KASIMIR MALEVICH AND SUPREMATISM: 
ART IN THE CONTEXT OF REVOLUTION

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1971
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Department of FINE ARTS

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date April 16, 1971
"The struggle is eternal, the result never stable."

Geza Roheim
The Gates of the Dream
"Throughout the world the dictatorship of speculators in pursuit of profit has disfigured life, thus destroying art. Artistic culture has been replaced by speculation; but the new art, architecture and painting of today is an indication that we are on the threshold of a great new classical age in art.

Our contemporaries must understand that life will not be the content of art, but rather that art must become the content of life, since only thus can life be beautiful."

K. Malevich, Painting and the Problem of Architecture.
Vol. II Essays on Art
ABSTRACT

It would seem almost inconceivable that art could, of its own accord, move society towards the kind of ultimate resolution of conflict necessary for an emergence of the egalitarian paradise on earth that was proposed by most Messianic philosophies in the nineteenth century. Art continually appears to be in the process of undermining any attempt by theoretical philosophy to contain or describe it as an absolute. This seems to be the source of much of the irony of art objects and their tacit philosophical implications. We can assume then that there is a somewhat paradoxical basis for the phenomenon of art as we have come to understand it historically.

Any object, in order to be meaningful, has to carry a charge. Whether this is of a magical quality or pertains, as we conventionally recognize it, to some social understanding, what we call an ideology, the art-object does not exist without meaning. It is important to realize that I am not drawing a distinction here between ordering or disordering phenomena. Destruction is equally meaningful as construction, these are not value judgments, evil is as present a phenomena as good, and probably as intrinsically human.

The concept of creativity that permeates our knowledge and respect for the powers art traditionally held, are historical understandings. As a civilization, we may have done
away with mythological stories of our origins, cosmogonies, etc., but we have tended to unconsciously replace them with conceptual, as opposed to imagistic, alternatives, still largely mythic in construction, although we do not popularly recognize them as such. I am using myth here in Levi-Strauss' sense of the word, i.e.: "the unconscious social truths, those principles which provide the broadest base for a society's conception of itself."¹

One task of this thesis will be to sort out the confusion which has resulted because of the ideological entanglement with mythic (religious) and scientific conceptions that has characterized the central arguments surrounding the arts in the early years of the twentieth century.

Revolutionary Russia now appears as a particularly dense arena for the combat of extreme or polarized beliefs as to the nature of art, and the artist's responsibility relative to an emerging mass consciousness. In this context there was a comparatively conscious merger of ideological propositions into what was previously considered a uniquely aesthetic or pure art production.

Such a situation was contingent to the life and work of Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935). My intention is to demonstrate the art historical antecedents to such a period relevant to Malevich's conceptions and the relationships which interconnect the development of his aesthetic with the philosophical and political concerns of his time. The ethos in which the artist emerges is especially indivisible in this instance from
any serious understanding of Malevich's growth, both formally in his art production and in his capacity as a theoretician of the historical process which inter-related art and life as a conscious part of its aesthetic. In previous art, the mimetic role had preserved a certain obvious balance between the pursuit of a formal vocabulary and a relationship to society overall, while the 'non-objective' art Malevich proposed had no such superficially visible social conscience.² It becomes necessary, therefore, to follow Malevich's development as an existential drama, the painting or object related specifically to the art and social ideology of its context. It is important, in this respect, to establish how Socialist and Communist theories of the period receive a more 'comprehensive' historical meaning, "only when viewed as part of a larger and more comprehensive movement of ideas, one may even say of a religion - political messianism."³ This is to call for an entrance, intellectually, into the body of material which comprises the 'myth' of our own recent history and especially the myth of our own particular culture, our own 'ruling ideas'. Through the sophistication of other professional disciplines, we now have the analytical tools 'necessary to define the underlying structure of our social conventions. Under normal circumstances, the psychic dislocations which this information might generate could be enormous, enough in fact to destroy a culture, as usually happens when a technically superior culture invades one less technically sophisticated. However, there is one important difference: we are destroying our own social
institutions. This fact is an indispensable theoretical perspective prior to many investigations of cultural phenomena in the twentieth century. Visual art, especially through the perceptions of Marcel Duchamp, was certainly not exempt from this analytical self-consciousness. While Malevich did not feel despair at the transparency of previous historical solutions, and indeed went on to create a cultural alternative for his time, I do not believe that the argument placing Malevich and Duchamp at opposite ends of the spectrum is a historically justifiable one except when we describe the art of the past on the basis of its capacity to act as a prefiguration of the present. Malevich was as analytical as Duchamp, but he lived in an entirely different context, one which first produced in him and then finally demanded from him, an application of his perceptions to some constructive social end. The political ethos extended the foreseeable horizon into a future of possibility rather than the kind of incredulity and misunderstanding which largely characterized the public reaction to Duchamp's work and decreased rather than increased the artist's possibility for affective extroverted activity in society at large.

Malevich, as most other European artists of this generation, shedded art-styles or ideologies as frequently as an animal adjusting to its variously different environments will shed its skins. Malevich's stylistic eclecticism is another process of his aesthetic that holds a larger significance in its explanation for the condition of the arts of this century in general. We will follow his transformations in style
complicit to the ideas they involved in their development. From the impressionist beginnings, to the early Fauvist-primitive pictures in all of their manifestations, we have a clear picture of his stylistic eclecticism both in its positive and its negative results. He passes through a Cubist phase, and then develops a hybrid which he calls Cubo-Futurism.

Parallel stylistic paths can be seen throughout these early years. At the same time that he is doing a kind of irrational collage-painting in a cubist mode, he is also originating the forms of the movement for which he is primarily responsible, Suprematism. We will follow the abstract geometric foundation of Suprematism, and its later applied manifestations, the architectoniki and the hovering visionary housing schemes that he called 'planiti'.

J. L. Talmon, in his book, Political Messianism, said that "the urge that prompted every one of the prophets of political messianism did not come from the discovery of social problems created by the industrial revolution, but from the need to solve the antinomy of individual self-expressionism and social cohesion, and in a still wider sense the problem of man versus nature.... Everyone of the messianic thinkers voiced the solemn conviction that his message was destined to supplant the Christian dispensation, undo the evil religion had engendered (or according to some make good the pledge given but unfulfilled by religion) and as it were start history upon its real course." It will be my task to
demonstrate how and why this effectively describes the sociological superstructure of SUPREMATISM as a particular movement, and how Malevich operated as a prophet much in the fashion that Talmon here describes the carriers of apocalyptic social theory in the nineteenth century. I do not want to maintain that Malevich's art was pre-destined to fulfill certain historical necessities, instead this argument is included to counteract the heavily overbalanced understanding of art as a self-sufficient historical entity, conceivable as a study separate from its contingency in a specific context.

At the level of aesthetic theory Malevich's debt to and extension of dialectical philosophy merged with a personal and often times ambiguous metaphysical structure, a realm of pure feeling which he conceived of as 'alogical' in its method, partially as an agitational content, (the negation of the 'rational') and partially as a continuation of his theory of the singularity of aesthetic phenomena which could not be prescribed by conventional epistemologies. The major problem will be to develop a vocabulary that, while remaining true to Malevich's intents, will still describe the vision of his art that survives the immediate context of social efficacy.

Complicit with the idea of Bolshevisim, the notion of a vanguard oiling the wheels of revolution, Malevich saw that conditions were ripe for a heretofore inconceivable harmonization of the various component parts of society. He was however not a part of the more radically materialist constructivist program
which heard Tatlin and three friends announce in Moscow on December 31, 1920, in a Manifesto entitled, THE WORK AHEAD OF US, "We declare our distrust of the eye, and place our sensual impressions under control." Although this sounds similar to Marcel Duchamp's rejection of the tyranny of the eye, it was towards entirely different if not antithetical ends. Duchamp's mastery of irony and humour would make him wholly outside any possibility to see the artist bound to such utilitarian ends as Tatlin had in mind. Of course these were artists in extremely different contexts and so the comparison is not intended to represent alternative parallel directions. This would presume a similar situation which was not the case. They shared a parallel art-historical heritage, but not a social one. These are some of the differences that have to be kept in mind. One of the most practical, although not the best, examples of art historical research among innumerable to deal with the larger social context and its concomitant ideology is Peter Collins' book, Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture. His attempt was to trace the influences of the history of Ideas on the various movements in architecture, 1750 to 1950. The dilemma of an architecture conceived by analogy is the mainspring of his argument and his work at deciphering the inter-relatedness of formal architectural propositions to specific ideas in a historical context provides a useful background to my own direction. He felt that "As a method of architectural research, Constructivism was undoubtedly very useful as a means of throwing off the legacy of Revivalism." but he doesn't take his own argument far enough in the very
direction initiated. It may have been that he wasn't interested in pursuing the matter beyond the surface reflection of ideology in design programmes, but the fact of the matter is that there is a real congruence and debt between the revolutionary programme of Constructivism and the enacted ideals of Marxist-Leninist analyses. While it made sense for the purposes of initial historical mapping to describe what appeared to be manifestations of the originators of Modern Design, the more revealing probes take us into the presumptions that designs apparently take for granted and the relationships they have as organic phenomena with their larger context. Regarding an often committed blunder, the confusion of the task of the theoretician with that of the historian, Professor Collins says:

"The dangers of this confusion can clearly be seen in recent attempts at art historical witch-hunting in pursuit of new manifestations of Revivalism, and one of the most striking and perhaps most disquieting paradoxes of modern architecture is that whereas the 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement' considered that their principal victory lay precisely in the overthrow of the nineteenth century concept of 'styles', no generation of architectural historians has ever classified its contemporary architecture into so many stylistic subdivisions as our own."  

The example of architecture, especially the problems which matured in the nineteenth century, provide a graphic model of my proposition in the extreme. The opposition between the engineer, proposing a rational thoroughly modern materialism as against the architect's reconstruction and extension of historical styles comprises the two polarities of an argument which finally becomes an insurmountable problem for the visual arts during the years immediately following the revolution in Russia.
My purpose therefore will not be to verify the legacy which it has been claimed Suprematism and Malevich as its progenitor left for our civilization, but to clarify the events in their contextual specificity. I propose to "concentrate not so much on the solution arrived at as on the formulation of the problem posed." It is in the complex of our historical misunderstanding of Malevich that we have failed to realize the wisdom Panofsky implored when he said that the art historian, "will do his best to familiarize himself with the social, religious and philosophical attitudes of other countries, in order to correct his own subjective feeling for content."

Malevich, although conventionally portrayed as an absolutist with a single-minded and formal artistic vision, had different conceptions of art corresponding to different historical junctions. At one point, he believed that easel painting had literally outlived its usefulness, and that the 'new art' committed to the success of the material revolution around it, would concommitantly mature into some appropriately revolutionized phenomena. But, as we shall see, when the revolution failed to live up to the initial vision that the artists, in their enthusiasm had supposed, some of them, Malevich certainly among them returned to easel-painting. In reprimanding the critics of 'new art' in Russia, he seems to look forward to the ensuing seizure at all levels of creative endeavour that occurs with Stalin:

"But the art of innovators is used to this and goes its own way; sooner or later it will overcome the bourgeois critical brain and become part of life itself. People always demand that art be comprehensible, but they never demand of themselves that they adapt their mind to comprehension; even the most
cultured socialists have taken the same line and make the same demands of art as a merchant asking a painter to make him a signboard showing in a comprehensible manner the goods available in his shop. And many people especially socialists, think that art exists for the purpose of painting comprehensible buns; but they also suppose that motor cars and the whole of technical life simply serve the convenience of economic and basely material affairs. "12

The question for Malevich becomes, although without a direct vocabulary, whether or not it is at all conceivable to communize knowledge and that would have mean art. For Malevich, art was a form of mind, a process of knowledge taking particular shape and known through its essential manifestations in form.

He ascribed an importance to the artist which, far from being at one with the revolutionary tenets of Lenin, related more to the tradition of previous high art and transcendent moral vision ascribed to the artist by Nietzsche, for one, where in his analysis of knowledge prior to Plato, embodiments by other than conceptual means, appears as the ultimate method for the communication of moral truths and spirit. 13 Shelley, in his A Defense of Poetry, conceived as a response to an attack by his friend Thomas Love Peacock, essentially moves for a conception similar to Malevich's innate understanding when he says, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." The heresy of such an idea given as direct a form in Russia would have been incalculable, but through analogy, art to society, Malevich was able to say:
"Evolution in art progresses further and further, for everything in the world moves forward: in art it is not always a case of evolution, but sometimes also of revolution. Cubism and Futurism were revolutionary movements in art, anticipating the revolution in economic, political life of 1917."\(^{15}\)

The historical emergence of a synonymity between left-wing political radicals and the 'avant-garde' or radicalism in the arts has been a problem which has harassed scholars for almost a century now. The most recent account, and I think the most decisive study to date is Renato Poggioli's, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, published in 1968. His thesis is that the avant-garde unconsciously functions in a reactionary way and that, "the identification of artistic revolution with the social revolution is now no more than purely rhetorical, an empty commonplace."\(^{16}\) He also says:

We recognize that the avant-garde more often consciously adheres to, and superficially sympathizes with, leftist ideologies; we affirm that the anarchistic ideal is congenial to avant-garde psychology. But neither one nor the other serves to deny what was said above concerning the eminently aristocratic nature of avant-gardism - a nature not, in turn, belied by its displays of the plebeian spirit. Thus the withdrawals into individual solitude or into a circle of the few elect, into the quasi-ritualist posture of aristocratic protest, are, like the gestures of the plebeian, anarchistic, and tessoristic revolt, equally owing to the tortured awareness of the artist's situation in modern society - a situation we shall describe later as alienation."\(^{17}\)

Poggioli also sees avant-garde communism as the product of an eschatological state of mind, messianic and apocolyptic, compatible pyschologically if not ideologically with the
anarchistic spirit. He then goes on to describe the state of mystical-ecstacy which such a high energy in the social context can induce in the artist, and while this may be immediately productive, he feels that it only prevents the artist from envisioning his future survival in a communist society. Of course the model he uses is gained from hindsight and is Russia where the revolution atrophied and failed to realize its vision. Marcuse's Soviet Marxism has an excellent chapter on the nature of the aesthetic which in fact occurred and why it rigidified. I will make use of this in a later chapter.

Poggioli's approach is the paradigm of conservative art history but at its most sophisticated plane and while this is not an attack on his observations, it does suggest that one should not necessarily, as he does, accept the extant models as the limits of what is possible. My proposal then is that Malevich conceived a belief in art that made it as tangible a process in life as is natural reality. When Plato banished the poets from the Republic in any serious capacity, he was in a sense, alienating that very power in himself that brought him closest to the essential human mystery, the question of existence itself; art after all is the residue of such an engagement, and seeks to be re-enacted each time one comes to it. A world lived entirely in the realm of argument proposes wisdom as some sort of final destination, which as I understand it, is not the path art takes. Progress, while the central myth of technocratic man, holds no ultimate content for the artist. The language which seeks to explicate the truth as such, finally is necessarily analytical and reductive, rather than directly
productive. Art, for Malevich, moves on a contrasting course and takes as its mode an entirely different task. Malevich's aesthetic was one that aspired to unify and integrate art with life. "Art must become the content of life, since only thus can life be beautiful."\textsuperscript{18} This is not a cry for a paradise without distinctions but it does demand that we cease creating over-simplified categories which tend to create divisions arbitrarily where in fact, they may not exist. Mallarmé for instance, was a poet who believed that, "the poet's consciousness no longer reflects the changing reality around him, but creates a new reality and, in so doing, fixes it forever. In one sense he carried the Romantic view of life to its logical conclusion, but, in another, his achievement was at the opposite pole from that of the Romantic movement."\textsuperscript{19} As with Malevich, this was not an escapist fantasy, but a proposition which bore credible realization in psychoanalytic terms. One could read into the above statement both the proposition of Freud, in his investigations into dreams as a verifiable formative element in the creation of personality or the more contemporary political manifestation it received as a sentiment scribbled in graffitti in Paris, May, 1968: "I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires."\textsuperscript{20}, a kind of Marxist-Surrealism taken root.

Mallarmé wrote overtly, "Poetry is the expression, by means of human language brought back to its essential rhythm, of the mysterious sense of existence: thus it endows our stay on earth
with authenticity and constitutes the only spiritual task."21

My point is that Malevich did in fact propose such a vision of the world, one molded out of the creative recesses of his own mind and having no substantial twin elsewhere. It is primarily in this initial metaphysical difference as well as relationships to the particular Russian context, that Malevich's inclusion as a forerunner of the later western formalist abstraction represents more a symptom of our own cultural ethnocentrism than a valid historical perception.

The metaphysical preoccupation in Malevich's aesthetic in any other context may have gone unhindered, but the difficulty in Russia was to determine within the rapidly transforming social milieu exactly what comprised the 'public' in art and the paradoxical inter-relationship of freedom and necessity that the artist, by virtue of his role, inevitably embodied. Malevich felt that it was unnecessary, indeed, beside the point, to radically transform art itself in directions other than he had already initiated. What the revolution affected was a seriously potential context for the consideration of what had previously been present only as an ideal or conceptual tradition and one that had remained historically untenable until this moment.

The concept of Revolution for the moment superseded evolution in the minds of the masses and the artists alike. What remains to be demonstrated are the particulars of Malevich's production in these terms.
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On May 15, 1935, in Leningrad, Kasimir Severinovich Malevich, died of cancer, leaving behind him his mother, Lyudviga Aleksandrovna, his wife, his young daughter, Uno, and a vast legacy of art works, poetry, theoretical treatises, his architectoniki, the planiti, educational practices, and most importantly, the example of a man who, even in death, left his mark indelibly upon the time and place in which he grew.

His was a consistent refusal to divorce ideas and his belief in them, from practice in the day-to-day life he lived. Even his funeral was carried out as a protest in the tradition of his uncompromised adherence to a belief in the ultimate value of imagination to understand reality more fully than ideological or conceptual alternatives. The repression he had suffered in his latter years followed by his arrest, the open denunciation of his work as 'decadent' in an exhibition in 1930, had finally brought the dreams of a revolution he had so enthusiastically participated in crashing about his feet. He had designed and left instructions for Suetin to build a Suprematist coffin (illustration #1) and lying in state in the artist's Union in Leningrad, the famous black square on the wall above him at the head of the coffin, a vigil was maintained by four of his followers, Suyetin, Katurkin, Ellonen, Klyun and Isakov. On the lid of the coffin was a black square and green circle. When the coffin
Fig. 1. Lying in state in the artist's union, Leningrad

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was to be taken to Moscow, it was transported to the railway station on an open truck that had the Suprematist Black Square attached to the front. It is reported that it aroused such a procession in its travels through the streets that afterwards the government felt it necessary to restrict any such public funerals from being repeated in the future. The final ironic gesture of Suprematism was completed by Malevich in the theatre of the streets as a glamorous symbolic extension of the origin of Suprematist form, the original manifestation of which he attributed to the designs created for the production of Kruchonykh's "Victory Over the Sun", a futurist opera on December 3, 1913.

Malevich was then cremated in Moscow, and his remains were subsequently buried in the fields near Nemchinovka under a plain granite stone cube that had a red square emblazoned on its front.

Curiously enough, such a denouement makes a rather good beginning, analogous as it is to the original enthusiasm and energy that launched Malevich into the mainstream of his own uniqueness and invention. He was born February 26, 1878 near Kiev, the son of a rather well-to-do foreman of a sugar refinery in the South of the Ukraine. It was expected that Kasimir would follow in the footsteps of his father and take over at the sugar refinery, but it was clear, even early on (as reported in Malevich's autobiographical segment) that in spite of the fact that his day to day life
Fig. 5. Leatatlin glider without fabric.

Fig. 6. Malevich was buried in the fields near Nemchinovka. A cube with a square was placed on the grave. Photo taken in 1935.
was common to that of all people working at sugar refineries at the time, and there was no mention of art as such, his interests and strongest impressions were not related to the operation of the refinery or its mechanics, but in clearly aesthetic preoccupations. He recounts how he and his father shared a fascination over nature that could not be articulated. He describes a heavy rainfall, just before sunset ... "there were enormous puddles in the street. A herd of cows was going through them and I was standing as though turned to stone and watching shreds of clouds pass across the disc of the sun which was forcing its rays through the gaps between the tattered clouds reflected in this undisturbed puddle; sometimes the water was stirred by the cows and it would ripple and at the same time the cows themselves were reflected in it." Malevich seemed to have a mind as receptive to the negative masses between forms as to their positive outline, already a hint, if only in germination, at the abstract quality of Suprematism to come. He had, of course, no idea what the 'impact' they had on him could possibly mean, he had no way even of knowing that there was such a thing as artists, let alone that these images and their affect might contain messages of import, besides their immediate sensual fascination. And so he says:

"All this had an impact on me, but I repeat it was only an impact, I could only carry these phenomena in my visual memory; to me they were strikingly wonderful! All these scenes were stored by the nervous system somewhere in a suitcase, like negatives which had to be developed, but there was no question of this happening either, this had not yet arisen in me yet, nor did advice come from outside, for no one knew what was happening to me, what I was thinking and experiencing, if indeed I was experiencing anything at all."
Malevich relates his astonishment when he first discovered that one could use paint to capture images of nature,
"For some reason I noticed a painter who was painting a roof; the roof was turning green, like the trees and sky. This gave me the idea that one could portray the trees and sky with this paint." When the workmen had gone for lunch, he climbed onto the roof, and attempted to reproduce a tree in colour with paint ..."but nothing came of it". However, this did not discourage him, for he "experienced a very pleasant feeling from the paint and brush". These were the earliest beginnings and it was his mother who first recognized any talent in him and went with him to Kiev to purchase his first box of paints. Apparently from this point on, he felt that his family acknowledged him as the black sheep. His father would even hide his applications to the Moscow art school he had heard about and announce a month later that there were no vacancies. This could not however, forestall the inevitable. "I resembled some sensitive instrument, something like a barometer, which reacted to all the changes in the light the sun throws on nature; and I did react." The family had moved to Konotop, in the Chernigov province, near Kiev in the mid 1890's where he began painting with great zeal and application "landscapes with a stork and cows in the distance." Then the family moved to Kursk. It was here that he discovered the nature of this obsession of his and that it was in fact called 'art', and people who accomplished it were called artists. He lived here from 1898 to 1901, where he exhibited for the first time and finally took an office job in order to earn money to attend the art school in Moscow. "The thought of going to Moscow
became a kind of obsession, but I had no money. The mystery was in Moscow; nature was everywhere, but the means of portraying it were in Moscow, where famous artists lived."

In 1902, his father died and having saved enough of his earnings, he decided to move to Moscow. Malevich's interests even at this point, according to his own record in retrospect, tended in the direction of the formal means of painting itself, rather than an acute sense of the need to 'express' an overpowering internal force. He was off on a quest, the extent of which he could not even have imagined at this point. In Moscow, he attended the school of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and was able to draw studies from life at the Stroganov School.

The first documented paintings, besides the early works described in his autobiographical segments, are a series of landscapes in a post-impressionist style. Flower Girl of 1903, relates as much to the western European context in its choice of subject matter and setting as well as the more overt stylistic dependence, as it does to the streets and habits of people in Moscow. The atmosphere and image of Renoirs, Moulin de la Galette, of 1876, could easily have been carried in the pages of the popular Russian magazine "Mir Isskustvo", (World of Art). The temperament is exceedingly French and moves Russia into the homogeneous mainstream of the contemporary European avant-garde. The form of Malevich's education in this regard, from imported art works and magazine reproductions obviously had an inestimable impact upon the
Fig. 7. Flower Girl, 1903.
formation of the processes that would later mould his aesthetic. In his memories of childhood, he has said "For some reason I sat at home, unable to realize that I ought to go out into nature, to look and paint. This idea did not arise in me, just as it never does in small children. They paint from memory and represent only what has remained in their memory; but I was no longer little, yet acted like a child."  

His mind was a mechanism 'storing images as if they were negatives in a suitcase', only to be retrieved and developed at length later. The Impressionists had liberated the artist from the burden of his studio and sent him off into the environment to seek the powerful moment. Malevich was returning the artist to the studio of his mind, an introverted and exceedingly Russian process. With an increase in the sophistication of continental communications, information about formerly distant urban centres and phenomena arrived on the scene almost immediately. Moscow rapidly became a suburb of Paris and the youthful Malevich found himself engulfed by an explosive array of high-powered painters and their ideas. Malevich's rapid stylistic growth can be seen as a process very much related to the evolving capitalist markets and their communicative needs. These were the first and most dramatic signs in the 'modern' artistic world of the profound relation between art-commerce and the new society, and the actual formal, aesthetic development in a unique artist's career. Russia overtly displayed the first manifestations of regionalism and the effects of the magazine syndrome, whereby the artist
and his stylistic evolution are unavoidably tied into needs and beliefs originating in a distant urban centre, just as a consuming population is created in order to make a market for goods produced in that other context. Many of the struggles that artists have undertaken in the twentieth century cannot be understood unless seen against this backdrop of the process of alienation, from which artists are certainly not exempt.

Prominent in furthering an already shrinking continent were two important Russian collectors, Morrisov and Shchukin. Between the two of them they had amassed extraordinary collections of some of the best 'avant-garde' art being produced in France. Shchukin began with a Monet in 1897 and by 1914 had over two hundred paintings, including more than fifty of Picasso's and Matisse's works.

Morrosov was more interested in the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters rather than the more radical work being done. Undoubtedly both of these collections were important to Malevich. By 1910, the influence from western sources was at its highest pitch and although it has been written that Malevich may have gone to Paris in 1912, there is no concrete evidence to this effect.\(^9\)

The primary concerns in Malevich's pictures of this period were centred on his explorations into the phenomena of colour and space; both owing their initial impetus to modernist sources. In Blossoming Trees, and Blossoming Apple Trees (1904), for example, the texture and energy so visibly patterned
Fig. 8. Landscape with River and Bathers. Kursk, 1908.
in paint acts almost as an articulated declaration of the self-consciousness of the brush or process of painting itself.

Troels Andersen, feels that two variants of Monet's Rouen Cathedral series which were in Russia may have had a particular influence at this time. The process is suddenly highly visible and a conscious part of the content of the picture rather than simply the means to a mimetic end. Distinctions between foreground and background are already beginning to disappear in favour of an overall field of intensity. Each object or spacial value is as capable of holding his attention as any other, any hierarchy of focus seems to be falling away. It is not a mannerist fascination with technique but the emergence of an entirely new content and aesthetic ideology. Even in Malevich's Portrait of a Member of the Artist's Family, 1904, where a single individual is portrayed and is supposedly the raison d'être for the picture, only the woman's head commands more attention than the surrounding objects and environment. The body of the figure merges and is almost indistinguishable from the overall treatment of the surface; how different from The Flower Girl of only a year before. This portrait has an almost numinous presence; rather than singularity and specific definition of form, our response is drawn to the indivisibility of her substance from the pulsing immaterial space comprised of light and colour in which she sits. This painting was no doubt done in Kursk where Malevich spent the summer of 1904.

In 1907, he participated in an exhibition arranged
Fig. 9. Portrait of a member of the artist's family, 1904.
by the artist's association in Moscow, Kandinsky, Larionov, David Burlyuk and Aleksey Morgunov, among others, were also included. Throughout the next few years, Malevich continued to exhibit with this group and in 1910, Larionov, invited him to take part in the now famous "Jack of Diamonds" exhibition.

The phenomenon of regionalism allowed Malevich to pass through a rapid series of stylistic transformations and syntheses that he seemed neither to worry about nor question explicitly until later. The post-Impressionist method was abandoned in favour of a new pictorialism which bears a clear relation to Picasso, Matisse and Derain, of the time, and probably originates in Cezannes isolation of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone, as elemental propositions in his visual language. It was clear, although as yet unarticulated, that Malevich had the kind of mind that tended to see things operating in terms of relationships and ultimately in systems. He saw not only the immediately rendered object, but the macro-structure or 'idea' which tacitly informed the particularity of one direction as opposed to another. In this respect, living in Vitebsk in 1919, he writes: "Faced with non-objectivity, we should build, without imitating ready-made forms, a new painterly form: in this way we enter the direct path of creativity. What is more, nowhere in the world of painting does anything grow without a system."¹⁰ These systems or conceptual structures were not however within the main body of his work prior to the revolution and only came to predominate after 1917. Of the various painterly elements at his disposal,
Fig. 10. Chiropodist (at the Baths), 1910.

Fig. 11. The Card Players, 1890-92.
Paul Cezanne.
colour was of great importance to Malevich right up until the end, although it is true that with Suprematism the function and use of colour changed considerably. In his pictures from 1910 to 1912, he utilized what could be called an 'atonal' sense of colour. Like the Fauves before him, he ceased using colour as a duplicative mechanism and dropping the descriptive function, colour became wildly expressive. Larionov and Tatlin, while working in a somewhat similar compositional format were using a monochrome surface corresponding to their western benefactors, Braque and Picasso. But Malevich was drawn into a world of rich colouristic dissonance.

From 1909 until 1912, his central preoccupation with this phenomenon of colour as presented through figures and landscapes that have been abstracted into tube shapes, truncated cones, planes and ellipses. While the themes of most of these paintings relate to simple peasant activities or landscapes, I think it would be a mistake to see this as an engagement with primitivism analogous to Picasso's use of primitive African material for inspiration in his. Maids of Avignon of 1907. For Malevich, the peasants were indigenous and anything but distant or esoteric. His 'primitivism', if one were to insist on the label, was a kind of folk-consciousness. If they can be thought of as representing anything, it would be their brutal directness and power, commensurate as it is to the affect Malevich wanted to induce through his use of colour. The content then is the fact or subject matter which you see as well as the process of its communication, which is its means.
Fig. 12.
The Bather, 1910.

Fig. 13.
Peasant Women at Church, 1911.
As early as the Fauvist-primitive pictures and certainly by the next stage, a kind of Fauvist-coloured cubism, Malevich was already correcting a disposition which weighed too heavily either, in one instance, (Cubism) towards the analytical, and in the other (Fauvism) towards the sensate, an almost hedonistic use of colour. It was a strength of his eclectic manner to be able to synthesize supposed contraries and out of this new hybrid to produce, so to speak, a more durable art-species. Rather than the metaphor of man in political turmoil, one organism warring with another for dominance, Malevich's instinctual movement was to demonstrate the shared tendencies of the two polarities in solution of the larger common problem of painting over-all. What I want further to suggest, is that even at this stage, prior to any thought of Suprematism as a macroscopic solution to the battle of styles, Malevich had an eye for the metaphysical, or the superstructure that could encompass disparate and presumably antithetical parts. Suprematism in fact did not accomplish such an end and instead negated alternatives and superimposed itself as a kind of eschatological destination. This will be studied in detail in a subsequent chapter, but what I do want to emphasize at this stage is his capacity to have singular and disparate art-styles merge in the ground of a single painting and through their seeming oppositions create a dialogue which rather than detracting from the effectiveness of the composition, gave it a unique vibrancy and life.

In the Reaper, 1911, it is possible to see the schemata of Malevich's compositional method. The figures are iconic
Fig. 14. The Reaper, 1911
and generalized rather than particular or descriptive. The colour distribution appears in approximate sets of opposites, a series of checks and balances that when integrated with the human form comes off rather awkwardly. It is an evidence of abstraction having to adjust itself mechanically to fit the compositional imposition of real people because it had as yet not developed a comfortable sense of its own manifestation. Anthropomorphic subject matter was historically given but can be thought of as entirely arbitrary to the needs and focus that abstraction was achieving at this time. In Frantisek Kupka's Disks of Newton (Study for Fugue in Two Colours), 1912, there is evidence of a search for a kind of musical analogy for a geometry of colour, very much resembling Malevich's earlier intuitive push in this direction. This sense of music as a region of infinite purity, much like mathematics, was fascinating for numerous painters of this epoch, offering as it does the one viable and living model of a successfully non-mimetic art form. Kandinsky, in this regard, was most overt, when in 1912, in his Concerning The Spiritual in Art, he said, "A painter who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express internal life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the least material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the means of music to his own art, and from this results that modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical, abstract construction, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion and so on." Robert Delaunay, by 1914, certainly was already on the road to such a
consideration of colour. This consideration of similarity in things overtly dissimilar was the genius of unexpected analogy or metaphor which Aristotle, for one, applauded: "But the greatest thing of all is to be master of the metaphor. It is the only thing which cannot be taught by others; and it is also a sign of original genius, because a good metaphor implies the intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilar things."  

Malevich was on his way to such a discovery through various other mediums, poetry and the theatre included. With The Reaper, by the time that the eye reaches the background this dualism of balances has become complete, even the haystacks are divided vertically into halves, one darker than the other, and the people have been reduced to alternating dark and white strokes. The option has been taken for a symphony of patterns in colour and form, although its 'sensible' shape has not as yet appeared.

By 1912, however, most of the allusions to a recognizable landscape have either been entirely put aside or have been reduced to representation by a formal pattern of geometric elements interrelated by a bold colourism. In The Woodcutter, the only discordant detail is the man's boot, the only element that has not been transformed through Malevich's aesthetic catalyst. One foot still resides in the empirical world, however partially. The axe already exists within the aesthetic shemata, and so its 'reality' does not appear as out of context.

In Peasant Woman With Buckets, 1912, Malevich, while still primitively figurative, began the introduction of dominant
Fig. 15. The Woodcutter, 1912

Fig. 16. Peasant Woman with Buckets, 1912.
repeating elements. What he called "the forming element" appears above one of the buckets as two elliptical shapes which both reflect the eyes of the figures and that have been curiously drawn "in the same perspective as the ointment jars in iconic representations." By the time we arrive at Morning in the Village After Snowfall, 1912, and Head of a Peasant Girl, all but the most formal representational allusions have been removed. Each new painting seems to be the stage for some radically new perception to exercise its phenomena, and the process of such a manifestation is what interests Malevich rather than the static residue, which is what it becomes, acting as a record of his former presence, the moment he moves on. Perceptions were the source of his energy, the path of a discovering intelligence seeking order both in itself and in its experience of the external world. By the time of the two paintings mentioned above, the haunting eyes of his earlier Peasant Women at Church, is lost to the abstracting motif of curves and counter-curves of which their bodies are primarily composed. The energy of the compositional elements themselves, Malevich's mysticism and the singularity of his direction in spite of the variety of stylistic adoptions and experiment, are astounding during the next few years.

Although his best known paintings and drawings from these years pursued a most singular course, it now appears that in spite of this anti-figurative, anti-mimetic program, he did maintain semi-figurative studies, possibly all throughout these
Fig. 17. Morning in the Village After Snowfall, 1912.

Fig. 18. Head of a Peasant Girl, 1912.
same years. In this light, his late return to conventional portraiture in the thirties, cannot be seen as a regression, except as it relates to the very concrete pressures put upon him politically at that time, but instead as a personal record maintained much as one would keep a journal of important events and friends, Miroslac Lamac, a Czechoslovakian critic and scholar, has said:

"The Tretjakov Gallery in Moscow possesses a painting representing a woman with a rake, dated 1915, probably by Malevich himself, and the authenticity of this date has been confirmed by the Gallery. Thus specialists in Malevich's work in the Soviet Union, some of whom count among his personal friends, affirm that Malevich always did figurative paintings, but that he never exhibited them and very rarely showed them to anyone."^{14}

It now appears that even during the period of Malevich's strongest polemics against figurative art (1915-1920), he was carrying out such seemingly antithetical works. This only appears incongruous against the background of the extent of his tirades against art historical categories. But when we look at the battle he was fighting particularly I think it becomes understandable. He was attempting to de-institutionalize historically given 'tastes' in favour of perception, that is process as the only absolute, rather than an idolatry for conceptions. Also the manner of his own development up to this point helps explain the simultaneous presence of seemingly contradictory modes. Contemporary with his cubist works that we have looked at he was already beginning a cubo-futurist variation of it. Very soon after this and concurrent with some of these same works, he began his alogical pictures. He
Fig. 19. Three Heads (After 1930).

Fig. 20. Mystical Religious Turn of Form (After 1930).
had this habit of moving out along several threads at once, a kind of parallel evolution maintained with variant paths that sometimes proved fruitful and sometimes not.

Many of the later figurative sketches after 1930 are reminiscent of his drawings many years earlier for Kroutchonykov's and Matjouchine's opera, Victory Over the Sun. There is no evidence that would lead one to suppose that he would have arbitrarily leapt back all those years if something had not previously been maintained out of it; that could be considered a contradiction.

In 1911, the same year The Reaper was done, we have a Portrait of Ivan Klyun, which is almost entirely cubist after the fashion of Braque or Picasso, but includes and is composed in combination with Malevich's own conception of the 'basic forming elements'. His appetite for experiment and stylistic innovation seemed inexhaustible, but whatever else may be said of his eclecticism he did not simply adopt superficial resemblances to existing models, but actually penetrated their essential raison d'etre. Because of this, they seemed to surpass style, and instead, created their own methodical development, one that was able to include an enormous range of new propositions without losing sight of itself in the process.
Fig. 21. Drawing for Portrait of Ivan Klyun (c. 1911).

Fig. 22. Portrait of Ivan Klyun, 1911.
CHAPTER 2
FUTURIST INFLUENCES

A. Influence of the Futurist Painters and Poets

Complicit with Malevich's iconoclasm in the visual arts, he made many journeys into the world of poetic discourse. His interest in poetry began with the first period of Russian futurism. The most general description of Russian Futurism one could give would I suppose, be that it was a "post-symbolist movement in Russian Poetry of 1910-1930."¹, but this would tell nothing of the "complex conglomeration in which there was not only poetry and prose, but ideology, aesthetics, literary theory and polemics, it contained elements of impressionism, expressionism, neo-primitivism, constructivism, abstractionism, dandyism, theosophy and so forth."² Markov's only generalization about the Futurist phenomenon overall in Russia, is Hegelian, and arises in the words of Lossky, when he says "Ideas are not thoughts, they are a special kind of reality."³

Kruchenykh, Malevich and Matyushin went for a holiday together in Usikirko in 1913, and after this wrote a manifesto (July 20, 1913) in which new experiments in the theatre and in literature were announced.⁴ The task was seen as the renewal of the language overall. Part of their manifesto reads: "The outdated movement of thoughts on the tramlines of causality, of toothless 'sound common sense and logic' and blind roaming in the blue haze of Symbolism must be destroyed."⁵

In St. Petersburg on December 3, 1913, the opera,
Victory Over The Sun, to which Malevich attributes the birth of Suprematism, burst onto the stage with propositions so revolutionary to the arts, that in retrospect they seemed to be predictive of the approaching general political upheaval. Curtains and drop-scenes, backdrops, set pieces and costumes, everything connected with the Opera were, by report, "obviously Cubist, entirely in the style of Malevich's easel paintings of the same period - for instance, Lady in Font of Poster Pillar, with distinct Suprematist elements."

The famous Black Square was present along with other Suprematist elements and the whole world of synthetic Cubism with its characteristic displacement of axes, figurative and abstract signs, letters and inscriptions, wheels, projectiles, segments of a circle, numbers and complete objects themselves.

The Futurist litterateur, Benedict Livshitz, was astounded by the performance and reviewed the lighting spect of it in the following fashion:

"From this night of the first-born the feelers of the projectors picked out parts, now of this, now of that object and imbued it with life by saturating it with light.... the figures themselves were cut into shape with the knives of the search-lights and robbed alternately of their arms, legs or head, since for Malevich they were only geometrical bodies subject not merely to dissection into their component parts, but also to complete extinction within their picture space. The only reality was the abstract form that absorbed the whole Luciferian base of the world."
Fig. 23. Sketch for decoration of 'Victory Over the Sun', 1913.

Fig. 24. Sketch for 'Victory over the Sun', 1913.
B. **Russian Futurism and Malevich's Cubo-Futurism**

There is some reason to believe that Marinetti, the poet Laureate of Italian Futurism, had visited Russia prior to the well-documented excursion of 1914. Raffale Carrieri, maintains that Marinetti's first trip to Russia occurred in 1910, "a year after the publication of the first Futurist manifesto in the columns of LeFigaro, the Paris newspaper, on the 20th February, 1909."\(^8\)

Reaction to Marinetti's visits were always colourful and usually extreme wherever he appeared. The reactions however to any kind of modernism were not unique to Futurism. Even Diaghilev, in the earliest years of the twentieth century, was called upon to respond in the pages of his review, The World of Art, to accusations that modern art was a manifestation of decadence. He said:"Our epoch, therefore, as regards painting, will never be able to be considered decadent, because it does not accept pre-conceived ideas and it never has pre-established truths on the tip of its tongue. We shall have the reputation we deserve because we have followed a new path."\(^9\)

The prophecy of such a statement as regards the next few years in Russian art and the ensuing recurrence of the accusation of decadence, but this second time by a politically radical constituency in the thirties, is ironic. The international character of the Russian aristocracy at this time is important to remember in order to understand the ease with which ideas travelled in and out of Russia.\(^10\)
It was under the leadership of the review Zolotoe Runo (The Golden Fleece) that two very important exhibitions of French art were held in Moscow in 1908 and 1909. Larionov was largely responsible for their organization and it was here that the first large-scale public manifestations of Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin occurred. The second exhibition included paintings by Matisse, Braque, Derain, Ronalt, Vlaminck and Van Dongen. Fauvist and Cubist ideology infected the minds of the Russian artists, producing both derivative and powerfully new results. Larionov's own response, Rayonnism, was an invention preceded by a whole range of Futurists works between 1911 and 1913. Larionov's Rayonnist manifesto appeared in 1913, the same year as Malevich's suprematism first took coherent shape under the auspices of Kruchenykh's opera, Victory Over The Sun. David Burlyuk was called the father of Russian Futurism by Mayakovsky, and it was literally he who made the first contacts with Russian artists living in Germany at this time, primarily Kandinsky and Jawlensky and also members of Der Blane Reiter.¹¹

While Burlyuk in his gregariousness was moving towards an open-ended eclecticism, Malevich was entering the initial stages of what by comparison was a highly introverted and contemplative study. Carrieri quotes Burlyuk from Katherine Drier's book entitled David Burlyuk, and he says that the basis of his art was, "all styles, all epochs, the finest things of the entire world. Not a restriction but an expansion of program, a protest against formal art - art
for art's sake - because art is for everyone, for the people, for the masses ... art is for the circus, and the circus is for art."

This highly charged declaration, as Carrieri notes, goes the way of most polemical tracts. It is filled with rather 'facile contradictions' but communicates both the similar enthusiasms and the major differences between himself and Malevich in spite of the fact that both were spawned from a similar sympathy and ground.

Malevich's own futurism of this period (1911 to 1912) was much less Italianate than Burlyuk's and tended to be more overtly indebted to French cubism and particularly the forms of Fernand Leger. The peculiar hybrid that emerged from this alliance he termed "Cubo-Futurism". In 1929, when Malevich wrote "Cubo-Futurism", Chapter VII of his book, New Art, the term 'Legism', appears as one aspect responsible for the 'great movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century'.

Where Burlyuk could be considered chaotic or anarchistic in his reaction to the dynamic tenets of the futurist aesthetic (a literal explosion of form), Malevich consistently offers a structured realization. For example, in The Knife Grinder, 1912, Malevich is obviously conscious of the implications of the Futurist dynamics, the stroboscopic presentation of forms literally resonating with the implications of active life. What does not occur is the complex subservience of Malevich's own formal vocabulary to the current-most objective panacea.
Fig. 25. The Knife Grinder, 1912.

Fig. 26. Malevich Retrospective, Moscow, 1919-1920.
His interest in the new image is not mechanolatry, a deification of the machine-like, but the power of the idea rooted in such a perception. This is why his move to the suprematist, non-objective world was such a seemingly easy transition to make.

Unlike his Futurist brothers, Malevich, on the whole, retains something of his figurative heritage throughout this period, as I mentioned earlier. We could only consider this a contradiction if we imagine the artist to be a servant of some rational or pre-conceived methodology analogous to the empirical sciences. Surely even speculative thought engages its most creative possibility when causative and linear connections no longer predominate and intuitive forces emerge of their own accord. What was extremely consistent in Malevich's method was his single-minded focus on the idealism of new styles rather than a superficial reading of their pictorial expressiveness. From this point of view, the path he takes appears, rather than rational, in the linear sense of the word, creative, by synthesis.

The 'phenomenon', as Malevich was later to call it himself, rather than the object, was what interested him consistently. The focus was already on the process. I think that this is the only way that the startling leap into Suprematist abstraction can be properly understood.

Futurism did not emerge from a vacuum. Its presence was contingent to an empirical, industrializing urban context;
militarism and social apocalypse were all present on Italian soil, and Marinetti overtly includes references to such phenomena in his manifestos. The 'anti-democratic tendencies' of Italian futurisms, its elitist bias was constantly being propounded. The Futurists were the reincarnation par excellence of 'dandyism', the cult of individual genius in opposition to the collective consciousness.

The reaction against the bourgeois was common to both Russian and Italian Futurists alike but the resounding difference had to do with the sophistication of the maturing political consciousness in Russia and its integration into the aesthetic discourse. This was more the result of specific differences between the two contexts than distinctly available options.

Italian Futurism was 'uncompromisingly anti-socialist'. In March, 1909, Marinetti addressed the people of Trieste and said:

"In politics we are as far removed from anti-patriotic and international socialism - if noble exaltations of the rights of the belly - as from the planks of the conservatives - timorous supporters of the clergy who walk around in padded slippers and carry a bedpan."

The importance of understanding the program of Italian Futurism in terms of Malevich is largely to be found in Marinetti's visit to Russia in 1914. It was there that he received scathing abuse from Larionov in an attack published just prior to his arrival in the end of January, 1914. Malevich defended Marinetti against 'the Rayonnist Larionov'
in an open letter printed in the newspaper Nov., No. 12, January 28, 1914, in which he said, "... giving slaps in the face, which is what the Rayonnist Larionov has built his Futurism and popularity on, all this belongs to the savage crowd, as does Larionov ..."\(^{17}\)

Malevich's own inclination towards an 'aesthetic' radicalism here predominates over his as yet immature political consciousness. This could be seen as a contradiction against the major tenet of my thesis, but it is precisely my argument that Malevich's position was inextricably bound up with the conditions of political turmoil once they became extroverted as a process in the consciousness and lives of the Russians of that time. At this point, prior to the revolution, aesthetic apocalypse is not seen as corresponding to the social apocalypse of mass society, in fact, almost the opposite. The masses, as a politically radical body, were finally given their effective power through the administration of the Bolshevik vanguard, much as the artists of the time turned to the streets to direct and create out of the potential mass aesthetic. The metaphor of the people was popular entertainment especially in the form of the circus so it was not long before the pagentry of the carnival infected the new climate of the arts following the revolution, primarily in the theatre and the mass fetes. Power in this sense returns to the people only in that the previous high art stylism was the hand which shaped this new celebratory and provocative content, but the people who actually held the baton to this choreography
were still those leaders sharing the new vision, and largely those artists who had matured through the previous bourgeois order. In this sense we can see how the revolution presented, in the minds of the artists themselves, the option either to become an artist-engineer, in which case the artist would consciously choose to give up the prestigious and previously established role contingent to what he saw as the new needs of the new society, as Tatlin did; or, by the example of the revolutionaries in his midst, even Lenin himself, to become an artist-revolutionary. Malevich never wanted to become an artist-engineer, but he did in fact seriously attempt to apply his aesthetic to the task the revolution proposed.

Malevich's attraction to Futurist ideology (marinetti had an understanding of the artist as an agitator) has a transitional historical validity in terms of the impassioned fauvism of his earlier peasant pictures. The Fauves used colour illogically, that is to their own, as opposed to rational imitative ends. The independence of the artist, as a social role, allowed him to propose a personal vision as if it were in fact, a reality. The art reality, or context, was acknowledged, if little understood, as significant but separate.

Marinetti called his peers 'young lions', relying on allusions to animal passion and independent dynamism to carry meaning. The machine-ethic appears as the first step in a program that is self-consciously modernizing and streamlining itself. Malevich was at once attracted to this anti-social aspect, the rejection of the civilized past, as well as the
possibility of moving beyond it into a pure abstraction purged of the debasement of literal references. Futurism's concentration on the dynamic as opposed to the static reality would have appealed to Malevich, but the ultimate step into idolatry of what remained mechanical metaphors, was not going to be possible. Marinetti openly despised the ideal, "Let us go my friends! At last mythology and the ideal have been outdone", whereas Malevich had as yet to experience the anguish and dreams of his idealistic vision, through the temper of the revolution itself. 19

What he did recognize in Marinetti was a volatility and energy that was bent on radically transforming the existing art context almost single-handedly. The implicit elitism of Marinetti was a kind of logical although perverse extension of the cult of individual genius that Fascism was to proceed out of in the very near future in various contexts all over Europe. Malevich's experience of 'high' or radical art forms was largely because of a supportive bourgeois constituency. In fact even the shape of his art stylistically was created out of the rising mobility and inter-continental communications that prospering capitalism created in the Russian context of his generation. While the implications of Suprematism as a potentially totalitarian aesthetic are relatively implicit, I think that it is equally clear that Malevich had not purposefully created a system intended for control, but what he thought was a process inherently liberating in its experience. But the Futurists meaning was really taken at another level
entirely; this was in the agitational or subversive and playful antics of the irrational incorporated into a semi-anarchistic framework, under the banner of Zaum and Alogism.
C. Zaum, Alogism and Berlin Dada

Kruchenykh appears to have been a vibrant and resourceful member of the Futurist community at this time. A book from him during his peak was likely to contain anything, including manifestoes, polemics, definitions, historical information on Futurism, discussions of his or his colleagues poetry, unfavourable reviews of Puskin, and on and on. Malevich collaborated with Kruchenykh through 1913 and 1914 and produced illustrations for several of his most important books of poetry, including *The Game in Hell*, *Let Us Grunt*, *Words as Such*, which was a combination of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, and others. The importance of the Futurist poetic being exercised in Russia at this time, on Malevich's growth as a visual artist cannot be overemphasized.

Vladimir Markov, in his book on *Russian Futurism*, says of Kruchenykh's publications, "In these writings, Kruchenykh often generously explicates his own poetry, which otherwise would probably never be properly understood by posterity; the three cornerstones of his aesthetics are sdvig ("shift"), faktura ("texture") and zaum ("transrational language")." According to Markov, sdvig means 'shift' or 'dislocation', and was a term used by avant-garde artists first and was then later picked up by the Futurist poets. In the widest sense it includes all of the conscious violations and distortions made on traditional aesthetics. "Painters used the word to denote that which takes place in Cubist and Futurist pictures when portions of an object are jerked loose and reproduced separately." Malevich's practical
Fig. 27. Khlebnikov and Kruchyonkhh, 'Igra v adu', (The Game in Hell), 1914. Illustrations, front cover and title page by Malevich

Fig. 28. K. Malevich, Twelve Costume Designs for 'Victory Over the Sun', 1913.
understanding of 'sdvig' had been derived as an experience by and large from French Cubism. It is no mere accident that Cubist compositions of both Picasso and Braque included elements that Malevich utilized in his Musical Instrument/Lamp of 1913. Troels Andersen pointed out what this picture owes in fact to Picasso's Le Poete, dating from the spring of 1912. The open corners in the composition, and the vaguely indicated oval form that circumscribes and partially unifies an otherwise disparate tending whole are all formal means derived from French Cubism and in spite of the fact that they are here given an unique expression they are an emulation rather than the kind of invention Malevich was soon to move to. Leads adopted from the French Cubists can be seen now as having created an artificial option for Malevich's eclecticism. Musical themes suddenly appeared in his work and are obviously derivative and lack further contextual relevance or meaning other than a formalist preoccupation. His individualism however could not stand for this for very long.

Cow and Violin, 1912-13, was a peculiarly combinative work that acted both as a painting in its own right, as well as a manifesto through its literary content and the proclamation written on the back which reads:

"The alogical clash between two figures, the violin and the cow, represents the fight between logic, the law of natural middle-class reason and prejudice."22

Malevich also accomplished some little known concrete-poetic drawings which are startlingly current in terms of the recent New York based conceptual art propositions.23 (See Illustrations). His Composition with Mona Lisa, includes a crossed-out reproduction of the Mona Lisa, a negation of that
Fig. 29. Sketch for Woman at The Tram Stop, 1913.

Fig. 30. Musical Instrument/Lamp, 1913.
Fig. 31. Cow and Violin, 1912-1913.

Fig. 32. Sketch for Cow and Violin, with manifesto.
aspect of art historical idolatry that he systematically rejected from his art, and which pre-dates Marcel Duchamp's gesture, L.H.O.O.Q. of 1919 by five years.

This example alone, where there are in fact many others will suffice to demonstrate the retarded attention that has been paid to Russian innovation in the arts of the twentieth century by historians.

Another manner in which 'sdrvig' appears in Malevich's pictures is by way of the simple dislocation or intersection of forms, one by the other, so that in An Englishman in Moscow, 1913-14, an illusory sword visually slices several objects, the candle, ladder, etc., into pieces, while they in fact remain intact. Visual puns are another part of Malevich's repertoire at this point, the use of language, actual words amongst the objects and illusions, counterpointing, or commenting on them, as well as existing in and for themselves as values in the composition. These are all elements learned in co-operation amongst the painters and the poets of this period here, as elsewhere in Europe.

The other direct antecedent to Futurist poetic practice was Malevich's notion of "alogism". It probably owed most to "Zaumist" poetic techniques, and although Markov feels that an entire book could be written about the essence and various kinds of Zaum, it was essentially concerned with the creation of meaning in speech-sounds, irrational combinations of words, etc., taken for their own aesthetic merit, rather than as the symbolists
Fig. 33. Laughter On The Boulevard, 1913-14.

Fig. 34. Brawl On The Subway, 1913-14.

Fig. 35. The Arrow, 1913-1914
Fig. 36. Two Zeros, 1913-14.

Fig. 37. An Englishman in Moscow, 1913-14.
would have it, that one thing, necessarily represents something other than itself. It was a step towards the concrete in poetry much the same as Malevich was making in the visual arts, an appreciation of the value of inventing wholly new modes for an artist's sensibility to be enacted through, without dependence on existing, and if necessary, even rational models.

"In zaum one can howl, squeak, ask for the unaskable, and touch the unapproachable subjects ... one can create for oneself, because the mystery of the transrational word's birth is as deep for the author's consciousness as it is for any outsider."24

It sounds very much like the concerns the Dadaists and even the Surrealists had for the sources and process of creation as a phenomenon, a question which however asked, seemed to distort accordingly the resulting object-form. In the idealist's eyes, it would be a call to a new communism in the arts, in spite of its apparently anarchistic first appearance, because what happens is that the audience of such an art-form is called upon to become artists themselves, to pick up the tools of their perceptions and make what they can of such an experience.

In this case, the poetry was believed in as a traditional aesthetic proposition, unlike the later Berlin Dada manifestations where the entire occasion was conceived primarily as negational and art became the means of subverting the existing order. Berlin, in the sense of its maintenance of a political commitment, was unlike Paris, New York or Zurich. In this way it is even more interesting than the still artful manifestations of the other urban centres. Dada was, as well as Futurism, a distinctly urban art
Fig. 38. Left to Right: M.V. Matyushin, A. Kruchonykh, Malevich. Photograph taken in 1913 while the stage performance of 'Victory Over The Sun' was being prepared.
form. The intellectual assumptions it made initially presumed a kind of cultural experience that simply could not have been recognized by a rural intelligence. The importance of Berlin was that it had an actual revolution in the streets, with real fighting and ideological conflict; the anarchists, the communists, etc., all held programmes and were acting on them. Dada in this instance, had its first real possibility of being something other than an evidence of bourgeois frustration and impotence. This is one of the few other examples, besides the Russian possibility of an art form that has had such an opportunity. The major difference with the Russians was the fact that artists like Richard Hulsenbeck, had ideological as well as emotional or romantic affiliations with left-wing inclinations, particularly the communists, and their entire program was conceived as insurrectional.

The artists of Berlin Dada were politically self-conscious very early on in their activities but their real revolutionary consciousness only developed into the mechanism it did after the example of the October revolution in Russia. It was an invaluable example and source of confidence and inspiration in their program and cannot be divorced from the subsequent spartakist uprising. Many of the events held in Berlin under the auspices of the Dadaists sound very much like corresponding events put on by the Russian Futurists a short time earlier. Satirical magazines were created and distributed with fanfare throughout the streets of Berlin. Walter Mehring, in his book Berlin-Dada describes the distribution of one of the most successful magazines called Every Man His Own Football.
"Through the streets of grey tenements, marked by the machine-gun fire of the Spartakus battles and ripped open by the Howitzer's of the Norske regime, the band was greeted with jubilation and applause as it played its two star turns, sentimental marching songs, 'Ich Hatt' einen Kameraden' and 'Die Rasenbank am Elterngrab'. After the cannibal dances of the Kapp-putsch, more savage than Sophie Taeuber's marionettes, after the danse macabre of the Stahlhelm movement and its swastika ornaments which seem to have strung straight out of Hans Arp's Heraldry, our Dada procession was greeted with a joy as spontaneous as the only danse of the Paris mob before the Bastille. The phrase 'every man his own football' became a popular Berlin saying as an expression of contempt for authority and humbug."25

The new aesthetic mode, photomontage and poster art as well as manifestoes arose as a natural necessity committed to the achievement of their intentions. Whereas the Russians, I am thinking here specifically of Malevich, were not on the whole, directly involved in the 'affecting' of the revolution. They were a part of the problem more than they can be said to have assisted the solution in those early stages. It was only through their latently left-wing sensibilities and their humanitarianism more than anything else that they came first to celebrate the revolution and then secondly to believe in it. Other artists were much more involved than Malevich, but on the whole, the phenomena was different from Berlin in this respect. Again I must remind the reader of the dilemma I outlined in the introduction to this thesis. The difficulties arising out of the immediate assumption that because the artist has come to be seen as a renegade or bohemian figure he is necessarily committed to revolutionary political propositions when they arise, is complex
in that it speaks of our capacity to continuously create mythic figures that embody or resolve fantasies society needs to have about itself exactly in the midst of the scientific age that supposedly implies an end to such 'aesthetic' needs. It is no mere accident in this regard that "the idolization of HISTORY should have been the outcome of and sequel to the collapse of concrete historic continuity embodied in organized religion, national tradition, local custom and social hierarchies of long standing."26 History seen as such a universal scheme necessarily makes all its component events meaningful relative to the inevitable arrival at the foretold destination. It was with Berlin Dada however that a different kind of political perspective was being utilized, one that initially did not suppose itself to be the last word on questions of ultimate human import. It is as interesting as it is precisely because of the specificity of its focus and the Socio-political or human, as opposed to abstracting or formal tendency that is its basis.

It is important to remember that when I say 'human' I mean that it was so in its insistence on the necessity for physical change to benefit a mass of people disenfranchised from any real power in terms of creating the conditions in which they lived and without real access to the means necessary for such transformations to occur. But the Dada method was always provocative and depended for its success on the administration of a kind of social "shock-therapy", that in its process in its particular occasions may look anything but humanitarian.
Hulsenbeck was the most radical and articulate spokesman for this direction in Dada. In his statement of 1920 *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism*, he said:

“To make literature with a gun in hand, had for a time been my dream. To be something like a robber-baron of the pen, a modern Ulrich von Hutten - that was my picture of a Dadaist. The Dadaist should have nothing but contempt for those who have made a Tusculum of the 'spirit', a refuge for their own weaknesses. The philosopher in the garret was thoroughly obsolete - but so was the professional artist, the cafe litterateur, the society 'wit', in general the man who could be moved in any way by intellectual accomplishment, who in intellectual matters found a welcome limitation which in his opinion gave him a special value before other men - the Dadaist as far as possible was to be the opposite of these.”

Dada was conceived out of a social urgency but with the difference that its phenomena lay in the hands and hearts of artists and not ideologues; Dada was anything but systematic. Hulsenbeck, later in this same essay goes on to say:

“What Dada was in the beginning and how it developed is utterly unimportant in comparison with what it has come to mean in the mind of Europe. Dada has operated - not as mild suasion but like a thunderbolt, not like a system set down in a book, which through the channel of superior minds, after years of chewing and rechewing becomes the universal possession of the nations, but like a watchword passed on by heralds on horseback. The immense effect of Dadaism on the great mass of the artistically indifferent lay in the senseless and comic character of the word Dada, and it would seem that this effect, in turn must derive from some profound psychological cause, connected with the whole structure of 'humanity' today and its present social organization.”

The difference between the German approach to the problem of the 'indifferent masses', which was the central problem of art in Russia after the revolution, and Malevich's
understanding was one of method. Malevich learned much from the techniques of Zaum and alogical poetics, but only thought of it as transitional after the revolution actually created the possibility to conceive of a future rather than being necessarily caught in the labyrinth of each existential moment. But even Hulsenbeck's politically self-conscious Dada finally thought itself eternal and the last sentence in his essay states that: "On March 5, we were in Karlsbad, where to our great satisfaction we were able to ascertain that Dada is eternal and destined to achieve undying fame." which it has, but not for the reasons which instigated Hulsenbeck's vision in the first place, reasons which were after all extremely close to Marx's famous maxim at the end of the *Thesis on Feurbach* where he says: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, the point is, to change it".

Malevich's alogism was only partially Dada-like. It still contained conscious references to existing precedent from the art context and could not have thought of this as reactionary. He had in mind a particular reconstruction, and was already onto the process of it, however tentatively. But both Malevich and Futurism overall also operated affectively at a subversive or agitational level in terms of ridding society or specifically one's art, of the old, the baggage of history. It must be remembered however, that Malevich and Russian Futurism as a movement, were not, like their Italian counterparts, rejecting history wholesale. They never approached Marinetti's hedonistic appreciation and even adulthood for war. Some of the Futurist exhibitions in Russia even included crafts and
artifacts from their own primitive history and environment, a latently nostalgic Futurism, a humanized and searching Futurism, one that wanted to see beyond the very blinders it had erected itself, in order to move at all in the first place. Alogism was something that infected everything that the artists were doing at the time, it was like Dada in that it had to be acted out in the streets in some way, in order to be fully understood. Malevich's alogism went so far as to claim that he had in fact purposefully rejected reason on February 19, 1914, at a public lecture. In being so prognostic he made the irrational, rational, which is of course absurd and ultimately ironic. While all of these early manifestations appear to be almost playful in terms of the later confident 'rationalism' and high principled harmony of Suprematism, I think that it can be maintained that it is only an apparent contrast.

Both Alogism and Suprematism are completed systems of understanding, or at least systems which put themselves forward as complete or absolute and self-sufficient processes as one of the main fascinations they offer the observer. They demand that one become an initiate of the perceptual experience and thereby insure that their particular ritual of knowledge will become known, and if the assumptions can be shared by the observer, the theory or experience will be accepted, on that basis. They offered a confidence of a vision in an age that had consciously set out to destroy such a world picture. But it is in the theoretical or philosophical heritage of rejection in Russian aesthetics that a further clarity is to be achieved. The next chapter will deal directly with this tradition.
Fig. 39. Woman at Poster Column, 1914.

Fig. 40. The Black Square, 1913.
CHAPTER 3

THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND CONTEXT

A. THE DESTRUCTION OF THAT WHICH IS

Nothing, much less the revolutionary ferment of Russia, emerges from a vacuum. Russia had even had the not unique experience of revolution organized and instrumented from above under the ambiguous reign of Alexander II, 'the Tsar Liberator', or 'great Reformer' as he has become known. Although he was directly responsible for the emancipation of the serfs, he seems neither to have had the strength nor determination to see such moves through to their conclusions, and the emancipation eventually proved a failure. There was a considerable reaction to this ambiguous relegation of powers, and, "Some of the more bigoted representatives of the dominant reaction (Katkov, the Metropolitan Philaret, Panin, Pobedonostev, P.A., Shuvalov, Dimitri Tolstoy) believed that the Tsar was losing control over the country by defying tradition, by capitulating to the enemies of autocracy or aristocracy."¹ Lampert feels that the failures of Alexander's reforms were largely due "to infirmity of purpose."² His life was threatened first in 1866 and was followed by many other attempts until finally there was a successful assassination in 1881. But under Alexander there had been released a 'current of radicalism', 'expressions of a new mood coincided with great economic changes' and a new climate which could not be ignored suddenly seized the conscience of Russia's intelligentsia.³ The fate of the peasant had become 'the chief human and social preoccupation of Russian thinkers'.⁴ Malevich's immediate artistic and philosophical predecessors had the doubly strange
role of being both exemplars of 'precocious erudition' at the same time as they were 'the symbol of Russia in revolt'.

Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was one such figure, novelist, social critic and charismatic public personality. His relations with the existing power structure took on a familiar enough pattern for Russian History; he was imprisoned on May 5, 1864 to fourteen years forced labour (later reduced to seven) in Siberia 'with permanent loss of all rights', and in all 'spent nearly a quarter of a century, that is about half his life,... in penal servitude and deportation.'

The importance of such a figure to our historical understanding of Malevich is I think best revealed in a quote from Lampert generalizing what such a man and his life represent in the Russian context.

"It has become a largely unquestioned commonplace that Russian thought was linked with social and political attitudes to an extent unknown almost anywhere in contemporary Europe. The idea of philosophy as a neutral technical enterprise, as mere methodology, is naturally alien to the Russian intellectual scene."

This will be an invaluable perception to the proceeding argument concerning the growing indivisibility in Russia of the intellectual and the artistic consciousness. There were other figures as well, but the one who remains most significant to our problem is Dimitry Pisarev (1840 - 1868). Although the fever of anti-aestheticism was already latent in the writings of Chernyshevsky and others, with Pisarev it became an overt programme, intent on 'The Destruction of Aesthetics', which was in fact the title of his most scathing attack. Pisarev essentially 'launched a campaign against art itself and the
culture which has produced it'. He felt that Beauty, as a notion, 'ideal' 'universal' or 'true' ... was just 'a mumbo-jumbo of indefinite Platonic and Hegelian notions'.

'Nothing in his view was more relative than our sense of the beautiful, and any attempt to divorce it from the concrete experience of the beautiful had no meaning'.

Lampert goes on to say that:

"Aesthetic nihilism is a characteristically Russian attitude. It is shown in the many views of many Russian writers pursued by a sense of guilt at being writers at all.... The experience sprang from an acutely felt conflict - pace Rousseau, almost unknown in Western Europe - between culture and life. Pisarev's reflection on this conflict impelled him to expose the myths of idols of culture to which men have become enslaved, and for the creation and maintenance of which they have enslaved others."^4

Pisarev envisioned a 'disappearance of culture altogether, which was to be succeeded by "the emergence of a 'non-cultural', scientific culture, whose ideal was neither invented nor abstracted but found and left where it alone could be represented, 'in actual and living phenomena'. It was to be a culture which reflected man's changing and unimpeded vision of the universe, free especially from all the burdens of the past, and with none of the hot air of 'exalted places'. Its 'temples' would be 'the workshops of human thought'. It would eschew the artist as a sacred monomaniac, misunderstood and misinterpreted and ensure his status as simply a human being, endowed with a special gift of articulation and free from somnolence and escapism."^10

What we have then is an interesting intellectual
pre-figuration of the ideas and tremors that were later to prove so volatile when finally they left the textbooks of academicians, and merged with the actual physical possibility of material transformation. This is one part of the all too often ignored heritage Malevich and his generation were surely steeped in as well as the more popularly known 'painterly' phenomena of the west.

B. RADICAL IDEALISM: HEGELIAN OR MARXIST?

"Art advances between two chasms, which are frivolity and propaganda. On the ridge where the great artist moves forward, every step is an adventure, an extreme risk. In that risk, however, and only there, lies the freedom of art."—Albert Camus

What then are we to understand of Malevich's use of the 'alogical' developed as it was, out of Cubo-Futurist propositions? Certainly it becomes absurd to simply view it as another extension of the stylistic vocabulary of the past; in spite of the fact that it undoubtedly owes its cues to previously generated precedent, this inevitably conceives of the materialized form as divorced from its original idea or content and subjects it instead to our inevitably dislocated interpretation. Surely there are as many significant clues to the content located elsewhere than in the shell of the forms which we view. While there is every reason why one might want to 'appreciate' the art object, painting, sculpture or whatever for its own sake, the scope of this thesis is committed to a larger task. In this sense, it would be absurd to insist on a focus on the object or the aesthetic idea in spite of obvious interconnections and
relationships with existing conceptions the society holds of itself overall. It would be like suddenly looking at Mayan or some equally as foreign, sculptural reliefs as stylistically expressive forms, discontinuous with their organic roots in beliefs and their commensurate function. We must, as Panofsky suggested, presuppose meaning and pay attention to the significance of the 'sign' we are literally presented with.

The necessity of understanding the system of belief contemporary with the object or aesthetic under consideration is, in these terms, an indispensable tool for exegesis. It is in this sense mandatory to have some cognizance of Hegel's notion of dialectics and his philosophy of what art is. I do not want to claim that Malevich was schooled in Hegelian metaphysics, but it is impossible to ignore the obvious parallels between his Suprematist system and such a philosophy.

I will employ Marcuse's analysis of Hegel to these ends, but let me first briefly describe the formation in Malevich's art of a dialectical process and his later understanding of it. Dialectic as Hegel initially propounded it, was not an analytical system of thought. "Instead of expressing and reflecting the movement of the content, the dialectic produces this movement. It is not so much a method of analysis as a method of synthetic and systematic construction of the content." Formal logic prior to Hegel left open an essential problem, that is, how are the form and content to be united? Formalism in the art context shares somewhat the same problem; there is a division which occurs between the technical means, and that which is embodied, or what was called the spiritual
content, as opposed to the material.

Because of our own formalistic bias we sometimes avoid seeing in historical art objects the largest part of their meaning. This is one aspect of the abyss into which Malevich has been shoved, as I mentioned earlier. Hegel broke his notion of Dialectic down into a triad; thesis, anti-thesis and the synthesis. It is possible to see Malevich's extended art production as a macro-structure somewhat in these terms. His representational but personal images, the Peasant pictures, etc., could be thought of as the initial historical given, although adjusted to his own sensibility. This would correspond to Hegel's thesis. The anti-thesis, or the negation is the next step for Malevich. It took as its principal task the dissolution of the connections between empirical causative space with its 'realistic' forms, and the reality of the world art revealed. The destruction of the figurative or representational element in Malevich's art was not a dehumanizing process as has been projected, but rather a reconstruction according to a transformed consciousness bringing the process and manifest content of art back into the realm of ideas from which it had been previously divorced. It is only with a demand for 'social realism' that we find an argument for the humanitarian to be disembodied from the ideal in favour of a preoccupation with the immediate. This is the propagandistic chasm in the extreme to which Camus refers.

With Suprematism, Malevich declared the birth of an art which he considered in fact, to be on an equal footing with
philosophy or religion, and as such made a call for artists to realize the 'true' content of their process.

For Hegel, "art, religion, and philosophy are ... different paths to the same goal: the understanding of the concrete universal or the true as the whole."  

In 1922, in a letter written to the De Stijl group in Holland, Malevich said:

What does this life consist of? Of Religion and flesh-pot well being. Both create objects of well-being, and all these objects of well-being are their content, although they themselves do not realize that ART has its own content in its idea. They imagine that it can only exist by swallowing life's content, which is simply a crude, animal plan of action.

The negation in his work was matured in an environment heavily populated with Cubist and Futurist alternatives, artists seeking somewhat in the same direction as Malevich himself. Cubism however, he saw as entirely too analytical without the presentation of a uniquely conceived alternative. Futurism was beseiged by a romantic preoccupation with the new mechanical culture, electrical metaphors, fractured objects, and in spite of this, still retained allusions to empirical forms. Malevich did not come to any of these conclusions magically or overnight; he did in fact execute a bizarre hybrid which he termed Cubo-Futurism (See The Knife-Grinder, 1912) as well as his 'alogical' pictures. (See Warrior of the First Division, 1914) Along with the maturing synthesis that he was finally to formulate and articulate as Suprematism, the final stage of the Hegelian triad, complete with the later Hegelian allusions
to Ontology, and a realm of 'absolute spirit'. The paintings that I will discuss in a later chapter from this period are essentially in a dialectical conversation within their own singular non-objective context, and history. Malevich felt that Suprematism was a culmination of art history much as Hegel believed he had proposed a conclusive metaphysical system of thought. The largest contradiction in this operation as a proposal was its manifestation as an idealism without any practical means of creating itself within the context of everyday life. Marx, in his *Theses on Feurebach*, said:

"The question whether human thought can arrive at objective truth is not a theoretical but a practical question. It is in praxis that man must prove the truth, that is the reality, the exactness, the power of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking isolated from praxis is a purely scholastic question."^16

My contention here is not that art operates as a parallel science to philosophy or as an illustration of philosophical tenets, but that in the art of Kasimir Malevich, and in the specific context of Russia, there is a linkage directly into the energy that political philosophy was enjoying at this time, that would later, during and immediately after the revolution, produce substantial challenges to the existing order. Under Marxist-Leninism this was considered a dangerous luxury and the manifestation of a radical abstract art was confusedly seen simply as a flag of the earlier bourgeois sophistication and as having no relevance to the needs of the immediate social reconstruction. The Russian Revolution was one historical variant that did not follow Marx's
Fig. 41. Contre-relief, Exhibited in Berlin in 1922, V. Tatlin.

Fig. 42. Corner relief, suspended type. Collation of materials, iron, aluminum, primer, 1915, V. Tatlin.
notions of how the revolution would in fact occur. Ernst Fischer describes this:

"The creation of a new socialist consciousness is a central problem of socialism, as it comes gradually into being and becomes recognizable in rough outline despite many distortions and setbacks. In the Russian revolution, consciousness had soared ahead of being. It had come about differently from what Marx had expected (for good reason, in his own time); new productive forces had not smashed the old production relations in one of the most developed capitalist countries. Instead, revolution had occurred in a backward country as the result of war, wretchedness, the elemental demand of the people as a whole for peace and the demand of the peasants for land. The undeveloped productive forces had not called for socialism. But historical decisions do not follow the textbooks; they are the product of unprecedented and unrepeatable situations."  

The revolution then appears more as a result of Lenin's genius, the creation of a Vanguard elite, and the deprived conditions than according to historical necessity. This description is interesting inasmuch as it sets the stage for some better understanding of why Malevich and the radical artists of the years preceding the revolution were subsequently rejected. Marcuse, in his preface to *Reason and Revolution*, has a very good paragraph that effectively describes the mechanism of negation in society and the reasons for its ultimate artificiality. Malevich's 'allogism' and his connections to the Futurist poets may be clarified by extension of this argument.

"The liberating function of negation in philosophical thought depends upon the recognition that the negation is a positive act: that-which-is repels that which-is-not and, in doing so, repels its own possibilities. Consequently, to express and define that-which-is on its own terms is to distort and falsify
reality. Reality is other than and more than that codified in the logic and language of facts. Here is the inner link between dialectical thought and the effort of avant-garde literature: the effort to break the power of facts over the word, and to speak a language which is not the language of those who establish, enforce and benefit from the facts. As the power of the given facts tends to become totalitarian, to absorb all opposition, and to define the entire universe of discourse, the effort to speak the language of contradiction appears increasingly irrational, obscure, artificial.\textsuperscript{18}

The question then is obviously not to locate the influences Hegel exerted directly or indirectly on Malevich, but rather on the fascinating fact that the process of dialectic, and poetic language, the 'alogism' or 'Zaumist' antics of Malevich, here converge. As Marcuse continues to say, "The common element is the search for an 'authentic language'... the language of negation as the Great Refusal to accept the rules of a game in which the dice are loaded."\textsuperscript{19}

Thus art, while not speaking directly in the language of political discourse operates out of and in response to, a similar need, and understanding embedded in the very nature of what it is. The form it takes necessarily can not be in the guise of the existing order; in Russia in the 1930's, such a demand was for Social Realism.

The central problem for Malevich then, as for us now, is the question and paradox of the relations between freedom and necessity. Malevich's Suprematism was unquestionably much more deeply committed to 'freedom' than any social realism propogating ideological tenets, precisely because it was not
dedicated to propaganda. Malevich, like Hegel, wanted an art that transcended particular and time-locked ideological premises. In *Soviet Marxism*, Marcuse says:

"The Soviet state by administrative decree prohibits the transcendence of art; it thus eliminates even the ideological reflex of freedom in an unfree society. Soviet realistic art, complying with the decree, becomes an instrument of social control in the last still nonconformist dimension of the human existence."\(^{20}\)

Malevich appears as an artist much more radical than the given historical context could afford to tolerate, in their minds at least, and so they effectively eliminated him and the influence of his works from within their sphere.\(^{21}\)

Another way of understanding the mechanism of this contradiction, the attempted welding of individual freedom and collective necessity or consciousness, is in the language of psychoanalysis.

Norman O. Brown, in reference to ideas initially elaborated by Freud, has said that, "Art, if its object is to undo repressions, and if civilization is essentially repressive, is in this sense subversive of civilization.... In contrast with the repressive structure of the authoritarian group, the aim of the partnership between the artist and the audience is instinctual liberation.... Art seduces us into the struggle against repression."\(^{22}\) During the months after the revolution, theatre and art did literally become animated in the lives of the people, a dialectic emerged which derived from the artists materializing perceptions they had as to what the essence of existence, especially in celebration of the Revolution, was
Malevich's interest in synthesizing dissident parts into a comprehensive whole in an attempt to overcome spiritual or philosophical ethnocentricity is indeed reminiscent of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel saw that the powerful spirit of every age, its ideology or what he called the 'Zeitgeist', makes men "prisoners of the prevailing perspectives of their period, their particular situations, and their national cultures." It was his attempt, through philosophy, as it was Malevich's through his art, to overcome this dilemma by creating a metaphysic that utilized this perception of man in history. Both devised a system that saw truth as a process and not a conclusion, and that hoped to provide a transcendental overview. That Malevich can be aligned with the fate of Hegel in this way is appropriate parallel to the failure of the revolution in classical Marxist terms.

While Hegel was seen by Marx to have given the "most advanced and comprehensive statement of bourgeois principles," so Malevich, who clearly embodies aspects of Hegel's philosophy in his aesthetic, would likewise at least conceivably, have been transcended himself if the new order had in fact actually been instituted. The analogy to Hegel is not expected to be a direct one. Generally the idealism was present as much in Marx as it was in Hegel or Malevich's use of both of them. One difference being that Marx had 'turned Hegel on his head' in order to apply idealistic philosophy directly to pressing contemporary human needs and in so doing created praxis out of theory and supposedly stopped useless acedemicism. Malevich did not operate as either a 'Hegelian' or a 'Marxist', the one
necessarily independent of the other, but combined them into a structure as substantially of his own creation as it depended on previously existing philosophical sources.

Another difference however lay in the fact that Malevich was present during the revolution which was supposed to act as a correction for the one looming contradiction Marx presented to Hegel's system. "The truth, Hegel maintained, is a whole that must be present in every single element, so that if one material element cannot be connected with the process of reason, the truth of the whole is destroyed. Marx said there was such an element - the proletariat." 2

The proletariat, through the forces of the revolution was to be realized as an aspect of the truth by being given the possibility, under the new conditions which the revolution creates, to fulfill their human potentialities and freedom. Suprematism, operating out of an understanding of this prospect, felt no restraints on its idealism, which, in retrospect, we can now see that it shared as much with Marx as with Hegel. The real confusion results only if we demand that the artist operate in absolute conjunction with the major theoretical forces of his time instead of in and around them; the problem in this case however is that Malevich, and indeed the major cultural ambience in Russia at the time, was very much tuned into such a possible conjunction.
CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT OF SUPREMATISM

A. SUPREMATISM IN WORLD RECONSTRUCTION

"I have transformed myself in the zero of form
and dragged myself out of the rubbish-filled
pool of acedemic art."\(^1\)

K. Malevich

The arguments between Malevich and Tatlin were really
finally formulated by 1915. Tatlin's 'materialism', his exhaltation
of the reality of the object-components, was seen as the embodiment
of a de-mystified rationalism, in spite of the fact that many
of his contre-reliefs for example, only work at all if viewed
as abstract sculptural statements. But in spite of this
apparent similarity, Malevich's 'non-objectivity' and its con­
comitant spiritualism, was theoretically untenable to Tatlin's
direction and a rivalry developed between them.

The painter, Ivan Puni, organized an exhibition
in 1915 - 'Tramway V', in which Tatlin showed his reliefs
and Malevich showed his 'zaumist' or 'allogical' works, but no
non-objective works appeared. The question arises as to why,
if in fact Malevich was working in his non-objective style at
this point, there were no such canvases exhibited.

"An argument frequently advanced is that there
were simply none in existence to exhibit;
alternatively it might have been that he was
waiting an opportunity to show a sizeable
body of works. And at the end of the year
he did in fact exhibit an impressive array
of new work at another exhibition, again
organized by Puni. This was entitled '0.10'
(The Last Futurist exhibition), Malevich
showed over thirty Suprematist paintings,
Tatlin a dozen reliefs."\(^2\)
The '0.10' exhibition had opened in December of 1915, including the famous black square among its astonishments. On January 5, 1916, Malevich took part in a public debate with Puni concerning 'Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism', and his pamphlet, 'From Cubism to Suprematism; The New Realism in Painting', was published, all to coincide with the '0.10' exhibit. Tatlin had a brochure printed on his reliefs to counter Malevich's propositions; the atmosphere was highly polemical. In his essay, Malevich maps the path of painting from its earliest primitive manifestations to his own work in Suprematism. His consciousness is very much attuned to explaining the need for the radical departure from traditional aesthetic modes that he demands. His sense of the primitive is not an idealized elementarism or return to basic first principles as the route to freedom and purity. Instead his interest tends towards the diversified and complex origins that he felt much of modern art was not dealing with mistakenly thinking that its path, analogous to biological, and later to technological evolution, was linear and that the appearance of a new or novel stage necessarily made its predecessor obsolete. In order to justify the sweep he makes of the historical legacy he attempted to demonstrate the error of the historical model if accepted as the precedent for the 'new art'. "For art should not proceed towards reduction, or simplification, but towards complexity." Since the metaphor of simplification became the watchword of abstraction in the painting, sculpture and architecture of the west not long after this, it is extremely interesting to note the fact that Malevich himself, an often referred to forerunner
of this phenomenon as a visual presence, did not conceive his aesthetic as anything like a 'less is more' puritanism. His intentions were in fact to a more rigorous and complex content although not in a literal or narrative format. He cites the Venus de Milo as a "graphic example of decline", Michaelangelo's David is a "monstrosity". His proposition is clearly that the art of the past has bequeathed a particular set of problems in its heritage as well as a vast richness. It has led us to understand art as a parasite to nature; the distinction is between the art of copying (allbeit with individuality or style) and the art of genuine creation.

He does not fail to credit contemporary movements with their unique discoveries, and says that "Futurism opened the 'new' in modern life; the beauty of speed". But at the same time, he proposes Suprematism as an inevitable advance and consequently says: "We have abandoned Futurism; and we, the most daring, have spat on the altar of its art." Malevich's complaint with Futurism was that while they rebelled from the restraints of reason and proclaimed intuition, which they equated with the subconscious, as the organizing principle for composition, in fact, they still utilized the same format, that is, empirical reality; but it was now seen through a conscious sense of fractured or distorted design.

Malevich wanted an intuitive form which 'should emerge from nothing', rather than from existing utilitarian elements. The fantasy that such a perception creates, especially if removed from the abstract and put into praxis among real men,
Fig. 43. Suprematist Drawing, 1915-16.
is not without historical precedent. The razing of the world, the apocalypse of destruction that 'necessarily' precedes the creation of a new order is as ancient to the mythic human memory as recorded time itself. Within a single year, the revolution was to enact Malevich's aesthetic considerations in terms of his perception of its historical necessity with corresponding socio-political forms.

The Bolshevik dream of a classless society and the concommittant initial 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as an intermittent stage prior to the realization of their utopia in fact corresponds to the kinds of absolutist declarations announced by Suprematism. Certainly Suprematist ideology does not indicate clearly utilitarian consequences, all I am pointing out is an obvious parallel at a formal level in the logic of corresponding arguments. The creative aspect of Malevich's argument is for a genuine and conscious liberation rather than a partial and unconscious one. He felt that the road of materialist reason reduced creation to the lowest possible level and made form simply into reasonable distortions, like variations out of a central and omnipotent theme alienated from its proper centre in man.

"The efforts of the artistic authorities to direct art along the road of common-sense reduced creation to nil. And with the strongest people real form is distortion. Distortion was driven by the strongest to the moment of vanishing, but it did not overstep the bounds of nothing. But I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is to Suprematism, to the new realism in painting - to non-objective creation. Suprematism is like the beginning of a new culture."
It is a curious expression of individual will and it is to Malevich's credit that he was strong enough not to have been smothered by the flood of mass oriented metaphors and psychology of his day. Malevich refused to succumb to a particular ideological mode simply because it was the natural reflex to the existing environment. What he did do however as an absorption of the drift of the time was to transform a given energy or idea into the structure of his own system, and he seems to have done this fairly unconsciously. I will deal with this in more detail in the final chapter. But for now it is enough to think of it as, Malevich, willing and finally accepting his own imaginative process, a created or aesthetic reality, in as substantial a way as the one informed by the history of the state. He projected a resolution of his moral sensibility as an abstraction into the system he called Suprematism.

So we find that we have moved historically from man's creation of God, to man's creation of things, and 'idolatry' is the description of the phenomenon of what such an event represents, that operates in both instances. Art then, in the second stage of a consciousness that was acting as a victim, blind to such a perception, would simply supplant religion in the exercise of such human needs. Marx even saw the whole fetish with commodities in the western world as being an understandable extension of the same unconscious drives. In this sense the commodity culture becomes simply a mechanistic replication of historically created and unconscious urges.

The parallel argument was made in philosophy by Feuerbach
in his analysis of *The Essence of Christianity*. In reference to what he felt was the most general cultural condition of his times, he said:

"And without doubt our epoch... prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being... What is sacred for it is only illusion, but what is profane - is truth. More than that, the sacred grows in its eyes to the extent that truth diminishes and illusion increases, to such an extent that the peak of illusion is for it the peak of the sacred."¹⁰

This is clearly an historical perception. That it is constructed as an engagement with specific contextual dilemmas is I think obvious. For Malevich, Suprematism was clearly his attempt to locate the lost unity of his era.

The seemingly continuous battle in historical societies between traditional forms, whether they be religious, political or aesthetic, and innovation, seems to be a basic concomitant of a finally self-conscious society, which can see itself in something like its totality. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that once a society begins to unravel the fiber of its mythic construction, once every rule of conduct is questionable, this condition necessarily moves that society through a process which appears very much to be, in effect, a real dissolution. It is interesting in this respect to note that, like art under Malevich, wishing to proclaim itself as an autonomous phenomenon, philosophy went through a similar proclamation. Both suffered the effect of being finally unable to describe the social totality coherently for any length of time; society seemed to be in an eternal state of flux whereas the philosophical descriptions, especially materialism, were contingent to concrete social and
economic observations. The really curious paradox of Malevich's so-called intuitional system, was that it required the apparent victory of a rational order, one conceived in his terms however, in order to survive as a separate cultural manifestation. Because Malevich's Suprematism could not offer anything even vaguely resembling a social critique, it was hopelessly dependent again on the revolutionary Russian context. And in another sense this left it open to very real accusations of unconsciously defending previously existing class structures, through its lack of overt supportive measures. Its support was ultimately abstract, and acted as a celebration of the potential freedom such a state could offer, and this proved unfortunately premature.

But in the loss of the communism a mythic community enjoys Suprematism necessarily emerged as a private language necessitating initiation. As a separated activity, art, especially at this moment historically, entered into the arena of cultural dissolution that had formerly been the situation philosophy had created in its critique of religion. From the critique of religion emerged the possible dissolution of all mythic constructions.

The attempt by the constructivists on the other hand was to rediscover some common language, by moving art directly into praxis. Needless to say, they suffered great difficulties as well. In its ultimate phase Suprematism transcended art as a possible function in the 'new society'. Art would be absorbed into architectural design, utopian projects, and life style.

Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* contains an argument which
can be seen to be a refutation of Malevich's process of setting up an alternative to existing art-historical idolatry as a way of overcoming the problems inherent to such a construction in the first place. All that ultimately accomplishes is to personalize the previously acknowledged error. The process of its creation is an alternative, but the conclusion which suggests itself as some sort of final destination, that is, suprematism, suffers from the same malady that spurred him on in the first place. Erich Fromm sums up the major sense of this dilemma in Marx's Concept of Man when he says: "Idolatry is always the worship of something into which man has put his own creative powers, and to which he now submits, instead of experiencing himself in his creative act." Art however, necessitates the production of some thing, and through that thing, the idea or necessity that informed its creation in the first place will usually resonate; this is one of the measures that we usually think of as the 'quality' or 'power' that the object possesses. In this sense, the object necessarily presents finality, inasmuch as it can be thought of as self-sufficient. But Malevich's system, in spite of the fact that the individual residues of it can be seen as autonomous, only gather their full capacity when seen in terms of the larger aesthetic whole. This is the paradox of man-made things, that they can retain their own unique identity which we experience at the same time as they have a sub-surface content that is communicated tacitly without overt declaration of intent or means and which relates them to what are apparently the larger 'ideas' of the artist and ultimately also his times. Fromm says in this regard: "They are man's creations; they are valuable aids for
life, yet each one of them is also a trap, a temptation to confuse life with things, experience with artifacts, feeling with surrender and submission.  

So this is the double-pronged potential of Suprematism that I think we must keep in mind; that it was a system of recognizable physical style, at the same time (the two are not really separable as an experience) that it had a two part message or content known through that stylistic means. One was declared, the message of the 'desert', the vast spacial and spiritual sensation which was Malevich's avowed intention, and the other, implicit and not necessarily known to Malevich himself, was the larger story or mythic pattern he enacted, the movement of ideas throughout time. Malevich would probably have been openly dismayed by Fromm's statement; being an artist and not an intellectual he would never have thought of an experience of his world of sensate spirit as requiring "surrender and submission", inherently pejorative designations but rather an intensely open sensibility seeking alternatives to unsatisfactory aesthetic beliefs. He enters the range of this kind of accusation precisely because he has made a decision about his art, that as phenomenon, it is not simply idiosyncratic or personal, but has a larger validity as a way of experiencing the world. Inasmuch as this is the case, the danger Fromm speaks of exists. But I do not think that it is necessarily the case that all created forms, that is ideas or art, necessitate a relinquishment of critical capacities in order to enter their ambience. In this sense, Malevich did go about attempting to create a mythic order, one that had enough self-sufficiency to merit investigation and experience for its own sake.
Amongst all of this theoretical background, it is almost possible to forget the objectivity of the form Suprematism took. What was the practical shape by which Suprematism was known?

Near the end of the essay I have been quoting, from Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting, he says: "I have untied the knots of wisdom and set free the consciousness of colour." Only the non-objective or abstract world is unhindered by ties to non-empirical reality and hence, only in such a world is the conception of an absolute existence going to be possible. In Tatlin's presentation of material objectivity, in spite of its abstract compositional appearance the object is predetermined by its material or formal substance (screws, tin, electrical armatures, etc.) that is, as Ron Hunt has suggested, it is the world's first "junk-sculpture". You do not, as Malevich would have you, experience the 'spirit' or sensation of the work relevant to a larger system of thought than the 'object-ness' of the various component parts in dramatic relationship. Hence the work lacks any profound uniqueness or autonomy to its basic structure and instead shares a complicity in the external world and although 'abstract' does not partake or consciously create an alternative order. Malevich's notion was that only through the experience of a work that, related to an idea larger than the physical composition taken for its own sake, that is aesthetic-ideology communicated intuitively, could the art-work's universality be affective. One of the most essential means of communication of this aesthetic is through the "consciousness" of colour. With the knots of the past (wisdom) untied, the consciousness or inner being of colour
itself is set free, an inherently liberating conception, essentially demanding that one follow by example and achieve freedom, ultimately even from the historical bondage Suprematism would represent to the succeeding generations of artists. Colour, as it was programatically for Kandinsky, was a means of evocation. It drew out a series of distinct, although anything but absolute, relationships among the various elements in the picture, and in a sense charged the already tense inter-relation of forms.

The use of geometrical forms (straight lines, curves, circles, squares, rectangles, etc.) corresponds to Mondrian's or Van Doesburg's aesthetic of 'universal harmony' where each compositional device, line, colour, etc., is seen purely and as resonating with a metaphysical meaning, rather than as an expressive or stylistic distortion. The 'De Stijl' artists however, while involved with similar sounding propositions and 'essential' elements, were not living contingent with a revolutionary-social consciousness. There was strictly no possibility of realizing their art ideas at a public scale except by an unsatisfactory and conventional osmosis, whereas Suprematism, even though conceived prior to the revolution itself, quickly adjusted the scale of its aims to include the mass metaphor. It was in fact El Lissitzky who articulated that the dynamics of Suprematism could be understood as symbolic of the dynamics of the revolution.14 Hence, the all important and seldom mentioned distinction between Malevich and Mondruan or Van Doesburg for instance; even though both factions shared the attribution of universal or metaphysical meaning above form experienced simply for its own sake, the distinction between the
Fig. 44. Suprematist Painting, Eight Red Rectangles, 1915.
contexts in which their art appeared was of an immeasurable importance precisely because both groups had the sensibilities, but it was only in Russia that its potential in praxis was a concrete possibility.

There is however a contradiction in the process. It is that as an artist, seeking alternatives to historical wisdom, you reduce the given elements to their lowest possible expressiveness, tentatively removing any adulation for craftsmanship in favour of an approach to what Malevich has called "the zero degree", or a kind of psycho-biology of form. What remains is pure "idea", hence complex, and ultimately an experience of 'particular' truth. The proposal has curiously returned upon itself as a form of 'knot' or wisdom of a similar order, although apparently looking nothing at all like its progenitor, the same place which inspired the reaction and search in the first place. It appears that he has done what artists and certainly "primitive" or "mythic" civilizations have always done, to re-create, after its own perceptions and subsequent principles, an order to the events and materials discovered about itself.

It will be useful at this point to turn to Malevich's criticism of an entirely different art form. His argument with the film-makers, Pudovkin and Eisenstein, is a most graphic example of this concern and was articulated in two articles. The first was called "And Images Triumph on the Screens," and the second, "The Artist and the Cinema". They are of interest here precisely because Malevich saw that even then his aesthetic was being utilized as a compositional device to impart dramatic effect without comprehension of the larger import he had intended.
In "And Images Triumph on the Screens", he quotes Arvator, who argues for 'agit-painting', and 'agit-cinema' because the new society has not yet been achieved and it is therefore necessary to "provide concrete persuasion i.e. by means of art", to convince otherwise dissident members. The assumption follows that as agitational art becomes unnecessary art will pass into production. The vision is of a single-minded proletarian society, but Malevich feels that 'single-mindedness' is not the proposition of art, but diversity and the creation of the beautiful is. It would undoubtedly have been abhorrent to Malevich to think that his art could be seen as restraining, on the contrary, I am sure that he thought of it as quite spontaneous, and he also saw art as passing, with the resolution of the new society, into production of a sort, however, more engaged in relations between people and environmental and architectural design, than mundane 'production'.

When Malevich says that "Form for form's sake does not exist, nor does form as such", he is referring to two things. One is the continuing 'triumph' of images on the screen, essentially products of the rejected bourgeois order and hence reactionary. The other contention is that where the dynamics of newer conceptions are utilized, it is only as new formulations for the choreography of compositional elements; Suprematism is thereby made into a formal proposition irrespective of the revolutionary proposal it made, that of non-objective content.

He complains that: "the painter-artist is invited into the cinema in order to play the part of some wretched yard-keeper... a scenery painter and furniture arranger, instead
of directing this powerful tool of expression: "17

The humiliation is then complete; the artist is engaged as a decorator, and his ideas are utilized as geometric devices for composition, denuded of all their revolutionary aesthetic content. In this sense Malevich had a keen eye for such exploitation and the haughtiness of his personality can be felt through every sentence.

Vertov's application of Suprematist principles did, in Man with a Movie Camera, far exceed in complexity, Eisenstein's use of it as a dynamic compositional device. He actually utilized it in questions involving the inter-twining of space and time. His use of rapid montage to achieve a high degree of abstraction in spite of the realistic people and places the film was concerned with, was another attribute as a philosophy, that would have been readily available from Suprematism. Vertov had in fact planned to work on a movie with El Lissitzky, and was needless to say, familiar with Suprematist thought. It was to have been a film on the Story of Two Squares by Lissitzky.

It was Malevich's project under Suprematism, to realize a new world out of the resources of its own conception. El Lissitzky puts the idea into as many words in his essay, Suprematism in World Reconstruction, of 1920, an almost biblical or incantatory invitation to join forces with Suprematist ideology. Images of worlds in collision, satellites, apocalypse and space travel, abound. In closing, he states:

"It will liberate all those engaged in creative activity and make the world into a true model of perfection. This is the model we await
One can hardly believe the innocence of such a phrasing. The lack of self-consciousness produces a kind of salvational tone that is finally taken to its literal if illogical conclusion. Malevich never put Suprematism into this format but did allude to such an apocalyptic connection. It is important to remember the context in which such a statement arose, the enthusiasm of a tremendous and successful social upheaval directly behind it; not too dissimilar manifestations were occurring all over Europe during this time and whether connected directly to political analysis or psychoanalytic diagnoses most were equally as aggressive. It was a period of cafe gatherings, manifestoes and demonstrations of one kind or another.

El Lissitzky also announces another important theme of Suprematism at this time, the analogy by metaphor to extraterrestrial phenomenon.

"Seven years ago suprematism raised aloft its black square but no one sighted it for at that time a telescope for this new planet had not yet been invented. The mighty force of its movement however caused a succession of artists to focus on it and many more were influenced by it yet neither the former nor the latter possessed sufficient inner substance to be held fast by its attractive power and to formulate a complete world system from the new movement. They loosed their hold and plunged like meteorites into irrelevancy extinguishing themselves in its chaos... But the second much improved phase is already following and the planet will soon stand fully revealed."19

The metaphor is a useful one in that it locates the fact that people had not yet seen the essential content of Suprematism
and had mistakenly opted for the appearance in its ease, over the reality. A psychoanalyst could also make much of the sublimated sexual contents of the choice of description but I will not get into that here.

El Lissitzky was one of the few exponents of Malevich's system to really understand the range that his ideas proposed. "The empty phrase, 'art for art's sake', had already been wiped out and in Suprematism we have wiped out the phrase 'painting for painting's sake', and have ventured far beyond the frontiers of painting." 20

The system could be realized just as well in three dimensions as in two, since one of its central proposals had to do with the "rhythmic arrangement of space and time", a fundamental preoccupation of architectural phenomenon. 21 I will return to this possibility of a three-dimensional application of Suprematism in a later chapter on the architectoniiki and planiti, but for now I want to move onto a discussion of Suprematist thought, whereby Suprematism appears as a manifold exploration; on the one hand producing a universal calculus of the spiritual and on the other, a kind of applied design science, complete with an ideological content.
B. WHAT WAS SUPREMATISM?

"The system is constructed in time and space, independently of all aesthetic beauties, experiences and moods; it is more a philosophical colour system for realizing the latest achievements of my ideas, as knowledge." 22

K. Malevich

Historically Suprematism may be considered the sum inventory of the projects, architectural models, planiti, theoretical treatises, and paintings that Malevich and his followers carried out, roughly between 1913 and 1930. That is, it does have an objective reality, we can see the projects and rationalize, according to Malevich's principles of dynamism, space-time, colour and the supremacy of 'pure feeling' in art, a program espoused and followed more or less accurately. But beyond the declared origins, the formal emergence out of Malevich's understanding of Cubism and Futurism, etc., and the concrete forms it took, there is an interesting geology; beneath the surface that we can experience there is the greater problem of meaning, the 'why' of Suprematism and the particularity of its historical setting.

Suprematism arose like a phoenix from the ashes it had itself created, and out of nothing, the zero degree of form, proposed the supreme manifestation of order. Malevich, in all of his writings, invariably has the tenor of a prophet or priest. The vision he proposes for the future of art in society is ultimately a highly moral stance. The morality is not a literal one, with concrete maxims for people to follow, but is a sublimated scripture, inseparable by way of process (i.e. it is
the latent content) from his Suprematist world.

Freud, in Totem and Taboo, has said:

"In only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thoughts been retained, and that is in the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects - thanks to artistic allusion - just as though it were something real."23

This is an interesting proposition because what it insinuates is that the artist is in fact operating, within the context of one predominant process of thought, with another, his own. Freud also goes into the narcissism and obsessiveness that he feels determines a man to create systems of thought which pertain to something as vast as a theory of the universe.

"Thus, a system is best characterized by the fact that at least two reasons can be discovered for each of its products: a reason based upon the premises of the system (a reason then, which may be delusional) and a concealed reason, which we must judge to be the truly operative one."24

I have tried to show both the premises of the system Malevich proposes, and the contextual and psychological reasons where determinable, in my analysis throughout this thesis. This alternative process is very evident in Malevich in spite of the fact that he includes the format of two previously extant modes as jumping off points, that is, a religious scheme, and the newer scientific or rational mode. His new form makes the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge meaningless. Henri Frankfort, in his essay Myth and Reality, says of the "mythó-poeic" mind:

"Meaningless, also, is our contrast between
reality and appearance. Whatever is capable of affecting mind, feeling or will has thereby established its undoubted reality. There is, for instance, no reason why dreams should be considered less real than impressions received while one is awake."25

In fact if we trust the perceptions psychoanalysis has given us at all, dreams really are formative, synthesizing and crucial to any understanding of our behaviour. I am not trying to suggest that Malevich then was primitive in his process, i.e. pre-logical, as much as by analogy he presented us access to our consideration of him as a post-logical intelligence, and this by extension, may bear some relevance to the method of the artist overall.

Malevich wrote:

"Hence to the Suprematist, the appropriate means of representation is always the one which gives the fullest possible expression to feeling as such and which ignores the familiar appearance of objects. Objectivity in itself, is meaningless to him; the concepts of the conscious mind are worthless."26

In many ways then we can, at this level, see a resounding similarity between Frankfort's definition of the complex character of myth and Malevich's otherwise apparently bizarre manner of logic;

"Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviour, which does not find its fulfillment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth."27

The pattern and process of Suprematism then may be seen as an alternative to contemporary speculative thought in Russia at the time. Suprematism did not simply produce a peculiar hybrid as a compositional variant, but was moving in the direction of re-investing a moral content in a process that had sacrificed all
of its former power in these terms to maturing institutions and ideologies throughout history. As the energy that had created the mythic intelligence turned from the worship of an anthropocentric God to an understanding (or worship) tempered by science, of an idea or conception instead, so art was turning from its former servitude (the production of images as demonstration or enactment of a pre-conceived belief) to a content uniquely its own. The materialist and evolutionist description of this process as simply a mechanism of survival (that is, when photography introduced the means of duplicating reality more accurately than the painter, one entire range of his focus was affectively lost) is simply not good enough. It pays no attention to the ontological and epistemological intentions of many artists and reduces their vision to the intellectual constructions that these critics have formulated themselves. The project abstraction initially envisioned was one of mind given material shape, as was Suprematism in its boldest phase. James Jean's description of this process is appropriate in this regard. He said that "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine, the old dualism of mind and matter seems likely to disappear... in our time matter has become spiritualized and the spiritual materialized." It is true, of our century especially, that it has become infinitely easier to talk in terms of abstractions as qualities than of the concrete attributes of things in themselves. Questions as to the meaning of 'being' abound and ultimately lie at the heart of many of the aesthetic ventures around us. Malevich was such an existential or phenomenological artist, and actually one of the first who understood himself as such. As the first
question for philosophers usually has to do with the meaning of existence, so with artists, many of their works that seem obscure or esoteric in their 'meaning' have to do with a man literally presenting his sensations of 'meaning' at any given moment as it becomes apparent to him. I think Suprematism started as such an adventure, but later became something quite different again.
C. SUPREMATISM AND THE ENGLISH VORTICISTS: WHAT RELATIONSHIP?

While it seems that we cannot find any direct iconographic antecedent for the Suprematist aesthetic, there is one non-objective movement that besides sharing a somewhat similar ideology, also produced pictures that the Russians of the period were verifiably aware of. This group called themselves Vorticists, a designation attributed to them by poet and apostle for the movement, Ezra Pound. Pound wrote a Memoir of one of the group's exponents, Henri-Gaudier-Brzeska. In it, he says:

"Every statue, every picture is a series of ordered relations, controlled, as the body is controlled in the dance, by the will to express a single idea.... Art is not an adjunct to existence, a reproduction of the actual. For indeed it is not essential that the subject-matter should represent or be like anything in nature; only it must be alive with a rhythmic vitality of its own."29

Within such a statement we can find many of the general descriptions of the intents of Suprematism as an organized aesthetic. Even more particularly, Malevich saw 'rhythm' as "The groundless stimulus of the universe,... the first and most important law of all that is manifested in life."30 Malevich goes on in this same essay to describe the difficulty man has in comprehending reality, precisely because "Its sum is unstable and its fluctuations endlessly quivering in the waves of rhythm."31 His sense of reality is permeated by a mystical envelope, a conception concerned with the eternal flux of things, as opposed to their static, reasoned understanding. But the option of both groups is the same, that is the overt removal of 'literary values' from their immediate concern. Both tendencies,
whether aware of it at the time or not, seemed simply to exchange absolutes. That is, they began with an interest in rhythm, essentially a specific metaphor for process, and then focused on the unstable or ephemeral nature of things rather than their static quality as the condition of their perceptions, and made that into an absolute, similar however different, from the earlier static description. Transformation was strangely made into an absolute and then reified as dogma in the form of particular pictures. This curious paradox (the absolute of transformation) was something that the Vorticists could have inherited from their relations and polemical exchanges with the Italian Futurists. The Italian Futurists when viewed from this perspective, became a fantastic catalyst, Marinetti especially, his influence ranging all the way from Moscow through Paris to England. The Vorticists went on to reject Marinetti in their own way, as did the Russian Futurists. But the connections between the three movements were there, both in conceptual and iconographical terms.

The Vorticists, under Pound's tutelage at least, did have a more intellectually enlightened notion of the significance of history and did not seem to become victims to the kinds of hysteria that enveloped Marinetti. 32

In dealing with the labelling the Vorticists received from contemporary English critics, as Futurists (then understood as a synonym for modernism), Pound writes:

"The Vorticist has not this curious tic for destroying past glories. I have no doubt that Italy needed Mr. Marinetti but he did not set on the egg that hatched me, and as I am wholly opposed to his aesthetic principles I see no reason why I, and various men who agree with me, should be expected to call ourselves Futurists. We
do not desire to evade comparison with the past. We prefer that the comparison be made by some intelligent person whose idea of "the tradition" is not limited by the conventional taste of four or five centuries and one continent."  

What I want to stress here, is the flow of information and ideas that undoubtedly occurred all across the continent during this period. The interests were not as dissimilar as they have sometimes been thought to be. There was an instance of a particular iconographical communication which may have been of use to Malevich, certainly it would have been of interest. It is a painting by Wyndham Lewis, reproduced in the article, English Futurists, by Zinaida Vengerova, in the Russian magazine Strelets ("Archer") of 1915.  

Of interest is the fact that the reproduction was in black and white and of a poor quality so that it tended to efface any hint of the illusionism, the three-dimensionality that Lewis was then working with. Instead, the sensitive Russian eye of this time would have seen a remarkably suggestive configuration of mass and plane in space, floating in a dynamic tension, similar to his own growing considerations of such phenomena. This may have exerted some influence on an otherwise unique iconography, but it will have to remain a reasonable conjecture in lieu of more specific evidence.  

There is a more conclusive possibility suggested for the iconographical source of the first Suprematist manifestation, the Black Square. Troels Andersen, in the introduction to Malevich's Essays on Art cites that Leger in 1913-14, gave two lectures, where he distinguished between the imitative and the realist
Fig. 45. Wyndham Lewis,
1915(?)

qualities in a work of art. In talking about contrasts he said that "the artist must be guided by a new, completely subjective sensibility. That he has broken an object or placed a red or yellow square in the centre of his canvas will not make his work new; what will make his work new is his grasp of the creative spirit infusing this outward appearance." Troels feels that there is little doubt that Malevich's works were painted after Leger's speech in the Academie Russe, but he does not feel that it indicates a direct source but demonstrates instead "the striking parallels in the development and modes of the two artists after 1910."

The dynamics of Suprematism as an aesthetic were certainly historically singular even if iconographically ascribable to a continuum of succeeding pictorial traditions. The only account Malevich gives that makes a great deal of sense as an attribution is one that he later rejected as a fallacy. For the exhibition of 1927 in Berlin, various theoretical charts were prepared (these are looked at in detail later). Chart number sixteen, entitled 'Painterly Sensations and Their Environment', ascribes the appearance of Suprematism to aerial photography and the new spacial considerations it provided. Even though Malevich later rejected this source as an "erroneous development", which is entirely understandable since this suggested a purely formal preoccupation, it still indicates a strong source for the configurations that we are finally presented with. This probably tells us more about his procedure as an artist than it gives information directly useful to our understanding of Suprematist pictures. The advent of the 'non-objectivity' he created was more spontaneous than any of the later writings ever have it appear.
Fig. 46. Study for an airport on the outskirts of Moscow, 1927.

Fig. 47. Study for an airport on the outskirts of Moscow, 1927.
The theoretical position was literally a much later and mature development but I do not think that this discredits his claims for the intentions of the system but indicates how literally he meant the "rejection of reason" and the actuality of his reliance on intuitive and spontaneous resources as a first start.

D. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUPREMATIST PICTURES

While the first overtly Suprematist manifestation, as mentioned earlier, was in the production of Kruchenykh's Futurist opera, Victory Over the Sun, in 1913, the formative elements were already utilized within the framework of Malevich's previous painting. Reduction of form became for his understanding of the intents of Impressionism, Cezanne and then Cubism, the next logical step towards the most essential elements that comprised what he considered to be the focus of art's process. It wasn't a simplification that he was after but a purposeful reduction to the binding elements of pictorial composition. The concept is very Platonic inasmuch as there is an 'ordering' principle, much like a paradigm, which in its enactment produces all of these manifestations which are Suprematist. The idea is ultimately what possesses the real symmetry of the system, where the individual pictures in themselves may be almost any combination of consistent geometries. At its most intellectual level, Suprematism became a calculus or metaphor for spiritual content, a search for the consistent essence as opposed to the
constructivist's mechanistic existentialism. Malevich's existentialism was a more profound confrontation with metaphysical questions.

The origins of abstraction, in Kandinsky and Mondrian especially, have clear linkages to studies centred in esoteric or occult understandings of the process of the mind.\(^{38}\)

Anton Ehrenzweig, in *The Hidden Order of Art*, has drawn what he believes is a direct map of abstract art itself that indicates the crucial equation of its success. He attributes the 'liveliness' of abstraction to its rich substructure in unconscious fantasy. The value of Malevich's poemagogic theorizing as a process, is described obliquely by Ehrenzweig in the following:

"The close cooperation between precisely focused reasoning and almost totally undifferentiated intuition has, to my mind, made our times so abundantly creative, both in art and science. In our abstract art there is a dramatic short-circuit between its high sophistication and love of geometry on the one hand and an almost oceanic lack of differentiation obtaining in its matrix in the unconscious mind."\(^{39}\)

I am not sure that I really understand or believe in the concept he uses here of the unconscious. But he does go on to describe how abstraction becomes truly 'empty' when it is dis-associated from these deep structures. It is rapidly turned into a vacuous generalization which will subsequently degenerate into empty ornament. "Empty generalizations can be handled with such facility because they have cut themselves loose from their anchorage in the deep."\(^{40}\)

The narcissism I spoke of in a preceding chapter is nowhere more in evidence than in precisely this withdrawal from a focus
on the object into a contemplation of the individual artist's mind. This would explain the almost intuitive repulsion for this kind of art felt by a self-consciously communizing society.

Worringer, was the first to link abstraction in any art form with deep anxieties permeating the society overall. While I appreciate the formulation that he made it did not go far enough in its own direction. Art is never simply symptomatic; the inter relationship of individual psyche and the social matrix is further complicated by the reality of the art-form produced and the commitments it creates in the artist's own mind, and the community that 'appreciates' or confronts his ideas. It is with Ehrenzweig's synthesis that an actual psychology of abstraction, complicit to the process of the human mind, and located in the particular social context, begins to emerge.

It is necessary to introduce a Freudian terminology in order to describe a specific condition in Malevich's work which will otherwise be impossible to understand effectively. Only through a combination of the psychoanalytical and art historical vocabulary can we enter the Suprematist world consciously. Neither method will be successful without the other; they will remain impenetrable 'formalist' compositions, which it is precisely my argument that they are not.

"Freud spoke of an 'oceanic' feeling characteristic of religious experience; the mystic feels at one with the universe, his individual existence lost like a drop in the ocean."41

In this regard, I do not believe that we can understand Malevich induced to such a state (i.e. 'oceanic' consciousness)
either by the immediacy and growth of a revolutionary collective society or by his interest in formal abstraction, independently of the other. They are in this way compositions relating to both their formal and their physical context. This is a particular instance whose phenomenon will not necessarily carry cross-cultural validity. 'Oceanic' imagery abounds in Malevich's writings and is the dominant enveloping spacial sensation in both the applied art (architectoniki and planiti) and the Suprematist pictures. In his essay, From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting, written 1915 to 1916, he says:

"I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped from the circle of things, from the horizon ring which confines the artist and the forms of nature. This accursed ring, which opens up newer and newer prospects, leads the artist away from the target of destruction."42

There is a manic quality to this kind of statement that is both a poetry of sorts, but also that resembles the kind of undiffer-entiated political fantasy containing world-wide significance, a spectre that haunts the earth and includes, as well as its humanistic motives, the metaphor of destruction as a means to realizing its end. It bears a provocative resemblance to the 'Diggers' or 'Ranters' who flourishing in the seventeenth century in England, both millenaristic movements. The prophetic insistence in the tone of the above quote is too obvious to go into detail. The insistence for an omnipotent vision of the macro-structure, over and above a discriminating sense of the details is another indicative feature of Malevich's approach throughout the really very few years that Suprematism flourished as a movement.
He goes on to complain that "their bodies fly in aeroplanes, but art and life are covered with the old robes of Neros and Titians."\textsuperscript{43}

As with the Futurists overall, he had a deep fascination for flight. For example with birds or aeroplanes and later space travel itself; or by a sensually associated metaphor, the literal ocean of water.

He compares the plight of captured birds in a zoo to artists in the academies:

"Setting the soul in marble and then mocking the living. But your pride is an artist who knows how to torture. You put birds in a cage also for pleasure. And for the sake of knowledge you keep animals in zoological gardens. May they tear to pieces the remains of your art and may the freed bear bathe his body in the ice of the frozen north and not languish in the aquarium of boiled water in the academical garden."\textsuperscript{44}

The fantasy is really quite remarkable. Everything has first to escape the knots of civilization in order to enter the neutrality of paradise. The reality principle is in this sense viewed as innately repressive. The bear enters the frozen, white vastness of the north, the birds move from the cage man erects into the infinite oceanic freedom of the sky. While the metaphor is nothing short of fantastic, the assumption is simply that there are variously different kinds of freedom to be lived and it is a mistake to impose one's own order on the world all because of what might be an ethnocentric myopia.

Creative entities, whether living or inert, have a contextual specificity without respect for which one becomes like a bull in the china shop of history. It is curious in this respect that Malevich went on to project his own eschatological
thesis in spite of this kind of sensitivity to the needs of independent units within the totality. We can understand this more if we think of it in terms of what each succeeding generation of people alive to the world find they must do for themselves; that is to create a kind of regeneration, to recreate the morality of their world-view in terms of the context and its fresh measure.

I could quote innumerable passages that would demonstrate various aspects of Malevich's psychology but will instead give a quote from Malevich's description of Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism in the essay of that name, printed in the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition, in Moscow, 1919:

"At the present time man's path lies through space, and Suprematism is a colour semaphore in its infinite abyss. The blue colour of the sky has been defeated by the Suprematist system, has been broken through, and entered white, as the true real conception of infinity, and therefore liberated from the colour background of the sky...
I am only free when my will, on a critical and philosophical basis, can bring from what already exists the basis for new phenomena. I have torn through the blue lampshade of colour limitations, and come out into the white; after me, comrade aviators sail into the chasm... I have set up semaphores of Suprematism. I have conquered the lining of the heavenly, have torn it down and, making a bag, put in colours and tied it with a knot. Sail forth! The white, free chasm, infinitely is before us."45

To attempt a psychoanalysis of such a passage would be almost redundant, the artist is both patient and analyst to his own process. This quality is not unique to Malevich certainly, but it is unique to the birth of abstraction to find it as central to the art-form itself as he makes it. That is, it comprises no
small part of the content as a sensation, of the suprematist pictures themselves. There are womb fantasies, sexual metaphors, delusions of grandeur and persecution, narcissism, auto-erotics and the whole comes dangerously close to mania in a pathological sense. The vision of the existing reality, the status-quo of the academic art world from which he was rebelling, is a personal one to the degree that his description of it is transformed by a perception that originates in deep-structures as opposed to conscious rational analysis in whose service it supposedly operates. Malevich's analysis and theoretical propositions mature along the same lines as do conventional art forms during conception. I am not saying that his 'theory' was or is art, but in its concretion it followed a parallel process and the theoretical emergence was entirely too integral to the objects themselves to be discounted as mere prostelatizing for something that already existed in form.

This does not mean to say that the pictures cannot stand without the theoretical superstructure he created (it was partially expounded in retrospect anyway, at least there were suprematist pictures before there was writing). What it does demonstrate is our own preponderance to reify the existing state of affairs in the images of the past rather than search out the more complex sources of its success and possibly alternative vision to our own understandings. Malevich, directioned into the mainstream of the concrete tradition by our apriori historicism presented instead a visual language that contained, rather than disavowed, ideas as a possible content in the face of increasing specialization. He was caught at the crossroads of an
intellectual and material dilemma. Malevich in his humanism unavoidably involved a degree of metaphor in the content of his abstraction. This does not mean that his art had a narrative or allegorical content, nor that it operated as a mere vehicle for the presentation of ideas, the metaphor was integrated into the process itself. The paradox of an art that operated in the shadow of the analogy to science, when such a vast prestige was attached to a tradition that has been conventionally seen as the enemy (or the alternative), subjugated art by reaction to its essential-most definition, that which it alone could accomplish. Many artists gave their content in ideas up to pragmatic science or philosophy in favour of concrete formal propositions. Malevich had seen the dialectic in these terms, and found the path of least resistance untenable. He engaged the battle head on, in a demand for the reinstatement of the artist as an integrated participant in the content of life instead of the humble servant he had become.
MALEVICH'S THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

A. Suprematism: Medieval or Modern?

Malevich did not appear in the role of theoretician until he was 37 years old and well advanced in his career as an artist. Although in the later writings it is possible to speak of a more sober analytical approach, he never completely sacrifices the poetic quality that has characterized his work from the earliest beginnings. I have somewhat paralleled Malevich's eclecticism in the methodology of this thesis by using various but related and similarly focused tools from several disciplines. There is an obvious danger to such a method as well as the very apparent advantages in its success. It has been necessitated here by this fact in Malevich's own career and is valid precisely to the measurable extent of the failure of other more singular historical methods that have not dealt adequately with the larger question of context and intention, and hence with the genuine historical meaning of Malevich and Suprematism.

The general shape of his essays and theoretical propositions has been integrated into the thesis overall but I will here deal particularly with the theoretical charts that were prepared by the Institute of Artistic Culture in Leningrad. The members of the 'Formal Theoretical Department' (FTO), headed by Malevich developed 22 charts dealing with the theories of the group between 1924 and 1927. The copies which we have survive from the show Malevich had in Berlin in 1927 and for which the charts were intended. I have not attempted to deal with each of the charts in detail but instead
have given a summary of their importance overall and focused on specific issues where the chart is demonstrably pertinent. (For translations of the text of the charts and references to parallels in Malevich's writings, see the Malevich catalogue from the Stedelijk museum by Troels Andersen).

The notion of the artist as a theoretician of his art as well as the producer of specific objects or images is certainly far from a novelty of our own era. The Middle Ages had an ontological basis for belief in the value of the arts that more closely matches the aesthetic ambitions of Malevich than do those of most of his contemporaries, or the currently fashionable psychological descriptions. In this respect, Panofsky has said:

"When we turn to treatises on the representational arts the difference between the medieval and the modern point of view becomes still more evident. In the Middle Ages paintings and sculptures were not thought of in relation to a natural object which they seek to imitate but rather in relation to the formative process by which they come into being, namely, the projection of an 'idea' existing in - though by no means 'created by' - the artists mind into a visible and tangible substance. Master Eckhart's painter paints a rose, as Dante draws the figure of an angel, not 'from Life' but from the 'image in his soul'; and in the exceptional cases in which the procedure of the imitative arts was considered with regard to their relation to a visible model, this model was conceived, not as a natural object but as an 'exemplar' or 'simile' - that is, as another work of art which served as a pattern. "An artist conceives the form, after which he wishes to work, from some other work of art which he has seen", says Thomas Aquinas, and thereby relieves the individual artist of the necessity of facing nature itself."

There are certain obvious differences between the two modes but I am interested rather in the similar focus on process. Although the 'idea' certainly was not expected to
originate with the artist, that is it was a Divine dictation, it seems obvious enough that when the Christian ideology becomes bankrupt the 'image in the soul' may become either personally visionary with much the same rationale, or programatically ideological, with a political as opposed to a religious message.

It is Panofsky's contention that Durer had to create a German language adequate to the task of describing technical details along with poetic and philosophical thought. Panofsky further states: "It is in his (Durer's) development as a theorist of art that we can study in vitro, as it were, the transition from a convenient code of instructions to a systematic and formulated body of knowledge." 5

Malevich was not a scholar. He had not been trained in the tradition of Western philosophical thought and therefore had no way of knowing that in the creation of his theoretical program he was essentially returning to an earlier understanding, one which was first articulated in the religious thinking of the Middle Ages. This is not meant as an irony for in spite of Malevich's espoused iconoclasm, he had an ultimately mystical sense of knowledge that was anything but an extension of the materialism surrounding him.

The theoretical charts then, are in one sense, the embodiment of the paradox inherent throughout Malevich's entire career. His program of Suprematism, while rejecting the romanticism of the nineteenth century naturalist or symbolist art chooses to be known under the banner of "the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art". 6 Suprematism, with the ecstasy of a revelation or vision, is communicated through the agency of an
'apparently' rational program of analysis. This dilemma is analogous to the apparent contradiction inherent in the nature of Marxism. That is, how do you create a seemingly objective analysis where traditionally subjective, or moral issues, are the centre of the problem? Michel Polanyi, in his book *Personal Knowledge*, wonders why such a contradictory doctrine carries such convincing power. He postulates "The answer is, I believe, that it enables the modern mind, tortured by moral self-doubt, to indulge its moral passions in terms which also satisfy its passion for ruthless objectivity." As a description of Marxism, Polanyi's analysis seems too generalized to be very useful except as a perspective in a complex and contemporaneous condition governing its mythic quality. But I think this does explain Malevich's passion to give his otherwise mystical and eschatological Suprematist ideology the prestige of a critical and objective science.

The charts are not successful as a proof for the historical necessity of Suprematism per se, but are more usefully considered as a pathway into both Malevich's own creative process and as a pre-cursor to later more sophisticated attempts to locate the dynamics of visual response as a physiological and psycholanalytic phenomena so that such an understanding can be literally taught and does not remain an esoteric information in the hands of a few genuine specialists.
B. **THE CHARTS: A 'DYNAMICS' OF VISUAL RESPONSE**

The Charts are introduced with this statement by Malevich:

"The field of painting is investigated as a form of the artist's behaviour. For us painting has come to mean the body in which the painter expresses his reasons and states of mind, the structure of his entire understanding of nature, as well as the relationship between himself and nature as it acts upon him."  

The arrangement of these charts were broken down into three categories as follows: 1. Analysis of a work of art (Charts 1 to 8), 2. Analysis of Sensations (Charts 9 to 16) and 3. Teaching methods (Charts 17 to 21). Most of the charts are analytical and classificatory, that is, they attempt to design a description of the dynamics of painterly phenomenon according to a structural breakdown of its most basic component parts.

Malevich calls this basic definitional unit "the additional, formative element," the title of chart number 3. In chart number 4, he defines the additional element as "a formula or sign which refers to the principles by which a painterly structure, with its colouring and stage of development within a given trend is organized." This corresponds to the classification of signs which is basic to the Saussurian linguistic terminology. Roland Barthes book *Elements of Semiology*, states that there are historically, a series of designations which are rivals to a 'sign'; these are, signal, index, icon, symbol and allegory. All of these are things that a sign is not. In Chart number 5, Malevich goes onto demonstrate that "a painterly system can be classified into stages by defining the degree of development of the additional element."
If we turn now to Roland Barthes's conclusions in his *Elements of Semiology*, we find a strikingly similar consideration, by analogy, to Malevich's method in the charts. He states:

"Reality, however, most commonly presents mixed substances; for instance, garments and written language in fashion; images, music and speech in films, etc; it will therefore be necessary to accept heterogeneous corpuses, but to see to it, in that case, that one makes a careful study of the systematic articulation of the substances concerned (and chiefly, that one pays due attention to separating the real from the language which takes it over), that is, that one gives to their very homogeneity a structural interpretation."\(^{13}\)

Barthes goes on to speak of the preference for synchronic rather than diachronic analysis. The analysis must "eliminate diachronic elements to the utmost; it must coincide with a state of the system, a cross-section of history."\(^{14}\)

This is, in a sense, exactly what the latent insistence of the charts is. Malevich has chosen a 'cross-section' of a particular history, 'art' in this case, in an attempt to determine the dynamic, or as in linguistics "to discover the systems' own particular time, the history of forms."\(^{15}\)

From here on in the analogy is less useful but does help as a general cognition of the insistence for an obviously 'structural' analytical process. It is as well, very unlike the previous Malevich. Its order is a borrowed discipline.

Beginning with chart number 9, we are introduced to the first explicitly ideological designation. Its title is "New Art as an Independent Movement of Thought". I here include an illustration of the chart and Troels Andersen's translation of its text.
New art as an independent movement of thought

New art marks a new era in which art achieves independence of other ideologies. The essence of new art differs from that of other epochs. Formerly art was only a means of clothing for the material, objective, industrial society. New art is now, because it has turned into an independent ideology, the content of which is different from that of other ideologies.

1. Formerly art only played a role in so much as it designed religious and civic ideologies.

2. New art has become independent. It talks with the civil and religious ideologies.

Fig. 48. Chart #9, 'New Art as An Independent Movement of Thought', 1927.

Note
The word 'Lebensart' covers the Russian 'byt'. everyday life, daily existence, existence.
Art is presented here as an autonomous epistemology with a unique, essential content and a self-conscious sense of its existential purpose.

Naturalism, Classicism, Expressionism, etc., Malevich calls 'painterly systems' and he sees each such system operating in the service of ideas. Religion is one such dominating idea, psychological motives present another, political, and so on. But his third category, his own 'new art' has become something else and he says "New art is new, because it has turned into an independent ideology, the content of which is different from other ideologies."\(^{16}\)

By chart 13, it is apparent that Malevich is not suggesting anything like a totalitarian aesthetic or system, but a means of distinguishing complex and disordered appearing painterly systems into their particular tacit ideological and formalist suppositions. The potential for a totalitarian application inherent in the kinds of absolute definitions he presents is gone into in the final chapter.

He describes most mimetic art-forms as "Painterly Systems as Means of Design". Nearer to the centre of the 'art-systems' square (#3), we find systems that use references to objective forms in one way or another, Cubism, and early Malevich, etc. The central most column contains systems of non-objective art, or what he would have considered the ultimate mode of invention at that time. Van Doesburg and Kandinsky appear, as would Mondrian.

Charts 15 and 16 are important as they refer to "Painterly Sensations and their Environment", that is, the physical
Fig. 49. K. Malevich
Teaching at the Institute of Artistic Culture,
Leningrad, 1925.
iconographical origins of 'painterly systems' where mimetic functions can properly be traced to their appropriate physical stimuli. Malevich, in Chart 16, attempts to correct what he has called "a wrong development, caused by the fact that the stimulating force was attached to the painterly culture, and that the stimuli did not reach the centre governing the arts." Troels Andersen has called this the "fallacy of aerial Suprematism". By this he means, as Malevich himself realized, that he had, like the Futurists before him, inadvertently suggested that he had in effect created a new imitative art in his enthusiasm over the novelty of the newly discovered analogy and its literalness.

The early Suprematist pictures, while bearing titles referring to objects or situations, never referred to such material in their content. It was more of a poetic insinuation. But these later pictures which Malevich rejected contained literal references to aerial views, planets, space travel, etc. He saw this infusion of literary content as nostalgic and a definite mistake, and there is no way of overlooking his refutation of it.

Malevich also warned against artists taking his attempts at this kind of systematization as a recommendation for the artist to become a pseudo-scientist; he says "The artist may, and indeed, should take an interest in the achievements of science in the field of colour and form, but he must be careful... I say this to stress that no scientific proofs are a law for the artist." For Malevich, the artist operates on another 'level' from that of the scientist and while his data, especially on optics, etc., may prove invaluable it would be a mistake to assume they shared a similar task simply because of the overlapping of information
Fig. 50. Suprematist Drawing, 1914-15.
Fig. 51. Sketches for Painting #63, in this thesis. Pencil on paper.
or shared perceptions. Regarding the difference between the inventor and the creator, Malevich says "By creative activity I understand a free expression, an activity which raises no question. Questions belong to the province of the inventor, not to that of the creator. Freedom can exist only where there are no questions and no answers." This curious seeming paradox of the nature of freedom, whereby the artist himself, as he understands it, cannot be free, is typical of the kind of thinking Malevich carried on. The statement is supposed to be considered as an axiom. From there on the argument will supposedly make sense, but you must accept the self-evident truth of the initial proposition. In this sense the White on White paintings, and the Black Square, can be understood quite clearly. They postulate an axiom which declares and sets up the ground for the following manifestations. In this way they are curiously like the Cow and Violin picture of 1912-13, where the painting was conceived to act, literally, as a manifesto. Malevich even went so far as to articulate on the back a complex absurd sounding description of the significance of the iconography. The quote was mentioned earlier.

The analogy to the scientist and the dangers therein were very apparent to Malevich, but it was also an appropriate metaphor commensurate to the advent of particular specialization in the arts. Malevich in an essay titled Aesthetics said "Stressing social and class motives we have completely disregarded the artist's painterly nature." Monet, for instance, was a painter who, with his Rouen Cathedral series, created a phenomenon of "immense significance in the history of art, and, by its activity, makes whole generations change their attitude to pictorial works."
In the succeeding essay in this book he makes an explicit statement warning of the dangers in misrepresenting his analysis as simply formalistic. His insistence is on the presence of a world of sensations beyond articulation. In this regard Malevich wrote:

"To examine a creation of Cubism formally is to fail to understand its essence. The world which is understood by sensation is a constant world. The world which consciousness understands as a form is not constant. Forms disappear and alter, whereas sensations neither disappear or alter. A ball, motor, aeroplane or arrow are different forms, but the sensation of dynamism is the same.

For this reason comprehension of the phenomena of the universe cannot be attained through their formal traits alone, but only through the sensation of their essence."

"...Sensations can be in a condition which is both non-objective and figurative, i.e., if the feeling of non-objectivity passes into psychological imagination. At this moment the form of a world image appears, and man falls into the power of his Weltanschauung and striving to possess the universe."

This oceanic sensation or overwhelming quality of spirit that Malevich felt permeated his entire ambience cohered at a certain point into, as he puts it, 'an image of the world'. Its 'appearance' as opposed to 'construction' suggests that Malevich believed such an image was somehow given, rather than created entirely from the individual artist's resources. This is descriptive of both his mystical inclination and his intuition of 'sensation' as energy which can neither be created or destroyed, and which does in fact have a real nature. Malevich was not a physicist and could not give such 'sensation' credible material explanations but there is a curious parallel between his ability to sense such a relationship and recent information affecting contemporary philosophy that has been discovered in physics. The mysticism of it was more involved in the image itself; that
Fig. 52. Sergeant, 1913-14

Fig. 53. Violinist, 1913-14
is, that somehow, the image, dependent on a forceful insistence and realization of the intuitively understood energy through the individual, when realized, would determine a universal validity. It corresponds closely to the earlier explanation Panofsky made for the medieval understanding of the sources of its art as arising from an 'image in the soul'. Another origination for such a belief in the substance of the process of his art was to be found, as I have outlined above, precisely in the analogy and vocabulary provided by the methodology of the Russian formalist school of structural linguistics.

El Lissitzky, in his prostelatizing for Suprematism (New Russian Art: A Lecture) seems to favour the reference to systems and the vocabulary of the linguistic sciences, an especially attractive and 'modern' attribute of Suprematism. His insistence is on the lack of symbolism in favour of a concrete reading of the image "Every flat surface designed is a sign - not a mystical symbol, but a concrete sketch of reality. A sign is a form through which we express phenomena."²⁴ It is easy to understand the formalist attribution Malevich has received recently when someone who was as close to him as El Lissitzky managed to translate his aesthetic so peculiarly attuned to the needs of the new Russian state, the new ideology, rather than the content it really exposed. That content would have been an embarrassment to Lissitzky at this point in the polemic; all other artists with ideas as distinctly 'aesthetic' as Malevich, had by this time fled Russia. Lissitzky himself becomes muddled in his argument over what this sign then signifies, if that is what it does. He says "A sign is designed, much later it is given its name, and
Fig. 54. What Insolence, 1913-14.
later still its meaning becomes clear. So we do not understand the signs, the shapes, which the artist created because man's brain has not yet reached the corresponding stage of development."

What all of this indicates is the intention of artists to maintain themselves and their growing aesthetic realities in the midst of vast social transformation. They had a dualistic dialogue occurring, the need to relate a form of order in an environment very much de-stabilized and tending towards chaos so they were, towards these ends, extroverted and communicative, and yet the point of reference for the aesthetic itself was highly internalized and abstract.

Complicit with this rapid change in social and institutional values, art had itself moved for an analysis of the very system of symbolization by which it was recognized. The discipline of linguistics was calling for something like the same close focus, but it has not been until the work of the French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, that we find such a 'structuralist' vocabulary becoming a part of our possible vocabulary. Structuralism, involving itself with the most innate patterns to man's behaviour and mind, seems almost to do away with a lot of historical analysis. It becomes superfluous as an explanation in this respect and is valuable only as an archive of information. Levi-Strauss' analysis of the phenomenon of abstraction in his chapter, The Science of the Concrete, in The Savage Mind, will be useful here. He said:

"... one might define non-representational painting by two features. One, which it has in common with 'easel' painting, consists in a total rejection of the contingency of purpose; the picture is not made for a particular use. The other feature characteristic of non-representational painting is its methodological exploitation of the contingency of execution, which is claimed to
Fig. 55. Fish.
1913-14
afford the external pretext or occasion of the picture. Non-representational painting adopts 'styles' as 'subjects'. It claims to give a concrete representation of the formal conditions of all painting. Paradoxically the result is that non-representational painting does not, as it thinks, create works which are as real as, if not more real than, the objects of the physical world, but rather realistic imitations of non-existent models."26

While the character of the last part of the statement happens to tell us as much about Levi-Strauss' limitations in terms of his investigations of modern art, it still reveals the most basic constituent of the problem of 'concretization', a pre-occupation which has haunted the twentieth century from its first initial and profound manifestation all the way into the absolute banality of a highly decorative minimalism and its concomitant complex rationalizations through phenomenology. Levi-Strauss obviously founds his perceptions as much on the model linguistic science and his own structuralism provides as he does on the art itself so that it becomes difficult to extricate the analogical argument from the directed aesthetic one. It is precisely because of the overlap of art and science in their methodological focus and art's increasingly analytical pre-occupation that such a description enjoys the accuracy it does. Levi-Strauss' bias is ultimately a linguistic one. "I think all problems are linguistic ones, as we were saying in connection with art."27 With Levi-strauss, articulate speech and not tool-making establishes the heretofore hazy demarcation between culture and nature and informs the necessary basis for any further understanding of the nature of art in the twentieth century.

It is my point that we have the first overt manifestations of this perception, although certainly in an entirely different
Fig. 56. Tailor.
1913-14
language in the utterings and program of the Russian Futurists, and more complexly with Malevich, at first as an imagistic as opposed to conceptual dialectic. The charts developed in the Institute of Artistic Culture, develop the argument latent in Malevich's pictures, and matured what he felt was a teachable system.

Malevich was working with an idea about the most basic intelligible element in painterly systems through the medium of the charts and it does seem to correspond as a basic framework to the structural orientation of the semantic sciences. It is my sense that he did so complicit to the increasing pressure of the State, in order to give his own non-objective Suprematism an 'objective' and 'rational' verification, as well as it seems to mark a general change in his optimism and a resignation to the increasingly apparent future of the Russian political climate.

The charts, besides their attempt to explain the dynamics of visual response, (Malevich had this strangely sophisticated behaviouristic interest) sought to make the historical inevitability of Suprematism evident. In fact they did not accomplish this task, the largely intuitive leap from historical precedent to 'the desert' of Suprematism was something that defied rationalization in the charts. The use of such an intellectualized apparatus may explain why his work lacks the more flowing stylistic stages of other abstract artists of the period, Mondrian for example.

The theories and charts were all developed in his years as a teacher. His intent was to discover the submerged talents that existed in the students he dealt with. As an analyst, with
Fig. 57. Row Boat, 1913-14.
the method of his charts and their theory, he was able to lead them through his own understanding of historical developments in painting and then, hopefully, on to a further creative approach of their own. Some of the charts (17 to 22) were conceived as a teaching methodology and integrated the individual student's response into a scheme that was directed towards discovering his perceptual mode at that moment, or the actual dynamics of his visual response, and out of that observation it was hoped that the best possible directions for his development could be determined. The charts make the system look somewhat mechanical, but it is clear from the writings that his intention was not to produce students who merely replicated and expanded his own ideas, but independently creative artists.

This is a problem inherent in the creation of any system and with the kind of intellect that invents it, it inevitably involves a kind of pedantry, which is the exact opposite of the vision he hoped for the future state of affairs. In this regard he said:

"We are moving towards a world where everyone will create, rather than repeating and mechanising a form that an inventor has rejected. We must set creativity's path in such a way that all the masses will take part in the development of every creative thought that appears, without turning it into a mechanised production or cliche. Solving this question could lead the entire people from being machines fabricating the ideas of a single inventor."28

This leads into a consideration of his applied projects, the use of the Suprematist metaphysic in creating some material sense of the shape a world conceived in such terms might take. We will turn to this applied Suprematism after a brief discussion of 'ethical idealism' and its bearing on Malevich's aesthetic conscience.
A. BERDYAEV AND MALEVICH: THE JOURNEY FROM NIHILISM TO CHRISTIAN AND AESTHETIC MYSTICISM

"I am an existentialist because I believe in the priority of the subject over the object, in the identity of the knowing subject and the existing subjects; I am, furthermore, an existentialist because I see the life of man and of the world torn by contraries, which must be faced and maintained in their tension, and which no intellectual system of a closed and complete totality, no immanentism or optimism can resolve."

A fellow Russian, and equally involved in the dialectic of oppositions of his day, Nicolas Berdyaev, was however more interested in the particular conditions pre-requisite to man's liberation, "the destiny of a concrete living human being", than in a "universally binding law of morality".

His philosophy, like Malevich's aesthetic had never been "'scientific': rather it was prophetic and eschatological in manner and orientation." In his autobiography, Berdyaev asks "Is knowledge intent on eliminating mystery? I do not think so. Mystery abides even on the summits of knowledge: indeed it is made more real and more significant in knowledge. But knowledge destroys the false mysteries proceeding from, and maintained by, ignorance." Berdyaev was born in 1874 in Kiev, not astonishingly the same city where Malevich was born some four years later. The dualism that Carnegie Calian attributes to Berdyaev's life, the unfailing drive to resolve the apparent contradictions of a mystical, philosophical coherence with the physical exigencies of the objective world is one which Malevich
most deliberately tried to deal with in the projects of his
architectural models, and other applied manifestations of
Suprematism. Berdyaev's mysticism found its emphasis in the
inward rather than the outward. In this way it "avoids the sin
of objectification". This represents one deliberate aspect
of Berdyaev's life that he shares overtly with Malevich; that
is, an acknowledgment of the existence, and indeed, necessity
of contraries in the world of thought. Berdyaev said:

"Mysticism frees us from the natural and
historical world which lies outside us,
and brings the whole evolution of material
nature and history within the sphere of the
spirit. To live through anything mystically
is to live through it spiritually and from
within. In the practice of mysticism the
whole world is blotted out in the night of
sensibility, and it is only within the
spiritual and divine world that anything
is revealed."

The resemblance between such a description of the 'practice of
mysticism' and Malevich's Suprematist iconography and intention
is startling. As if the empirical world were blotted out by a
non-objective understanding and one were to be "transformed in
the zero of form", and arise, quite literally from the
ashes, with such a new consciousness.

Berdyaev went through a period of strong identification
and belief in the genius of Marx's perceptions at the same time
as he recognized the European homogeneity it introduced. In his
autobiography he said:

"What attracted me most of all was its characteristic
appreciation of the moving forces below the surface
of history, its consciousness of the historic
hour, its broad historical perspectives and its
universalism. The old Russian socialism seemed
provincial and narrow minded in comparison. The
fact that Marxism took root among the Russian
intelligentsia was evidence of a further
Fig. 58. Cross, Circle, Square and Grave (After 1930).
Europeanization of Russia and of her readiness to share to the end the destiny of Europe."

He soon however became critical of Marx, first out of his idealism and then from a religious standpoint. He considered the "marxist Social-Democratic eschatological forecast of a classless society", as a false religion. Berdyaev was more aware than most intellectuals in Russia of the long tradition in Russian history of nihilism and radicalism. In his book on The Russian Revolution, he describes the militant anarchism of Bakunin as an archetype of this tradition. Bakunin believed that the:

"Russian and Slavonic world had the great mission of lighting a vast fire which is to burn up the old sinful world. This passion for destruction is a creative passion. Out of the ash-heap, out of the ruins of the old world, a new world will arise, free and beautiful. This revolutionary messianic idea of Bakunin has found its way into Russian Communism, which believes that the Russian people are to send forth a light that will illuminate the bourgeois darkness of Western Europe." 

Berdyaev found Lenin to be the truly dynamic leader of the revolution, incorporating all of the characteristics of the Russian sectarian intelligentsia, at once. Berdyaev thought that the Bolsheviks, under Lenin, remained:

"faithful to certain primordial Russian traditions, to the Russian search for universal social justice, understood in a maximalizing sense, and to the Russian method of government and control by coercion. This was predetermined by the whole course of Russian history, but also by the feebleness of creative spiritual power among us. Communism was the inevitable faith of Russia, the inward moment in the destiny of the Russian people."

Needless to say, Berdyaev went into exile in 1922.

The parallel between the frustration Berdyaev felt
in the impossibility for any resolution to his eschatological longing, and the repression that Malevich suffered throughout his last few years is obvious. As is their similar sympathy for the analyses of Marxism in the first place and their subsequent disappointment at their application empirically. Reality was limited to "a temporal-materialistic plane, thus denying the existence of another world", and this was insufferable to both men.

Berdyaev is particularly interesting in terms of Malevich, beyond these contextual political and philosophical issues, because a large part of his concern was given directly over to The Meaning of the Creative Art, a book of the same name which he published in Moscow in 1916. It is here that it becomes obvious that for Berdyaev creativity is inseparable from the notion of freedom, and that freedom was finally aligned with an eschatological dimension in that "Freedom breaks into this world. Freedom comes from another world: it contradicts and overthrows the law of this world." Freedom is ultimately subjective and when made into an objective proposition loses its creative aspect. "Freedom is a part of eternity, whereas being is a part of this world." Berdyaev comes closest to clearing up Malevich's idea of where suprematism originated in the following statement on the quality of 'nothing'. "When we speak in our imperfect human language about creativity out of nothing, we are really speaking of creativity out of freedom".

A quote from Calian's book on Berdyaev, concerned with the 'divine-human' nature of creativity is illuminating here, cast as it is in almost exactly the same terms as Malevich.

"The divine human relationship which is necessary
to his idea of creativity cannot be expressed in terms of a rational philosophy of being but rather must go beyond a rational ontology to a superrational realm. Any rationalization in the divine-human relationship can only be spoken of in symbolic and mythological terms which leave the door open to Mystery. This open door then allows the eschatological dimension of creativity to be seen. Creativity, in his view, is not an 'insertion' into the finite, not a mastery over the medium, or the creative product itself: instead it is a flight into the infinite, 'not an activity which objectifies in the finite but one which transcends the finite towards the infinite. The creative act signifies an ek-stasis, a breaking through to eternity'. This breaking into eternity is the true, though unattainable goal of creativity."

Berdyaev and Malevich, in these terms sound so close in their view of the immanence of an aesthetic sensibility that would do away or literally transform the old orders to the extent that our existing categories or notions about the role of the artist for example would be quite antiquated.

Berdyaev also shared, with Feuerbach, a rejection of the sensibility which takes symbols for reality. In his autobiography, *Dream and Reality*, he said "To take symbols for reality is one of the chief temptations in human life, and it has proved, on more than one occasion, the undoing of man and the betrayal of creativity." This is the plight of man fallen from the garden, constantly transforming the subjective into the object, when the promise of the creative will is ultimately subjective, in spite of the fact that it appears as a concretized form. The distortion of this process appears objectively as the fetish of the commodity culture, mentioned earlier. So for Berdyaev as with Malevich, creativity is only possible when conceived within the substance of "a prophetic-eschatological
Fig. 59. Malevich
Retrospective, Moscow, 1919-1920.
viewpoint of the end." The major difference being that Malevich propounded no self-consciousness about the eschatological process whereas for Berdyaev it was of fundamental and overt importance to his philosophy.

It is also interesting, in a more abstract way, that Malevich's Suprematist pictures are most effectively viewed as if outside of time or causation. They appear like arbitrary but organically ordered manifestations of an alien world or consciousness, as if glimpsed suddenly through the portal of a ship hurtling through infinite space. Of course they are in our time but it is as if, thinking of them in their own dimension, we are able to return them to the moment of the creative act which produced them in the first place. In this regard, Berdyaev has said: "Creative works are within time, with its objectifications, discords and divisions, but the creative act is beyond time: it is wholly within, subjective, prior to objectification." 19

Such is the background and substantiability of the ethical idealism that understandably led Malevich to create the material manifestation of his Utopia.
Malevich first became interested in three dimensional objects in the autumn of 1919. It was in the summer of this same year that he had written the text of *On New Systems In Art* while living at Nemchinovka, and it was also this year that Chagall invited him to Vitebsk to teach. This soon proved problematic for Chagall who retired from the school only a few months after Malevich's arrival because of 'disagreements' between Malevich and his students and other teachers and their supporters.

Malevich had been busy. By early 1920 he had organized the students into a group under the title of UNOVIS ('affirmation of New Art'). The group thought of themselves as a party, complicit in enthusiasm if not in direct affect, to its political counterpart. The members wore black squares sewn to their sleeves (see photo) and certainly must have presented a formidable image of their programme in the school by its overflow into the streets and through their cohesive enthusiasm. On the anniversary of the Revolution the town was decorated by way of celebration with suprematist configurations, circles, triangles and squares abounded; the walls, kiosks and even the moving trams were covered with images announcing the continuing expressive delight of the revolution and its still vibrant, youthful imagery. Indeed several of the students from the school were no more than fourteen to sixteen years of age. Eisenstein visited the town at this time and reports on his impressions:

"Like many towns on the west side. Sooty and dismal. All the main streets are covered with white paint splashed over the red brick walls,
Fig. 60. Suprematist Studio, Vitebsk Academy, 1920.
and against this white background are green circles, reddish-orange squares, blue rectangles. This is Vitebsk 1920. Kazimir Malevich's brush has passed over its walls. 'The squares of the town are our pallettes,' is the message these walls convey."

There was still, at this point, a possibility for the 'theatrical-ization of everyday life' that had been one of the most communicable aspects of Malevich's desire to make 'art the content of life'.

In spite of the fact that Unovis was able to stage another production of 'Victory Over the Sun', this time with decor by Yermolayeva, and have several exhibitions of Malevich's architectural models, by 1921, relations between the local authorities and Malevich's group had become strained. Somehow Unovis was able to stay off the decision regarding their removal but only until the end of that same year. By December, Malevich had made application to join the forces of the newly created Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow. By 1922, he was able to leave for Petrograd where a branch of the Institute had been set up largely under the initiative of Tatlin. Five of his students came with him as well as a large file on Unovis' activities and the manuscript for a major work that he had been writing in Vitebsk. The architectural models, drawings and theory of this period, which I shall return to shortly, were immediately preceded by Malevich's most controversial and certainly his most famous paintings, the white on white. They have been variously interpreted subsequent to the particular ideological binoculars of the observer since they first appeared. The problem overtly is that they do not present a subject-matter, or content which is to be read, and since the entire previous bias in the visual
Fig. 61. Nathan Altmann, Decoration of the Alexander Column in celebration of the revolution, Leningrad, 1918.
arts was to consider painting as a text, allbeit a visual one, exegesis of particular iconographic elements and configurations coupled with an explanation of their internal dynamics was a natural enough path to follow.

The erasure of any literal deviciveness or identification through an anthropomorphic content has been proposed as an example of the 'loss of self' and a dehumanization of art, and hence it is felt that there is a concomitant loss of the possibility for a realization of a basic human need, communication. It is accused in short of being esoteric, if not 'occult'. This is where the revolution in aesthetic philosophy occurs, if it occurs at all; that is, the move to process and sensation (not removed from the consideration of intellect) itself, as the content to replace the previous ideological subservience, which in one sense is a liberation, but on the other hand, as I have mentioned before, necessitated that the artist become involved with the communication of ideas whose profundity was related to an aspect in himself that fulfilled the ideological mode, essentially created outside the artist's arena. The artist therefore, lost his perception of one of the very qualities that was responsible for his distinctness. His vocation was not analogous to the church or the state. An individual did not have to swallow whole parcels of information and make decisions about its nature in order to get the message. The phenomena was experiential and involved the use of sensual intellect. It has been the work of the twentieth century that brought art into the political sphere as a literal combattant, with its own polarized opinion and in some cases, even its own dogma, as an alternative.
This is by way of description of the extreme danger included in this new method of art, one that considers the major intellectual commitments of its period as consistently as it does the poetic values; it is of course equally as responsible for much of the genuinely profound energy as well.

For Malevich, it took the path of a call for the absolute autonomy of forms, instead of the earlier pattern of history to dominate form, in the guise of style, as an illustration for ruling ideas. "Every form must be free, alive, every form is a world." In this sense, Malevich wanted to institute an historical state of affairs commencing with the apocalyptic appearance that the revolution seemed to intimate. The nature of most of the preoccupations within Malevich's vision were not unique to art. They were issues that German philosophers for instance had been quarreling over for years; freedom and necessity, social cohesion versus individual expression, etc. The White on White, then embody this ideal potential, not as an open or declared program of intent but implicitly by virtue of what they are as objective experiences.

In terms of the White on White (I am here using this as a generic for the earliest and most abstract pictures with a radically 'reduced' content that Malevich painted), we have the most distinct demonstration of the difference between his heritage from the moral idealism of Hegel and his later attempts, specifically in the charts, to realize a more practical aesthetic, somewhat tuned or adjusted to the demands of a Marxist-Leninist context. The chronology in the appearance of the Suprematist pictures, the Architectoniki and planiti, and the charts is
Fig. 62. White Square on White, 1918.
extremely important to establish at this point. In spite of the apparently contradictory path they suggest, that is, a radical change of direction mid-stream, the linkages to the necessities of the context in which Malevich found himself are profound, and is the only agent that can effectively de-mystify his process which has been thought of as, at the least, erratic.

When Marcuse outlines Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, especially as it is stated in the draft entitled The System of Morality, he moves into a discussion of Hegel's conception of culture as a realm of mind. In this conception:

"A social or political institution, a work of art, a religion and a philosophical system exist and operate as part and parcel of man's own being, products of a rational subject that continues to live in them. As products they constitute an objective realm; at the same time, they are subjective, created by human beings. They represent the possible unity of subject and object."  

(This was discussed in detail earlier in the thesis.) But the interesting parallel to Malevich's artistic development is between the understanding he shares with Hegel of the process of 'culture' itself. It "is conceived as ontological as well as historical; it is an actual historical development as well as a progression to higher and truer modes of being." In Malevich's demonstration of his Suprematist system taken to its 'logical' extremes (i.e. given the nature of the system), it becomes dogmatically singular, absolutist, and ultimately Utopian. 

For Malevich, as with Hegel "the ontological process gains greater predominance over the historical, and to a large extent is eventually detached from its original historical roots."
Fig. 63. Ceramic cups designed by Malevich, (c. 1922)
The White on White can be seen as the characterization of this proposition, the predominance of the ontological over the historical. The question then is to discover how an ontological proposition is communicated, and it is my notion that here we find the strongest correspondance between Malevich and the eschatological tradition of Russian mysticism. The experience of his paintings is to be thought of as revelational through the transmission of oceanic or undifferentiated sensations, largely relying on the manipulation of space and the dynamic juxtaposition of various diagonal or contrary elements. This stage of Malevich's aesthetic communicates the sensation of Utopia, that is, an option is taken for the values of the 'pleasure principle' exercised over the utilitarian demands of the reality principle. Marcuse tentatively describes the change which occurs in the governing value systems as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pleasure Principle</th>
<th>Reality Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>immediate satisfaction</td>
<td>delayed satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleasure</td>
<td>restraint of pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joy (play)</td>
<td>toil (work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receptiveness</td>
<td>productiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absence of repression</td>
<td>security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think if we keep this in mind as we look at the paintings themselves, many of the enthusiasms relevant to the highly charged potential of the context in Russia at the time become apparent and meaningful in the works. The Libidinal sensations of oceanic space, the suggestion of an infinite expansiveness without hierarchies, the entire appreciation of the painting becomes kinaesthetic rather than rational or expressly intellectual. It is exactly because of the absence of repression, even abstractly in the manner of ideas impregnated into the forms, and
Fig. 64. Suprematist Painting, 1917-18.
instead an invitation to literally receive the vitality of another world, that we sense a drift, as Malevich suggested, into the infinite reaches of the human skull. "I myself have entered a remote and for me new realm of thought; as best I can, I shall give an account of what I see in the infinite space of the human skull."¹⁰ The response is instinctual, and suggests Malevich's intention, to move into a closer understanding of the quality of the mind as it perceives, and so establish an order of reality totally without a mirror image in everyday life, one which could liberate rather than repress or mould one's perceptions.

These are then, in one sense, as Levi-Strauss has suggested, not really "more real than, the objects of the physical world, but rather realistic imitations of non-existent models."¹¹ This is to an extent obvious, and needs no further comment, but it is in the distinction between the artist willing to take imagination as a tangible reality in the 'substantial' formation of his life and art, and the anthropologist's hard-nosed demands for ultimately causative relationships, that the profound nature of what Levi-Strauss has not seen as opposed to what he obviously has, becomes apparent.

An idea of such abstraction, was only really considerable in a seriously human fashion contingent to the ensuing revolutionary momentum, and as Hegel had suggested, once reality embodied the ideal (which was the assumed intention of the revolution in the first place), art in its historical guise, would necessarily become superfluous, obsolete and in as much, a genuine "token of progress."¹² Malevich shared this analysis and had stated that painting may, indeed, have outworn its usefulness. He made a
tangible step in such a direction with the project of the planiti and architectoniki.

It is significant that such a number of Utopian presentations and ideas were active in Europe during and immediately following the first World War. Social despair, in the face of immanent calamity, combined with an upsurging belief in the powers of technology to set man free from the chains of history and charged the aesthetic context with a new and seemingly virgin idealism. The Bauhaus certainly, was one of the major applications of this idealism that saw, as the ultimate products of its energies a life transformed by an educational process, that created an ideology for the artist-artisan-architect, as more than a simple stylistic re-evaluation, revival, or invention serving the will of the existing status quo. Indeed, Gropius spoke directly to this problem. Unfortunately the German context was not moving towards anything like the kind of political environment where his ideas could be put into practice at any scale larger than the experiment.

Malevich was certainly not unique in his need to create an apocalyptic scheme at this historical moment. His system consists of signs that operate consistently at the same level in all of their, however diverse, appearances. This replicates, as previously explained, a basically ontological need unconsciously modelled after what we can now see was in fact a combination of the mystical christian and western European idealist philosophical traditions, and initiated by a kind of 'spasm' of Nihilism. The notion of 'individual genius' is clearly not an adequate explanation for an artist with as complex a manifestation as
Malevich. I spoke earlier of the eschatological bearings of the era through which Malevich matured and I think it is possible to relate his aesthetic through an imagery of that order, in the Christian form at least, to specific works he accomplished at this time. He seems to have had a fatalism and painful personal sense of the curious anonymity of the crucified deity. Indeed Malevich speaks metaphorically of having to 'bear his cross', aligning himself with the prophetic and persecuted historical Christian counterpart. The cross forms of Suprematism have an inherent and unavoidable allusion to the archetype mythic symbolism immanently present in the Christian apocolypse. Some of Malevich's later figurative drawings have figures that stand, arms outstretched bearing witness by the stigmata on their hands and in the Russian Orthodox cross that creates their facial features, (see the drawing of the Standing Figure), to the transfiguration that Christ signifies as a symbol, a sacrificing and transformative God of paramount importance to the nature of the human condition and the significance of renewal, in mythic terms. The analogy by association of arising from the razed ground of history that Malevich affects intellectually as a pre-condition to an eternal, ideal, realm is imprinted into the very method by which Suprematism declares its birth; in a sense, a re-birth, a renaissance of renewal of faith in an idea.

Suprematism was divined as an universal art form en-gendering an universal society. Malevich was very much aware of this as a 'real' factor, without which his aesthetic would have made little, if any (other than as passive decoration) sense. He saw himself as eradicating the pre-disposed and repressive
Fig. 65. Standing Figure.
This drawing is closely related to a number of works made after Malevich's return from Germany.
ideological program of previous art forms in favour of a universal vision conscious of its historical totality. In fact, Malevich's Suprematist system ceased being simply another ideology and became a Utopian gesture only when the conditions for its possible realization became apparent. I am thinking here of Mannheim's notion of the distinction between Ideology and Utopia which he makes, in his book of the same name. What Malevich is instigating is the will to dominate historical reality commensurate to the actual circumstances presented by the transformed and highly potential context. Nature ceased to be of vital interest both in the activity of the painter, whether through the invention of photography, or by other pressures, and in the eyes of philosophers. The interest switched from a preoccupation with real formations, to the abstraction of those formations in time. The will was to 'dominate historical reality'.

The similarities between Malevich and the De Stijl or Bauhaus movement correspond only in their shared faith in the potential technology presented to solve the world's most apparent and distressing material contradictions. The difference, again, lay in Malevich's direct experience of an actual revolution, which, in his mind, had promised much more than a mere gratification of immediate material needs, indeed it pointed the way to an entirely new world. For the more critical and ultimately negative sense of technology as simply the projected and transformed symbols of the ruling class, the nightmare of an alien and dehumanized world, we have to turn to the art of the Dadaists or the Surrealists.

Art, at this time, was without a purposefully created
socially cognizant role. The artist could enact unconscious social fantasies and appear as a bohemian, but this was only a transitional responsibility of diminishing spiritual interest or fulfillment. Suddenly in Russia, the conditions were ripe for the artist to become as 'practical' a social importance as the figures whose charismatic appeal he shares, and possibly envied, the revolutionary and the saint. It was at this point that Malevich turned to the materialization of his vision of the imminent Utopia. It is important to remember that his paintings of this period were almost ecstatic in their sensual spiritualism. This mystical sense of his production has to be maintained even throughout the more utilitarian projects (see illustration of ceramic cup he designed), otherwise his particular path out of the historical labyrinth into synchronic time and space, with its commensurate forms, will not make sense.

Part of the mistaken interpretive direction of western art historians would probably have been avoided if a particular drawing of a planiti, a hovering residence of 'Earth's dwellers' and its associated text of 1924, were known. The normal affiliation of these forms to the architectural and sculptural experiments of Vantongerloo and the constructivist forms of Rodchenko, etc., would have been apparent for the nonsense it is. The text reads:

"I am now thinking of material(;) white opaque glass, concrete, tarred felt, heating by electricity(,) a planit without pipes. The colouring of the residential planit is predominantly black and white. Red, black and white is exceptional circumstances, it depends on the tension of the state's powers and its weakness in dynamism. The planit must be universally tangible for man, inside as well as outside, the planit is as simple as a tiny speck,
Fig. 66. Alexander Rodchenko
Construction of Distance,
1920.

Fig. 67. Georges Vantongerloo. Construction of
Volume, 1921.
Fig. 68. Future Planits for Leningrad. The Pilot's Planit, 1924.

Fig. 69. Future Planits for Earth's Dwellers, 1924.
everywhere accessible to the man living in it, who, in fine weather, may sit on its surface. The planit thanks to its construction and system will afford the opportunity to keep it clean; it can be washed every day without the least difficulty, and thanks to its small stature is harmless.  

Suddenly the problem of the form's previously obscure meaning disappears, the practicability of its easily maintained surfaces, its hovering purity, takes on an almost personable sensation, the scale is highly humanized and any esoteric quality it may have had evaporates in an appreciation of the marvel of its unique and revolutionary architectural function. Architecture was the natural and most logical place for the unification of painting and sculpture to occur. Tatlin had created the first such project of deomonstrable success, the monument for the Third International. (See Illustration) A monument which like Malevich's projects, was fated not to be built beyond the scale of the model, a fitting tribute to the Third International commemorating a world communism, which, like the monument, was destined never to be built.

As early as 1919 at Vitebsk, Lissitzky had been given the leadership of the Department of Architecture, and encouraged by Malevich he initiated his first 'Proun" experiments. In March of 1921, an exhibition took place in Vitebsk that had models of 'floating electric towns, power stations, railway stations, etc., formed as cardboard reliefs'. Malevich's production from this period is unfortunately missing. It isn't until 1922-23 in Leningrad, that the first of the plaster of paris models were constructed.

Besides the planiti which were discussed above, there
Fig. 70. Modern Buildings, Suprematism, 1923-24.

Fig. 71. Monument to The Third International, V. Tatlin, 1920.
were the architectoniki. Most of these models are known only through photographs. They fall into two categories: those that stand vertically and those that are low-lying horizontal constructions. They were built out of component parts which seems to have suggested the possibility for their use as ornaments as can be seen in the picture of Malevich's funeral where one of the architectoniki has had a mantle placed on top of it and was used as a monument at the foot of his coffin. He named the projects, Alpha, Beta, Gota and Zeta. Some of the building systems suggested by the component parts resemble the current use of modular elements, as well as the adaptation of skyscrapers to new zoning regulations that occurred in New York in the twenties.

The architectoniki hover somewhere between a modernist's conception of an earthly and a heavenly city, an ideal kingdom reflected in the perfection of its architecture but only partially realizable as a concrete living phenomenon. It shares this distinction with various other manifestations of an 'ideal architectural' intention.

Bruno Taut, a visionary German architect, accomplished projects and designs for futuristic conceptions as early as 1914 when the Glass House at the Werkbund exposition in Cologne was built.

His writings are revealing in terms of Malevich's theories and serve to illustrate that the same needs were present in the rest of Europe and Malevich's poetic sensibility was in fact not simply idiosyncratic.

"A call goes out to all those who have faith in the future. All strong concern for the future is incipient architecture. One day
Fig. 72. Zeta. Architectoniki.

Fig. 73. McGraw-Hill Building, New York, 1931.
a philosophy of life will exist and then its symbol, its crystallization-architecture will also exist.

Then there will be no struggles and no fretting about art in a life of banality; then there will be one art alone, and this art will shine into all corners and crevices. Until that time the functional can only be endured if the architect carries in him a premonition of that sun. Architecture alone gives measure to all things, differentiates sharply between the sacred and the profane, between the great and the insignificant, yet at the same time gives a glimmer of its radiance to everyday objects, too.¹⁷

In Taut's Circular letter of February 3, 1920, he said:

"What justifies our activity is the creation of an intellectual framework. Visible architecture is the simple, direct consequence of an inner spiritual architecture. Our Form can therefore never arise as a derivation from another artistic medium such as sculpture or painting. The concern is to create in us a general atmosphere of faith. Out of our amoebic condition develops an inner tension, an electric current, a source of power, which today appears to spinter apart, yet is more coherent within itself than the brotherhood of the so-called architects. In inexplicable fashion the spiritual framework will generate from it. This is my conviction. And this intellectual framework will then create spontaneously the binding form which can accommodate passion and dance simultaneously."¹⁸

There is a tension implicit to the proposal because Malevich insinuates a realm dominated by man's instincts (the definition of his Utopia being committed to the presence of a non-repressive reality) rather than a Rousseauian primitivism, or a romantic escape. But at the same time, he attempts to envision this system within the necessary and apparently inevitable technological sophistication that is an intimate concomitant to its initial appearance as well as an extremely important attribute of its potential future success.¹⁹ The pragmatic quality of this discrimination, mixed with his mystical sensibility, made
Fig. 74. Beta. (Before 1926). Architectoniki.

Fig. 75. Dynamic Suprematist Architecton.
for a very peculiar archetypal design solution. The architectoniki presume technology as pre-requisite to their construction at the same time as they transcend a strictly utilitarian answer in that the demands the proposal presented were for an entirely transformed social and spiritual intelligence; this is, needless to say, their tacit idealism.

Suprematism proposed a further and continuing revolution that was inconceivable to the strategies of the Soviet and consequently it was soon to become an outlawed conception.

Malevich, at one level, seems to have had an extraordinary grasp on the problems of individual points of view as they pertained to ideological conflict, and the political necessity, that was indeed one of the major concerns of Marx, to remove such necessarily 'personal' value judgments in favour of a system of understanding that did not exclude the new industrial environment and its mass constituency. This leaning of so many artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries towards more intellectual-oriented preoccupations as a means of solving painful and obvious contradictions is entirely understandable. Malevich hoped, in the process of his art, to break through the socially and politically maintained presence of myths that were no longer authoritative or convincingly useful. While the problem for philosophy was to avoid replacing one mythical structure with another, simply more sophisticated variety, the fascination of the artist was precisely in the centre of the energy and need for these stories that people incessantly seem to tell each other about the nature of the world in which they live. Indeed, much of Malevich's vocation centered in precisely the creation of
Fig. 76. Suprematist Architecton. (1929?)

Fig. 77. Suprematist Ornaments (1927)
literally unthought of orders, that while bearing no clear parallel to 'every-day life', served to resubstantiate the spiritual in the midst of the great materialist epoch.

In 1927, he secured permission through Narkompros to travel in Europe with a one-man exhibition. It was partially displayed in Warsaw and then again, more fully, in Berlin. Troels Andersen, states that Malevich was in Warsaw from March 8 to 28 and in Berlin from March 29 to June 5. He visited the Dessau Bauhaus and met Gropius and Le Corbusier, and agreed to have selections from his writings published in the Bauhaus series as number 11. Andersen also records that Malevich met with various members of the German avant-garde, among them, Gabo, Arp, Schwitters and Hans Richter. It was because of his sudden departure for Leningrad that his manuscripts and the entire contents of the Berlin exhibition, which now comprise the major part of the Stedelijk collection, remained in Western Europe.

The Institute of Artistic Culture was dissolved in 1927 but Malevich continued to live on the premises with his mother and third wife. In 1930, he was able to conduct a course in the theory and practice of painting in Domiskusstv in Leningrad. He was still a prolific writer producing numerous articles and a 'comprehensive account' of the history of Modern Art. Probably because of the connections he had made in Germany and a subsequent invitation to exhibit there again, suspicions were aroused and he was arrested in the Fall of the same year. His manuscripts were destroyed by friends for fear that they might incriminate him, but he was released in a relatively short time.

All through this period of his life, Malevich had
Fig. 78. Malevich Exhibition, Berlin, 1927.

Fig. 79. Malevich Exhibition, Berlin, 1927.
continued to work on his painting. He probably only actually quit, if at all, for a very short period during the peak of his enthusiasm for the potential society arising out of the aftermath of the revolution, the time of the planiti, the architectoniki and the 'applied art' projects.

While some critics have seen his return to figurative painting as a kind of despairing comment on the conditions around him, a regression into a less complex if not nostalgic world. I tend to see it instead as a part of his continuing search for the possibility of re-establishing the figurative in art that he had talked of previously, and also as an autobiographical content, like maintaining a diary that included literal references to the present and one's society, friends, etc., a document of his life. This stoicism at this point in his life, especially in terms of the public rejection he received by the political administration, seems in fact a very rich state of mind in the life of an artist who had committed himself so continuously to such a genuinely high level of creation. It is analogous perhaps to the silence of Ezra Pound, as if taking account of one's life in preparation for the inevitable profound experience of death. It is certainly one aspect of our lives that western society in general pays little serious attention to; the deification of progress and novelty at the expense of all else, here demonstrates its final defeat.

Malewich's later portraits are a curiosity in some respects, but they do in fact maintain obvious references both to Suprematism, the cut of the clothing and the reduction into patterns of balanced asymmetrical dark and light bands, and to
Fig. 80. Malevich working. Photograph by N.M. Suyetin, April 3, 1933.

Fig. 81. Self-Portrait, 1933.
Fig. 82. Portrait of N. Punin, 1933.

Fig. 83. Portrait of the Duke of Montefeltro, Piero della Francesca, 1465.
the respective high traditions that Malevich, in spite of his earlier iconoclasm, still held a devout respect for. In fact, they very much resemble Piero della Francesca's portrait-diptych of the Dukes of Montefeltro in their studied severity and dis-passionate realism. It is in this sense that his comment on his architectural experiments reveals the ambiguity and complexity with which he intuitively synthesized his vision and that continues to make the mistake of categorizing Malevich succinctly into one particular camp or another, apparent.

"In my Suprematist architecture I visualize the beginning of a new art of building, an art which, as in the past, only creates that which is 'beautiful'. Art always reveals the present as a synthesis of the entire past and the future."20
"What surprises me is that you are touched in such a concrete way by a metaphysical situation."
"But the situation is concrete" said Francoise, "the whole meaning of my life is at stake."
"I'm not saying it isn't" Pierre said. "Just the same this ability of yours to put body and soul into living an idea is exceptional."

S. de Beauvoir, *L'Invitée*

There are many complex questions surrounding the emergence of Suprematism and the development of its metaphysic and iconography. While I cannot presume to answer them all, I do feel that the illuminating construction from which further insights will be gained is in fact located exactly in the nexus of historical relationships Malevich utilized as intuitive perceptions and in a sense, as a role or posture for himself as an artist.

In retrospect, Suprematism appears as a rather curious hybrid. Following the developments of western European aesthetic concerns, it develops initially as a rather conventional 'avant garde' art form, another extension of the seemingly infinite front of styles, each with their particular and more often than not, absolute ideology. But then, contingent to the intellectual and political turmoil in which he lived, there appeared a coherence and a pattern to the events and art surrounding him which allows, even demands (in his eyes) an apocolyptic response. Art as a phenomenon overall has always presented problems to classical Marxism, which if we follow the argument of Kenelm Burridge in his *New Heaven, New Earth*, was in itself a
millenarian movement sharing similar processes at the macro-physical level to the rejected ontological tradition of Christianity. He says that "Being itself millenarian, Marxism can, like the early Christian, explain a millenarian in terms of its own postulates and experience. On the other hand, denying the deity or divine interventions, the 'Marxist' cannot explain the prophet and his inspiration".\(^2\)

The figure of the prophet closely resembles the role Malevich achieved as an artist within his context. The attempt to create a system with universal validity was something which it shared with Marxist thought, but rather than being critical or consistently analytical, Malevich finally came to a point where he simply accepted the limits of its initial proposals and then proceeded to create objects and conditions that it thought would prevail under the administration of such an order. He has said that "Suprematism in its first stage was a purely philosophical, colour conscious movement; in its second, it is a form which may be applied."\(^3\) The artist's power in this process was on the verge, in Russia, of becoming considerable enough that he could create a substance to his vision that exceeded the experiential limits of the object and entered the actual dynamics of social interaction. But the access to 'material powers' quickly dwindled and the nature of the 'dream' the artist held for a possible return to the conditions of the garden diminished correspondingly. Malevich did attempt to create a means of applying his system, by analogy, to the social process he saw occurring all around him. In 1930, he wrote an essay called "An Attempt to Determine the Relation Between Colour and Form
in Painting". What he tried to develop was in a sense an analysis that is the predecessor of our contemporary considerations of the relationship between people's behaviour and the physical conditions of their environment. He says:

"Thus we have looked at two situations, where one and the same thing can be coloured differently depending on circumstances or social conditions. These conditions, in turn, have their own law on the basis of which corresponding changes in colour and form arise, without taking form into account. This law is the reason for the changes in man's perception of colour and his mental attitude." 4

Significantly enough, Malevich does not state a law at all but a perception. By this time, that is 1930, he was obviously tempered by the conditions he was living through, as his own perception ironically states, and had absorbed a certain amount of programmatic materialism.

In Burridge's book, he goes into the manner by which a prophet can become a hero or political leader. He says that: "Charismatic qualities attach to the message rather than to the prophet. Nevertheless, if the prophet is able the message and the prophet may become closely identified. Charisma attaches to the prophet with an acceptable message." 5

Seen from the point of view of a vanguard sensibility, Malevich's message, I am arguing, was particularly suited to the needs of the context of his time. They were not, however, conceivable to the reality of the regime which was growing up around him at the time and whose directions he must have felt were intolerable.

Either the society can be seen as a mirror to the message implicit, although submerged in the ideology Suprematism created,
or exactly the opposite. That is, Suprematism "intuitively" picked up on the current of the times, and gave it an aesthetic formulae. However, I do not want to suggest in any way that this was initially a conscious move on Malevich's part. While he may have realized the kind and extent of coercion necessary to implement a society with such a singular moral order (certainly he did by 1933 when he had himself experienced imprisonment by the communist status quo), his lack of effective political presence, except in a limited fashion, demonstrates a naivety from which the overt lack of careful premeditation is clear.

But the really significant thing about Malevich's production that differentiates him from most European artists of the time, seems to be that he did in fact eventually make this intellectual and metaphysical perception a conscious and major expression of his aesthetic. Not content with the somewhat mechanical extension or re-formulation of styles as his essential task, he transformed the very nature of his art into an organic correspondence with the external environment. He wanted a correspondence between conceptions and their material forms, one that would produce a harmony commensurate to the then potential society the revolution enthusiastically offered. Unfortunately this correspondance took place at such a theoretically sophisticated level that its significance remained lost to all but an initiated few and even they remained unaware of the potential authoritarian dangers.

Suprematism is somewhat analogous to a pure science. One for instance interested in the phenomenon of mind in relation to matter. Its quest was for an absolute, universally applicable
description of such phenomenon. Towards this end he created a system. One which would supposedly transcend self-interestedness or the confines of individual ego, and instead substitute a state of de-differentiation, oceanic and expansive. A condition where the intrusion of class-interested or socially created beliefs (Ideology in Marx's sense of the word) would not operate as forceful determinants, was his ambition. This has been referred to as a 'classical' sensibility, and dismissed as such. In that it tends towards an archetypal and singular state where the ideal image is a living phenomena, in this sense it was 'classical'. But without an understanding of the conditions of Malevich's idealism and the conditions of its birth, Suprematism looks either like our own most immediate progenitor, which in one sense it is, but also, then becomes, in its own right, an undecipherable system of signs and symbols whose significance for its own context is lost.

Malevich's own struggle, which he presumed could offer the "practice and recognition of truth against the domination of ideology", was effective in as much as art, by its nature is a 'revolt of reality against false consciousness'. The question then is to determine whether or not Malevich was attempting to rid art of its ideological or propagandistic significance or simply to change its point of view. We tend to see systems of belief by way of their most outstanding differences rather than in their common aspects. Similarities are sometimes impossible to see because of the radical and often dramatic juxtaposition of the differences in various systems. For example, Christianity and Communism, as Ernst Fischer has pointed out, share a common basis, no matter how different their ultimate ideology and program.
"The Christian and the Marxist conception of man and society are based on common ethical values. A Classless society." While this kind of perception suffers an almost intolerable degree of oversimplification, it was this capacity to envision the most common or shared elements of aesthetic systems that Malevich activated from the earliest days of his career. By 1910, 1911, he had absorbed and was utilizing elements from both Fauvist and Cubist alternatives. His early eclecticism holds the key to both disentangling the 'knot' of his iconography as well as it tells us a great deal about the reasons for his leap into the intuitive desert of Suprematism. Early primitivist overtones abound in many of these early pictures. He develops a kind of peasant vernacular, the common language of the immediate and most pervasive Russian rural landscape and consciousness which appears endlessly throughout these formative years. The vocabulary, while particular, and irrefutably his own, shared a communicable content with both the 'art-world' and his context.

The next combinative stylistic stage was to paint in what he called Cubo-Futurism, and again, the content was, besides the overt act of painting itself, localized; Carpenter's Scene, The Knife-Grinder, Peasant Scene, etc.

Both poles were present in the pictures and rather than warring with each other could apparently co-exist in relative harmony. By late 1912, early 1913, however, the formal persuasion had seemingly won out. There was an abundance of Cubist-collage with Zaumist poetic overtones and assemblagist inclusions.

By 1913, with the appearance of The Black Square, we also have Malevich's move into a state of stylistically
internalized ideological coexistence and rather than each element propogandizing by its forceful presence, its own belief, we literally leave the ground of recognizable reality and enter a somewhat neutralized idealism.

The analytical use of Claude Levi-Strauss that I made earlier is interesting by way of a more personal parallel inasmuch as he has made a statement about his philosophical ideas in the last chapter of his book *Tristes Tropiques*, that by analogy reflects one way of seeing Malevich's Suprematism. Using the metaphor of geology (i.e. there is an invisible structure which determine and give meaning to the strata that lie above it), he refers to Marxism as a geology of society, and psychoanalysis as the geology of the psyche. Flowing between and enjoining the two analytical modes is the synthesizing or creative religiosity of Buddhism. Suprematism as a kind of mythical language was founded within a Marxist context, employing sensate phenomenon supposedly to arrive at a similar kind of destination. In this sense it also becomes obvious how important the engagement with the overall mythic structure is to the meaning of the various elements. Their meaning is unavoidably involved in its position as a part of the larger construction. Its meaning arises directly from its context as in the logic of mythic constructions, or in the structural arrangements of language. The language that Suprematism presents was fighting arduously for a system strong enough to gain socially congruous approval as a means of translating deep structured phenomena into common experience.

The artist in this sense had unconsciously cast himself both in the role of what we understand from anthropological studies
as the shaman, the practitioner of discrete and complexly ordered perceptions of social experience, and in more contemporary terms our reference at this level would be to the role of therapist, attempting to redefine individual pathology back into group consensus or tradition. Malevich can be seen as an individual participating in his capacity to experience 'abnormal' thought where normally insignificant details from the everyday world take on a whole range of meanings, in his Zaumist collage, for example, relevant to the ongoing creation of a self-created and projective aesthetic system.

The experience of Malevich's system from without is then, logically, distorted and other than its intended effect. The method of Suprematism attempted (and the occasion of the Russian revolution presented the necessary catharsis) to redefine collective experience of objective phenomena through its highly charged system of significations, almost an exact inversion of the task that the conventional therapist assumes. This is really the importance of Malevich's production for the history of art; it presented a violent rupture in the social process of assumed responsibilities and roles. Even though Malevich received no public recognition of the fact, (it is our task in retrospect to discover these meanings), he had really created an art form that made him the 'guardian of the spiritual coherence' of the group when no other focus or function was creatively concerned with such issues within the social fabric of the time. Levi-Strauss uses the psychoanalytic designation of 'abreactive' to describe the demonstration or creative process which the artist undertakes in such a circumstance. In spite of the fact (possibly because of it) that he is referring to the Sorcerer in aboriginal societies, I think its significance to the appearance of the artist
in our own culture is clear. Abreaction is defined as "the release of psychic tension through verbalizing or acting out an adequate resolution of a repressed traumatic experience, with the appropriate emotion or affect." The artist enacts deep-seated individual, and hence with any sophistication, collective psychological traumas. This certainly is not all the artist does effect, but this is an aspect of his process that without our cognizance will cause endlessly fallacious and superficial insights into the larger ontological validities when they do in fact exist.
Suprematism, whether in the initial barrenness of its monochrome proposals (White on White, etc.) or the splendid variety of its applied manifestations (theatre, costumes, ceramics, planiti, architectoniki) invoked all the prerequisites of an Utopian vision. It proposed a rehumanization of art by the artist whereby that social responsibility which he had forfeited was taken back upon himself in the form of an entirely unique and ethical aesthetics.

Malevich found that history had presented him with a largely decorative and imitative instrument, a language of forms inherited from an almost altogether foreign history in spite of the fact that it was his closest antecedent. He was not responsible for its creation and yet was expected to make use of it. Innovation was allowed, even demanded by the avant-garde, but complete transgression was as yet a rare exception rather than the rule. Therefore, the options were either to reject art as a way of life entirely, or to completely revise and reintegrate the previous division between form and content that had so plagued art periodically throughout the past; this engendered a moving in and out of the replication of existing reality, the Apollonian and Dionysian again, distortion and self-consciousness of the process until an inevitable mannerism seemed to take over. It was only when the construction of society overall was capable of radical change that art was not, it seems in retrospect at least, stuck in a recycling of historical modes and the
Fig. 84. Malevich at his last major exhibition, RSFSR-XV Years, 1932.
inevitable spiritual 'wasteland' it led to.

Malevich announced with Suprematism an all pervasive and homogeneous condition in the arts which unified form with content and objectively created a Utopia in the material of its vision. In some ways the thought of a scheme of such cosmic proportions suggests an apathy or giving up of oneself to the unity of the impossibly larger whole or totality, the infinite. It must be remembered that I have studied Malevich more as a particular phenomenon than as a generalized example of the activity of the artist. Such a homogeneous system, if somehow possible to imagine as an instituted world view, would create incredible boredom. But that never came about in the context and the totalitarian implications which informed some part of the initial energy that undoubtedly created such an ahistorical system, recurred and was exercised in the praxis directly. In the world Malevich conceived, such ideas are in no way intended as politically instrumented hierarchies.

He was both the victim of historical circumstances in that his idealistic state did not become a political reality, and a self-conscious recipient of enormous responsibility. Suprematism may have failed in the extent of its ambitions corresponding to the fate of the Revolution it supported, but its commitment remains a source of energy for the future towards the realization of such an ethical art.
FOOTNOTES

ABSTRACT


2 Mimesis, as a terminology originates with Plato. Plato's hostility to the poetic experience is an interesting fact that our 'aesthetics' have taken as a central condition for some 2000 years now. The best discussion I have read to date by way of exegesis to Plato's arguments and conception of mimesis is to be found in Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato*. I cannot too highly recommend the reader to his exposition and I will not attempt to recreate his complex explanation here. The essential interest it proposes for the work of this thesis is the cultural and historical context that placed Plato in the position of having to literally do combat with 'poetry', the epic, as an epistemological mode directly integrated into the process by which the 'moral-character' of citizens was proposed and learned. It occupied this position not for the values we conventionally ascribe to poetry, that is, inspirational or imaginative effects, but on the grounds that "it provided a massive repository of useful knowledge, a sort of encyclopedia of ethics, politics, history and technology which the effective citizen was required to learn as the core of his educational equipment."(p.27) Havelock insists on the fact that Plato "writes as though he had never heard of aesthetics or art". (p.29) This is exactly the case that I am trying to articulate; it has taken two thousand years of 'civilizing', the increasing sophistication of the technological domination of nature, etc. to produce such a highly specialized system of linguistic distinctions as we commonly possess today. I am not proposing a nostalgia for the pre-sophistic or pre-philosophical mode of thought, but that an understanding of such a dialectic in history removes one aspect of the mystery as to why Malevich specifically so desired to re-incorporate a rigorous intellectual-moral content into his art. Otherwise he would have been specializing himself out of any collective content which could communicate at all. Of course he could not undo history, nor recreate in a single lifetime an entirely lost understanding or vocabulary, but I think that he did manage to set the problem up in a uniquely modern vocabulary, and one that has all but been lost to us.

3 Jacob L. Talmon, *Political Messianism*, pp. 505-506.

4 Jack Burnham, Ibid. p. 43.


6 Troels Andersen, *Vladimir Tatlin*, p. 51.


8 Peter Collins, Ibid, p. 296.
9 Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning In The Visual Arts*, p. 56.


11 I am thinking here specifically of Tatlin, as well as Malevich, who, while not returning to easel painting, did revert from his artist-engineer principles to the creation of a glider, a beautifully metaphorical, poetic and individual expression; a fanciful flight from the repressive hand of Stalinism.


13 The skeleton of an argument that has permeated much critical thinking in our century and which has served artists themselves in one way or another is given a credible formula by Nietzsche in his essay *The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music*, first published in 1872. He cites the opposition of an instinctual polarity and gives his observation an archetypal mythic characterization through the figures of Apollo and Dionysus. Essentially the extremes could be thought of as the opposition between freedom and necessity, essence and existence or any number of embodiments of these sets of traditionally warring dualisms. Apollo is the paradigm of the instinctual urge to order. Dionysus is seen as the will to liberation. This dualism was very much in evidence historically as an affective understanding, and it is useful to see how much it has characterized preconceptions about Malevich, and to what extent it has been utilized as an understanding of his essential dynamic.


20 Ronald Hunt. *Transform The World! Poetry Must be Made by All!* p. III.


**BIOGRAPHY AND EARLY WORKS**

1 There is an almost tragic parallel in the ending of artistic careers between Malevich with his elaborate funeral production launched as a protest, and Tatlin's manufacture of the Leatatlin glider. The former so aggressively consistent with his life's aesthetic, while the ornithopter appears as a
metaphor of escape from the 'dead hand' of Stalinism.


3 Ibid, p. 149.


6 Ibid, p. 153

7 Ibid, p. 154

8 Ibid, p. 152


She claims that Malevich went to Paris in 1912, but there is no further evidence of such a trip than the article itself.


*Note*: Malevich's use of colour was never as intellectually structured on an understanding of visual correspondences to emotional constructs as Kandinsky's was. Where both Kandinsky and Mondrian had documented experience of occult and theosophical systems of philosophy particularly for Kandinsky of Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner, Malevich was virtually innocent of those instructions. I am relying for my understanding in this regard on the excellent article in the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes by Sixten Ringdom entitled *Art in the Epoch of the Great Spiritual*. It further relies, or at least its investigations were initiated by the bizarre and extremely biased account of the occult origins of early abstraction made by Robsjohn-Gibbings in his book *The Mona Lisa's Moustache*.


**FUTURIST INFLUENCES**

1 Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 384


3 Ibid, p. 385.

that it in fact was a "meeting of Futurists... attended by Mayakovsky, Burlyuk, Kruchonykh, Matyushin, Sseveryanin, Malevich, and others." p. 137.

5 Peter Luft, "Kasimir Malevich Designs Victory Over The Sun" in Art and The Stage in the 20th Century, ed. by H. Rischbieter, p. 137.

6 Peter Luft, Ibid, p. 137. The article quoted from goes on to say that "This Futurist opera designed by Malevich was thus the world's first Cubist theatrical spectacle. With the establishment of this fact, the view current hither to that Picasso first introduced Cubism onto stage with his designs for the ballet Parade by Cocteau, Satie and Massine on May 18, 1917, must finally be corrected."

7 Ibid, p. 137.

8 Carrieri, Futurism, p. 129

9 Ibid, p. 130.

10 A good example of this fact is to be found in Nicolas Berdyaev's autobiography Dream and Reality, in which the first chapter deals with the Russian gentry and the cultural milieu in the early years of the 20th Century. Berdyaev, in Dream and Reality (p. xiii-xiv) also says "I am a Russian, and I regard my universalism, my very hostility to nationalism, as Russian." Malevich was a man of a very similar fiber and in a later chapter I shall go into a more detailed account of their common ground.


12 Ibid, p. 137.

13 Markov, Russian Futurism, p. 173. He here maintains that the First Journal of Russian Futurists, whose issue # 1-2, appeared in Moscow in March 1914 ... "Among the artists who took part or agreed to take part, one finds the familiar names of the Russian avant-garde of the period, such as the two Burliuks, Malevich, Matyushin, Yakulov and Exter, and also Fernand Leger."


15 Rosa Clough, Futurism, p. 29.

16 Ibid, p. 34.


18 This eschatological seizure of the current-most technical panacea is similar in mode to the messianic claims of Buckminster Fuller, as demonstrated in The World Game. A type of politically naive adoption of implicitly Futurist metaphors.

19 Martin, Futurist Art and Theory, p. 41.


23 I am here thinking of artists like Joseph Kosuth and the Art & Language group in Britain.

24 Markov, Ibid, p. 334. (He is quoting Igor Terentyev).

25 Kenneth Coutts-Smith, *Dada*, p. 90.


28 Ibid, p. 31.

29 Ibid, p. 47.

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**THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND CONTEXT**

1 E. Lampert, *Studies in Russian Radicalism*, p. 3.

2 Ibid. p. 3.

3 Ibid, p. 5.


5 Ibid, p. 95.

6 Ibid, p. 132.

7 Ibid, p. 137


10 Ibid, p. 332.


12 Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in The Visual Arts*. (One History of art as a Humanistic Discipline). Freud also demonstrated the power of any action or object to contain meaning by devious routes - his was the specific task to develop the means of extricating such 'unobvious' meaning; see his essay *Delusion and Dream*. This point will be discussed further in another chapter.

13 Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, p. 53.


17 Ernst Fischer, *Art Against Ideology*, pp. 91-92.


19 Ibid, p. x.


21 Malevich, in this perspective at least appears more radical than the constructivists; but then this gets into the problem of determining as to how positive and how negative this is in fact. They were practical, and realistic, working with what was there in fact, while Malevich thought Suprematism was apolitical inasmuch as its scheme was Utopian, visionary and ultimately in transcendence of the mundane. But even in spite of these distinctions they, by and large, suffered the same fate.


**THE PROJECT OF SUPREMATISM**


6 Ibid, p. 27. As Troels Andersen notes in the essays, (p. 241, footnote #8), "Only the year before Malevich had actually considered himself a Futurist. He also defended Marinetti in an open letter printed in the newspaper Nov' no. 12, January 28, 1914, on the occasion of his visit and in his defense against an attack by Larionov published just before his arrival." The phrase "to spit on the altar of its art" had been used previously by Marinetti, so Malevich's use of it is doubly apt on this occasion.
8 Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of The Millennium.
10 Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (Preface to the second edition).
11 Eric Fromm, Marx's concept of Man, p. 45.
12 Ibid, p. 46.
14 Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers, El Lissitzky, pp. 327-330.
19 Ibid, p. 329.
21 Ibid, p. 328.
22 Kasimir Malevich, Essays on Art, Vol. I, p. 120.
23 Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, p. 90
24 Ibid, pp. 95-96.
25 H. Frankfort, Before Philosophy, p. 20.
27 Frankfort, Ibid, p. 16.
28 James Jeans, Quoted by Kenneth Coutts-Smith in The Dream of Icarus.
31 Ibid, p. 194.
32 This is complicated for two reasons: One is that Marinetti was in Italy where there was an entirely different and finally more conservative cultural context, one that presumably necessitated
the use of more radical methods to induce the kind of political and cultural change the Italian intentions overtly included. The other is that Pound later also turned to Italian Fascism, although with a different rational, but needless to say this complex interrelatedness of movements and ideas is a difficult question which I want to acknowledge here but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.


34 Wyndham has referred on several occasions to abstract painting as "visual music". Morse Peckham, in his book Man's Rage for Chaos, speaks of the similarity between Kandinsky's sense of the quality of 'improvisation' and this phrase of Lewis. He includes Malevich in this attempt to discover what in fact was meant by these variously different painters with their similar sounding use of the musical metaphor in reference to the quality they felt effectively described abstraction.

35 This information was given to me initially by Ronald Hunt and has since been corroborated by Markov, in his book Russian Futurism, p. 280.

36 Kasimir Malevich, Essays on Art, Introduction by Troels Andersen, p. 11.

37 Ibid, p. 11.


40 Ibid, p. 129.

41 Ibid, p. 294.


MALEVICH'S THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

1 See Appendix for the official report of the Institute of Artistic Culture's activities in translation.

2 I use the psychological, Freud and Ehrenzweig particularly, as one way of articulating the 'deep-matrix' of abstraction. Certainly the best articulation, needless to say, is the work itself. In this sense the psychoanalytical has a specific
validity. The only reservation I want to indicate is in terms of mistaking the artist as merely a symptom of larger social functions or disorders.


4 In order to corroborate Panofsky's quote about the process and position of art in medieval society, I want to quote various passages from J. Huizinga's book The Waning of the Middle Ages; specifically from chapter 19, Art and Life. "Now, really to understand art, it is of great importance to form a notion of the function of art in life; and for that it does not suffice to admire surviving masterpieces, all that has been lost asks our attention too. Art in those times was still wrapped up in life. Its function was to fill with beauty the forms assumed by life". (p. 253) "Art was not yet a means, as it is now, to step out of the routine of everyday life to pass some moments in contemplation; it had to be enjoyed as an element of life itself, as the expression of life's significance". (p. 233-34) There is also the curious congruence between public events in celebration of religious ideology and the mass fetes and street theatre agrandizing the triumph of the revolution in Russia. Huizinga says: "In the Middle Ages the religious festival, because of its high qualities of style founded on the liturgy itself, for a long time dominated all the forms of collective cheerfulness." (p. 240)

5 Erwin Panofsky, Ibid, p. 244.


7 Michel Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p. 228.

8 Troels Andersen, Malevich, p. 116.

9 The resemblance by way of method and vocabulary to semiological or linguistic structural analysis is no accident. The discoveries of Ferdinand de Saussure were added to the work of revolutionary critics, aestheticians and linguists of the Russian and Prague schools. Malevich would undoubtedly have had, if not direct access to such an intellectual ferment, certainly some coherent descriptive understanding.

10 Troels Andersen, Ibid, p. 118.

11 Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, p. 35.

12 Troels Andersen, Ibid, p. 119.


14 Ibid, p. 98.

15 Ibid, p. 98

16 Ibid, p. 121.

17 Troels Andersen, Malevich, p. 30.
21 Ibid, p. 123
23 In this regard, see Milic Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics.
26 Claude Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, pp. 29-30
27 G. Cherbonnier, Conversations with Claude Levi-Strauss, p. 150.

ETHICAL IDEALISM

1 Nicholas Berdyaev. Dream and Reality, p. 93.
2 Ibid, p. 95.
3 Ibid, p. 91.
4 Ibid, p. 90
5 C. S. Calian. The Significance of Eschatology in the Thoughts of Nicolas Berdyaev, p. 124.
7 Ibid, p. 14 (quoting Berdyaev)
9 Calian, Ibid, p. 44.
11 Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism, p. 133.
12 Calian, Ibid, p. 53.

14 Calian, Ibid, p. 69.


19 Berdyaev, Ibid, pp. 210-211.

**THE MATERIALIZATION OF UTOPIA**

1 Troels Andersen, *Malevich*. p. 11.

2 Ibid, p. 11.

3 Ibid, p. 27, quoting Malevich.


5 Ibid, p. 56.

6 Like Hegel, who thought he had created the end of a need for philosophy, Malevich, for somewhat similar reasons, found himself predicting the obsolescence of painting as a 'useful' mode, maintaining that it could now be seen to be a prejudice of the past. Unlike Hegel however, he did have to modify his system in order to partially adapt to increasing social and material demands.


8 The sensation of Utopia that we are presented with at this stage pictorial phenomenon is later seen by Malevich as 'logically' tending towards a genuine manifestation in concrete space. The resulting forms this took were the architectoniki and the planiti. The charts, created at a slightly later state, 1927, attempted to explain the rational necessity of Suprematism as an outgrowth of previous aesthetic solutions. Cubism, being a largely intellectually conceived and extremely academic art form that answered largely intellectual problems, was naturally enough taken as the prime progenitor of Suprematism. But the charts do not succeed in this venture and instead only serve to confirm the 'ideological' network that Malevich undoubtedly thought that he was transcending.


14 Ronald Hunt in conversation with the author.

15 El Lissitzky referred to his Proun experiments as 'changing trains between painting and architecture', by which he meant that they were to be considered as phenomena that were neither painting nor architecture, but something in between, combining attributes of both.

16 Troels Andersen, Ibid, p. 32.


18 Ibid, p. 143.

19 The most contemporary correspondence here is to Buckminster Fuller's messianic conception of "The World Game". In it he projects a solution to man's ideological problems through a naive reliance on the ultimate embodiment of an absolute objectivity, a computer; the computer will be programmed with a system created to equitably administrate the world's good according to existing and real needs.

20 Troels Andersen, Ibid, p. 36.

**SUPREMATISM: IDEOLOGY, DREAM OR MILLENIARIAN MOVEMENT**


6 In occult terminology, the designation, Supreme or Superior World, refers to the world of Idea or mind. Gaynor, *Dictionary of Mysticism*, p. 176.

7 Ernst Fischer. *Art Against Ideology*, p. 49.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. BOOKS


II. PERIODICALS and ARTICLES


### III. MUSEUM AND EXHIBITION CATALOGUES


APPENDIX A

THE INSTITUTE OF ARTISTIC CULTURE (INCHUK)
Report of the Institute's activities.

The Institute of artistic culture was founded in May, 1920 at the Figurative Arts Section of the People's Commissariat for Education (IZO). Kandinsky took an active part in its organization, but very soon radical differences grew up between him and some of the members of the Institute. Kandinsky's psychological ideas came into sharp conflict with the point of view of those who defended the autonomous material "object" as the basis of creation. Kandinsky left and Rodcenke, Stepanova, Babicev and Brjusev came into the new administration.

The work was developed collectively and included an objective analysis on the basis of the plan and programme elaborated by Babicev, along two lines:

1. Theoretical: analysis of the work of art, taking into consideration the essential problems of art (colour, workmanship, material, construction, etc.). The enquiry was carried out on the works of art themselves, often in galleries.

2. Practical: group work, free or according to prearranged tasks: for example, works on the theme Composition and Construction were presented by all the members. In the spring of 1921 the ideology of the Institute, in the first phase of its activity, was completely crystallized and defined, and can be summed up in the following word: "Object". A later reflection of this stage in the development of the ideology was the review Vesca, organized by Lisiskij, a member of the Institute at Berlin, at the beginning of 1922.

But at the moment of the crystallization of this ideology a reaction was developing within the Institute, directed "against the object", "against pure art". From this the 'constructivist' group was born. In this same period the group devoted to objective analysis also produced a group of architects, designers, a musical group (which then developed autonomously) and a sociological group.

The process of revision announced by Inchuk at the beginning of the summer of 1921 led to a pause in the work for the whole of the summer, and when the members of the Institute met again in the autumn a decisive change was clearly indicated, which not only necessitated a new ideological policy but also new methods, new channels into which the work would be directed. Constructivism represented a transitional step towards the idea of a 'productivist' art. The winter of 1921-22, a memorable period in the life of Inchuk, was filled with really intense and fervently self-critical internal activity, and devoted to the elaboration of the ideology of productivist art and of a Marxist aesthetic.

Thus, when the Institute was amalgamated with the Academy of Fine Arts on the 1st January 1922, it was a compact group of
exponents of the art of the Left, all completely committed to the productivist programme. Before work started in the autumn of 1921 a radical reorganization had taken place (organization, administration, methods of work, composition of personnel). Instead of division into work groups in which the material (easel-painting) was developed collectively, the system of oral statements, communally prepared, was introduced. The method was changed because the material had changed. The artists had left the narrow orbit of "pure art", renouncing easel-painting as an end in itself. A true account of this was given in a large collection of articles expressing the credos of all the members of the Institute, which ought to have been published but was not, for lack of funds. Its title was to have been From Figurative art to the Construction. The organization of the groups among the members takes on a different significance. They form two sections: (1) pedagogical; (2) sociological.

Once the administration was reorganized Brik came in as President, Babicev and Ladovskij as members of the directing committee, and Tarabukin as Secretary. Artists who had remained members but were still attached to easel-painting and in disagreement with the productivist programme, left the Institute. In this way the new ideology led to a sort of natural selection; Korolev, Kljun, Drevin, Udaltsova, withdrew finally. New members, on the other hand, were typical productivists and Marxists (Arvatov, Kusner and others).

The work completed within the Institute from the time of its amalgamation with the Academy can be broken down as follows:

1. **Practical work**: (the spreading of the Institute's ideas and measures taken to put them into effect).

2. **Scientific-theoretical work**: which in this second phase of the Institute's activity was concentrated on the elaboration of Marxist method in the field of the study of art.

The practical work was distributed outside the confines of the Institute, entering increasingly into the activities of other institutions, organizations or associations, (whereas the theoretical work was concentrated within the Institute and was directed towards aims of an essentially scientific and theoretical nature).

1. First of all it is necessary to emphasize the very close fundamental ties that exist between Inchuk and Vchutemas. The great majority of the members of Inchuk are teachers from Vchutemas. Their practical work in the 'studies' is always, and naturally, developed in close connection with the ideological views of Inchuk. The decisive direction, the friendship and spirit of collaboration which distinguish the Vchutemas teachers, undoubtedly spring from this. In addition, on a formal level, in preparing the programmes for the 'studies', the Institute necessarily takes part in the work of the Vchutemas. Even the standards used in the choice of materials, followed in the 'studies'
was developed by the Institute at the time when it was still concentrating its own attention on the fundamental problems of easel-painting. In short, the organization and activity of the pedagogic Section of the Institute is the fruit of this link: it originated in a natural necessity.

2. Besides this it is necessary to indicate in general all the practical work of the members of Inchuk, who worked as scene-painters (Popova, Vesnin, Altman, Stepanova, and others), lecturers or literary collaborators (Arvatov, Brik, Kusner, Tatubkin, and others) etc. Among these practical undertakings must be mentioned a series of exhibitions of the "Obmuchu" in the ex-hotel Drezden, the second "Obmuchu" exhibition; an exhibition of 'constructions': K. Medunetskij, V. Stenberg, G. Stenberg; the "5x5=25" exhibition (Vesnin, Popova, Rodcenko, Stepanova, Ekster).

3. Once the productivist programme was agreed on, the Institute naturally decided to make contact with a whole lot of other organizations which set themselves the task of developing the problems of production and its scientific factors:

(a) thus Arvatov, as the official representative of the Institute, worked on the production committee at the cultural sections of the national syndicated organizations and on that of Moscow province.

(b) Brik worked with the central tecnico-scientific Group of the national syndicated organization.

(c) Kusner worked on the Committee for activities concerning the scientific organization of production within the VSNCH (Higher Council of the National Economy).

4. The Institute took an active part in the reorganization of the Proletkult on new bases of production, through its members Arvatov, Brik and Kusner. Several members of the Institute went to take part in the renovated Proletkult (Tarabukin, Kusner, as a lecturer; and, in Petrograd, Tatlin).

5. Outside Moscow, the Institute extended its influence and made new contacts in the following localities:

(a) in Petrograd the reorganization of the Academy was accomplished under the direct influence of, and with the participation of, Arvatov and Tatlin, who were acting as representatives of the Institute. Within the Academy, a technical-constructivist faculty was organized, and Tatlin, a corresponding member of the Institute was put at its head.

(b) Arvatov and Tatlin organized a productivist laboratory in the "Novyj Lesner" factory.

(c) Tatlin did a great deal for the union of all the painters of the Left in Petrograd. With the painter Mansurev, he talked about this activity at the Institute on December 1st, 1921. Following this talk the Petrograd group of Inchuk was organized, under the direction of Tatlin. The question of organizing an official branch of the Institute in Petrograd was adjourned because the Institute did not have the necessary funds at its disposal.

(d) The Inchuk group at Vitebsk, directed by Malevich who,
in December, 1921, together with the members of "Unovis" had also given a similar talk at the Institute, found itself in the same situation.

6. Inchuk is also gradually establishing contacts abroad:
(a) thus the artistic section of German Communist Youth has entered into official contact with Inchuk through its member the German art-critic Kemeny, who arrived on a visit to Moscow, where he gave a series of lectures at the Institute.
(b) contacts with Holland have been established through the painters Petrus and Alma.
(c) connections with Berlin exist through the member of the Institute Lisitskij, who is publishing the review Vesc which reflects the ideology - now considered out of date by the Institute as it is now organized - of so-called vescism.
(d) also through Lisitskij, Inchuk is in touch with the Parisian review L'Esprit nouveau.
(e) in Tokyo (Japan), Bubnova is a corresponding member of the Institute.
(f) through Brik, who went to Berlin, a whole series of contacts has been established with artistic organizations of the Left (the productivist associations) of German students and technical associations with reviews and publishing houses.
(g) Contacts have been made with Hungary through a Hungarian painter who publishes the review Egyseg.
(h) The 'constructivist' group is establishing relations with Sweden.

Theoretical work

Inchuk's theoretical work is carried out in a series of reports, with related discussions and articles. The reports can be divided into three groups:
(a) theoretical; (b) organizational; (c) informative.

To the first category - of a general theoretical nature - belong the reports of 1) Lisitskij: Prouny (23rd September 1921). 2) Ilin: The Policy of RSFSR in the artistic field (17th November, 1921). 3) Kemeny (in German): Most Recent tendencies in modern German and Russian Art (8th December, 1921); 4) Malevich: The Principal Task. 5) Stepanova: constructivism (22nd December, 1921); 6) Toporkov: The dialectical and analytical method in art (22nd February, 1922); 7) Borisov: Analysis of the concept of the object in art (23rd March) and The Rythm of Space. 8) Krinskij: The course of architecture.

Among the reports of a productivist and sociological nature can be enumerated the following:
1) Tarabukin: The last picture has now been painted (20th August, 1921).
2) Brik: Artistic and political tasks of Inchuk (12th October, 1921).
3) Brik: The programme and tactics of Inchuk (22nd December, 1921).
4) Brik: What should the painter do in the meantime? (13th April).
Finally the reports of the third category—reports and accounts of the practical work completed:

1) A report by Popova on her scenery for the *Cocu magnifique* (27th April).
2) Vesin: on the scenery for the *Phaedro* (4th March).
3) Altman: on his scenery for *Uriel Acosta* (11th May).
4) Lavinskij: *Neo-engineerism*. On the orders of the administration the following articles were written by:

From the reports and activities mentioned above it can be seen that both the theoretical and the practical work of the Institute have developed in two basic directions. One can be defined as critical, and is essentially demonstrated in the idea by which easel-painting, as an end in itself, was made the target of the most varied criticism, with the consequent abandonment of working in the sphere of pure forms at the easel and with the introduction of easel-painting into the field of laboratory work. The other strove for the elaboration of the ideology of productive art. A convergence of these two tendencies took place on the 24th November, undoubtedly a day of great historical importance in the creative activity of the Institute. On that day Brik gave a report in which he proposed to the painters who had given up ease-painting that they should devote themselves to a real, practical work in the field of production. This new programme was accepted as an ideal by Inchuk. Twenty-five exponents of the avant garde art of the Left, under the impetus of the revolutionary art of our time, have renounced the "pure" forms of art and have recognized that easel-painting has been superseded and that their own activity as painters, and only painters, was a senseless activity. The new type of artist has thus raised a new banner of his own: productivism. Now that Inchuk's ideology has not only permeated every member of the Institute but is bearing fruit in the periferal areas of the artistic consciousness of our society, the time has come to define in precise concepts, to systematize, to give form to all the material developed by the Institute in the memorable winter of 1921-22. The Institute is now entering its third phase, that of a scientific-technical elaboration of all the questions connected with the idea of productivist art. It is symptomatic that the Institute should now count among its members a number of theoreticians, whereas previously it was composed exclusively of practical artists. From all that has been said it must be inferred that the Institute is not an
artificially created organization, but something absolutely real and unique and in a state of evolution.

The Information Department of Inchuk

(Russkoe iskusstvo, no. 1, 1923)
APPENDIX B

A SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

I will here attempt to describe the sensation and possible dynamics of a specific Suprematist work. It is important to remember that this is only one description and it is largely a formal one bearing on the information I have presented throughout the thesis but I do believe that there are as many possible interpretations of its 'sensation' as there are minds to receive it. This is the sense in which it transcends ideology.

It is necessary to grasp the difference between an image and a symbol because Suprematism does not operate as a symbol but as an image. Symbols are denotative, they stand for only one thing (this is purposefully oversimplified). But Suprematist images are seldom symbolic, they tend to be connotative. That is, they are sensitive to the emotional and intellectual potential of their immediate context and this of course includes the observer as an indispensible element in their process (see illustration, Suprematist Painting, after 1920). The sensation as 'pure feeling' of this picture is dynamic in physical character; the diagonals oppose the vertical forces of the centre-post of the cross, the upper crossing bar suspends the upper area of the canvas. The dynamics in Suprematism seem invariably cinematic when they are effective. It is as if, in the void of the white background images were to suddenly present themselves, the eye becomes a camera scanning vast uninterrupted tracts of space with sudden and momentary interruptions of isolated and combined geometric elements. They disperse again
Fig. 85. Suprematist Painting (After 1920).
and reform in other unique and apparently arbitrary combinations elsewhere in the inner space of the mind. The activity of painting has become a kind of specialized intellection; colour, surface, texture and form, all syntehsize to create an experience of space outside of any consideration of time other than their own duration in the observer's eye. The moment of utmost importance, is cathartic and transitory. It is as if they were only meant to be viewed momentarily; possibly this is the reason that they were initially hung high, up near the vast blankness of the ceiling. They were, by their adjacency, to have connoted a vastness collected from the expansive and blank ceiling, the oceanic and limitless world of potential energy, the garden in its idyllic and profound absence of repression.

The experience is what is essential to any understanding of this composition. The reality of this experience of specialized cognition as a process not as a fixed state was the intended perceptual gestalt. Outside of such an experience, related to its further landscape, it would have appeared as it was taken to be, a conventional extension of the vocabulary of 'art-styles', and hence an ideology, contrary to its own original and intuitive intentions.