

Nicholson to come to England, where they believed he would be safer if and when a second war broke out. In the event he was in London during the Blitz. He left for America in October 1940, taking with him the manuscript of an essay headed 'Art shows the evil of Nazi and Soviet oppressive tendencies', which he was eventually to call 'Liberation from oppression in art and life'. It is quite clear from the essay that in 1939–40 Mondrian, at least, believed that he still had a specific and important job to do in the light of historical events.

Human life is oppressed by internal causes – both physical and moral – as well as by external factors. It is necessary to fight against both. All that can help us to understand the evils of oppression is useful to present and future. Therefore it is essential to demonstrate that plastic art can help to clarify this evil ...

Art is the aesthetic establishment of complete life – unity and equilibrium – free from all oppression. For this reason it can reveal the evil of oppression and show the way to combat it.

Plastic art establishes the true image of reality, for its primary function is to 'show', not to describe. It is up to us to 'see' what it represents. It cannot reveal more than life teaches, but it can evoke in us the conviction of existent truth. The culture of plastic art can enlighten mankind, for it not only reveals human culture, but being free, advances it.

(Mondrian, 'Liberation from oppression in art and life', pp.322–3)

In the following sections I shall consider further the work of Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. In both cases I shall be examining some claims made by the artists and others for the meaning and value of their work, but I shall apply a slightly different emphasis in each case. In the section on Malevich I will consider his career in relation to some specific historical events and developments and will look further at the changing context of arguments for the autonomy of the aesthetic. In the section on Mondrian I shall look further into the relationship between problems of explanation and problems of evaluation as these bear upon abstract art.

Kazimir Malevich

The *Black Square* is the most art-historically notorious of all Malevich's works. It was the painting upon which the artist came to base his own professional self-image. It has also been made a virtual icon of radical artistic modernity. In 1916 Malevich described the *Black Square* as 'the first step of pure creation in art. Before it, there were naive deformities and copies of nature'. That quote is taken from the final version of the essay *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism* which Malevich first published late in 1915 as a pamphlet with a black square on the jacket cover. In 1933, he used the motif of a miniature black square to sign what appears a relatively conventional and certainly thoroughly figurative self-portrait (Plate 192). On his death two years later a version of the black square was placed at the head of the bed on which his corpse was laid out, another was fixed to the front of the vehicle on which his coffin was carried, while his grave in Nemchinovka was marked with a black square on a white ground (Plates 193–195).

What Malevich meant by 'pure creation' was not a *process* of abstraction. That's to say, the *Black Square* as he represented it was not, like Mondrian's *Pier and Ocean*, the end product of a gradual reduction or formalization of some aspect of the natural world. Albeit the evidence of underpainting now visible suggests that Malevich may have worked *towards* his painting from some less 'absolute' starting point, as he actually presented the work it was supposed to be the elementary component of a new 'purely painterly' order, quite independent of naturalistic appearances. 'Each form is free and individual. Each form is a world' (*From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism*).

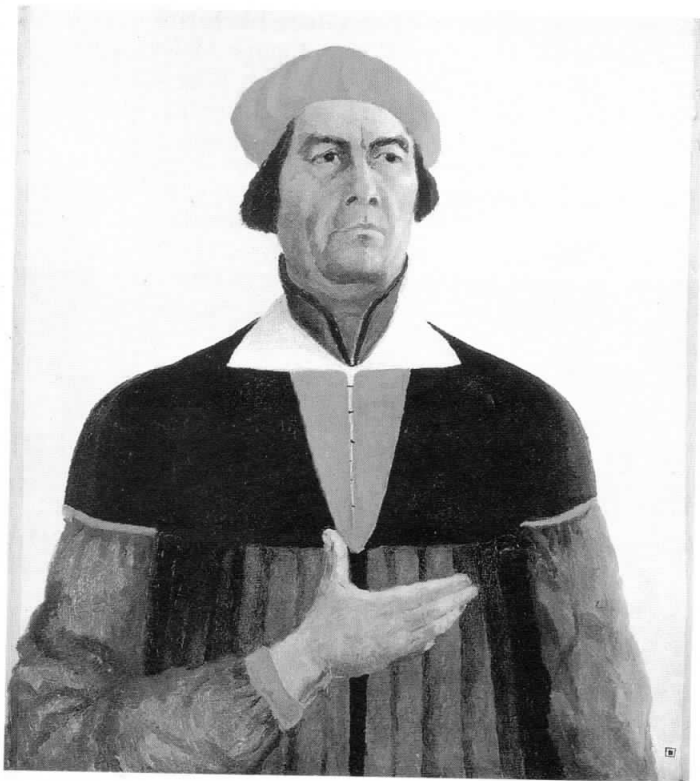


Plate 192 Kazimir Malevich, *Self-portrait*, 1933, oil on canvas, 73 x 66 cm. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

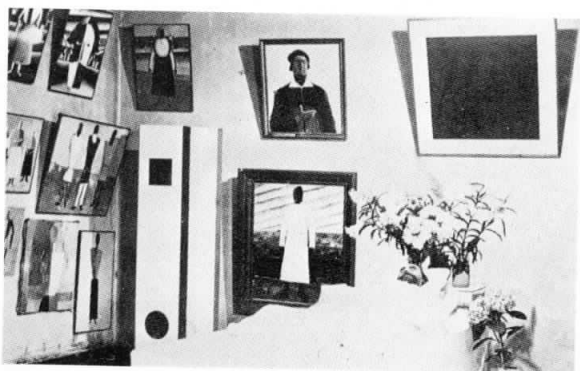


Plate 193 (above left) Photograph of Kazimir Malevich lying in state in his apartment, 1935. Archive of State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Plate 194 (above) Photograph of the arrival of Kazimir Malevich's funeral procession at Moscow Station, Leningrad. Archive of State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.



Plate 195 (left) Photograph of Kazimir Malevich's grave. Archive of State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

From Cubism and Futurism ...

Malevich had shown work in what he himself called a 'Cubo-Futurist' style in the exhibition Tramway V in Petrograd in March 1915 (see for example, Plate 196). Tramway V was subtitled the 'First Futurist Exhibition' and 0.10 the 'Last Futurist Exhibition'. It is of some relevance on the one hand that Futurism was referred to in the titles of both the 1915 exhibitions and on the other that termination of its reign in Russia followed so quickly upon its first announcement.

The original Futurist movement was launched in 1909 with a manifesto published on the front page of *Figaro*, a daily French newspaper of relatively conservative character. The author of the manifesto was the Italian poet and propagandist Filippo Marinetti. The specific and aggressive aim of the Futurist movement was the modernization of Italian culture, but its characteristic rhetoric of modernity for its own sake resonated throughout Europe in the years immediately before the First World War. Two manifestos of Futurist painting appeared early in 1910, the second published in Paris. In 1912 an exhibition of Italian Futurist painting opened in Paris and subsequently travelled to London, Berlin, Brussels, Hamburg, Amsterdam, The Hague, Frankfurt, Breslau, Zürich, Munich and Vienna. The introduction to the catalogue – 'The Exhibitors to the Public' – was published in a Russian journal in the same year. Marinetti himself visited Russia early in 1914. Superficially at least, Futurist painting appeared to transfer the technical concerns of Cubism from the conventional pictorial world of still-lives, figures and landscapes to a more explicitly modern world of urban uprisings and speeding machines (Plates 197 and 198). The Futurists were much taken with the ideas of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who wrote of change as the essence of reality and of consciousness as a state of continual flux. He conceived of a kind of life force or vital impulse seeking freedom in face of the resistance of matter. Such ideas were clearly inviting to those, like the Futurists, who were seeking stylistic forms for 'modern' sensations.

Malevich was among those many European artists for whom the transitional self-image of a 'Futurist' was the means to disavow provincialism, to express impatience with the conservative in culture and to assert a commitment to the idea of a modernized world (see Plates 199–201). In Malevich's case the reign of this particular self-image was relatively short-lived. So far as the art of painting was concerned, the Italian Futurists' interpretation of modernity involved concentration upon those forms of imagery and of 'force' which they deemed characteristic of the modern age and of its typical modes of experience. At worst this resulted in forms of journalistic enchantment with speed and machinery – or 'automobilism' as their detractors called it. In 1912–13, Malevich painted pictures with

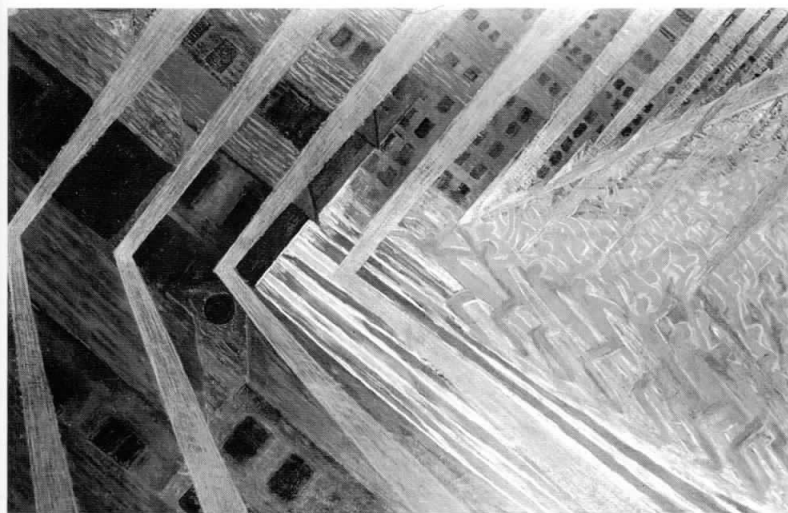


Plate 197 Luigi Russolo, *The Revolt*, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 150 x 230 cm. Collection Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

Plate 198 Giacomo Balla,
Velocita astratta. L'auto e passata
(*Abstract Speed. The Car Has*
Passed), 1913, oil on canvas, 50 x
66 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

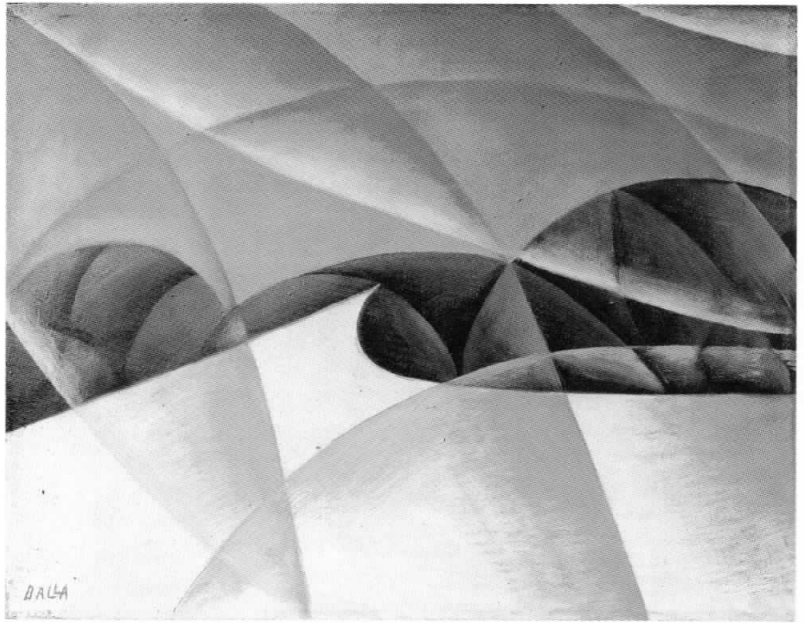


Plate 199 Kazimir
Malevich, *The Woodcutter*,
1912–13, oil on canvas, 94 x
72 cm. Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam.



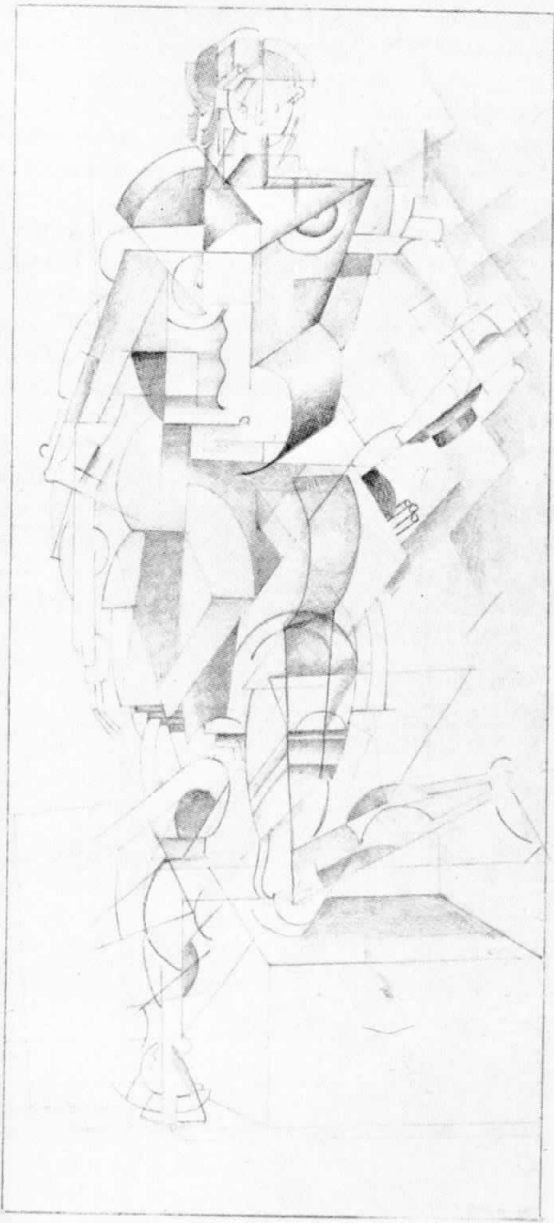


Plate 200 Kazimir Malevich, *Cubo-Futurism. Dynamic Sensation of a Model*, dated 1911 but probably c.1912-13, graphite pencil on cream paper, 62 x 29 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Plate 201 Kazimir Malevich, *Life in the Grand Hotel*, 1913-14, oil on canvas, 108 x 71 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Kuibyshev.

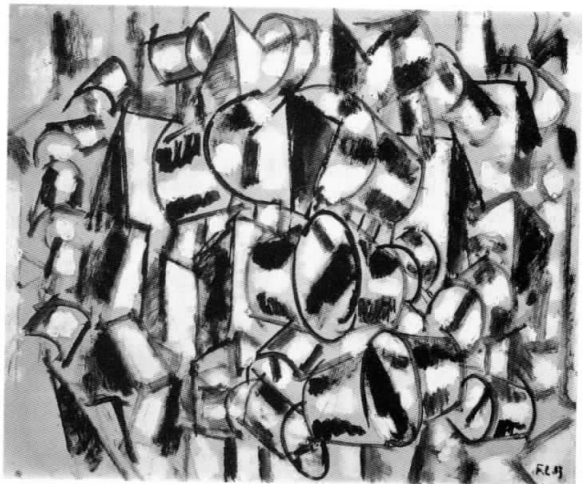


Plate 202 Fernand Léger, *Contrastes de formes (Contrasts of Forms)*, 1913, gouache on paper, 55 x 46 cm. Rosengart Collection, Lucerne. © DACS, London, 1993.

simplified forms and metallic effects which evoked the stylistic world of the Futurists and which were comparable to the abstract, mechanized version of Cubism which Fernand Léger established with his *Contrastes de formes* (see Plate 202). But Malevich peopled this formally modernized world with peasants, and he showed them as engaged in the 'timeless' occupations of carrying water, chopping wood, and harvesting crops (see Plate 199). In fact, in combining modern techniques with references to the abiding virtues of the supposedly 'primitive', he proved himself closer than were the Italians to the mainstream of avant-garde art in the early twentieth century.

In the summer of 1913 Malevich attended the self-styled 'First All-Russian Congress of Futurists'. From this small avant-garde gathering held at the dacha of Mikhail Matiushin there emerged a proposal for a 'Futurist' form of theatre. During that same year Malevich collaborated with Matiushin and Kruchenyk on *Victory over the Sun*, an opera for the St Petersburg Union of Youth which was staged at the close of the year. The style of the project was aggressively modern, in the sense of being determinedly anti-naturalistic. In his designs for the sets and costumes Malevich employed a Cubo-Futurist formal vocabulary consistent with the current manner of his paintings (see Plates 203–204). For the backdrop, he adopted the overall format of a box-shaped perspective framing a square aperture or window (see Plate 205). In the sketch for Act 2, Scene 5, the square is bisected diagonally, signifying the encroachment of darkness and the coming victory over the sun – a 'victory' consistent with the anti-rationalist irony of the opera as a whole (see Plate 206). Though no sketch survives for the final backdrop, we can surmise that it might have shown the square aperture entirely dark within its framing perspective.

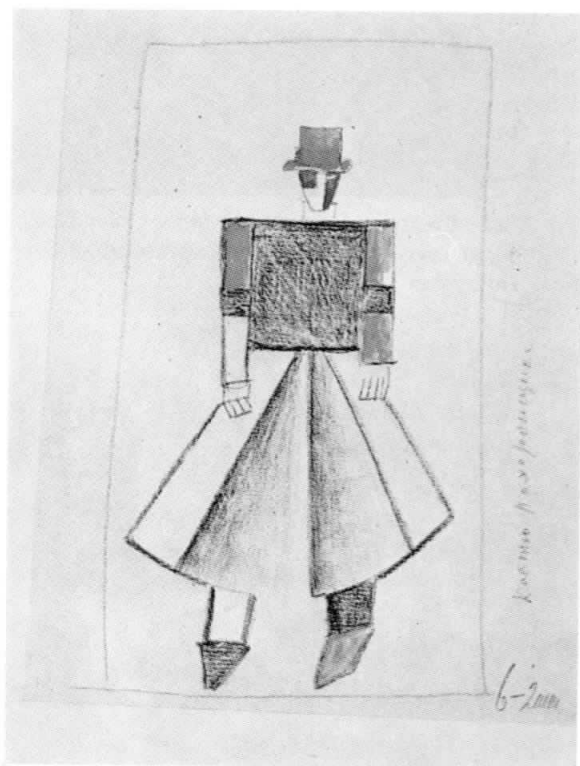


Plate 203 Kazimir Malevich, *Pallbearer*, design for *Victory over the Sun* (libretto by A. Kruchenykh; music by M. Matiushin), 1913, pencil and watercolour on paper, 27 x 21 cm. State Museum of Theatrical and Musical Arts, St Petersburg.



Plate 204 Kazimir Malevich, *Sportsman*, design for *Victory over the Sun*, 1913, watercolour, indian ink and charcoal on paper, 27 x 21 cm. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

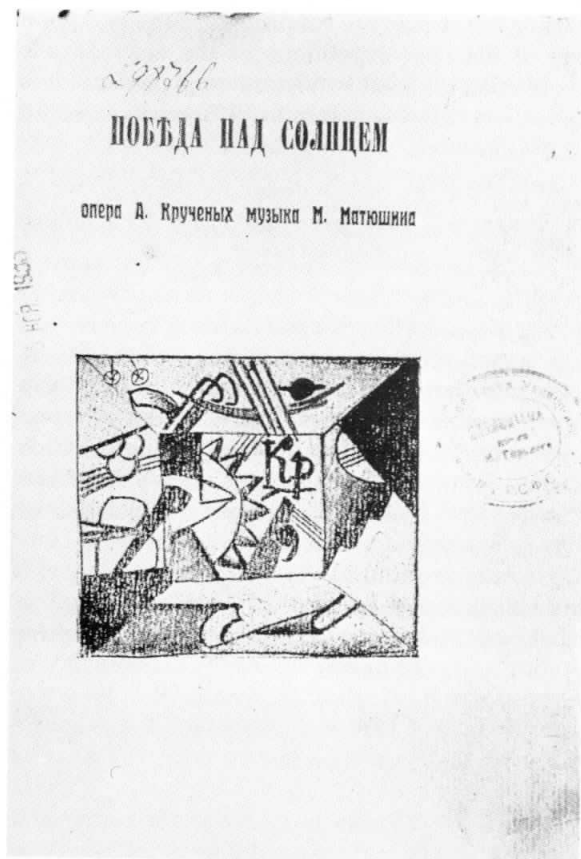


Plate 205 Kazimir Malevich, stage design for Act 1, Scene 4, of *Victory over the Sun*, reproduced on cover of libretto. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

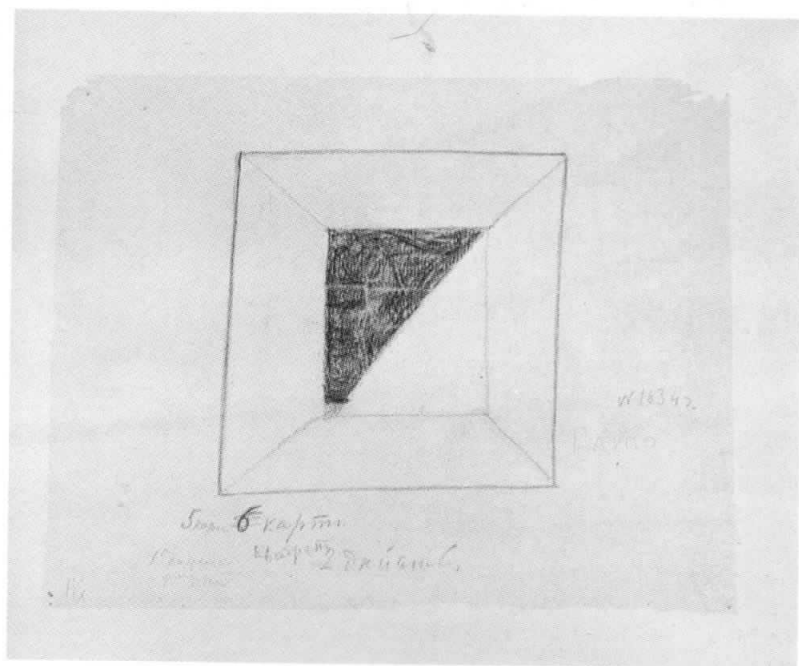


Plate 206 Kazimir Malevich, stage design for Act 2, Scene 5, of *Victory over the Sun*, pencil on paper, 21 x 27 cm. State Museum of Theatrical and Musical Arts, St Petersburg.

The nature and significance of this missing last design are confirmed by an inscription written by the artist on the back of one of his later repetitions of the *Black Square*: 'Suprematism 1913 the initial element first manifested itself in Victory over the Sun'. It is further confirmed by a letter which Malevich wrote to Matiushin in 1915, when a second staging of the opera was proposed.

I'll be very grateful if you yourself would position my curtain design for the act in which the victory is won ... This drawing [or design] will have great significance for painting; what had been done unconsciously, is now bearing extraordinary fruit.

(Letter of 27 May 1915, published 1976, p.156)

The point to emphasize is that in the spring of 1915 Malevich was writing as if he was himself still surprised by the implications of what he had done, as he puts it, 'unconsciously'. It was only two months earlier that he had shown works in his Cubo-Futurist vein in the Tramway V exhibition. It seems unlikely that he would have represented himself in this way in an avant-garde exhibition if he had already produced a body of abstract work about which he felt confident. The evidence therefore suggests either that the 'Suprematist' works exhibited in December 1915 had in fact all been completed since that spring, or alternatively that if the *Black Square* and possibly others had been completed earlier, Malevich himself was not yet sure enough of what he had done to put it forward for exhibition in Tramway V – not yet sure, perhaps, that it was indeed 'painting' or 'art' at all. What is clear, however, is that once he had accepted the implications of the *Black Square* – which may have been taken him a year or more – his view of his practice as an artist was decisively changed. 'I have transformed myself in the zero of form', he wrote on a broadsheet distributed at the 0.10 exhibition. The text of the broadsheet was subsequently incorporated as the opening page of Malevich's pamphlet *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism*.

A photo of the installation of 0.10 shows the *Black Square* hung across the corner of a room in the position traditionally associated with religious icons in domestic interiors (see Plate 207). The photo suggests that Malevich exhibited more than one black square. Certainly, he painted at least three versions of the composition. One of these can be dated with certainty to the late 1920s, though he seems to have dated all versions to the moment when he believed the idea had first formed.

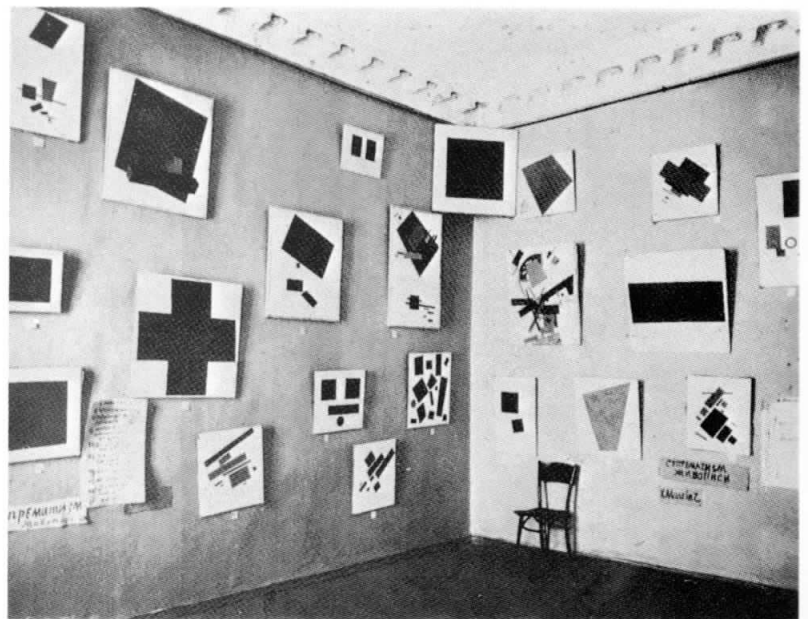


Plate 207 Photo of installation of 0.10 exhibition, St Petersburg, 1915. Archive, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

... to Suprematism

To sum up. It seems clear firstly that the idea for the *Black Square* derived at least in substantial part from the stage design of late 1913, with its connotations both of victory and of Futuristic anti-naturalism and anti-rationalism, and secondly that it was not until some time later, probably between the opening of the 'First Futurist exhibition' in March 1915 and the letter of two months later, that what had started as a kind of theatrical conclusion became positively transformed in Malevich's own mind into the initiating work of a would-be global aesthetic to which he was to give the name of Suprematism. Under the circumstances in which he was working at the time – not only the relatively limited circumstances of the Russian avant-garde with its connections out to Paris, to Munich and elsewhere, but also the wider circumstances of impending revolutionary change – the black square must at a certain point have appeared as the potentially powerful symbol both of a cultural *tabula rasa* and of a point of absolute origin from which a new aesthetic culture could be derived. It would not be the first nor the last time in the history of art that what was done 'unconsciously' in response to one set of concerns and problems came to be seen and theorized in relation to a different and much larger problem field.

The first version of *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism. The New Realism in Painting*, was complete for the 0.10 exhibition (and was issued under the title *From Cubism to Suprematism*). In his text Malevich represents Suprematism as the latest point of a progressive development commencing with the 'art of the savage'. He had come to believe

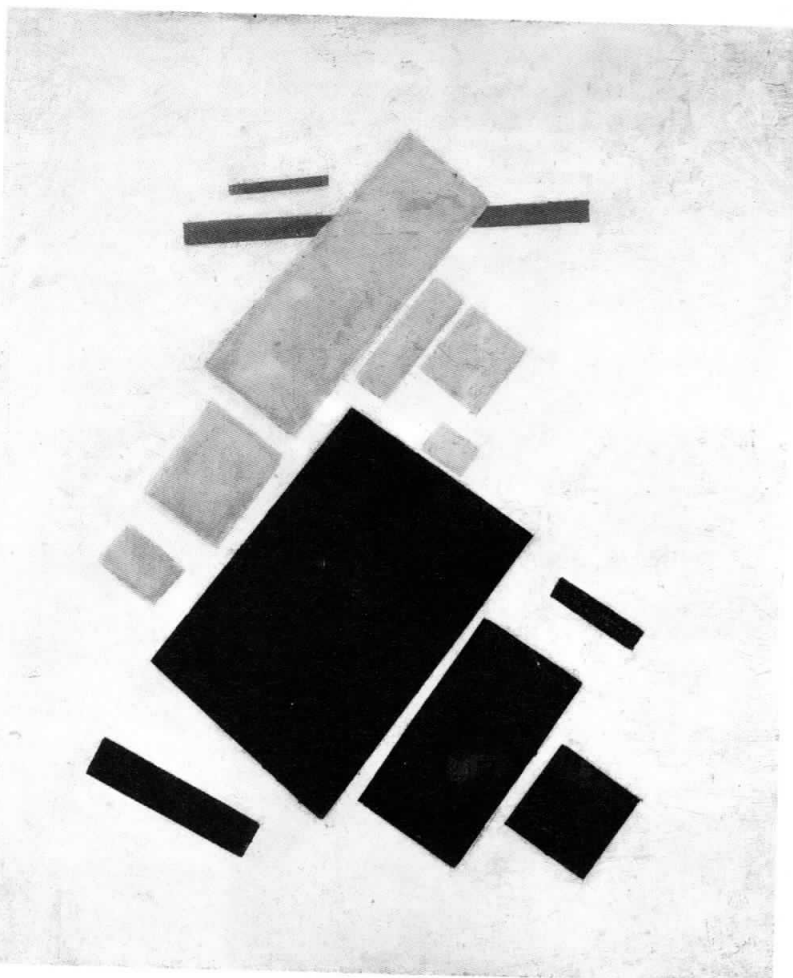


Plate 208 Kazimir Malevich,
*Suprematist Composition:
Airplane Flying*, 1915 (dated
1914), oil on canvas, 58 x 48 cm.
Collection, The Museum of
Modern Art, New York.
Purchase.

that the savage's attempt to produce a self-image was the birth of the aspiration to naturalism. In some early Suprematist works like *Airplane Flying* of 1915 (Plate 208) he had appeared still to toy with a Futurist iconography. On the way to the Suprematist present, however, Futurism was decisively abandoned on the grounds that 'In pursuing the form of aeroplanes or automobiles, we shall always be anticipating new cast-off forms of technical life', and that 'In pursuing the form of things, we cannot discover painting as an end in itself, the way to direct creation'. Futurism was thus seen to fail on two counts: the nature of its subject-matter ensured that it would date rapidly; and its autonomy as art was compromised by its adherence to forms of illustration. Suprematism was advanced as the positive counter to these negatives.

In a second letter to Matiushin written in May 1915 Malevich mentioned a proposed journal, which connects to the title given the 'Zero-Ten' exhibition of that December: 'In view of the fact that we are preparing to reduce everything to nothing, we have decided to call the journal *Zero*. Later on we too will go beyond zero' (letter of 29 May, p.157). If the *Black Square* was a 'first step', then what would have to follow was not a further reduction in the figurative residues of pictorial form but rather the gradual addition of other non-objective (abstract) elements to constitute an extending series. In ensuing works Malevich proposed further basic elements (see Plate 209). In other paintings datable to the years 1915–16 he combined several different elements into more complex compositions (Plates 210 and 211). Altogether Malevich showed between 38 and 40 abstract works in the 'Zero-Ten' exhibition. It seems likely that these were all produced within a relatively short period in the second half of 1915, together with the long theoretical essay which announced Suprematism as 'The New Realism in Painting'.

Malevich's avant-garde project which had begun in Futurist anti-naturalism and irrationalism was thus continued as an ambitious campaign for the autonomy of artistic creation and of artistic form. In fact he seems to have believed that the potential universality

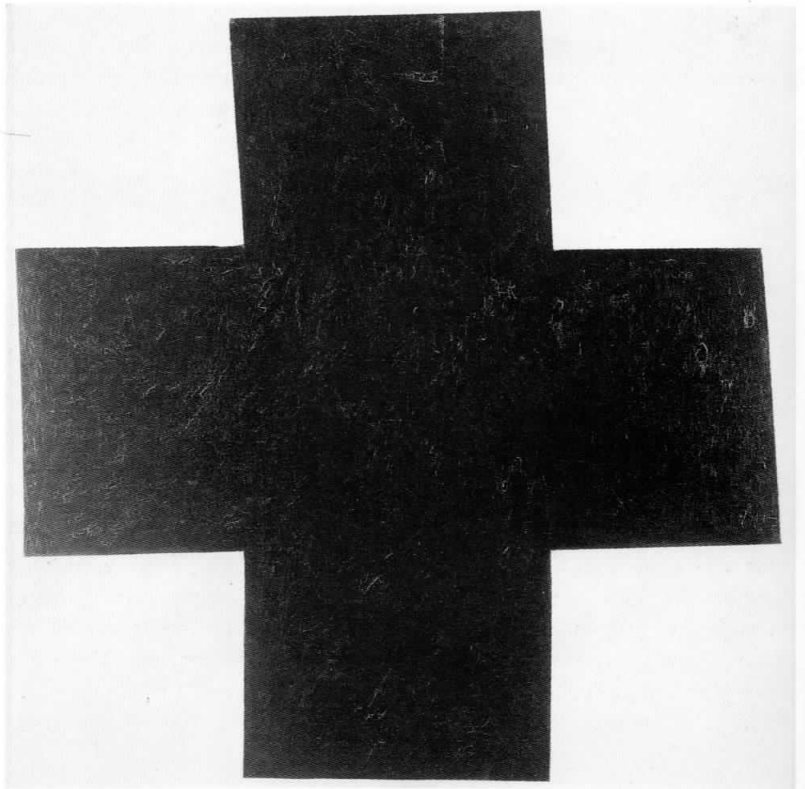


Plate 209 Kazimir Malevich,
Black Cross, c.1915, oil on
canvas, 80 x 80 cm. Musée
National d'Art Moderne, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.
Donation of Scaler Foundation.

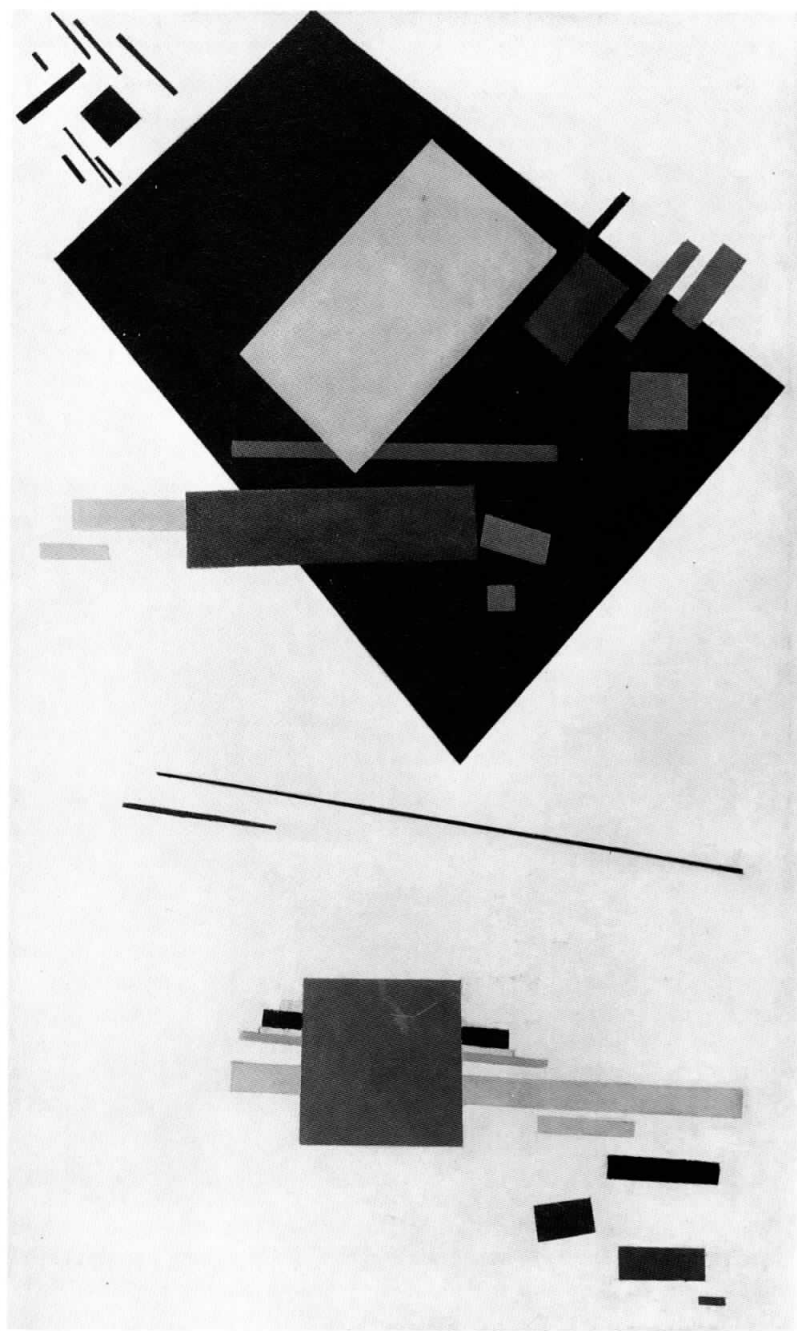


Plate 210 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematism*, 1915, oil on canvas, 102 x 62 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

and the absolute formal autonomy of Suprematist art qualified it not simply as the most up-to-date of avant-garde styles, but rather as the potential aesthetic base for an entire new world order. He was thus one of the earliest and most potent generators of that utopian dream which came to possess the wider European Modern Movement of the 1920s: the idea that the intractable problems of modern social existence could be solved if only planning were conducted on an aesthetic basis, with the abstract artist authorized as the ideal planner.

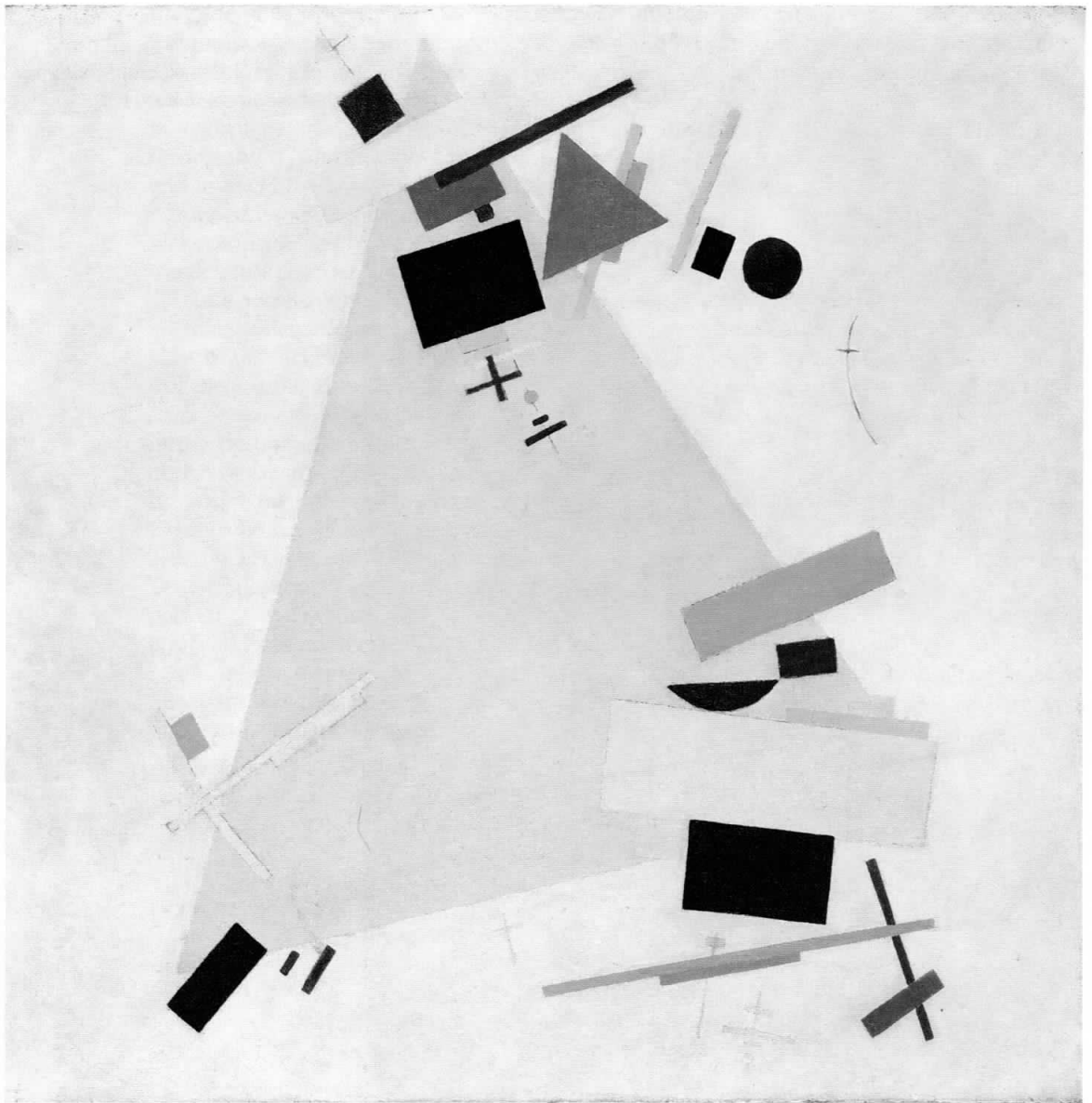


Plate 211 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition*, c.1916, oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

The new realism

Like many of the other members of the artistic avant-garde, when the Revolution came in 1917 Malevich was quick to express an unqualified confidence in the relevance of his own work. The new forms of art, he assumed, would provide an appropriate basis for the building of a new culture. How could they not?

The powerful storm of revolution has born off the garrett, and we, like clouds in the firmament, have sailed to our freedom. The ensign of anarchy is the ensign of our 'ego', and our spirit like a free wind, will make our creative work flutter in the broad spaces of the soul.

(Malevich, 'To the new limit', p.55)

In 1919, in a contribution to a conference on museums, Malevich celebrated the position of the modern Russian artist at the centre of the historical stage.

The centre of political life has moved to Russia.

Here has formed the breast against which the entire power of the old-established states smashes itself.

Hence goes forth and shines in all corners of the earth the new comprehension of the essence of things, and hither to the centre representatives of old culture crawl out of their cracks and come with their worn out old teeth to gnaw themselves a piece from the hem of the new coat.

A similar centre must be formed for art and creativity.

Here is the rotating creative axis and race, and it is here that a new contemporary culture must arise, with no room for alms from the old one.

Hitherto to the new pole of life and excitement all innovators must surely stream in order to take part in creation on a world scale.

(‘On the museum’, p.68)

Among the few surviving works datable to this period are a series of ‘white on white’ paintings, actually composed of cool bluish-white motifs on warm creamy-white grounds, the former tending to blur at the edges and to dissolve into the latter. The effect is to compress the potential figurative space of Malevich’s Suprematism into a still narrower range than the works of 1915–16 (see Plate 212).

Works from this series were shown in the Tenth National Exhibition in Moscow in 1919, held under the title ‘Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism’. In the same exhibition Alexander Rodchenko exhibited paintings in ‘black on black’, as forms of materialist riposte to what the Constructivists saw as Malevich’s aestheticism and idealism (see Plate 213). As I have already suggested, during the early 1920s there was an increasing tendency for the avant-garde factions in Russia to polarize along the lines of that split between idealists and materialists which was symbolized by this juxtaposition of paintings (Plate 212 and 213). It should be said that to represent the polarization in such terms is to impose the tidy categories of hindsight. At the time, differences between individual positions and commitments emerged largely as barely theorized disagreements over the practical reorganization of educational and curatorial institutions and over the reallocation of their scarce resources in the wake of the Revolution. For the most part the various members of the artistic avant-garde were energetic in their involvement with the task of reorganization, and in the early years of the Revolution their contributions received some overall support and encouragement. The possibility of practical commitment to this task helps to explain both the note of *utopian fervour* which accompanies much of the artistic theory of the time, and the somewhat *ad hoc* and improvisatory character of much of the artists’ actual production.

To say that the disagreements emerged in practical contexts is not, of course, to imply that the issues involved were not theoretically substantial. The apparent coherence of his Suprematism made Malevich both a figurehead and a target in the debates involved. When in 1921 he attempted to establish a foothold in the recently established INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) in Moscow, the attempt failed. Opposition came from the Leftist majority of artists at INKhUK, who had already rejected a programme drawn up by Kandinsky and who were concerned to re-establish the practice of art on the model of technical laboratory work or as a form of utilitarian production. In the rhetoric of the Constructivists, ‘art’ and ‘style’ were associated with (bourgeois) ‘ideology’, and ‘constructivism’ and ‘line’ with ‘intellectual production’ and thus with labour. Notes for a talk to be given at INKhUK in 1921 record Rodchenko’s view that ‘Line has bid a red farewell to painting’. And it is clear from the same notes that ‘painting’ means Malevich and the *Black Square*: ‘In putting line to the forefront – line as an element by whose exclusive means we can construct and create – we thereby reject all aesthetics of colour, facture and style; because everything that obstructs construction is style (e.g. Malevich’s square)’

(*Alexander Rodchenko*, p. 128). In turn, when Malevich's essay 'God is not cast down' was published in 1922 it was taken as a direct attack upon the materialist conception of art – with some justice, considering its elevation of 'thought' to the 'throne of government'.

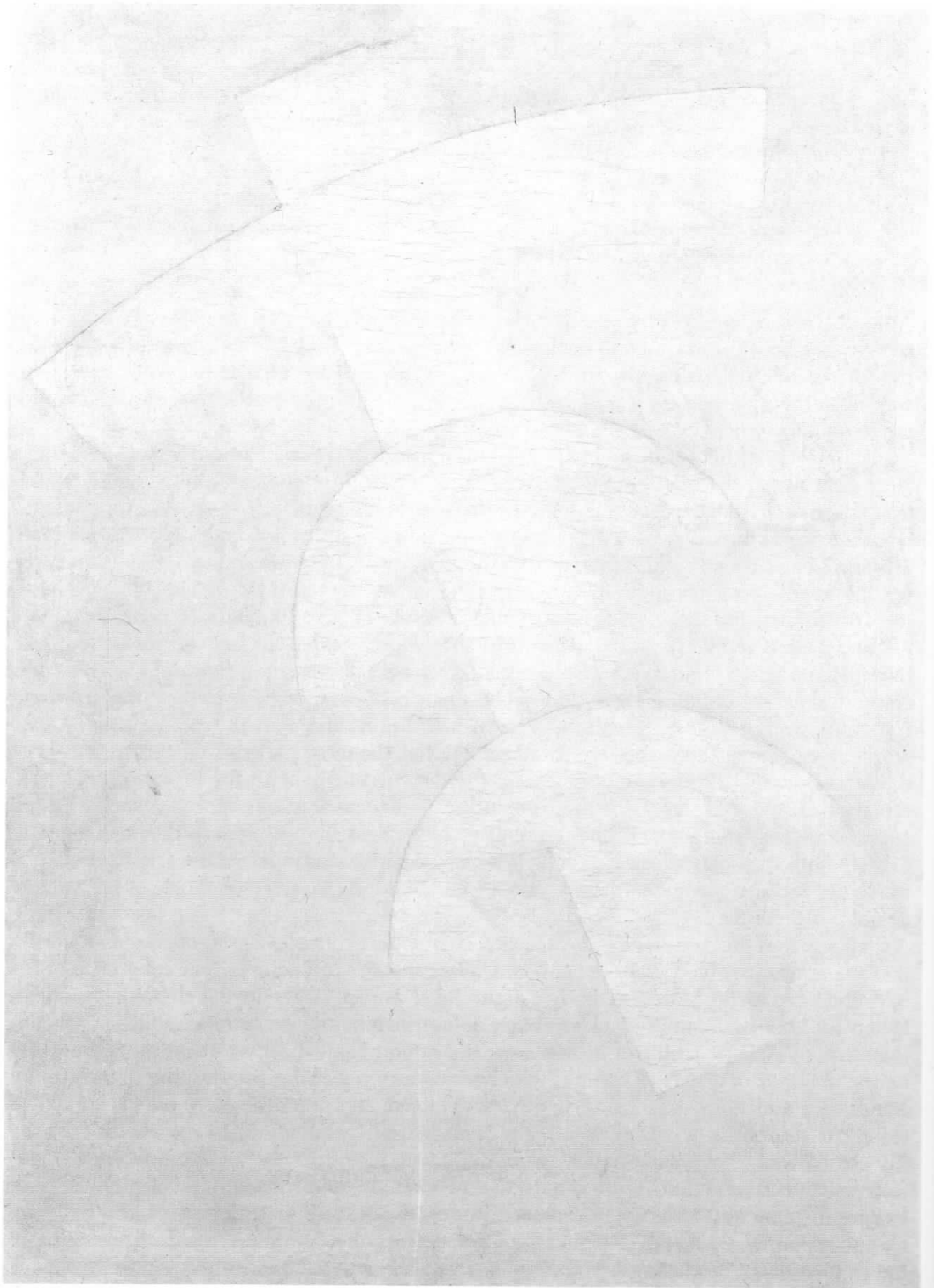


Plate 212 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting (White on White)*, 1917–18, oil on canvas, 97 x 70 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

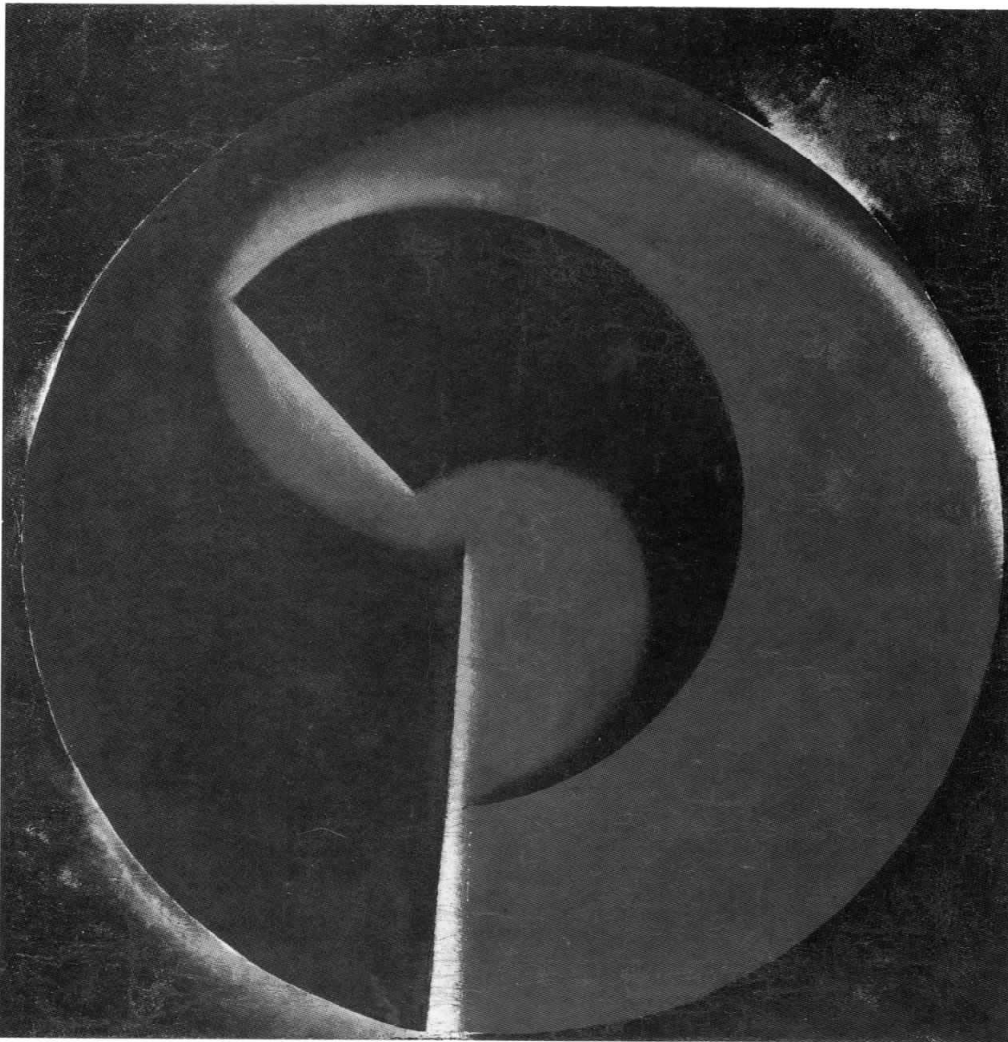
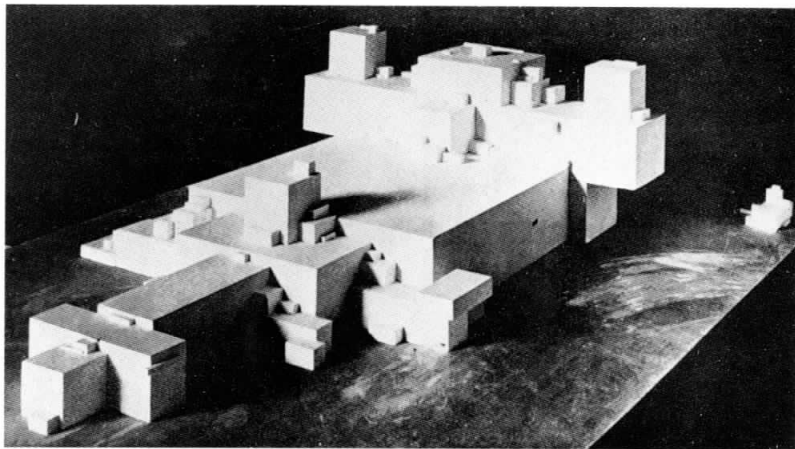


Plate 213 Alexander Rodchenko, *Non-objective Painting: Black on Black*, 1918, oil on canvas, 82 x 79 cm. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist, through Jay Leyda.

The limits of autonomy

Between the Revolution and 1926 Malevich occupied a number of important posts in the reorganized art-educational system of the Soviet Union. At the art school of Vitebsk in 1920 he put into practice a teaching regime based on the idea of Suprematism as a complete and universal system, to be realized in collective work. The plan went under the name of UNOVIS (Affirmation of the New Art). Predictably UNOVIS attracted both loyal devotees and determined opposition. Between 1923 and 1926 Malevich was again working in Petrograd, involved in the transformation of the Museum for Artistic Culture into a scholarly institute for research into the culture of modern art. If Suprematism was the practical model of an ideally autonomous painterly culture, then the aim of Malevich's pedagogical work was to establish a complementary critical and art-historical theory. This aim was most clearly formulated in the regime of teaching and research which he was able to implement at GINKHUK in Petrograd between 1924 and 1926. During the period between the Revolution and the mid-twenties he and his followers were also engaged in designs

Plate 214 Kazimir Malevich,
Beta Architekton, 1926, plaster,
 27 x 60 x 99 cm. State Russian
 Museum, St Petersburg.



for ceramics and textiles (see Plates 177 and 178) and on architectural projects which were not so much plans for actual buildings or fragments of cities as three-dimensional versions of complex Suprematist compositions (see Plate 214). These 'architectons' served further to promote the idea of the artist as the ideal planner of civil life.

In Malevich's own mind the painting of the *Black Square* had both closed an epoch and initiated a tendency. Working to understand this tendency and to pursue its implications, he had come to believe that the advanced aesthetic aspect of each epoch – 'the additional element' – was capable of isolation through painstaking formal analysis. In June 1926 he completed his 'Introduction to the theory of the "additional element" in painting', so far the most ambitious exposition of his aesthetic ideas. The 'additional element' he aimed to identify was nothing less than the aesthetic distillation of the age, for which the artist is medium in so far as he or she is absorbed in and by an autonomous 'painterly culture', and thus immune to the distractions of 'extraneous elements' (see Plates 188 and 215).

Publication of the text of Malevich's 'Introduction' proceeded no further than proof stage, however. Early in 1926 he had been dismissed from his post as director of GINKhUK, which he had held since the previous year. In June a representative exhibition of work drew the public criticism that the Institute had been maintained as 'A cloister at the expense of the state' (review published in *Leningradskaya Pravda*, 10 June 1926; in Malevich, p.82). In December 1926 the Petrograd INKhUK was dismantled by merging its staff and their departments with the State Institute for the History of Art. Malevich's work proved incomprehensible to the art historians, who in 1929 finally achieved the expulsion from the State Institute of the artist and his entire department.

It is clear that Malevich's position on the autonomy of art had come to attract powerful opposition by the mid-1920s. It is also clear that the earlier polarization in the world of modern Russian art had been superseded by another. On the occasion of the 1926 exhibition the criticism of Malevich's activities came not from the survivors of the Constructivist avant-garde, but from the direction of the Society of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, the AKhRR. Founded in 1922, the AKhRR had by the mid-twenties become the most powerful association of artists in the country, with strong support from the Communist Party. Its members were committed to the 'truthful' depiction of the ordinary life of the peasantry, the proletariat and the Red Army and to the rejuvenation of the 'realistic' traditions of the nineteenth century.

In 1927 Malevich was invited to exhibit a substantial selection of works in Berlin at the Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) (see Plate 216). The extensive campaign of self-representation with which he responded to this invitation suggests that he intended to secure at least the possibility of a new career for himself in the West. Though he returned to Russia after a visit to Poland and Germany in the spring

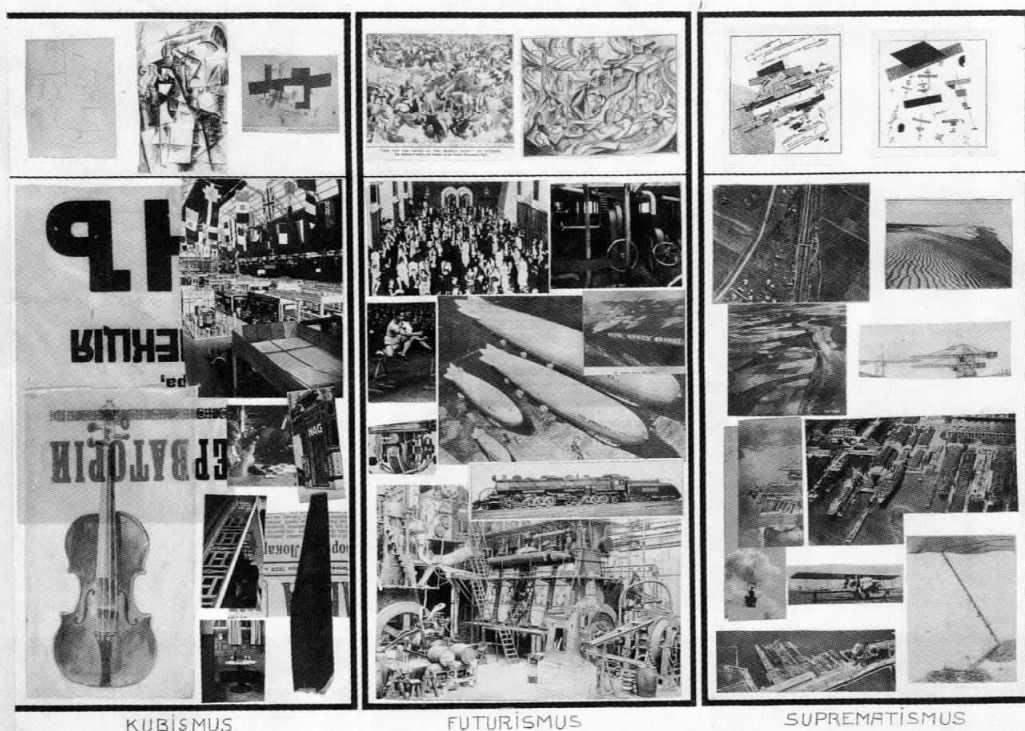


Plate 215 Kazimir Malevich, 'The relationship between the painterly perception and the environment of the artist (in Cubism, Futurism and Suprematism)', collage with pencil on transparent paper, pen and ink, 64 x 83 cm. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

of 1927, he left explicit instructions that none of the material he had taken to Germany should be returned. Until very recently the Malevich knowable at first hand in the West was largely coincident with the image organized for export by the artist himself in 1927. In forming a retrospective selection of his work up to that date, he offered an account of his career which was negotiable in terms of the established groupings and categories of European avant-gardism: Expressionism/Fauvism, Futurism and Cubism, with Suprematism represented as a distinctive contribution to the wider post-Cubist modern movement. The works through which Malevich constructed his artistic self-image fall into four broad categories: brightly coloured gouaches of 1911–12 which connect to the primitivist-expressionist strain of the Russian and western avant-gardes (Plate 217); paintings and drawings datable to the following year, in which peasant and landscape subjects are rendered with a simplified metallic modelling comparable to Léger's (Plate 199); Cubo-Futurist paintings of 1913–14, which show Malevich as a major figure in the pan-European development of Cubism (Plate 196); and the Suprematist paintings and drawings of 1915–27 by which Malevich is best known and which since 1927 have composed the largest and most immediately coherent group of works in the West (albeit the majority of these were hidden from view until they were traced and acquired by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1958; the exceptions being a group of paintings and charts selected by Alfred H. Barr Jr. for his exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1936).



Plate 217 Kazimir Malevich, *On the Boulevard*, 1911, gouache on paper, 72 x 71 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

When he travelled to Berlin Malevich also took with him a considerable body of theoretical materials, either because he feared – with some reason – that opportunities for publication would increasingly be denied him in Russia, or because he was ambitious to promote his ideas in the West, or for a combination of both reasons. Amongst these materials was the still unpublished 'Introduction to the theory of the "additional element" in painting'. Through the agency of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, this essay was finally published in German in 1929. It was issued as a Bauhaus book under the title *The Non-Objective World*. Despite the extent and importance of his theoretical work, it was by this text alone that Malevich was to be represented in the West as a theorist of modern art until 1963, when a selection of essays originally published in Russia was issued in Danish. (An English edition based on this selection was published five years later.) With hindsight, the 1927 tour to the West appears as an organized and summative demonstration of Malevich's global form of Modernism, mounted at a moment when practical closures were being applied in Russia and elsewhere to the imaginative possibilities by which that form of Modernism had until then been sustained.

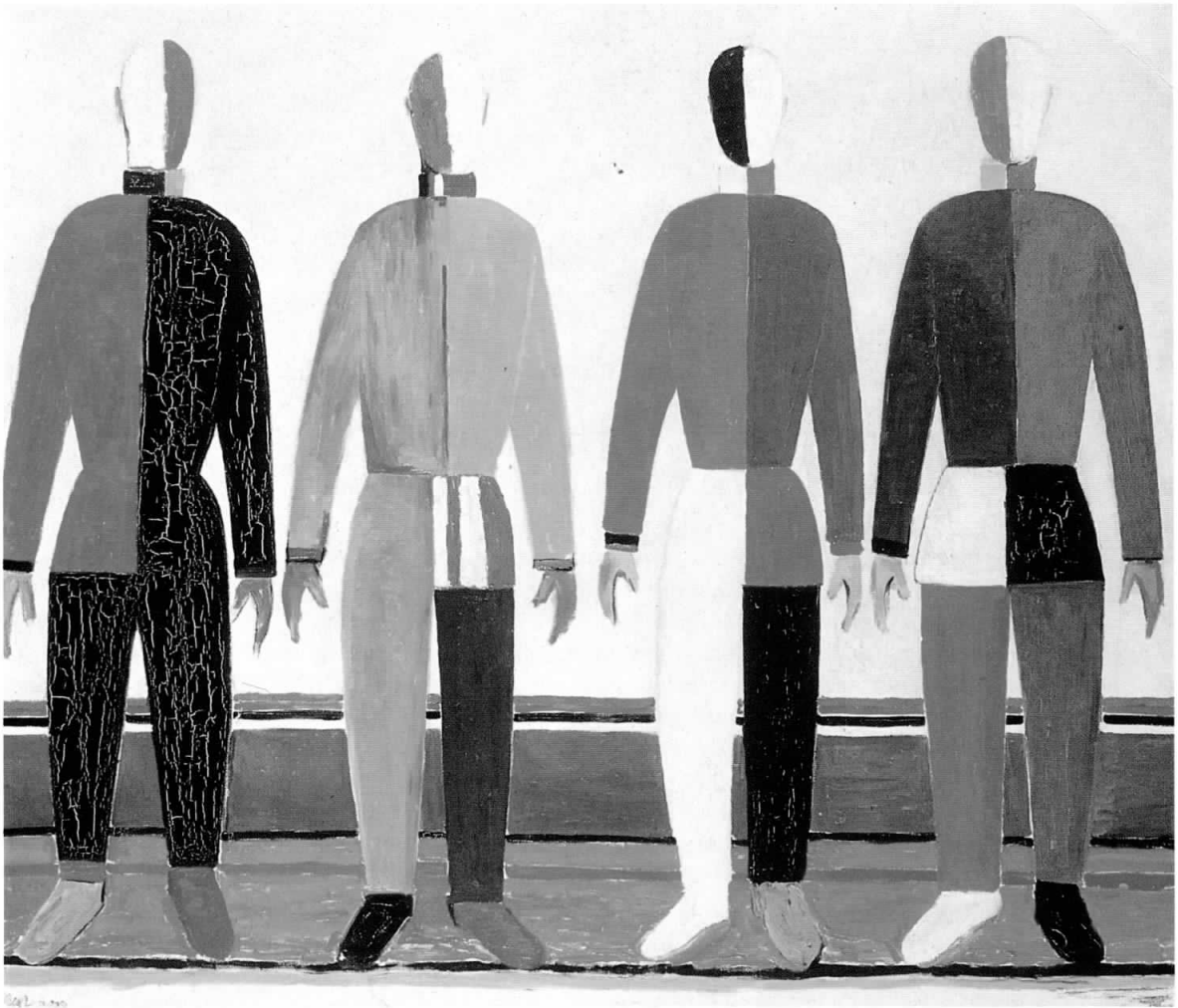


Plate 218 Kazimir Malevich, *Sportsmen*, d. 1912 but probably executed 1928–32, oil on canvas, 142 x 164 cm. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

The discussion of Malevich's subsequent work is a separate issue. What can be said here is that it appears as if the utopian aspiration to design the world had been required after 1927 to face the actual awkwardness and absurdity of the people's existence, as that existence was represented in the matching idealizations of Socialist Realism. In the late 1920s and early 1930s we find Malevich combining 'Suprematist' form and colour with stereotypical human figures (Plate 218). If this image of confrontation between Abstraction and Socialist Realism represents some historically actual struggle, it was one in which there could be no victor. At best there was the possibility that the struggle itself could be continued, as it seems to have been, at least intermittently, to the end of Malevich's career as a painter.