Kazimir Malevich and Architectons as Monument:
On Looking at Early Modernism

Iryna Karaush


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Abstract

Kazimir Malevich and the Architectons as Monuments: Looking at Early Modernism examines Malevich’s 1919-1932 artistic exploration, architectons. Conventionally understood as early modern avant-garde art objects or as blueprints for a new urbanism, this thesis explores their function as monuments and as profound influences on how we now look at modernity. As monuments, I argue, they opened up a new way of expressing collective memory that has had a significant influence on avant-garde production and attitudes towards monuments. I develop this argument through an assessment of existing literature on the architectons and Malevich, the theoretical discourse on monuments contemporaneous with Malevich’s artistic and intellectual development, including Alois Riegl and Soviet Commissariats, and late 20th century discussions on memory.

There are three chapters to my thesis. In the first chapter I will introduce Malevich’s theory of Suprematism and the philosophy of architectons. I will elaborate on the meaning, differing interpretations, and possible significance of Malevich’s architectons. The second chapter is historical and biographical, retracing Malevich’s movements in time and space. I will show how the social, philosophical, academic and artistic milieux of post-revolutionary Vitebsk affected his artistic thoughts about the monument. In addition to being current topics in art and philosophy at the time, both of these factors are related to Malevich in the way he lived, practiced art and conceived philosophy. The last part of the second chapter examines the position of monuments contemporary to Malevich’s time in 1920s Russia. In the third chapter I will discuss the notion of “monument” and “memory.” Here I will start with Alois Riegl (1903) and his systematic study of modern monuments. In this part, I will argue that the socio-political and cultural context of 1900 Vienna enabled the emergence of Riegl’s theory of monuments, a study that was widely disseminated at the time and to which Malevich probably had access at the same time. I consider the cultural attitude towards the meaning of monuments just prior to Malevich’s work in Vitebsk. I will use Riegl’s theory of monuments to explore several monuments and highlight the importance of this theory to frame Malevich’s architectons within the historical and present discourse on monuments. In this chapter I will articulate how Malevich’s architectons can be translated as monuments of the twentieth century. Finally, in my conclusion, I argue that Malevich and his architectons in particular, had, and continue to have, a profound influence in the ways we look at modernity. I also provide a case study for my proposal that the architectons functioned as monument. The case studies examine the links that twentieth century art and architecture had with Malevich’s ideas.
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CHAPTER 1
SUPREMATISM: SUPREMATIST ARCHITECTURE and ARCHITECTONS

1.1 Introduction

Living in his parents' home in Kiev, the young Kazimir Malevich (1889-1935) must have wondered at the mysteries awaiting him in such a far-off place as Moscow. In his late teens, when he was a student of the Kiev drawing school¹ (1894-1986), Malevich had read extensively about distant places, had dreams about being an artist and thus finally committed to moving to Moscow, where in spite of not formally have been accepted to any art school. This decision to relocate would become the most significant decision of his philosophical and artistic life. He had been writing poetry, practiced lubok -- the native, traditional way of wood carving, and had been participating in the artistic life of Kiev. And Malevich had ambition: he was familiar with the “new” stars and movements in art – The Ècole de Paris, the French School, with Pablo Picasso (1881-1973); Amedeo Mogdiliani (1884-1920) and Marc Chagall (1887-1985); French impressionism with Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), and the German Expressionism presented by Der Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) with Wasiliy Kandinsky (1866-1944). Russian academic art – the modern, was flourishing, and in 1893, Malevich was leaving on an art adventure that would take him first to Moscow, then to Petersburg, Vitebsk, Berlin, and finally back to the newly renamed Leningrad (St. Petersburg).² His movements through the Russian urban landscape were not insignificant and certainly not without profound effect on his own art and what would become his legacy: the architectons.

¹ All the translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.
² Considering that “St.Petersburg” sounds very much as German at the time when Russia was at war with Germany it was decided to rename it to Petrograd in 1914 and in 1925 Petrograd was renamed to Leningrad to commemorate name of Lenin.
Malevich pioneered Geometrical Abstraction and developed the concept of the Non-objective world that was defined as “Suprematism,” and hence earned his position as an avant-garde artist. Suprematism has different manifestations, “where at the first stage it has a pure philosophical meaning through the movement of color, at the second as a form that can be utilitarian, it can become the beginning of a new suprematist style.”

These two stages are visually presented in the system of abstract painting and the series of architectural models, architectons. The architectons, a series of three-dimensional models made out of white plaster, at an average height of 75 cm, were built between 1919 and 1932.

1. K. Malevich. Architecton Gota (circa 1925)

(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

According to Malevich’s theory of Suprematism which he developed between 1915 and 1918, color becomes supreme in space because it reflects the movement of a form; accordingly “change in form leads to the change in color.” Malevich offered a

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5 The first time Malevich coined the term Suprematism was in 1915 in Petrograd at “The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings -- 0, 10.”
6 Shatskikh 80.
treatise on space without object, without objective. Malevich believed that the world is nonobjective, since “to explore the object we have to deconstruct it, take it apart until there is no solid object left, and it only appears in a number of small parts and fragments.” Eternity or limitlessness comes into play when these fragments relate to each other. Suprematism denies the object and in its stead places a discussion of opinions concerning the object, the approaches to which are limitless. According to Malevich the essence of Suprematism is philosophical, as are the artistic approaches that decode it. Malevich gave Suprematism a threefold visualization in three squares: black, colored and white, which are eventually transformed into the sculptural volumes, architectons.

2. K. Malevich. *Black Square* (1915)  
State Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow  
3. K. Malevich. Pictorial Realism of a Woman in Two Dimensions, Called Red Square (1915)  
privet collection.  
(Figures removed for copyright reasons.)

These architectons initiated a dialogue with architectural space. The architectons, or *architectona*, as Malevich referenced them, are three-dimensional models made of white plaster. The first architectons looked like a number of white cubes that were freely clustered, together creating horizontal platforms. Later, Malevich

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2. Drutt 127.  
3. Malevich used the term *Architectona* for a single model, morphologically implying Architecture (architecture), architectoni was the usage for the plural, a composition of a number of architectona.
presented them as a modern prototype of the Greek column, emphasizing an unlimited vertical extension in space, accentuating the image of classical monuments. On the other hand, these freely combined white cubes always seemed to be intentionally unfinished. “By fragmenting the single plaster mass, they visually deprive the material of weight and density,” architectons were fragmented into pieces, and ready to be transformed or “disappear” in imaginative white space.\(^\text{10}\)

Continuing the “Suprematist philosophy” of the Non-objective world, architectons became three dimensional renderings of The Black Square,\(^\text{11}\) where the meaning of the object is no longer important. Instead, the architectons are more about the notions of time and space, as related to the same object. Originally, Malevich used the architectons to outline his avant-gardist way of understanding architecture, where the social aesthetics of modern society can be modified by the aesthetic of visual art. Hence, architectons present the decorative rather than the functional. The architectons are exemplary of Suprematism because they became “the theoretical tool that transforms the object into space, or builds the space into the object, dissolving its originally associated meaning.”\(^\text{12}\)

The architectons, are indefinite and transcendent, temporarily timeless within the infinities of meanings and with “0” meaning. They define an object or an event by

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\(^\text{11}\) “Black Square” (1915) was the first of Malevich’s paintings that announced his Suprematist philosophy. It is important to note were not “square”; that is to say that each side of a different length, rendering to Malevich at least a resemblance of “floating.”

\(^\text{12}\) Shatskih (2001) 73.
ignoring the present, denying the past, and yet sending a message to the future. These phenomenal qualities of the architectons allow me to argue that the philosophy of the architectons enabled a transformation of the traditional concept of monuments and enabled a conceptualization of modern monuments possible. I will argue that the architectons are what Alois Riegl defined as unintentional monuments. Referring to historical monuments, Riegl described the ways in which they could become unintentional. According to Riegl, some historical monuments meant to satisfy their own ‘practical and ideal needs’ without the idea of being purposely designed for cultural heritage in the future, “when we call such works of art “monuments,” it is a subjective rather than objective designation. It is not their original purpose and significance that turns these works into monuments, but rather our modern perception of them.”

Therefore, the architectons can be read as unintentional monuments in that they often appeal to our emotions and seem to be irrelevant to their initial historical meaning.

In structuring his architecton - monuments with fragmented facades, Malevich anticipated the modern discourse on memory and monuments. For instance, the image of Malevich’s architectons collides with pictures of modern monuments documented by German sociologist Wulf Kansteiner (2002). In Finding Meaning in Memory, Kansteiner sees monuments as the ‘media of memory’ that assists us to render our feeling and knowledge about the past, they represent “collective memories” which are “collages consisting in part of a “mixture of pictorial images and scenes, quips, and snatches of

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verse, abstractions, plot types and stretches of discourse, and even false etymologies. They also include statues, memorial sites, and buildings."\(^{15}\)

Moreover, because the architectons were built in fragments they could be seen as a collage where no single central idea was important. This quality of the architectons allows them to be defined by Riegl as unintentional monuments possessing within a newness value, where the "possibility of compromise comes from the recognition of newness-value and the overwhelming aesthetic power it assumes whenever the circumstances are favorable."\(^{16}\) In other words, there is no definite meaning attached to the fragmented facades of the architectons but a contextual currency of the readings.

1.1. Malevich's Philosophy of Architectons: Interpretations

1.1.1. Russian Interpretations

To better understand the impact of Malevich's philosophy on the development of the modern theory of monuments it is imperative to look at contemporary Russian and Western research related to his heritage. From my observations, while some of this research was devoted to the implications of Malevich's work by comparing his work with the work of his contemporaries, (such as Italian futurism and French cubism,)\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Kansteiner 190.

\(^{16}\) Rieg 644.

\(^{17}\) For example, Ivan Kirillov. *Russkiy Avant-Garde v Evropeiskom Kontekste. (The Russian Avant-Garde in European Context).* (Moskow: Nayka, 2000)

some was dedicated to the historical importance of Malevich’s biography. In order to illustrate contemporary Russian research on Malevich’s work I have chosen the studies by Alexandra Shatskih and Tatiana Mickhienko, where I found some unique insights in addition to widely accepted notions about Malevich’s work.

Alexandra Shatskih (2003), the Russian author of many monographs on Malevich, in Organika Filosofckogo Architectona (The Organic Philosophy of the Architectons), explains the history of the emergence of the architectons through the theoretical background and appearance of the architectons in Malevich’s treatises. Shatskih observed that the idea of the architectons was born in the Vitebsk’s Art School, where Malevich worked with a group of some of the most influential artists of the Russian avant-garde. In the Vitebsk of 1919-1923 Malevich formulated Suprematism as his artistic/philosophical stance, which eventually led him to the concept of the architectons. Working on the philosophical aspects of suprematism, Malevich entrusted the architectural development of the School to a group of young architects under El Lessitzky’s leadership. In 1920, David Jakerson, one of these young architects, created the first prototypes of the architectons - “stereometricheckie kompozitcii” (sterereometric compositions), which found their first spatial application as monuments, and were used as the pedestals for “vitebsckie pamyatniki” (Vitebsk’s monuments). At the same time

Alexander Babin, Picasso i Brak Glazami Malevicha, (Picasso and Brak viewed by Malevich) Vitebsk 2 102-115.
the students of the Vitebsk’s school were also projecting different futuristic architectural models such as “airdvijushicieyvokzali” (flying railway stations). Developed under the influence of Malevich’s suprematist principles, these models became new type of monuments: non-objective monuments.

Even though he developed non-objective art, Malevich was still committed to the idea that art could have its scientific and industrial signification, which he attributed to numerology. In his search for the expression of the non-objective, Malevich found numerology one of the most powerful of theoretical tools. Malevich used numbers in titles for his paintings, for example one of his paintings was “Suprematism 52”; on the backdrop for *The Victory Over The Sun* he drew “1000” as an expression of cosmic infinity amongst astrological signs. Malevich’s famous painting, “Black Square,” which was the first suprematist work and thus began the categorization of suprematism as a philosophical movement, became an expression of “0”, “0” meaning “eternal peace.” According to Shatskih, Malevich used numbers to code his work, make its meaning multivalent, and to imbue it with metaphysical presence. This fascination with numerology was continued in Malevich’s series of treatises, which he distinguished by fractions from 1/40 to 1/49. Malevich wrote these treatises in 1924, in Leningrad while he was teaching in GINHUK, at the faculty of architecture.

19 Another explanation for this mysterious interplay of numbers in Malevich’s work was that this was affiliated to Schopenhauer’s influence. Shatskih (2003) 9.

20 GINHUK- Gosudarstvenniky Institut Khudogestvennoi Kulturi, Leningrad (The State Institute of Art Culture, Leningrad).
The treatise number 1/46 was Malevich's first writing about architecture. In this treatise Malevich talked of transforming the architectons from pure text (theoretical mode) into three dimensional models. Shatskih argues that there was a logical parallel between the fractions in the text-titles of his treatises and the fractions in the three-dimensional spatial presentation of the architectons. It may be that Malevich used the concept of fractions in the discourse of the architectons to reconfirm their unlimited and unfinished supematist megatext.

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By using numerology, Malevich possibly found his own way to resist an historical chronology. This is suggested by the fact that he constantly changed the dates on his paintings and texts. While, there is no exact date for the emergence of the architectons, it is assumed to be 1923. In 1923 Malevich made his departure from two-dimensional art to spatial praxis. It was first expressed in the two-dimensional “projects for superarchitecture,” *Planiti* (habitat project for Planets) and *Zemlyaniti* (a habitat project for the Land). In 1924, in his correspondence with El Lissitzky, Malevich described the models as *moi slepie soorujeniya* (my blind constructions). Originally called *slepaya architectura* (blind architecture), or *bespredmetnaya architectura* (non-objective architecture), the architectons were discussed as comparable to Egyptian architecture - no windows, no holes. Interestingly, Malevich had always viewed windows in a negative light long before the creation of the architectons. When Malevich conceived his “Black Square,” which he called a “Cube”, he denied its utilitarian meaning, accusing contemporary critics of a pedestrian interpretation of the “Black Square.” Malevich scolded his critics, saying that they wanted to “make holes in art, or to make windows and doors in the Cube to live within, to transform it into a utilitarian type dwelling.”

Architectons were meant to continue Malevich’s theme of abstract art, “weightless
architecture,” with no visible holes. This conceptual premise was discussed in Malevich’s treatises where he polemically contrasted his own creation, his blind architecture of the architectons, to the methods and ideology of rational and functional constructivism.

To conclude, then, Shatskih asserts that the emergence and the history of the architectons presented an apogee of Malevich’s suprematist art theory and philosophy. Entirely textual, the idea of the architectons was embodied in the visual and spatial, they were defined volumetrically as architecture, yet they were purposely non-functional, non-constructive architecture. Non-objective and non-functional architectons were, according to Shatskih, compositions of “prirodoestevtvennih tel” (natural, organic objects). That is to say, the architectons had an organic nature where they had the potential to move and multiply at will. This was one of the ways in which Malevich created the suprematist megatext. Shatskih’s latest archival research (2003-2005), and studies on the publication of Malevich’s quintessential work, Vechniy Pokoi (Eternal Peace), and a number of new materials that have recently become accessible, allowed her to conclude that the principle of formulation and construction of the architectons was intuitively found by Malevich during his work on the construction of text/textual. The architectons became an iconic expression, the plastic “conclusion,” of Malevich’s theoretical thoughts.25

In opposition to Shatskih’s emphasis on the theoretical and metaphysical aspects of the architectons, Russian art critic, Tatiana Mikhienko, in her review of the 2003 Guggenheim Exhibition in Berlin, introduced the architectons as Malevich’s practical architectural experiments. Mikhienko asserts that architectural models are not for

functional architecture but merely decorations for various living spaces which provoke the sensational and “cosmic” aspects of Suprematist architecture. Beginning with Malevich’s description of the architectons: “A Suprematist column is vertical Suprematism- A monument to the new non-objective art,” the author opens the interesting interplay of arguments that creates a powerful discourse about the significance of the architectons and their relevance to the notion of monument. Mikhitenko outlines the importance of Malevich’s artistic and philosophical approach to the concept of a modern monument in her description of the way in which Malevich viewed the architectons as monuments. In her descriptions there are two aspects of the concept of the architectons that articulate Malevich’s intention to create his own type of modern monument. One important related aspect is that Malevich named some of the architectons monuments: Column of the Monument of the Land of the Soviet, Themes of Architectural Monuments a, b, c, and so on. As will be discussed later in Chapter 4, even though the attitude towards monuments in Malevich’s time was diverse and complicated, this nomenclature is evidence of the tremendous politico-ideological pressure to devise a new kind of monument. Hence, Malevich’s monuments can be seen as a reflection of these demands. Denying the past, Malevich’s aspiration was to create new monuments in his own “suprematistic order” and his desire to create a modern classicism, which would be a substitute for the classical orders. Mikhienko implies that architectons took on the programmatic meaning of monument after Malevich changed their horizontal design to a vertical one, in keeping with the “Suprematistic order” that, in a sense, was reminiscence of Greek columns.

26Mikhienko 82.
Another aspect in Mikhitenko’s elaboration on the architectons that allows me to assume that Malevich perceived the creation of the architectons as a term of monument is Malevich’s idea to use one of the architectons after his death as his tombstone. There was a note, on the photograph of this architecton, which stated: *Suprematist column vertical Suprematism. A monument to the new nonobjective art. K. Malevich 1935.*\(^{27}\) In a letter to Ivan Kluin (1933), he speaks to all the artists of the world asking them to install an architecton on his tombstone, which would enable him to observe Jupiter. Hypothetically, he asked for a tombstone that could become the monument to his ideas. Mikhienko concluded that the architectons thereafter became a monument to Malevich as a creator.

There are important observations about the architecton-monuments in Mikhienko’s review that provoke an interesting discussion which that is relevant to my argument. There are a few dichotomies within the concept of the architectons. One of these dichotomies is that in denying the past and removing classicism as the ideal/iconic, denying the dogmatic, Malevich proposed a new type of classicist - suprematist architectural order: “Having established definite plans for the suprematism system, I am entrusting the further development of what is now architectural Suprematism to young architects in the broadest sense of the word, because I see it as the only possible system in an era of new architecture.”\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\)Mikhienko 86.
In denying one ideal Malevich imposed another. This was the beginning of a major contradiction of modernism. And it was an attempt to find a way to build a monument without any figurative meaning or semblance of the conventional monuments of the past. Another dichotomy in the concept of the architectons is that the quality of permanence adhering to Malevich's monument could rely on the temporality of the textual, its titles. The fact that the architectons were named after real monuments but bore no resemblance to their contemporary, early- twentieth- century models of monuments is evidence of this. There is, however, no evidence that Malevich anticipated these dichotomies in the context of creating his architectons, yet the concept of the modern monument can be seen as which continues these dichotomies.

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29 Shatskih V4, 198.
1.1.2 Western Interpretations

During the past decade, the architectons have been interpreted differently: The differences in these interpretations seem mostly due to the disagreements between Russian and Western perceptions of the “meaning” of the Avant-garde. In 2003, the Exhibition of Malevich’s Suprematism with at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin celebrated the 125th anniversary of Malevich’s birth. Matthew Drutt, Chief Curator of the Menil Collection, was responsible for the organization of this exhibition and was the editor of the catalogue *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism*. This exhibition and the subsequent catalogue, ensuing interviews and other publications contribute to the discourse on Malevich. This contribution consisted of a notion of Suprematism as possessing theoretical and visual universal uniqueness and timelessness. During an interview about the exhibition, Drutt underscored the contribution of Malevich’s Suprematism to the avant-garde of the 20th century. Drutt observed that after the “First Russian Art Exhibition” in Berlin, in 1922, the impact of Malevich’s Suprematist theory on the development of a world-wide avant-garde was undeniable. Malevich and his student and follower, Lissitzky were invited to the Bauhaus, where Malevich’s book, *Suprematism- as Nonobjective World* was translated into German and published by Moholy–Nagy, one of the leaders of the Bauhaus. Five years later in Berlin, in 1927 there was another exhibition of Malevich’s work. Drutt argues that it was “Malevich’s art

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30 The exhibition, organized by Matthew Drutt, Chief Curator of the Menil Collection, was shown in Berlin January 18- April 27, 2003, in New York May 13- September 14, 2003, and in Houston October 3, 2003- January 11, 2004. There were many works that were either unknown or deemed lost, that were shown in conjunction with the exhibition in the collection of Nikolai Khardziev, a passionate collector, critic and one-time friend of many protagonists of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s.
that has been rooted in the Western imagination for over 50 years. It’s an incomplete view, but it’s one that certainly inspired American art of the 1960s and 1970s: people like Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Ellsworth Kelly, and Robert Ryman.\footnote{Drutt did not mention Smithson in this list, but we can assume that Smithson could be mentioned here as we will discuss later the significance of his work related to Malevich’s philosophy.}

Emphasizing the impact of Malevich’s philosophy on the design world and saying that “Malevich continues to be a kind of historical monument”, Drutt enumerates the modern and contemporary groups, such as the English Constructive movement, The Circle Group, The Radical Painters, The Neo-Geo painters, which in turn, retain an eternal dialogue with Malevich’s suprematist theory of non-objective representation.

Drutt quotes from the critic Ernst Kallai’s review of Malevich’s work at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition of 1927, where the critic acknowledged Malevich’s singular accomplishment: “It is quite difficult to imagine what further development in painting is possible beyond what has been archived.”\footnote{Drutt, Matthew, ed. “Kasimir Malevich: Suprematism.” Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003) 17.}

In this underscoring the world-wide significance of Malevich’s work, Drutt “created” the personage and ideas of Malevich. In a sense, Malevich became a monument himself in that his art and theoretical work became a landmark for many generations of modern artists.\footnote{Apt to the argument I wish to make, is a modern artist such as Robert Smithson, who followed Malevich’s ideas and was led him into the discourse on new forms of monuments.}

Another perspective on Malevich’s suprematist architecture, the architectons, is presented by Maria Faerna (1996), in Great Masters: Malevich. To categorize the phenomenon of Suprematism as an avant-garde experiment, she coins the term “radical
abstraction,” and insists that Malevich’s non-objectivism was presented in the form of “geometric abstraction,” which is later used to refer to Suprematist abstraction. According to Faerna the emergence of the architectons was related to the critical point when Suprematism should have developed a new phase because the “Black Square” was a “profound reductionism that could not last long; gradually it gave rise to a geometrical idiom of shapes and colors, which evolved with increasing complexity through successive derivations from an elemental square.” In view of the fact that in 1923 Malevich was appointed director of the Petrograd Museum of Artistic Culture, where he established laboratories of industrial design, the author claims that the “architectonics” or “planets” “were sculptural models for modern houses, conceived as three dimensional structures to be made of concrete and glass, with electric heating units built into the walls to eliminate dirt and clutter...Malevich’s works were increasingly pragmatic, and he was eager to apply Suprematism to industrial production.”

From this review of the literature, the architectons may look like a pure product of radical abstraction yet they could become the raw model for modern houses. It was very common in the Western literature to present the architectons as prototypes for new low cost housing. This type of aberration comes from anachronistically confusing Malevich’s circle of suprematists with his contemporaries, the constructivists, which were involved in the process of industrialization and the mass production of new housing for a “brand new human kind,” a soviet citizen. Yet, Malevich opposed the constructivist’s ideology

34 “Black Square,” (1915) is also known as Black Quadrilateral, the first Suprematistic painting of Malevich.
36 Faerna 8.
of rational functionalism with his suprematists theory as El Lissitzky once mentioned, “the sky belongs to Malevich but the land to Tatlin.”

Jean Claude Marcade, one of the leading contemporary French theoreticians of the avant-garde and the author of *Avant-garde: Before and After* (2006) and of a further monograph on Malevich (1990), in his essay “K. S. Malevich: From Black Quadrilateral (1913) to White on White (1917): From the Eclipse to Objects to the Liberation of Space.” (1981), evaluated the key idea of Suprematism as artistic experiment, and philosophical moment, when Malevich attained “zero” with the “Black Square” and “nothingness” with the “White Square.” Marcade emphasizes that Malevich’s invention of non-objective art strongly separates the non-objective world from the world of abstract art.

37Vladimir Tatlin, the author of “Monument to the Third International (1920) was one of the leaders of group of Constructivists.
38“White Square” (1918) or “White on White” is considered to be the last suprematistic painting of Malevich.
Marcade begins his essay on Malevich with the Western perspectives on the Russian avant-garde that dominated in the 1980s, saying “the invention of Suprematism remains one of the most powerful enigmas of the twentieth century.” Having quoted Matisse, who said that all art is abstract in itself, Marcade defines Suprematism as the artistic movement that is something different from abstract art. To prove that Malevich’s Suprematism does not correspond to the theory of abstract art, Marcade introduces an example of abstract art, the painting of Kandinsky. In this example, Marcade discovers the “necessities” in abstract art that provoke phenomenal forces to join the internal and the external, the material and non-material. The disappearance of the object, its transfiguration is in the interest of “inner sound,” which “transcends material forms.” Marcade attests that abstract art as a non-mimetic presentation of the object, as a non-figurative interpretation of the object, is the moment when the object is “no longer material, but spiritual, yet the object still remains the painter’s end.” On the other hand, Marcade evaluates Suprematist philosophy as emerged from the principles of Cubism and Futurism. For Marcade, Cubism is a “sterereometric treatment of forms, a construction of space.” Futurism is a “decomposition of movement.” Thus according to Marcade, Malevich’s Suprematism is more the representation of space and movement, rather than the presentation of the object.

39 Shatskih V2, 49.
41 Marcade 19.
Continuing with Malevich’s legacy, Marcade describes the sensational appearance of the Black Square as a manifesto of universal minimalism. Identifying Suprematism with the term “Minimalism,” Marcade does not refer to the art movement of the late 60s. According to this interpretation, Suprematism was a new mode of art that was intentionally non-utilitarian and non-representational. Furthermore, the universal significance of Malevich’s Suprematism, in Marcade’s text, derives from his definition of Suprematism as non-objective art. Malevich’s non-objective art, or the non-objective world to which it points, liberates space from the weight of the object, “free space-nothingness from figurative weight.”

Marcade used the discourse on non-objectivity to explain Malevich’s Suprematist theoretical platform. Marcade argues critics that what positions Malevich as “a unique figure in the universal history of the arts, is that he was not a painter-philosopher, but a great painter and philosopher who was able to raise in philosophical, often dialectical terms, on par with the greats, the question of the truth of being.” Even though Marcade did not mention architectons in his review, his stress on the importance of Non-objectivity in Malevich’s work, which greatly impacted the minimalists, provokes an immediate association with the silent, indifferent, and “façadeless” appearance of architectons.

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\[42\] Minimalism came to the attention of the New York art world via exhibition between 1963 and 1965 following solo exhibitions of work by Donald Judd (1928-94), Robert Morris (1931). Minimalism was one of many labels used by critics to describe simple geometric structures that these artists were producing.

In *The Enigma of the Square* (2003), a review of the Malevich exhibition at the New York Guggenheim in 2003, Stefano Casciani, an art critic, explains the history and philosophy of Malevich's legacy. The word "mystery" along with "enigma" became the key words in his review. Elaborating on "mystery," Casciani quotes the *New York Times*: "throughout the exhibition, what you see is not what it seems." Inasmuch as Casciani creates mystery, the author of the *New York Times* exaggerates this with his reference to the architectons in terms of their "magnetism of the unfathomable." Casciani develops the insight that "the equivocal openness of which suprematist abstraction is replete and that, in fact, makes those 'architectural models' ideal volumetric compositions ready to become anything, from sculpture to city." The author understands Malevich's architectural models as a universal and timeless structure. Another way that Casciani veils Malevich's suprematism with mystery is by relating it to mythology and complex symbology. Casciani interpreting the "square" as the number

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45 Drutt 204.
47 Casciani 2.
four as an analogy with the tetramorph of the Hebrew Tora, although there is no evidence that Malevich used references to Judaism. Casciani has mystified Malevich's dedication to numerology.

Casciani refers to Malevich and the Suprematist idea of his work, stating that "the supreme work is done precisely through destruction (nevertheless evoking archaic ceremonial meanings) of the traditional work of art which remains pivotal and efficacious." He underscores the success of this deconstruction of tradition, and analyzes Malevich's architectons as a number of the coded textual messages sent from a metaphysical galaxy, as the volumetric architectural models that could serve any purpose because of the nature of their multivalent meaning.

Similarly, in Unframe Malevich: Ineffability and Sublimity in Suprematism, (2004) Branislav Jakovlevich, the Yugoslavian art critic who specializes in modernist and avant-garde art, (with specific focus on the Russian and East European avant-gardes), is also concerned with converting "Suprematism, one of the most decisive attacks on convention in the history of modern painting into "conventional museum presentation." The author observes that the Guggenheim Museum celebrates Malevich, because there is "outside of Russia the renewal of interest in Malevich's visual work," yet these presentations of visual Suprematism "have not been accompanied by comparable consideration of Suprematist theories." In order to restore this missing link in the presentation of Suprematism, Jakovlevich sets out to explain the essential meaning of

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48 Casciani 2.
49 Jakovlevich 1.
50 Jakovlevich 3.
Suprematism. Doing this, he locates Suprematism in the field of abstraction, however, saying that “abstraction comes only halfway to full non-objectivity. Absolute non-objectivity requires not only the removal of mimetic, even abstract forms, but the radical restructuring of the painting content.”

Observing that Malevich never frames his paintings, Jakovlevich characterizes Suprematism as frameless. Symbolically, dissolving the difference between the surface of a wall and the canvas, Malevich declares the break from a distinction between spaces; hence “the abolition of the frame results in the proliferation of edges. From the Black Square in oil on plaster there is but one short step to Malevich’s architectons, such as Gota.” To emphasize the priority of the conceptual meaning of the architectons over their literal meaning, the author simplifies them to “blocks made out of plaster or wood,” they are not three-dimensional objects, “not aesthetic objects, but points of great conceptual density,” the continuation of the Black Square, “its protrusion from the surface of painting into open space.” He observes that “for him infinity is not an effect produced by the optical device of the interrupted grid. His paintings cannot be filled up with any concept, including the concept of infinity. For Malevich infinity is the endless unfolding of edges that proceeds right here, in front of you, in anything conceived as finality without end, or as an architecton, or as a perfect gift.” Jakovlevich concludes that Malevich declares an infinity of meanings that equals “0” meaning.

51 Jakovlevich 2.
52 Jakovlevich 5.
53 Jakovlevich 8.
54 Jakovlevich 8.
Jakovlevich’s and Shatskih’s perspectives on the architectons are very similar. They see the architectons as conceptual, textual, non-objective spatial models. Departing from these conclusions, I argue that monuments become invisible when their importance is lost; when they cease to provoke curiosity they become ephemerally present. However, the meaning or the text can make them evident again. Therefore the conceptual architectons might be seen as monuments with a lost meaning, or within the current of a new meaning, depending on contemporary context.

1.2 Conclusion

The common ground in these essays can be found in the way these art critics from the West and from Russia understand the theoretical significance of Malevich’s architectons. Attributing the architectons to the philosophical trends of the 1920s, the art critics from both perspectives see a tremendous influence of Malevich’s suprematist thought on the development of the modernist movement throughout the century.

Inasmuch as these contemporary critics agree on Malevich’s importance, they depict the architectons differently. Accordingly, there are many possible readings of the architecton. Using these reviews, the architectons could be seen as abstract volumetric compositions, as prototypes for new housing, as pure theoretical edifices, or as monuments... The major difference between these interpretations is that some art critics see the architectons as blueprints for rational and functional architecture; others understand them as pure theoretical edifices, or as metaphorical and textual constructions.
There is a common problem in these essays which is that there is no link between Malevich's suprematist theory, particularly his architectons, and their modernist philosophy. The fact that Malevich's work is not seen from a postmodern perspective in the eyes of art critics today is highly problematic. Most of the time art critics attempt to assess Malevich from his contemporary perspective and not from that popular today. Even though they agree on the profound influence of Malevich on many generations of modernist artist and movements, they do not explain why Malevich's theory and construction of his architectons is important today. In what follows I argue that Malevich's theory of the architectons is important today because it offers an insight into an understanding of modern monuments.
CHAPTER 2

ARCHITECTONS as MONUMENTS

2.1 Malevich: Time and Space

In order to better understand the significance of Malevich’s philosophy of “Suprematism”, as well as the spatial and transcendent meaning of his architectons and his general theoretical perspectives, it seems obligatory to explore his cultural and geographical contexts, as well as the landmark events of the Russian avant-garde era, within which he experimented. This will contribute to understanding the significance of what Malevich meant by the term “monument” as oppose to mainly asses Malevich’s intentions from the perspectives of his time.

The short-lived phenomenon of the 1910-1930s Russian Avant-garde movement can be analyzed in time and space – historically and geographically. The historical context of pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia, and the eventual developments during the post-revolutionary Soviet state regime, all influenced by the events taking place in Europe, were fundamental for modernism in the early twentieth century. In other words, a chain of historical cataclysms in early twentieth century Russia, and the emergence of European modern art and a burst of industrial development might be seen as catalysts for the beginning of a new mode of living-modernism. The early Russian Avant-Garde became significant for international modernism, the “avant-garde radicalizes the basic principles of modernity-the urge toward continual change and development, the rejection of the old and the longing for what is new. In its historical manifestations-futurism,
suprematism, constructivism, Dadaism, surrealism, and kindred movements—it represent a ‘spearhead’ of the aesthetic of modernism.”

Charlotte Douglas, an art historian and specialist on Malevich and Russian Avant-Garde art, in Swan of Other Worlds: the Origin of Abstraction in Russia (1994), particularly pointed to the significance of Malevich’s contribution to the development of the philosophy of modernity. She emphasizing his influence on Western art: “[...] this single body of work has had a direct and persistent visual impact on Western art—at first in Russia in the objectless creation of the early Soviet period and then throughout the Bauhaus school of international modernism.”

Through modernism, some residual of Malevich’s thinking might be found in modern interpretations of the theory of the modern monument. Douglass states that Malevich’s creation of the architectons as have had impact in the United States: “American artists have pursued radical solutions to many questions merely raised by Malevich and now find themselves far beyond his early geometry; but serve as dramatic validation of Malevich’s original insights.”

The architectons are one of these original insights and I argue that the architectons are keys in this late development.

While different avant-garde art movements were spread out geographically, they were ideologically connected by the idea of affirming the new and denying the old, reinventing art as well as the notion of the monument. Malevich’s architectons became a part of these reinventions. It is very useful to explore what was happening, culturally and

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56C. Douglas, President of the Malevich’s Society in New York (1986-present).
58Douglas 2.
politically, within the geographies of Malevich, and to look at the principle events of the avant-garde era in which he participated, and especially the links between the encounters he had with individuals – the artists and philosophers of the time when he was inventing the concept of the architectons.

   Private Collection, Moscow
(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

It is possible, indeed probable, that several types of spontaneous and simultaneous processes occurred similar to or sympathetic with terms of Malevich's thoughts about the

59 Goodman 73.
Suprematists and eventually, the architectons, in several centers. The appearance and subsequent development of the Russian avant-garde movement and the formulation of Malevich’s Suprematist “reality” of the architectons would lead, I contend, to a particular discourse on the modern monument that I will develop later part in this chapter. This same discourse, I will argue, is inextricably linked to two specific sites; the cities of Vitebsk, and Vienna. Malevich’s thought on Suprematism and eventually the architectons-monuments was, as I will demonstrate, informed by ideas circulating simultaneously in different places beginning with Vitebsk, where Malevich was engaged within a mainstream of the Vitebsk Art School and the conceptual art centre in Vienna, where Riegl developed his theory of the modern monument.

Malevich made the significant breakthroughs in his artistic and philosophical development during his self-imposed exile at Vitebsk, where he worked with some of the most prominent adherents of contemporary art movements such as Chagall, Ermolaeva and El Lissitzky. It was through this group of individuals that he was introduced to Bakhtin and his philosophical circle. Eventually, Chagall moved to Moscow, Malevich and El Lissitzky both left for St.Petersburg. The latter two subsequently made many trips to Moscow, frequently participating in the debates surrounding art exhibitions and encountering their philosophical opponents, Kandinsky and Tatlin. These debates were powerful in Vienna where the issues of monuments were given, perhaps, their clearest contemporary articulation in the liberal world.

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60 Gustav Kiepenheuer (2002) was able to examine and connect the forces that made it such that the DADA movement was able to emerge simultaneously from four different places: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover and Köln.
2.2 **Vitebsk: The Origin of Architectons**

A strange provincial town... The red bricks of the principle streets are painted white and on this white background numerous green circles, orange squares and blue rectangles have been painted. This is Vitebsk in 1920. Malevich’s paintbrush has made its way over the brick walls of the town. “The squares are our pallets” the wall proclaim ...In fleeting impression of the town one sees orange circles, red squares and green trapeziums.

Suprematism confetti is strewn about the streets of a flabbergasted city.\(^{51}\)

Malevich spent almost four years in Vitebsk, from 1919 to 1921.\(^{62}\) This short period of time became one of the most significant moments in his artistic career. He wrote *Suprematism as Non-Objective World, About New Systems in Art, Suprematism as Non-objective or the Essence of Art* (1921), created the album *Suprematism. 34 Drawings* (1920), and organized the innovative art praxis studio “UNOVIS” (1919-1924). One of his most important contributions to avant-garde art at this time was his projection of two-dimensional art into open urban space, which hypothetically prefaced his architectural experiments, architectons. Time and space, Vitebsk’s artistic milieux between 1919 and 1921, directly and profoundly impacted Malevich’s philosophy and art.

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\(^{62}\) The history of Vitebsk began in 974 as a military camp for Byelorussia and since that time all periods of its history were related to different battles and wars. The town-warrior went through history fighting under the banner of Ivan the Terrible and Alexander Nevski against the tartars, defeating Napoleon in 1812, and participating in the Civil War under the command of Peter the Great. At the beginning of the nineteen century it became a center of political action for the first revolutionists, the Decembrists. At the beginning of the twentieth century it became one of the largest Pale Settlements, the areas where Jews were forced to migrate.

Malevich arrived in Vitebsk on the fifth of November 1919. In his first letter two days later, addressed to his friend and mentor, O. Gershenson, Malevich stated that he had been invited by El Lissitzky and Chagall to teach in the Vitebsk Art School. He had accepted the invitation and, arriving exhausted after his five day trip, he very soon began to feel exiled -- the suburban site where he lived was far removed from the dynamism of the revolutionary cultural life of Moscow. His seemingly negative reaction to the city opens a set of questions that will guide the remainder of this chapter: What was the impact of the Vitebsk experience on Malevich's art and philosophy? More specifically, how did Vitebsk affect Malevich's perception of monuments? Did its influential artistic milieux prompt the architectons?

Vitebsk was one of the largest industrial cities in the Western territories, well connected to Moscow and St.Petersburg by a major railroad route. While relatively prosperous, half of the population of the city lived in the Pale of Settlement – a group of areas set aside for the habitation of the Jewish population. The first Russian Revolution in 1905-1907 was supported by the people of Vitebsk who had been suppressed by the Tsar's regime. These people believed that a new political power would liberate them. In solidarity with workers in Moscow they held strikes, and in 1917 the February revolt in Saint-Petersburg inspired them to establish Soviet Vitebsk and install a provincial government. In 1918 Vitebsk was under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation subordinated by St.Petersburg, in 1919 Vitebsk became part of the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Republic, still occupied by Poland at this time.
While the socio-political environment of Vitebsk was volatile, the cultural life of the city was less changeful than culture in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In Vitebsk cultural life was centered on the traditions of its Jewish population. Theatres and “agitation” companies from the capital performed in Vitebsk relatively often and the local artistic milieux sprang from the only Art School, headed by Yehuda Pen.

As a graduate of the Imperial Academy of Art in St.Petersburg, Yehuda Pen advocated classical art as well as the neoclassical style of pre-revolutionary Vitebsk. However, these classic art traditions, which were represented by Pen’s School, also embraced the Jewish cultural landscape and embraced its eternal mysticism. Two talented Jewish students graduated from his school, Marc Chagall and El Lissitzky. Both artists will leave Vitebsk for Saint-Petersburg in 1920 and 1922 and then for Paris and Berlin respectively.

Even in the midst of Civil War in 1918, the new Soviet Russian Federation was concerned with the development of new art media inasmuch as it concerned the intensification of the new economic policy. The reason for this could be found in Marxist theory, which was essential for Soviet ideology. According to Marxist theory, the purpose of art is not just to describe the world, but to transform it. Analyzing the history of Marxist theory, contemporary art critic Gordon Graham (1997), Professor of Philosophy and Arts, defined Marxist criteria for art by its necessary connection within ideology to a practical application in reality. He refers to one of the advocates of Marxist theory, Tony Bennett, the author of “Formalism and Marxism” (1979) who stated that

64 Agitation was a form of performance propaganda
“[W]ithin the context of the topography of the ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ mapped out by Marx, there has been a sustained attempt to explain the form and content of literary texts by referring them to the economic, political and ideological relationships within which they are set.”

Therefore, expecting that the new art would become an ideological and political link between Moscow and St. Petersburg, the newly born government decided to develop a network of art schools within their industrial suburbs. These schools had to initiate a new type of education that would be accessible to the majority of proletarians. The organization of these schools was one of many post-revolutionary experiments and geographically remote Vitebsk was a secure place for such an experiment. If any dramatic political or ideological disagreement occurred it would be easy to erase it from the political art scene. Therefore, the organization of the Vitebsk Art School, which played a very significant role in the development of Malevich’s Suprematist theory, was an experiment, a momentary event in the history of the Russian Avant-garde and at the mercy of the Soviet political power. This perception of temporariness probably inspired Malevich and his Vitebsk’s contemporaries to accomplish their historical task in a very short time.

Despite Malevich’s initial reaction, historical documentation reveals that Vitebsk most certainly was not a suburban city subordinated to Moscow. At the beginning of the

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66 Peter Burger in his influential book The theory of Avant-Garde, uses the term ‘historical avant-gardes’ to demarcate the developments in art between 1910 and 1930.
twentieth century, Vitebsk emerged as a stimulating context for the Russian Avant-Garde. The city is consequently an ideal place to trace the visual and conceptual transformations of monuments. Thereafter, observing these transformations of monuments erected in Vitebsk, Malevich invented his own idea of monument, which can be seen in his architectons.

2.2.1 The 1900 to 1920 years: Russian Avant-Garde-Chagall and the Public Art School

The organization of Vitebsk Art School was an important event in the history of the Russian Avant-Garde art. Created by Marc Chagall the school transformed Vitebsk, which in its turn changed its occupants as a new artistic era was borne. Chagall had welcomed new ideas and embraced them. Many would ask: "Why Vitebsk?" The answer to this question lies within the thought underlying Chagall's personal philosophy on art and his position as Commissar of Fine Arts. His mission was to establish a national art school that would have no connection to the bourgeois past or with the old Russian Academy of Fine Art which was now closed. He was also given the task of establishing a new model for the Museum of Contemporary Art that would pursue the Marxist educational mission. The dictatorship of classicism was to be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat.
As Commissar of Fine Arts, Chagall had the authority to invite a group of leading avant-garde artists from Petrograd to ensure the recognition of the Vitebsk Art School. He believed that the collective forces of Russian artists, who made Petrograd their “Mecca”, would contribute to the educational experience of the school. El Lissitzky and Malevich, Ermolaieva⁶⁷ and Exter⁶⁸ were among those invited to Vitebsk. They became a pedagogical team that formulated the essential art principles for the school and defined its ideological position. Once this group of artists arrived in Vitebsk, the culture of the city became totally immersed in the spirit of avant-garde art.

The Vitebsk Art School became one of the most important and influential for the Russian Avant-Garde and for Malevich particularly, because, in opposition to the old classical Russian School, the curriculum of Vitebsk’s Art School included a whole spectrum of modern trends. Each new faculty member was assigned to different studios. El Lissitzky was in charge of the Graphics and Prints studio, which eventually took over the architectural/practical application of art and became the ideological foundation for the Constructivists group. Malevich was a mentor for the studio of Décor, where the content of its curriculum was mainly oriented to the study of visual art. Chagall was in charge of “studio number two,” which was inspired by European movements and particularly that of the French school in Paris, where Chagall had spent four years. Although, the post-revolutionary avant-garde was influenced by the French School and Italian Futurism, it

⁶⁷ Vera Ermolaeva, (1938-1938), was an artist who had a great impact on the development of the Russian avant-garde. Her artistic development was marked by a close affiliation with the leading personalities-Tatlin, Larionov, and contribution to the design of the first futurist opera “The Victory Over the Sun.” Also, she was the first artist to illustrate Mayakovskiy’s poetry.

⁶⁸ Alexandra Exter, (1882-1949), participated in the avant-garde movement from 1908 (St. Petersburg’s New Society of Artist), frequently traveling she was close to Russian and Western avant-gardes.
still claimed to be totally original with its own vocabulary and terminology. As a result a term “left art” was invented to define the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde, the term which indicated its leftist political leaning. Therefore, the Vitebsk School of Fine Arts became an ‘alma mater’ for the avant-garde artist, where they could develop, expand and interchange their ideas, and it also became one of the significant centers of left art, and was immediately affiliated with the leading artists of the Institute of Artistic Culture, InKhuk in Moscow headed by Wasiliy Kandinsky between 1920 and 1922.

The Vitebsk Art Academy was designed not only for art students but for the general education of all strata of society in post-revolutionary Vitebsk. This was one way of presenting the visual evidence of avant-garde art ideology. This ideology stated that art had to be first and foremost accessible to everyone. This is why art of this era was integrated with everyday experience. Art became a political tool in this way and the Vitebsk School was instrumental in this process. This concept reflected one of the essential principals of the Russian Avant-garde, according to which social context could be transformed through artistic experience. Therefore, the art school’s task was to publicize the new art through exhibitions as well as theatrical performances.

In 1918, on the celebration of the first anniversary of the October Revolution in Vitebsk, Chagall was commissioned to design street decorations for the city. Thematically, these decorations were supposed to communicate the power of the proletariat and to assert the eternity of its ideology. According to Chagall’s idea, the decorations would present a number of painted slogans and small architectural forms and
volumes that could contextually present one theme while structurally connected to a single modular system. In doing this, he wanted to incorporate these structures into urban space and to intertwine them with the social landscape. Seemingly, this serious task should correspond to revolutionary art-political demands. Yet the images used in the slogans consisted of colorfully painted animals which "caused" as the art critic, Goodman described, "bewilderment rather than pleasure."  

Goodman did not explain the motive for Chagall’s decorative choices; she quotes Chagall, “Don’t ask me why I painted blue or green and why a calf is visible in the cows belly, etc. Anyway, let Marx, if he is so wise, come to life and explain it to you.” Even though Chagall’s explanation was quite ambivalent, the resonance of the project was unprecedented. Overnight, Vitebsk’s neoclassicist architecture was overpowered by the colors of flying words, cows and horses. Theatrically delivered revolutionary agitation took over the city. However, Chagall’s street art caused a concern for the local government that feared that the visual impact of the street decorations would overpower the intended political ideology. This concern was in part provoked by fears of the probability of the reemergence of an anarchical movement. Recently, the art historian Victoria Kirillova has revealed documents that show that these October decorations, which remained in place for a long time, were titled as Monuments to Propaganda -- Agitacionie Pamyatniki.

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70 Goodman 60.


The understanding of a monument in the post-revolutionary context of Vitebsk was most certainly a reflection of the city’s social and political landscape. On the one hand, the newly installed government was willing to protect the old, “historical” monuments in preserving the neo-classical façade of the city. On the other hand, it admired the architecture of the more recently flourishing Russian Art-Nouveau. The Soviet regime portrayed itself as a humanitarian power, respecting cultural history and identity, all-the-while safeguarding the foundations of Soviet heritage, hence, the temporary nature of Chagall’s street decorations. The one exception to this quest for preservation, of course, was religious edifices; the latter conveyed a monarchic power that was threatening to the Soviet regime. All churches were thus demolished. These almost controversial approaches to the architectural and monumental, with a corresponding demand for new monuments made Vitebsk a laboratory for experimenting with new concepts of monuments.

Chagall’s decorations, the first attempt to create new monuments, did not meet Soviet ideological demands. From the local revolutionaries’ perspective soviet ideology had to be expressed in a more conservative way, without the mystical phantasmagoria of flying cows. Presumably, it was one of the reasons that Malevich took over the next public decorating project and soon thereafter- the leadership of the Vitebsk Art School. Chagall left Vitebsk for Moscow in May of 1920.

To conclude then, how exactly did Chagall influence Malevich’s art and thinking? Seemingly opposite, the two were linked by their spirit of innovation; both were looking
for a new way to practice and look at art, as well as searching for a new direction for art and the values attached to it. Both of them were taking experiences from European art, and these common artistic perspectives gave them tremendous impetus to become a powerful teaching duo in the Vitebsk Art School. Even though they had different approaches to pedagogy, they created an unprecedented school structure: Malevich had had little experience in teaching, but the opportunity of working with Chagall helped him develop his teaching skills, and organize his thoughts and eventually popularizing them (Cook, 1989). There are no direct references from Malevich that might help understand how Chagall’s art affected the notion of Suprematism and how it would lead him to his theory of the architectons. However, it is highly possible that Chagall’s way of decorating Vitebsk’s streets, his understanding of urban space, and the subsequent possibilities of its virtual transformations, opened new avenues for Malevich’s thinking, especially in connecting his Suprematist “cosmos” to urban existence.

Finally, the differing philosophies within the artistic practices of Malevich and Chagall found new points of intersection in their interpretation of abstract art, where the application of color dominated. Perhaps Malevich gained from Chagall’s art the magnetic power of colors that provoked the imagination, taking one “behind” the painting as if it were an aspect of theatrical decoration that hid a space behind a back door. Or perhaps in Chagall’s painting Malevich saw Vitebsk from above, as a virtual city, leading him to think differently about urban space and how color could limit or extend it to infinity. The latter is fundamental and I believed that nowhere has this
previously been highlighted. We will see how this new thinking about color and urban space is manifested in the next sections.

2.2.2 Malevich in Vitebsk

Although by the time Malevich arrived at Vitebsk, he was known as an avant-garde artist and revolutionary activist, he had little teaching experience. As the art historian Catherine Cook observes, “Opportunities to teach had not been extensive in the years of War and revolution during which Malevich reached artistic maturity.” Therefore, his coming to Vitebsk had become an opportunity to teach. As a result of this, in his letters he became more optimistic about his living in Vitebsk. Despite finding his adjustment to what be termed suburban life difficult, he strongly believed that inasmuch as the authorities of Vitebsk trusted his assistance in the development of the Vitebsk Art School, Malevich believed that time in Vitebsk would aid his artistic and philosophical experiments. During this time Malevich would also publish his treatises. However, even though he was already known as an avant-garde artist, the creator of a new art trend, Suprematism, the audience in Vitebsk did not find his first lectures attractive. The fact that even local artists found themselves lost in the content of Malevich’s 1919 lecture From Cezanne to Suprematism confirms that Malevich’s ideas were ahead of his time.

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Through working experience in Chagall’s School, Malevich achieved social and artistic popularity. One of Malevich’s popular works was the project for street decorations devoted to the first anniversary of the Committee for Prevention of Unemployment. Evidently, the project was similar in intent to that of Chagall’s project for the first anniversary of the Revolution. Malevich and El Lissitzky worked together on this project and on defining new architectural perspectives. The philosophy of geometrical abstraction influenced the work and created a theme much different than that of Chagall some years before. Instead of Chagall’s flying cows, Malevich’s flying squares and circles energized the urban space, alienating it from the familiar landscape.


(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

It is likely that the idea of the architectons originated from Malevich’s experience of working in the open three-dimensional space of Vitebsk. It was also at this time that Malevich began his discourse on contemporary architecture, in effect he began ‘to animate’ the two-dimensional painting “Black Square” into spatial volumes, the

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75 Kirillova 37.
76 Shatskikh V4, 294.
architectons. While in charge of the Décor Studio, Malevich organized a new division, a studio named UNOVIS, “Affirmers of the New Art”. Initially, UNOVIS was a workshop for the production of visual agitation, and students from various art schools participated in its activities. Painting, sculpture and slogans that were not utilized as street decorations came to be shown at art exhibitions. One such exhibition was held in Moscow in May of 1919. The impact of this exhibition was felt in Vitebsk, as described by Cook (1989), by “unanimous declaration of the apprentices [literally ‘sub-masters’] of the former “individualistic” studios announced their intention to follow the UNOVIS line. This meant that all the studios of the Vitebsk except those for academic studies and sculpture have united under the banner of UNOVIS.”

12. The October Demonstration on Marsovo Pole, St. Petersburg, 1920.78
(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

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77 Cook, *AD 11*  
The mission of UNOVIS was to create an artistic mode that would ideologically correspond to a new society. Writing in 2003, Christina Lodder described UNOVIS's mission as one that advocated the "abstract artistic language of pre-Revolutionary Suprematism, stripped down to colored planes floating and interacting spatially against pure white grounds, which could and should serve as the correct aesthetic correlative of the new social order." However, UNOVIS contained within it many contesting visions of how future Suprematism should look. A group of artists inside UNOVIS actually rejected the main concept of Suprematism, based on purely artistic, non-objective perception and started to promote a material approach to art drawing inspiration from engineering and architecture. This group eventually separated itself from UNOVIS and gave rise to the Constructivist movement.

Malevich's sojourn in Vitebsk was not without its significance: During these years he published his most fundamental theoretical work and he developed his idea of the "artistic group," enabling the promotion of his notion of "three-dimensional Suprematism." The latter had emerged, first as street decorations that he created while at Vitebsk, then as part of his theoretic as he developed his ideas in his written work. "Three-dimensional" Suprematism became the point of departure for the creation of the architectons.

Vitebsk had other attractions and possible influences. Perhaps, attracted by the escalating turbulence of Vitebsk’s post-revolutionary cultural life, Michael Bakhtin and his group of followers, now known as the Bakhtin Circle, moved from Nevel to Vitebsk in the Fall of 1918, just before Malevich’s arrival in 1919. Being absolutely interested in the emergence of new philosophical trends, Malevich became one of the proponents of Bakhtin’s work. Whether they were in ideological and political agreement or not, they spent a great deal of time together during the early 1920s. What they discussed is not documented, but perhaps they discussed notions such as “galactic infinity”, all-the-while observing the night skies through Malevich’s telescope. Just as the two discussed their mutual ideals and artistic directions, the Bakhtin Circle gradually relocated itself to Petrograd and by 1924 the group was almost completely entrenched there. It is quite possible that his whole situation had an impact on Malevich in terms of his ideas about the social world and that he assimilated some of Bakhtin’s ideas and his own critical thoughts about philosophy. While working in Vitebsk Malevich created his idea of architectons and Bakhtin found the key for his concept of heteroglossia, which is in the late 20th century would be instrumental in rendering the understanding of Malevich’s concept of the architectons as monuments.

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80 Bakhtin’s study primarily focused on philosophy of culture, and especially “present-day” philosophy and culture. In his work, he discussed the interaction between “subject” and “object”, and between different social groups in terms of varying interpretations of language. Language, or “linguistic text”, according to the Circle, was dialogic and understood as having been formulated by the interaction of different social groups. Still according to the Circle, the dialogical nature of linguistic production was seen as creating heteroglossia, or multivoices, reflecting different social values and rearticulating the speech of others. In spite of the complex philosophical genre that was not easy for the masses to understand, the Bakhtin Circle became moderately popular among Vitebsk’s artistic milieux in a short time.

Another philosophical influence that had impact on Malevich's philosophy of Suprematism was the philosophical empiricism of Ospensky\textsuperscript{82} and of Lobachevskiy.\textsuperscript{83} Their stances advocated metaphysical perspectives that described the world as infinite, whereby, in the end objects would change their respective meanings and the world would have parallels that would eventually intersect. Olga Shihireva,\textsuperscript{84} the Russian Soviet critic, points that these works of Ospenskyi and Lobachevskiy enabled Malevich to define his non-Euclidian space and construct multidimensional space within the fourth dimension of time, and the fifth dimension of economy. Hence, the context of Malevich's non-objective architectons can be found in their current dimension.

2.2.3 The Soviet Decree on Monuments

The Vitebsk’s urban landscape during the post-revolutionary era, reflected changes in city planning that occurred in all newly born Soviet cities. From 1917 the politico-social climate dramatically changed affecting the urban fabric of the young country. The new Soviet administration considered urban space to be one of the most

\textsuperscript{82} Peter Ouspensky (1878-1947), esoteric philosopher, the author of \textit{Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought, a Key to Enigmas of the World} (1912), which became one of the most influential metaphysical studies for Malevich.

\textsuperscript{83} Nikolai Lobachevsky (1792-1856), philosopher, mathematician developed one of the studies of the non-Euclidean geometry-hyperbolic geometry.

important narratives of the new communist ideology. Accordingly, there were a number of new laws that were responsible for governing the organization and structure of the new urban space. Because the construction of new monuments was strategically important, comparable to the construction of new residential developments, the Decree on Monuments was constituted. To follow the law, the old monuments that were erected in honor of the tsar were supposed to be removed; the meaning of existing obelisks had to be changed by installing new plaques. The old monuments could be preserved for the sake of enlightenment, yet which monuments were historically valued for the Soviets was difficult to decide. At the same time, the construction of new monuments should take place according to this legislation. Ideologically imposed collective memory dictated the new format of monuments, where “the monument represented the official version of our memory.”

85 Hence, that what constituted an appropriate Soviet monument was left ambiguous.

Malevich’s treatises on Suprematist architecture were not written yet when in 1917 Malevich was appointed as Commissar for Preservation of Monuments and Antiquities. By the time Malevich created Vitebsk monuments, his understanding of monumental values and meaning had changed and reflected needs for new monuments. This was the ideal time for the advent of the architectons. It is important to highlight that with his appointment as Commissar in 1917 Malevich would have been immersed in the debate in the contemporary monument. Also this predated Malevich’s arrival in Vitebsk and he would bring the idea with him.

2.2.4 Projecting New Monuments

While Riegl in Vienna was concerned with the historical value of the monument in order to preserve them, post-revolutionary Russia was concerned with the ideological value or ideological meaning of monuments in order to destroy them. With the great expectations that monuments would reflect the new ideology and the new collaboration of art and architecture, the Soviet authorities opened a large scale program for the construction of new monuments. The Soviet art historian, Victoria Khazanova (1972) in Sovetskaya Architectura Pervih Let Octyabrya (The Soviet Architecture of the First years of October) underscores the importance of this venture and explains the criteria and standards of the 1920s new monuments. According to Lenin’s Decree monuments were not supposed to depict a story but to describe it. In other words, monuments had to portray, to visualize, appealing to a viewer by scale, color and text. Hence, more often monuments were built in the style of realism and took the form of figurative sculptures with built-in informative text which consisted of ideological propaganda. These monuments meant to become land marks; therefore, their scale was what was meant to make them significant in context of urban planning. Soon after the increased scale of residential construction began ‘overcasting’ these figurative monuments and the impossibility of increasing their scale brought about the demand for new abstract monuments like cubes, obelisks, and columns which became more ‘useful,’ because it was much easier to increase their scale. At this very moment the Constructivists took over the task of designing new monuments. Even though building abstract monuments
seemed to be more feasible, most of these projects ended up being two dimensional.\textsuperscript{86} One of these Constructivist attempts in designing monuments was Tatlin’s Tower-Project for a Monument to the Third International (1920). The tower was meant to express the “archetypal symbol of the machine aesthetic”, and many critics considered the Tower’s synthesis of kineticism and agitational propaganda the ideal emblem of radical politics as well as of progressive, experimental architecture.\textsuperscript{87} Never built in a real scale, the design of the Tower had tremendous international success and till now remains in “the realm of visionary architecture.”\textsuperscript{88} Even though Malevich’s perspectives on architecture were totally opposed to those of Tatlin, Malevich celebrated the appearance of the Tower and understood it as a symbol of “The new life of iron and the machine, the roads of automobiles, the glitter of electric lights.”\textsuperscript{89}

13. A. Nikolskyi. Proekt Pamyatniky Lenina, 1925, (The Project of the Monument to V. I. Lenin)\textsuperscript{90} (Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

\textsuperscript{86} For example, A. Nikolskyi ‘s Project of the Monument to V. I. Lenin.
\textsuperscript{88} Roman 47.
\textsuperscript{89} Roman 51.

Even though, there were a lot of oppositions to Lenin’s Decree on architecture and monuments particularly, all of these oppositions were reduced to the discussions on form and functionality. For example, Chagall created his Vitebsk’s pamphlets in forms of flying cows, Benua\textsuperscript{91} advocated the format of the classical style of Romans temples, Rodchenko and Tatlin constructed their monuments with functional meaning in the light of technological progress of new era.

14. V. Tatlin. \textit{The Model of the Project for the Third International, 1920}.\textsuperscript{92}

(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

\textsuperscript{91} Alexander Benua (1870-1960), prominent Russian artist, art historian and critic, advocated Classical art., one of the major opponent to Malevich art.

2.2.5 Malevich’s Understanding of Monuments

In Vitebsk, Malevich wrote his treatise *O Neobходимости Kommuni Economistov–Supretatistov* (About Necessities in the Commune of the Economist-Suprematist) where he elaborated on his idea of monuments. At this time he was completely confident that “monuments are the habits of the bourgeois, pagans and Christians. The installment of monuments is not a collective idea that would support the commune; if it is absolutely necessary to have monuments, they could be as simple as a picture of trains and workers.” It is evident that he denied traditional/conventional meaning and format of the monument, which was colliding with Lenin’s ideology.

Malevich discussed the concept of the monument within the discourse of Suprematist architecture. Malevich wrote about the new monuments as they would become part of ‘formoobrazuushega elementa’ (the system that would unite different elements in one form). In his treatise *Jivopic’ v Probleme Architecturi* (1928) (The Painting in the Problem of Architecture) he affiliated his Suprematist architecture to the realm of antique monuments, titling some of the architectons as *Architecton Alfa* and *Architecton Gota* (1925-27). Advocating the art value of antique monuments, Malevich’s denied any functional or ideological values. He called his architectons architectural.

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94 Shatskikh 164.
95 Shatskikh, Vol. 2 138.
formulas that would enable him to create a form for new architecture and which would attribute to the new/modern idea of monument.

Finally, Malevich built his architectons contrary to any existing patterns of monuments of his time. Opposite to Tatlin's Tower, the architectons did not demand super technology and futuristic materials to be erected, they did not hold any specials symbols, and did not mime any reality. Paradoxically, even though the architectons were molded by Suprematist theory, which advocated the supreme role of color, the architectons are white. These architectons, which were not attached to any material or ideological values, I argue, became archetypes for the modern monument. Malevich anticipated Siegfried Gideon’s discourse on the modern monument in his *Nine Points of Monumentality* (1943) where he defined modern monuments: “Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for the future generations. As such, they form a link between past and future.”96

2.2.6 Conclusion

Vitebsk of 1919-1922 offered Malevich the artistic and philosophical milieux of debate and experimentation shaped by the new political doctrine of the Soviets. To summarize Vitebsk’s impact on Malevich’s philosophy of the architectons, it would be

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logical to list two factors that defined these milieux: time and space. The first, time, refers specifically the post revolutionary period. The second, space, refers to Vitebsk where Malevich was introduced to the scope of the work of his contemporaries such as Chagall, EL Lissitzly, and Bakhtin.

The idea of the architectons was born in 1919 Vitebsk, at the time when demands for the new were at prevalent, when the rapidly accelerated power of the post-revolutionary philosophy and art needed to be engaged within a much more extensive socio-cultural space, provide a boundless access to the millions of proletarians. The idea of the architectons was inspired by the eclectic urban space of Vitebsk. There, the monumental scale of the eighteenth century classical architecture and historical monuments were enhanced by the 1900s Russian Art Nouveau monuments. These could often be seen in stark contrast with obscure buildings that were meant to hide synagogues for fear of pogroms. The idea of the architectons was elaborated and discussed under the strong influence of Malevich's Vitebsk contemporaries and supporters who were in a constant dialogue with his opponents.

Thus, having discussed the role of monuments in Malevich's time, it is clear that there were social, cultural and political factors that affected Malevich's theory of Suprematism and inspired him to build the architectons-monuments, which might have some visual similarities with the creations of his epoch, but are totally unique in their inner meaning.

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97 Pogrom - the violent action against the Jews of the time was totally imminent.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM RIEGL TO ARCHITECTONS

3.1 Vienna: “The Modern Cult of Monuments”:

Intentional Purposes and Unintentional Resonance

When Kurt Forster and Diane Ghirardo published their translation of Alois Riegl’s early twentieth-century essay on “The Modern Cult of Monuments” in 1982, they would have been acutely aware of the modernist debate on the meaning of monuments. Riegl’s essay continues to be the starting point for most current work on the subject, especially meaningful has been its main focus on defining a variety of monument purposes and arriving at a logical conclusion regarding the evolution of the monument as a concept and practice. Today, the work of many artists and architects, including, among others, Peter Eisenman (1995) and Aldo Rossi (1991), claim adherence to one or other of the meanings derived from Riegl’s essay. At the same time, scholars and critics continue to debate the purpose of monuments -- past and present. From the contemporary work of Adrian Forty, John Gillis and James Young, we get a collage of definitions of “monument,” and its relationship to “heritage,” “identity,” and so on. And from Francis Yates’ “The Art of Memory” to the work of Adrian Forty, we

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get a mixed set of views; all purporting to correct misconceptions about what monuments truly represent or what function they initially perform.

In this chapter, I focus on defining “monument” and concepts invariably related to it, including “memory” and other terms relevant to my research. It is worth to detour to explain what a monument meant at Malevich’s time and I turn to Riegl, while my primary focus is on Malevich’s architectons as monuments in light of Riegl’s discussion of monuments generally, as set out in his essay written in the early twentieth century.104 I also turn to Yates’ groundbreaking book on the way memory is internalized I initially focus on Riegl work and within the collective, as well as other, more recent work on the subject. The ultimate intent of this exploration is to form my own understanding of the same terms, while simultaneously assessing the use of Riegl (and others) within present-day modernist discourse, and importantly in relation to Malevich architectons, which were contemporaneous to Riegl’s writing.

During his investigations in the field of the Art History, Riegl wrote a proposal to the Austro-Hungarian government for the protection of old buildings and monuments. His work, The Modern Cult of Monuments, written in 1903, was a part of this proposal. In the essay he developed the concept of the “typology of monuments” that would enable him to develop a strategy for the preservation of old monuments according to their historical context and present values. The Modern Cult of Monuments included the concept of Kunstwollen, which defines “the position and function of art within context of

general cultural development\[\]^{105}; it and his system, were based in the scientific method in art history; observation, description, definition, hypothesis and conclusion.

While Malevich was not concerned with the popularization of heritage, Riegl’s research on monuments became significant for his contemporaries because it collided with the then-current idea of historicism; he rejuvenated the discourse on monuments by applying it to heritage. His *The Modern Cult of Monuments* became unprecedented in its “attempt to speculate on the popularization of heritage in western culture.”\[\]^{106} While is not any documentary or even anecdotal evidence suggesting Malevich knew of Riegl’s ideas pertaining to the cult of monuments, which was published in 1903. He was possibly made aware of Vienna and the philosophical discussions occurring there via his contact with Moholy—Nagy, which however did not occur until 1927, long after the architectons were proposed.

Nevertheless, as the discussion and debate regarding monuments in the new Soviet State was clearly part of his experience, as witnessed in his position in 1917 as Commissar of Monuments and the suggestive comments made by Chagall regarding monuments and his street art while both were in Vitebsk, Malevich perhaps aware, if only second hand, of Riegl’s ideas, which became obscured pretty much soon after been published in 1903. Regardless of a lack of connections between Malevich and Riegl, both were forced to deal with the question of monuments in the formative years of

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modernism and juxtaposing the two highlights Malevich’s contribution to the conception of a modern monument.

3.1.1 The 1900 to 1930 years

At this juncture, it becomes important to discuss Vienna. It is clear that Malevich did not visit Vienna; he was never permitted to do so. That said, the philosophical and artistic draw would have been enormous and there are a number of factors that make Vienna significant in the discussion of his work. First, Vienna was a city of monuments, where Riegl, an important person that I am about to discuss below lived and worked. In 1903 Alois Riegl published his work on the *cult of monuments* and it is quite possible to conceive of Malevich coming into a contact with the document. Second, it is important to underscore the predominance of Vienna’s avant-garde movement in Europe. Again, Malevich would have being intellectually emerged in the ideas emanating from the city. Third, Malevich’s key publisher, Moholy-Nagy lived and operated out of Vienna; he was one of the members of Vienna’s avant-garde group and there were a series of direct links between this particular group’s thinking and that of Malevich; I will discuss these in a moment. Some philosophical ideas linking the Viennese philosophers and Malevich’s treatises led to the initial ideas of modernism. The “modernism” of the time, or to paraphrase Anthony Vidler (2000), the present mode of living, is what was thought of as instantly transforming the notion of “monument” from Riegl’s to Malevich’s. This is fundamental because it was the cultural and philosophical developments of Vienna that gave Malevich many of his points of philosophical departures. I will return to discussion
on Vienna in the postscript, where the end of the twentieth century monument by Rachel White will be analyzed in the light of Malevich’s theory. Consider Vienna in slightly greater detail.

3.1.2 Riegl and the Viennese “Monumental View”

To understand the contribution which Malevich’s architectons made to the notion of modern monument, we need to look at different aspects of the understanding of monument, which were being dramatically transformed in the modern period. As above highlighted, a key figure of this transformation was Riegl in Vienna. Alois Riegl (1858-1905) was one of the founders of the New Vienna School, and a professor of Art History at the University of Vienna where he initiated the use of the scientific method in the field of art history, transforming into as a science of art. The new method developed by Riegl and his invention of “Kunstwollen” were both based on classical archeology and the romanticist tradition of German metaphysics. “Kunstwollen” or “will to art” was the continuation of Rousseau’s idea that there is a general will to attain political power. The New Vienna School adapted Rousseau’s idea of a political will to power to an artistic will to power. Nietzsche’s equivalent of this notion underscores the idea that power is willed by all people and that that is what stirs thought. Schopenhauer expressed a similar notion in his identification of will through representation. More recently, Foster (1984) signals that Riegl’s Kunstwollen was a “neologism of his own—and “it conveys ... unreflected force, the compelling power of a

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107 In opposition to its contemporaries such as the Vienna Circle, which advocated an empirical method in a science based on natural sciences and exemplified the notion of perfection, the Vienna School did not wish to abandon metaphysics.
particular vision.” Foster underlines that Riegl’s idea had its basis in Freud’s notion that “recognition of libido in its individual manifestation and collective force” is key.108

In 1918, by the conclusion of the World War I, Austria had obtained the status of “Democratic Republic,” the prewar vanguard had died, and Jugendstil had come to an end: the new era had begun. Because the first democratic political leadership advocated procommunist ideology, post war Vienna was given the name “Red Vienna” (1918-1938). “Red Vienna,” ruled by the socio-democratic leadership, aimed at democratization, industrialization and welfare, supported the working class, offering a new social and cultural life. Due to industrialization the immigration from Slavic Europe and Hungary, an increased working class population had to be provided with housing. Therefore, the main focus in new construction was low cost housing, running water supply, recreation zones and development in peripheral zones. To finance these projects the new policy of redistribution was imposed on the wealthier segment of population.

Moholy-Nagy was one of those Hungarian immigrants. He participated in The Red Vienna movement and found his artistic media in the avant-garde art magazine, “Ma”, (tomorrow), a focal point for avant-garde artists in Vienna who were searching for recognitions within progressive art movements around the world. As a “Ma”s correspondent in Germany, Moholy-Nagy began working within the Bauhaus and became one of its directors. Key to these is that in 1927 Malevich met Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus. As one of the teachers and a friend of El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy who was already very much

108 Foster 22.
influenced by work of Malevich,\textsuperscript{109} offered to publish Malevich’s writing in Germany. The first publication of Malevich’s work in German and Polish \textit{O pribavochnom elemente v jivopisi} (About the Additional Element in Art), was a momentous first step in the light of popularization of his ideas amongst European artists and philosophers.

### 3.1.3 Riegl’s Theory of the Monument

Riegl’s research was based on the comparison of ancient and more recent monuments. Andrian Forty (2000) refers to Reigl’s groundbreaking work as “an interesting refinement of Ruskin’s ideas about the memorial significance of ancient buildings.”\textsuperscript{110} This may be true, but for Riegl, history was essential in understanding the meaning of present life within its temporariness and within nostalgia for the past. Riegl went much further than Ruskin; he advanced the modern discourse on art and architecture, heritage and collective memory as he developed his ideas further. He believed in Kunstwollen and art ambitions that defined art and architecture; to him, art and architecture were meant to be merged physically in terms of interpretations within a cultural and historical environment. Furthermore, Riegl’s \textit{The Modern Cult of Monuments} was one of the initial insights on the development of the modern monument where he anticipated the inevitable transformation of its meaning according to historical context. As Forty highlights, Riegl looked both ways: he commanded and refined the

\begin{flushendnote}

\textsuperscript{110} Forty 212.
\end{flushendnote}
research methods tested during Winckelmann’s work in the eighteenth century and sensed the displacement of traditional values in the new, twentieth century.\textsuperscript{111}

Riegl’s work was written at the turn of the century, the beginning of the modernist era and the ultimate denial of the past and its values. Forty writes: “[b]y the time Riegl was writing his essay, memory was already under attack, Nietzsche’s famous assault on memory and celebration of forgetfulness in his essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History” appeared in 1874.\textsuperscript{112} Hence, in the few years after Riegl’s death, “The Modern Cult of Monuments” was abandoned for over last century.

When Riegl’s theory on the monument was being developed in early 1900s Vienna,\textsuperscript{113} Malevich’s idea of the architectons was not yet formulated. In the 1900s in Russia, the notion of “monument” was represented in a very classical, single meaning mode; the discourse on the monument took on new significance with the 1917 Socialist October Revolution. It is safe to assume that Riegl’s Viennese treatise would have enabled Malevich to assess the meaning of pre-revolutionary Russian monuments because they were contextually similar to Viennese of 1900 in the way they conveyed the art- historical values and the presence of new, although there is no evidence that he considered the treatise.

\textsuperscript{111}Forty 24.
\textsuperscript{112}Forty 212.
\textsuperscript{113}The art historical period of Russia in 1900 was known as “Silver Age,” a time when Viennese art movements coined term “La Belle Époque” and “Fin de Siècle.”
By the 1960s there were two extreme approaches to the historic past. The first was to completely reject the old; the second was to measure the progress of the new against the past. Therefore, one of the reasons for the re-emergence of Riegl's work in the post-modern era is his theory of dynamic relativity in the meaning of the monument, as well as the almost instant changes in its role in culture and history.

At the end of the 20th century, post-modernist philosophers were entirely preoccupied with the past and its relationship to the modernist present. Extremely expanded modernist studies of memory allowed academics to respond to the legacies of the past. Thus modernist studies on memory provoked interest in Riegl's research on monuments and caused the re-emergence of The Modern Cult of Monuments. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1990, 1995) followed Riegl's notion of collective memory as he interpreted it as a collective representation of the past. Still in the more recent past, Foster describes monuments as the representation of the past, saying that "in the modern era, history lies before our eyes in the form of monuments."114

For Riegl, a monument consists of any ancient or recent edifice, or any residual of them to be found in ruins. At the same time, a monument could simply be a piece of any object that would commemorate a historical moment, or an individual. Riegl opened his essay with a definition of the intentional monument -- "a human creation, erected for a specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations," which would be understood without special

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114 Foster 22.
knowledge.\textsuperscript{115} Unintentional monuments, on the other hand, are those monuments whose purpose was forgotten over time. These were more controversial and complicated because they required a certain understanding of the context in which they originally occurred. Riegl made this clear: “unintentional monuments, which are more numerous, are remains whose meaning is determined not by their makers, but by our modern perception of these monuments, i.e. by retrospective cultural memory.”\textsuperscript{116}

Riegl was concerned that over time monuments would become ‘fragile’ because they deteriorated and lost their historical context. Foster picks up on this notion, writing that “[t]he deliberate memorial -- Riegl called it the ‘intentional monument’ -- is exposed to a kind of historic double jeopardy: memory is all that sustains its meaning but its physical form will have to survive the vagaries of changing perceptions and values.”\textsuperscript{117} Therefore, the principle concern for Riegl centered on what each epoch would remember about the monument and what people would perceive as the value of the monument, and how these values could change over time. These memory values were described as (art) \textit{historical} value, \textit{commemorative} value and \textit{age} value. Even though Riegl only briefly discussed contemporary monuments, he extended the memory values to the category of present-day values: \textit{art} value, \textit{newness} value, and \textit{use} value that were related to architecture and art.

In structuring these essential categories of the monument, Riegl found that there persisted a dialectic between memory values and present values, the oscillation between

\textsuperscript{115} Forster 3.
\textsuperscript{116} Forster 3.
\textsuperscript{117} Foster 23.
the meanings of intentional and unintentional monuments. He explained this dialogic as the
dynamic development of monuments as a reflection of their historical development:
"the concept of continuous evolution which generates its own changing values."\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{trajan_column}
\caption{Trajan's Column, Rome.}
\end{figure}

(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

For example, Greece and Rome were concerned with the patriotic past; they created intentional monuments out of the most durable materials and protected them in order to prolong the fame of the state. Trajan's Column was used by Riegl as an example of how the intentional monument could maintain its intended meaning while its values changed over time. Trajan's Column, a symbol of the might and power of the old Roman Empire, survived through the Middle Ages when monuments were known only as intentional. By the Renaissance, Trajan's Column became a valuable art work. For a Renaissance viewer the column was a symbol of the patriotic past and an appropriation of contemporary art which was rooted in ancient Roman art. In this example, Riegl pursued...
the idea of Kunstwollen that attributed art power to the format and meaning of monument, which relying on artistic perception which is continually being transformed throughout historical time and space. Indeed, the art values of the monument were always appreciated by a viewer immediately, yet were dependant upon the current style or fashion, however, art values became more ‘fragile’ than the monument itself.

Commemorative value was related to the intentional monument, while age value and art/historical value were attributed equally to intentional and unintentional monuments. According to Riegl, he was concerned mostly with old monuments, the difference between intentional and unintentional monuments was the difference between simply old monuments and not that old, recent ones with no understood meaning, or with lost meaning or historical importance. Moreover, Riegl affirmed that, “[i]n contrast to intentional monuments, historical monuments are unintentional, but it is equally clear that all deliberate monuments may also be unintentional ones.” In other words, the historical development of the intentional monument might be a cause of its transformation into the unintentional and visa-versa. Therefore, the intentional meaning of the monument is in a state of ceaseless flux, it relies “on the beholder whose perceptions were themselves contingent within history.” Thus, different perceptions of the monument create different meanings of it. This supposition raises the question of whether unintentional monuments are made into monuments through a mere application of meaning. A similar speculation on an ephemeral value of meaning, and its subordination to the collective or individual, social or political, was explored by M.

119 Foster 23.
120 Foster 23.
Bakhtin’s in his concept of *heteroglossia* formulated while in Vitebsk in 1919. Bakhtin says “[a]t any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions -- social, historical, meteorological, physiological, that will insure that a word uttered in that place and that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.”

There is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of influencing others and being influenced. Can we separate one voice from another? Is there a pressure towards canonization, a process that blurs heteroglossia … that facilitates a naïve, single-voiced reading? Both Riegl and Bakhtin pose questions relevant to the architectons- should architecture became canonized there would be no need to read its meaning, it will become evident – benign, another Arc de Triomphe. But once canonized, can this be the moment when architecture becomes a monument? When does a monument become a relic, if a relic is something ancient, a memorial having a meaning associated with the past, tradition and history?

Moscow’s Red Square exemplifies the momentary of constructed meaning in a monument. In the period between the twelfth and thirteen centuries, the Red Square was first utilized as a public space comparable to the roman forum. By the fifteenth century, Ivan the Terrible commissioned St. Basil’s Cathedral to celebrate victory over the Mongols. The grand scale of the cathedral towered over the rest of the city making it a visible appropriation of space, symbol of both Ivan’s tyranny and the growing influence of Russia over its neighbors. This dual symbolism was further reinforced when Ivan the

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122 Bakhtin 425.
Terrible commissioned *Lobnoe Mesto*, a place for the persecution of criminals under his regime. At the end of the nineteenth century, the department store GUM was constructed across the square from the (1879) Kremlin Monastery further altering Red Square’s image. GUM installed a new architecture that echoed the flamboyant flavor of Art Nouveau and changed the once threatening demeanor of Red Square.

16. GUM. The State Universal Store, Built by Pomerantsov in 1888, Moscow. (Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

Shortly afterwards, the early twentieth century brought the revolutionary zeal of the new communist Russian to the forefront of politics and in turn to the podiums of Red Square. During the 1930s, Lenin’s Mausoleum was erected in Red Square. This revolutionized the meaning of Red Square, yet again appropriating the once public place in the name of dictatorship regimes. Ever since Lenin’s public burial, military drills around Red Square have become commonplace. In fact, a portion of the Kremlin Monastery was removed by Stalin to make room for military parades.

The Monastery, *Lobnoe Mesto*, St Basil’s cathedral, GUM and the Mausoleum, all reside within Riegl’s category of ‘historical value.’ At the same time, these monuments unintentionally alter the meaning of Red Square through the shifting of social
memory and history. The social and political conditions of an era dictate the meaning of a particular monument. This is precisely what Riegl meant when he stated that meaning is relative to social and historical context. That is to say that past meaning is constantly being mediated by the present. It is the context in which we view a monument that shapes our understanding of it. Without a present context, collective memory becomes abstract and we would foolishly assess monuments just by the category of old. St. Basil’s Cathedral today could be seen as an example of this kind of empty canonization of monuments, another Arc de Triomphe because is simply understood as old as opposed to a monument to the victory over tartars.

Many questions come to the forefront in Reigl’s discussion of the monument: Can anything have the meaning of a monument if adequately described as such? Does the differentiation or dialogue between the old and the recently old monument open up the possibility of reconstructing old monuments or creating new ones? Does Foster’s conclusion, for example, which proposes to see the need for new monuments as “a need for innovation and the dialectics of destruction, which over the centuries allowed new monuments to take the place of old” hold true in all instances?123 And was Malevich’s notion of “monument” related to the first question?

Today, one can say that both old and new monuments are intentional, as they are built for the purpose of commemoration. However, their meaning cannot be permanently determined by their makers and hence all of them are also unintentional. Meaning has to be negotiated within a historical and cultural context. Historian J. E. Young, supports

123 Foster 4
this notion, as does French writer Pierre Nora (1984), who introduced the concept of an inert memorial whose meaning is continually reconstructed by ever-changing social and cultural contexts. Young sees little value in monuments themselves; once they are built or “once they are created, memorials take on a life of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state’s original intentions.”

3.1.4 Age-value and newness

These monuments are nothing more than indispensable catalysts which trigger in the beholder a sense of life cycle, of the emergence of the particular from the general and its gradual but inevitable dissolution back into the general (Riegl, 642)

Ruins can be seen as buildings that outlasted their usefulness. Since the sixteenth century, academia’s ambivalent attitude towards ruins and their reproduction was well balanced by ever lasting public admiration. In his analysis, Riegl revisits this prevailing attitude, revisits it in light of his current notions of the monument. Inasmuch as Riegl was concerned with preservation, his attitude towards age and ruins was romantically ambiguous as he saw them as important historical messages from the past and at the same time, as pure decoration. He was concerned with both the material and the ethical.

For Riegl ruins were attributed to the image of a picturesque landscape, this was the case whether they were expressing the deconstruction made by a drama of the patriotic past, or were carrying a distant message of natural decay. Age-value, according to Riegl, could be recognized immediately, “Age-value in a monument betrays itself at

It appealed to mass society through emotion; it evokes feelings of nostalgia, the attitude in which the past seemed to be idealized. Ruins always provoke sadness of loss, perceptions of the end, yet predefine the new that is eventually coming instead of the old. In this sense, Foster observes that Riegl discovered a new attitude to the past, “He discovered that mortality of culture to be of value to culture itself. When he defined the new appreciation of monuments as the recognition of age-value, he recognized, in effect, the pervasive acceptance of the advancing death of culture.”

From the material point of view, Riegl was concerned that the physical appearance of the artifact should portray age-value. Hence, for Riegl it was important to find how ruins could be protected, and to allocate them to the category of pure art. Also, he attempted to find out if age-value would be still recognizable if the old building was to bear new function.

“Age-value” can be understood by looking at today’s tendency towards accelerating memory, to use Nora’s term. The seemingly perpetual reconstruction and ultimately production of monuments has continued and amplified an obsession with the ruin. The theme of the reproduction of a cultural picturesque landscape, which would help to animate our memories, to re-evoke our traditions, is expressed in the book The Necessity for Ruins by John B. Jackson (1998). The author suggests that by restoring the historic and cultural landscape, reconstructing environments, the past can be brought

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125 Foster 631.
126 Foster 24.
back “in all its richness.” Someone’s’ desirable result can be archived; we become “part of the environment. History ceased to exist.”

For Riegl, the distortion and fragmentation presented by ruins was an obstacle on the way to understanding the wholeness of the historical past. In opposition to Riegl, modernist philosophy rediscovered fragments as a new aesthetic category. Fragments, disjunctions, distortions- incompleteness perpetuates the dialogue between past and present, history and memory. Still, it is disputable whether or not today’s appreciation of age-value and ruins differs dramatically from that of the nineteenth century, in the post or pre-Riegl time. However, the image of age and ruins provokes more sentiment, the ruin’s concept of immortality, celebrates the end. Referring to the ideas of Lewis Mumford, Young states: “They write their boasts upon tombstones; they incorporate their deeds in obelisks; they place their hopes of remembrance in solid stones joined to other solid stones, dedicated to their subjects or their forever, forgetful of the fact that stones that are deserted by the living are even more helpless than life that remains unprotected and preserved by stones.”

According to Riegl, newness was opposite to age-value. Newness, the contemporary validation of the aesthetic, was intolerable to “a lack of completeness” and “displeases us.” Despite the fact, that Riegl’s historicist’s stances were not popular

128 Brinckernoff Jackson 102.
129 Foster 26.
amongst the modernist adherents of the early 20th century, Foster sees Riegl’s idea of newness was inherited and manifested as “radical newness” by Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, a newness that “would outpace, as it were, the passage of time.” \(^{131}\) Expressing the idea of oppositions between newness and age, Riegl said that: “In the new, signs of decay irritate rather than lend atmosphere.”\(^{132}\) The Villa Savoya by Le Corbusier could be the illustration of this statement. The Villa Savoy, as Foster deemed it was “a monument before its time” became “a monument beyond its time.”\(^{133}\) Originally the Villa was designed as an example of functionality and rationality; these goals were then abandoned and considered loathsome in buildings of the recent past” by “anti-modernist polemic.”\(^{134}\) During the time of the Villa’s abandonment it was partly destroyed. The sign of decay destroyed the original image and understanding of the Villa. Before Le Corbusier became concerned with the protection of his built works in the early 1960s, the Villa Savoye gave rise to a series of restoration campaigns, more expensive than those of many medieval monuments.”\(^{135}\)

Does the fact that Le Corbusier had begun to garner protection for his buildings mean that at the end of his modernist career he realized that meaning in modernist architecture was transcendent and that once a building no longer meets its programmatic requirements it ceases to have any value within a society? In other words, would he have concluded earlier on that without value there is no reason to preserve it and that it is a

\(^{131}\) Foster 24.  
\(^{132}\) Foster 632.  
\(^{133}\) Foster 18.  
\(^{134}\) Foster 18.  
meaningless monument without the protection afforded by time? Quite obviously, modern architecture has no value created by age; its original credo did not allow for the valuation of ruins. Thus, whether or not the Villa Savoye, for example, is preserved because of its perceived aesthetic value is irrelevant. In this case, we are probably talking about the cult of (Le Corbusier’s) personality.

3.1.5 Historical and Art Value

Historical value, to Riegl, refers to historical context in the different stages of human civilization. He states: "Everything that has been and that is no longer with us, we call historical, in accordance with the notion that what has been can never be again, and that everything that has been constitutes an irreplaceable and irremovable link in a chain of development."136 Discussing the historical monument, Riegl refers to the monument as a work of art that ‘documents’ a period of art history, and history inscribed in a work of art: “The ‘art monument’ in this sense is really an ‘art-historical monument’; its value from this point of view is not so much artistic as historical.”137 Riegl’s idea that in the preservation of art-historical monuments, “we are interested not in traces of the natural decay that occurs since its creation, but in the original status of the artifact. The more faithfully a monument’s original state is preserved, the greater its historical value.”138

136 Choay 621.
137 Choay 622.
138 Choay 634.
3.1.6 Memory

Riegl's categories of monuments were based on a realization that there were old monuments with no understood meaning -- they were simply old and valued for that reason as they became part of the landscape of memory. However, by the time Riegl wrote his essay on monuments, modernist theory placed little value on memory. Although, Riegl stated that monument value was dependent on the historical aspect and collective memory, he evaluated monuments mostly from a visual point of view. By the early 1980s, the slippery phenomenon of memory came to the attention of students of philosophy and architecture. Debates in the field of memory focused on the relationship between history and memory. When historian Frances Yates, in her *Art of Memory*, rediscovered an antique mnemonic technique (which was based on associations within architectural space), the discourse on memory shifted to the architectural field. As a result, the debate focused not only on whether or not history could be replaced by memory, but also whether or nor any difference between contextual meaning of architecture and memory existed. The influence of Yates' writing on memory can be seen, as Forty asserts, as a "complicated need to be taken into account in thinking about ‘memory’ as a category of architecture."\(^{139}\) Hence, the *post-Riegl* discourse on monuments was reshaped by notions of “memory” that, over time, became incorporated within the collective memory. Riegl's monument categories have, as the point of departure for the vast majority of memory-relate discussions, been somewhat altered, due in large part to the fact that we are no longer in the early twentieth-century when he was writing. New ideas on the relationships between memory and architecture, new notions

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\(^{139}\) Forty 207.
of architecture and its memory-value, and new ways of interpreting monuments, such as those elucidated in Forty's anthology of modern discourses on architecture and memory, have made it such that while we turn to Riegl for interpretive clarity, the contemporary textual corpus is more complex, and hence different from Reigl's. Forty asserted that the modern understanding of collective memory and the appreciation of architecture from both manual and intellectual aspects came from John Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). Contradicting this in the early and late-twentieth century respectively, Marcel Proust and Michel de Certeau denied the idea that memory was a part of the apprehension of architecture; they insisted that memory was unstable and illusive, and that it could not be attached to one object. This dialectical quality of memory within a relationship to the object could be also understood in a parallel within notion of Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*, which perhaps was discussed with Malevich in the 1920s in Vitebsk.

To me, memory is a-temporal, non-continuous, and non-sequential. Memory discourses center around events that are repetitive, cyclical, telescopic or merged into one another in the telling, with no logical continuations or connections with one another. There is a narrative quality to memory. It is in the vignettes and anecdotes that we tell one another and it becomes a voice within the collective imagination. Memory is dialogic: It embodies unity and fragmentation; it is in constant interaction between meanings. Once the historical narrative is written and given some sort of context, the
meaning of the spatial occurs and the symbolic is denoted --"One lives in writing. Writing is a way of living."140

In terms of architecture, how can memory and the collective imagination be identified and how does it persist? Memory is often associated with place taking precedence over time -- very few of us can remember a date but we can visualize the event which in turn can evoke a sense of nostalgia: “Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.”141 Vidler, in his writings, deduces that Western societies during the late twentieth century are obsessed with memory and fearful of losing their history, traditions, and culture. This fear is founded upon an anxiety over loosing one's social and cultural identities, regardless of whether they are authentic, arbitrary or reconstructed: “Architectural space is a precondition ...for something potentially forgotten."142 Being old is no longer enough – its importance has to be explained to us.

Conclusion - Malevich and Monument Theory

What emerges from the above discussion is a clearer understanding of the ongoing chiliastic discourse on the modern monument, mostly, I would contend, initiated by Riegl in 1903, and then further promoted and accentuated by Malevich and his dialogue centered on the architectons, and eventually others.

With this investigation of the modern monument, it becomes possible to map some of the complexities (and contradictions) in the conception of “history”, all-the-while accepting the notion of “collective memory”. Either permanently built or ephemerally constructed modern monuments become subordinate momentary fragments of social and cultural space. The same space then becomes visible (or invisible), depending on time. Writing on Suprematism, Malevich hinted at the notion of “the invisible” with respect to monuments. He wrote:

The ascent to the peaks of objectless art is arduous, painful…
And yet it brings happiness. The familiar retreats little by little…
The contours of the world of objects fade more with every moment;
and the same thing continues in the world of figurative notions –everything that we loved and all from which we lived, becomes invisible.

K. Malevich, Suprematism, (1922), 161.

Notions of “fragments” and “disjoints”, or “disjunctions” were emblematic for many modernist movements, such as Cubism in art, and the later ideas related to Deconstructivism in architecture and philosophy. As discussed earlier, the facades of Malevich’s architectons were expressed in the fragments of white volumes, all alluding to the dis-centered or distorted, ideas connected to notions of “the disjoint” and always ready to alter temporary meanings.
Referring to modernist philosophers and sociologists such as Riegl, Halbwachs and Benjamin, it is possible to explain the anthology of the modernist dialectic as one that establishes endless tension between remembering and forgetting (Forty, 2000). The latter is not new of course, but clearly, the absence of the discourse on memory in the early stages of modernism has been substituted by an extreme obsession with memory in its later episode. Forty writes: “...colossal investment in museums, archives, historical study, and heritage programs are the symptoms of a culture that appears terrified of forgetting.” This radical change signifies the essence of modernity and as Vidler insists, we are still living in a continuation of modernity (Vidler, 2000). Forty questions whether this aggravation of memory succeeds in changing the relation between architecture and memory. “Modernism had good reasons for detaching ‘memory’ from architecture and urbanism. The attempt to recover ‘memory’ as an active constituent of them may be understandable in terms of the apparent conditions of silence...” And later he concludes that, “it remains doubtful whether architecture has archived any distinctive contribution to the “art of memory.” “Memory may well yet prove a short-lived architectural category - and one inherently alien to architecture.”

Finally, the discourse on the intentional / unintentional monument makes it possible to relate the relevance of Malevich’s concept of the architectons to the discussion on the significance of the modern monument. Paradoxically, the way Malevich’s Suprematism removes spatial certainty and its symbolic dimension, visually

\[\text{\footnotesize{Forty 219.}}\]
and conceptually prefaces the modernist denial of the past. Yet the latter becomes the technique for constructing memory in the twenty-first century as oppose to monuments.

Understanding the transformation from traditional monuments and architectural forms, to the universal abstract formality that we now recognize as modernist architecture would not have been possible without Malevich’s synthesis of pure form devoid of meaning. He created the opportunity to deny reference in order to discover spatiality as completed or negated by individual interpretation. Through the advent of the architectons Malevich made pure architectonic abstraction, formal play of masses, and the ultimate dissolution of the questions around the difference between the public perception of monuments and the pragmatic realization of the modern architectural form.

One has only to compare the monumental expression of a pre-Malevich world to the current conceptual space that enables architects such as Rachel Whiteread, Robert Smithson, Richard Meier, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman to create forms that defy simple interpretation and that are simultaneously universally understandable, yet meaningless. This is nothing less that a Zeitgeist metamorphosis. A statement such as the latter would not be possible in a pre-Malevich world because it is full of references yet has no singular extrapolation. Therefore one could say that it is its very universality that makes Modernity ultimately meaningless, in terms of its intellectual abstraction and denial of acceptability.
John Haber, in his review of Robert Smithson’s project, “Floating Island,” characterizes Smithson as “the artist as outsider to fine – art tradition...” “…who makes a discomforting subject for a museum retrospective.” This characteristic is associated with Malevich, who was an ‘outsider’ during his own time. Like “Floating Island”, ‘a moving object that never touches land,’ Malevich’s legacy of the world museum floating in space, scripts its own history; simply by collecting new reviews related to it an auto-history of sorts is enabled. Although these reviews are very diverse, sometimes laconic while at other times purporting to be definitive, sometimes profoundly long while attempting to be subtle, they present a contemporary insight on Malevich’s work in perpetually redefining the notion of Suprematism, all- the- while instantly revaluing its artistic and architectural significance.

Malevich created architectons - the “things”, the “non-objective” objects, and the theoretical models. These theoretical models became monuments, mostly due to their philosophical significance, but also due to their theoretical and temporal “applicability”. Deliberately or not, Malevich left the precise meaning of architectons somewhat blurred and at this blurriness that renders them applicable to the modern theoretic. To me, it is in this light that the architecton-monument became a key factor in the story of early modernism.

Memory requires effort and energy. Individuals look for efficiency. This is why monuments are so useful – they stand in place of remembering for both individuals and

the collective. The same individuals and collective require memory and meaning because without the two, everything becomes meaningless.

Modern art also has meaning, however, as it is “described”. Its value and meaning change as quickly as the description that explains it is altered. In this way, modern art parallels the monument. Riegl’s position is still valid in that the changing values attached to monuments are what preserve them physically and within the dynamic human consciousness.

In ancient times monuments were a focus for remembering. The modern monument has become a substitute for remembering. We build monuments to forget. Monuments now take many forms but the basis is that the monument is an artistic expression of how to best represent conceptual or experiential memory of past events. Monuments paradoxically allow us to retain meaning without memory. Monuments in the future will fill our need for acts of memory sometimes only conceptually – the very knowledge that we gave respect to past events will satisfy our sense of responsibility.

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In his 1920s *Suprematism in World Reconstruction*, El Lissitzky emphasized the tremendous significance of Malevich’s suprematist architectons: “... [F]or us suprematism did not signify the recognition of the absolute form which was a part of an already-completed universal system. On the contrary, here stood revealed for the first time in all its purity the clear sign and plan for definite new world never before experienced – a world which issues forth from our inner being and which is only now in the first stages of its formation. For this reason the square of suprematism became a beacon.”\(^{146}\)

The following section examines the links that twentieth century art and architecture had with Malevich’s ideas and in turn, his related theories. In presenting the case studies, I highlight my own theory on how *architectons* function as monuments: That is to say that whether it is Smithson’s Monument, Augustus’ Ara Pacis, the Vienna Holocaust Memorial (or ancient ruins, for that matter), the idea of the architecton (that the visual is not a key factor in interpretation) applies.

MALEVICH'S THEORETICAL LEGACY

Case Study: New Jersey. Passaic- The “Monument” of Smithson

Malevich’s Architectons create a precursor that allows us to look at abstract forms as having a meaning that is independent of the conceptual intent of the creator and as being understood not in relation to the critical selection of forms with engendered meaning and contextual reference, but as abstractions to be approached on a personal level. This means that we can understand found objects as pieces of art without understanding their raison d’etre and can project or apply meaning based only on the frame or context in which they are viewed.

18. R. Smithson. The Fountain Monument (1967)\(^\text{147}\)

(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

Robert Smithson, American minimalist artist in the 1960s initiated “earthwork” as a form of conceptual art. Employing the concept of entropy, the ‘evolution in reverse’, as

Yucatan is Elsewhere, On Robert Smithson's *Hotel Pancha*
(First printed in *Parkett* 43, (1995)133.)
“a theme that constantly ran throughout Smithson’s art and writings he explored his ideas involving decay and renewal, chaos and order.” The series of his monumental earthworks reflects the idea that the object can be elaborated from museums, and can be transformed into the natural landscape or can be reflected in it. The chain of these transformations ruins the notion of traditional space, reverses relations between the object and the subject, detaches space from time and reads it anachronistically in its reflections. Smithson’s project, “Monuments of Passaic” is a series of photographic works that takes place in New Jersey, where Smithson grew up. Documenting the industrial landscape in black and white photographs, Smithson breaks with the conventional image of New Jersey City. Each photograph becomes a fragment of the city, which becomes the “instant- monuments; parts of time rather than space. Time becomes a place minus motion. If time is a place, then innumerable places are possible.”

The city becomes the monument; it becomes timeless, frozen in the format of white and black photograph as Smithson names it a ‘ruin in reverse, that is –all the new construction that would eventually built. This is opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because the buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built.” If time is a conventional scale that means removing or reversing, time Passaic replaces Rome as The eternal city?” In defining a ‘City of Future’ Smithson refers to Malevich’s philosophy saying “This kind of nullification has re-created Kazimir Malevich’s “non-objective world,” where there are no more likeness of reality, no

idealistic images, nothing but desert.” This ‘city’ performs no natural function; it simply exists between mind and matter, detached from both, representing neither.” Smithson’s creates a monument, converting three-dimensional space of the natural landscape into a flat surface, freezing time, seeking metaphorical meaning. Malevich extrudes volumetric monument from two-dimensional space, stripping away any meaning. Both artists create a monument, both of them use the word “monument” in their titles, such as Smithson’s “The Great Pipes Monument”, “The Fountain Monument” and “The Sand -Box Monument”, and Malevich’s -“The Theme of Monuments ,a, b ,c , d”,

If deliberately abstract monuments can have multiple interpretations then isn’t it possible for any abstract object to be understood as a monument. Smithson proves that it is not the subject that defines a monument, but rather the format in which it is presented that defines the found industrial artifact as a kind of “architecton” to be contemplated and upon which interpretation of meaning can be projected. This marks the metamorphosis from a deliberate monument that no longer requires reference (Malevich’s architectons) to the bracketing and format of found objects/forms as monuments to the societal forces that created these forms. In some ways, this a quintessentially post modern response that looks at re-attaching meaning to the abstracted forms generated as industrial artifacts. This places Malevich as an essential catalyst to the transition from “monuments with meaning” to “monuments looking for meaning.”
Case Study: Rome - The Ara Pacis

19. The entrance to the altar enclosure.
Ara Pacis, Rome.  
(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

The Ara Pacis, the Altar of Peace, represents a multitude of meanings found within any given monument. Throughout its history it was transformed physically and rhetorically. The Ara Pacis represents a very complicated historical monument, especially if we are to consider it in terms of Riegl's classifications; it requires archeological and historical knowledge to interpret. From the historical point of view the Altar of Peace evokes the memory of Antiquity, resonates within the historical importance of the Roman Empire in the development of world civilization.

The monument was initially commissioned by Augustus upon his defeat of Gaul and Spain in the ninth century B.C. Augustus had distinguished himself by establishing peace within the Roman Empire and thus the monument chosen to commemorate this event took on the simple name – the Altar of Peace. Ironically, it was placed within the “Field of War.” The Field of War, despite its threatening name, was actually a holy place

150 Source: Samuel Ball, Plather, Topography and Monuments of Ancient Rome, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1904)
on the widest route between the Vatican hill and Rome. Its original meaning was therefore inseparable from the omnipotence of Augustus and the Roman Empire in general.

The Ara Pacis' aesthetic features, such as the Perian marble that encloses it evoke patriotic feelings as it is a work of antiquity. The sculpture that surrounds the altar demonstrates Roman admiration for Greek classicism. This is especially evident in the way the sculpture of gods bear striking resemblance to real people. Incredibly beautified by the sculptural decor, designed to glorify Augustus and the delight of Peace, the altar was the functional sacred slaughter for almost five hundred years. Perhaps, it was the beginning of the dialectic between the historic meaning of the altar and its inner controversy, between its intentional purpose and social political use-value.

To symbolize the immortality of fame and glory of the Emperor, the Altar had to be properly designed and built. To archive this, the Romans used the outstanding durability of the Venetian marble and a unique system of siting for the Altar; this was intended to protect it from terrain-related problems. The result of the building techniques could be seen as having newness value at Augustus' time, yet as historical value to contemporary science of architectural history. To increase political significance of the monument, the Romans used the power of astrological mystery and astronomical reality in the situational planning for the Altar.
As an example of the use of astronomy, the great obelisk, the Horologium Augusti, was designed to project its huge shadow over the Ara Pacis on the 23rd of September, Augustus birthday. The name of the artist, perhaps Greek and the date of the original design was preserved by oral memory until Ovid’s Fasti.151 Neither the explosive nature of memory nor hegemonic opinion of historical discourse rewards the date or the event that caused the intentional meaning of the Ara Pacis, to be dissolved into historical fragments. In fact, we suppose that we lost track of the monument during the medieval era.

Fragmented parts of the monument were rediscovered during the late nineteenth century in Florence, the Vatican, as well as other locations. It was reassembled with many of its original parts missing and left until the twentieth century where it would serve yet another function. By the dawn of Mussolini’s fascist regime in the 1930’s, the monument was used to appreciate the “glorious” Roman past in the name of the state. Mussolini used the Ara Pacis to reclaim history and in a sense to associate his power with that of the ancient Roman Empire. He achieved this by clearing away old buildings in the center of Via Lucina and replacing them with a central plaza on which he plotted Augustus’ Mausoleum and a new enclosure for the Ara Pacis that both made it the centerpiece of the plaza and ensured its preservation for future generations. To prolong visual memory and signify the global importance of his project and make it correspondent to the fame of the Roman Emperor, the original plaque, the Res Gestae

151Ovid, Book I, 709-722, cited from Lacus Cutrius, Ara Pacis Austae
Divi Augusti\textsuperscript{152} was installed on the newly built enclosure of the Ara Pacis. The whole project was instigated by Mussolini, who was then responsible for the monumental task of salvaging and proudly displaying the almost forgotten Roman past. However, another meaning was inscribed in the public square: it became a constant reminder of the horrors of fascisms and it became a monument to the defeat of Italy by the Allies. Instead of seeking solace in their historical greatness, people grew ashamed of what the square represented, Mussolini's rule.

During the early twentieth century, Italians had to once again recontextualize the Ara Pacis, this time in modern democratic terms. Thus the American architect, Richard Meier was commissioned in 1995 to fashion an alternate enclosure for the Ara Pacis. He designed the museum of the Ara Pacis as juxtaposition to the ancient sculpted marble with modern concrete and glass. The result downplays significantly the original function of the Ara Pacis; in fact it constructs a meaning that is quite foreign to that of Italian antiquity. Rather than affirming this sought out authenticity, it distances the viewer from it, making the Ara Pacis a nameless relic of the past that has a very limited \textit{milieux/context} within the ever progressing modernity.

Using the Ara Pacis as an example one can easily validate Riegl’s claims about the necessity of historical contextualization of monuments. The monument is multifaceted, with a complex set of meanings, and the Ara Pacis definitely requires historical knowledge about its origins and transformations. Yet it seems that this

\footnote{152 The original engrave on Ara Pacis, where Augustus prides himself of having restored peace to roman commonwealth.}
knowledge is unavailable and even undesirable to the average modern person. Its final meaning is inaccessible and unimportant; therefore the viewer values it solely according to its age value. One can admire it for of its age, because the perception of undeniable age value we are reluctant to look beyond it. The fact that Augustus conquered Spain and Gaul all those years ago seems irrelevant. This disdain for unavailable historical antiquity is epitomized in Meier’s building delivering the Ara Pacis as the emblem of modernity.

If Aldo Rossi were to elaborate the metamorphosis of the Ara Pacis, he probably would insist on the power of collective memory that fabricated the locus of the city. The locus or place that played dialectic by with its current context, according to Rossi’s philosophy, “constituted its collective memory”. The Ara Pacis could be perceived as the locus. It was a locus for antiquity, it became a present locus. Antiquity applied the patriotic collective context, while the essence of the present locus was contextualized by the erasure of memory of any kind. The new project of Meier’s encapsulates the Altar in a new context, deconstructs the power of visual memory. What Rossi wrote would have applied: “As for the term context, we find that is mostly an impediment to research. To context is opposed the idea of the monument.”

The collective memory could be expressed in architecture and perhaps could later on be converted into the monument. However, the monument then could manipulate memory. At this point one can raise the question of whether or not the Ara Pacis

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153 Forty 218.
154 Rossi, The Architecture of the city.
represents collective memory. If so, who would be inscribed within the current Res Gestae?

The uniqueness of the relationship between collective memory and monument, monument and context, or locus and design, is a subject for the modernist discourse on architecture; architecture is a means by which “space” is converted into “place”. French philosopher, phenomenologist Henry Lefebvre, allocated the phenomenon of monument to the living space. He understood the space of monument as having transformative power-political power, in the sense of empowerment, a claiming of oneself as a part of community. He assigned power to those who claimed the space. If the space no longer registers significance, it disappears. Indeed, the significance of the Ara Pacis instantly provokes the forces of political power to deconstruct its origins. This dynamic of the instant deconstruction created its own significance. Therefore, the contemporary discussion on the Ara Pacis also became a part of a traditional routine of the discussion on political power. Does the Ara Pacis become another expression of the Foucaudian definition that space is fundamental in the exercise of power?
Case Study: Vienna - The Holocaust Memorial

In the recent past, the number of “gigantic” (volumetrically) Jewish museums were built in the “heart” of Europe has increased. These museums embody and express architectural value with the grandeur of the architect’s prominence within the global community. One of the controversial Jewish monuments is the Holocaust memorial on the Judenplatz in Vienna. Vienna was no accidental locus for the new memorial. Vienna

20. Rachel Whiteread’s Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust at Judenplatz, Vienna, 2000
Photo credit: Florida Center for Instructional Technology
(Figure removed for copyright reasons.)

was chosen for its strong social-historical significance. Vienna was a transitional point for Jewish refugees since the fifteenth century when they were expelled from Spain. The Jewish diaspora has over time supported those who escaped from anti-Semitic regimes and, while some stayed, others moved on. Over centuries, the Viennese municipality appreciated the Jewish contribution into the national economy and allowed the construction of a Jewish quarter, the living community in the core of the city center, in the block convoluted by the Judenplatz square. It is important to mention that out of Jewish traditions, their dwellings were supposed to be clustered, located really tight to each other.
Until now we are not certain if this tradition came out of the family hierarchy or the idea of the clan, or if it came out of the idea of the power of community, but this tightness made them very vulnerable to pogroms. Thus, living together they were a perfect target. At any rate, the frequency of pogroms was the cause for ruining a number of synagogues. One of the biggest synagogues was built in the thirteenth century and disappeared after the pogrom in 1420. In the late of twentieth century, during the digging that was related to the construction of the underground parking lot, the ruins of this synagogue were discovered.

Perhaps, the fact of the discovery collided with the aggravation of cultural anxieties about forgetting and led to the idea of designing the Holocaust memorial. The memorial was planned into two stages. The first stage was to extend the historic house of Misrachi that traces continuous occupations from the Middle Ages, by opening the freshly discovered ruins of the Or-Sarua synagogue on the underground level. The second stage was to project the monument in the middle of Judenplatz that would reflect the meaning of the hidden underground Museum of Memory, and could be a symbol of never-ending but a fleeting sorrow.

In Opposition to the Meier’s project that encapsulated the historical heritage of the Ara Pacis as an anonymous image of modernist architecture, designers Jabornegg and Palffy in Vienna protected a minimalist face of modernism under eighteen century grimace of historical eclecticism. What was developed underground, the exposition of
remains of the synagogue and other exhibits, was covered by the façade of everyday monotones.

There is no architectural reference that could be seen to remind about the horror from the past, to imagine the no-mercy slaughter of thousands of innocent people. Emptiness was chosen as a metaphor for loss. Curiosity takes on an air of intrigue and perplexity then rapidly evolves into a dread. One is drawn into the emptiness, a labyrinth of cavernous spaces that gives no sense of life. A deliberately narrow selection of finishing materials, and darkness of space, provokes a sense of aloneness and disorientation. Darkness and the sound of your own steps, remote whispers, take the viewer away from the reality of daylight. The distance between past and present becomes blurred. The timeless face of modernism exemplifies universality; this space can be anything one wants, yet emptiness, the erasure of the relevance of textual hierarchy, allows one to produce their own context, in effect, to construct their own collective memory. The Torah script engraved on the walls of one of the sparsely scattered artifacts creates the locus of the suffering of the Jews from the fifteenth century Viennese pogrom to the Holocaust tragedy.

The essential contradiction in the nature of the modern monument was expressed in the 1930s by urban historian Lewis Mumford. He wrote: “If it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern it cannot be a monument”. 155 Modernism replaced the patriotic theme of the pre-modern conventional intentional monument with the anonymous abstract surface of the modernist’s monument. In parallel with Riegl’s

category of the historic monument, modernism advocates the category “monument” not according to the visual or material, but in the accord with the Art of Memory. New notions of monument would be expressed in the category of the non-monument, anti-monument, counter monument, implying the end of the monument.

Rachel Whiteread’s design of the Holocaust Memorial had continued with the theme of the anti non- or counter-monument. Uncomfortably neighboring with the silence of its pastel colored locus of the eighteenth century, the brutal finish of the reinforced concrete cube breaks the conventional, the traditional, and provoke anxiety. Undeniably powerfully symbolic, it derives from the images of closed books that create the surface of the cube. Never-read books are close to each other like people in the Jewish community remaining inaccessible, the entrance is inaccessible – there is no way to get in.

After analyzing the above contemporary monuments, I came to the conclusion that once we have created a monument we no longer need to remember; the monument has replaced the need for personal and collective memory. It stands in place of our active participation of historical reflection and acts as a panacea of cultural anxiety and guilt of forgetting. The monument becomes the “things”, the “non-objective” objects, the Architectons that replace the act of remembering.
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