A Rejection of Nature? Or the Natural World? An Objectless Inquiry into the Writings of Kazimir Malevich

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A Rejection of Nature? Or the Natural World? An Objectless Inquiry into the Writings of
Kazimir Malevich

Senior Project Submitted to
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of Bard College

by
Aidan Edward Galloway

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

This project could not have been possible without the loving support and inspiration of so many wonderful teachers, friends, and parents I’m so fortunate to have in my life. The names below, only a fraction of all who supported me throughout this process, appear (somewhat) “in order of appearance” during my journey with Malevich. I dedicate this work:

To Olga Touloumi, my dependable advisor who has been an immensely helpful writing coach and who first pointed me towards Oleg Minin’s course on the Russian avant-garde, wherein Oleg Minin (to whom I also dedicate this thesis) exposed me to the endless source of creative and intellectual inspiration that is Malevich;

To Jane Smith, who met with me weekly outside of the 9-5 workday and gave me so much kind advice and compassionate listening throughout this rollercoaster of a process;

To Bard’s Buddhist chaplain Tatjana Myoko von Prittwitz und Gaffron for her endless spiritual support and for referring me to Gail Sher’s *One Continuous Mistake*, which proved to be absolutely liberating (to write is another Zen practice, I see now);

To Marina van Zuylen, who (like all on this list) has given me so much of her time and who exposed me to an entire world of uncannily relevant ideas (which I would have loved to include more explicitly in this project had time permitted);

And to my father, Andrew Galloway, who regularly emails me writing tips and accounts of dreams he had about my work, who showed me the immeasurable joys of long walks in the woods and bike rides among the hills, and who never seemed to tire of my incessant ramblings which never quite captured the environment of my mind as it sought to grasp the sublime work of Kazimir Malevich.
My obsession with investigating the writings of Kazimir Malevich grew at the onset of the pandemic. As I self-isolated and contemplated my place in the “Anthropocene” as a budding architect (and wanna-be artist/poet), his words spoke, and continue to speak, to a multitude of questions I’m still trying to articulate. (What is it that fuels my artistic creation? Must my feelings and experiences always be “captured” or put to use? And how can one create an architecture that is not exploitative of the natural world, both in terms of morphology and resource consumption?)

As much as I tried to uncover Malevich’s understanding of nature as an “Environmental and Urban Studies major with a concentration in urban and regional studies,” this project kept “naturally” (or “habitually,” but I digress) becoming rather “art historical,” and, perhaps worse-yet, a process of me trying to work out some of the tensions and abstract question that exist within myself.

I am not an art historian. I am not a literary critic. I am not a philosopher. Indeed, my approach is perhaps “undisciplined” in both senses of the word. My intuitions likely adulterated objectivity (fitting, perhaps, for work on Malevich, whose entire philosophy was concerned with “non-objectivity,” or, as he would more often say, “objectlessness” [not to necessarily equate the two]). Nonetheless, I hope this project begins to express the excitement of my journey with Malevich, during which I found many more questions than answers, more seeds than gardens; but these “seeds,” I feel deeply, contain so much possibility, and will blossom into many strange forms in the vast unknown that lies before us.

Aidan Edward Galloway
Known for his 1915 painting, *Black Square*, the art-philosophical-architectural movement he called “Suprematism,” and his affiliation with the Russian avant-garde, Kazimir Severinovich Malevich spent his life trying to define and rediscover various forms of “nature.”

Throughout his intricate, non-linear writing undertaken between 1913 and 1935, sometimes “nature” meant quite literally “the natural world,” (which from here on I refer to as “Nature,” for clarity); and sometimes it meant something more abstract, such as “that which is perceived,” “lived experience,” “history,” “objective content,” or, to quote Andrew Benjamin, “that which sanctions imitation” (which I’ll call “nature”).

Abstractly speaking, this thesis (if it could be called a “thesis” — it’s rather unconventional, as will soon become evident) explores Malevich’s endlessly illusive understanding of and relationship to nature, Nature, and everything in between. Much of my time was spent reading Malevich, writing and writing and turning my nose up at what I’d written, selecting quotations, and polishing the form of this “non-objective” or “objectless” inquiry, which uses an approach to investigate Malevich that I inferred from Malevich himself.

Due to the complexity, breadth, and depth of Malevich’s writings throughout his life, determining the scope of this project was immensely difficult. Within any given text, I found myself feeling an increasing sense of clarity as I read on, only to come across a new phrase or commentary about the “terrestrial skull,” for instance, that would make me rethink my entire interpretation. But this complexity, I think, and my uncertainty about my understanding, is part of what made this sublime endeavour so interesting.

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I very much feel this is only the beginning of a larger inquiry that may never feel finished. But nonetheless, I share this crazy “collection of impressions” (and fragments of stimuli which overwhelmed my analytic faculties) with the hope that it will promote the development of a new way of studying Kazimir Malevich and, ultimately, a new way of approaching the contemporary problem of our extractive, exploitative, objectifying relationship to “nature,” in any sense of the word.
Kazimir Malevich sought to end the antagonism between nature and the artist.

What might that mean for Nature and humankind?
A Note About the Format

The format of this thesis does not adhere to standard conventions. It contains a series of “moments” (whose page numbers are referenced on the next page) which I allowed to grow (and decay, and morph into each other) until the very last, well, moments, before submitting the “final” version. This strategy, in part, allowed me to stop trying to impose a single linear narrative onto the crazy flowerings of the mind of Mr. Malevich, who endlessly contradicted himself over the course of his life and often even within a single text, paragraph, or sentence.

Various quotations hang unadorned, unexamined; trying to “flesh things out,” I became interested in the effect of leaving primary material to be contemplated as self-contained (“autonomous”) entities, and began to consider this project as a kind of “abstract painting” in itself. Perhaps this was something of a risk, but it was a risk that Kazimir Malevich gave me the courage to take.
| 0.10  | 3   |
| 0.09  | 6   |
| 0.08  | 23  |
| 0.07  | 45  |
| 0.06  | 61  |
| 0.05  | 76  |
| 0.04  | 87  |
| 0.03  | 96  |
| 0.02  | 102 |
| 0.01  | 106 |
Malevich lying in state, Leningrad, May 1935
It’s hard to imagine that an artist who at one point was involved in the production of an “opera” called Victory Over the Sun would go on to write about his absolute adoration for the sun as a child. “The sun,” Malevich later recalled, “I always considered as something great and more pleasant than whistles.” How strange, he remembered thinking, that his father would go to the factory when the whistle blew, despite the black night sky’s calls for rest.

“Peasants aren’t afraid of any whistles,” wrote Malevich. “The sun gently calls them to work with its rays and the sun calls them to bed, hiding its rays behind the globe.” These reflections, found in an unfinished autobiography he began in 1933, emerged shortly after Stalin’s first Five-Year Plan led to mass starvation among the peasants with whom he connected so viscerally. Now feeling a sort of nostalgia for “Nature,” Malevich longed for a return to the “living, breathing fields” of his youth that were, at the time of his writing, being turned into

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3 The moon, too, left quite an impression in his memory: “I also loved the moon very much, and it always seemed to me to be competing with the sun, making the nights very beautiful, doing this better than lamps and candles could. It kept many young people from sleeping, including me, although I was not yet a young man. I loved the moon. When everyone else in the house had gone to sleep, I would always open the curtains to look at the moon and the reflection of the window on the floor or on the bed. The singing of girls and boys would reach my window. I listened with great pleasure, studying the Ukrainian sky against which stars burned like candles. For the Ukrainian sky is dark, dark like nowhere in Russia.” Malevich, “Chapters from an Artist’s Autobiography,” trans. Alan Upchurch, 27.


5 Malevich’s autobiography opens with an extended commentary on his relationship to the peasants, whose lifestyle he even “imitated” at one point: “I preferred the peasant children for friends, considering them always free among the fields, the meadows and forests and with the horses, sheep and pigs. I didn’t like the factory children, their clothes or their way of life. They always wore shoes and socks in which they couldn’t climb trees or jump into the river after frogs.” “Chapters from an Artist’s Autobiography,” trans. Alan Upchurch, 26. Regarding his connection to the peasants in his later years, Evgenia Petrova comments: “On the reverse of one of the peasant paintings — Complex Presentiment (Torso in a yellow Shirt) — Malevich even went so far as to write: ‘The composition is comprised of the elements of a sensation of emptiness, loneliness and the inescapability of life.’ This inscription contains a tragic sense of life during that period [1928-33], both for Malevich himself and for the peasantry he depicted, with whom he clearly empathised.” “From Suprematism to Supranaturalism: Malevich’s Late Works,” in Achim Borchardt-Hume, ed., Malevich (London: Tate, 2015), 203.
industrial centers of production as Stalin ramped up efforts to modernize the USSR. After having spent some time in prison for his “degenerate” art which failed to preach the objectives of the state — Malevich sought, instead, to realize a new world of his own — paintings like The Running Man (1933) suggest his utter suffocation as he neared the end of his life, as both art — and n/Nature — were burdened with yet another source of weight.

It’s worth noting that, as Pamela Kachurin writes, “the state’ . . . was not some kind of unitary, unchanging, bureaucratic apparatus intent on brutally repressing modernist art production and crushing individuals at will. In practice, ‘the state’ was actually composed of interlocking networks of individuals, who played the role of brokers and patrons, and who either supported their clients in the art community or withdrew that support, depending on which way the political winds were blowing at a particular moment.” Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928, Illustrated Edition (Northwestern University Press, 2013), xxii.

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6 When Malevich was born in 1879, Kyiv was still a part of Ukraine. Kyiv saw the most rapid urbanization in the 1920s after it had been absorbed by the Soviet Union. For more, see Chauncy D. Harris, “The Cities of the Soviet Union,” Geographical Review 35, no. 1 (1945): 107–21, https://doi.org/10.2307/210935.

7 It’s worth noting that, as Pamela Kachurin writes, “‘the state’ . . . was not some kind of unitary, unchanging, bureaucratic apparatus intent on brutally repressing modernist art production and crushing individuals at will. In practice, ‘the state’ was actually composed of interlocking networks of individuals, who played the role of brokers and patrons, and who either supported their clients in the art community or withdrew that support, depending on which way the political winds were blowing at a particular moment.” Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928, Illustrated Edition (Northwestern University Press, 2013), xxii.
Malevich, *Running Man*, 1933
0,09
Earlier that century, Malevich and other artists associated with the Russian avant-garde had found great artistic energy in the movement of their urbanizing surroundings. “The poetry of Futurism is the poetry of the city,” declared Vladimir Mayakovsky, Malevich’s close friend and another contributor to Victory Over the Sun. “[F]actory smokestacks, enormous stone buildings, soot and smoke — these are the elements of beauty in the new urban nature.”

“[T]he new urban nature,” wrote Mayakovsky; for Mayakovsky, the city was his nature:

In the gaps between skyscrapers, full of blazing ore, where the steel of trains came clattering by, an aeroplane fell with a final roar into the fluid oozing from the sun’s hurt eye. 

“The city was his nature,” I write. In other words, the city was the environment which provided material for his creations.

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9 Cited in Ball, Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia, 45.
“The natural environment for a Futurist was metallic, dynamic soil,” reflected Malevich as he was dying of cancer in the last few years of his life.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Whereas Italian Futurism produced a great many paintings, to Malevich, there were comparably few Futurist paintings in Russia: “Futurism interested us, but there was no Futurist painting in Russia, because the few works painted by me (\textit{Knife Grinder}), Goncharova (\textit{Moving Carriage, City}, and two or three others), and Kliun (\textit{Landscape Rushing Past}) cannot be considered a movement.” I. A. Vakar and T. N. Mikhienko, eds., \textit{Kazimir Malevich: Letters, Documents, Memoirs, Criticism}, English edition. (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), 37. (The image on the next page can be found in that compilation as well.)
Malevich near death, 1935
The urbanizing environment also encouraged indirect forms of mimesis. “The Earth and Nature no longer exist in their conventional sense,” wrote Aleksandr Shevchenko in the opening line of his 1913 manifesto, *Neoprimitivism*. “They have been turned into building foundations, into asphalt for pavements and roads. […] The factory town rules over everything.”

The content and formal vocabulary of the artistic movement of “Neoprimitivism” was not based on the bustling growing city but on the “primitive” art of the peasants with whom young Malevich sided when fights broke out with the children of the factory workers; but the departure from “conventional” Nature occurring in the environment of real space — urbanization — served as a justification for a departure from the depiction of traditional nature (or “content”) in the environment of the canvas. Shevchenko goes on:

We can no longer be satisfied with a simple organic copy of nature. We have grown used to seeing it around us altered and improved by the hand of man the creator, and we cannot but demand the same of Art.

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11 As was true for both Malevich and Mayakovsky, the “asphalt for pavements and roads” for Shevchenko, was just as much a part of “Nature” as the sun. However, Shevchenko explicitly distinguishes “Nature” from “life” in a footnote in *Neoprimitivism*, writing: “Nature is the aggregate of those things of which the world consists; life is the aggregate of the forms of these things and of their movements.” John Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, The Documents of 20th-Century Art (New York, N.Y.: The Viking Press, Inc., 1976), 44.
“The artist can only be a creator when the forms of his pictures have nothing in common with nature,” wrote Malevich the painter in 1915. Then, in 1923: “The essence of house-building lies not in animal sweat but in world architecture. New fields, a mountain, the new architecture of space.”

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Moscow, early 20th century
[Tuberculosis killed Malevich’s second wife in 1923.]
In the 1920s, Malevich became interested in studying this interaction between painters and their environment, “scientifically,” to see what conditions gave rise to certain “artistic cultures.” 

15 “The concept of ‘artistic culture’ — key in the artistic life of the early nineteen-twenties — was developed in the widely known ‘Resolutions on Artistic Culture’ in the Department of Fine Arts at Narkompros, and published in 1919-1920.” Anja Schlossberger and Britta Tanja Dümpelmann, “Introduction to the Theory of the Additional Element in Painting,” in Kazimir Malevich, *The World as Objectlessness*, 146, footnote 1.
If we compare for the sake of analogy the medical understanding of climatic conditions for various bacteria, they will be regarded as beneficial or not beneficial for the development of some disease, some culture of an additional element.\textsuperscript{16}

“Dynamic Suprematism,” like Futurism, emerged naturally in the city.

If we had the ability to transport the Futurist, Cubist, and dynamic Suprematist to the provinces, isolate them from the city, gradually they will shed the additional element and move to their original state, the original beginning, nature, for the reason that the organism would have to expend enormous energy to reject the surrounding environment.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{17}\) Malevich, *The World as Objectlessness*, 181.
Analytical Chart on the environments give rise to the artistic cultures of Cubism, Futurism, and Suprematism, early 1920s.
Malevich sought to liberate art and the artist from their surroundings but couldn’t and Suprematism reproduced the forms of the urban environment in real space.\footnote{\text{[Foreshadowing:] “All our behaviour depends on influences, the circumstances that surround us and continually violate our human essence of tranquility and stasis.” Malevich, \textit{The World as Non-Objectivity: Unpublished Writings 1922-25}, trans. Troels Andersen (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1976), 148.}}
Malevich, *House of the Future*, 1924
0,08
Sun, you gave birth to passion
And burned with an inflamed ray
We will cover you with a dusty veil
We will board you up in a concrete house!

- “Strongmen” in Victory Over the Sun
A bizarre iconoclastic opera whose plot pivots around the capturing and execution of the sun, *Victory Over the Sun*, like Mayakovsky’s poetry and the other manifestations of Futurism in Russia, is often thought of as a rejection of traditional values and old modes of art production — not with the literal rejection of “the natural world.” “The sun,” according to Malevich’s friend Mikhail Matiushin who composed the atonal score for the opera, was heavily symbolic:

[The] sun of cheap appearances is understood to be the creator and the symbol of everything visible ... giving objects the illusion of reality. It is Apollo, the god of rationality and clarity, the light of logic and thus the arch-enemy of all “bards of the future.”

To Matiushin, the sun was the art of the past — it symbolized the Symbolists which he and other Russian Futurists sought to “throw off the ship of modernity” along with Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy; it was the romantic source of hope, the sentimentalism which would inevitably end in the perpetuation of delusion and psychological suffering; it was the old form of reason, the rules of academic perspective, the source of tricking the eyes into telling the mind they know what’s real. The sun was the “arch-enemy” of the “bards of the future,” by whom Matiushin surely meant Futurist poets like Velemir Khlebnikov, who took part in the creation of the “transrational” “zaum” language, which, beyond poetry, was also very much about the

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21 For a more historically and culturally situated interpretation of *Victory Over the Sun*, see Rosamund Bartlett and Sarah Dadswell, “Introduction,” in *Victory Over the Sun: The World’s First Futurist Opera* (University of Exeter Press, 2012).
22 *Zaum*, according to Peter Stupples, was intended to “free the mind of archaic conventions and prejudices [and] create conditions to stimulate a greatly expanded sense of logic and reason, not unrelated to the superconscious states of yoga and of the Russian mystics.” Stupples explains that these influences were familiar to the Russian avant-garde by way of “M V Lodyzhensky's The Superconsciousness and Ways to Achieve (St Petersburg, 1912).” Heightened consciousness, it was claimed, is an inevitable product of organic evolution.” Peter Stupples, “Malevich and the Liberation of Art,” New Zealand Slavonic Journal, 2001, 18.
restructuring of the human mind. To Matiushin, in short, the sun did not necessarily mean “The Sun.”

Yet to Aleksei Kruchenykh — co-creator of zaum, the opera’s librettist, and another close friend of Malevich — “the sun” also meant something quite literal. Years later, Kruchenykh wrote that Victory Over the Sun was about the “victory of technology over cosmic forces and biologism.” Beyond resonating with Russian Cosmism, a movement which strove for human immortality and life among the cosmos, Kruchenkykh’s remarks also reveal that he and his collaborators — Malevich included — might have been interested not only in liberating art from its dependence on nature, but also in liberating humankind’s dependence on Nature.

23 “To the poet the sun is not always the sun, nor the moon always the moon, nor the stars — the stars,” writes Malevich in “On Poetry” (1919), in Essays on Art 1915 - 1933, trans. Troels Andersen, 75.
25 “Humankind, according to [the school of thought of Cosmism], is not just a spectator of the world, of earth’s vast expanse, of the majestic panorama of the starry sky, but also an active participant in the process of the world’s creation.” Anastasia Gacheva, “Art as the Overcoming of Death: From Nikolai Fedorov to the Cosmists of the 1920s,” E-Flux, March 2018, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/89/180332/art-as-the-overcoming-of-death-from-nikolai-fedorov-to-the-cosmists-of-the-1920s/.
26 It’s hard to read the libretto without detecting some eerie foreshadowing for our condition in the 21st century: “All is well that / begins well / and has no / end,” proclaim the “Strongmen” in Act II, “the world will perish but to us there is no / end!” Cited in Britta Tanja Dümpelmann, “A Snapshot of an Artistic Universe,” in Kazimir Malevich, The World as Objectlessness, 31.
Malevich, Costume design for *Victory Over the Sun: Sun Carrier*, 1913
“Intermission”
“The Socialist Settlement Section in accordance with the RSFSR State Plan. Settlement schemes:

[(1) Disurbanized; (2) Decentralized; (3) A-centralized; (4) Dispersed.]”

In the Soviet Union during the 20th century, “modernization” often meant urbanization. Dense human environments were seen to be necessary for collectivization and thus necessary for progress.

Marx and Engles suggested the dichotomy between town and country had to be dissolved in their *Communist Manifesto*, and debates among such urban-architectural groups like the “Urbanists” and the “Disurbanists” ensued in the late 1920s. Whereas the “Urbanist” school (including Leonid Sabsovich and the Vesnin brothers, both of whom were influenced by Malevich and Suprematism) dreamt of high-density cities and a more defined separation between [humankind and Nature], the “Disurbanists” (led by Mikhail Okhitovich and Moisei Ginzburg) sought to dissolve the distinction entirely.28

In response to the Disurbanist movement, Swiss architect Le Corbusier, who competed in the 1930s Green City competition in the USSR and whose architecture Malevich admired considerably, wrote: “Disurbanization: this term is misleading . . . Nature is beneficial to the city dweller . . . the peasant does not study the blossoms on the trees or listen to the lark’s song. It is the city dweller who does this.”29

28 It’s worth noting that Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden City” movement continued to be influential around the world and in the USSR. For more on the debates between the Urbanists and the Disurbanists, also see Selim Omarovich Khan-Magomedov, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture: The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s*, 271.
Lazar Khidekel, *Futuristic City*, 1926
If the Anthropocene marks the somewhat sour triumph of modernity over the environment, Suprematism reimagines what it means to have a Victory Over the Sun.

Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski (WAI Architecture Think Tank), 2018

When in 1915 after revisiting his drawings for *Victory Over the Sun* Kazimir Malevich debuted his infamous *Black Square* at the “0,10” exhibition in Petrograd, Alexandre Benoïs called it an “icon of a cardinal sin: humankind’s arrogant elevation of the self and the machine above nature and God.”

*Black Square* — a form which was decidedly as far removed from the world of visible nature as possible — was the emblem and most poetic expression of Malevich’s “Suprematism,” which, by its very name, sounds like the epitome of anthropocentric modernity. “[T]o attain the new artistic culture,” wrote Malevich, “art advances toward creation as an end in itself and toward domination over the forms of nature” — sounds like what Cruz

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31 Cited in Maria Taroutina, *The Icon and the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 205. Although Benoïs was perhaps Malevich’s most consistent critic, he, ironically, played a considerably important role in paving the way for Malevich’s artistic growth by opening the way for avant-garde experiments in the arts. Regarding my claim that it was after revisiting *Victory Over the Sun* when *Black Square* emerged (oh, the necessity of revision): I base this claim on Aleksandra Shatskikh’s interpretation of how Suprematism and the *Black Square* came into being. See Aleksandra Semenovna Shatskikh, *Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism*, trans. Marian Schwartz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

32 To Malevich, “painting ‘as such’” was most accessible when it did not evoke “associations with nature and objects”: “By working in impressionism, I learned that an objective image never entered into its concerns. If likeness was still maintained, then it was only because the painter hadn't yet found that form which would portray painting ‘as such,’ without evoking associations with nature and objects, without being an illustration or a story, but as a completely new artistic fact, a new reality, a new truth.” Malevich, “Chapters from an Artist’s Autobiography,” trans. Alan Upchurch, 43.

33 When I first encountered the word “nature” in the writings of Malevich and other members of the Russian avant-garde, I was between worlds and living at the onset of the pandemic: a student with a background in environmental studies living in the 21st century, I was shocked to read Malevich’s calls to “reject” and “dominate” nature. At the same time, in one of my architecture classes, I was designing a dwelling that was mimetic of basalt cliffs, which are particularly “unnatural-looking” forms found in nature. At the time, I had a relatively solidified idea about what might be meant by the word “nature” (as if that definition were not historically and contextually specific — I have the mind of an abstract essentialist, I suppose) and, seeing such calls for dominance over nature, I pictured sprawling cities and tons of asphalt exerting humanity’s dominance over every inch of the “natural” world.

Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski recently referred to as modernity’s “sour triumph of the environment.”
Italian Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia, Perspective drawing from *La Città Nuova*, 1914.
Yet Lazar Khidekel, Malevich’s loyal student committed to converting Suprematism to a system of world architecture, wrote in the early 1920s that his architecture was intended to “instead of destroying the natural environment […] enter into a beneficial and special relationship with surrounding nature.” Un-concretized, weightless Suprematist projects like Futuristic City and Aero City were what inspired Garcia and Frankowski to claim that “Suprematism reimagines what it means to have a Victory Over the Sun.”


36 Regarding Khidekel’s proclamation of architecture’s emergence into a “beneficial and special relationship with surrounding nature,” Regina Khidekel writes: “In AERO Khidekel articulated for the first time his view that ecology is crucial for the new architecture. He argued that architecture should not conquer nature by forcing it into a workable shape, but, on the contrary, develop new solutions, enabling humanity to exist in harmony with the natural environment. Consequently, AERO is regarded as the first ecological manifesto in modern art and architecture…” “Lazar Khidekel and Suprematism as an Embodiment of the Infinite,” in Christina Lodder, ed., Celebrating Suprematism: New Approaches to the Art of Kazimir Malevich, 170.
Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski’s 2016 Photomontage of Lazar Khidekel’s *Aero City*, 1964
In his search to free painting from the ballast of representation, Kazimir Malevich made Suprematism out of Pure Feeling. Through architecture, Lazar Khidekel promises a form of human liberation. One of the unbearable lightness of Suprematist mastodons, that today more than ever, can lift humanity over environmental, social, and political dilapidation, and create pure habitats in a radical relationship with landscapes whether on Earth or in the Cosmos.\textsuperscript{37}

In the same 1916 manifesto Malevich proclaims, “Honor to the Futurists who forbade the painting of female hams … They made a huge step forward: they abandoned meat and glorified the machine,” he preaches: “The Square is a living, regal infant … The first step of pure creation in art.”

Pure creation
Pure creation means just creation means just creation means creation ex nihilo means creation without destruction means creation that allows Nature to be as autonomous as art itself, free from nature.
The academy and the critics are this millstone round your neck. The old realism is the movement that seeks to transmit living nature.

They carry on just as in the times of the Grand Inquisition.

Their aim is ridiculous because they want at all costs to force what they take from nature to live on the canvas.

At the same time as everything is breathing and running, their frozen poses are in pictures.

And this torture is worse than breaking on the wheel.

Sculptured statues, inspired, hence living, have stopped dead, posed as running.

Isn’t this torture?

Enclosing the soul in marble and then mocking the living.

But you are proud of an artist who knows how to torture.

You put birds in a cage for pleasure as well.

And for the sake of knowledge, you keep animals in zoological gardens.39

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[Was Malevich trying to liberate art (and architecture) from nature (and Nature)? Or nature (and Nature) from art (and architecture)?]

40
Whereas Shevchenko justified Neoprimitivism’s development by pointing to the Nature around him that was being “altered and improved by man the creator,” Malevich sought to end these processes of alteration and improvement entirely, on the canvas and in space.

Shevchenko wrote that Neoprimitivism chose the (non-European) art of the Russian peasants (and their “lubki”) as its “point of departure” (or nature) since “There are, and can be, no phenomena that are born out of nothing.”

Malevich created a loophole, “the zero of form,” an icon of nothingness, a mass of immaterial material which could enable the artist, philosopher, and architectural dreamer to create “ex nihilo,” to create new worlds whose creation did not depend on the destruction, on the displacement, on the extraction of Nature or nature. To Malevich, Black Square was the infinitely dense particle that resulted in the Big Bang. It was “the embryo of all possibilities,” the primary element, the primary shape, “the progenitor of the cube and the sphere,” a circle and a cross, which then, disintegrating into small elements, forms the Suprematist universe.

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42 Irina Vakar, “Black Square,” in Christina Lodder, ed., *Celebrating Suprematism: New Approaches to the Art of Kazimir Malevich*, vol. 22, Russian History and Culture (Brill, 2019), 12-13. In one of his journal entries from 1916, Malevich expresses further his “cosmic” experiments with Suprematism: Khlebnikov was at my place and took several drawings to measure their relationships ... but I don’t know if he’ll notice what I noticed: the attraction of the forms, so that in my painting No. 51, the law of its construction becomes clearly visible. Perhaps [it is] how the World and its forms are designed; the connection and attraction and scale of one form to another establish the placement of their relationship.” Cited in *Celebrating Suprematism: New Approaches to the Art of Kazimir Malevich*, 41.
Malevich, *Suprematism (Supremus No. 56)*, 1916
We wish to build the world up according to an objectless system, departing further and further from the object, like the cosmos’s creation of nature.\textsuperscript{43}

Or, situated within a different ontology, it was the “formless void,” the “darkness [over]
the face of the deep” from which God created the earth. Perhaps it was in response to
Shevchenko — or Benois — that Malevich later wrote:

… there is nothing strange in God’s building the universe from nothing, since man also
builds everything from the nothingness of his imagination …

44 Kazimir Malevich, “God is Not Cast Down” (1922), in Essays on Art 1915 - 1933, trans.
Troels Andersen, 2nd ed., vol. 16, The Documents of Modern Art (New York: Wittenborn and
Company, 1971), 223. “To most of Malevich’s contemporaries,” writes Jean-Claude Marcade,
“the language in Bog ne skinut: Iskusstvo, Tserkov, Fabrika (God Is Not Cast Down: Art,
Church, Factory, 1922) may have seemed muddled, barely intelligible, incorrect, without
beginning or end.” “Malevich, Painting, and Writing: On the Development of a Suprematist
Philosophy,” in Matthew Drutt, Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism (New York, NY: Guggenheim
Museum Publications, 2003), 36. From my point of view, it should be no surprise that
Malevich’s writing is “without beginning or end”: discussions of the meaning of nature or the
material origins of creation are difficult to “pin down,” so to speak.
According to Maria Taroutina, Malevich’s paintings during this period emerged as “multiple restoration and revivalist projects … were taking place around him in Kiev and its environs during his youth.” (Noteworthy, too, is that Taroutina calls these works “pure creation[s].”) The Icon and the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 185.
… there is nothing strange in God’s building the universe from nothing, since man also builds everything from the nothingness of his imagination …

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… [and man] does not know that he himself is the creator of everything and that he has created God also as his imagining …
Suprematism appears completely antithetical to Nature. It is *defined by* its rejection of nature. Its icon is nothing more than a black square.
But Malevich was able to revere Nature because he abandoned nature.
Malevich, *Black Circle*, 1916
In painting, Malevich put an end to the antagonistic relationship between the artist and nature —
Painting has now reached this universal static of art, it has worked out non-objective relations between itself and the existence of nature, therefore they are equal, they never conquer one another, therefore they do not possess paths or more ideas, they are non-objective.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{47} Malevich, \textit{The World as Non-Objectivity: Unpublished Writings 1922-25}, trans. Troels Andersen, 287.
— the same in architecture.
...if it follows that, nature is not an obstacle to art and not hostile towards it, then architecturality (architecture as modality) is only a continuation of its aspects outside the objective and the utilitarian, therefore it is not a murder weapon or a weapon of conquest, it sees nothing it ought to kill, it sees peacefulness everywhere. Therefore nothing is created in the world one for another, neither as a supplement nor as a tool, nor as a struggle for existence.\footnote{Malevich, \textit{The World as Non-Objectivity: Unpublished Writings 1922-25}, trans. Troels Andersen, 277.}
Khidekel’s architecture, then, chooses the environment of the clouds and is made of the immaterial “zero of form” because that’s the only way architecture won’t “perfect” Nature, won’t create “one for another.”

49 Perhaps Lissitzky’s famous *Cloud Irons* (1925) floated for a similar reason.
Lazar Khidekel, *City on the Pillars – Structural Element*, 1960
And Malevich did not reject Nature because he viewed it as subordinate to human beings.
Everything in nature has this objectless source, but man wants to objectify it. The idea of using everything for one’s own personal or social benefit. ... That is why two truths emerge now, the objective world and the objectless world. But since the objectless truth lies in nature itself, then obviously it must win, for the object will have to reveal its bankruptcy and the failure of man to perfect it.\(^50\)

No, Malevich rejected mimesis to allow both nature and art to remain autonomous, interdependent but not codependent; he rejected the exploitative relationship that artists (and what he calls “engineers” or “utilitarian architects”) had to their own lived experiences, their own imaginings to which they attached, their own mental objects which have nothing to do with reality as such.⁵¹

Malevich dreamt of liberation for both the artist and nature — humankind and Nature — where even the very idea of nature was free and weightless, flying above the walls of categorization and objectification, in the world free of objects or the need to create them.

Malevich at a retrospective of his work, 1932
0,05
In her essay, “Man, Space, and the Zero of Form: Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism and the Natural World,” Christina Lodder suggests that instead of seeking to “add to” Nature by way of creation ex nihilo, Malevich sought to replace it:

In December 1921, Osip Brik told the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture that Malevich had recently explained to him that “the earth’s surface is not organized. It is covered with seas, mountains. Some nature exists. I want to create instead of that nature, a Suprematist nature, built pursuant to the laws of Suprematism.”

To replace Nature — to perfect it? — perhaps to “improve it,” echos Shevchenko:

We can no longer be satisfied with a simple organic copy of nature. We have grown used to seeing it around us altered and improved by the hand of man the creator...

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Malevich, *My Montage, NY ARkhitekton*, in *Proesens*, no. 1, 1926

54 I include the Russian title of this collage as it appears in Maria Gough, “Architecture as Such,” in Achim Borchardt-Hume, ed., *Malevich* (London: Tate, 2015), 163, figure 116. It’s worth mentioning Gough’s comment regarding this collage: “It is hard to believe that Khlebnikov's elaborate fantasy was not somewhere in Malevich's mind when he, or one of his assistants, rotated and 'plugged' the aforementioned drawing of a blind architecton into the early skyscraper-scape of Manhattan, in a photomontage reproduced in the pages of *Praesens* (Warsaw) in 1926.”
Still, Malevich maintains:

_We cannot conquer nature, for man is nature._

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And yet:

...but I wish to see a new flowering...”
Mikhail Vrubel, *Morning*, 1897
After showing his concern for Nature for Nature’s sake, Malevich situates humankind as being at once one with Nature — “We are the living heart of nature” — and, on second thought, as “the most valuable construction in this gigantic living picture.”

... this renaissance comes from the single factory of the terrestrial skull. ... When nature achieved the organism called man via a number of her perfected forms, she began to create through him as an instrument of perfection the new, modern world of iron.  

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“An instrument of perfection,” writes Malevich. Perhaps this was a response to Russian art critic and essayist Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon’s book, *Three Faces of Perfection* (1918), “in which the conditions of life are [described as being characterized by] the urge to produce objects and the necessity to destroy nature’s organisms.”
An instrument of perfection," writes Malevich. Perhaps this was a response to Russian art critic and essayist Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon's book, *Three Faces of Perfection* (1918), "in which the conditions of life are characterized by the urge to produce objects and the necessity to destroy nature's organisms." 

58 [Why create art at all?] “To some extent [Malevich’s 1922 text] *God is Not Cast Down* can be seen as an answer to Gershenzon. Malevich saw the production of objects as humanity’s attempt to liberate itself from physical reality,” continues Troels Andersen in the Introduction of *Essays on Art 1915 - 1933* (1971), 14.
If the human organism could not give an outlet to its sensations, it would perish, because sensation would make a shambles of the entire nervous system.\footnote{Kazimir Malevich, \textit{The World as Objectlessness}, 190.}
0,04
Malevich, *Suprematist Composition (The Sensation of Objectlessness)*, 1927
Malevich sought to transcend impermanence, suffering, attachment, located in the body, earth, Nature. He sought to create “a counterworld that will approximate permanence,” that would “not disappoint.” He would be free from Nature.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50} To quote in full: “Dorothea’s severity takes us back to Mondrian’s rigid formalism or to Malevich’s Suprematism. The latter used to argue that if man demands nothing of the world it will not disappoint him. In other words, if you do not seek the world as your home, then you will never turn to it for solace. Solace will come from divorcing yourself from the world and from creating a counterworld that will approximate permanence.” Marina van Zuylen, Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art, 1st edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 113, footnote 19. Here, van Zuylen cites page 68 of the 1962 version of Die gegenstandslose Welt.
...all the works of art collected in museums and its monuments in nature are always valuable to life, for they are themselves in a state of eternal beauty, i.e. outside time, space and movement; this is what life wishes to enter.61

He freed the artist from his dependence on nature because the “impossibility of communicating what he wanted to say about nature” led the poet to “become indifferent towards her, [groan and seek] deliverance in death.”

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0.03
Extreme old age is the threshold of a ‘world’ outside the technology of space and time, nothing irritates hearing or sight, and reflections fade in the eye, the brain changes nothing . . . everything becomes reality, tranquility descends.\textsuperscript{63}

Malevich destroyed the idea that n/Nature needs to be different, improved, created, or destroyed.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{64} [To see the perfection. Not to build it.]?
Man on achieving perfection immediately retires into rest, i.e. the absolute; he is freed from understanding, knowledge, and various proofs and cannot conceal himself from God... God is rest; rest is perfection; the building of worlds is completed... His creative thought will move, while he himself is liberated from madness, for he no longer creates.  

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*he* no longer creates.
As he painted nature and reflected on his love of the Sun as a child, Malevich signed with a black square in place of his name.
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