This special issue of Canadian-American Slavic Studies is devoted to an exploration of the ways in which performance influenced all the art forms and became the chief device for unifying art forms in Russia in the period between 1900 and 1930. The contributions trace the parabola of Russia's great avant-garde surge from the moment when Russian artists in all fields became cognizant of Wagner's principle of the Gesamtkunstwerk to the sad descent of the line in Pavel Filonov's ill-starred career. Taken together they do, I believe, demonstrate the degree to which almost every artist of the period was influenced by the aesthetic of performance. Whether artists actually joined together to produce multi-media works for the theater or whether they retreated to their studies and studios to produce private, individual, and lyrical works, they had in mind conceptions of form and of relationship with the audience that drew from the example of theater. Performance can be regarded as perhaps the unifying key to the conception of art, artist, and audience that developed in the Russian avant-garde.

Two distinct phenomena show the primacy of theater in the period. In the theater itself there was a veritable explosion of new ideas in every realm of production including acting, directing, stage design, costume, and theater architecture. Marginal performance genres like the circus and the cabaret came into prominence and began to influence the mainstream performances of the theater. Ballet and dance developed into fuller, more theatrical performance genres. The written repertory expanded and literary materials were manipulated in new ways on the stage, for example in Meierkhol'd's iconoclastic production of Gogol's Revizor or the FEKS production of Mertvye dushi. The theatrical experimentation of the teens flowed directly in the twenties into the new medium of film.

Accompanying the resurrection of the theater as such, there was a seepage of theatrical and performance aesthetics into other art forms—as subject matter in works produced by painters and writers, as pressure to rethink the rela-

* The articles presented here were first delivered in earlier forms at Cornell University in the fall of 1982 at a conference made possible by the generous support of the Committee on Soviet Studies and the Center for International Studies.
tionship between artist and his audience when writers and painters were co-opted into theatrical productions, and as a new emphasis on values particularly appropriate to each art form in itself, following theater's rejection of "literariness" on stage.

These two phenomena were followed by a third, the theatricalization of public spaces and public life. The Futurists' spilling out into the streets and lecture halls was followed after the revolution by the ROSTA posters, by the decorated propaganda trains, and by the mass spectacles to celebrate important anniversaries, when the entire city became the artists' canvases, the entire public space a stage.

The dominance of "performance" in arts of all kinds created a complex situation where various aspects of the new aesthetic came into conflict with each other. The striving in modernist movements for the totally new led to a situation of extremity in the attempt to break with the communicative systems of the past. The modernists of the second decade of this century, and the Russians among them in particular, did this so successfully that it is difficult to go beyond them. It is hard to imagine a more radical break with traditional language than Futurist poetry in its most daring experiments. To go further would be to leave the realm of poetry altogether; the Futurists work on the boundary of what experimentation can do and still recognizably remain poetry. The same can be said for the movement away from representation in painting: one can go no further than Malevich. From that point the painter must turn to something else. As for theater, avant-gardists in the theater still cannibalize the ideas and experiments of this period. In every case there was nothing left for later avant-gardists but either to play out with refinements possibilities already found by the innovators of the futurist period, throughout Europe; to reject art entirely; or to restate the problem, not in terms of the means themselves.

The internal contradictions of the aesthetic of performance are already apparent in the moment when the practitioners of the various art forms crystallize a theatrical production, the famous performances of Victory Over the Sun in Petersburg in December 1913. The collaboration between the painter Kazimir Malevich, the composer Mikhail Matiushin, and the Futurist poet, Aleksei Kruchenyykh showed to what a degree theater had managed to subsume the talents of practitioners of the various forms. These were not primarily artists of the theater and yet to use the vehicle of performance to advertise their aesthetic program apparently seemed entirely natural to them.

Victory Over the Sun had a central place in the development of the avant-garde ethos, one just now coming to be fully realized as the significant Russian contribution comes into focus through belated scholarship on the peri-