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Two Towers

Peter Droege

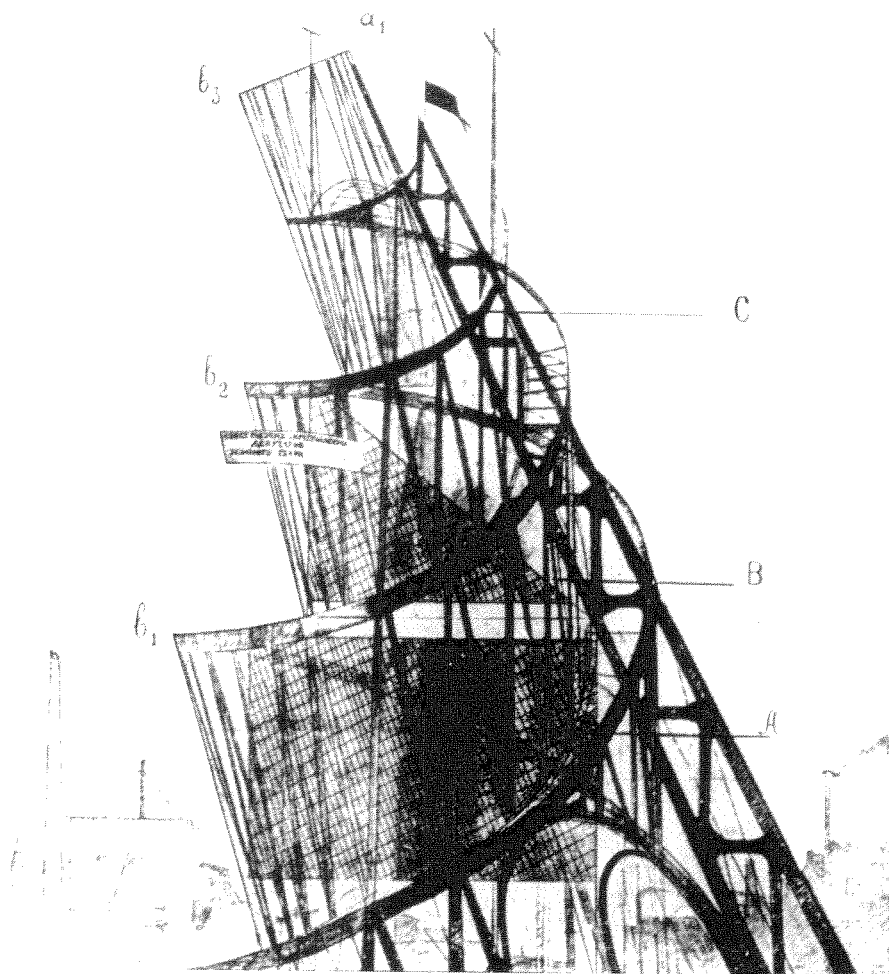
Babel's Tower

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shi'nar; and they dwelt there. And they said to each other, Go to, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime they had for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:1–9



Gustave Doré, 1832–1883, from the “Illustrated Bible” (around 1860), reprinted from *Rassegna V* (16/4, December, 1983).



Vladimir Tatlin, *Elevation of the Monument to the Third International*, 1919–1920, published on the cover of Nikolai Punin's *The Monument to the Third International*, Petrograd, 1920.

Tatlin's Tower

Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1920) marked a turning point in constructivism, imbuing it with social commitment. It was conceived to surpass the Eiffel Tower in height. Rooms were to rotate on three levels, marking off time like a clock. A cylinder on top, moving around its axis once a day, was meant to distribute the intended world government's decisions through "printing presses, propaganda offices, a telegraph office, projection equipment for the proposed large screen and a radio station." The central room, a pyramid for executive administrative committees, rotated once a month, and the base, a cube housing legislative functions and large meetings such as the International, moved around once a year. "Tatlin's tower provided an image of the social macrocosm, of collective man." It was a cosmological vision indeed, resting on the sphere of the earth as its first hall, its spire to reach toward the pole star. Social, economic, and psychological conflicts were resolved by the smooth functioning of the machine.¹ One could say that it, unconsciously, sought to reverse the damage inflicted onto mankind by God's punitive and preemptive expedition to Babel.

Note

¹ John Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).