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WORLDVIEW AS A CONSTRUCTIVIST ACT

BRUNO GIL

The aggregated reflections of feelings in the individual’s consciousness – feelings of the most varied kinds – determine his “view of life” (worldview). (...) The human being can be likened, in a way, to a radio receiver, which picks up and converts a whole series of different waves of feeling, the sum-total of which determines the above-mentioned view of life. (Malevich, 1927)

WORLDVIEW AND ITS DIALECTICAL LOGIC

The Russian geo-cultural identity is frequently observed by an interval between west and east. That was the main argument brought by Viollet-le Duc’s L’Art Russe published in 1877, when he searched for a definition of an original Russian art, as a unique composition of Syrian, Indian and Persian elements. His life-long medieval project, arguing for a symbiotic relation between form and structure, pushed him to criticise in the Russian architecture a conspicuous addition of the classical canon as a difficult collage with Oriental references.

More than underlining these abstract notions towards an original Russian cultural identity, as naïve as these can be, by questioning the emphasised interval we may bring some light to unravel a worldview under construction within a perpetual negotiation of that vast in-between space, which has its highpoint in the dialectical condition of the constructivist project.
In the act of construction of the Russian territory, where distances are difficult to apprehend, and scale distends, a landscape of objects helps to capture a punctual artificiality of nature. Infrastructures are surpassed by superstructures, wishing to become objects, always in self-movement, consciously unaccomplished. We can say that scale becomes valueless, when the micro and macro are conceived with the same “creative energy”, as Iakov Chernikov might argue.

But whereas these objects are politically conceived and artistically expressed, they are realistically constrained by the prevailing logics of social and technical realms, also essential to frame – while critiquing – its established limits and its possible phantasies.

The painted square by Kazimir Malevich can be read as the ultimate sophistication of both limits and phantasies, charging a quintessential spirit: an oppressive white daylight coming from above is challenged by a nocturnal communal dream where black cosmos gives way to a renewed dawn. A reset of the established principles is fulfilled and the pre-existent worldview taken to oblivion. A collective memory gives way to a collective movement. The constructivist act is, thus, the inertial force resulting from the after-zero.

With this force, the low-tech scenography designed by Malevich for the opera “Victory over the Sun” (1913), can reach its high performance. Objects made of wood and paper surpass their material fragility. A trans-rationality (zaoum) is achieved with the arrival of the black square as an icon – “a high-cultural form” – that can be traced back to Malevich’s memoirs of his childhood. The black square shared the spirit he had sensed in peasant art, familiar to the one emanated by Medieval icons painted by the Florentine painter Cimabue, to whom Malevich frequently referred to.

More than a subjective epiphany that kept Malevich awake for several days, the square emerges as a way of going back to basics: a popular instinct mirroring reality that we can already trace in the words of Viollet-le-Duc when discussing the Russian art in 1877:

“Ce n’est jamais d’en haut que surgissent les principes vivifiants sans lesquels l’art se traine dans les pâchiches: c’est d’en bas, c’est par le sentiment ou l’instinct populaire. Tout renouvellement se fait par suite d’une élaboration dans l’esprit du peuple, des masses: il n’est jamais le produit d’une élite.”

In this sense, if we observe the Bronze statue of Peter the Great in Saint Petersburg (1782) designed by the French sculptor Étienne Maurice Falconet, we can say that the stone pedestal is the true icon, more than the statue itself. When carved and made abstract, its effective heaviness is visually emptied, while revealing its own formal self-content: the diagonal, the upwards force, the eruption of a constructivist act. This pedestal is a “proun” avant la lettre. Controversially, or not, if formally assessed, it has in its conformation the potential leaning revealed in the Lenin’s tribute designed by El Lissitzky.

Moreover, this might be considered within Lenin’s reading of Hegel’s “dialectical logic”, critical of eclectic short views, arguing that an object should be taken in development and in self-movement, and “if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and “mediacies””.

We can perceive this “dialectical logic” as the constructivist worldview in the Soviet realm and, as such, the uncompletedness, the instability, appear precisely as the aura of the unfinished project of constructivism.

HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

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Actually, Gan was trying to make his own decision, attempting a re-enactment of Malevich's theories, in front of the shortcomings brought by the rationalist movement, headed by Nikolai Ladovski. His rationalist movement, even if rejecting yesterday's styles, was still atavistic and disconnected from everyday life. On the other hand, Malevich's metaphysical formulation opened up a world of possibilities between painting and the third dimension. A "suprematist architecture" should maintain weight, speed and movement as its main features, similarly to a "suprematist painting".

Bringing forward this third dimension, "arkhitektons" (1920s) constitute an archetype for suprematism. Where the horizontal model Alfa reveals the deep structured volume colliding with minor elements, paused in their territorial dislocation, the vertical model Gota evokes the vertigo of form, extruded in its aerial flight. We regard those models as an experimental constructivist act between two suprematist archetypes of a house: first, its fundamentals in the "House under construction" ("Stroyuschiysya dom") (1915-16) and, secondly, its application in the "Houses of the Future Leningrad" ("Planity (doma) budushchego Leningrada") (1924). Whereas, in the latter, elements have collided and coalesced into one planity, the "House under construction" can be interpreted as the conception of Malevich's own suprematist worldview of art: the art under construction with single coloured elements cosmically relating to each other in space.

Indeed, the act of "transition" between elements consists in a powerful means to unveil the inventive capacity of the designer and his constructivist spirit. The way the (trans)formation is conceived and made present in the design, is translated into the hermeneutic formulation of the constructed composition – the "conjugation" as later theorised by the "Soviet Piranesi" Iakov Chernikhov.

"Conjugation" depends on the "interval" between formal conditions – departing from one form and reaching another. Constructiveness, appears, thus, as a sublimation of forms – supremely achieved in visionary projects by Ivan Leonidov. The more its representations express force, tension, rhythm, dynamics, the more its forms are pushing the limits of reality and reaching "zero". This is the Malevichian "Suprematist Mirror" ("Suprematicheskoe zerkalo") (1923) in action, where "the world as human distinctions" is equal to zero. Therefore, the "after-zero" is itself a revolution. Malevich's avant-garde aura continued henceforth. Fifty years later, the constructivist movement caused astonishment in the 1960s and 1970s, taking a formal rebirth elsewhere, freed from the original ideology. After one hundred years, it keeps persisting in smaller revolutions, in architecture and art, as a broader worldview in perpetual construction determined by "aggregated reflections of feelings in the individual's consciousness – feelings of the most varied kinds".


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