lent teaching material for courses in Russian culture, Russian folklore, cultural anthropology, and women's studies.

Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, University of California, Davis


As beeswax melts and is reformed, so an ancient ritual carried by Ukrainian immigrants was reshaped and became an important part of Canadian-Ukrainian spiritual life. The core of the ritual is simple: a healer melts wax and pours it into a bowl of water held above the patient while reciting incantations, usually three, or a multiple of three, times. The basic ritual can be expanded to include fumigation with smoldering herbs, interpretation of the shapes assumed by the wax when in solidifies, and instructions for follow-up actions such as bathing with the water used in the ceremony. Yet this simple ritual is deemed effective in curing "fear sickness" and accompanying physical and psychological distress.

Rena Jeanne Hanchuk's account of the wax ceremony is as smooth as the wax shapes that indicate successful healing. She gives background on folk medicine, including some insightful discussion about the difference between scholarly and folk knowledge. She talks about the position of the healer in society and the sort of person who assumes this position. The relationship between folk medicine and religion is discussed and the author underscores that, while there are many non-Christian elements in both the actions and the words of the healing ceremony, the practitioners of it view their work as being supported by God. In fact, a typical formula states that it is the power of God which affects the cure, not the human actor speaking over the patient. Hanchuk gives the Ukrainian and often broader context of the elements of the wax ceremony: the incantations, water, which should ideally be drawn early in the morning, beeswax, the types of bowls used, the use of a knife in the ceremony, among others.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is Hanchuk's account of actual healing sessions which she witnessed. These ranged from an encounter with a man who spoke in English, requested a fee, worked by appointment, and had a makeshift waiting room, to sessions with women who served refreshments to their patients and turned over any money they earned to the church. Mrs. V. B., the best known and oldest of the informants, performed the most elaborate ceremony and had a complex surrounding belief system which included the need to protect herself from illness transfer when treating patients who were her seniors.

In addition to the account of the wax ceremony, Hanchuk provides photographs of the implements used by a folk healer and of some wax lumps produced by pouring, complete with interpretation of the meanings of the various shapes. There is an entire chapter of incantations, given in transliterated Ukrainian and translation. Useful charts help the reader see at a glance healer profiles, components of the ceremony, Christian elements, and Canadian adaptations. There is a glossary, especially of terms used for healers and for the ceremony, a list of interviews, and a bibliography. Throughout the book, the author offers attempts at interpretation and, toward the end, she discusses the contemporary context and offers a prognosis for the continuation of the wax ceremony in Canada. It is interesting that the ceremony has already survived translations into English, the language used by one of the more successful of Hanchuk's subjects. It is also indicative that, while discovering the source of the fear or the frightening event which made the patient sick is the motive for the healing ceremony in Ukraine today (my fieldwork in the Cherkasy and Kyiv regions, 1998) and was likely the
original motive in Canada, a number of healers admitted that they could not interpret the wax shapes well and often did not bother to try. Also, patients reported that relief came from the ceremony itself, regardless of diagnosis or lack of same. We have long suspected this to be the case and it is wonderful to receive folk confirmation.

The Word and Wax is an exemplary study. My quibbles with it are minor. I found the transliterated incantations difficult to read and would have preferred them in Ukrainian with parallel English translations. Mostly, I wish the author had done more: offered more interpretation, conducted more interviews, given more Ukrainian background from archival or published sources, drawn parallels collected in contemporary Ukraine. Making the reader wish for more, of course, is a tribute to what is already there. And I do hope we will see additional studies from Hanchuk and other Canadian and American folklorists. The fact that The Word and Wax is part of a series is a hopeful sign.

Natalie Kononenko, University of Virginia


Like other leading modernists in Russia and the West, El Lissitzky was a keen inventor of forms. In pursuit of his artistic goals he also became a versatile innovator in a much broader sense: after producing Suprematist works under the influence of Kazimir Malevich in the early 1920s, he experimented with photography and several years later came to reconcile his art in the service of the radically progressive, technologically advanced society envisioned after the Revolution. This ideal of social agency eventually involved him in virtually every branch of the visual arts, including large-scale exhibitions celebrating the Soviet state. Beyond the Abstract Cabinet for the first time explores the political and aesthetic aspects of Lissitzky's work in photomontage, photography and design from 1931 until his death from tuberculosis in 1941. Margarita Tupitsyn, Matthew Drutt, and Ulrich Pohlmann give special attention to the role of photography in Lissitzky's work and to his intense collaboration first with German and then with Soviet photographers and filmmakers.

In the course of his artistic career Lissitzky engaged in photography not as a distinct medium, and certainly not as pure art, but as a part of an open-ended array of available tools. Nor did he first engage in photography as a photographer. His first photogram, entitled 41 Lampe, created with the Dutch de Stijl artist Vilmos Huszar and published in the Dada periodical Merz in 1923 is analogous to his earlier investigations of abstraction and light in painting and in geometrical compositions known as Prouns (acronym for Project for the Affirmation of the New). Lissitzky continued to experiment with photography, and in 1924 he produced a series of portraits of his close friends, and a famous portrait of himself known as Constructor. Several years later in the essay about photo-writing, or photo-painting, entitled "Fotopis," he extolled the expressive potential of photography, attributing special importance to the creative possibilities of the negative. Eventually, photography and photomontage came to play a dominant role in his work.

Lissitzky traveled and worked abroad far more than any other Russian artist of his time. He studied engineering in Darmstadt and after 1921 made regular trips to Germany, both officially, to help export Soviet culture abroad, and attracted by better working conditions. In 1922, together with Ilya Ehrenburg, he published the tri-lingual periodical Vestnik-Gegenstand-Object whose objective was to disseminate the theories of Suprematism and Constructivism in the West and to act as international journal of contemporary culture. Significantly, the concept of the