselves as a forum for scholarly assembly and debate, expressed by titles such as *Asefat Ha-Khamim* [The Gathering of Scholars], a Hebrew journal founded in 1877.⁴

During the second phase of the *Haskalah*, presses took on the role of a ‘mentor, herald, and teacher’⁵ to the less educated, offering tuition and moral guidance to a mass Jewish audience. In Eastern Europe this implied the use of the Yiddish vernacular, in addition to Hebrew. Jewish presses thus came to rely on a diglossic⁶ use of language, while its principle mission became education, rather than information. This was in contrast to the press ideals of the surrounding peoples, which lived by the mediation of news items, comments, and entertainment.

With the attempt of *Haskalah* leaders to intensify the dialogue between Christian and Jewish communities,⁷ the use of Hebrew along with Yiddish was replaced by press multilingualism, which presented a choice between Russian, Polish, and German. Hence, Jewish presses came to function in a social environment that included more than one speech community. The same applied to its journalists and editors whose command of various languages—Hebrew and Yiddish, besides Russian, German, and Polish—paved the way for a more transparent relationship between Jews and Christians in the multilingual empires of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus,

4 The striking literary-philosophical title not only alluded to the Jewish scholarly tradition, but was also cunningly designed to lead the Russian censors away from the journal’s political agenda, to “smuggle our [revolutionary] ideas into Russia through the back door,” as *Asefat Ha-Khamim*, published in Königsberg, spread socialist ideas in Hebrew among Russian Jews; it had to fold after its eighth edition, because the Imperial censors would not allow the journal to enter Russia. See: Winchevsky, *Gezamlte shriftn*, 193.

5 Singer, *Presse und Judentum*, 87.

6 Diglossia: Two languages functioning side by side, in the present context Yiddish, the “vernacular,” the language of daily life, and Hebrew, the language of writing, reserved for Torah study and prayer, viewed as “the sacred tongue.”

7 Schreiner, “Isaak Ber Lewinsohn,” 82–91.

Jewish presses generated a transcultural public sphere whose linguistic and ideological implications depended not only on the circulation of press items, but even more on the linguistic competence and mobility of their producers and recipients.

A Russian-Jewish press emerged only during the third phase of the *Haskalah*. It represented the publishing projects of Russian Jews in the sense of the pre-revolutionary,⁸ pre-Soviet Russian Empire, who had a secular education, and whose preferred language was Russian because it was their primary language to make knowledge accessible to the non-Jewish reader. This endeavour was instrumental in Russian becoming the language of organized Jewish scholarship in Late Imperial Russia.

Well-known examples of organized Jewish scholarship being largely a Russian enterprise are the *Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia*, founded in 1862; the *Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society*, founded in 1908, led by Simon Dubnov and his journal *Evreiskaia Starina* [The Jewish Heritage]; and the Russian-language *Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in St. Petersburg between 1906 and 1923. The Russian Jewish intellectual elite lived in St. Petersburg, which became the centre of Jewish Art and Scholarship despite restrictions on Jewish residency.⁹

There was a conglomerate of Russian publishing enterprises in St. Petersburg, many of them founded by a Jewish initiative. Their owners were increasingly acculturated to Russian language and culture and moved from printing and publishing to editing, from books to magazines and newspapers. Nevertheless, the Jewish intellectual tradition of philosophical enquiry, ideological controversy, and knowledge dissemination into society at large remained the sponsor of the “sacred craft,” and maintained a standard of ethical conduct that preserved its essence without the requirements of Jewish languages and religious ritual and law.

Both Tsarist and Bolshevik authorities welcomed the Jewish expertise in disseminating knowledge: the former on their mission to reorganise the lives of the Jews by encouraging them to acquire a Russian education, in particular during the Era of the Great Reforms in the 1860s, and the latter in their efforts to spread the message of the revolution. These endeavours were intrinsically linked to St. Petersburg and Moscow. They brought Jewish publishers closer to administrative institutions, and as a result, the Jewish presence in publishing

8 Markowitz, “Criss-Crossing Identities,” 201–210.

9 Greenbaum, *Jewish Scholarship and Scholarly Institutions*, 4–5.

grew to further prominence. Their agents were secular Russian Jews who were part of a social class that was educated and distinctly urban. They spoke Russian and felt attached to Russian culture.

Transferred to Berlin, they continued to participate in Russian cultural enterprises by providing significant shares of financial and moral support.¹⁰ Their anchorage within the Russian language and culture clearly distinguished them from Yiddish modernist groups usually originating from the former Pale of Settlement¹¹ who also stayed in Berlin around this time.

Among them were the editors of the modernist Yiddish review *Milgroym*, with its cognate Hebrew issue *Rimon* [both meaning Pomegranate], Rachel and Mark Wischnitzer from Minsk, the members of the Kiev *Kultur-lige* [League of Culture], and Uri Zvi Grinberg from the rebellious Warsaw literary group *Khalyastre* [The Gang]. The *Milgroym* editors followed the *Kultur-lige*'s approach to promoting the development of Yiddish as an expression of all spheres of secular Jewish culture, including literature, art, theatre, and education, and thus advocated a Jewish revival in the European diaspora.

Their attempt to bring respect for traditional Jewish life into harmony with Western civilization was in sharp contrast with Uri Zvi Grinberg's *Albatros*, also published in Berlin at the time, and the views of other *Khalyastre* members. Their pessimistic vision of Christian-Jewish symbiosis in the post-war world is vented in Grinberg's poem *In malkhes fun tseylem* [In the kingdom of the cross],¹² and his essay *Veytikn-heyem oyf slavisher erd* [Home of anguish on Slav soil],¹³ both of them full of apocalyptic imagery.¹⁴ A similar attitude is reflected in the poem *Biznes: Moskve-Berlin* [Business Moscow–Berlin],¹⁵ the introductory part of which is formulated in terms of the apocalypse and the extermination of the Jewish people.¹⁶

Hence, Jewish cultural agency in Berlin was not the act of a homogeneous group, but fuelled by ideological diversity ranging from Russian acculturation

10 Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 27.

11 The western region of Imperial Russia stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea, beyond which Jewish residency was normally prohibited.

12 Grinberg, "In malkhes fun tseylem," 15–24.

13 Grinberg, "Veytikn-heyem oyf slavisher erd," 25–27.

14 Valencia, "The Vision of Zion," 159–174.

15 Markish, "Biznes," 62.

16 Bechtel, "Les revues modernistes," 161–177.

and the project of a Jewish renaissance in Europe to the vision of destruction and Jewish emigration from Europe to Palestine. The contacts between these groups were characterised by delimitation and polemic, rather than friendly coexistence. This is, however, beyond the scope of the present article, in which only the agency of those Jewish publishers will be discussed who were acculturated to Russian language and society in both its pre- and post-revolutionary state. Their “Jewish identity” will thus be considered in the light of their entrepreneurial and intellectual disposition as a shared heritage of their “sacred craft,” rather than any religious dimension or Jewish national aspiration.

Divided passions

While the “sacred craft” had been essential in spreading the message of the *Haskalah* during its first phase from Berlin to the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, a hundred years on, the reverse trend can be observed, with Jewish publishing expertise right in the forefront.

In 1922, the German capital hosted some 150 Russian political journals and reviews¹⁷ and forty-eight Russian publishing enterprises, whose number rose to eighty-seven in 1924.¹⁸ But not all of them were émigré publishing houses. Others were established as Soviet enterprises. The liberal atmosphere of Weimar Germany and the geographical proximity to their homeland had encouraged some publishers to transfer their business to Berlin; others were lured by the favourable conditions resulting from the German hyperinflation. Low-cost printing, postage, and skilled labour in the publishing sector, as well as the provision of quality paper and printing facilities by German peers, attracted a large number of publisher-entrepreneurs from both the Russian metropolitan centres and the former Pale of Settlement.

Again, Jewish publishers in particular rose to prominence because of the cultural-educational nature of their publishing portfolios, which were now in great demand in both Soviet Russia and Central Europe. In Russia this was due to the Bolshevik literacy campaigns and the thirst for education among the previously underprivileged, with a growing need for books of popular science and world literature in Russian translation. In the newly independent national states of Central Europe, a second market for schoolbooks emerged among the Yiddish speaking communities in response to the cultural autonomy granted

17 Scandura, “Das ‘Russische Berlin,’” 754–762.

18 Kodzis, *Literaturnye Tsentry Russkogo Zarubezhia*, 77.

to them by the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. A third big market comprised Russian classical and world literature for the rising number of Russian emigrants scattered around Europe.

While these three publishing markets evolved concurrently with the favourable economic conditions in Germany, more Russian publishers left for Berlin at the behest of the new governing elites in Soviet Russia. Their agency is not only linked to the long-standing alliance between Russian authorities and Jewish publishing expertise, but also to the more recent coincidental rise of Bolshevik rule during the establishment of about one third of all new publishing houses as Jewish initiatives. These were the so-called private cooperatives, whose publishing portfolios¹⁹ were of a cultural-educational nature.²⁰ Their owners had been able to escape nationalization chiefly for two reasons: firstly, because the Bolsheviks had foreseen that the Soviet state-sponsored publishing house *Gosizdat*,²¹ founded in May 1919, would not be capable of satisfying the growing need for literature as part of the Bolshevik literacy campaigns. Formerly catering to a small elitist group of readers, the *intelligentsia*, literary products now had to serve a mass audience thirsting for knowledge and education. The requirements of this new mass audience were accommodated by the literacy campaigns during the initial stage of Bolshevik rule, 1918–21, aiming at the inclusion of ever more people into the revolutionary movement and bringing them together in the common cause.²² The Bolshevik leaders thus found it necessary, for a certain time at least, to rely on the private cooperatives, thus profiting for an extended period from Jewish expertise in the preparation and publication of learning resources.

In 1921, when a paper shortage, obsolete print technologies, and the lack of skilled labour seriously jeopardized the production of books in Soviet Russia, Bolshevik leaders decided to outsource Russian publishing to Berlin, which at that time was a centre of competence and professionalism in the printing and publishing industry. They assumed that it would be easier for the private publisher-entrepreneurs, with their contacts abroad, knowledge of

19 Juniberg, “Evrei-izdateli i knigotorgovtsy russkogo zarubezhia,” 129–141.

20 Among them were *Alkonost* (run by Samuil M. Aliansky) and *Gelikon* (run by Abram G. Vishniak), see “Khronika i raznye zametki,” 9–10, 21; *Petropolis* (run by Iakov N. Blokh and Abram S. Kagan), see Lozinsky, “Petropolis;” *Ogonki* (established by the editor, A. G. Levinson, and the publisher, Zinovii Grzhebin, who also ran the *Grzhebin* publishing house); *Vozrozhdenie* (run by A. B. Levinson and L. Z. Katz); *Efron* (by Ilya Efron); and *Kopeika* (by Benedikt Katlovker, Alexander E. Kogan, and Gorodetskii), see Gessen, *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii*, 333–334.

21 Acronym for Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo [state-owned publishing house].

22 Golubeva, *Gorki-Izdatel'*, 97.

foreign languages, and negotiating skills, to build supportive and commercial relationships with German publishers, and to procure their help for the provision of printing paper and equipment, as the latter might prefer to deal with a private publisher rather than a representative of *Gosizdat*.²³

The publishing houses *Gelikon*, *Petropolis*,²⁴ and *Epokha*²⁵ opened branches in Berlin. Other publishers founded new presses, either independently,²⁶ or under the auspices of German publishers.

Instrumental in this respect was an agency established by Alexander E. Kogan, who launched a *Bureau for Typographical Engineering and Support* [Печатно Техническое Бюро]²⁷ as part of his publishing house *Russkoe Iskusstvo* [Russian Art], founded in Berlin in 1921. This Bureau served as a first point of contact for publishers from countries with “strong currency” who intended to transfer their businesses to Berlin. Set up to help them surmount “the enormous technical obstacles they encountered at every step and turn when trying to establish themselves in Germany,”²⁸ it became an important link in a chain stretching from the *Narkompros*,²⁹ the Soviet Peoples’ Commissariat for Education, to the German publishing and printing sector in Berlin and Leipzig.

Indeed, those years saw a symbiosis that turned out to be unique in the history of publishing, enabled by the attitude of German publishers among whom the Jewish presence was also very prominent. *Mosse*, *Ullstein*, *Fischer*, *Philo*, *Schocken*, *Wolf*, and *Cassirer* are cases in point. During the 1920s they began to consider book design and presentation to be at least as important as text. In their search for graphic artists, designers, and illustrators, they welcomed experts like Kogan. Exemplary are the collaborations between *Ullstein* and *Russkoe Iskusstvo*, *Mosse*³⁰ and *Znaniia* [Knowledge],³¹ and between *Grzhebin* and the *Spamersche Verlagsdruckerei* in Leipzig. *Ullstein* furthermore helped

23 Gorki, “Telegramma zaveduiushchego izdatel’stvom ‘Vsemirnaia Literatura,’” 67–95, 73.

24 Lozinskii, “Petropolis.”

25 “Izdatel’stvo Epokha,” 35.

26 Examples include *Grzhebin*, *Grani*, *Mysl*, *Obelisk*, *Ogonki*, and *Efron*.

27 “Khronika Izdatel’stva ‘Russkoe Iskusstvo,’” 41–42.

28 Ibid.

29 Acronym for “narodny kommissariat prosveshcheniia” [Soviet People’s Commissariat for Education].

30 Stanka, “V. S. Voitinsky,” 237–251.

31 “Bibliografiia: Russkaia kniga za-granitsei,” 18.

the Yiddish Klal-farlag, a continuation of the Folks-farlag in Kiev, but also lent a hand to V. D. Nabokov (the father of the novelist) in setting up his publishing house Slovo [The Word].³² While *Ullstein* supported *Russkoe Iskusstvo* in terms of finance and commerce,³³ it profited from its owner's expertise in high-quality art printing and graphic design while broadening its publishing portfolio by moving into intellectual literary journalism and book publishing, with a special interest in book-cover design.³⁴

Many German publishers thus acknowledged the skills of their newly-arrived peers and appreciated them as inspiring visitors to learn from, rather than as competitors or suspicious strangers to be shunned. Their attitude was welcomed by the new Bolshevik elites, as it helped them to maintain their programme of national enlightenment despite the crisis of book publishing in Russia. At the same time, it improved the positions of Jewish publisher-entrepreneurs, whose mobility was a valuable asset to what proved to be a lucrative business during the period of German hyperinflation. And although it is the cultural aspect of their intermediacy that is under discussion here, both mobility and profit played their respective roles within this "brokerage."

What exactly does cultural brokerage entail?

The term "brokerage" was originally applied in the field of economics, where it designates a third party involved in a commercial transaction as an intermediary or a facilitator between seller and purchaser. Here it is applied to the analysis of inter- and trans-cultural agency.³⁵ Cultural brokers are agents who are deliberately active in intercultural communication, attempting to teach, promote, or simply to enable exchange across cultural or religious borders.³⁶

The use of brokerage is advantageous, because brokers know the markets, products, and prices, besides having established contacts with producers and prospective clients; i.e. they have access to resources and tools that may not be available to an individual, especially a newcomer to the field. The meaning of the word extends nowadays to acts of mediation, or negotiations, as in the brokering of a peace treaty.

32 Fuks, "Yiddish Publishing Activities in the Weimar Republic," 417–434.

33 "Khronika i raznye zametki: Novoe russkoe khudozhestvennoe izdatel'stvo," 11–12.

34 *The People of the Book*, 11–12, 20.

35 Jaspert, "Mendicants, Jews, and Muslims at Court in the Crown of Aragon."

36 *Ibid.*

However, meanings are not always so explicit. Attitudes change, some faster than others, which is also reflected in the connotation of brokerage. Today, brokerage can be perceived as a loaded term, i.e. a term that has assumed a connotation within a discourse; one of those words that, besides its explicit, public meaning contains an implicit hidden meaning, or association, depending on the attitude and experience of the communicator and the receiver. Hence, the application of “cultural brokerage” within the Jewish context, in the present case referring to mobile agents active in the publishing business, requires clarification. Here it serves as a tool to describe and analyse the activities of Jewish publishers in Berlin, with “cultural brokers” mainly referring to “cultural intermediaries” and “advocates” or “agents of cultural change.”³⁷ In order to scrutinize their space of activity, three types of agents can be discerned: *others*, *emissaries*, and *go-betweens*.³⁸

Others

The *others*, according to Jaspert’s conceptual model on Jewish intermediacy,³⁹ comprise all individuals who live—whether voluntarily or not—in a cultural environment that is different from their own. In the present context, this concept applies to the Russians staying in Berlin, either as emigrants waiting in the wings for the Bolshevik regime to collapse, or voluntarily as visitors travelling on Soviet passports.

For both groups, the preliminary character that informed their intended sojourn had implications on those cultural agents who would use the German capital as a hub to maintain links between the communities of *Russia Abroad* and *Russia at Home*, between the old, pre-revolutionary Russia, which had virtually ceased to exist, but lived on among the growing Russian communities in Berlin and other centres of emigration, and those staying in Soviet Russia where the Bolshevik regime was still weak.

Hoping for an imminent return to their homeland, the emigrants had undertaken to maintain the Russian spirit among the scattered Russian communities. Their agency struck a balance between the urge to assert and celebrate communal particularities and the need for a broader public.⁴⁰ It becomes most visible in the Russian periodical culture they developed in Berlin, in order to promote

37 Michie, *Working Cross-Culturally*, 40–41.

38 Jaspert, “Mendicants, Jews, and Muslims at Court in the Crown of Aragon.”

39 Ibid.

40 Guesnet, “Russian Jewish Cultural Retention,” 6.

internal cohesion among Russian expatriates without the infrastructure of state institutions,⁴¹ and to promote links between them while also combating the subversion of Russian language, literature, and art. This intention informed the mission of the almanacs they launched in Berlin.

These almanacs primarily addressed Russian-speaking audiences, with the exception of graphical material, which offered German, English, and French translations of the captions. Hence, since the publishers considered their sojourn in Berlin to be preliminary from the outset, these publications focused first and foremost on building bridges between Soviet Russia and Russians living outside the Soviet Union. Only to a lesser extent were they intended to help their readers negotiate between home, the emigrant community, and the host society.⁴²

Their almanacs included the above-mentioned *Teatr i zhizn'* [Theatre and Life], *Spolokhi* [Northern Lights], and *Vereteno* [Spindle]. *Teatr i zhizn'* appeared under the editorship of Eugen Grünberg, V. V. Klopotovskiy [Leri], and Sergei Gorny, and was devoted to the propagation abroad of Russian scenic art, and writings about the work and life of artists in Russia both at home and abroad.⁴³ *Spolokhi*, on the other hand, was launched as a journal of literature, art and society. It covered essays, poetry and literary criticism, thus resuming the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literary journalism and following in the footsteps of the pre-revolutionary “thick journal.” Here in Berlin, it had undertaken “to serve Russian literature and culture from an unwelcoming and unwanted distance,”⁴⁴ as the editor Alexander Drozdov pointed out in his mission statement.

While both *Teatr i zhizn'* and *Spolokhi* appeared regularly between 1921 and 1923, the literary-artistic almanac *Vereteno*, also conceived as a monthly bulletin, remained an ephemeral undertaking. Established in May 1922 as the organ of the eponymous association *Vereteno*, its aim was twofold: to combat, by a particular ideological agenda, the subversion of Russian art and literature, in particular the contamination of the Russian language,⁴⁵ and to promote communication with similar creative forces in Russia, rather than restricting its activities to the Russian diaspora communities.⁴⁶ Hence the

41 Schlögel, *Berlin Ostbahnhof Europas*, 104.

42 Ibid.

43 Mission statement from the editors, *Teatr i zhizn'*, 1–2.

44 Drozdov, “Domashnie stranitsy,” 27–28.

45 “Literaturnoe sodruzhestvo ‘Vereteno,’” 20.

46 “Vereteno,” 15.

symbol of the spindle [Russian “vereteno”], which suggested a device that supports itself and spins the fragile thread between the emigrant communities and the mother country during these difficult times. Although the initiative of *Vereteno* members turned out to be abortive due to internal disputes and discord,⁴⁷ its idea was subsequently revived by the almanac *Chisla* [Numbers], launched in Paris in 1930.

All these periodicals supported communication between Russian metropolitan and diaspora communities. But they also turned out to be carriers of group identity for the dispersed Russian emigrants, striking a balance between entertainment and comfort, with a tenor set by the yearning for the homeland, the lack of experience in coping with exile, and the hope for a swift return. While steering clear of politics, they promoted joint projects, with special attention given to music, literature, and the performing arts: the ballet, the theatre, and the New Russian Cinema.

The endeavours of these agents to maintain the dialogue between creative forces in Russia and in Berlin during the years 1921–24, and the strong interaction they facilitated between what was eventually to crystallize into two divergent branches of Russian cultural production⁴⁸—Soviet and émigré—represent the most prominent feature of “Russian Berlin.” It made the German capital a place of dynamic exchange, rather than a closed system of émigré culture, and distinguished the “Russian Berlin” from “Russian Paris,” “Russian Prague,” or any other centre of the post-1917 emigration.⁴⁹ It is therefore justified to label the agency of these “others” as cultural brokerage.

Emissaries

While the agency of the “others” remained largely confined to Russian language communities, the cultural brokerage of the “emissaries,” in contrast, implied crossing linguistic barriers. It concerned agents who had left for Berlin, as discussed above, on the instructions of the Bolshevik government, perhaps with a degree of voluntariness that remains open to speculation, the so-called *emissaries*, a term that, according to Jaspert, describes those cultural brokers who actively or deliberately transfer cultural messages.⁵⁰

47 Piotrovskii, Letter to the editors; Alekseev, Letter to the editors; see also Fleishman et al., 1983, 86.

48 Struve, 1954, 389–406.

49 Fleishman, Hughes, and Raevskii, *Russkii Berlin*, 2.

50 Jaspert, “Mendicants, Jews, and Muslims at Court in the Crown of Aragon.”

In the first instance, these emissaries mediated between the new Bolshevik elites in Soviet Russia and the German publishing sector. In the second instance, both groups made use of their “sacred craft” to disseminate knowledge into society at large, primarily to German Berliners in the immediate environment of Russian communities staying in Berlin, but also to European and global readers, while making use of the success story of the Ballets Russes as the first successful Russian artistic endeavour to go global, and of Russian creative forces scattered in other countries of emigration, France in particular, where the *Mir Iskusstva* [World of Art] group had just been reunited.

A first group of emissaries comprised the owners of the private cooperatives sent to Berlin: Jewish publisher-entrepreneurs who, due to the educational nature of their portfolios, were appreciated by the institutions of the new Russia, in particular the Soviet commissars at the *Narkompros* who had instructed them to raise funds for Soviet book production and set up their business in Berlin. To this end, publishers had contrived a strategy that was both extraordinary and ingenious. While securing the provision of paper and print facilities from German publishers,⁵¹ they took advantage of the global interest in Russia’s destiny during this period of political turmoil, and displayed the oeuvre of Russian artist-exiles. In that respect, they addressed target groups that had shortly before been generated in Paris by the members of the *Mir Iskusstva* group, a circle of artists around Sergei Diaghilev, formed in 1898. The costumes and stage decorations these artists had created for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes from 1909 onward were the first Russian art project to be highly appreciated by western audiences. Originating from St. Petersburg, the group was now reunited on foreign soil,⁵² which they celebrated with an exhibition organised at the Paris gallery “La Boétie” in June and July 1921.

The aim of this exhibition was twofold: to generate empathy among the Parisian public for Russia’s destiny, and to assign a greater visibility to the oeuvre of the *miriskusstniki*, as stipulated in the exhibition brochure:

In the chaos that represents the modern world in a painful gestation of the days to come all eyes are on Russia: a new mystery hovers over her, adding to her traditional mystery. We are waiting anxiously in the dark for the sun to rise on her new destinies; for it is not only political and economic interest that binds us to this vast empire of the European orient. Deep empathy unites the French spirit to the Slavic soul. [...] We have already known her musicians and dancers.

51 Marten-Finnis, “Outsourcing Culture,” 61–86.

52 Bénéдите, Untitled speech.

And in these dark times when the iron curtain between us and the great tragedy which is committing its wild acts behind the river Weichsel and the northern shores of the sea, it is they, the musicians and the dancers that remind us of the living Russia. But her artists are less well known to us. The image certainly has a language that needs no translation; it doesn't have, with the exception of prints, the precious facility of replication and expression that the book has. It is confined to its individual role.⁵³

The publicity that the instigators, A. E. Kogan and Georgi Lukomsky, created around their exhibition helped them to launch a campaign for the internationalisation of Russian art and its display to audiences well beyond the confines of Paris. They correctly gauged that Russian Silver Age⁵⁴ art, as displayed in the décor of the Ballets Russes performances, would still find a receptive audience⁵⁵ in Paris and other capitals of the Western world. They therefore referred their target groups to the magnificent exhibitions of Russian paintings in Paris and London and Pavlova's success story in Paris, as well as the outstanding concerts of Russian music, Diaghilev's Ballet, and the mastery and refinement of Russian stage and choreography⁵⁶ such as *The Firebird*.⁵⁷ Indicative of this view is the mission statement of *Teatr i zhizn'*, which points out that

foreigners often look down haughtily on our political clumsiness and lack of talent that has thrown us out of our homeland to unfamiliar shores, with scorn they look down on our social helplessness, our never-ending inner dissensions. But once Russian art appears before them, in gesture, in word, sound or colour, they instinctively bow their heads and remember in awe Russia's creative originality.⁵⁸

In shared editorship, Kogan and Lukomsky envisaged the launch of illustrated monographs in German, French, and English, in which to present reproductions of works by the artist-decorators Léon Bakst, the most prominent scenic artist of the time,⁵⁹ and Konstantin Somov; editions on fifteenth- to

53 Ibid.

54 The metaphorical characterization for Russian culture from the 1880s to 1914.

55 Raeff, "Emigration," 21.

56 Lukomsky, "Itogi i zadachi," 3–4.

57 Ballet by Igor Stravinsky, world premiere in Paris, 1910.

58 Mission statement from the editors, *Teatr i zhizn'*, 1–2.

59 Marten-Finnis, "The Return of Léon Bakst."

seventeenth-century Russian art, and a number of illustrated volumes about the architectures of ancient Kiev, ancient St. Petersburg, and ancient Moscow.⁶⁰ Moreover, they had editions on Russian graphics and design⁶¹ in the pipeline, which they intended to publish in *Russkoe Iskusstvo* in Berlin. For mid-1921, they planned the launch of two international reviews: *L'Art Russe—The Russian Art—Die Russische Kunst*, and *Zhar ptitsa* [The Firebird], the former edited by Lukomsky, head of the Paris-based affiliate of *L'art Russe*, the latter with Kogan signing as art director and chief editor, residing in Berlin.

For *L'Art Russe*, Kogan promised expert articles under the broad headings “Russian art exhibitions abroad and Russian artistic life in Europe and America;” “bibliographical material disseminated by Russian art editions;” “public sales and auctions of Russian art works,” and “chronicle information, press items and Rossica.”⁶²

Zhar ptitsa's art section, on the other hand, was designed to share with global audiences the treasures of the Russian artistic heritage: high-quality tableaux and front covers designed by the artist-decorators Bakst, Bilibin, Griogriev, Gontcharova, Iakowleff, Soudeikine, Stelletsky, und Tchekhonin, together with the history of each artist's background in Russia and their careers abroad; insights about the oeuvre of Russian sculptors; illustrations from Old Russia; contributions on Russian architecture (monasteries, fortresses, the masters of eighteenth-century architecture; traditional Russian countryside dwellings, the so-called “Izbas,” and imperial palaces together with their artistic miracles), and metropolitan and provincial Russian museums; leading representatives of Russian stage, ballet, and opera; and Russian costumes, books, and folk dance.⁶³

Not only was *Zhar ptitsa*'s editorial programme much more sophisticated compared to *L'art Russe*, its lifespan of five years (1921–26) with fourteen issues in all, greatly exceeded that of *L'art Russe*, of which only three issues appeared. *Zhar ptitsa*, as a matter of fact, also topped the lifespan of all other Russian periodicals launched in Berlin during the early 1920s. Only the last issue of 1926 appeared in Paris.

The review's elegant appearance, its Silver Age-inspired format and typography, its lavish illustrations employing the latest technologies of

60 “Les éditions de ‘L'Art Russe’.”

61 “Khronika i raznye zametki: Novoe russkoe khudozhestvennoe izdatel'stvo,” 11–12.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

fine-art printing, photography, and book ornamentation were outstanding. They reminded Russian emigrants of the extravagant, Russian pre-revolutionary art reviews *Mir Iskusstva* (1899–1904) and *Apollon* (1909–13), and enabled foreign readers to revisit the success story of Ballets Russes performances.

In order for his art editions and reviews to reach global audiences, Kogan made use of the effective distribution network established during his long experience as an internationally renowned professional in art printing and graphic design:⁶⁴ in France and Belgium through the affiliates of Russkoe Iskusstvo, the Société Moskva, and the Société N. P. Karbasnikoff; in the United States through Brentanos Booksellers New York and Washington; in the United Kingdom and Ireland through Marc Wilenkin's Agency of Russian Newspapers and Periodicals; and to South America through the Gregorio A. Kassian Import of Russian Books, Music and Home-Industry Agency in Buenos Aires. Paris, London, New York, and Buenos Aires were also the cities of the biggest Ballets Russes triumphs. It is therefore no coincidence to see Kogan's publishing outlets at these places, as they can be related to the performances of Diaghilev's troupe, whose stage decorations, like the reviews of the "emissaries," were also Silver Age-inspired and the first successful encounter of Western audiences and Russian art.

In this way, Kogan secured a global readership willing to learn about the Russian artistic heritage, whose subscription fee provided an essential contribution to the funds for the Soviet book market.⁶⁵ In the years to come, *Zhar ptitsa* rose to be a prominent and enduring publishing project that united contributing artists in exile and Bolshevik animators in their endeavours to establish a mass audience for solidarity and protest. Both groups profited from the brokerage of this Russian Jew whose dissemination expertise and skills in the art of printing enhanced the visibility of the former and the income of the latter.

The focus on art reviews directed to audiences in Germany, western Europe and the Americas, with a complete absence of political messages, was in line with the recommendations of *Narkompros* commissar Anatoli Lunacharskii, who had encouraged contacts with Weimar Germany; Soviet Russia, he argued, could only learn from Western approaches to proletarian culture. But he also understood that cultural contacts with western intellectuals would be feasible only as long as they steered clear of politics. He therefore instructed his emissaries to limit their activities strictly to the arts sector.⁶⁶ From this

64 Evreinov, "Khudozhnik pechatnogo dela," 5.

65 Marten-Finnis, "Outsourcing Culture."

66 Lunacharskii, "Peredovoi triad kul'tury na zapade."

instruction evolved their strategy to display the Russian artistic heritage and transport their audiences into an ideology-free zone in the past. This neutral stance and elimination of current political issues from their publishing projects appears to have been a decisive factor in their eventual emigration, after the Bolsheviks in Russia consolidated their power and no longer needed and supported their Jewish publisher-friends.

Yet the strategy of sheer display without any political message was copied in Berlin as late as 1924 by N. G. Berezhansky [pseudonym for Kozyrev] in his ephemeral art review *Zlatotsvet* [Chrysanthemum]. There is no obvious indication of a connection between Soviet institutions and Berezhansky. Rather, he seemed to have given up his career as a military correspondent and political journalist in Riga to use resources available in Berlin to display his private collection of Russian folklore⁶⁷ in *Zlatotsvet*, which he launched at the Olga Diakova publishing house in Berlin. However, Berezhansky's project documents that, over several years, the display of Russian art to international audiences developed its own dynamics through agents who were able to cross linguistic and professional barriers within Russian and German communities. The two groups predestined for this were the Russian Germans from the Baltics and agents who had a knowledge of Yiddish. Closely linked to Germany by culture or language, many of them stayed on in Berlin long after the city had ceased to be the capital of Russian emigration, as the 1925 census reveals.

Berezhansky's self-appointed mission points to a second group of emissaries. The year 1921 saw the professional printing of literary works disappear from Soviet Russian soil, and with it the trust of many writers in the new government;⁶⁸ they left, and with them their publishers, friends, and supporters, who followed them into exile and established new presses abroad, either independently, or under the auspices and with the support of local publishers and printers.

Hence, there were two groups of emissaries in Berlin: one pro-Soviet group following Bolshevik instructions, and the other, who had escaped the political and social situation in Soviet Russia and became an active part of Russian-speaking diaspora communities in Central and Western Europe, usually sharing an anti-Bolshevik attitude. This differentiation is important in order to understand their strategies of accommodation and resistance, and the complexity of Jewish agency in Berlin. One sees here the different interests of Jewish publishers and editors, and the relationships with their

67 Abyzov, "Rizhskaia gazeta," 221–239.

68 Juniberg, "Evrei-izdateli i knigotorgovtsy russkogo zarubezhia'."

(new) environment, and thus the specific transcultural exchange processes and entanglements that they had built up or were involved in before 1925 when Bolshevik control was asserted, closing the borders between East and West in Stalin's Soviet Union. Their Berlin-based activities were governed by the loyalties and alliances formed before and after 1917.

Yet the presence of publishers like Kogan also forces us to call into question the boundaries between the emigration and the Soviet Union that Russian emigrants and Soviet Russians eagerly tried to maintain. Kogan ran an émigré publishing house that was also an early Soviet enterprise, using resources available in Berlin to educate a global readership about Russian culture and to provide books for Soviet Russia, where resources were inadequate for their production. The nature of "services" publishers delivered thus largely depended not only on their varying degree of resistance or conformity to the new governing elites in Soviet Russia, but also on their experience in pre-revolutionary Russia.

Go-betweenes

The internationalisation of Russian art was also the quest of a third category of cultural brokers; the "go-betweenes," comprising those who mediate between two (or more) cultural spheres without being fully accepted members of either (or any) group.⁶⁹ In the present context, the term "go-betweenes" refers to a small group of people who actively and deliberately transferred cultural messages from Russia to the West and vice versa. In contrast to the "others" and the "emissaries," who were looking to their Russian heritage and avoiding any reference to current political events, the agency of the "go-betweenes" was governed by their Utopian vision and the ideals of the new society in Soviet Russia, and thus highly politicised.

While the emissaries' intention to display Russian Silver Age art in the West to support the patronage of Soviet book production has never been publicly admitted—we know about it only from the intensive correspondence in 1919–21 between Maxim Gorki, Vladimir I. Lenin, and Vatslav V. Vorovskii, the head of *Gosizdat*⁷⁰—the "go-betweenes" explicitly acknowledged their mediating role. They comprised avant-garde artists rehearsing Constructivism and Suprematism on new ground, using the German capital not just as a centre of publishing resources, but also as a hub from which to advocate their views and launch their manifestos into the wider world.

69 Jaspert, "Mendicants, Jews, and Muslims at Court in the Crown of Aragon."

70 Gorki, A. M., "Pis'mo A. M. Gorkogo V. V. Vorovskomu."

“Go-betweens” did not identify with the emigrant community. With their statement on a new international style, “By the strength of a combined effort the new collective international style is emerging, and all who aim to play a part in its development are friends and comrades-in-arms,”⁷¹ they made a provocative effort to contrast with, or even counteract, the nostalgic tones displayed in the publishing projects of the “others” and the “emissaries,” who in turn labeled them as chaotic, disorganized, and unable to identify with the internal system and discipline of the Russian community in Berlin.⁷²

They turned up in Berlin around the time of the Treaty of Rapallo, by which Germany accorded the USSR *de jure* recognition. Motivated by the prospect of cultural exchange that both governments encouraged, the agency of two go-betweens stands out: El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, both of them cosmopolitan Russian Jews, the former an artist, architect, typographer, and theoretician, the latter a writer and journalist. While instructed by the *Narkompros* to present the art of the New Russia to Europe, and travelling legitimately on Soviet passports, they were as yet unsure whether they were going to end up as future emigrants or Soviet citizens.

Their focus was on publicity rather than publishing, heralding the new Soviet spirit in two prominent projects: the *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung* [*First Russian Art Exhibition*], which took place in the *Van Diemen* Gallery in October 1922,⁷³ and *Veshch–Gegenstand–L’objet*, a spectacular trilingual review of international avant-garde creativity published in the spring of that same year.⁷⁴

Transfer of knowledge and material objects

Initiated by the *Narkompros*, together with a series of other exhibitions, the *First Russian Art Exhibition* was organised by El Lissitzky, Naum Gabo, David Shterenberg, and Nathan Altman. Lissitzky also designed the cover for its catalogue.⁷⁵ The show displayed more than 500 exhibits. It was intended as a showcase of Soviet artistic achievements and a focus for creating and harnessing sympathy for the new regime.⁷⁶ It had undertaken to create

71 “Blokada Rossii konchaetsia,” 3

72 Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, “Zdes’ i tam,” 4.

73 Shterenberg, *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*, 1.

74 Marten-Finnis and Duchan, “Transnationale Öffentlichkeit,” 37–48.

75 Nakov, *The First Russian Show*, 11.

76 Lodder, “Ideology and Identity,” 339–364.

a forum for cultural exchange between European and Russian artists.⁷⁷ The most important creations of the Russian avant-garde were exhibited in Berlin, and a variety of innovative Utopian projects were unveiled. Among them were works by the organisers Lissitzky and Shterenberg, but also by Wassili Kandinsky, Marc Chagall, and Naom Gabo, who lived in Berlin as exiles. The fact that they saw their works flagged as “Soviet art” indicates not only their unresolved status, but also the blurred boundary of what exactly was classified as “Soviet art.”

While their works served the instigators of the exhibition for disseminating the message of the revolution to German audiences, the graphic designer and art theoretician Henryk Berlewi referred to it as “New Jewish art.”⁷⁸ He delineated two trends in contemporary Jewish art, one preoccupied with romantic folklore and mysticism, the other “with the modern universal task.”⁷⁹

It is no coincidence that such debates took place in Berlin, whereas inside Russia, Bolshevik leaders became increasingly reluctant to allow national artistic styles, imposing more and more political and social restrictions on the development of individual talents. Outside Russia, however, they were still promoting them. Although many conservative and avant-garde artists, including the principal Jewish artists, had objected to Bolshevik cultural politics and left the country, and only a modest Jewish presence remained, notably in the theatre,⁸⁰ European artists continued to look with admiration to Soviet Russia, where the new revolutionary social context had provided rich fodder for avant-garde artists.

“We have tremendous support in the Russians!” said Theo van Doesburg, leader of the *De Stijl* movement in Holland, in 1922; “the Germans are gutless in comparison [...] great things can happen.”⁸¹

Kurt Schwitters, the editor of the Dadaist review *Merz*, was similarly impressed. He found the Constructivists’ principles irresistible.⁸² They were international in outlook, strove for a better world, dismissed superficialities and ignored their own needs in the quest for a new order. They valued the

77 Shterenberg, *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*, 3–4.

78 Berlewi, “Yidische kinstler in der hayntiger rusisher kundst,” 14–18.

79 Ibid.

80 Goodman, “Alienation and Adaptation of Jewish Artists,” 28–39.

81 Hemken, *El Lissitzky*, 29.

82 Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 117–118.

group rather than the individual, emphasized the role of communication, and did not forget the common man.⁸³ He was so impressed with Lissitzky's ideas that he invited him to publish them in *Merz* in July⁸⁴ and October 1923.⁸⁵ In July 1924, Schwitters and Lissitzky jointly produced a double issue that is said to be the most remarkable of all issues.⁸⁶

It was here in Berlin that the Russian avant-garde established contacts with the luminaries of German art and architecture, among them Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, Hans Scharoun, Paul Klee, and Georg Grosz. Berlin was also where the Utopian vision of the Russian avant-garde met the projects of the "Gläserne Kette" [The Glass Chain] and other German trends, and where Russian and German avant-garde artists created a shared history, developing from Utopian representations towards functional approaches in 1919 and to the realisation of Utopia in the late 1920s.⁸⁷

Confident in the commercial possibilities of such innovative art, Berlin art dealers greeted the exhibition with enthusiasm.⁸⁸ The response of the local public, however, to whom the exhibition was presented with a charitable façade, was less warm.⁸⁹ The profits made from the sale of works in the exhibition were to go to a fund to help Russian people afflicted by famine.⁹⁰ According to Lukomsky, fewer than 1,700 entrance tickets had been sold during the first two weeks, whereas during the first two weeks of the Paris *Mir Iskusstva* exhibition of 1921, the number had topped 15,000.⁹¹

Knowledge about the other and the other's knowledge

To create a forum for young Soviet and western European masters to exchange their views on the latest trends of avant-garde creativity was also the mission of the trilingual avant-garde review *Veshch–Gegenstand–L'objet*. Their

83 Ibid., 126–127.

84 Lissitzky, "Topographie der Typographie," 47.

85 Lissitzky, "Proun," 1.

86 Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 155.

87 Marten-Finnis and Duchan, "Transnationale Öffentlichkeit."

88 Westheim, "Die Ausstellung der Russen," 493–498.

89 "Russkaia khudozhestvennaia vystavka v Berline," 23–24.

90 Shterenberg, *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*, 2.

91 Lukomsky, "Russkaia vystavka v Berline," 68–69.

editors, El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, had spent their formative years in Western Europe and were thus familiar with Russian and European innovative cultural trends and challenges. Published in Russian, German, and French, *Veshch* presented an international rallying call to avant-gardists who had been separated by the Great War.⁹² It appeared at *Skythen*, whose owner, Alexander Shreyder, was a declared emigrant—only one of many examples showing that Russian Berlin saw intellectual exchange taking precedence over political recriminations, and that publishing portfolios were governed by cultural needs and market conditions, rather than ideological convictions.

In February 1922, Lissitzky wrote to Malevich “[...] We experienced in Vitebsk very good, very significant and very multi-temporal times [МНОГОВРЕМЕННОЕ время]. However, my pulse is thumping and I follow it. [...] I’ve organized a review, jointly with Ehrenburg. As you will see—*Veshch*—an affirmation of new art. [...]. So, we come in contact with everything that is new in the world, and in any case it will be an international review. France, Germany, Italy, America, Hungary, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have already joined us. [...] The first issue will appear in two weeks. [...]”⁹³

This concept of transcending national boundaries and relating developments in post-revolutionary Soviet art and design to similar trends in the West was unprecedented. *Veshch* published authors from Russia, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, and the United States, as well as translated material from *L'Esprit Nouveau* and other leading avant-garde reviews. While articles on conceptual issues and contemporary Western art were published mostly in Russian, sometimes along with German and French translations, distinctive material on Russian contemporary art and Russian exhibitions⁹⁴ appeared in German and French only.

Although the transfer of these cultural messages was necessarily linked to translation, it went far beyond purely linguistic assignments. Ehrenburg and Lissitzky did not simply transfer texts from one language into another, or from one country to another. Their European experience had enabled a knowledge transfer that included mutual exchange of views, comments and open debate, and was eventually complemented by the transport of material objects displayed in the First Russian Exhibition later that year.

92 On the nationalistic orientations in the avant-garde movements before, during, and after World War I, see Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War*; Paret, *German Encounters with Modernism*, 133–185; Basner, “My i zapad,” 27–35.

93 Lissitzky, “Pis’mo Malevichu,” 150.

94 Ulen, “Die Ausstellungen in Rußland,” 18–19.

Like Kogan, Lukomsky, and Berezhansky, the editors of *Veshch* had crossed linguistic barriers. Unlike the former, however, they did not publish for commercial reasons nor to comfort or entertain. Neither did they lure their readers into the ideology-free zones of the past. Their project displayed a Utopian vision, heralding a new spirit and an affirmative positioning, as had been advocated by the UNOVIS group.⁹⁵ While drawing upon their experience in both Western Europe and Russia, they were not in complete agreement but still loyal to the political agenda of the New Russia, and they wanted to see their revolutionary message disseminated into society at large.

Their method of combining innovative developments in avant-garde art and design with cultural and social progress⁹⁶ found a receptive audience in the West. *Veshch* thus came to be associated with a broad notion of artistic creativity that encompassed painting, sculpture, and design, and became identified with a politically progressive, but not explicitly Marxist, ideological stance.⁹⁷

The way Lissitzky and Ehrenburg approached interdisciplinary issues related to the visual and scenic arts, architecture, literature, and music, was well received by their European peers. Rather than advocating a systematic concept, the editors of *Veshch* offered discussion and dispute from different and even contradictory perspectives, which distinguished their approach from the more systematic attitudes towards Constructivism,⁹⁸ as expressed for example by its Soviet Russian advocate Alexei Gan in his manifesto *Constructivism*.⁹⁹ While Gan established a complete thesaurus of Constructivism, strengthened by Marxist quotations, Lissitzky and Ehrenburg flagged an open text as a forum—a space for assembly, where experts could gather and debate Constructivism, thus allowing its concept to emerge gradually. To this end they chose a particularly suitable tool: a questionnaire filled in by leading figures of the European avant-garde, among them Fernand Léger, Gino Severini, Jacques Lipchitz, Alexander Archipenko, and Juan Gris, to document these artists' individual views on Constructivism.¹⁰⁰

95 Acronym for *utverditeli novogo iskusstva* [affirmators of new art] (Avant-garde group established by Kazimir Malevich in Vitebsk).

96 Lodder, "El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism," 36.

97 Ibid. 38.

98 Dukhan, "El Lissitzky," 1–20.

99 Gan, *Constructivism*, 1.

100 "Anketa," *Veshch—Gegenstand—Objet* 1–2, 16–18; "Anketa," *Veshch—Gegenstand—Objet* 3, 11–12.

This path towards a definition, namely by gradually shaping the subject matter through debate and discussion while overcoming contradictions, is very similar to the Talmudic discourse of intertextuality, where the principal meaning germinates through an infinity of rabbinical disputes.¹⁰¹

As the editors of *Veshch* and organisers of the exhibition, Lissitzky and Ehrenburg, along with Shterenberg, Altman, and Gabo, effected a process of cultural transfer that occurred on various levels, both textual and material. In the present case, the transport of textual messages (*Veshch*) preceded the transport of material representations (Exhibition). As a result of their agency, a comprehensive body of knowledge about the other, but also the other's knowledge, was transported from Russia to the West, and vice versa in the case of *Veshch*, which makes Ehrenburg and Lissitzky cultural brokers in the sense of truly mediating "go-betweens," who made use of Berlin as both a centre of Russian publishing culture and a hotspot of communication.

As it turned out, the sojourn in Berlin of all cultural agents discussed in this article was temporary. Paradoxically, many of the "others" became half-way émigrés and returned to Russia, among them *Spolokhi* editor Alexander Drozdov. The "emissaries," ironically, among them Kogan, Lukomsky, Grzhebin, and Kagan, ended up in Paris. Their transition from preliminary to permanent emigration distinguished the "emissaries" from the "go-betweens," most of whom returned to Russia, in the case of Lissitzky and Ehrenburg after extended periods of living abroad. Lissitzky's interlude between cultures¹⁰² ended in 1925 when he left Berlin, as he decided that revolutionary art was only possible in a revolutionary society.¹⁰³ Ehrenburg took a similar decision. His return to Russia did not surprise anyone, as he had become increasingly isolated among the Russian Berliners.¹⁰⁴ Gabo moved on to the United States; Shterenberg and Altman returned to Russia. Berezhansky, the editor of *Zlatotsvet*, returned to Riga in 1925 to resume his assignment for the newspaper *Segodnia*.

During the years to come, the "go-betweens" aligned their work with Soviet government politics, both at home and on future assignments abroad. A case in point is El Lissitzky's decoration of the Soviet pavilion at the international press exhibition (PRESSA) in Cologne in 1928, which became the greatest attraction of the entire PRESSA.¹⁰⁵

101 Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.

102 Lodder, "Ideology and Identity," 361.

103 Williams, *Culture in Exile*, 307–308.

104 Arbatov, "Dnevnik. Vospominaniia. Dokumenty," 106–122.

105 Marten-Finnis and Dukhan, "Propaganda and Design."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mediation of Russian art to Berlin, European, and global audiences was facilitated by cultural agents whose discursive skills were intrinsically linked to the Jewish tradition of intertextuality and the dissemination of knowledge. At first glance, their agency seems to support the general narrative of Jews as outsiders and typical “intermediaries” or “middlemen” in European history, basically in the area of economics and sciences. But there is more to it. They cannot be classified as “service nomads” in the sense of Slezkine, who referred to the Jews as people “specializing in the delivery of goods and services that natives were unable or unwilling to perform.”¹⁰⁶ Rather, in the present context, they were more experienced and could do it *better* than the natives.

After moving to Berlin they were even able to improve their services, whether they were Bolshevik, emigrant, or on a self-appointed mission, through the technical support and sponsorship provided by their German peers. Few publishers, however, outlasted the favourable conditions they had enjoyed during the period of German hyperinflation. Wage rates in the typographic industry had almost doubled, and postal rates increased by ten to fifteen times, with serious implications for distribution. While it had cost between one and a half and two dollars to dispatch fifty books abroad by registered post, by January 1924 it cost about twenty-six dollars,¹⁰⁷ which hugely affected circulation. But during the years before, Berlin’s position as a paradigmatic node of publishing knowledge, competence, and profit enabled them to use the German capital as a platform for the dissemination of their respective messages to both Russian and global communities, and thus to promote the city’s rise to a world metropolis.

Besides this aspect of dissemination as a powerful remnant of their Jewish heritage, their cultural agency entailed publishing projects that had borrowed their mission from the prehistory of the Jewish press and the distant forerunners of *Haskalah* journalism, with three characteristic features: their publishing projects maintained links between dispersed communities after their departure into a diaspora existence, a strategy mostly utilized by the “others;” they provided western readers with tuition and guidance on Russian art, a tool mostly used by the “emissaries;” and they established a forum for a diversity of communities to gather for debate and to proclaim their manifestos into the wider world, a forum mostly used by the “go-betweens.”

106 Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 4–39.

107 D., “Krizis russkogo knizhnogo dela v Germanii,” 84–86.

The tendency of these cultural brokers to consciously identify themselves collectively as Jewish, and forming particular bonds among each other, is not to be found in the Jewish content of their publishing projects. Neither is it found in any religious goals, but in their shared heritage and ideals as disseminators *par excellence*: firstly by maintaining links between communities scattered in the European diaspora; secondly, by heralding education and knowledge as a prerequisite for the survival of a tradition; and thirdly, by helping defined groups of people to communicate their ideas and to convey their messages to society at large.

Transferred to Berlin and shared with a wider international public, those ideals came to form prominent Jewish contributions to modern journalism, of which the genre of the *manifesto* is probably the most spectacular. It is derived from a type of journalism that is based on an inherent messianic vision and a powerful ethos of communication and outreach,¹⁰⁸ which aims to make the world a better place. This ambition is grounded in the strong spiritual responsibility of the Jewish community for the world community. It is part of the Jewish messianic hope *From Suffering to Redemption*, often intensified when preceded by a revolutionary or cataclysmic event. Such an event often produces a call for immediate commitment, enthusiastically nourished by a vision of the future alongside exhortations encouraging speedy action to transform the world. In the present context, the transformation evolving from the cultural agency of Jewish publishers was preceded by Revolution and Civil War, with three lasting effects: they initiated a globalisation of Russian art; they stimulated Berlin's rise to a world metropolis, and they helped to turn a considerable fraction of the Russian population into "people of the book."

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