The State Academy of Artistic Sciences was born in conditions hardly conducive to tranquil academic research. It was a time when a bitter struggle was being waged around issues of art, when the theater, leftists and rightists in the visual arts, Constructivism, and the Sociological and the Formalist methods in literature lay at the center of interminable polemics. Some extremist circles even questioned the need for state support of art. On the other hand, however, this conflict emphasized the need to form a competent and solid institution that could resolve the vital questions posed by the artistic policy of the government.

This state of affairs prompted Narkompros to establish a Permanent Scientific-Artistic Commission on May 7, 1921 — which was to grow into the future Academy. In their report at the first session of the Commission on June 16, A. V. Lunacharsky and P. S. Kogan (President of the Commission) noted the basic tasks and work plans of the Academy and in subsequent remarks the People's Commissar of Narkompros [Lunacharsky] defined the assignments that the Narkompros Collegium was entrusting to the Academy: "Within its walls, [the Academy] should unite competent representatives of all branches of art, specialists, and also individuals who have been involved in the Revolution. The Academy
must become a highly authoritative organ which will give support to the
Chief Artistic Committee which is supervising the artistic policies of our
country. At the moment there is much disagreement in matters of art, and
the various movements and, what is worse, the institutions guiding the
artistic life of the Republic are engaged in a bitter struggle. What is
needed, therefore, is a kind of common premise that can help resolve all
the vexed questions, an authoritative organ whose judgments, submitted
on the basis of rigorous scientific data, would be binding."

Such was the first assignment imposed upon the Academy — to be an
organ offering expertise and counsel to the higher state institution super-
vising the artistic life of the country, and this task lent a special character
to the way the Academy operated. In contrast to traditional scholarly in-
stitutes, the Academy confronted the urgent issues of life at once, fostering
a vital connection between theoretical research and the exigencies of
reality, between leading specialists in art on the one hand, and the
Narkompros executives headed by Lunacharsky on the other.

The task of the Academy was not only to heed the burning issues of
the day from the viewpoint of serious scholarly research, but also to plan
ahead "for eternity." Its task was to establish a scientific esthetic and to
impose a system upon past experiences, which included, as a matter of
fact, experiences accumulated in the sphere of art during the Revolution-
ary years. Art theory is still at an embryonic stage today and not even the
West is in possession of concrete esthetic canons.

That the tasks set before the Academy were vitally important was
confirmed by its rapid growth, for within a short time it became a major
scholarly center for those conducting research on issues of art.

II

From the very beginning, the structure of the Academy was deter-
mained by the needs of contemporary scholarship and the particular exi-
gencies that the Revolution had asserted. On October 7, 1921, five
months after its formation, the Commission changed into the Academy
and the basic sections were established. There are three major divisions
that make up the Academy, namely, the Psycho-Physical [Physico-Psy-
chological], Sociological, and Philosophical Departments. The former
concentrates on research involving the synthetic study of the artistic phe-
nomenon as a product of spiritual and material activity from the stand-
point of positive and empirical investigation into its a) elements, b) con-

5. Kogan confuses the two entities here, i.e., the Physico-Psychological Department
headed by Kandinsky in 1921 and the Psycho-Physical Laboratory that was founded in
1924.