

UAI JOURNAL OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (UAJAHSS)



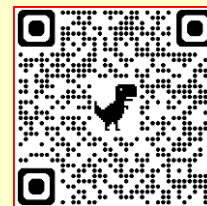
Abbreviated Key Title: UAI J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 3048-7692 (Online)

Journal Homepage: <https://uaipublisher.com/uaijahss/>

Volume- 1 Issue- 5 (December) 2024

Frequency: Monthly



Three squares that changed the world. Russian Suprematism by K. Malevich in the intersection with the philosophy of ideas of Russian cosmism by N. Fedorov: Historical and philosophical analysis.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyse the relationship between the two leading movements in the art of the early twentieth century, known as the "Russian avant-garde", and the philosophical trend known as "Russian cosmism". These two currents epitomise cutting-edge ideas and are of interest to the modern world. Special attention is paid to the relevance of early twentieth-century Russian philosophical thought, with its cutting-edge ideas that are still relevant and important to modern society.

KEY WORDS: Russian cosmism, Russian avant-garde, Suprematism, Malevich's square.

Introduction

"Russian avant-garde" as a direction in the art of the early twentieth century, especially Suprematism strangely goes hand in hand with a philosophical and religious direction called "Russian cosmism". "Russian avant-garde" in its own way was born as a protest against religious dogmatism with the aim of transforming the world in its development. One of the outstanding artists of the avant-garde, namely the Suprematists can be called the name of Kazimir Malevich. His three squares can rightly be called avant-garde works of the time.

Special attention should be paid to the name of Nikolai Fedorov, the founder of the movement known as "Russian cosmism". His grandiose idea of uniting all people to overcome death deserves special admiration. At the beginning of the twentieth century, at the height of Russian thought, the desire to realise, or better to say materialise, the project in a secular way prevailed.

"Russian avant-garde."

In the 19th century, the term "avant-garde" acquired a cultural meaning as a movement in the arts associated with political propaganda and aesthetic expression aimed at bringing about social change in society. With the beginning of the 20th century, the term "avant-garde" began to define a certain group of intellectuals, including writers, artists, architects and others, whose creative views, ideas and experimental works raise doubts about the cultural values of modern bourgeois society. From a social point of view, as part of the intelligentsia, avant-gardists in art, literature, architecture and other fields create artefacts - works of art, books, buildings and the like - that oppose intellectually and ideologically the conformist values of established society.

Avant-garde art created a direction that would be timeless, on the semblance of a world of ideas embodied in the creative act. B. Groy's notes: "The avant-garde did not want to labour for the art of the

future, it wanted an art that was timeless, an art for all time. We often hear and read about the need for change, that our goal, as well as the goal of art, is to change the status quo. However, constant change is our only reality. Under these conditions, to affect the status quo would mean to get rid of change altogether"¹. The artists of the avant-garde did not seek to save the soul, but to save art. They sought to achieve this goal through reduction - the reduction of cultural signs to an absolute minimum so that they could be carried through all changes, shifts, fashions and trends. V. S. Turchin notes: "Avant-garde, striving to enter the sphere of information, at the same time presents a minimum of it"². By and large it is an attempt connected with the creation of a universal world of ideas in art, connected not with the religious component of Christian theology in the context of an unchanging world of ideas, but with a concrete material form.

It can be said that the avant-garde, looking into the future, sees the same engraving, P. Klee, which W. Benjamin acquired in 1921 under the title *Angelus Novus*³, (Fig. 7) looking into the past. From the very beginning of its history, modern art has taken into account in its own practice the possibility of failure, historical failure and destruction. It follows that art cannot be shocked by the destruction that progress leaves behind. The avant-garde *Angelus Novus* always contemplates the same picture, whether he looks into the future or into the past. Life is understood by him as a non-teleological, purely material process⁴. Looking forward, towards the future, we perceive only potential and promise, while looking backwards into the past, we see only the destruction of the original promises.

In the context of the inspired Hegelian dialectic associated with the maxim "negation is an act of creation", the proponents of this approach, F. Nietzsche, proclaimed the concept of "active nihilism". Avant-garde artists recognised the legitimacy of creating new icons through the destruction of old ones. "Black Square" is iconic (Ill. 8). K. Malevich knew that "God is not discounted"⁵. Due to this circumstance Malevich's painting "Black Square" was exhibited in the red corner of the hall as an object of nihilistic cult and a new symbol of modern art. B. Groys notes: "The artists of the classical avant-garde saw themselves as agents of negation, destruction and eradication of all traditional forms of art. <> A work of modernist art was evaluated by the degree of its radicalism, because of how far its author went in destroying artistic traditions"⁶.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, revolutionary and mystical sentiments permeated Russian culture and influenced various

¹ Groys, B. *Weak Universalism, Politics of Poetics*: [collection of articles]/Boris Groys. - Moscow : Ad Marginem Press LLC, 2012, p. 41. (In Russian)

² Turchin V. C. *Po labyrintham avant-garde.-M.*: Izd-voor MSU, 1993. C.11. (In Russian)

³ *Angelus Novus* (New Angel) is a 1920 monoprint by Swiss-German artist Paul Klee, using the oil transfer method he invented. It is now in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. In his works, W. Benjamin refers to the image of *Angelus Novus* within the framework of a materialist conception of history.

⁴ Groys, B. *Under the gaze of theory, The politics of poetics*: [collection of articles]/Boris Groys. - M. : Ad Marginem Press LLC, 2012, p. 29. (In Russian)

⁵ Turchin V. C. *Po labyrintham avant-garde.-M.*: Izd-voor MSU, 1993. C.83. (In Russian)

⁶ Groys, B. *Art at War, The Politics of Poetics*: [collection of articles]/Boris Groys. - M. : Ad Marginem Press LLC, 2012, P. 337. (In Russian)

spheres of life, taking a variety of forms. The religious nihilism of sectarianism and mysticism of V. Solovyov's religious nihilism of sectarianism and the mysticism of V. Solovyov and the cosmism of N. Fedorov, who put forward radical ideas of denying the existing order, were intertwined with the revolutionary movement of the Narodniks, who were inspired by explicit religious motives. The fascination with neo-paganism and Gnostic ideas of many artists created a remarkable combination of political and religious radicalism, which was perhaps the most important leitmotif in early 20th century Russian culture. All of these contradictory actions indicate that man in the early twentieth century lost touch with God and sought to find new grounds for his existence.

In the context of visual art, prominent artists such as A. Goncharova, M. Larionov, V. Kandinsky, K. Malevich and the followers of Russian Constructivism never applied the term "avant-garde" to themselves. They preferred to identify themselves as Futurists, Suprematists, Abstractionists or Constructivists. This shows their confidence in achieving the future as they successfully severed ties with past legacies. They often resorted to using icons, *lubochnaya* painting and other forms of traditional Russian art in a more radical form. This was primarily to contrast Russian tradition, with Western painting.

The reinterpretation of the Russian icon played a special role in this process, exemplified by P. Florensky's work "The Iconostasis". In this context, the icon is seen not as a frozen stage in the development of unified Christian art from Byzantium to the New Age, but as a magical sign system that is radically different from European mimesis and thus offers an alternative to the Western pictorial tradition. B. Groys writes: "The Russian avant-garde is extremely rationalistic and at the same time extremely irrational, and these two moments cannot be separated in it. The avant-garde artist simultaneously strives to gain power over the magic of the subconscious by systematically studying the unconsciously applied techniques of art, but at the same time he himself creates in the power of the subconscious, irrationally, and it is important for him to believe that he lives in a special, privileged situation that allows him to rise above the original irrational artistic intuition without being deprived of it at the same time, and the Russian cultural situation really made this belief plausible for the artist"⁷.

"Russian cosmism."

"Russian cosmism" emerges in the second half of the nineteenth century and it is associated primarily with the name of N. Fedorov. The teachings of N. Fedorov emerge and become popular among intellectual youth as a reaction associated with the loss of connection with the Divine and transcendent world. Russian cosmism is a philosophical movement that differs from classical religious teachings in that its representatives considered the cosmos as a basis for understanding the place of man in the universe, after the loss of faith in God.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Russian culture felt the harbingers of the onset of apocalyptic catastrophe. Russian religious nihilism, like medieval nihilistic sects, was imbued with an apocalyptic mood. Its followers anticipated the onset of catastrophe, believing that the world was on the threshold of the end of time, when corruption and destruction would reach their climax, and only a purifying fire could bring change. It is therefore not accidental that many participants in various mystical movements, such as A. Blok,

⁷ Groys B. "The Russian Avant-Garde on Both Sides of the 'Black Square'", written by him for the journal *Voprosy filosofii*, 1990, No. 11. (In Russian)

A. Bely, N. Klyuev, and A. Remizov, showed a persistent interest in sectarian mysticism. Among the Futurists, a similar interest in sectarianism can be noted in A. Kruchenykh, V. Khlebnikov, E. Guro, V. Kamensky, M. Matyushin.⁸

The philosophy of A. Schopenhauer about the world as an illusion and about salvation from this illusion through the denial of the world will both within oneself and in cosmic life, had a decisive influence on the outstanding thinkers of that time: N. Fedorov, V. Soloviev, K. Tsiolkovsky, V. Vernadsky, L. Tolstoy, N. Strakhov and many others. This direction in philosophy called "Russian cosmism" also served as a powerful impetus for the development of original Russian philosophy. The idea of "Russian cosmism", which implied at its core the principle of sobornost in the development of a common cause.

In his treatises, often quoting L. Tolstoy and drawing on the philosophy of A. Schopenhauer, K. Malevich expresses the concept of the end of the illusory world of traditional cultural forms, as well as the end of individualised "life". He writes: "the visual arts expressed one or another unchanging feeling, always associated with the same form of illusory order, the new artist expresses not an illusion but a new real reality"⁹. This negation is symbolised by three squares, which is a symbol of the "supremacy" of inner "feeling" over external form, subconscious over conscious, contemplation over will, impersonal over personal, chaos over cosmos, absence of purpose over goal, and the priority of pure art over any content. K. Malevich writes: "The Suprematist three squares (Fig. 9) are the establishment of certain worldviews and worldviews. The white square, apart from the purely economic movement of the form of the whole new white worldbuilding, is also a push to the justification of the worldbuilding as "pure action", as self-recognition of oneself in the purely utilitarian perfection of the "all-man". In the dormitory it has received a further meaning: black as the sign of economy, red as the signal of revolution and white as pure action"¹⁰.

B. Shklovsky noted that: "the Suprematists did in art what a chemist would have done in medicine. They allocated the active part of the means"¹¹. Malevich's squares symbolise nothingness, embodying the idea of cosmic death. This work reflects the avant-garde's aspiration to ultimate reduction, where the main emphasis is placed on revealing the elementary, non-reducible and indestructible. B. Groys writes: "Malevich's "Black Square" (1915) is a particularly eloquent example of radical destruction, elimination, reduction of the usual signs of painting. What remains in the end is the universal, basic form of the painting as such, the medial medium of the pictorial picture, purged of all those images which it normally bears"¹². It is important to note that reduction does not alienate from "elementary" folk life, but, on the contrary, unites with it. This is

⁸ Bobrinskaya E. Russian Avant-Garde Origins and Metamorphoses, Moscow: Izd.: Fifth Country, 2003, P.70. (In Russian)

⁹ Malevich K. Articles, manifestos, theoretical works and other works. 1913-1929, Collected Works in Five Volumes, Vol. 1. Moscow: Izd.: "Gileya" 1995, P. 311. (In Russian)

¹⁰ Malevich K. Articles, manifestos, theoretical works and other works. 1913-1929, Collected Works in Five Volumes, Vol. 1. Moscow: Izd.: "Gileya" 1995, P. 188. (In Russian)

¹¹ Kotovich T.V. Encyclopaedia of the Russian avant-garde, Minsk, Econopress, 2003, P. 311.

¹² Groys, B. The border between word and image, The politics of poetics: [collection of articles]/Boris Groys. - Moscow : Ad Marginem Press LLC, 2012, p. 178. (In Russian)

why it is possible for the artist K. Malevich to move from the point of ultimate self-denial to a new project of "common cause", which involves the creation of a new world on the basis of the ultimate possible speculation, with nothingness and death perceived as the futile life of the people beyond individual aspirations and hopes. He writes that it is necessary: "to be in the unity of the general plan for the development of the organism's modernity"¹³. The life of the Russian masses of people was the basis for maintaining the idea of an artificial return to the archaic way of life characteristic of the era of pre-cultural pre-conscious existence. This way of life, devoid of a clear boundary between death and life, illustrates the peculiarities of cultural attitudes and worldview of the peoples inhabiting Russia.

It is necessary to recall the manifestation of Fedorov's ideas in art, architecture and literature in the early twentieth century. As mentioned earlier, the avant-garde in art occupied a special place in the transformation of the ideas of the Russian cosmists. "Kazimir Malevich creates the painting "White on white" (Ill.9): An image of a cosmos within a cosmos. "The white square carries a white world (worldbuilding), affirming the sign of purity of human creative life"¹⁴. P. Filonov, artist-researcher, as he officially called himself, also wrote paintings related to the ideas of cosmism: "peasant family (holy family) 1914, which reveals the image of restored paradise, the world centred around man, "Flowers of world blossom", written before leaving for the front, marking one of the newest trends called luchism.

The group of Russian cosmist artists, which existed between 1923 and 1930, united such talented masters as A. P. Sardan (Baranov), B. A. Smirnov-Rusetsky, P. P. Fateev, S. I. Shigolev, V. T. Chernovolenko, V. N. Przesetskaya (Runa), and A. F. Mikuli and V. I. Yatskevich, working under the name "Amaravella" - a word combination from Sanskrit that can be translated as "sprouts of immortality" or "carrying light"¹⁵. N. Roerich's paintings inspired the transformation not only of the physical outer cosmos, which was dreamt of by K. Tsiolkovsky and Russian science fiction writers, but also of the spiritual inner cosmos. K. Malevich's suprematist compositions and architectural works not only conveyed a cosmic sense of space and its form, but also inspired the architects of the 1920s to create projects of "space dwellings", "flying cities" and "cities in space" that surpassed the technical capabilities of their time. He writes: "Our architecture was a Chinese wall, the latest painting had made a breach there too; architects learnt a lot from the latest constructive painting to create the latest form of architecture without, however, becoming painters"¹⁶.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, the ideas of cosmists are of great interest not only in Russia, but also in other parts of the world. The fact is that they remain avant-garde even today. Modern society is increasingly interested in the idea of achieving bodily immortality, which is clearly evident not only in popular culture, but also in academic debates about posthumanism. From a historical perspective, the

¹³ Malevich K. Articles, manifestos, theoretical works and other works. 1913-1929, Collected Works in Five Volumes, Vol. 1. Moscow: Izd.: "Gileya" 1995, P. 210. (In Russian)

¹⁴ Gacheva A. Russian cosmism in ideas and faces. - Moscow: Academic Project, 2019. C. 396. (In Russian)

¹⁵ Gribova Z. P. Way long in a century. - Samara: Publishing House "Agni", 2003. C. 46. (In Russian)

¹⁶ Malevich K. Articles, manifestos, theoretical works and other works. 1913-1929, Collected Works in Five Volumes, Vol. 1. Moscow: Izd.: "Gileya" 1995, P. 305. (In Russian)

theories of Russian cosmism can be seen as the starting point of this reassessment of the importance of bodily immortality, a process that continues to the present day. These trends open up new perspectives for contemporary society, described as "post-", where interest in posthumanity and posthumanism is manifested.

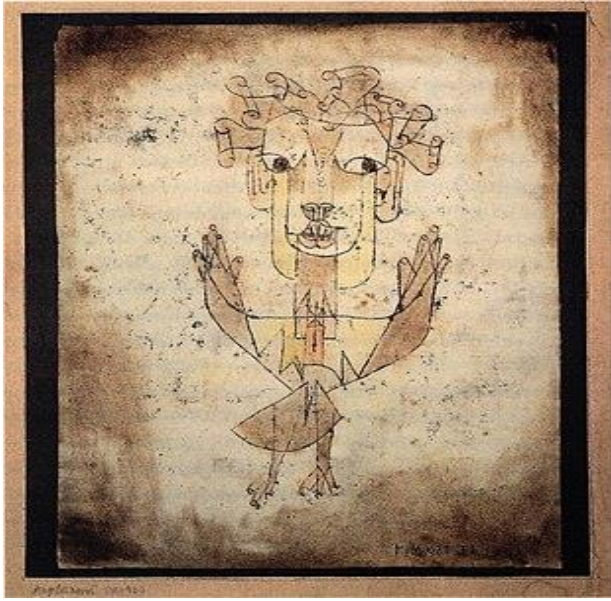
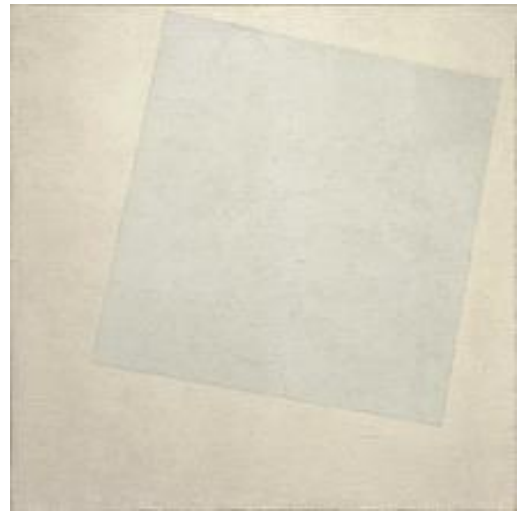
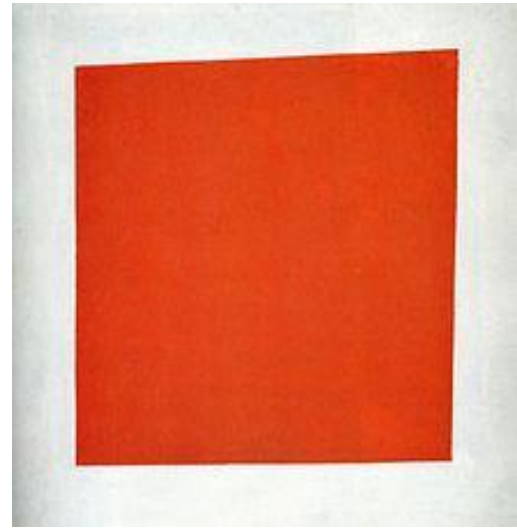


Fig. 7 Paul Klee's The New Angel (Angelus Novus), 1920, Israel Museum, Jerusalem



III. 9 K. Malevich, three squares (1915, 1915, 1918)

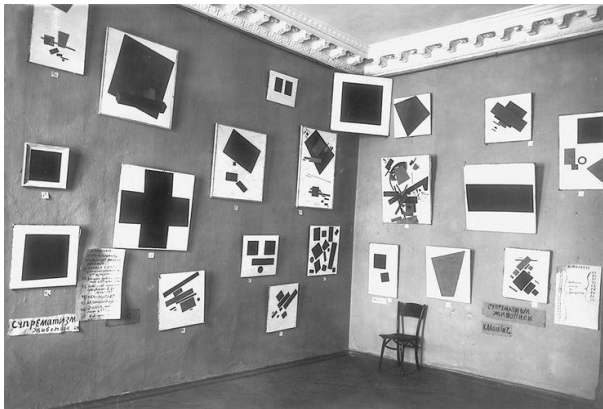


Fig.8 Kazimir Malevich, black square, 1915

