

**ARCHITECTURAL FORM GENERATION
IN SUPREMATIST PAINTERLY SPACE:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EL LISSITZKY'S PROUNTS**

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ABSTRACT

ARCHITECTURAL FORM GENERATION IN SUPREMATIST PAINTERLY SPACE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EL LISSITZKY'S PROUNS

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This thesis re-conceptualizes Lazar Markovich (El) Lissitzky's (1890-1941) PROUN drawings as architectural representations. The study reframes the PROUNs within the intellectual climate of the Russian Avant-garde, circa 1920 when the compatibility of the two-dimensional form generative approach with industrial production was contested. The mentioned reframing is intended to serve as a tool for the principal argument of this thesis: the PROUNs as architectural representations, indicate an alternative and inspiring constructivist strategy. This condition might suggest an intellectual process for architectural design along with the contributions of individual skill and craftsmanship which were surpassed by mainstream Constructivism.

Keywords: form generation, architectural representation, architectural design, constructivism

ÖZ

SÜPREMATİST RESİM UZAMINDA MİMARİ FORM ÜRETİMİ: EL LİSSİTZKY’NİN PROUNLARI

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Bu çalışma, Lazar Markovich Lissitzky’nin (1890-1941) PROUN adını verdiği çizimlerini mimari temsil ortamları olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırır. Tezin kurgusu PROUNları, biçim yaratımına yönelik her türlü iki boyutlu çabanın Çatkıcılar tarafından endüstriyel üretime uygun olmadıkları gerekçesiyle reddedildiği 1920’li yıllardaki Rus Avant-garde’nin düşünsel ortamında konumlandırmaya çalışır. Sözü edilen konumlandırma, tezin temel önerisi olan PROUNların, mimari temsiller olarak, Çatkıcılık’ın ana kolundan ayrılan özgün bir yorumu ifade ettiği fikrini ortaya koymak için bir araçtır. Bu ana fikir, Çatkıcılık’ın reddettiği bireysel yetenek özelliklerinin PROUNlardan hareketle mimari tasarım sürecinde tekrar etkin kılınabileceği düşüncesidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: form üretimi, mimari temsil, mimari tasarım, çatkıcılık

To My Parents

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* Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.125

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have established the definitive plans of the Suprematist system. Further development into architectural Suprematism I leave to young architects, in the wide sense of the word, for I see the epoch of the new architecture only in this. I myself have moved into area of thought new to me and, as I can, I will set out what I see within the endless space of the human cranium.¹

Kazimir Severinovich Malevich's (1878-1935) given motivating suggestion to search for the future architectural counterpart of Suprematism (Appendix-A) had not sufficiently been elaborated in practice, as stated by Mäcel Otakar.² As indicated by Catherine Cooke, the socio-political developments in USSR circa the October Revolution acted comparatively in favor of the newly emerging Constructivism.³ Cooke notes that during the first half of the decade after the Revolution, Constructivism rendered outmoded Malevich's Suprematism, which was for the most part a pre-Revolutionary Russian Avant-garde movement.⁴ Christina Lodder states that the reason for the vulnerability of Suprematism had been "the absence of material and structural interests" inherent in its theoretical background towards the immediate problems of the revolutionary society that required practical solutions.⁵

¹ Kazimir S. Malevich, "Suprematism. 34 Drawings, Vitebsk, 1920," cited in Evgenii Kovtun, "Kazimir Malevich" in Art Journal, trans. Charlotte Douglas, Fall 1981, p.234

² Mäcel Otakar, "The Black Square and Architecture," in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p. 62.

Otakar states that the consideration of his survived works, both written and visual, reveals that Malevich himself could not proceed towards his ends

³ Catherine Cooke, "Malevich: From Theory into Teaching," in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p.26.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.20

However, Paul Wood claims that in the Soviet Union, the suppression of Suprematism was quickly followed around 1930 by that of not only Constructivism but all the avant-garde movements based on experimentation.⁶ The turning point from the state of “democratic freedom” of experimentation to the consecutive “totalitarian repression,” mentioned by Wood,⁷ becomes crucial for the mapping of the PROUNs;⁸ (Figures 1-12) Lazar Markovich (El) Lissitzky’s (1890-1941) architectural representations that become central for this thesis.

El Lissitzky’s following definition locates the PROUN, namely “The Project for the Affirmation of the New,”⁹ between the steps of conceptualization and physical realization as a process of architectural representation introducing the painterly space the role of form generator:

PROUN begins on the flat plane, passes through three-dimensionally constructed models, and continues to the construction of all objects of our everyday life.¹⁰

also see Michail Grobman, “About Malevich”, in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.26

Furthermore, as indicated by Mikhail Grobman, the “mystical philosophy” of Malevich was regarded to be “ideologically dangerous” in the political context which demanded that art should develop in tune with the sociological objectives of Marxism.

Grobman compares Suprematism and Constructivism with respect to the intensities of social engagement in their manifestations by claiming that while Suprematism was “a mystic program of perfection” that “turned the face of art toward eternity,” Constructivism remained the “pure dream and work of youth” that “turned the face of art toward life”.

⁶ Paul Wood, “The Politics of the Avant-Garde,” in The Great Utopia, The Russian & Soviet Avant-Garde 1915-1932, New York: Guggenheim Museum & Rizzoli International Publications. Inc., 1992, pp.5-12

Paul Wood notes that “failure is not Constructivism’s alone, what is at issue is a far wider failure: the failure of the October Revolution itself.”

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Henk Puts, “El Lissitzky (1890-1941), his life and work,” in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p.17

“PROUN” is “etymologically a contraction of the Russian *proekt unovisa*,” which means the “architectonic design of the UNOVIS”, where UNOVIS is the name of the Suprematist group founded in Vitebsk Academy by Malevich in 1919, and stands for the “Affirmation of the New”

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

It should be noted that the period of PROUNs' production between 1919 and 1925 coincides with John E. Bowlt's location of the turning point concerning the relation between political authority and the Russian avant-garde.¹¹ Emphasizing this quality, Yves Alain Bois regards Lissitzky's PROUNs as "abstract models of radical freedom."¹² Bois states that "as long as Lissitzky kept intact the utopian force of his political desire, the radical project was sustainable; but as soon as the circumstances closed off his utopian impulse, he was faced with no possibilities other than silence and service."¹³

In order to explain the causes for the transition illustrated by Bois, it might be argued, by referring to Christina Lodder, that as compared to Suprematist interpretations such as that of Lissitzky, Constructivism seemed to better cope with the social

¹¹ John E. Bowlt, "Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts," in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.131-146

John Bowlt dates this turning point at 1923 when, the tolerant intellectual climate that, until then, let conflicting attitudes coexist, was brought to an end by the official state policy, as argued by Benjamin Buchloh.

See also Benjamin H. D Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," in October 30, (Fall 1984), pp.83-86

Also see Paul Wood, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," pp.5-10

Wood gives Walter Benjamin's impressions from his trip to the USSR in 1926, which noted that "the Soviet regime was trying to arrest the dynamic of revolutionary progress in the life of the state by bringing about a suspension of militant communism."

¹² Yves Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky, Radical Reversibility," in Art in America, April 1988, pp.164-166

¹³ *ibid.*

also see Paul Wood, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," pp.6-16

Paul Wood elaborates the changing relation between the avant-garde and the Soviet administration, which becomes crucial for the reconsideration of PROUNs in terms of their suggestions of experimentation.

Wood identifies a strong association between the fates of Soviet Avant-garde and the initial objectives of Bolshevik Revolution which were both repudiated after circa 1930 by the central administration.

For Wood, it was both the socio-political system envisioned by the Bolshevik Revolution and its artistic counterpart; "the Soviet avant-garde" that were abolished together by the later totalitarian regime, which should have been seen as only one of the possible consequences of the historical flow, rather than being the inevitable one. Wood strongly opposes the "continuity thesis" that had been proposed before 1970s. The "continuity thesis" thesis asserted that Stalinist Bureaucracy who introduced the mentioned totalitarian suppression of Russian Avant-garde was the natural consequence of a historical continuity that commenced with the 1917 Revolution. For Wood, this "continuity thesis" asserted that by its nature, the Soviet era, from the beginning necessarily projected a totalitarian regime, which however, "disguised itself in revolutionary garb during its first stage of development". Wood strongly disagrees with this thesis that regards the participants to the avant-garde as "the innocent victim of the Marxist power," because for Wood, this view deprives them from their political alignments by neglecting their actual dedication to the Bolshevik Revolution.

Wood's reconstruction of the participants of the Russian Avant-garde becomes closely related with Lissitzky's mapping throughout this thesis.

engineering project of the Revolution during the first years of its formation.¹⁴ However, Lodder argues that the Constructivist proposals for an industrial culture turned out to be quite premature for the current socio-economic circumstances of the backward country.¹⁵ To illustrate this discrepancy between the motivations of the avant-garde and the actual social condition, Grobman states that “Constructivism is the condition of building a house for the yet unborn man.”¹⁶

In Bowlt’s discussion of the Russian Avant-garde¹⁷, it is possible to identify a similar claim to that of Grobman.¹⁸ Bowlt argues that there had been a common attitude regarding the Russian interpretation of Futurism as “the ideology of leftist proletarian régime” that constituted “the common denominator” of the new “collectivity, industrialism and dynamism.”¹⁹ Evgenii Kovtun states that this “proletarian theory” was represented by the newly founded educational institutions who sought to establish the “theoretical basis” compatible with a “serious scientific analysis and foundation” in order

¹⁴ Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.181-186

¹⁵ *ibid.*

also see Paul Wood, “Art and Politics in a Worker’s State,” in Art History 8, no.I (March 1985), pp. 105-124

Similarly, Paul Wood notes that the early Soviet economy was still based on agriculture and the majority of the population mostly lived in the provinces.

Paul Wood claims that in post-revolutionary Russia, which remained a backward country, “futurism was taken as an ideology beyond a mere aesthetic style to motivate industrial development.” Wood states that futurism triggered the “rising political militancy” for a radical change in all spheres of human activity during the October Revolution and the subsequent civil war between the revolutionist “Red Army” and the tscharist “White Army.” Therefore, for Wood, futurism became a common ground for the “specific conjunction,” the union established between the formal and the political

¹⁶ Mikhail Grobman, “About Malevich”, p.26

For Grobman, Constructivism reflects the general attitude of conceptualizing the future, existent in all Soviet avant-garde movements including Suprematism, although with variations on the extend of the time scale that would be predetermined.

also see Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, London: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1997. p.171

Kenneth Frampton elaborates the same point from a technical stance. Frampton argues that the realization of most of the architectural proposals of Constructivism were “beyond the capacity of Soviet engineering” therefore reflect “the disparity between the vision of a supercharged technique and the reality of a backward industry.”

¹⁷ John E. Bowlt, “Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts,” in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, p.139

¹⁸ Grobman, p.26

¹⁹ Bowlt, “Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts,” p.139

to get rid of the gap between the realm of design and the masses²⁰ Christina Lodder notes that this materialist view of creativity merged with scientific and technological developments gave birth to the new concept of “artist-constructor” or “artist-engineer.”²¹

Lodder implies that the principle objective of this new concept of “artist-constructor” had been fulfilling the contemporary idea of “design” as a complex process of production in which technical and aesthetic concerns interrelate throughout a complex process.²² Lodder states that this notion of design led to the foundations of the new state-initiated educational institutions such as the “Institutes of Artistic Culture” in Moscow, Petrograd and Vitebsk (INKhUK) and the “Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops” in Moscow (VKhUTEMAS), all of which envisioned a radical change in the structure of design education.²³

The specific interpretation of “artist-constructor” by Lissitzky may be related with his transformation of Suprematism through his belief in the validity of two-dimensional spatial representation as a medium of form generation for works of architecture and all objects of everyday use.²⁴ Lodder illustrates the difficulties in the application of the two dimensional vocabulary of Suprematism to the design process of an object that is thought to be realized in physical space.²⁵ Lodder explains the cause for this difficulty as “the lack of interest in the structural and material concerns in Suprematist theory.”²⁶ However, Milka Bliznakov argues that El Lissitzky achieved to establish a new system of spatial

²⁰ Evgenii Kovtun, “Kazimir Malevich” in Art Journal, trans. Charlotte Douglas, Fall 1981, p.238

²¹ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.106-110

²² *ibid.*

Lodder argues that this new concept of the designer was underlined by the motivation to produce for the collective interest of the society

²³ *ibid.* pp.83-89

Lodder argues that the concern for the merging of the artistic and scientific knowledge during the first half of the 1920s reveals the close alliance unprecedented in Western Europe, between the avant-garde artist and ideology of state that both declare their aim as unified. This common aim was basically defined as fulfilling the predetermined tasks of Bolshevik Revolution.

Also see Evgenii Kovtun, “Kazimir Malevich” p.238

Similarly, Evgenii Kovtun argues that “The Museum of Artistic Culture” and INKhUK, both based in Moscow, had been the first state initiated institutions that serve the dissemination of modern art contrasting with the leading Western European academies that still adhered to classical theoretical positions.

²⁴ El Lissitzky, in “A. and Pangeometry,” cited in Linda D. Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and the Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983p.296

²⁵ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.20

²⁶ *ibid.*

representation which responded to the inevitable needs of architectural realm such as materiality, applicability and stability.²⁷

Milka Bliznakov argues that the PROUNs utilized a certain color code that made their proposals applicable for different technological paradigms without turning the attempt into a mere representation of machine.²⁸ Bliznakov also states that “in some of the PROUNs, Lissitzky simulated the effect of real materials through the use of color” and “in many PROUNs, however he did not include existing materials in the belief that new materials could be developed to approximate the effect of the PROUNs in actual buildings.”²⁹ Christina Lodder reveals the uniqueness of Lissitzky concerning his proposal of the creative contribution of painterly space in the form generative process.³⁰ It might be inferred that, in contrast to Constructivism, Lissitzky’s solutions are based on his definition of aesthetic object as expansible into the domain of industrial production.³¹

Therefore, it may be claimed that the PROUNs as the early work of Lissitzky may be considered as the representative of his claim for the capability of Suprematist painterly space to suggest spatial representation. Considering that they were produced during this interval when the Constructivist position versus Suprematism was being consolidated in INKhUK, the PROUNs indicate a transformed Suprematist painterly attempt that still inherits certain aspects of the theoretical basis founded by Malevich. In this respect, Selim O. Khan Magomedov regards El Lissitzky’s PROUNs as the most profound representatives of El Lissitzky’s interpretation of volumetric and architectural Suprematism.³²

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh identifies the trend which attempts to “transcend the purity of Suprematist painting by introducing iconic photographic fragments into suprematist works”, starting from 1919 with the work of Gustav Klutis and El Lissitzky.³³ Buchloh regards the development of photomontage especially by the former

²⁷ Milka Bliznakov, “The Rationalist Movement in Soviet Architecture in the 1920’s,” in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.150-151

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.100-105

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Selim O. Khan Magomedov, “A New Style: Three Dimensional Suprematism and Prounen,” in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, pp.35-45

³³ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” in October 30, (Fall 1984), p.95

disciples of Malevich such as Klutis, Lissitzky and Rodchenko as “constructivist strategies to expand the framework of modernism” to compensate the “failure to communicate with the new audiences of industrialized urban society.”³⁴ For Buchloh, this need emerged due to Suprematism’s understanding of the product of design necessarily as “non-objective”³⁵, “opaque”³⁶ and “hermetically sealed”³⁷.

Christina Lodder identifies a similar transformation in the work of Lissitzky and Klutis.³⁸ Lodder explains this as the introduction of the concern for graphic communication as a new function along with this compromise with the existing, “objective” reality as opposed to projected “non-objective” reality of Malevich.³⁹ The mentioned compromise may be thought to enhance the PROUNs to acquire the capability of suggesting architectural representation by the introduction of three-dimensional illusion and conveying of material and technical qualities that were totally out of concern in Malevich’s vision of Suprematism.

For Lodder, these consecutive interpretations of Malevich’s Suprematism had been attempts to propose “an alternative form of agitational art” which could gain official support while still retaining, into a certain extent yet not in entirety, the abstract language of the Suprematist painterly space.⁴⁰ (Figure- 12) Lodder argues that the graphical work of Lissitzky and Klutis, may be read as the gradual transformation of the absolute non-

Gustav Klutis is El Lissitzky’s colleague from the INKhUK of Vitebsk, where they were both pupils of Malevich

³⁴ *ibid.* pp.94-99

³⁵ Kazimir Malevich, The Non-objective World, trans. Howard Dearstyne, Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959, pp. 78-84.

The term “non-objective,” shows a gradual development during the pre-revolutionary Russian avant-garde and reached its absolute state in Malevich’s Suprematism.

Here the term is borrowed from Malevich’s major text, and addresses the sense of abstraction that strips all connotations dictated by the earthly constraints such as material and gravity, off the painterly space.

³⁶ For the discussion of the “opacity of the work of art” in the avant-garde, Alan Colquhoun, “Three Kinds of Historicism,” in Theorizing A New Agenda for Architecture: an anthology of architectural theory 1965-1995, Kate Nesbitt Eds., New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p.209

³⁷ Bowl p.131

³⁸ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.180-188

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

objectivity of the Suprematist painterly space.⁴¹ Referring to Lodder, the PROUNs may be regarded as preparatory experiments that arose due to “the need for a certain degree of documentality even in abstraction” in order to “transcend the confinements dictated by the uncompromising strictures of Modernism”⁴².

Henk Puts underlines El Lissitzky’s interdisciplinary background that greatly contributed to the synthesis he arrived.⁴³ Puts notes that Lissitzky was trained as an architect, engineer and painter and that, through practical experience, became acquainted with photography, typography and book illustration.⁴⁴ John Bowlt argues that this interdisciplinary character guided Lissitzky into his claim to realize the personification of the concept of the “artistic-creator,” engaged in the design activity contributing to the restructuring of the revolutionary society.⁴⁵

Stephanie Barron argues that Lissitzky adhered to Malevich’s Suprematism (Appendix-B) but his interdisciplinary development guided him “to evolve his own style; a unique combination of Suprematism and Constructivism”.⁴⁶ However, Sima Ingberman reveals that Lissitzky’s engagement in the realm of architecture had moved him more into a Constructivist ground.⁴⁷ In spite of this later adherence to Constructivist circles, John

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Henk Puts, “El Lissitzky (1890-1941), his life and work,” in El Lissitzky 1890-1941, architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, pp.14-20

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ John E. Bowlt, “Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.133-148

⁴⁶ Stephanie Barron, “The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, p.17

⁴⁷ Sima Ingberman, International Constructivist Architecture, 1922-1939, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, pp.3-11.

Ingberman claims that Lissitzky’s relations especially with Western Europe lead to an international movement following the principles of “Russian Constructivism,” regarding Lissitzky as “the father of International Constructivism”.

In this thesis, to avoid contradictions, the relation of El Lissitzky’s work with Suprematism will be considered only through his PROUNs; his earlier painterly attempts into architectural representation.

Ingberman notes that El Lissitzky’s influence into the international ABC movement lead to a totally different tendency, which illustrates once again the impossibility of indicating strict categories by referring to particular identities. What constructs the initially defined affiliation is not the individuals, as their interpretations may change throughout their lifespan, but rather the emerging role of Suprematist conception of painterly space in architectural design process, as exemplified by the PROUNs.

Bowlit regards Lissitzky as a figure who inherited the Suprematist sensation in the origins of his work and thus proposed a different interpretation of Constructivism in tune with his Suprematist background.⁴⁸

Lodder's research on Russian Constructivism reveals that the concept of "construction" has been extensively utilized in divergent and even conflicting theoretical frameworks in the Russian Avant-garde both in the pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods.⁴⁹ This aspect rendered the term ambiguous.⁵⁰ Naum Gabo criticizes the Constructivists' appropriation of the term "construction" circa 1920, through their "materialistic philosophical and Marxist political alignments."⁵¹ For Gabo, the Constructivists distorted the meaning of the term which is indeed an anonymous production of the avant-garde culture in Russia.⁵²

Christina Lodder claims that there has not been a monolithic block of Constructivism due to the constant evolution of the artistic ideas originating from both the personal developments of artists and their changing relations with the political authority.⁵³ Therefore, Christina Lodder invents the term "mainstream Constructivism"⁵⁴ to differentiate the widely acknowledged variation from the other ones engendered by the same context. Throughout the thesis, Constructivism with capital "C" shall designate the movement that is referred by Lodder as "mainstream Constructivism." This situation reinforces Bowlit's claim that with his adherence to Suprematist principles, Lissitzky represented an alternative interpretation of constructivism different from the mainstream line.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Bowlit, "Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand," pp.133-148
also see: Mäcel Otakar, "The Black Square and Architecture," in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p. 62.
Mäcel Otakar regards Lissitzky as "the fighting apostle of Suprematism" if Malevich was to be "the high priest"

⁴⁹ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.180-188

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.39

⁵² *ibid.*

Lodder quotes Naum Gabo to show that mainstream Constructivism relied on a reductive definition which evaluated aesthetical concerns as nothing else than "a pleasurable occupation cherished in a decadent capitalistic society and totally useless, even harmful in the new society of communism."

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.205

⁵⁵ Bowlit, "Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand," pp.133-148

The research presented here focuses on the underlying reasons for such an argument of continuity between Suprematist principles of spatial construction and El Lissitzky's language of architectural representation in his PROUNs. Therefore, this study aims to reframe Lissitzky's architectural representations within a contemporary understanding of the Russian Avant-garde.⁵⁶ Barron notes that, in the West, the construction of this contemporary understanding has been maintained by certain exhibitions.

Until the decomposition of the USSR around 1990, the Russian Avant-garde remained mostly unknown due to the enduring political repression.⁵⁷ In contrast to the

⁵⁶ Barron, "The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West," p.5

The Russian avant-garde is regarded by Barron as the modern art movement "that is least studied and exhibited in spite of all its remarkable achievements immediately before and after the Revolution of 1917."

Also see Magdalena Dabrowski, "The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.28

Magdalena Dabrowski implies that in Russia the gradual consolidation of the cultural avant-garde had been realized through the exhibitions, manifestos and publications that triggered the awareness of the most advanced trends in Western art.

Dabrowski argues that these activities originated in the pre-Revolutionary period of the early twentieth century have been carried out with both the unparalleled moral and financial support of the official Bolshevik approval, which provided the Revolutionary Russia with the privilege of becoming "the first country to exhibit abstract art officially on a wide scale," with no precedent in Western Europe.

Dabrowski states that the common goal of these exhibitions and academic debates was to construct "a new aesthetic language compatible with the modern reality of industrialized Russia".

Also see Charlotte Douglas, "0-10 Exhibition," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, pp.34-41

Emphasizing, similarly, the significant role of the exhibitions, Charlotte Douglas claims that "the emergence of the two forces of the avant-garde," namely Constructivism and Suprematism had first appeared through the "contrasting personalities" of Vladimir Tatlin and Kazimir Malevich, respectively, and this was also the outcome of an important exhibition held in Petrograd in 1915: "The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures: 0-10".

⁵⁷ Barron, *The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West*, p.12

Stephanie Barron states that the close alliance between the political authority and the artistic avant-garde had a short duration; by the late 1920s, the avant-garde began to be denounced by the Soviet regime, which tended to endorse Socialist Realism; "a more propagandistic aesthetic oriented to the masses".

Barron notes that the official document that marked the end of the political support was the Communist Party's resolution of 1925: "On the Party's Policy in the Field of Artistic Literature," which projected that art should be "comprehensible to the millions." Barron argues that during the late 1920s the government gradually withdrew its official sanction from all experimental art; therefore from avant-garde. The official hostility went beyond the lack of encouragement and through the decree of "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations," in 1932 resulted in the prohibition of all cultural groups apart from the governmentally controlled "Union of Artists." Eventually in 1934 the "First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers" explicitly stated that all Soviet artists were obliged to accept "Soviet Realism."

official Soviet policy which disregarded the avant-garde period and rendered it unavailable to the public, in the West several exhibitions were held for the reassessment of the productive years of the movement, such as: “Art and Revolution,” Hayward Gallery, London (1971), “Russian and Soviet Painting,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1977), “Paris-Moscou,” Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1979) and “Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930: New Perspectives,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art, (1980).⁵⁸

Apart from the mentioned exhibitions which primarily focused on the documentation of the available Russian Avant-garde artworks, the “Deconstructivist Architecture,” of 1988, held in Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York introduced a new contemporary tendency of architecture that, through Mark Wigley’s theoretical mapping, claims to develop unrealized conclusions of the Russian Avant-garde.⁵⁹

The PROUNs have also been a part of the mentioned process of documentation through various exhibitions. Ayşen Savaş states that recently “exhibitions and various publications have broadened the dissemination of architectural expressions within the overall culture and within the discipline [of architecture]”⁶⁰ Savaş emphasizes the crucial role played by the emerging “specialized institutions” like “private collections, archives, research centers, and museums of architecture” in the “collection of *artifacts*, such as drawings, models, sketchbooks, and related written sources.”⁶¹

In this sense and concerning the Russian avant-garde, the private collection of George Costakis in Athens, offering a great variety of textual and visual information, becomes an important contribution to the recent knowledge of the period.⁶² Ayşen Savaş claims that “in the process, however, the informative function of these artifacts has been transformed” because “visual or textual expressions, whether executed before or after the construction of an edifice, are subject to redefinition by their new position within the

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Mark Wigley, “Deconstructivist Architecture,” in Deconstructivist Architecture, James Leggio Eds, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1988, pp.15-20

⁶⁰ Ayşen Savaş, Between Document and Monument: Architectural Artifact in the Age of Specialized Institutions, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis at MIT History, Theory and Criticism Program, Boston, 1994, p.7

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Margit Rowell and Angelica Zander Rudenstine, Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia, Selections from the George Costakis Collection, New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1981

borders of an institution.”⁶³ Savaş argues that “the definition of an architectural artifact is found at the intersection of two courses of action: the material formation of the artifact, and its cultural interaction through specialized institutions.”⁶⁴

In this research the PROUN drawings will be considered to be “architectural artifacts,” defined by Ayşen Savaş “to encompass the graphic and textual works of architects,” and generally “does not refer to buildings” themselves.⁶⁵ At this point, Savaş’s proposal of the “architectural artifact as representation” enables the consideration of architectural drawings as documents that are “worthy artifacts in their own right”⁶⁶ further than being merely “analytical tools and informative documents.”⁶⁷ Referring to this definition, the thesis considers El Lissitzky’s PROUN drawings as such “architectural artifacts.”

Therefore, the PROUNs’ contribution to architectural design will be analyzed within the limits of their two dimensional formation, having a significance independent from the consecutive physical existence of architecture, which these drawings suggest. In this way, PROUNs’ consideration as “architectural artifacts”⁶⁸ becomes possible if they are regarded as abstract conceptions and architectural representations, which transcend the limits of a specific architectural problem with a defined scale and context.

The defined task will be handled through simultaneous constructions for comprehending the constituents of the initially made association: Suprematism, Constructivism and the PROUNs; Lissitzky’s spatial representations. Otherwise, it would be a less insightful attempt to select one of them as a set of fixed principles and accept the other as the unknown whose ambiguity would be lessened step by step through an exploration in terms of the other. For understanding Lissitzky’s position in the context of the Russian Avant-garde, “a greater knowledge of the varieties of the practices and

⁶³ Ayşen Savaş, pp.7-8

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.8

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Ayşen Savaş’s definition is based on two resources :

Jill Lever and Margaret Richardson, *The Architect as an Artist*, New York, 1984 and

Norbert Messler, “The Artist as Builder. On Architecturalism in German Art,” in *Artscribe International*, January-February, 1990

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

attitudes”⁶⁹ that the terms Constructivism and Suprematism encompass during their “emergence, dissemination, appropriation and reinterpretation”⁷⁰ becomes a prerequisite.

This thesis argues that the reconsideration of the architectural principles projected by Suprematism in the light of El Lissitzky’s work and similarly the reconsideration of Lissitzky’s painterly attempts in the light of Suprematist theory deserve broader exposure due to the premise of rediscovering the role of these historically surpassed suggestions especially within the formal vocabulary of PROUNs, which the thesis regards as architectural representations. This may help to understand the possible transformations that had occurred in the initial objectives of the Suprematist principles while being inserted into the form generative process of architecture and may enable to reveal the further potentials they can offer.

Before going into the details of the development of the concepts of “construction” and “artist-constructor” in the Russian avant-garde and in its two basic movements: Suprematism and Constructivism, the discussion will depart from an introductory analysis of Lissitzky’s synthesis through the PROUNs. Then, it will pass through selected points of focus in Suprematist and Constructivist thinking, in comparison with Lissitzky’s interpretations concerning architecture. This trajectory is also thought to reflect the author’s process of conceiving these terms throughout this research. The concluding discussion will be concerned with the significance of PROUNs’ contribution to architectural design, along with the constructed understandings of Suprematism’s and Constructivism’s further potentials interpreted by Lissitzky’s spatial representations.

⁶⁹ Christina Lodder, “El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.27-33

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION AND AXONOMETRIC PROJECTION: SPATIAL ILLUSION CONVEYED BY THE PROUN

2.1 Lissitzky's Contribution to Architectural Design: The PROUNs' Claim for Architectural Representation

The research presented until this part focuses on the significance of the PROUNs, El Lissitzky's series of spatial representations, which are for Boris Brodsky, explorations for the "subjection of object and space"¹ into the otherwise "non-objective" painterly compositions. The significance of the PROUNs will be elaborated by emphasizing the potentials that they introduce to architectural representation.

Catherine Cooke states that, in contrast to Lissitzky, for Malevich, Suprematism had been an end in itself signifying the "spiritual construction" for the revolutionary epoch, the accomplishment of the final supreme step of the long stylistic evolution,² in other words, "rediscovery of the essence of creativity that had been forgotten for a long time."³ Leah Dickerman implies that Lissitzky's contribution, in contrast to his tutor, was conceiving Suprematism as an "intermediary step; more of a laboratory of investigation

¹ Boris Brodsky, "El Lissitzky," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p.92

² Catherine Cooke, "Malevich: From Theory into Teaching," in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, pp.8-10.

Malevich, introduces the notions of "art as a man made system" and "art as comprising a sequence of culture-specific systems". While formulating his suggestions, he relies on the historical consciousness of the recent developments in painting, namely "the sequence of culture-specific systems" that he gives as "Impressionism, Cézannism, Cubism and Futurism" This sequence becomes a justification for his "man-made system" of Suprematism which is attached as the last step of evolution.

³ Malevich, The Non-Objective World, p.74.

than a final result” serving the liberation of the form generation process of “all practical objects of daily life” from the traditional constraints of physical space.⁴

Therefore, Lissitzky’s PROUNs may be considered as a starting point for a further attempt to reintroduce individual artistic skill and craftsmanship into the form generative process of architecture, which had been saturated by technical constraints of mechanization and collectivity. This view may be inferred from Lissitzky’s statements that explicitly put forward his interpretation of the recent painterly developments solely as conclusions that should be further developed in order to emphasize the reemerging role of the individual skill within architectural design:

The painter’s canvas was too limited for me. The connoisseur’s range of colour harmonies was too restricted; and I created the PROUN as an intermediary station on the road between painting and architecture. I have treated canvas and wood panel as a building site which placed the fewest restrictions on my constructional ideas.⁵

In order to reveal the further potentials it might offer to the architectural design process, the recognition of the PROUN as an “architectural artifact”⁶ becomes crucial. By this way PROUN may be considered as architectural representation indicating the intermediary step between the phases of conceptualization and realization. Thus this intermediary phase itself may be taken into account. Milka Bliznakov argues that Lissitzky also considers the suggestions of his two-dimensional work into the process of physical construction, which would eventually subject the mentally constructed and flatly projected images to the rules of the earthly space.⁷ However, this fact does not disturb the significance of the PROUN’s intrinsic value conveying the visual manifestation of Lissitzky’s architectural representations.

⁴ Leah Dickerman, “El Lissitzky’s Camera Corpus,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.153-158

⁵ El Lissitzky cited in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, London, 1980, p.325

⁶ Ayşen Savaş, Between Document and Monument: Architectural Artifact in the Age of Specialized Institutions, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis at MIT History, Theory and Criticism Program, Boston, 1994, pp.7- The signification of “architectural artifact” is given in the Chapter-1 (Introduction) based on the definition of Ayşen Savaş.

⁷ Milka Bliznakov, “The Rationalist Movement in Soviet Architecture in the 1920’s,” in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.147-161

Through the definition of the PROUN, El Lissitzky had expressed his profound understanding of the multidimensionality of architectural production, which would otherwise be conceived within the narrow limitations of traditional understanding. PROUN offers an intermediary possibility advancing beyond the extreme conditions of ultimate painterly autonomy asserted by Malevich⁸ and subservience to machine asserted by the Constructivists.⁹ John E. Bowlt claims that Lissitzky's achievement had been through the proposal of the "artist-constructor" the possessor and the merger of aesthetic and technical dimensions of practical knowledge.¹⁰ Lissitzky's statements reveal that the mentioned compromise sought to suggest an alternative construction of space:

PROUN supersedes painting and its artists on one hand, the machine and the engineer on the other, and proceeds to the construction of space, building a new, manifold yet unified image of man's nature.¹¹

Before discussing how three-dimensionality was conveyed to render PROUNs architectural representations, it is necessary to clarify what architectural representation corresponds within the scope of this thesis. Robin Evans thinks that there is a close relation between the architects' interest in two dimensional geometrical inquiries and their belief in architectural representation as a form generative process. Evans claims that there are sensible reasons for the architects' belief in the power of geometry.¹² For Evans, architects are consumers of geometry, if not its producers.¹³ Evans argues that without "the architect's faith that geometrically defined lines will engender something else more substantial yet discernible through the drawing," there would be no architecture.¹⁴

⁸ Malevich, The Non-Objective World, p.74.

⁹ Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, pp.73-80

¹⁰ John E. Bowlt, "Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand," in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.129-133

¹¹ El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, p.352

¹² Robin Evans, The Projective Cast, Architecture and Its Three Geometries, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995, p.xxvi

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.xxvi

Robin Evans considers the relation between architecture and building from this point of view that regards architectural representation indispensable.¹⁵ In Evan's understanding, "architecture is considerably less than building" in contrast to the general idea that "architecture is more than mere building."¹⁶ The reason for Evans' specific comprehension of architecture becomes his assertion that "architects do not make buildings; they make drawings of buildings."¹⁷ This understanding of the architectural imperative in the design process is relevant for the reconsideration of PROUNs as "architectural artifacts" because this thesis' understanding of the architectural realm will remain within the limits of the phase between conception and application, that is, without extending into the physical realization.

Robin Evans further associates the capacity of projection to convey "the generic message inscribed in paper" with architectural representation.¹⁸ Evans implies that ideas become "architectural" only if "they are given definition prior to being constructed."¹⁹ Evans argues that this quality of being "architectural" is what gives architecture its peculiarity because specifically, "the anterior definition of the object, whereby all significant decisions are normally taken before the thing itself is even begun" belongs only to the object of architectural representation.²⁰ At this point, the relation between the reconsideration of the PROUN as "architectural artifact" and its claim for architectural representation needs to be clarified by referring principally to Robin Evans's categorizations of architectural drawings.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Robin Evans, "Architectural Projection," in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989, p.21

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.21

²⁰ *ibid.*

2.2 PROUN as “Architectural Artifact”

Robin Evans states that, “architectural drawings are projections.”²¹ However, for Evans, “architectural projections” differ from all other modes of projections such as those encountered on the TV screens or photographs, which “embody” events that actually exist within three dimensions.²² Evans defines the relationship between “the projection” and “the projected” directionally.²³ For Evans, “architectural representations” indicate the direction opposite to the given ones, for architectural representation is intended to be used so as to extract information to create objects, which are “embodied” by the drawing prior to the objects’ realization.²⁴

Hence, Robin Evans argues that “projections- the invisible lines that relate pictures to things- are always directional.”²⁵ When this directionality is considered, architectural representations, for Evans, fall under a more specific category as a special mode of architectural projection. Evan’s proposal of these two possible and opposite directions indicated by projection that “relates the pictures to things” match two actions, respectively: “to record or to propagate things already made” versus “to project things as yet unmade.”²⁶ It may be discerned that the latter conforms to the idea of architectural representation expressed by Evans.

Robin Evan’s understanding of architectural representation greatly contributes to PROUNs’ contemporary definition as “architectural artifact” that is given by Phyllis Lambert.²⁷ Evans criticizes the majority of the interpretations into the history of western architecture by claiming that they analyzed architectural drawings from a narrow point of view. For Evans, architectural drawings were erroneously seen to be solely dependent on

²¹ *ibid.* p.19

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Phyllis Lambert, “Foreword,” in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989, p.9

the “purposes of construction and dissemination,” which became justifications for the existence of these drawings. Evans argues that this mistake would be compensated by a recently emerging approach towards which he feels an affinity:

At present, we are only just beginning to investigate the power that drawings and photographs have to alter, stabilize, obscure, reveal, configure, or disfigure what they represent. Whatever the final outcome of these investigations, we can be certain of one thing in the meantime: architecture is reliant on its own pictures to a far greater extent than has hitherto been recognized.²⁸

Concerning this criticism, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman indicate parallels with Robin Evans.²⁹ Blau and Kaufman reassess the underestimated significance of the intrinsic issues of representation, considering it as a noteworthy field of inquiry in itself.³⁰ The same point appears as the thesis statement evoked by Phyllis Lambert, the director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), in her foreword for the itinerary of the exhibition “Architecture and Its Image: Four Centuries of Architectural Representation” held by the institute in Montréal, in 1989.³¹ Lambert defines the role of the CCA as “a museum and a study centre devoted to architecture as well as into the nature of architectural representation.”³² Lambert states that the CCA presents valuable archival material to the discipline and contributed to the development of the “notion of architectural artifact as representation.”³³

²⁸ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.21

²⁹ Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman, “Introduction,” in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989, p.13

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Phyllis Lambert, “Foreword,” p.9

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

Phyllis Lambert states that such “autonomous architectural museums or departments within museums are recent phenomena” and that “they were first recognized as such in 1979 at the organizing meeting of the International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM) in Helsinki.” Lambert notes that “the ICAM members agreed on the importance of collecting and preserving architectural documents for the purpose of interpreting and presenting architectural concepts to the public.” Lambert states that the foundation of the CCA in 1979 had been a contribution of this recently defined objective of focusing on the intrinsic nature of architectural representation.

Agreeing with Lambert, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman invite the spectator to “look not only *through* these representations to the objects they depict but also *at* the representations themselves and the ways in which they convey information, ideas and attitudes about architecture.”³⁴ This newly emerging mode of investigation mentioned commonly by Evans, Lambert, Blau and Kaufman provides the theoretical background for this thesis’ reconsideration of El Lissitzky’s PROUNs as “architectural artifacts as representation.”

Through his analysis of architectural representation, Robin Evans emphasizes the “imaginative roles” of both the architect and the observer to argue that the communicative function of the drawing is modified by both of them. Similarly, Ayşen Savaş suggests the definition of an “architectural artifact at the intersection of a process of material production and reflective conceptual discussion.”³⁵ Therefore, Evans’ discussion reveals another important quality that transforms a projection into architectural representation. This is the drawing’s form generative quality achieved through the interaction of the producer’s and the spectator’s imaginative capacities.

2.3 PROUN’s Claim for an Active Form Generative Process: From Architectural Projection into Architectural Representation

Robin Evans asserts that “projection” is the mediator between “thing and picture”; “a two-way traffic between A and B” and that therefore it is always directional.³⁶ Evans classifies architectural drawings according to the variations in their directionality.³⁷ Evans argues that the ideas of architectural presentation and architectural representation

³⁴ Blau and Kaufman, p.13

³⁵ Ayşen Savaş, Between Document and Monument: Architectural Artifact in the Age of Specialized Institutions, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis at MIT History, Theory and Criticism Program, Boston, 1994 p.9

³⁶ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.21

³⁷ *ibid.*

match these opposite directions of “from A to B” or “B to A” during the correlation of the thing and the picture.³⁸ For Evans, presentation drawing “propogates” visual impressions “*coming from* the building,” whereas architectural representation as a form generative approach communicates visual expressions that are “*on the way to* building.”³⁹

Robin Evans claims that the imagination of the observer plays a crucial role for the “mobilization of the projected information” concerning the accomplishment of architectural representation - the creative “embodiment” thus “projection” of the architectural object that is “yet unmade.”⁴⁰ Evans claims that such a recognition of the role of the observer’s imagination contests the idea of the simple and uncomplicated “straight arrow” spanning the gaps between A and B in both directions. Therefore, Robin Evans asserts that the role of imagination is so significant for achieving architectural representation that the contribution of “the observer’s imagination is itself comparable to projection” envisioned by the architect.⁴¹

Evans argues that, based on the imaginative faculty of the observer, architectural drawings have the potential to convey “a constant interplay between the passive portrayal and active remodeling of reality.”⁴² Evans claims that the removal of the “activating imagination” from the reading of the architectural projection might lead to its appreciation as “a mere technical facilitator” which implicitly accepts that “drawing can propogate things but never generate them.”⁴³

Christina Lodder reveals the Constructivists assertion that the two dimensional work could no longer have the form generative capacity.⁴⁴ Therefore, it may be claimed that the Constructivists tend to regard the architectural projection only as “technical facilitator” as given by Evans. The Constructivists saw in drawing no other potential than the role described by Evans: “propogating things whose generation had been completed

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*p.20

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Lodder. Russian Constructivism. p.183

elsewhere.”⁴⁵ In this respect, El Lissitzky criticizes the Constructivists for “fixing the limits between a work of art and technical invention.”⁴⁶

In Evan’s terms, the directionality of the logic of projection encompassed by the Constructivist thinking might be only one way; from the “thing” to the “picture”, thus leaving no space for any possibility for the form generative role of the drawing. The Constructivists also regard this connection as a simple vector. Because, for them, the role attributed to the imagination of the observer had been associated with the notion of individual contemplation that Constructivism was strictly opposing.⁴⁷

El Lissitzky’s approach transcends the extremities of Constructivism and Suprematism both of which reject architectural representation achieved by two dimensional projection. In contrast to Malevich’s flat Suprematist compositions endorsing his repudiation of three-dimensional illusion on canvas, PROUNs constitute “inter-changeable situation between painting and architecture”⁴⁸ that inevitably necessitate a three-dimensional mental construction through illusion. Milka Bliznakov states that such a construction is thought to be relevant both for the producer and the spectator, so as to express “the interrelations of three-dimensional volumes and masses with forces”⁴⁹.

It should be noted that the mentioned illusionary quality of the PROUNs is in conformity with the principal ideas of Malevich, such as the emphasis on the role of human mind as the principle source of spatial intuition and the idea of liberation from gravity.⁵⁰ In spite of its opposition to the attempt of spatial illusion, the given qualities in Malevich’s conception of Suprematism enable recognizing the creative imaginative roles of the producer and the observer in the achievement of architectural representation whose features are elaborated by Robin Evans.

⁴⁵ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” pp.20-21

⁴⁶ Lissitzky cited in Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.183

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Bliznakov, “The Rationalist Movement in Soviet Architecture in the 1920’s,” p.150

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Blinakov states that: “Even though Lizzitsky, the architect, often depicted solid geometric forms on his canvases instead of Malevich’s planes, a work such as Proun 30T of 1920 shares the infinite space as well as freedom from gravity and specific orientation that were Malevich’s goals. The axonometric perspective used by Lizzitsky to depict his solid forms further counters any dominant orientation and augments their dynamic potential for the motion.”

The same Suprematist qualities play an important role in the development of Gustav Klutis' "The Dynamic City," (Figure-22) which was influenced by Lissitzky's PROUN compositions. Cristina Lodder states that there is a common structure in Klutis' photomontages and paintings produced circa 1920: "a series of rectangular and cuboid bodies grouped along a diagonal axis against the background of a spherical structure,"⁵¹ which may also be observed in some of the PROUNs. (Figures-1,3,7,8,9,11) Lodder claims that "the Dynamic City" intended to represent "a flying city as a world in microcosm with its own center of gravity."⁵²

Alan C. Birnholz argues that, similar to Klutis' work, most of the PROUNs presented "an architectonic idea, such as a bridge or a city," but without any "concern of concrete architectural plans."⁵³ Similarly Yves Alain Bois states that Lissitzky's success concerning the PROUNs was "being able to sustain a radical suspension of alternatives, to destabilize the spectator's spatial assumptions, without replacing them with ready-made solutions."⁵⁴ Emphasizing the same point, Birnholz claims that the PROUNs may be regarded as exercises for "the floating complex of spatial forms" implying architectonic ideas rather than proposals for particular programs or sites.⁵⁵

Similarly, Henk Puts argues that due to their visual similarities which may also be associated with the structure of Klutis' "The Dynamic City," PROUNs vary in their intensity of explicit architectural suggestions.⁵⁶ For instance, Puts argues that while PROUN 1-D (1919-20) (Figures-1 and 3) remains more as the spatial arrangement of abstract masses, PROUN 1-E (1919-20) (Figure-11) enables a more explicit suggestion of architectural forms, asserting "a more concrete architectonic idea proposing a Suprematist-town, a Suprematist system for a town square" by presenting the spatial arrangement in bird's eye view.⁵⁷ In the PROUN99 (1925) (Figure-10), Stephanie Barron claims that Lissitzky's arrangement of colorful voluminous and planar forms against the

⁵¹ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.188

⁵² Lodder, p.188

⁵³ Alan C Birnholz, "El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.99

⁵⁴ Yves-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky, Radical Reversibility," in Art in America, April 1988, pp.161-165

⁵⁵ Birnholz, pp.98-101

⁵⁶ Henk Puts, "El Lissitzky (1890-1941), his life and work," in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p.17

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

white background indicates complicated spatial relationships due to the coexistence of different vanishing points within the same composition.⁵⁸

Concerning the richness suggested by architectural representations ranging from the more abstract to the more concrete, Robin Evans argues that there are three sorts of “active imagination”: those of the architect, the observer and the drawing itself.⁵⁹ Evans argues that, at this point he does not associate these categories with “the mental faculty of the imagining” because this cannot be claimed for the part of the drawing.⁶⁰ Evans asserts that what he calls “active imagination” is closely related with the mode of projection used in the architectural drawing.⁶¹

Evans argues that, as “the product of an intense imagination and a massive effort of imaginative intelligence,” orthographic projection is capable of emanating a great variety of effects, in each of its utilization.⁶² The importance of orthographic projection concerning the PROUNs becomes a point of focus for the understanding of their claim for architectural representation. The specific projective technique employed for the achievement of this end should be identified in the consideration of the intrinsic developments in the painterly vocabulary of the PROUNs as “architectural artifacts”.

2.4 A Prerequisite for the Claim of Architectural Representation: The Emergence of Axonometric Projection in the PROUNs

Robin Evans argues that “two distinct shifts of emphasis concerning the practice in relation to drawing” has occurred along with modern architecture and that these are the

⁵⁸ Stephanie Barron, “The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West,” p.16

⁵⁹ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.21

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

emergences of axonometric projection and of the sketch.⁶³ Evans claims that the sketch and the axonometric are modes of graphical expression belonging to two extremes of a polarity; which are respectively the “synthetic, indefinite, amorphous” that lacks “obvious geometry” versus the “analytic, exact, rectilinear that is full of obvious geometry.”⁶⁴ Evans notes that in spite of these opposing connotations, the two are observed in coexistence. Within the scope of his principle concerns, Evans finds it inappropriate to discuss whether this coexistence meant “a broadening of architectural representation, or incompatibility of two tendencies pulling in opposite directions,” and he continues by unfolding the connotations of axonometric projection, which he finds to be more significant.⁶⁵

The emergence of axonometric projection may also be observed in the PROUNs. Lissitzky’s use of axonometry instead of “classical perspectives”⁶⁶ is emphasized both by Yves-Alain Bois and Selim O. Khan-Magomedov.⁶⁷ Bois claims that the re-emergence of axonometric projection - which remained forgotten since their first “positivist use” circa 1820s - through the graphic representations of El Lissitzky and Theo Van Doesburg is worth considering.⁶⁸

Yves-Alain Bois argues that apart from the aesthetic potentials of the axonometric, this shift indicates a deeper theoretical signification associated with the “notion of history of art as a Hegelian series of replacements concerning one type of illusion by the other.”⁶⁹ Bois states that this “relativism” is in accord with Lissitzky’s

⁶³Robin Evans, The Projective Cast, Architecture and Its Three Geometries, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995, p.337

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶Leah Dickerman, “El Lissitzky’s Camera Corpus,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.157
Dickerman discusses Bois’ reading of Lissitzky’s text: “K. und Pangeometrie” as a “radical critique of the model of classical perspective” paralleling the increasing interest on classical perspectives and Euclidian geometry in the mid-1920s, exemplified by the art historian “Erwin Panofsky’s analysis of the conventionality of perspective as symbolic form (1927)”

⁶⁷ Yves-Alain Bois, “From $-\infty$ to 0 to $+\infty$: Axonometry, or Lissitzky’s Mathematical Paradigm,” pp.27-33 and S. O. Khan-Magomedov, “A New Style: Three Dimensional Suprematism and Prounen,” pp.35-45 in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990

⁶⁸ Bois, “From $-\infty$ to 0 to $+\infty$: Axonometry, or Lissitzky’s Mathematical Paradigm,” p.27

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.28

Bois claims that Lissitzky conceives “the relationship of art and mathematics as an exemplification of the Zeitgeist of a given epoch.”

conception of the “evolution of art,”⁷⁰ where perspectival illusion is “bound to earth and dependent to human vision” and should be “superseded by” axonometry; “a non-perspectival mode of representation”⁷¹ as seen in the PROUNs, “a fully abstract conceptual system”⁷² of spatial representation completely independent from human perception.

Bois suggests that “the internal logic of axonometry offers a critique of perspective’s contradictions.”⁷³ For Leah Dickerman, axonometry creates “an atemporal, universalizing and subjectless mode of spatial representation by dispensing analogy with human perception, breaking the correspondence between viewpoint and vanishing point central to the conceptualization of perspective as a model of sight.”⁷⁴ Dickerman argues that axonometry constructs “an irrationality; an imaginary space, unconstrained by the rationalism and disciplinary logic of a single, fixed viewpoint aligned with a vanishing point” dictated by perspectives.⁷⁵ This reading of axonometric projection is in accord with the Suprematist view of construction of a mental space liberated from the implications of retinal perception or its imitation by perspectives, as “an imperfect instrument.”⁷⁶

Robin Evans locates the axonometric between the perspectival and orthographic modes of projections as “an expeditious way of representing the third dimension without sacrificing the scale measure of the plan, elevation and section,” namely the constituents of the orthographic set.⁷⁷ Thus, in order to understand the role played by the axonometric within architectural representation, it is necessary to focus on the implications of the perspective and the orthographic as illustrated by Evans.

For Evans, the perspective is the “mimetic” representation of “the way we see things” using the “convergence of the “*projectors*; the array of imaginary lines on a single point.”⁷⁸ Evans states that, in contrast, in orthographic projection, which is mostly

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Leah Dickerman, pp.157-158

⁷² Bois, “From -∞ to 0 to +∞: Axonometry, or Lissitzky’s Mathematical Paradigm,” p.30

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Dickerman, pp.163-164

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p.164

⁷⁶ Paul Crowther, “Philosophy and Non-Objectivity,” in *Art & Design*, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, pp. 50-54

⁷⁷ Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast, Architecture and Its Three Geometries*, p.337

⁷⁸ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.21

used in the “professional design and production” phases of architecture, the “*projectors* do not converge to a point but remain parallel.” The following conclusion might be inferred from Robin Evans’s comparison: in contrast to perspectives, the axonometric that is engendered by the constitutive logic of the parallel orthographic *projectors*, does not “correspond to any aspect of our perception of real world.”⁷⁹ Therefore, axonometric projection might be thought to entail the “abstract and axiomatic” nature of the orthographic set claimed by Evans.⁸⁰

After these definitions, Robin Evans arrives at a statement that reveals the reason for the relevance of axonometric projection for the attempts of architectural representation: “So it is not surprising that orthographic projections are commonly encountered *on the way to* buildings, while perspectives are more commonly encountered *coming from* buildings.”⁸¹ Evans claims that, historically, the use of axonometric projection by “the painters with architectural ambitions such as Theo Van Doesburg and El Lissitzky” is not unprecedented.⁸² For Evans, in contrast to the perspectival, the orthographic projection had traditionally been “the preponderant method for devising, picturing, and transmitting ideas of buildings before they are built.”⁸³

However, Robin Evans thinks that the works of Doesburg and Lissitzky are indicative of a unique contribution to the use of the axonometric. To illustrate this quality Evans refers to Yves-Alain Bois who considers Doesburg and Lissitzky’s axonometrics as “the first attempts to use this kind of projection in the service of aesthetic aims rather than practical ones.”⁸⁴ Robin Evans considers the employment of the axonometric in van Doesburg’s painterly interpretation of the architecture of his collaborator, Cornelis van

Evans states that these *projectors* “behave in exactly the same way as light rays converging on the eye do.” Evans claims that “although these imaginary lines, called *projectors* have no real existence, they mimic the pattern of something that does exist, and that is why they can be relied upon to produce pictures that look like what they represent.” Therefore, for Evans, “the images with which we are most familiar are perspectival.”

⁷⁹ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.21

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Robin Evans, The Projective Cast, Architecture and Its Three Geometries, p.338

Eesteren. Evans claims that van Doesburg arrived in a painterly effect that conveys free floating, which would be quite difficult to realize in buildings.⁸⁵

This point firstly revealed by Bois and elaborated by Evans might also be illustrative of the Suprematist background inherent in Lissitzky's conception of the PROUN. Evans claims that the axonometrics provided Lissitzky with the possibility of introducing "a change of sensibility by exploiting a visual ambiguity that causes the viewer to lose his bearings."⁸⁶ It is inferable from the argument of Evans that axonometric projection contributed to the conveying of the Suprematist sense of weightlessness or floating through challenging the viewer by superseding "the more familiar" perspectival projection in which, habitually, the viewer "knows his place."⁸⁷

Yves-Alain Bois claims that, here, "a similarity is suggested between the floating observer and the floating planes."⁸⁸ Bois further argues that a novel definition of space has been made by conveying this sense of floating.⁸⁹ Bois states that "if we all float, we float in something: space, the space of the twentieth century." El Lissitzky expresses the search for an alternative definition of space claimed by Evans and Bois:

A construction is floating in space, carried together with a spectator out of the limits of the earth, and in order to make sense of it all he should do is to rotate it and himself around its axis, like a planet.⁹⁰

In continuing to paint with brush on canvas, we have seen that we are now building and that the picture is burning up. We have seen that the surface of the canvas has ceased to be a picture. It has become a construction and, like a house, you have to walk around it, to look at it from above, to study it from beneath. The picture's own perpendicular axis (vis-à-vis the horizon) turns out to have been destroyed. We have made the canvas rotate. And as we rotated it, we saw that we were putting ourselves in space. Space, until now has been projected onto a surface by a conditional system

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p.339

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, El Lissitzky, p.352

of planes. We began to move on the surface of the plane towards an unconditional distance.⁹¹

In the first part, the objective of this chapter has been described as the clarification of the significations of the term “architectural representation” put forward by Robin Evans together with its realization through the attempts of El Lissitzky. In the part 2.2, identification of architectural representation within the formal vocabulary of the PROUNs had been thought to be possible firstly considering Lissitzky’s drawings as “architectural artifacts,” as illustrated by Phyllis Lambert. In part 2.3, Robin Evans’ claim for an “active form generative process” existent in the definition of architectural representation appeared as a consequence of the previous part. Evans argues that this “active form generation” was triggered by the imaginative capabilities of the architect and the observer along with the potentials inherent in the orthographic projection itself. In 2.4, it is revealed through the suggestions of Evans and Bois that the use of axonometric projection greatly contributed to provide the painterly space with the role of architectural representation. This last part concluded that Lissitzky’s search for integrating three-dimensional illusion through the employment of axonometric projection has continuities with the proposal of a new definition of space, which will be the point of focus in the following chapter.

⁹¹ El Lissitzky, “Lecture delivered in INKhUK, 1924,” in October 24, trans. John E. Bowlt and cited in Margit Rowell, and Angelica Z. Rudenstine, Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia, Selections from the George Costakis Collection, New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1981, p.175

CHAPTER 3

ARCHITECTURAL FORM GENERATION AND PROUNs' REPRESENTATIONAL AND SPATIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Lissitzky's Interpretation of "Suprematist Architecture": The Transformations Claiming Architectural Representation

Alan C. Birnholz argues that by the turn of the 1920s, "Malevich had taken Suprematism to a point where it was difficult to develop any further," the point when "the decline of painting" was announced by the gradual consolidation of "non-objectivity" through subsequent painterly developments.¹ Chronologically, the emergence of PROUNs coincides with this turning point. Milka Bliznakov claims that Malevich's objectives went beyond painting and claimed the definition of "eternal aesthetic values applicable to all art forms".² Bliznakov states that in the INKhUK of Vitebsk, along with Lissitzky, his student, Malevich himself sought for the extension of Suprematism into architecture through three-dimensional experimentations.³

Bliznakov notes that these ideas were put into practice in Vitebsk by Malevich as a part of a new architectural education curriculum that tried to "teach architectural aesthetics as a science"⁴ an organization according to the rules of "cosmic or universal space" rather than that of the earth and its particular laws such as gravity.⁵ Malevich

¹ Alan C. Birnholz, "El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.99

² Milka Bliznakov, "The Rationalist Movement in Soviet Architecture of 1920's," in Twentieth Century Studies, Russian Formalism J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.148-149

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

argues that Suprematism aims the conquest of “The non-objective world”⁶ through “the cosmic feeling of objectlessness” and “take off from the earth through weight distributed into the systems of weightlessness”⁷. Conceived within this framework of creativity as “the revelation of cosmic consciousness,” the objectives of the architecture conceptualized by Malevich sought to transcend the traditional utilitarian concerns of earthly conventions just like it transcended the physical restrictions of them. Malevich’s UNOVIS⁸ group claims that “beauty as an ideal is absolute, and therefore supersedes the usefulness of an architectural edifice”.⁹

An antique temple is not beautiful because it once served as the haven of a certain social order or of the religion associated with this, but rather because its form sprang from a pure feeling for plastic relationships. The artistic feeling which was given material expression in the building of the temple is for us eternally valid and vital but as for the social order which once encompassed it – this is dead.¹⁰

The term PROUN, which is etymologically the contraction of “the Projects for UNOVIS” is, by its definition, closely related with Malevich’s architectural conception. The UNOVIS vision was interpreted by El Lissitzky with an awareness to consider the UNOVIS and the OBMOKhU¹¹ “lineages of constructivism” within a polarity out of which he extracted his unique synthesis of constructivism:

Two groups claimed constructivism, the OBMOKhU and the UNOVIS:

The former group worked in material and space, the latter in material and plane. Both strove to attain the same result, namely the creation of the real object and of architecture.

⁶ “The non-objective world” is the name of Malevich’s major book that introduces the theory of the additional element along with the basic principles of Suprematism.

⁷ Evgenii Kovtun, “Kazimir Malevich” in *Art Journal*, trans. Charlotte Douglas, Fall 1981, p.235.

⁸ “UNOVIS” is the abbreviation for the Russian of “the Affirmers of New Art”

Catherine Cooke, “Malevich: From Theory into Teaching,” in *Art & Design*, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p.26.

⁹ Bliznakov, “The Rationalist Movement in Soviet Architecture of 1920’s,” p.149

¹⁰ Malevich. *The Non-Objective World*, p.78

¹¹ “OBMOKhU” is the abbreviation for the Russian of “The Society of Young Artists,” the early Constructivist including Rodchenko, Medunteskii and Stenberg brothers.

Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, pp.67-72

They are opposed to each other in their concepts of the particularity and the utility of created things.

Some members of the OBMOKhU group went as far as a complete disavowal of art and in their urge to be inventors, devoted their energies to pure technology.

UNOVIS distinguished between the concept of functionality, meaning and the necessity for the creation of new forms, and the question of direct serviceableness. They represented the view that the new form is the lever which sets life in motion, if it is based on the suitability of the material and on economy. This new form gives birth to other forms which are totally functional.¹²

As Lissitzky argues, “the pure feeling of the plastic relationships” and “absolute and eternal aesthetic values” were considered by the UNOVIS group as the essential requirements for architecture, out of which utility would inevitably emerge as the final quality of the product. Therefore, for the UNOVIS, the utilitarian imperative as a predetermined task should be out of concern, in strong contrast to the Constructivists.

Milka Bliznakov states that these concepts were investigated through numerous “spatial compositions of abstract forms unbound to any function other than pure aesthetic satisfaction.”¹³ Bliznakov notes that, in order to illustrate the difference of these spatial studies from the traditional architectural models designed with a preconceived utility, Malevich calls these “arkhitektoniki”.¹⁴ (Figure-21) These explorations emphasizing the predominance of the absolute aesthetic values concerning architectural design were thought to answer utilitarian demands automatically due to the Suprematist idea of

¹² El Lissitzky, “The New Russian Art: A Lecture (1922),” in *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds. translated by Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall, London: Thames & Hudson, 1980, p.340

Also see Christina Lodder, Christina Lodder, “El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism,” p.31 Christina Lodder argues that such an explicit claim for a UNOVIS lineage of constructivism had not been made elsewhere. Therefore Lodder states that the state illustrated by the quotation should be taken as Lissitzky’s later personal interpretation of the intellectual climate that engendered the UNOVIS-OBMOKhU polarity around 1920, as the correspondences of the conflicting Suprematist-Constructivist tendencies, rather than the initial commitments of the Suprematists and the Constructivists. Lodder further argues that Lissitzky had constructed this view for the justification of his constructivism as the unique synthesis of these two opposing proposals to the achievement of the same objective.

¹³ Bliznakov. p.149.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Bliznakov notes that the Russian word “arkhitektoniki” was derived from the Greek “arkhitektonikos”, which means “constructed as if architecture”.

evaluating the latter as earthly requirements of secondary importance, which follow the rules of the former:

Architecture brings Suprematism to utilitarian-ness. The interesting result of this non-objective approach is that we produce an executant who is freely capable of handling tasks that are based on real subject matter, for the non-objective and real are erected upon the identical principles of form.¹⁵

The comparison of the different conceptions of the Suprematist architecture by Malevich and Lissitzky constitutes the structure of this chapter. It has been mentioned that in Vitebsk, Malevich and Lissitzky undertook research that serve for the same goal; the application of the liberating principles of mental construction into the architectural design process.¹⁶ A more detailed comparison between these experiments of Malevich and Lissitzky shall reveal the novelties that are introduced by PROUNs into the painterly vocabulary of Suprematism. The thesis identifies three focal points for this comparison. When considered as a set of transformations, these three aspects offer a framework within which PROUNs can be located and discussed with respect to the comparative interpretations of Suprematist architecture proposed by Malevich and Lissitzky.

The first principal feature introduced by the PROUNs, the emergence of the three-dimensional illusion along with axonometric projection has been elaborated in Chapter 2. By referring principally to Robin Evans, the previous chapter sought to reveal the close relation between the emergence of the idea of architectural representation and that of axonometric projection in architectural drawings. The second part of this chapter will begin with the second of these features; the reintroduction of the representative role of colorful geometric Suprematist bodies to suggest material connotations. The last part of this chapter will focus on the third feature, the search for the simultaneous construction of the receiver spatial environment and the design object.

¹⁵ Malevich cited in Bliznakov, p.151

¹⁶ *ibid.*

3.2 Architectural Representation and Colourful Geometric Bodies: “Conveying Abstraction and Materiality”^{*} Interchangeably

Christina Lodder notes that the issues of “plane and colour” were undertaken in VKhUTEMAS between 1921-25 establishing a separate “Department of Plane and Colour,” leaded by Lubiov Popova and Aleksandr Vesnin.¹⁷ Lodder states that, within this department, the “relationship between colour and form and between volume and mass” were discussed both in space and plane.¹⁸ Lodder gives the objective of this department as “to teach colour as an independent organizational element, and not as figurative, optical decoration; to take it as an element to its outmost concreteness concentrating on the purely painterly artistic aspects of the manifestations of colour.”¹⁹ Lodder underlines Popova and Vesnin’s statement that “the main task of the use of colour on the surface of a mass is giving a particular quality to the surface of an object with the aim of conveying qualities of abstraction or materiality to our perceptions.”²⁰

Although the thesis discusses primarily the architectural suggestions of the PROUNs, this painterly approach towards the use of colour in VKhUTEMAS also relates to the effects of abstraction and materiality conveyed by Lissitzky’s architectural representations. The introduction of the terms “figurative surfaces” and “abstracted surfaces,” given by Lodder become relevant for the understanding of PROUNs in terms of their representative roles. It may be claimed that the PROUNs’ are able to convey Suprematist sensation of floating through “colorful bodies dissolved in painterly space.”²¹ The cause for this achievement may be related with Benjamin Buchloh’s emphasis of the need for “a certain level of documentality even within abstraction,” in the post-

^{*} Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.125

¹⁷ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.125

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

revolutionary period, marked by the requirements of the “simultaneous collective reception”²² in the Soviet society.

Malevich’s conception of Suprematism repudiated the value of expressing the qualities of materiality through painterly bodies, moreover considered such an approach as a taint in the evolution towards absolute non-objectivity.²³ Lev Yudin, a pupil of Malevich in the academy of Vitebsk expresses this Suprematist rejection of the significance of material concerns in its initial form asserted by Malevich:

I consider that all endeavours of the artist, and even the most sophisticated understanding of the material, will not lead to anything creative if they are only a means for expressing the character, essence and concept of already existent forms of object, since they do not manifest the new systems of creativity but only subordinate them to readymade forms.²⁴

However, Leah Dickerman claims that Lissitzky’s synthesis attempts to deal with the problems of space and material without “subordination to readymade forms.”²⁵ In contrast with Malevich’s non-objective planes, the surfaces of Lissitzky’s architectural representations do not indicate an extreme disengagement from the obligations of earthly concerns, such as building technology and materials. This may be considered as a search for a compromise between the two extremes: Malevich’s total disapproval of machine-aesthetics²⁶ and Constructivism’s subordination of form generative process of architectural design to technological preconceptions.²⁷ Lissitzky’s operative notion of abstraction enables the synthesis of universal Suprematist principles for mental construction transcending the earthly limitations.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Malevich. The Non-Objective World, p.78

²⁴ Lev Yudin, “Suprematism,” in Art & Design, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p. 31.

The given quotation underlines the fundamental source of disagreement between the two contemporary trends of 1920’s Russian Avant-garde: Suprematism and Constructivism.

²⁵ Leah Dickerman, “El Lissitzky’s Camera Corpus,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.153-176

²⁶ Malevich. The Non-Objective World, pp.70-80

²⁷ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.83-90

Milka Bliznakov implies that in the PROUNs, Lissitzky sought to instantiate this abstract model by assigning specific materials as well as technical paradigms.²⁸ Although in the PROUNs, Lissitzky assigned certain materials into the abstract surfaces through his special use of colour, he generally applied this with an awareness that “new materials could be developed to approximate the effect of the PROUNs in actual buildings.”²⁹ Hence, it is possible to claim that the PROUNs maintain abstraction by preventing the complete disengagement from the specific conditions within which architecture is obliged to act.

Bliznakov claims that Lissitzky’s specific combinations of paint with supplementary materials; for instance, mixing of sand with paint for the representation of coarseness or application of pure varnish for achieving a visual effect of transparency (Figures-10 and 11) enabled him to convey these material qualities more explicitly, establishing an equivalence between certain colours and contemporary materials.³⁰ Considering the argument of Lodder,³¹ it may be inferred that the PROUNs signify an early phase for this post-revolutionary trend of combining new materials to Suprematist paintings.

Christina Lodder notes that the earliest examples of the mentioned tendency had been Gustav Klutssis’ photocollages.³² In his introduction to his lithograph edition of the Russian Futurist Opera, “Victory Over the Sun,” Lissitzky states that “color should be understood not as a means of defining the image but as a conditional denotation of properties of the material,”³³ opposing the quality of absolute non-objectivity in conceiving the role of the colour.

Magdalena Dabrowski states that Constructivism understood “the synthesis of material, volume and construction” in terms of the conception of “dynamic space,” which is manifested in Lissitzky’s PROUNs.³⁴ Dabrowski argues that by virtue of “the

²⁸ Bliznakov, p.149.

²⁹ *ibid.* p.151

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.188

³² *ibid.* pp.163-166

³³ Brodsky, p.91

³⁴ Dabrowski, p.32

achievement of a synthetic organization of related flat and illusionistic elements, the space depicted in the PROUNs becomes volumetric and architectural.”³⁵

Henk Puts emphasizes on the differences of Lissitzky’s and Malevich’s use of colour as an important feature expressing the originality of the PROUNs.³⁶ Puts claims that unlike his tutor who chose bright colours, Lissitzky used various shades of gray and ochre, colours that are encountered in the architecture of industrial urban space.³⁷ Selim O. Khan-Magomedov also claims that in the PROUNs, “Lissitzky’s interest in Suprematism did not embrace colours.”³⁸ Magomedov explains this by claiming that Lissitzky, with his architectural interests, discovered “a distinct outline for the stylistic organization of the object world”³⁹ in Suprematism. Therefore, although inheriting the Suprematist view of subordinating technology to human intelligence and creative capacity of the “artist-constructor,” Lissitzky dealt with the visual effect of the contemporary materials:

We will turn the ruggedness of concrete, the smoothness of metal and the reflection of glass into the skin of the new life.⁴⁰

Milka Bliznakov emphasizes the continuity between Malevich and Lissitzky in terms of their claim of establishing a universal ground for the constructive creation of objects, in spite of the radical transformations in the fundamental qualities of Suprematism, undertaken by Lissitzky. Bliznakov claims that “Every PROUN is a symbolic representation of not only a space enclosed by a structure, but also the actual building materials and colours.”⁴¹ The PROUN, therefore, is regarded by Bliznakov as “the Project for the Affirmation of the New in cosmic scale” considering its treatment for the association of material and surface qualities.⁴²

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Henk Puts, p.16

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Magomedov, p.43

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, “El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts, London 1980, p.332

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Bliznakov. p.149.

Bliznakov argues that by virtue of the PROUN Theory, the idea of universal aesthetic principles mentioned by Malevich was applied into an architectural language that “compiles a table of forms and colours classified according to the psychological effects that each would provoke.”⁴³ Similarly, “form, colour and sensation”⁴⁴ that become central concerns for the architectural representations of Lissitzky, were also the transformed principle elements which were central to Malevich’s theory.

3.3 From Absolute Space to Dynamic Space: PROUN as the Manifestation for the Shift in the Conception of Space

Milka Bliznakov argues that Malevich’s “Architektons” (Figure- 21) were intended to reflect the dynamic qualities of Suprematist painting into spatial compositions through “flat, smooth surfaces defining volumes of basic geometric forms either neatly interconnected with or sharply interpenetrated by long horizontal planes.”⁴⁵ It may be claimed that Lissitzky interprets this repertoire inherited from the pre-revolutionary Russian Avant-garde by the incorporation into an architectural program, although very broadly defined, so that Suprematism could advance beyond these models of “architektons; constructed as if architecture” and engenders more concrete implications for realization.

Boris Brodsky regards Lissitzky’s painterly endeavour as the revelation of the “intricate spatial connections associated with light, colour and rhythm.”⁴⁶ Vasilii Rakitin argues that Lissitzky’s interpretation of architectural Suprematism contrasts with Malevich’s Architektons which were essentially “enclosed, plastic, architectonic three-

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Malevich, “Form, Colour and Sensation,” in *Art & Design*, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p. 44

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

Bliznakov claims that Architektons were the “visual expression of Malevich’s search for absolute aesthetic rules”

⁴⁶ Brodsky, “El Lissitzky,” p.92

dimensional models”⁴⁷ Mácel Otakar argues that the theoretical basis for the extension of Suprematist principles into architecture had been established simultaneously with the presentation of the “Architektons.”⁴⁸

However, for these two approaches, a common definition of “Suprematist sensibility” concerning architectural design may be discerned. For Ilya Chasnik, another adherent to the UNOVIS group in Vitebsk, the Suprematist sensibility⁴⁹ operating within an architectural design process not only projects the relevant conceptualization of built form and its constituent elements, but also calls for the designer’s constructive definition of the space, which is destined to receive the architectural interpretation:

Architectural Faculty of Suprematism involves the study of systems of drawn suprematism and the construction of them in plans and drawings, the ruling out of earthly space, giving each energy cell its particular place in the overall plan, the construction of all its component elements and the allocation of space on the earth’s surface on each of them, delineating those planes and lines from which the forms of Suprematism will rise and extend in space. Drawings and plans emanates the diagram of earthly energy cells as the cells of Suprematist forms of space⁵⁰

For Chasnik, it is not only the built form but also the site that should be mentally constructed out of “non-objective” constituents.⁵¹ Chasnik implies that the Suprematist painterly space is employed to suggest an environment with its “pure spaciousness”⁵² inside which “pure plastic sensation”⁵³ of form regulates and enhances the intuitive mental construction isolated from all the constraints emanating from the “physical world” and its “objective” representations. Malevich argues that these characteristics that

⁴⁷ Vasilii Rakitin, “The Artizan and the Prophet: Marginal Notes on Two Artistic Careers,” in The Great Utopia, The Russian & Soviet Avant-Garde 1915-1932, p.61

⁴⁸ Mácel Otakar, “The Black Square and Architecture,” in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, pp.58-63.

⁵⁰ Chasnik, “The Architectural and Technical Faculty,” in “The Art of Graphic Representation,” in Art & Design, edited by Andreas Papadakis, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p.29

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Malevich, The Non-objective World, p.68

⁵³ *ibid.*

constitute the sensations of movement should become “the only substance of life”⁵⁴ reframed inside the architectural form composed according to Suprematist principles.

The comparison between the conceptions of architectural design in Malevich’s *Architektons* and El Lizzitsky’s *PROUNs* should be discussed in terms of the difference in their broader understandings of the space receiving the design process. As a prologue to his essay “From Cubism to Suprematism” (1915) Malevich notes that “Space is a receptacle without dimension into which the intellect puts its creation, may I also put in my creative form.”⁵⁵ Linda D. Henderson associates Malevich’s understanding of space with “Newtonian view of space as absolute, a container that exists even if empty.”⁵⁶

Henderson argues that, “Malevich, at this stage, was far removed from the growing belief among his physicist contemporaries that space is created by matter and exists only relative to matter.”⁵⁷ Henderson refers to the statements of Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), to explain Malevich’s understanding of space which she finds to be outmoded.⁵⁸

I shall exclude, first of all, the idea of an alleged sense of space which would locate our sensations in a ready-made space whose notion would pre-exist experience.⁵⁹

L. D. Henderson argues that in contrast to Malevich’s Suprematism, Lissitzky’s *PROUNs* are indicative of an affinity with “a new expression of space” with a “transitory nature.”⁶⁰ Henderson notes that Lissitzky used the term “imaginary space” and explained it as follows: “so temporal that it would exist only as long as the object was in motion.”⁶¹

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Linda D. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and the Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983 p.291

Henderson states that Malevich’s conception of space as a “receptacle without dimension” was hardly compatible with modern science.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Henderson notes that Lobachevsky and later Poincaré, the prominent representatives of non-Euclidian geometry, opposed the notion of absolute space that -as an empty receptacle- exists separately by itself.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Linda D. Henderson refers frequently to Henri Poincaré, the French mathematician, physicist, philosopher of science and the representative of non-Euclidian geometry.

⁵⁹ Henri Poincaré, “Space and Time,” in *Last Essays*, p.15 cited in Henderson, p.291

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.297

Every form is the petrified snapshot of a process.
Therefore, work is a station in evolution and not its
petrified aim.⁶²

Henderson identifies the emergence of a temporal element in Lizzitsky's spatial representations.⁶³ Therefore, it may be argued that the process of spatial construction is conceived through a sequence that step by step reconstructs the receptacle space. Similarly, PROUNs may be thought to depict certain sections of the mental construction of the imaginary space receiving the architectural design process by means of graphical representation. It is not only the built form but also the site being mentally constructed out of weightless but representative constituents, on a conceptual level, which would otherwise remain "non-objective".

Hence, the PROUNs imply that the space receiving them exists in tune with and during their conception of architectural interpretation. They accentuate the prominence of a mentally constructed space, which does not pre-exist the design process, according to the qualities attributed to the spatial representation. Magdalena Dabrowski states that "the concept of dynamic space" had become a point of focus in the painterly development indicated by the Russian Avant-garde, and retained its significance in "the transformation of the means of expression in non-objective art."⁶⁴

Boris Brodsky implies that Suprematism provides spatial possibilities that were left unexplored by Malevich and the Suprematist space may be thought to "cease to be a vacuum between objects."⁶⁵ Brodsky argues that contrasting with Malevich's conception of pre-existent, absolute space, the Suprematist space has the potentials to "become spherical or arched and consequently elongate, bend, and shorten the object, forcing it to soar, to revolve, and to cut into the next object, which, now liberated from gravity, move along spiraling, circular, or elliptical orbits, while the composition itself loses any sense of top and bottom."⁶⁶

⁶² El Lizzitsky cited in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, "El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts, London 1980, p.330

⁶³ Linda Henderson, p.291

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Brodsky, "El Lissitzky," p.92

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Alan C. Birnholz claims that the experience of movement suggested likewise in the PROUNs “occurs wholly inside the spectator’s mind,” strengthening Lissitzky’s proposal of the transformation of spectator’s role “from passivity to participation”⁶⁷ Birnholz’s emphasis for the active role of the spectator may be related with Robin Evans’ assertion of the creative imagination of the spectator as well as that of the architect as the prerequisite for the achievement of architectural representation.⁶⁸ As already mentioned, Robin Evans suggests two principle possible roles for architectural projections that “relates pictures to things”: either “to record or propogate things already made” or “to project things as yet unmade.”⁶⁹ The latter role conforms to Evans’ idea of architectural representation, whose accomplishment he associates with the contributing creative imagination of the observer.⁷⁰

Analyzing the relation between Malevich and Mikhail Matyushin, L. D. Henderson reveals certain influences of this on Lissitzky concerning his proposal of his “new expression of space.”⁷¹ In his 1913 essay published in the “Union of Youth” journal⁷², Matyushin (1861-1934) states that “the ability to discern a form implies, besides the ability to see and to move, a certain development of the mind”⁷³ and that “some forms must be only implied so that the mind of the spectator is the chosen place of their concrete birth.”⁷⁴ Matyushin considers this productive intellectual interaction between the “artist-constructor” and the spectator so important that he claims: “nothing is real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental direction”⁷⁵

These statements become central to Lissitzky’s conception of the graphical communication process of the PROUNs. In his essay, “El Lissitzky and the Spectator:

⁶⁷ Birnholz, “El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation,” p.99

⁶⁸ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.19

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ El Lizzitsky cited in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, “El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts, London 1980, p.330

⁷² *ibid.*

Linda Henderson refers to Matyushin’s juxtaposition of Gleizes and Metzinger’s “*Du Cubisme*” and P.D.Ouspensky’s “*Tertium Organum*”

⁷³ *ibid.* p.371

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.374

⁷⁵ Henderson, p.375

From Passivity to Participation,”⁷⁶ Alan C. Birnholz claims that Lissitzky tried to abandon the traditional notion of the spectator by regarding him as the representative of the new collective consciousness of the Revolutionary epoch.⁷⁷ Birnholz argues that this new concept of spectator indicates liberty in conceiving the spatial suggestions of the graphical work, according to collectively developed sensory powers. Birnholz replaces this active spectator with the traditional one to whom already made forms complying with the rules of the physical world were imposed.

It is necessary to reconsider the dynamic effect created by the PROUNs underlined by Yves-Alain Bois and already mentioned in the part 2.4 of the previous chapter. Bois claims that this active participation enables the observer imagine his own floating together with Lissitzky’s geometric bodies within this novel understanding of “the space of the twentieth century.”⁷⁸

The surface of the PROUN ceases to be a picture and turns into a structure round which we must circle, looking at it from all sides, peering down from above, investigating from below. Circling around it, we screw ourselves into the space. We have set the PROUN in motion.⁷⁹

A. C. Birnholz refers to the PROUN 30T (Figure-7) and PROUN 99 (Figure-10) to explain this understanding of movement. Birnholz states that certain visual devices such as “tangent relationships, vigorous contrasts and thrusting diagonals” frequently appear “to convey to the spectator the sense that the form he sees are moving at the same time that the spectator begins to conceive of his own movement.”⁸⁰ The transformation in the understanding of the space from “absolute” to “dynamic” becomes one of the principal contributions of Lissitzky in his endeavour to expand the contributions of Suprematist painterly space into the domain of architectural representation.

⁷⁶ Alan C Birnholz, “El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, pp.98-101

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ El Lissitzky cited in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, “El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts, London 1980, p.330

⁷⁹ El Lissitzky cited in Henderson, p.296

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

Therefore, it may be claimed that spatial intuition, whose source is placed inside “the infinite space of the human mind,”⁸¹ by Malevich becomes crucial in the PROUNs. This transformative feature gives the PROUNs a great significance in their suggestion of architectural representation through the proposal of a new notion of dynamic space as illustrated by L.D. Henderson.⁸²

The Chapters 2 and 3 sought to trace the transformations undertaken by Lissitzky in the Suprematist painterly space. This task shall be considered as a tool serving the further proposal of individual skill and craftsmanship as qualities which should be reintroduced into the form generative process of architectural design. If the enduring influence of Constructivism which asserts the subjugation of the form generative process of architecture by the governing mechanical concerns of collective communication is taken into account, the proposal of this thesis acquires a contemporary significance.

⁸¹ Malevich, “Suprematism. 34 Drawings, Vitebsk, 1920,” cited in Evgenii Kovtun, “Kazimir Malevich” in Art Journal, trans. Charlotte Douglas, Fall 1981, p.234

⁸² Henderson, p.375

CHAPTER 4

THE QUESTIONING OF FORM GENERATION WITHIN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTION: THE COMPOSITION-CONSTRUCTION DEBATE (MOSCOW, 1921)

4.1 The Reframing of the PROUNs Within the Russian Avant-Garde

Angelica Z. Rudenstine argues that the architectural imperative introduced into painterly space by Lissitzky through the PROUNs had been a contribution to a more general tendency during the 1920s, which was involved with the “ideological effort to create new architectural forms that would embody the aspirations of the Revolution.”¹ Rudenstine considers Tatlin’s “Monument to the Third International,” (Figure-20) Malevich’s “Volumetric Suprematism,” (Figure-21) and Klucis’ “Dynamic City” (Figure-22) as manifestations which, although indicating divergent approaches, “shared the utopian characteristics of this phase of Constructivism.”² For Rudenstine, the given examples were “essentially visionary and imaginative conceptions of technological developments” illustrating the “common search for cosmic paradigms of the new age” rather than proposals for “practical and structurally feasible designs.”³

Stephanie Barron states that the politically surpassed Russian Avant-garde movement “encompasses a variety of styles: beginning with a very Russian folk-derived style, followed by interpretations of Cubism and Futurism such as Neo-Primitivism and

¹ Angelica Zander Rudenstine, “Lissitzky and Klucis,” in Rowell, Margit and Rudenstine, Angelica Zander. Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia, Selections from the George Costakis Collection, New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1981, p.175

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

Cubo-Futurism, evolving into the two unique schools of thought: Suprematism and Constructivism and culminating in Productivism.”⁴ However, Barron states that “the Russian avant-garde does not constitute a style” in the conventional sense of the word because it lacks the “specific formal characteristics to describe Russian avant-gardism.”⁵ Camilla Gray notes that although “one is accustomed to think of styles in formal terms”, “in the Russian Avant-garde movement there is no unifying theme or element which joins all of its creative manifestations.”⁶

Michail Grobman identifies these “unifying formal characteristics” arriving at a similar conclusion: “The right angle, the line, the circle are the general material results of two great movements of thought, Suprematism and Constructivism, but with different aims, different methods, with only the style seeming the identifying invisible link.”⁷ Therefore the formal similarities do not constitute conditions which guarantee coinciding theoretical frameworks that lie beyond them, and the investigation of the divergent tendencies in Russian avant-garde requires a deeper knowledge that goes beyond simple stylistic categorizations based on visual affinities.

Christina Lodder emphasizes the common misunderstanding of Lissitzky’s position due to the tendency to label individual figures according to visual stylistic characteristics.⁸ Lodder argues that for several decades until the dissolution of the USSR, the straightforward mapping of Lissitzky as a “Constructivist” had been a dominant idea.⁹ Lodder claims that this erroneous view reduced the formal aspects of Lissitzky’s PROUNs into “abstract and geometric” and considered these as the characterizing qualities of Constructivism.¹⁰

⁴ Stephanie Barron, “The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.12

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Camilla Gray, The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922, London: Thames & Hudson, 1962, p.17

⁷ Michail Grobman, “About Malevich”, in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.26

⁸ Christina Lodder, “El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.27

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Lodder’s reference for the illustration of this straightforward comprehension of Lissitzky’s position and Constructivism: George Rickey, Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, New York: George Braziller, 1967

Lodder claims that the reason for this misconception had been the lack of “a more complex and nuanced understanding of Constructivism as we possess today.”¹¹ The same misrepresentation of the PROUNs might become possible due to their close relation with Malevich’s Suprematism both in theoretical and formal levels. Formal reminiscences between the PROUNs and Malevich’s Suprematism should not lead to distortion and underestimation of the originality of the statement that underlines the unique attempt of Lissitzky.

For Boris Brodsky, Lissitzky contrasted Prounism to Suprematism asserting that his approach encompassed an essentially different movement.¹² Brodsky refers to Lissitzky’s trilingual publication of “*Die Kunstismen/ Les Ismes de l’Art/ The Isms of Art*” in 1924 in cooperation with Hans Arp, during his stay in Switzerland.¹³ (Figures 18-19) This publication may be thought to classify the important movements between the years 1914-1924 by mentioning “Prounism” independently from Suprematism and Constructivism.¹⁴ The idea of such a classification of the “-isms”; within a linear development to suggest the progressive evolution of art forms is a common quality of the Russian avant-garde, and it is especially seen in the work of Malevich.¹⁵

However, Magdalena Dabrowski claims that although an interrelated list following stages of formal evolution may be suggested as: Neo-Primitivism, Cubo-Futurism, Rayonism, Suprematism, Constructivism and Productivism, these “by no means present a linear development” because they “essentially they varied in the degree of emphasis on the spiritual, philosophical and formal aspects of art and artwork.”¹⁶

Similarly, Stephanie Barron argues that “the development of the Russian avant-garde movement is not linear; it cannot be seen as a succession of styles or ideas flowing directly into one another”¹⁷ For Barron, the contemporary understanding of the Russian

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Brodsky, “El Lissitzky,” in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.92.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, pp.13-65

¹⁶ Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.28

¹⁷ Barron, “The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West,” in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, pp.14-15

Avant-garde characterizes the movement by “an extraordinarily high level of experimentation and cross-fertilization among all arts.”¹⁸ Therefore, Barron claims that the Russian Avant-garde designates “a richly interwoven fabric” nurtured by “the multi-dimensionality of the participants and the chaos of the political environment,”¹⁹ rather than a progressive historical flow as visualized by most of the participant artists of the period.

The understanding of the PROUNs as “architectural artifacts as representation” should be proposed taking into account this complexity of the period revealed by Dabrowski and Barron.²⁰ Hence, as shown until this part, this research necessitates a structure other than linear history writing. The individual figures that contributed to the formations of the central concepts of the thesis; “construction” and “artist-constructor” will be handled according to the positions they take in a given moment within this “richly interwoven fabric” proposed by Barron.²¹ These concepts shall not be taken as representatives of a certain “-ism” whose principles are thought to remain constant through the historical flow.

Therefore, in order to reveal the significance of PROUNs’ claim for architectural representation within the Russian avant-garde, trying to grasp the momentary conditions of the intellectual climate would be more relevant. Such an approach would make it possible to take sections through the historical flow so as to look through the diversity of approaches towards the concepts of “construction” and “artist-constructor”. As John E. Bowlt claims, since the Russian avant-garde is, in general, a period where reason seeks to penetrate into the process of artistic creation through the encouragement of the artists’ conscious reflections on his productions²²; the verbal manifestations acquire an equal importance with the formal ones.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² John E. Bowlt, “Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts,” in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlt Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.138-140

Bowlt notes that especially the interval 1908-1917 is marked by the tendency of “analytical or laboratorial interpretation of art under Marxist sociological factors which regard individual artistic ego meaningless for the proletarian historical consciousness. Bowlt claims that in Russia, Futurism is conceived as an ideology that complies with collectivity, industrialism and dynamism; namely the common denominator of new art.

Since the history of the Russian Avant-garde cannot be separated from that of the VkhUTEMAS, the debates that have taken place among the faculty concerning the definition of the term construction become crucial. “The Composition-Construction Debate” (1921) that is given by Christina Lodder as the threshold that lead to the inauguration of the Constructivist position in VKhUTEMAS²³ is quite appropriate as a section because it will enable the extractions of diverse attitudes towards the significations attributed to the concepts that give their name to this debate. The extractions that will be made out of these sections are thought to contribute to the understanding of the PROUNs’ originality and significance by mapping Lissitzky’s spatial representations within this complex theoretical framework of the Russian Avant-garde. This consideration intends to cope with the complexity and richness of the intellectual efforts presented during the period.

4.2 The Significance of the 1921 Debate for Mapping the PROUNs:

In 1921 (1,21 and 28 January, 11 and 18 February, 4,18 and 25 March), the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow (INKhUK) housed a series of meetings later called “The Composition-Construction Debate”, whose conclusions would develop the theoretical basis for the post-Revolutionary Russian avant-garde movement that is known today as Russian Constructivism²⁴. Christina Lodder notes that these meetings were held by the “General Working Group of Objective Analysis,” a stream that then dominated the intellectual climate of INKhUK with its stress on the urgent need for the establishment of

Bowlt presents Nikolai Punin’s statements as a concrete illustration of this general tendency: “an art criticism with exact theoretical premise” that is applicable to the collective “examination of any work of art.” This tendency culminated in Constructivism and later in Productivism whose major theoretician Boris Arvatov stated in 1923 that new community needs “art as a mass phenomenon intelligible to all,” therefore “rationally constructed art form,” and “scientific art criticism” as theoretical prerequisites.

²³ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983 pp.83-90

²⁴ *ibid.* p.83

“a scientific basis of explanation for the intuitive element in creativity” through the redefinition of “the basic artistic categories of composition and construction”.²⁵ (Appendix-C)

Christina Lodder identifies a divergence within the participants indicated by basically two extreme groups, of which the former asserted that “construction could exist as a purely aesthetic principle within a two dimensional art work” and the latter claimed that since material was necessarily “an integral part of the concept of construction”, “construction” was, by definition, “related to real objects in actual space rather than painting”.²⁶ Lodder states that the debate came to an end with the triumph of the second group which would later transform into the “First Working Group of Constructivists” constituted by Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891-1956), Varvara Stephanova (1894-1958) and Alexei Gan (1889-1940); the early Constructivists, who stated that construction necessarily “contained a utilitarian imperative which limited its pure manifestation to the construction of useful as opposed to aesthetic objects”.²⁷

Lodder implies that this conclusion of the debate explicitly introduced, for the first time, the concerns of utility and physical stability as inevitable requirements for the concept of “construction” which had extensively been utilized since the turn of the twentieth century, in the course of the intellectual development concerning the Russian Avant-garde.²⁸ Therefore Lodder argues that the year 1921 had been a turning point for the Russian Avant-garde because of the intellectual developments within INKhUK, which carried the tension between the “supporters of a spiritual and utopically oriented art” and the “proponents of a utilitarian art” into its climax point²⁹, beyond which the latter would prevail and cause the resultant “transition into Constructivism and later to Productivism”.³⁰

²⁵ *ibid.* p.79

²⁶ *ibid.* pp.83-90

²⁷ *ibid.*

Christina Lodder notes that in March 1921, First Working Group of Constructivists was established by Rodchenko and Stepanova. Alexei Gan became the major theoretician for the movement which would develop into mainstream Constructivism.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Henk Puts, “El Lissitzky (1890-1941), his life and work,” in El Lissitzky 1890-1941, architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p.17

³⁰ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.85-95

Lodder notes that during these meetings, each participant from the faculty of INKhUK was required to submit his own definitions for the terms of “construction” and “composition” respectively and to demonstrate his ideas by two drawings corresponding to each of these definitions.³¹ It may be inferred that the written explanations accompanied by the drawings (Figures 13-16) illustrate the basic divergence between the two mentioned groups in terms of their approach towards the value of two-dimensional work during the form generative process of design. Although these groups conflict with each other, considering the definitions of the given terms, their common point is that both indicate an implicit association of “construction” with the newly emerging industrial and objective imperative leading to production and “composition” with the pure aesthetic and subjective principles that guide the allocation and arrangement of parts.

Lodder notes that the first group represented by Sergeevna Popova (1889-1924), claimed that “construction” could have a two dimensional nature and that construction” and “composition” could coexist within the organization of the two dimensional work because they were complementary of each other.³² Christina Lodder refers to the definitions given by certain participants of the debate. One of these is that of Popova: “construction is the purpose, necessity and expediency of organization” and “composition is the regular and tasteful arrangement of material”.³³ (Figure 13)

Magdalena Dabrowski states that in contrast to the views of Rodchenko, Ioganson, and Stephanova, “construction,” was seen by Popova as “the process of formation and the metaphorical order of the work of art,”³⁴ which can be both two or three-dimensional in its execution, and which is not necessarily technical or adhered to practical necessity. Lodder also gives Drevin’s associations of “construction” with “the creation of the artwork” and “composition” with “the distribution of parts,”³⁵ implying a fusion between the two concepts throughout the creative process.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.88

³⁴ Magdalena Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives*, p.31

³⁵ *ibid.* p.85

Lodder states that, on the contrary, for the second group, “composition” and “construction” were conflicting thus their coexistence would be contradictory.³⁶ Lodder argues that for this group “composition,” that was underlined by subjective contemplation and association with the individual pleasures of the outmoded bourgeois society had to be replaced by “construction,” in order to be compatible with the proletarian collectivism.³⁷ Lodder states that for this early Constructivist position, “the organization of forms on the surface of the canvas” necessarily matched “an elitist conception of high art,” which was “unfit to satisfy the aspirations of a proletarian mass society”.³⁸

Lodder notes that for the Constructivists, the conventional notion of “composition” was not truly creative both on the part of the artist and the spectator because it stimulated the passive production and appreciation of art due to the lack of communicability in its executive process and due to the subsequent impossibility of its comprehension by the masses.³⁹ Lodder states that this second group represented by Aleksandr Rodchenko and Karl Ioganson (1890-1929) regarded all two dimensional representation as purely artistic activity and due to their narrow definition of any aesthetic concern within the confines of “bourgeois pleasure,”⁴⁰ rejected the capability of the two dimensional medium to contain “constructive reality” claiming “the incompatibility of artistic activity with the functional character of industrial production”⁴¹.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” p.31

⁴⁰ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp. 74-78,

Lodder states that this notion of art is the consequence of the necessity felt in order to associate the artistic theories to the fundamental principles of dialectical materialism where art is seen definitely as “socially conditioned” within the historical flow that is confined within the terms of “the struggle between the social classes”. These associations introduced by Bogdanov and Lunacarshky lead to the foundation of the “Proletarian Culture Movement” (Proletkul’t) just after the October Revolution in 1917.

For Bogdanov, “creative art” should be nothing else than “a form of labour and as such should use everyday, theoretical and practical techniques” that would conform to the techno-scientific paradigm necessitated by the proletarian collectivity. Proletkul’t projected “the critical study and assimilation of the past culture”; the decadent bourgeois culture which operated through subjective contemplative efforts in its execution and individual pleasure in its appreciation.

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.95

Lodder notes that Proletkul’t (Proletarian Culture Movement) utilizes the following terms to describe the design process: “artistic construction”, “artistic-production”

Christina Lodder gives a detailed account of factual information concerning the mentioned debate of 1921 to which Lissitzky did not participate.⁴² However, for the mapping of PROUNs within the diversity of ideas that have presented in Russian avant-garde until 1921, their reconsideration in comparison with the two primary tendencies becomes necessary. It might be stated that the PROUN which was built on Lissitzky's transformative attitude towards Suprematism, complied with the supremacy of the individual and contemplative process of creation. Thus Lissitzky would be located in proximity to the former group that understood "construction" as a formative principle that is applicable to the painterly space. Therefore, the PROUNs would be contested by the emerging Constructivist belief which proposed direct subjection to the immediate needs of the society" and the subordination of the individual will of the artist to collectivity.⁴³

4.3 The Debate's Conflicting Definitions for "Construction": The Repudiation of Architectural Representation

Christina Lodder's research on Russian Constructivism reveals that the abandonment of "composition" as a counterpart to "construction" and the subsequent emergence of "construction," as an alternative to "composition" occurred as a result of the "Composition-Construction Debate".⁴⁴ Lodder concludes that the Constructivist comprehension of the "artistic construction," especially with its strict attachment to three-

Lodder states that "in its most precise usage, this denoted the complete fusion of the artistic and technological aspects of the productive process" which would be personified in an "artist-constructor" who would "posses both the artistic and technical skills required to produce an object completely adapted to its total function.

⁴² *ibid.* pp.83-95

⁴³ Henk Puts, "El Lissitzky (1890-1941), his life and work," in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p.17

⁴⁴ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.110-120

dimensional means of formal explorations as a prerequisite appeared as the result of the debate.⁴⁵

Lodder illustrates the conclusion of the debate by referring to Rodchenko who asserted that even mentioning of the concept of composition is “anachronism”, therefore discussion of its value is, from the beginning, out of question.⁴⁶ Lodder notes that for Rodchenko “composition” represents “mere aesthetics, taste and outmoded artistic ideas,” hence “composition” should be replaced by “construction” because “all new approaches into art derive from technology and engineering” where “pure construction is the utilitarian necessity”⁴⁷ Lodder states that Stephanova advocates the same view by noting that “composition is the contemplative attitude of the artist to painting” while “construction” is an “active and creative” manifestation.⁴⁸ (Figure14)

Another early Constructivist stance that asserts the incapability of two dimensional projection to engender spatial representation is reflected by Ioganson. Lodder notes how Ioganson completely repudiates “the two dimensional nature of construction” by giving his succinct statement: “there is construction only in real space”.⁴⁹ Lodder states that, in his 1922 essay, “From Construction to Technology and Invention,” Ioganson introduces two types of “construction”.⁵⁰ For Ioganson the first one is “false construction”, which means “construction of an aesthetic / artistic nature, while the second one; “pure construction,” means “a genuine building; technical construction” that is able to produce “objects themselves constructively made not for art but for the real translation of it into the rails of practical necessity.”⁵¹

This duality of “pure construction” and “false construction” in the definitions of Ioganson may be encountered in other participants’ ideas. Among the proposals of “pure construction” versus “false construction” given by Lodder, one of the most significant is that of Stenberg brothers; Vladimir Stenberg (1899-1982) and Georgii Stenberg (1900-

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.88

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” p.31

⁴⁹ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.85

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.95

1933). As correspondences to these terms, they propose “technical” and “painterly” “construction”⁵²:

Technical construction determines the structural means of material properties such as weight, durability and resistance.

The system of technical construction derives from the utilitarian task.

Painterly construction determines the efficient utilization of material.

The system of painterly construction derives from the tasteful distribution of forms, which are individually constructive.

Since the structuring system of painterly construction is taste, painterly construction is not a construction in its pure form.⁵³

Lodder reveals the intermediary position of Konstantin Medunetskii (1899-1934) between the two extremities by giving his assertion that “what is construction in technology is composition in painting”.⁵⁴ Medunetskii states that “construction can exist in two dimensional art form” but his formulations conclude that “it is only effective in the three dimensional technical construction”.⁵⁵

However, it may be inferred that the possibility of the “existence of construction” in two dimensions, mentioned by Medunetskii is nothing more than the two dimensional projection of an object that has already been formulated in three dimensional space under the guidance of purely technical and utilitarian concerns.⁵⁶ Referring to Robin Evans’ categorization for the modes of architectural projection,⁵⁷ it may be stated that Medunetskii’s idea of projection does not contribute to the process of form generation by

⁵² *ibid.* p.87

⁵³ Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg, cited in Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.88

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.86

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989 pp.19-23

becoming spatial representation but only represents what is already finished according to Constructivist principles in three dimensions.

Medunetskii's proposition of two dimensional projection might be associated with Robin Evans' understanding of "architectural presentation drawings."⁵⁸ For Evans, these presentation drawings "propagate a completely defined idea" and do not "test or modify" an unfinished idea.⁵⁹ In this sense, Medunetskii's proposal contrasts with Evans' definition of architectural representation where the unfinished idea is completed simultaneously with the act of architectural projection.⁶⁰ Robin Evans argues that although both of the terms "representation" and "presentation" addresses the production of "pictures that precede the act of building," there exists a great difference between them. For Evans, presentation drawings have no contribution to the design process.⁶¹

Evans argues that although clearly differing from form generative architectural representations, these projections are not recordings either, since what they "embody" is also not yet realized in contrast to "a perspective from life", for instance, where "impressions are received from a real object".⁶² Evans states that these are "projections of a plausible outcome for a set of instructions and proposals already defined elsewhere but not yet accomplished."⁶³ At this point, the proposals of the early Constructivist during the Composition-Construction Debate may be thought to fall under this category of "presentation drawings" put forward by Robin Evans. Referring to the information provided by Christina Lodder, such a similarity might be proposed. Lodder notes that Medunetskii's and Stenberg Brothers' drawings (Figures 15 and 16) were criticized by Ioganson for being "merely the representations of technical constructions,"⁶⁴ which would be called, in Evans' terms "presentation drawing" or "technical facilitator."⁶⁵

Lodder gives the concluding remarks of Karl Ioganson for the debate in 1921, where Ioganson goes further to claim that "the path of every Revolutionary artist" should follow the development from painting to sculpture and "construction" and eventually lead

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

to “technology and invention.”⁶⁶ Ioganson states that not only “composition”, as mentioned by Rodchenko⁶⁷, but also categories like painting and sculpture become anachronism in the dawn of the industrial culture that, for him, urgently requires their replacement by “construction”, “technology” and “invention”.⁶⁸

Regarding Ioganson’s statement, it may be claimed that the possibility of architectural representation is seen indifferent from the activity of “painting.” It may be inferred that whether the form generative attempt is two or three-dimensional becomes the principal criteria for Ioganson. Therefore, the Constructivists contest the enduring value of any two dimensional form generative attempt.⁶⁹

Robin Evans speaks of such a possibility of rejecting architectural representation⁷⁰ as done by the Constructivists in the mentioned debate. It is already mentioned in Chapter 2 that for Evans architectural drawings have the ability to convey whether “the passive portrayal” or “active remodeling” of reality.”⁷¹ Evans argues that the repudiation of the role of “active imagination” during the reading of the architectural projections may lead to their evaluation as “a mere technical facilitator” which asserts that “drawing can propagate things but never generate them.”⁷² Since Lodder reveals the Constructivist’s opposition against the notion of “active imagination,” the conclusions of the “Composition-Construction Debate” asserts that the only possible role of any two dimensional projection is the “passive portrayal of reality” which is given by Evans as one of the options.⁷³

El Lissitzky’s contrasting tendency with the mainstream Constructivism may be thought as a further deviation from the Constructivist principles with its aspirations towards the reintroduction of artistic skill and craftsmanship to the form generative process of architectural design. The following chapter shall elaborate the nature of this deviation in order to propose this further proposal while emphasizing its continuing significance.

⁶⁶ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.95

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p.88

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.95

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” p.20

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

PROUN AS ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION: THE RE-INTRODUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL SKILL INTO ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

5.1 The PROUN's Architectural Interpretation of Suprematism In The Light of the 1921 Debate:

The principal quality that distinguishes El Lissitzky's contribution to Suprematism had been the fact emphasized by Kenneth Frampton¹ that, Lissitzky had been more in contact with the Constructivist line both in Russia and in Western Europe as compared to Malevich, his "outmoded" master as regarded by Eva Forgàcs.² Forgàcs elaborates this continuity by arguing that, by means of his PROUNs, El Lissitzky "cast Malevich in the role of a forefather who is gently pushed aside by the more modern, technology-conscious young artist."³

¹ Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, London: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1997, p.163

² Eva Forgàcs, "Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky's Proun Room," in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, edited by Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003, pp.59-60

³ Forgàcs, "Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky's Proun Room," p.59
Forgàcs claims that the master-disciple relationship between Piet Mondrian and Theo Van Doesburg indicate strong resemblance with that between Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky. Thus, although an explicit statement of Lissitzky concerning this illustration of his relation with Malevich does not exist, Eva Forgàcs refers to Van Doesburg's ideas about Mondrian, which she thinks retains their validity for the relation between Lissitzky and Malevich:

(Van Doesburg, "Letter to J.J.P. Oud," September 1921, cited in Forgàcs, p.59)

"Mondrian as a *man* is not modern because in my opinion, although he has developed psychically towards the new, spiritually belongs to the old. By this I mean that he still sees the spiritual as a conceptual

In order to reinforce her position, Eva Forgàcs constructs a parallel between the relations of Malevich and Lissitzky with that of Mondrian and Van Doesburg by arguing that Lissitzky had been “closer to Van Doesburg’s architecturally interpreted neoplasticism.”⁴ Forgàcs states that “both Van Doesburg and Lissitzky asserted themselves as modernizers and innovators of their precursors’ art.”⁵ For Forgàcs, they were “doers, active shapers of the new world, as opposed to their forerunners, who had assumed a philosophical stance.”⁶

Kenneth Frampton also refers to the relation between Theo Van Doesburg and El Lissitzky mentioned by Eva Forgàcs.⁷ Similarly, for Frampton, Van Doesburg was considerably influenced by Lissitzky.⁸ Frampton argues that this influence is related with Doesburg’s integration of the concern for “social structure and technology as prime determinants of form” into the “De Stijl ideal of universal harmony” originally conceptualized by Piet Mondrian.⁹ Frampton claims that, by the mid-1920s, Doesburg considered Mondrian’s “anthipathy to everyday objects” as an obstacle for practical application.¹⁰

After giving this observation, Frampton claims that Doesburg eventually arrived at a “Lissitzkian solution to this dilemma” where “both the environmental scale and status of the object should determine the degree to which it may be manipulated in accordance with an abstract conception.”¹¹ For Frampton this synthesis enabled the “built environment itself to conform to a higher order” where “equipment as produced by the society at large ought to be accepted as the ready-made objects of the culture.”¹² This research similarly argues that, from an architectural point of view, the PROUNs become

abstraction. Of life itself as a *reality* he is in fact afraid. He *thinks* life, but does not live it. He makes his conception, which is of course very good, too much about an ideal image outside of normal life.”

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, p.147

See also Eva Forgàcs, pp.59-60

⁸ Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, p.147

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

the visual manifestations of the specific “Lissitzkian solution,” hereby proposed by Frampton.

This synthesis of Lissitzky, however, retains certain aspects of Malevich’s Suprematist thinking. After mentioning the deviations of PROUNs from this original conception of Suprematism, it is necessary to give the common points.

Evgenii Kovtun notes that, in opposition with Constructivism, Malevich had placed the source of spatial intuition guided by the “intuitive reason” inside the human mind, in which he believed “an infinite space” to exist.¹³ This idea also becomes crucial for the suggestion of architectural representation by the PROUNs. Due to the uniqueness of his theory, John Bowlit regards Malevich as “a genuinely creative individual” for whom, “generally intuition overshadowed principle”¹⁴. Sima Ingberman emphasizes Malevich’s criticism that the Constructivist attempts would lead to the imitation of the machine which would never achieve the synthesis it projected.¹⁵

¹³ Malevich, “Suprematism. 34 Drawings, Vitebsk, 1920,” cited in Evgenii Kovtun, “Kazimir Malevich” in Art Journal, trans. Charlotte Douglas, Fall 1981, p.234

¹⁴ John E. Bowlit, “Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts,” in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlit Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, p. 144

Also see: Paul Crowther, “Philosophy and Non-Objectivity,” in Art & Design, vol. 5 no. 5/6-1989, p. 51. Crowther proposes an affiliation between the mystical philosophy of P.D. Ouspensky and Malevich’s “non-objectivity,” which brings to the fore an Idealist philosophical approach contrasting with Marxist Materialism, which was the prevailing approach through the Russian avant-garde. Paul Crowther states that in spite of the materialistic overtones of the general intellectual climate in which he worked, Malevich never lost his belief in the idealization of “another transcendental world” asserting that “the world as perceived with imperfect sensual apparatus of mankind is only a reflection.”

In his introduction to the English edition of “The Non-Objective World”, Ludwig Hilberseimer also focuses on the limits of human cognition as conceived by Suprematist theory:

“With his Suprematism, Malevich, in much the same way as Plato, broke through the barrier of sense perception of reality. They both held that the world as reported by our senses is an illusion.”

¹⁵ Sima Ingberman, International Constructivist Architecture, 1922-1939, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, pp.3-11.

Sima Ingberman underlines Malevich’s assertion that contradictions would be inevitable for the Constructivists because creative values in “conscious constructive artistic production” could not be limited within technological determinism in conformity with certain material and technical paradigms.

Also see: Anatole Kopp, Constructivist Architecture in the USSR, translated from French by Sheila de Vallée, London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin Press, 1985, p.6

Anatole Kopp gives Malevich’s argument that, on the contrary, Constructivism would definitely remain subservient to technology by completely repudiating free intuition; the absolute source of inspiration that had ever guided men through the history of architecture.

Kopp considers Malevich as a follower of Wassily Kandinsky’s (1866-1944) founding programme of INKhUK (The Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow) that envisaged “an autonomous art glorifying the psychological and mystical levels of artistic creativity, to which the emerging Constructivist view of “the

Christina Lodder notes that Constructivists reduced the design principles into “functional and structural expediency”¹⁶ dictated by material concerns considered “earthly” by Malevich who associated this principle with a pejorative meaning.¹⁷ Ingberman argues that Malevich criticized Constructivist understanding of construction for being literal and implying only the construction of objects with real materials in three dimensional space.¹⁸ For Constructivists, generally the two-dimensional plane could not be a medium of form generation for architecture because the essence of all “real constructive reality” lied in the real physical relationships set by real materials in space.¹⁹ The last chapter revealed that the claim of architectural representation by the PROUNs strongly contrasted with this Constructivist view.

infinite possibilities that industrialization and mechanization will offer architecture,” would strongly dispute and oppose.

¹⁶ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p. 106

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Ingberman, pp. 3-11

Ingberman states that for the “Suprematist Art of Volume Construction”, “form would triumph over brute material” under the guidance of “the organizational principle on the basis of which forms must be made.” Suprematist stress on autonomy blamed Constructivist architecture for being “a mere imitation of machine” and started to challenge “its explicit manner of expressing the parts, materials and functions of a building and its emphasis on tensile elements, circulatory parts and mobile innovations”.

¹⁹ Lodder, “The Transition to Constructivism,” p.272 also see Ingberman, p. 21.

Also Eva Forgács, “Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky’s Proun Room,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, edited by Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003, p.47

Forgács states that: “for the progressive artists of the 1920s, real space as opposed to the illusory space of flat painting was a new means of grasping the reality. The word *real* resonated as “true” as well as “present”, in stark opposition to the word *art*, which came to mean “obsolete,” “imagined,” or “contrived.” Forgács states that the opposition between Suprematism and Constructivism was originating from the rivalry between Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin, who are recognized as the fathers of these movements, respectively:

“There was a fundamental difference between Malevich’s concept of reality as the ultimate source of spiritual meaning of the universe, and the constructivists’ materialist understanding of reality as comprising any actual, tangible, and, ultimately, utilitarian objects.

5.2 PROUN's Architectural Interpretation of Constructivism In The Light of the 1921 Debate:

Nancy Perloff notes that “Lissitzky’s constructivism was not a straightforward method of geometric abstraction, economy and construction of objects; rather it was a complete ideological mix, full of contradictory impulses that bespeak alignments outside constructivism.”²⁰ These external impulses primarily originate from Lissitzky’s former association with Malevich’s Suprematist UNOVIS group in Vitebsk in 1920-21. At this point, El Lissitzky’s statement of 1921, illustrates his divergence from the mainstream Constructivist view of the complete mechanization of the genius. In spite of its increased concern with the structural and functional features, the Suprematist painterly space of Lissitzky would represent a taint for Constructivists who considered the total disengagement from all traditional artistic means of expression.²¹ Lissitzky clarifies his position by expressing what he finds to be promising in the future development shaping the ideology of INKhUK:

[a kind of half-way towards Constructivism, but while retaining the belief in the validity of the work of art *per se* and widening of aesthetic criteria to include industrial objects²²

²⁰Nancy Perloff, “The Puzzle of El Lissitzky’s Artistic Identity,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.17

²¹ Alexei Gan cited in Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.237

Alexei Gan, the prominent representative of Constructivism during the 1920s, condemns Lissitzky for “not being able to tear himself from art” completely. Christina Lodder shows that although sharing the general belief in the validity of “artist-constructor” with its pre-Revolutionary formulation, Malevich’s Suprematism had been contested by the Constructivists who certainly declared that “art is dead”. One of these theoreticians was Alexei Gan whose famous phrase “down with speculative activity in artistic work!” demarcates his great conflict with the theory of Malevich, for whom, art is nothing but “speculative thinking”.

Also see, Lodder, p.103

Lodder states that abandoning the search for form generation within two dimensions, Constructivism sought for the extension into three-dimensional means, as the prerequisite for compatibility with the demands of the collectivist culture.

²² El Lissitzky cited in Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.79

It is already argued that Malevich's uncompromising belief in the absolute opacity of the work of art emphasized by Magdalena Dabrowski, indeed, had become an obstacle as firm as the oppositions of the Constructivists, against the suggestion of architectural representation.²³ Lodder illustrates the mentioned opposition against architectural representation shared by certain Constructivists by quoting Rodchenko: "This is the end of painting. These are the primary colors. There will be no more representation."²⁴

Although conflicting in terms of their opposing attitudes in their consideration of the industrial paradigm as the regulator of form generation, Malevich's absolute non-objectivity and Rodchenko's total refusal of the value of painterly space in industrial production, both serve the abandonment of the idea of plane used as a means of architectural representation. Therefore it can be inferred that El Lissitzky's proposal of the PROUNs as a system of architectural representation has been an achievement which would be neglected by both Suprematism and Constructivism in their original conceptions.²⁵

²³ Magdalena Dabrowski, "The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, p.29
Dabrowski illustrates this condition by referring to Malevich's statement: "the meaning of a work of art was no longer contained in its representational quality, but in its pictorial elements themselves, in their mutual relationship and interaction."

²⁴ Rodchenko cited in Lodder. Russian Constructivism, p.183

²⁵ This claim relies on Stephanie Barron's "characterization of Constructivism as a concern with volume rather than the plane:"
Stephanie Barron, "The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, p.15

Also see Lodder, p.183, where it might be inferred that Suprematism's refusal of spatial representation together with the use of illusionary perspective has been accepted by some Constructivists, such as Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891-1956), who took this view as a conclusion from which justifications might be extracted for the suggestion of architectural drawing as representations and two-dimensional projections of a structure whose principles are predetermined by fixed materialistic limitations and technological paradigms rather than claims for a form generative activity of architectural representation.

The definitions of architectural representation and architectural projection utilized here are borrowed from Robin Evans, "'Architectural Projection,'" in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989 and Robin Evans, . The Projective Cast, Architecture and Its Three Geometries, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995

Seeking a balance between the absolute freedom of mental construction conceptualized by Suprematism and the earthly limitations of physical construction dictated by Constructivism, El Lissitzky criticizes the Constructivist tendency in architectural design.²⁶ By expanding the visual vocabulary of Suprematism with the introduction of three-dimensional illusion, Lissitzky offers an alternative approach for the definition of “construction” and “constructivism” where the Suprematist plane becomes the medium of architectural representation and, therefore, form generation²⁷ :

These artists look of the world through the prisma of the technic. They do not want to give an illusion by the means of colors on canvas, but work directly in iron, wood, glass, etc. The shortsighted see therein only the machine. Constructivism proves that the limits between mathematics and art, between a work of art and a technical invention are not to be fixed.²⁸

It can be inferred that the use of color and three dimensional illusions in the two dimensional surface of PROUNs aims to “convey qualities of abstraction or materiality to our perceptions” as claimed by Lodder.²⁹ The PROUNs may be considered as the unique attempt of El Lissitzky to apply Suprematist principles into architectural design process by utilizing the Suprematist canvas for architectural representation, where he declared that he aimed to formulate a system in which PROUNs would be an “interchangeable situation between painting and architecture”, which “begins on the flat plane, passes through three-dimensional models and continues to the construction of all objects of our everyday life.”³⁰

The PROUN approach of El Lissitzky, therefore, offers an alternative view of “constructivism” contrasting with the mainstream Constructivist view that sees in the drawing no potential beyond the two-dimensional projection of the design object already

Robin Evans’ understanding of “architectural representation” will be considered along with the form generative attempt of the PROUNs in the following chapters 2 and 3.

²⁶ *ibid.* p.82

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.* p.95

³⁰ El Lissitzky cited in Linda D. Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and the Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 294-296

conceptualized in physical space according to technical concerns. Similarly, Stephanie Barron claims that Lissitzky's PROUNs search for the "embodiment of a synthesis of art, science and technology"³¹ rather than rendering one of these superior over the others.

The straightforward categorization of El Lissitzky under the banner, "Constructivist" would, therefore, be an error underestimating his personal formulation of constructivism, certainly apart from the one with capital "C".³² Therefore, considering Malevich's written work, it is possible to claim that Lissitzky's constructivism found its main source of inspiration in Malevich's theory where the term "construction" corresponded to the sense of mental construction that acts as liberated from the limitations of earthly considerations.³³

5.3. PROUN's Architectural Interpretation of the "Artist-Constructor": Transcending the Extremities of Constructivism and Suprematism

John E. Bowlit claims that starting from the pre-revolutionary period of the Russian avant-garde and through the inauguration of Constructivism, "establishing a scientific basis for artistic creativity" had been the prevailing objective regardless of the various approaches that proposed divergent solutions to the same problem.³⁴ Magdalena Dabrowski argues that the term "construction", in its earlier stage of development, was

³¹ Brodsky, p.92

³² *ibid.*

Christina Lodder calls this approach "mainstream Constructivism" and notes that afterwards, even Tatlin, who is regarded as "the father of Constructivism" felt that his approach was not coinciding with the direction that Constructivism developed, and criticized this mainstream view of Constructivism.

³³ Michail Grobman, "About Malevich", in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.26

Concerning the conflicting correspondences offered for the term, Michail Grobman contrasts this Suprematist understanding of "spiritual construction" with the Constructivist assertion of "physical construction."

³⁴ John E. Bowlit, "Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts," in 20th Century Studies, Russian Formalism, J.E. Bowlit Eds. Brighton: Dolphin Press, 1993, pp.132-138

thought to constitute “the metaphorical order of the work of art” that guided its “process of formation”.³⁵ Dabrowski claims that this “architectonic structure” enabled the consideration of the “assembly of the material and pictorial composite parts” as an active and conscious process of creation.³⁶

Christina Lodder states that the Russian Avant-garde is underlined by the objective of “artistic synthesis” that manifested the collective solutions for the problems themselves conceived in terms of “painterly, sculptural and architectural synthesis.”³⁷ If this objective of multidisciplinary synthesis is assumed to be valid for Constructivism, it would be easier to understand the cause for the “ideological effort to create new architectural forms that would embody the aspirations of the Revolution”³⁸ that is commonly encountered in the works of non-architects such as Vladimir Tatlin, Kazimir Malevich and Gustav Klutss. A. Z. Rudenstine locates the PROUNs within this more general trend of the 1920s.³⁹

Therefore the utilization of “construction” as a metaphor as claimed by Dabrowski,⁴⁰ may be thought to reveal the emergence of an architectural imperative even in the painterly developments that, unlike the PROUNs, are not necessarily and directly concerned with architectural design.⁴¹ If Stephanova’s statements in the “Composition-

³⁵ Magdalena Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.31

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.60

Lodder explains the utopianism and enthusiasm to accomplish “the brotherhood of artists and architects to link art with life” at the speech delivered by the Soviet architect Lunacarsky at the opening of the “State Free Art Studios” in October 1918. Lodder notes that this objective of artistic synthesis found its practical manifestations in the various project drawings which “reflected a very strong reliance on the formal language of the avant-garde painting and even structural coherence and viability were sacrificed to the expressive qualities of form.”

³⁸ Angelica Zander Rudenstine, “Lissitzky and Klutss,” in Rowell, Margit and Rudenstine, Angelica Zander. Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia, Selections from the George Costakis Collection, New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1981, p.175

³⁹ Dabrowski, p.31

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Dmitri Sarabianov, “The Painting of Lubov Popova,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, pp.42-45

Although it should be considered that the signification of “construction” is different in these painterly efforts, the use of architectural terms for their definitions is worth considering. Dmitri Sarabianov

Construction Debate”⁴² is reconsidered, it might be claimed that the metaphor of construction signified the search for “establishing a scientific basis for artistic creativity,” as expressed by Bowlt.⁴³

Christina Lodder argues that the specific understanding of “construction” which was going to formulate the theoretical basis for mainstream Constructivism is clearly put forward associating it with arrangement of “real materials” inside “real three dimensional space” serving for a “specific purpose” in tune with the “construction” of the new collective life in the Soviet society.⁴⁴ The identification of this special understanding of “construction” unique to Constructivism is vital because the frequent use of the term engendered other understandings of “construction,” that are external to the specific definition that prevailed in the debate of 1921. This thesis argues that one of these external definitions originates from the PROUNs.

Referring to Christina Lodder claim for “general commitment to a link between art and industry,”⁴⁵ it may be argued that within the Russian Avant-garde, there had been an overarching tendency to subordinate architectural design to the newly proposed category of “production art.” Lodder claim for the existence of a general “confusion, ambiguity and incompleteness”⁴⁶ may be also thought to apply to the nature of the relation between the architect and the engineer.

illustrates this lineage with Popova, who frequently used “painterly architectonics” or “painterly construction” to name her approach.

⁴² Dabrowski, “The Plastic Revolution: New Concepts of Form, Content, Space, and Materials in the Russian Avant-Garde,” p.31

Dabrowski emphasizes Varvara Stephanova’s claim that “composition is the contemplative attitude of the artist to painting,” while “construction” is an “active and creative” manifestation.

⁴³ Bowlt, “Russian Formalism and the Visual Arts,” pp.132-138

⁴⁴ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.94-103

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.103

The principle representatives of this stream that developed in parallel with the Constructivist position in INKhUK are art critics Boris Arvatov and Nikolai Tarabukin.

Lodder claims that in spite of their common commitment for the creation of a production art, Constructivists and Productivists diverge in their conception of the “artist-constructor”, namely “primarily by the difference in their relative commitments to the two halves of the art-industry polarity,” respectively.

⁴⁶ Lodder, Russian Constructivism, pp.101-102

Despite the acknowledgment of a certain trend called “Productivism,”⁴⁷ Lodder claims that there is not any concrete theory of production art reflecting coherence and collective approval.⁴⁸ Increasing the ambiguity of the term “artist-constructor,” which appeared with quite different associations in several frameworks, “production art”, for Lodder, signified nothing more than an unidentified “commitment to the idea of art involved in industry.”⁴⁹

Christina Lodder states that this unresolved concept of “the complete fusion of the artistic and technological aspects of the productive process” is personified in the figure of “artist-constructor.” John E. Bowlt refers to Lissitzky’s photomontage of 1924, “the Constructor,” (Figure 17) to further claim that Lissitzky, who had been trained as an “architect-engineer,” considered this figure to be personified in his own interdisciplinary character.⁵⁰ Boris Brodsky claims that through this photomontage image composed by three superimposed negatives: a hand with compass, the face of Lissitzky and graph paper squares,⁵¹ El Lissitzky illustrates the dilemma of the Russian avant-garde between collectivity and individuality or reason and emotion.⁵²

John E. Bowlt claims that the solution of the mentioned tension had been a preoccupation for the Russian avant-garde especially during the pre-revolutionary period which produced “pseudo-scientific jumbles”⁵³ as the proposals of scientific method into the domain of aesthetics; The dilemma is evident in Lissitzky’s photomontage, “the Constructor” where the idea in the message of anonymity and collectivity in art-construction conflicts with the individuality exemplified by Lissitzky’s own face.⁵⁴ Boris Brodsky notes that “the eye of the face seems to be afire in the palm of the hand, expressing a unity of the idea and will, the artist’s single and concentrated idea of creativity.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.103

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Boris Brodsky, “El Lissitzky,” in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives*, p.95

⁵² John E. Bowlt, “Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand,” in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.129-136

⁵³ *ibid.* p.135

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

The acknowledgment of “art-construction” as a necessity for the new collectivity conflicts with the quality of individuality inevitably inseparable from the concept of “artist-constructor”. It might be claimed that architectural representation through the PROUNs have been possible thanks to this coexistence which made it possible to maintain a purely mental effort in “cosmic scale;” a free flight as disengaged from normative restrictions of the “earthly scale.” The liberating effect of the space envisioned by the PROUNs remains valid even through their claim for architectural representation, which is by definition, destined towards the physical realization in conformity with all these limitations illustrated by gravity.

The PROUN approach of El Lissitzky, therefore, offers an alternative view of “constructivism” contrasting with the mainstream Constructivist view that sees in the drawing no potential beyond the two-dimensional projection of the design object already conceptualized in physical space according to technical concerns. Similarly, Stephanie Barron claims that Lissitzky’s PROUNs search for the “embodiment of a synthesis of art, science and technology”⁵⁵ rather than rendering one of these superior over the others.

⁵⁵ Brodsky, “El Lissitzky,” p.92

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study argues that Lissitzky's PROUNs illustrate the possibility for graphical representation to search for further potentials in order to expand its contributing space into the realm of architecture. This thesis considered the investigation of the PROUNs by revealing their significance as the transformer and the synthesizer of divergent tendencies. The mentioned reframing is intended to serve as a tool for the principal argument of this thesis that the PROUNs as architectural representations, indicate an alternative and inspiring constructivist strategy to reload the process of architectural design with the contributions of individual skill and craftsmanship which were surpassed by the mainstream lineage of Constructivism.

El Lissitzky's endeavour for form generation within the painterly language of Suprematism has been reread through the three focal points that illustrate the transformations undertaken by Lissitzky. These can be considered as attempts introducing three novelties into Suprematist painterly space. Firstly, they implicate three-dimensional architectural compositions by virtue of a unique interpretation of Suprematist painterly language expressed on the flat plane. Secondly, they load these planes associated with initial "non-objective" connotations with traces constituted by a particular paradigm of construction that instantiates the architectural representation into specific conditions. Thirdly, Lissitzky introduces the notion of dynamic space that is constructed simultaneously with the architectural interpretation, in other words the mental space of architectural design that does not pre-exist the interpretation that it receives.

This study claims that, contrasting with the mainstream lineage of Constructivism especially after "the Construction-Composition Debate" (1921), Lissitzky's PROUNs

recognized the role of creative imagination, which transformed this painterly attempt into architectural representations in the sense given by Robin Evans.¹ As Alan C. Birnholz has argued, this approach necessitates the active participation of the spectator as the representative of the revolutionary consciousness which replaces the outmoded modes of passive contemplation.² Lissitzky emphasizes this new role of his spatial projections and states in 1922 that “the art of painting became like a preparatory exercise in the course of organized participation in life.”³

Lissitzky’s statement illustrates the role of architectural representation that he associates with the PROUNs proposing an intermediary process between the phase of conceptualization; the liberated notion of “freely floating” mental construction proposed by the Suprematist UNOVIS circle and the phase of physical realization; taken by the mainstream Constructivists as the eventual step that any form generative exercise is obliged to confront.

It may be claimed that, Suprematism encompassing an early Russian avant-garde attitude relates to the modern conception of “opacity of the work of art.”⁴ How far this “opacity” could be retained while operating within the “discipline of architecture” and claiming “architectural representation” through the space of modern painting has been questioned. El Lissitzky’s PROUNs employ Suprematist formal system while structuring the plane of architectural representation. Although initially conceptualized as non-objective planes, here within these PROUN drawings “the Suprematist bodies dissolved in the painterly space”⁵ suggest the illusion of three dimensional space through the

¹ Robin Evans, “Architectural Projection,” in Architecture and Its Image, Four Centuries of Architectural Representation. Works From the Collection of the Canadian Center of Architecture, Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989, pp.19-20

² Alan C Birnholz, “El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, pp.98-101

³ Lissitzky, “The Exhibitions in Russia,” in Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet,no.1-2, translated by Paul Zygas, cited in Lodder, “El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism,” p.29

⁴ Alan Colquhoun. “Three Kinds of Historicism,” in Theorizing A New Agenda for Architecture: an anthology of architectural theory 1965-1995, Kate Nesbitt Eds, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p.209

⁵ Alison Hilton, Kazimir Malevich, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992, p.3.

introduction of axonometric projection, as the appropriate form of expression to the spirit of the new epoch.⁶ This condition offers a novelty for a Suprematist composition.⁷

Lazar Markovich Lissitzky's unique position within the Russian avant-garde has been investigated through his early post-revolutionary contributions, the PROUNs, which may be regarded as his interpretation of Suprematism from an architect's point of view. Boris Brodsky argues that, in spite of his proposal of Prounism as a separate movement in "*Die Kunstismen/ Les Ismes de l'Art/ The Isms of Art*," (Figures- 17, 18 and 19) which he edited with Hans Arp in Switzerland, in 1924, El Lissitzky's career did not engender an "ism," that might be considered as a "first rank of innovation in the true sense of the word."⁸

Boris Brodsky claims that for Lissitzky, the cause for the co-editorship of this publication was more of a "self-assigned responsibility as the apologist of the new Russian Art" who sought to "integrate the Russian avant-garde into the mainstream of European culture"⁹ rather than the manifestation of a brand new movement or stylistic

⁶ Yves Alain Bois, "From $-\infty$ to 0 to $+\infty$: Axonometry, or Lissitzky's Mathematical Paradigm," in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, pp.27-30

⁷ Hilton, Kazimir Malevich, p.8

Hilton claims that Malevich, would not endorse the painterly attempt to suggest conveying of volumetric qualities by illusion, evaluating this as a continuation of the traditional perspectival representation.

⁸ Boris Brodsky, "El Lissitzky," in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.91

⁹ *ibid.* p.93

Although El Lissitzky's contact with the West constitutes an important part of his career, and his work is greatly influenced by this interaction, the thesis reserves a limited space for the discussion of these external influences.

Also see: Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, pp.130-131

Kenneth Frampton shows how the international dimension of his approach distinguishes Lissitzky from his Russian colleagues.

Also see: Christina Lodder, "El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism," in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.36-40

Christina Lodder implies that Lissitzky had been the only Russian Avant-garde figure simultaneously practicing at home and abroad. This quality provided Lissitzky with the liberty of developing an original constructivist interpretation of his own, independently from the machine-oriented and conservative criticism of Moscow Constructivism.

In order to differentiate it from the constructivist understanding developed by Lissitzky in the international level, Christina Lodder also calls this mainstream movement as "Moscow Constructivism," which had been confined within the national limits by not being able to transfer its Marxist theoretical basis into Western Europe.

derivation independent from Constructivism or Suprematism. Nancy Perloff states that Lissitzky adopted the motivations of these two seemingly conflicting streams of thought originated in Russia in divergent ways and mediums within both national and an international dimension.¹⁰

Selim O. Khan Magomedov regards El Lissitzky's PROUNs as the architectural interpretation of Kazimir Severinovich Malevich's Suprematist style of geometric abstraction.¹¹ As the representative of a unique interpretation that merges the otherwise uncompromising principles of Suprematism and Constructivism, "two primary schools of

Moreover, Lodder implies that unlike the Russian émigré artists like Naum Gabo, for Lissitzky working abroad did not dictate the prerequisite of total disengagement from his homeland, and especially after 1930 until his death in 1941, he mostly stayed in Moscow.

¹⁰ Nancy Perloff, "The Puzzle of El Lissitzky's Artistic Identity," in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.1-8

The fact that he had not broken ties with the developments in Russia, supports this thesis' assumption that Lissitzky's conception of PROUNs are relevant to be considered in the Russian specificity of the avant-garde.

Also see: Kenneth Frampton, "Modern Architecture, A Critical History," p.131

Kenneth Frampton states that El Lissitzky had the privilege to circulate relatively more freely in the Western Europe as an "unofficial cultural ambassador" of the USSR.

Also see: Paul Wood, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," in The Great Utopia, The Russian & Soviet Avant-Garde 1915-1932, New York: Guggenheim Museum & Rizzoli International Publications. Inc., 1992, pp.5-12

Paul Wood associates this status with Lenin's vision of "International Socialism," which aimed the dissemination of Bolshevik principles in the Western capitalist countries by propagating a "world revolution" through all dimensions of human activity, among which architecture constituted a considerable place.

Also see: Margarita Tupitsyn "After Vitebsk: El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich, 1924-1929," in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, pp.184-188

Margarita Tupitsyn states that, in this respect, 1924; the year Lenin passed away had been a turning point for Lissitzky due to the resultant change of vision from "international socialism" to "socialism in one country" undertaken by Stalin.

Also see Wood, p.6-9,

Paul Wood notes that Lenin's successor gradually introduced the central administration of the artistic activity, which, after the second half of the 1920s, would lead to the suppression of the avant-garde experimentations in the USSR.

¹¹ Selim O. Khan Magomedov, "A New Style: Three Dimensional Suprematism and Prounen," in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, pp.35-45

thought engendered by the Russian Avant-garde”¹², El Lissitzky produced the PROUNs circa 1920, within a context where the relevancy of the two-dimensional painterly activity to the contemporary modes of industrial production was contested by the Constructivists.¹³

Christina Lodder’s research reveals the significance of “the Composition-Construction Debate,” held by the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow (INKhUK) in 1921, as the prominent event that marks the inauguration of the Constructivist position as the prevailing tendency of the Russian Avant-garde during the 1920s.¹⁴ For Lodder, at this point, Constructivism confined itself within a process of form generation only in “three-dimensional real, space” using “real materials”.¹⁵

Therefore, Malevich’s Suprematism, which constituted the basis for Lissitzky’s PROUNs and which placed non-objectivity; “the absence of material and structural interests”¹⁶ as a prerequisite for genuine creativity was repudiated by the Constructivists. However, El Lissitzky’s unique search for the generation of architectural form through Suprematist painterly space transcends the extremities of both Suprematism and Constructivism and obliges Malevich’s “abstract, non-objective plane bodies dissolved in painterly space”¹⁷ to confront the implicit demands of architectural realm asserted by the Constructivists as compatibility with the current technological paradigm of construction.

Discussing the significance of PROUNs as the proposition of “three-dimensional Suprematism,” Khan-Magomedov emphasizes the “independent creative concept” possessed by El Lissitzky, which prevented him from formulating a sharply demarcated “theoretical construct.”¹⁸ Magomedov claims that the Russian avant-garde, which covered the first third of the twentieth century exploring the “primary impulses of creativity” for the construction of the new industrial society, encompassed two types of

¹² Stephanie Barron, “The Russian Avant-Garde: A View From the West,” in The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930, New Perspectives, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p.12

¹³ Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, pp.83-89

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.20

¹⁷ Alison Hilton, Kazimir Malevich, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992, p.3.

¹⁸ S. O. Khan-Magomedov, “A New Style: Three Dimensional Suprematism and Prounen,” in 1890-1941 El Lissitzky: architect, painter, photographer, typographer, Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p.35

features for the artistic propagators: the “style-generating talent” and the “integrative talent.”

To the first class, Magomedov includes Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin, widely acknowledged as the initiators of Suprematism and Constructivism because their activities were underlined by “an extreme formalization of the artistic means and methods of expression.”¹⁹ Although a complete success of consistently disseminating the initial motivations of the new style among the future followers remains impossible, Magomedov thinks the “style generating talent” to have the capacity, into a considerable extend, “to transfer its theoretical foundation,” to others with “integrative talent,” such as Lissitzky.²⁰

Throughout this thesis, Lissitzky’s specific interpretation of the term “constructivism” has been elaborated in connection with the influences of Suprematism and Constructivism. Magomedov claims that Lissitzky’s ability to integrate “different style-generating concepts without regard for the boundaries between them” emerges thanks to his dissociation from any “trait of partisan exclusionism,”²¹ that probably prevented most of the Suprematists and Constructivists from achieving such a synthesis on the basis of compromise.

John E. Bowlit states that this multidimensionality of Lissitzky had been seen as either an eclecticism; “a troubling sense of variety” or “a measure of inquitiveness and tolerance,” both of which equally rendered the mapping of Lissitzky problematic for the scholars.²² Christina Lodder argues that Lissitzky tried to justify his own interpretation of “constructivism” by claiming “a UNOVIS lineage of constructivism” as the new alternative to the widely recognized “OBMOKhU lineage.”²³ This alternative view of constructivism underlines the PROUNs.

The PROUNs, the products of Lissitzky’s Vitebsk years when he had been studying with Malevich’s UNOVIS group have vital signification for his understanding

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.36

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.* p.37

²² John E. Bowlit, “Manipulating Metaphors: El Lissitzky and the Crafted Hand,” in Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.133

²³ El Lissitzky, “The New Russian Art: A Lecture (1922),” in El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds. translated by Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall, London: Thames & Hudson, 1980, p.340

of the term “constructivism.” Lissitzky’s constructivism seen as the synthesis within this polarity is manifested in his PROUNs. However, Lissitzky’s influence concerning architecture, in the wider sense beyond the PROUNs, has many dimensions.²⁴

It is evident that the figures given here, including Lissitzky, passed through individual developments that changed their contributions to the “individuality-collectivity” polarity that has been introduced as a central concern for the thesis. Therefore, throughout this study, to avoid the straightforwardness of a possible claim for seeking one to one correspondences between certain sharply defined movements and figures, the research has been confined within the investigation of the PROUNs, as Lissitzky’s contributions to the architectural realm within a limited period of his career.

The focus had been Lissitzky’s interpretation of “constructivism”, within these confines due to the fact that both his own later development, and the consequences of his international influence might lead to divergent interpretations of “constructivism” and the “artist-constructor” different from those manifested in the PROUNs.²⁵ Along with these

²⁴ Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, London: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1997, pp. 130-134

Kenneth Frampton states that during his contact with Switzerland between 1923-25, Lissitzky’s relation with the architects such as the Dutch Mart Stam, the Swiss Emil Roth, Hans Schmidt and Hennes Meyer lead to the establishment of the ABC group with a gradually developing commitment to an “objective approach” into “an international style of building,” which is considered by Sima Ingberman as “the international constructivist architecture.”²⁴

Also see: Sima Ingberman, International Constructivist Architecture, 1922-1939, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, pp.20-24

²⁵ Kenneth Frampton, Modern Architecture, A Critical History, pp.116-122.

Kenneth Frampton illustrates this difficulty of associating certain avant-garde architects with sharply defined movements of the period by claiming that, indeed, many had oscillated between the extremes of “*Typisierung*” (normative form) and “*Kunstwollen*” (will to form). Therefore the trial to seek the reflections and traces of the Suprematist or Constructivist principles inside the discipline of architecture is bound to confront this reality.

Also see Lodder, Russian Constructivism, p.230

Lodder states that in connection with his role as the cultural representative of the Soviet regime in Berlin, Lissitzky was assigned as the curator of the “*Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*” held in Van Diemen Gallery in 1922.

Lodder argues that starting from this exhibition, “constructivism was depoliticized by its emigration to the West; especially to Germany and the Netherlands.”

Also see: Sima Ingberman, International Constructivist Architecture, 1922-1939, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, pp.8-16

formal analyses, this research has recognized the dangerous oversimplifying affect that risks to underrepresent the complex and hybrid ideas embedded within the discourse.

The associations of certain identities with Suprematism or Constructivism are not intended to serve as one to one correspondences or ultimate parallels. They are rather illustrations of certain arguments, within a limited time span, concerning the generation of architectural form, that are common to the terminology of these movements and the particular instance of architectural tendency, here taken as the PROUNs . The reason for the initial selection of the particular avant-garde movements within the Russian specificity has been the freshness of their suggestions that have been obstructed due to political suppression which was followed by a world-wide historical ignorance for over half a century.

Although Christina Lodder argues that it was subjected to a certain level of depoliticization in the West, Sima Ingberman asserts that constructivism had turned into an international movement, transcending the boundaries of Russia.

Also see: Christina Lodder, "El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism," p.27

Lodder claims that constructivism encompassed divergences "in different geographical and historical contexts" during its dissemination in Western Europe primarily through El Lissitzky.

Together with Ilya Ehrenburg, the Russian writer, Lissitzky greatly contributed to the recognition of constructivism in the West through their publication of the artistic journal "*Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet*,"

Also see, Alexei Gan cited in Lodder, p.237

Alexei Gan's criticism of El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, the "unofficial cultural ambassadors of the USSR in Berlin," illustrates the conflict between the current Constructivists at VKhUTEMAS and Lissitzky's constructivism that is considerably inspired by his Suprematist background:

"The basic mistake of comrade Ehrenburg and comrade Lissitzky consists in the fact that they cannot tear themselves away from art."

Lodder argues that El Lissitzky became the principal propagator of international constructivism. Lodder implies that the formation of "depoliticized" version of constructivism may not be directly attributed to Lissitzky because the Western circles themselves extracted and adopted the "external geometric style" of the PROUNs. Lodder argues that the formal language of Lissitzky's constructivism in his PROUNs was "visually and culturally more accessible" for the West than the ideological assertions of Moscow Constructivism.

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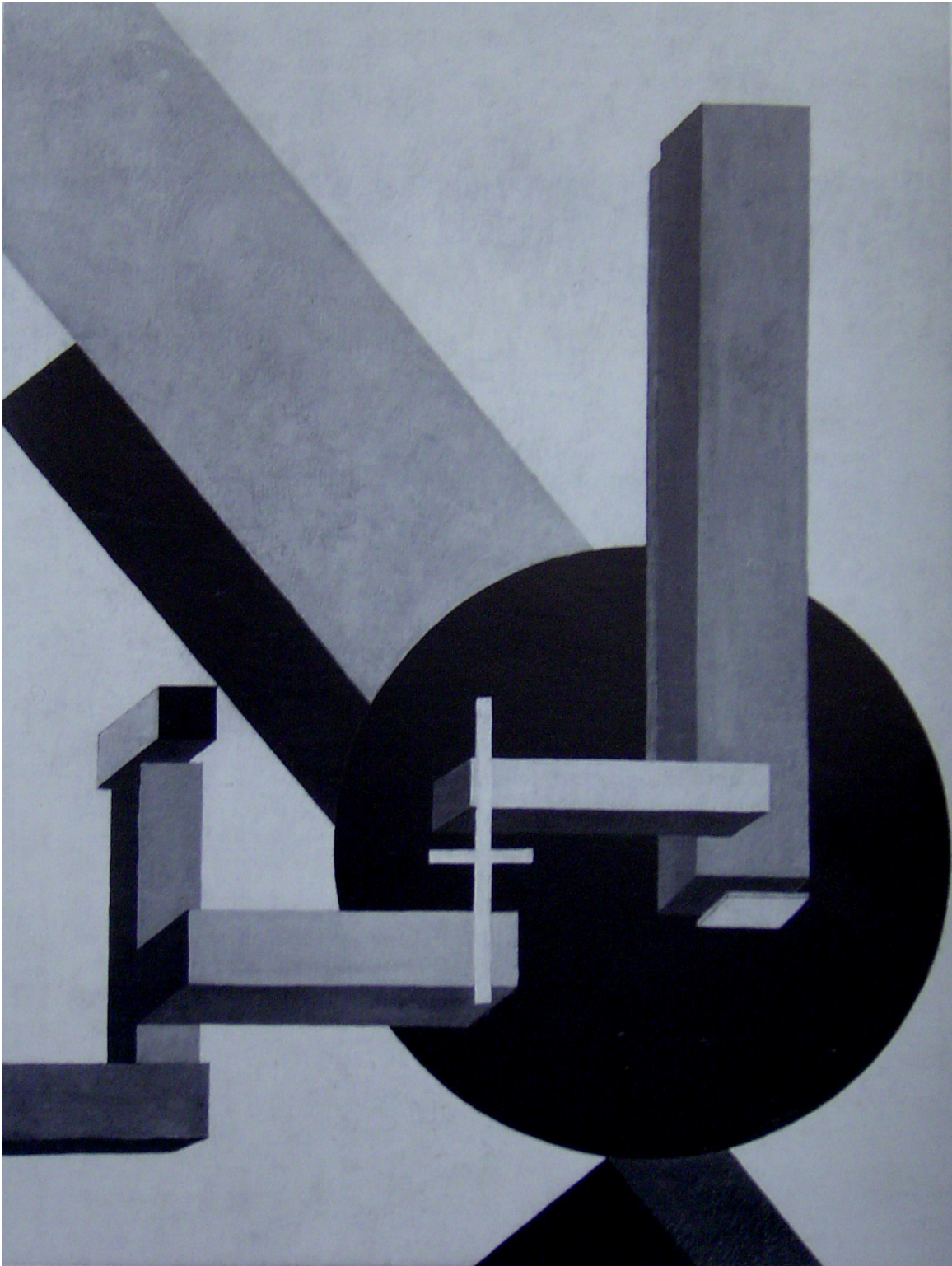


Figure-1 PROUN 1-D (1919)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1968

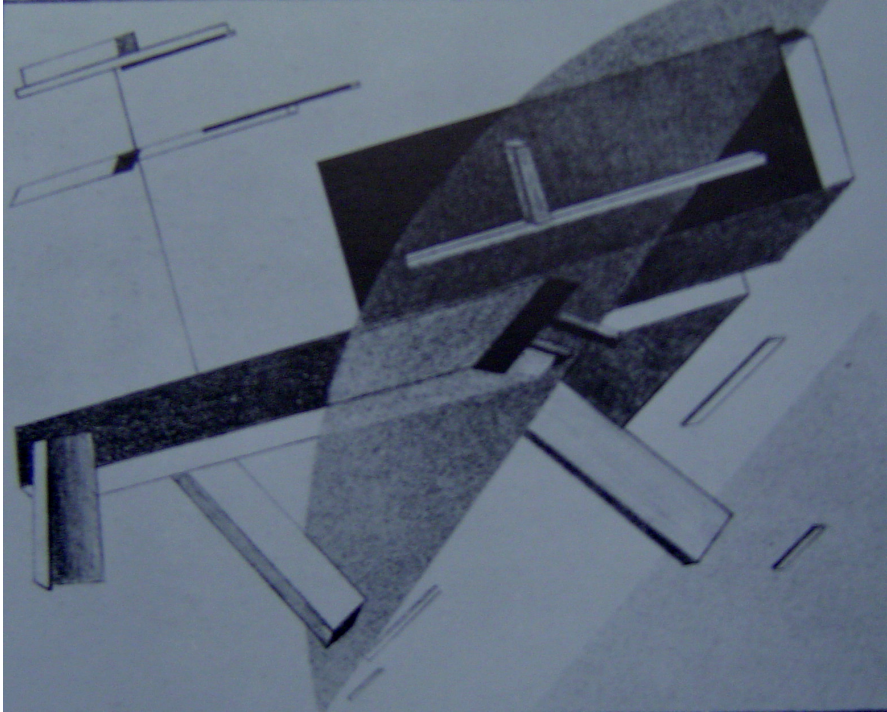


Figure-2 PROUN 2-B (1919-20)

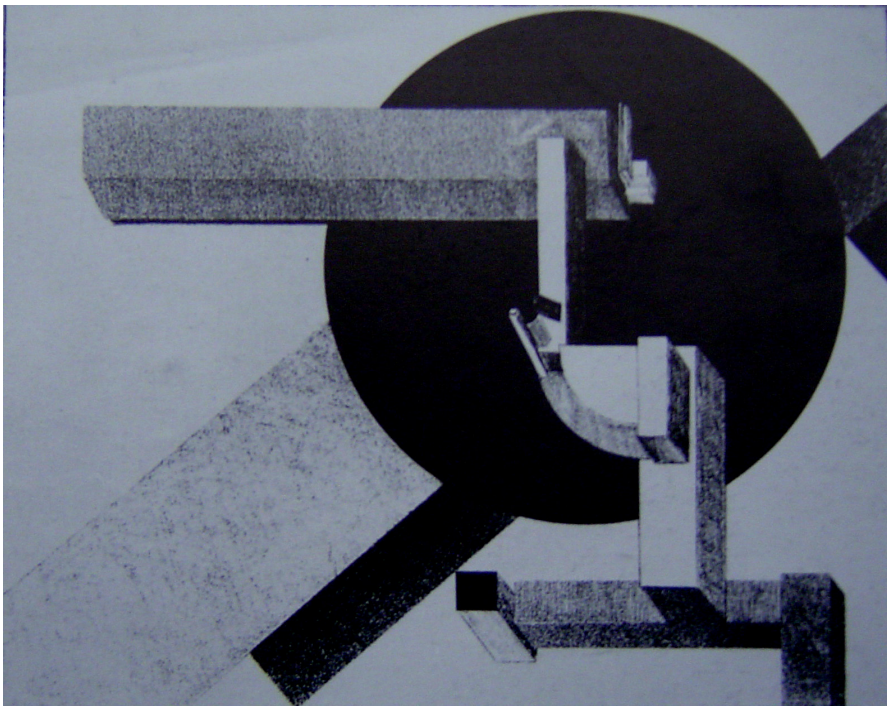


Figure-3 PROUN 1-D (1919-20)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read, London: Thames & Hudson, 1968



Figure-4 PROUN 2C (c.1920)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1968

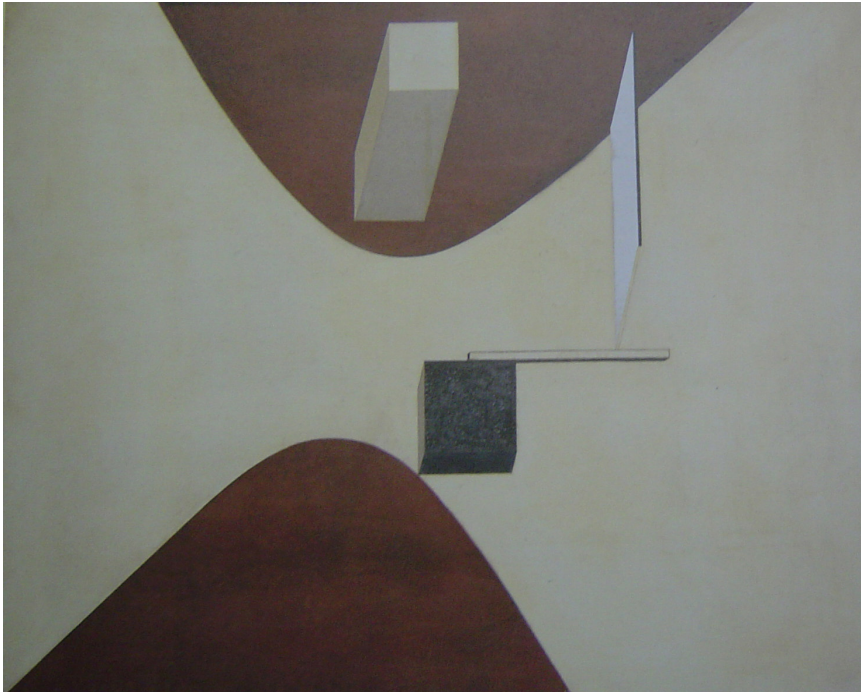


Figure-5 PROUN P23 (1919)

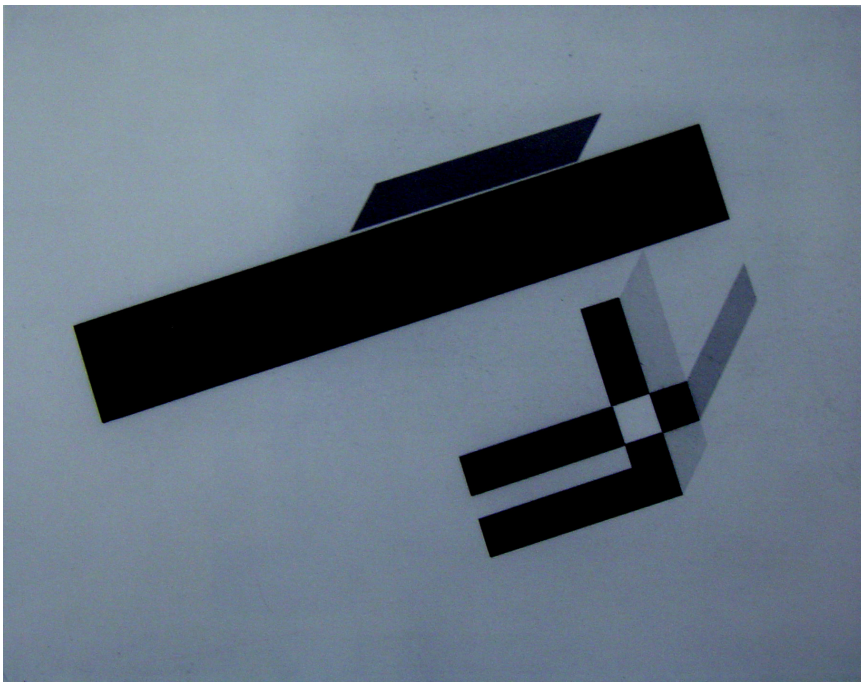


Figure-6 PROUN 88 (c.1923)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read, London: Thames &Hudson, 1968



Figure-7 PROUN 30T (1920)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1968

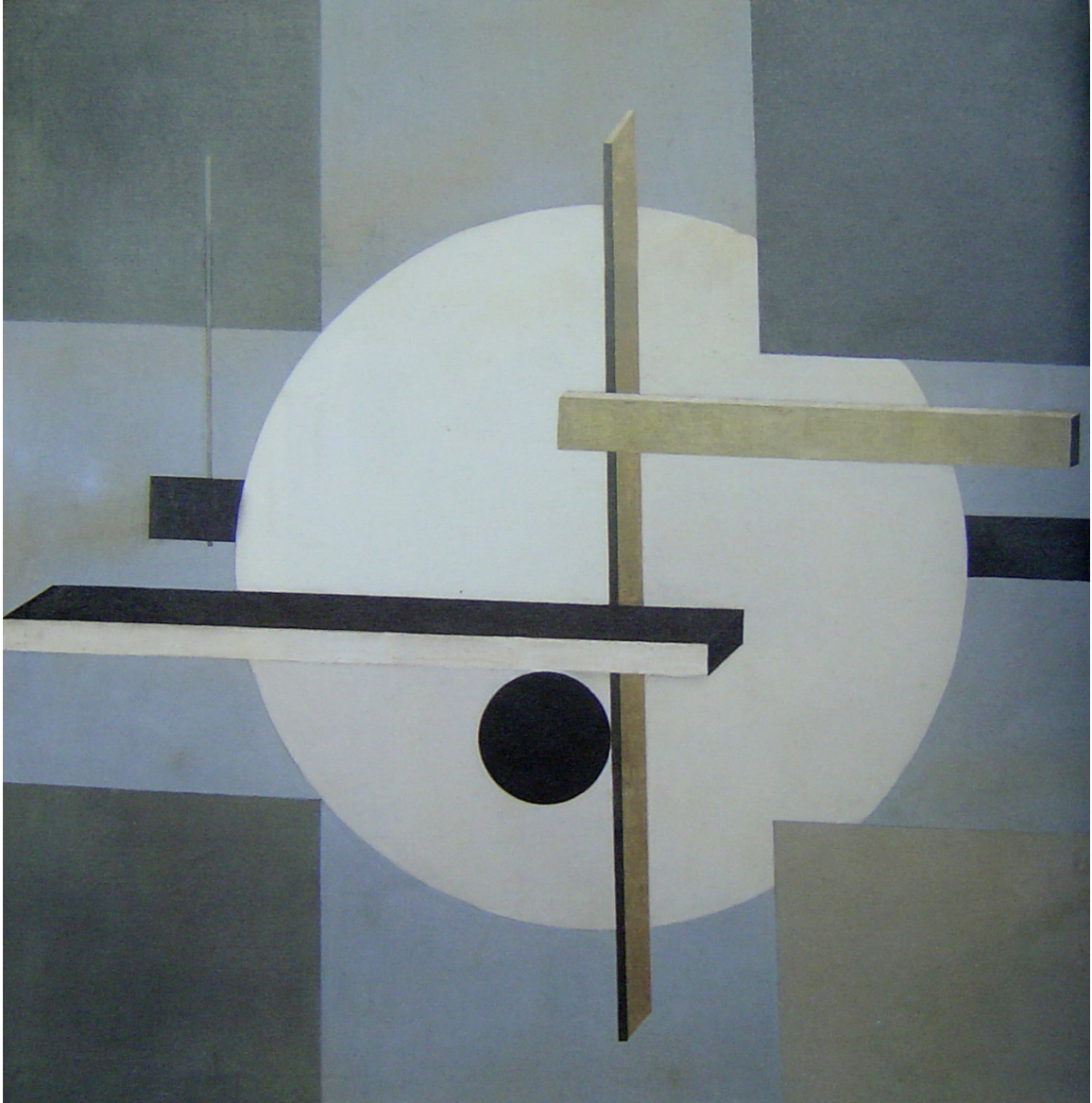


Figure-8 PROUN R V N (1923)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1968

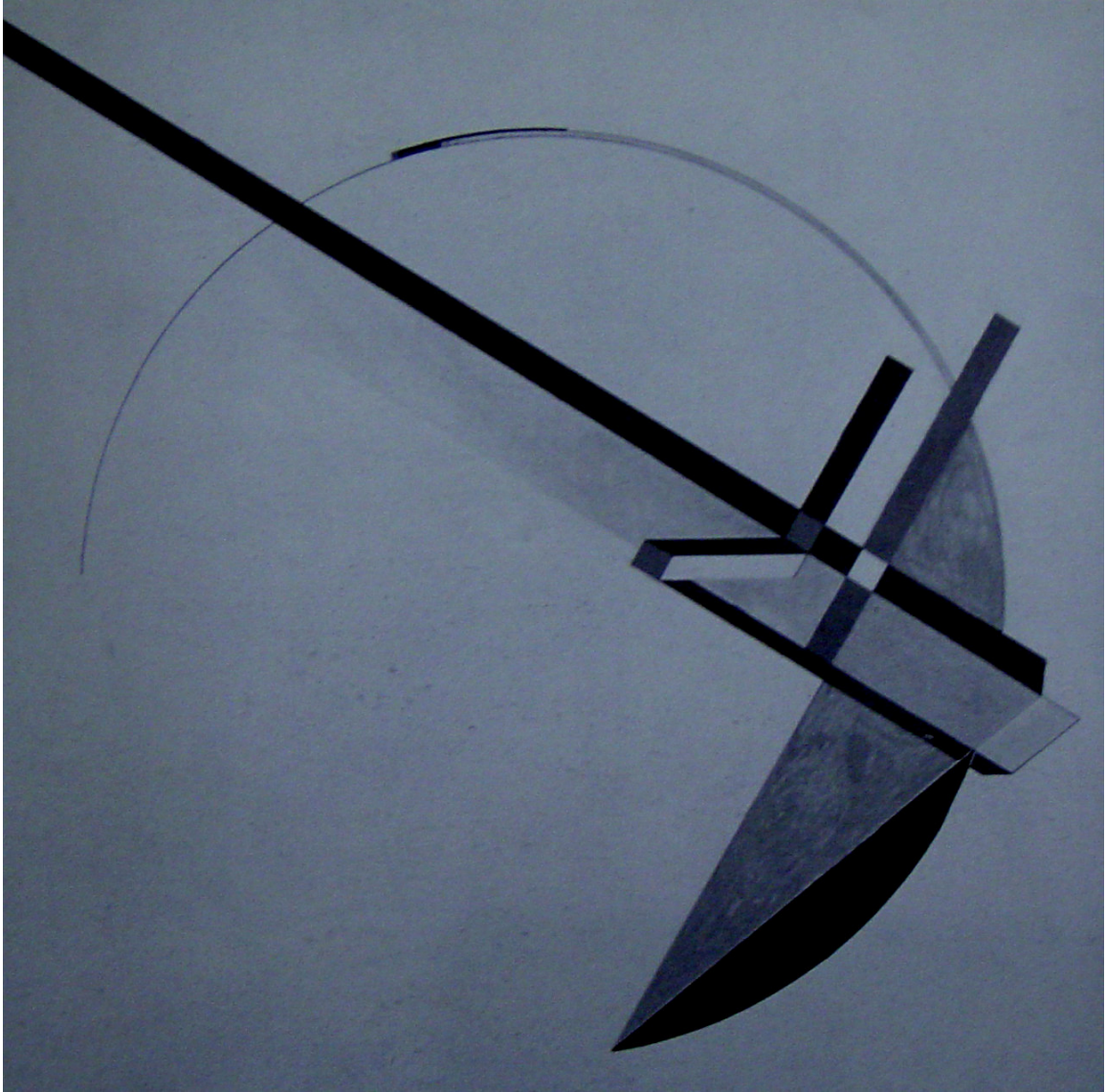


Figure-9 PROUN (C.1924)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames &Hudson, 1968

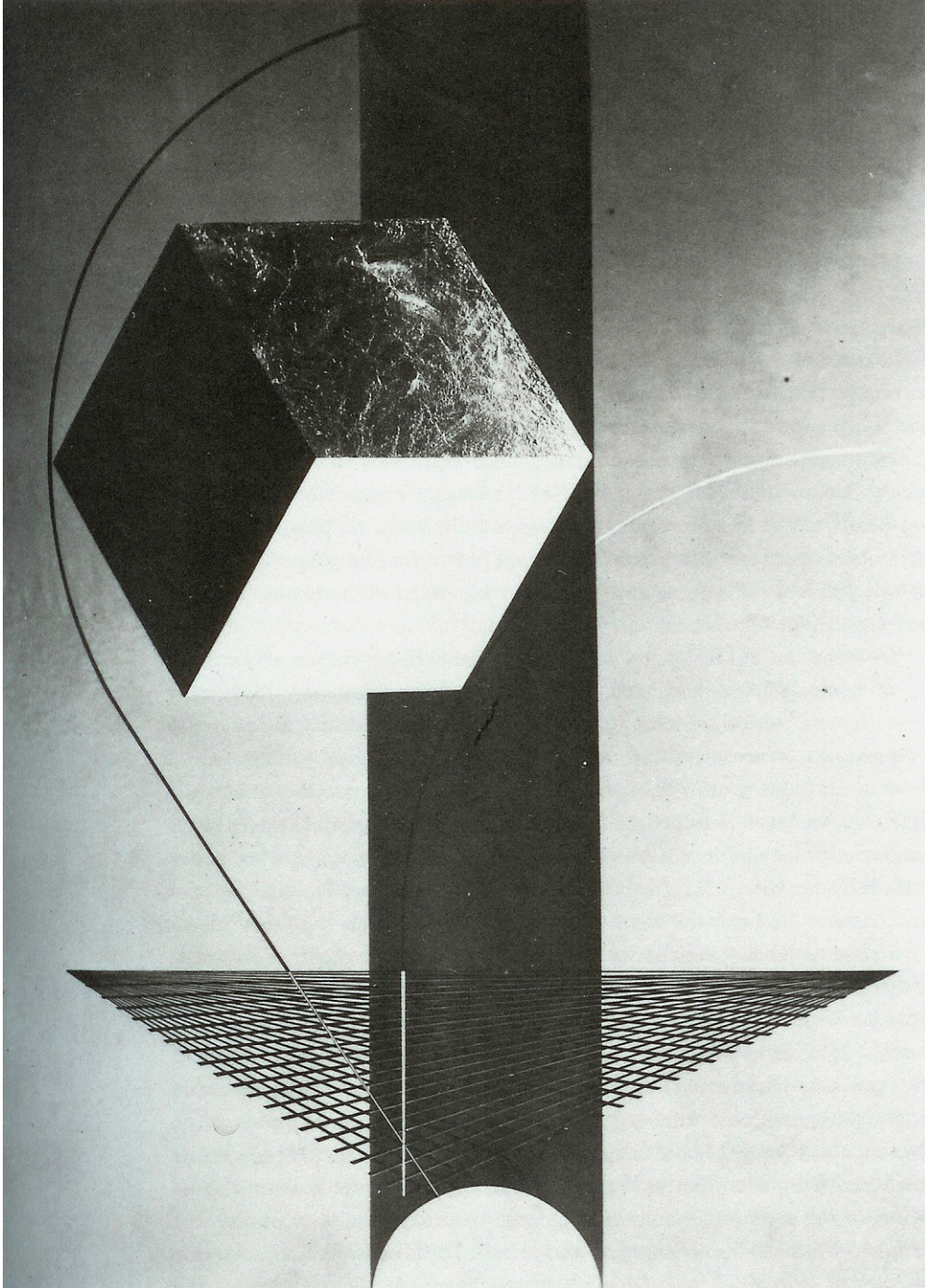


Figure-10 PROUN 99 (1925)

El Lissitzky, Life, Letters and Texts, Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers Eds, Introduction by Herbert Read,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1968

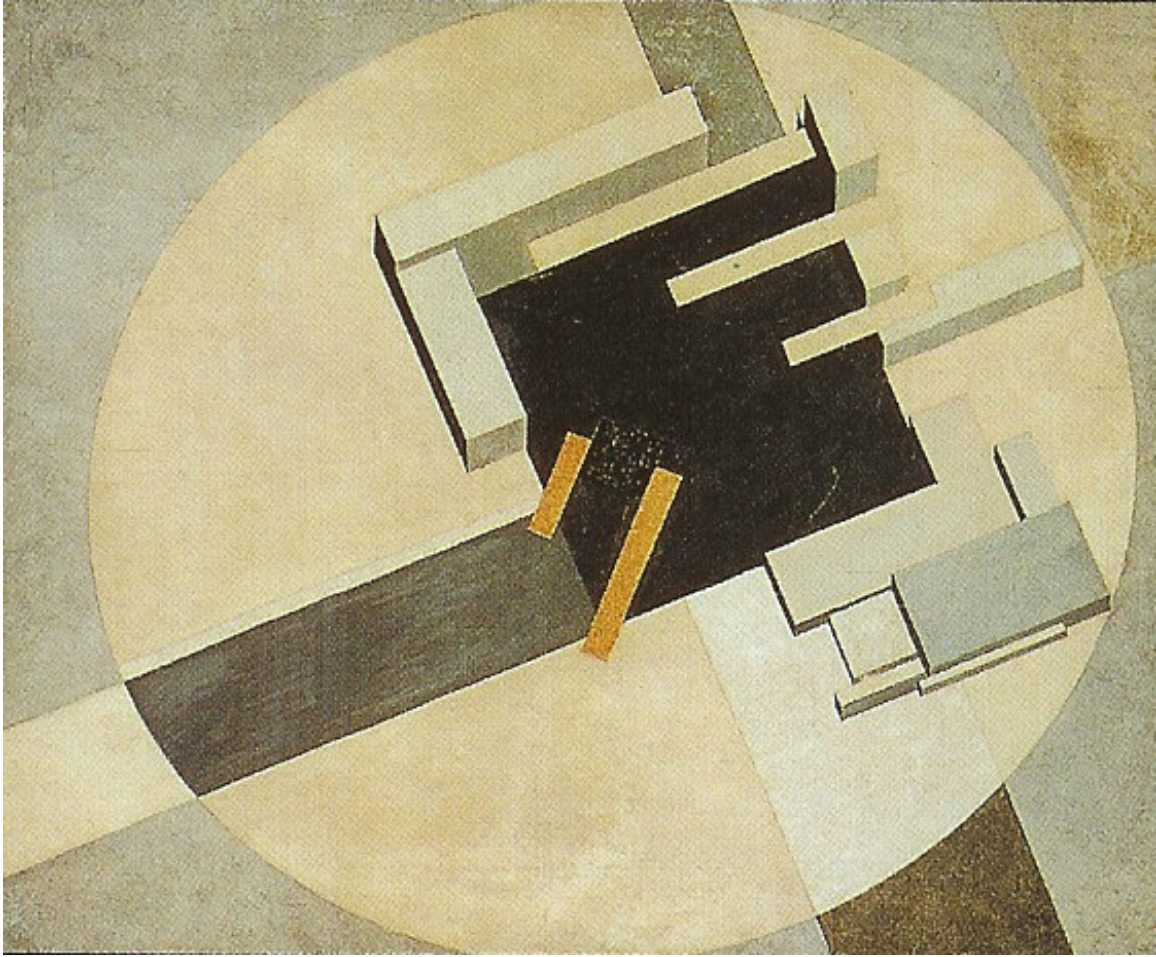


Figure-11 PROUN 1E:Town (1919-20)
oil and sand on plywood (47x63.5 cm)
Baku, Azerbaijan State Museum of Art

Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.240



**Figure-12 View of El Lissitzky's propaganda board
in front of a factory in Vitebsk, 1920**
Moscow, RIA-Novosti

Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.5

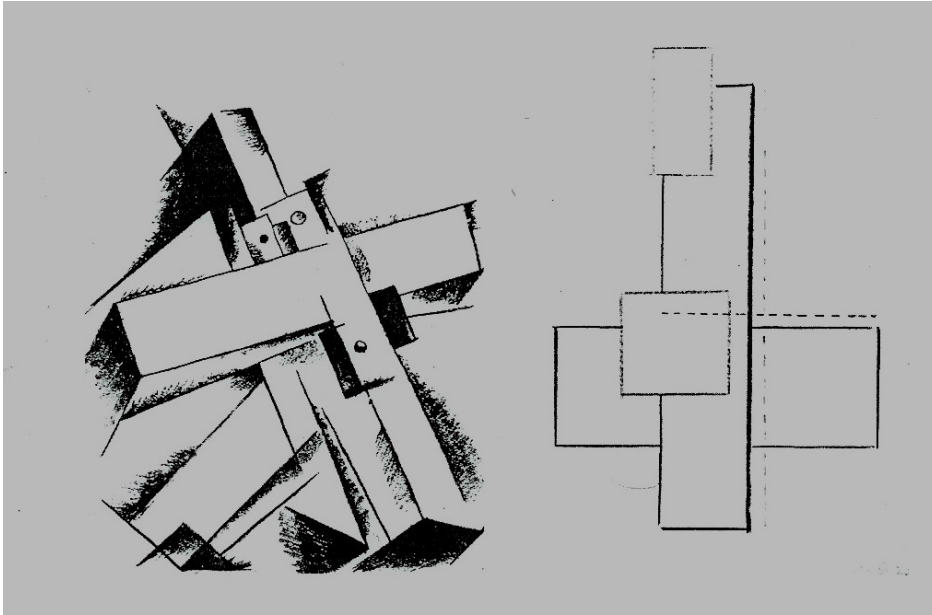


Figure-13 L. Popova, *untitled* (1921)
pencil and ink on paper,

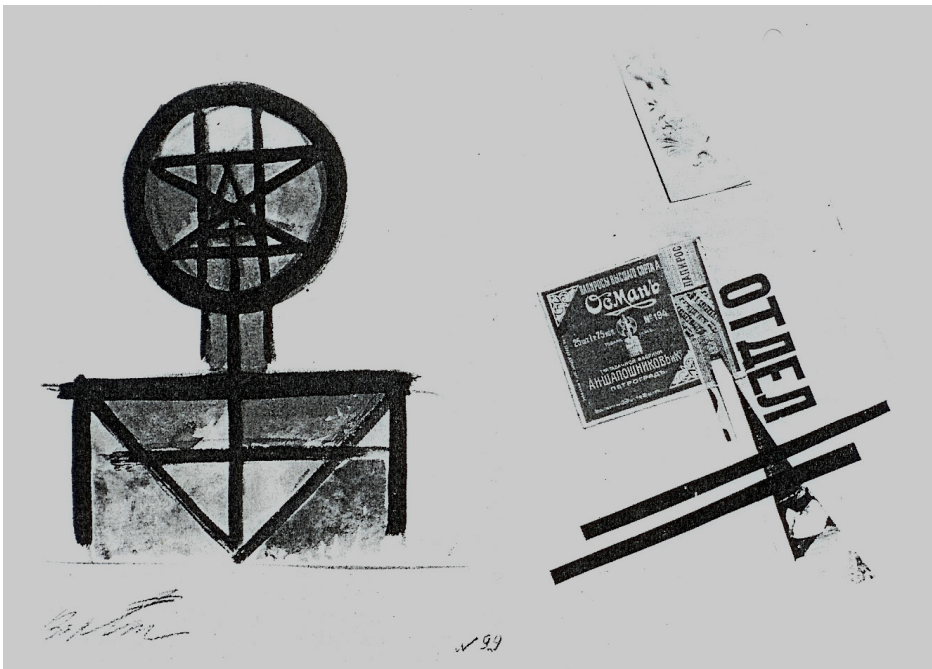


Figure-14 V. Stephanova, *Composition and Construction* (1921)
Gouache on paper

Collection George Costakis, Athens. [Photograph: G. Costakis 1981]
Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, pp.88-89

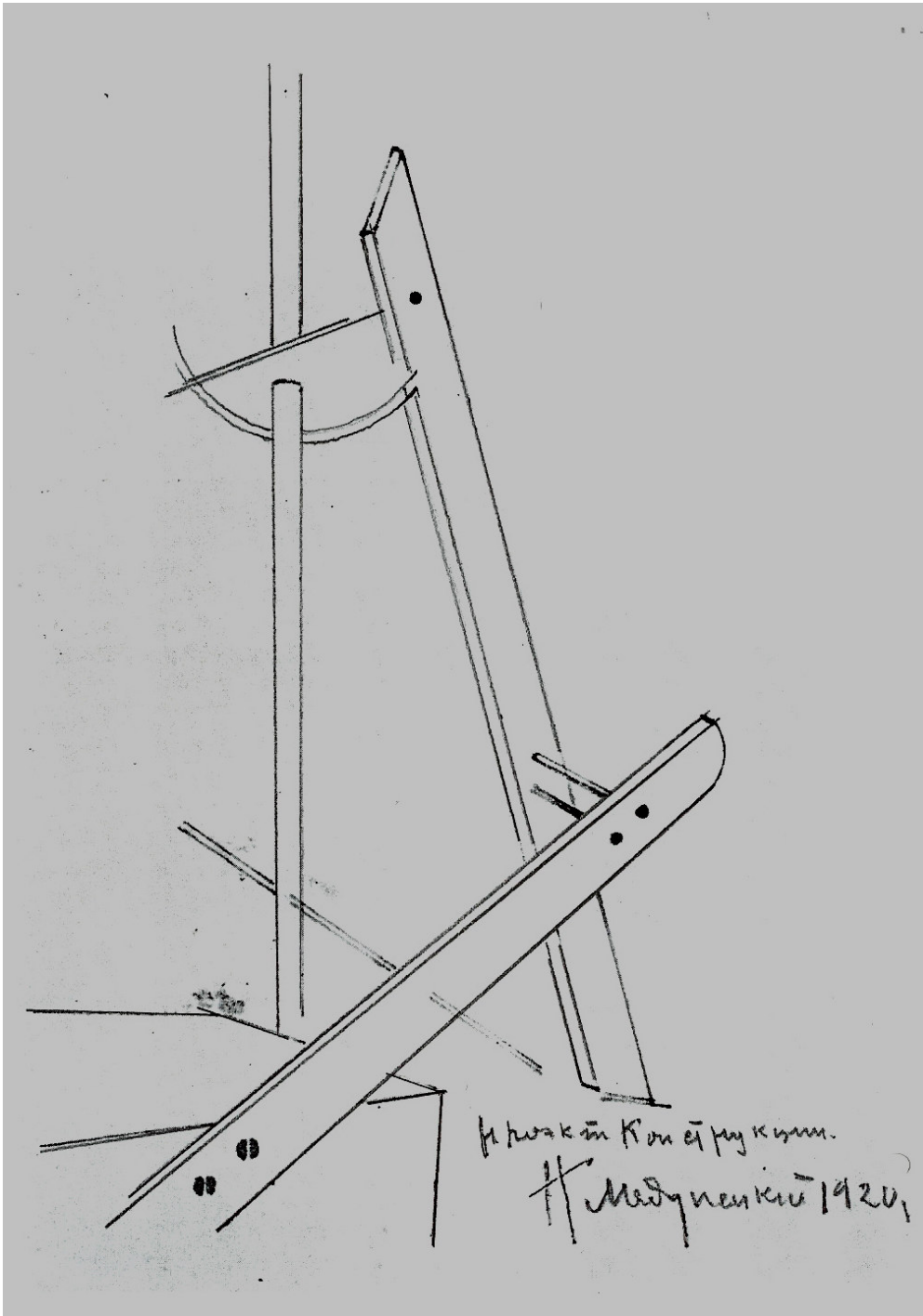


Figure-15

K. Medunetskii, *Project for a Construction (Proekt konstruksii)* (1920)

Brown ink on paper,

Collection George Costakis, Athens. [Photograph: G. Costakis 1981]

Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.86

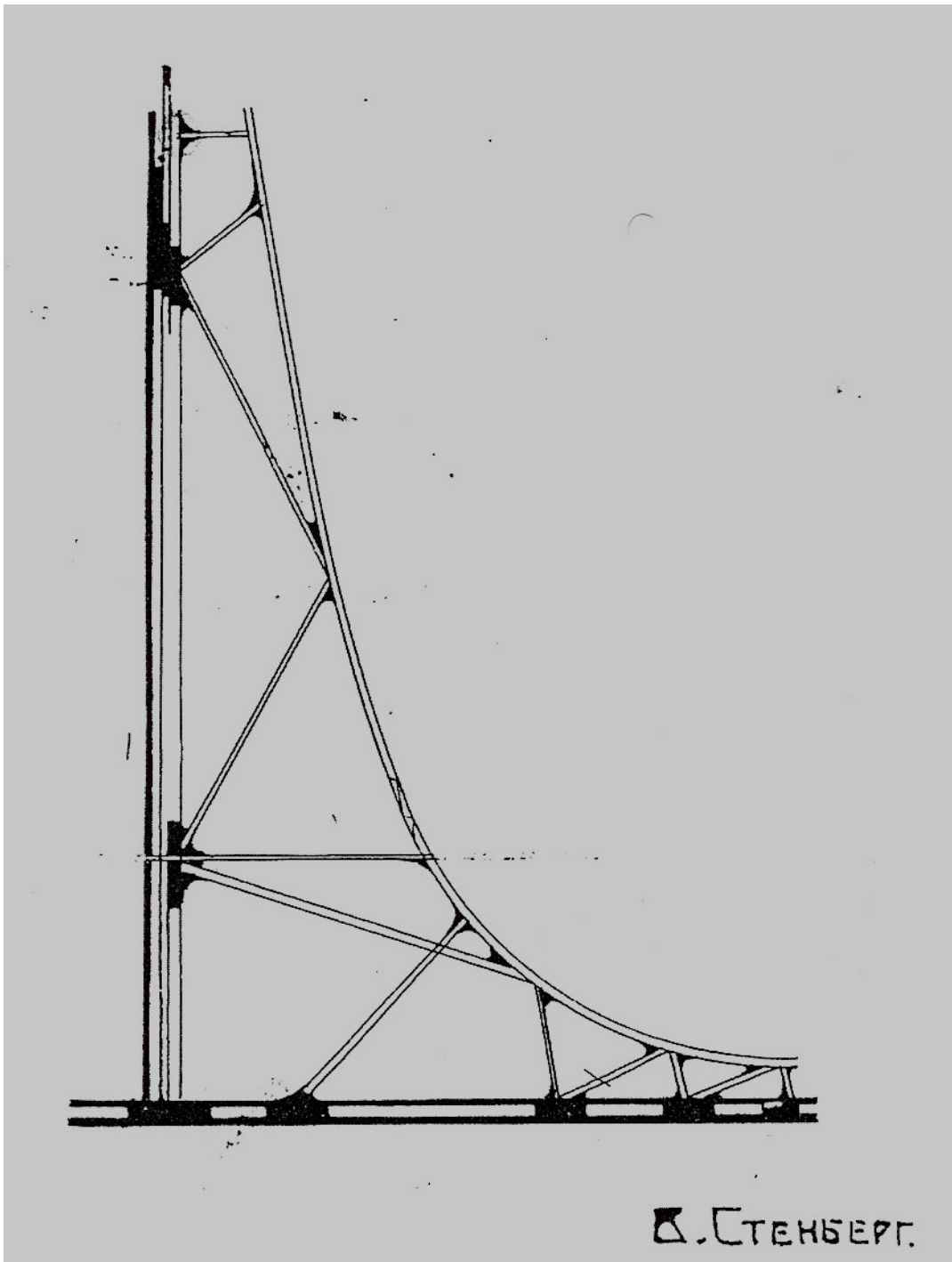


Figure-16

V. Stenberg , *Construction* (1920)

ink on paper,

Collection George Costakis, Athens. [Photograph: G. Costakis 1981]

Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.87

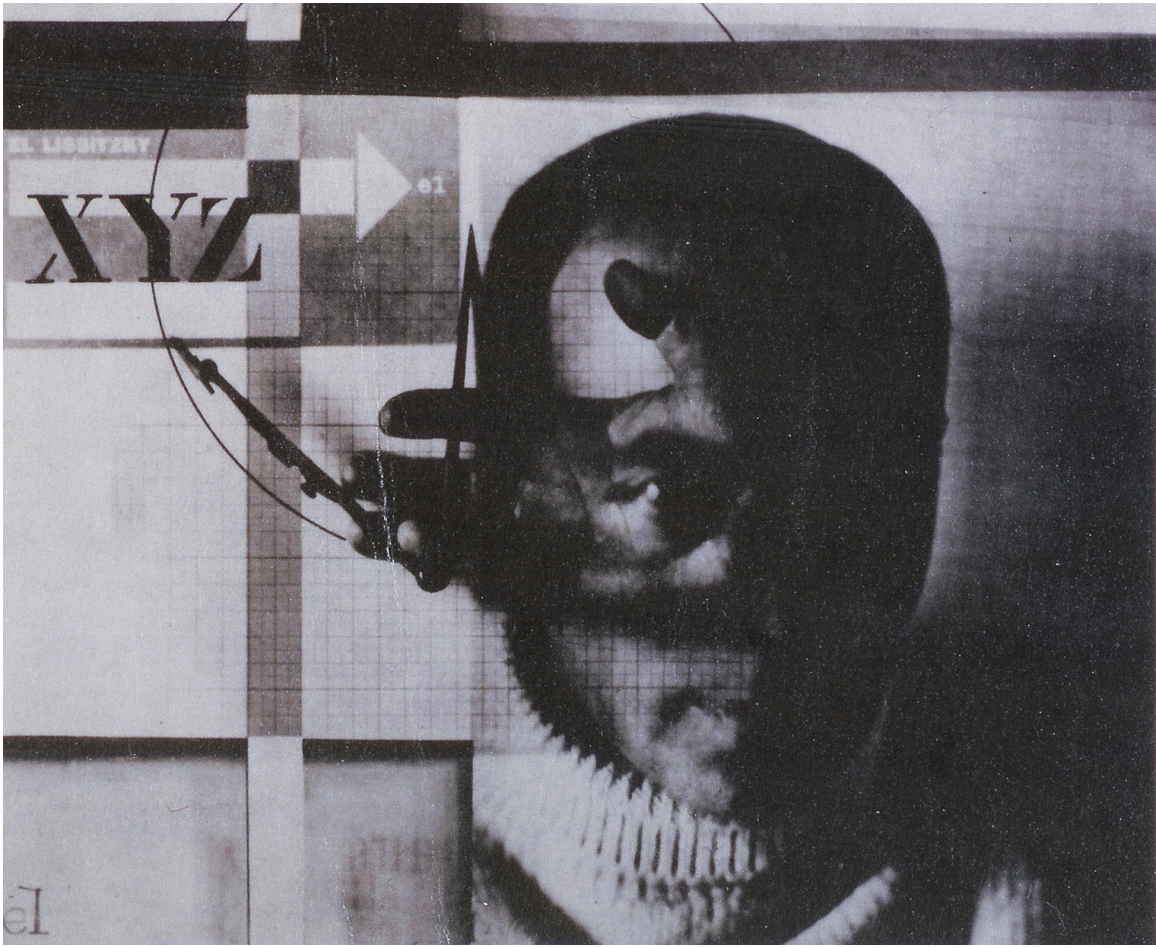


Figure-17 El Lissitzky, *The Constructor* (1924)

Richard Weston, Modernism, London: Phaidon Press, 1996, p.153

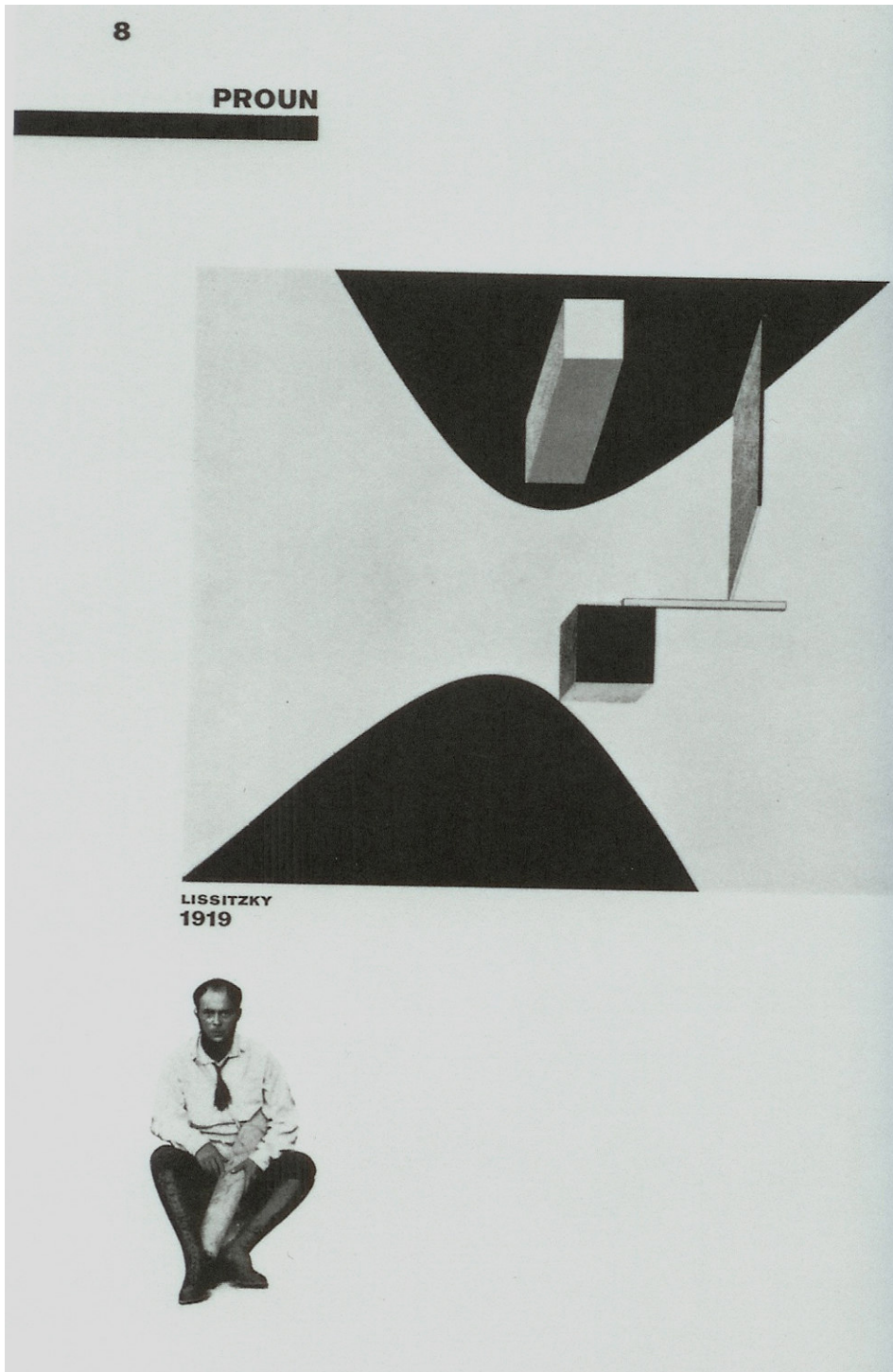
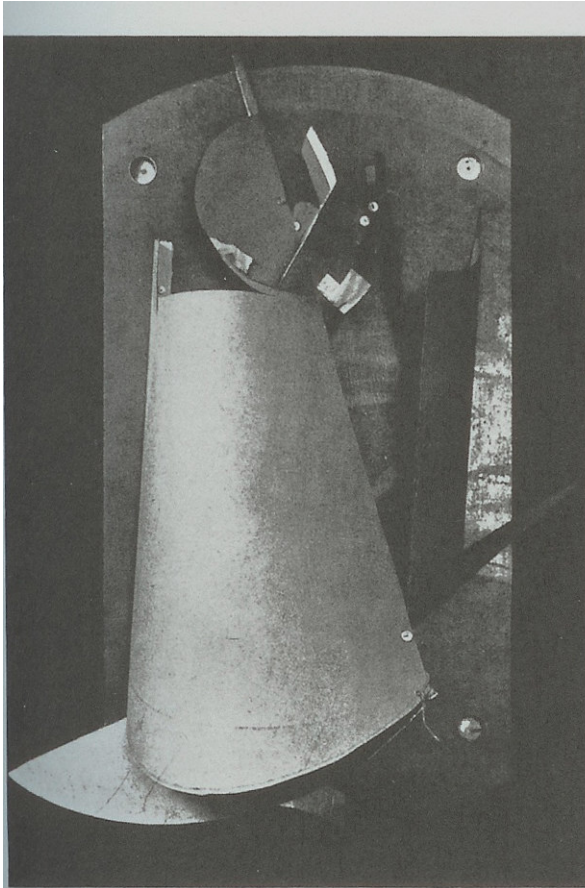


Figure-18 *Die Kunstismen / Les Isms de l'Art / The Isms of Art*
El Lissitzky & Hans Arp (Erlenbach/Switzerland 1924)

Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.42



KONSTRUKTIVISMUS

1917



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Figure-19 *Die Kunstismen / Les Isms de l'Art / The Isms of Art*
El Lissitzky & Hans Arp (Erlenbach/Switzerland 1924)

Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.39

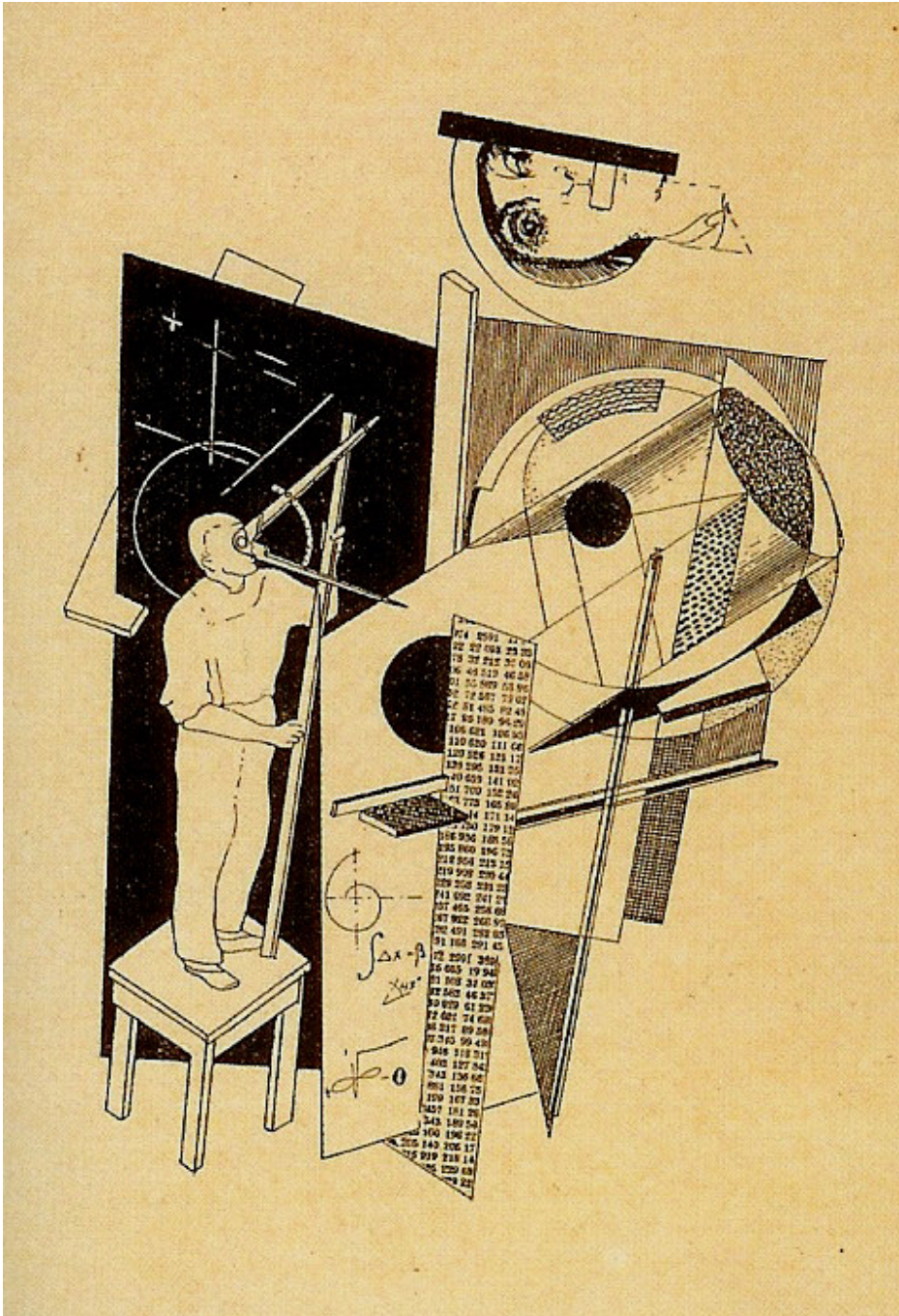


Figure-20 El Lissitzky, *Vladimir Tatlin at Work on the Model for the Third International*

(from Ilya Ehrenburg, Six Tales with Easy Endings, Berlin: Gelikon, 1922)

Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow, Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed Eds. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2003, p.239

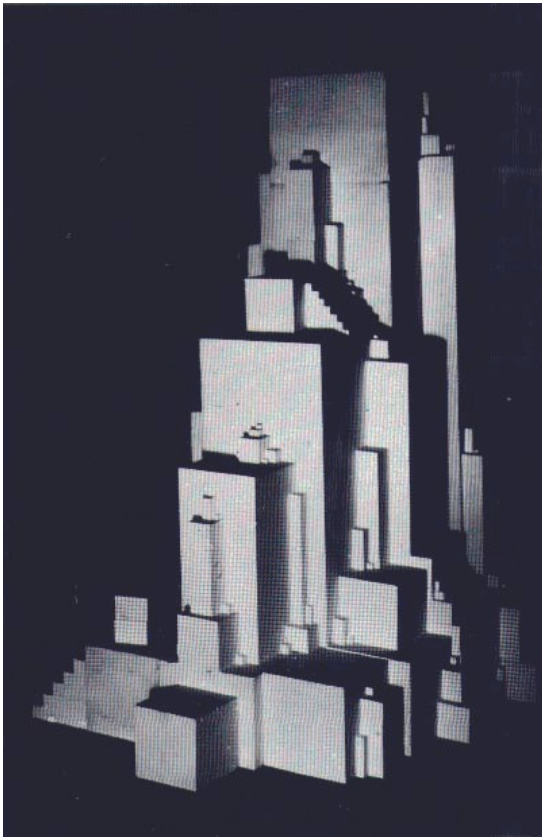
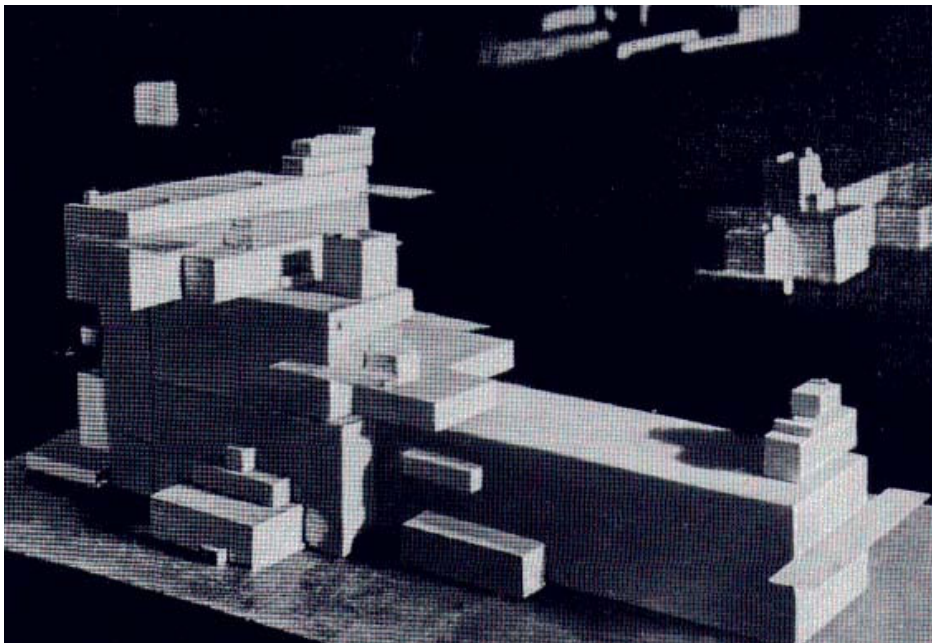


Figure-21 Architektons



Kazimir Malevich, The Non-objective World, trans. Howard Dearstyne, Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959



Figure-22 Gustav Klutsis, the Dynamic City, (c.1919)

Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932, Introduction by Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska, (:Exhibition Itinerary, Seattle, Washington: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, July 4-September 2, 1990) New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990, p.11

APPENDIX-A*

KAZIMIR S. MALEVICH: SUPREMATIST MANIFESTO UNOVIS (1924)

On 2 May 1924, KaZimir Malevich (1878 near Kiev, 1935 Leningrad) published his *Suprematist Manifesto*, to which he attached the abbreviation UNOVIS: “Establishment of new forms of art”. Already in winter 1915—16 Malevich’s *Black Square on White Ground* hung in the “Last Futurist Exhibition- 0.10” in St Petersburg as a guiding image for new forms, the “Zero Form” or “naked unframed icon of my time” (Malevich). His book *Die Gegenstandslose Welt* (first published by the Bauhaus in 1927 and published in an English translation in 1959 as *The Non-Objective World*) grew in the confusion of the years of war and revolution in Russia. Gabo and Pevsner, Kandinsky, Lissitzky, and Moholy-Nagy carried Suprematism into Europe with them as a catalyst.

The art of the present, and in particular painting, has been victorious on the whole front. Consciousness has overcome the flat surface and advanced to the art of creation in space. Henceforth the painting of pictures will be left to those who have been unable, despite tireless labour, to free their consciousness from the flat surface, those whose consciousness has remained flat because it could not overcome the flat surface.

Through spatial consciousness painting has developed into the constructive creation of form.

In order to find a system for the spatial orders, it is necessary to do away with all dying systems of the past, with all their accretions, by advancing unflaggingly along the new path...

Our path will be difficult, very difficult! The *vis inertiae* of economic and aesthetic concepts is positively unshakable. Therefore Futurism too, with its dynamism, fought against all clinging to yesterday. This struggle was the sole guarantee of the timely dissolution of these things. But aesthetics too, that mendacious emotional concept,

* Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture, Ulrich Conrads Eds. translated by Michael Bullock, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971, pp. 87-88

declared implacable war on the new art. Since 1913 this struggle has been carried on more intensely under the motto of Suprematism as the 'non-objective world-view'!

Life must be purified of the clutter of the past, of parasitical eclecticism, so that it can be brought to its normal evolution.

Victory of today over fond habits presupposes dismissal of yesterday, the clearing of consciousness from rubbish . . . Everything that still belongs to yesterday is eclectic: the cart, the primitive plough, the horse, cottage industries, landscape painting, statues of liberty, triumphal arches, factory meals, and — above all — buildings in the classical style.

Everything is eclecticism looked at from the age of the aeroplane and radio. Even the motor-car really belongs in the lumber room already, in the graveyard of eclecticism, like the telegraph and the telephone. The new dwellings of man lie in space. The Earth is becoming for him an intermediate stage; accordingly airfields must be built suited to the aeroplane, that is to say without columnar architecture.

The new man's provisional dwellings both in space and on Earth must be adapted to the aeroplane. A house built in this way will still be habitable tomorrow. Hence we Suprematists propose the objectless planets as a basis for the common creation of our existence. We Suprematists will seek allies for the struggle against the outmoded forms of architecture [...]

We recognize the grandeur of classical art. We don't deny that it was great for its time.

Nor do we dispute that the proletariat must get to know classical antiquity and acquire the right attitude to it. But we dispute very emphatically that classical antiquity is still fitted to our modern world.

Every new idea demands the new form appropriate to it.

Therefore we refuse to recognize classical temples, which were adequate both for the pagans and the Christians, as now suitable for club houses or a 'House of Culture' for the proletariat, even if these temples are called after the leaders of the Revolution and decorated with their pictures!

We want to create new relations to the content of today, relationships that do not move on the plane of classical antiquity, but on the plane of present, today!

We regard the form of aestheticizing representational painting as finished. Suprematism has shifted the emphasis of its activity to the architectural front and calls upon the revolutionary architects to join it.

APPENDIX-B^{*}

LAZAR M. LISSITZKY: SUPREMATISM IN WORLD RECONSTRUCTION (1920)

Real name Lazar Markovich Lissitzky (near Smolensk, 1890-Moscow, 1941). 1909-14: at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt; also traveled in France and Italy;
1914 returned to Russia;
1918—19 member of IZO Narkompros; professor at the Vitebsk Art School; close contact with Kazimir Malevich;
1920: member of Inkhuk; 1921: traveled to Germany;
1922: in Berlin, edited *Veshchi/Gegenstand!Obiet* [Object] with Ilya Ehrenburg 1925: returned to Moscow; taught interior design at Vkhutemas.

The text of this piece is from a typescript in the Lissitzky archives and, apart from the notes, is reproduced from Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (London and Greenwich, Conn., 1968), pp. 327—30, with kind permission of Thames and Hudson and New York Graphic Society. Despite its title, this essay acts as a retrospective commentary on Malevich's original formulation of Suprematism and advances a far wider concept with its emphasis on such ideas as visual economy and the universal application of Suprematism (ideas also developed by Malevich in his *novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* [On New Systems in Art] [Vitebsk, 1919];

Both for Lissitzky and for Malevich, but more so for the former, the architectural discipline presented itself as an obvious vehicle for the transference of basic Suprematist schemes into life itself. In this respect, Lissitzky's so-called PROUNs *proekty ustanovleniyn (utverzheniya) novogot*—"projects for the establishment (affirmation) of the new", which

*

Lazar Markovich Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction," in Russian Art of the Avant-Garde, Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934, edited and translated by John E. Bowlit, London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, pp.151-158

he designed between 1919 and 1924 were of vital significance since they served as intermediate points between two- and three-dimensional forms or, as Lissitzky himself said, “as a station on the way to constructing a new form.”

In a wider context, the spatial graphics of Petr Miturich, the linear paintings of Aleksandr Vesnin, and the mono- and duochromatic paintings of Aleksandr Rodchenko, all done about 1919, symbolized the general endeavor to project art into life, to give painting a constructive dimension. More obviously, the suprematist constructions—the so-called *arkhitektony*—modeled as early as 1920 by Malevich and the *unovisovtsy* (members of the UNOVIS group organized by Malevich in Vitebsk) also supported this trend, thereby proving Ilya Ehrenburg’s assertion that the “aim of the new art is to fuse with life.”

Lissitzky’s description of the radio transmitting tower as the “centre of collective effort” is therefore in keeping with this process and anticipates the emergence of constructivism and the emphasis on industrial design a few months later. In this context, Lissitzky’s references to the “plumbline of economy” and the “counterrelief” remind us of Naum Gabo and Vladimir Tatlin, respectively, and of course, reflect the general concern with *veshch* [the object as such] on the one hand, and the contrary call for its utilitarian justification on the other, manifested in INKhUK in the course of 1920.

SUPREMATISM IN WORLD RECONSTRUCTION (EL LISSITZKY, 1920)

At present we are living through an unusual period in time a new cosmic creation has become reality in the world a creativity within ourselves which pervades our consciousness.

For us SUPREMATISM did not signify the recognition of an absolute form which was part of an already-completed universal system. On the contrary, here stood revealed for the first time in all its purity the clear sign and plan for a definite new world never before experienced—a world which issues forth from our inner being and which is only now in the first stages of its formation. For this reason the square of suprematism became a beacon.

In this way the artist became the foundation on which progress in the reconstruction of life could advance beyond the frontiers of the all-seeing eye and the all-hearing ear. Thus a picture was no longer an anecdote nor a lyric poem nor a lecture on

morality, nor a feast for the eye but a sign and symbol of this new conception of the world which comes from within us. Many revolutions were needed in order to free the artist from his obligations as a moralist as a story-teller or as a court jester, so that he could follow unhindered his creative bent and tread the road that leads to construction.

The pace of life has increased in the last few decades just as the speed of the motor bicycle has been exceeded many times over by the aeroplane.

After art passed through a whole series of intermediate stages it reached Cubism where for the first time the creative urge to construct instinctively overcame conscious resolve, from this point the picture started to gain stature as a new world of reality and in this way the foundation stone for a new representation of the shapes and forms of the material world was laid. It proved to be essential to clear the site for the new building, this idea was a forerunner of futurism which exposed the relentless nature of its motivating power.

Revolutions had started undercover, every thing grew more complicated. Painting economical in its creative output was still very complicated and uneconomical in its expression. Cubism and Futurism seized upon the purity of form treatment and colour and built a complicated and extensive system with them combining them without any regard for harmony.

The rebuilding of life cast aside the old concept of nations classes patriotisms and imperialism which had been completely discredited.

The rebuilding of the town threw into utter confusion both its isolated elements—houses streets squares bridges—and its new systems which cut across the old ones—underground metro underground monorail electricity transmitted under the ground and above the ground. This all developed on top of a new powerhouse whose pumps sucked in the whole of creation.

Technology which in its achievements took the most direct route from the complexity of the train to the simplicity of the aeroplane from the basic primitiveness of the steam boiler to the economy of the dynamo from the chaotic hubbub of the telegraphic network to the uniformity of radio was diverted by the war from the path of construction and forced on to the paths of death and destruction.

Into this chaos came Suprematism extolling the square as the very source of all creative expression. and then came communism and extolled work as the true source of man's heartbeat.

And amid the thunderous roar of a world in collision WE, ON THE LAST STAGE OF THE PATH TO SUPREMATISM BLASTED ASIDE THE OLD WORK OF ART LIKE A BEING OF FLESH AND BLOOD AND TURNED IT INTO A WORLD FLOATING IN SPACE. WE CARRIED BOTH PICTURE AND VIEWER OUT BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THIS SPHERE AND IN ORDER TO COMPREHEND IT FULLY THE VIEWER MUST CIRCLE LIKE A PLANET ROUND THE PICTURE WHICH REMAINS IMMOBILE IN THE CENTRE.

The empty phrase "art for art's sake" had already been wiped out and in suprematism we have wiped out the phrase "painting for painting's sake" and have ventured far beyond the frontiers of painting.

First of all the artist painted the natural scene which surrounded him. then this was obscured by towns roads canals and all the products of man for this reason the artist began to paint artificial nature—but involuntarily he referred in his works to the method for depicting this new nature. Suprematism itself has followed the true path which defines

the creative process consequently our picture has become a creative symbol and the realization of this will be our task in life.

When we have absorbed the total wealth of experience of painting when we have left behind the uninhibited curves of cubism when we have grasped the aim and system of suprematism—then we shall give a new face to this globe, we shall reshape it so thoroughly that the sun will no longer recognize its satellite, in architecture we are on the way to a completely new concept. after the archaic horizontals the classical spheres and the gothic verticals of building styles which preceded our own we are now entering upon a fourth stage as we achieve economy and spatial diagonals.

We left to the old world the idea of the individual house individual barracks individual castle individual church, we have set ourselves the task of creating the town. The centre of collective effort is the radio transmitting mast which sends out bursts of creative energy into the world, by means of it we are able to throw off the shackles that bind us to the earth and rise above it. Therein lies the answer to all questions concerning movement.

This dynamic architecture provides us with the new theatre of life and because we are capable of grasping the idea of a whole town at any moment with any plan the task of architecture—the rhythmic arrangement of space and time—is perfectly and simply fulfilled for the new town will not be as chaotically laid out as the modern towns of north and south america but clearly and logically like a beehive, the new element of treatment which we have brought to the fore in our painting will be applied to the whole of this still-to-be-built world and will transform the roughness of concrete the smoothness of metal and the reflection of glass into the outer membrane of the new life, the new light will give us new colour and the memory of the solar spectrum will be preserved only in old manuals on physics.

This is the way in which the artist has set about the construction of the world—an activity which affects every human being and carries work beyond the frontiers of comprehension. we see how its creative path took it by way of cubism to pure construction but there was still no outlet to be found here. When the cubist had pressed forward and reached the very limits of his canvas his old materials—the colours on his palette—proved to be too pale and he put into his picture cement and concrete and home-made iron constructions. Not content with that he started to build a model of the structure he had depicted on canvas and then it was only a short step to transform the abstract cubistic still-life into a contre-relief which was complete in itself.

The short step then required to complete the stride consists in recognition of the fact that a contre-relief is an architectonic structure. But the slightest deviation from the plumline of economy leads into a blind alley. the same fate must also overtake the architecture of cubist contre-relief. Cubism was the product of a world which already existed around us and contre-relief is its mechanical offspring. It does however have a relative that took the straight path of economy which led to a real life of its own. The reference is to the narrow technical discoveries for example the submarine the aeroplane the motors and dynamos of every kind of motive power in each part of a battle-ship. Contre-relief is instinctively aware of their legitimate origin their economy of form and their realism of treatment.

By taking these elements FROM THEM for itself it wants to become equally entitled to take its place alongside them as a new creation. it seeks to demonstrate its

modernity by surrounding itself with all the devices of modern life although this is really nothing other than a decoration of its own self but with intestines stomach heart and nerves on the outside.

In this fragment of TECHNICAL INVENTIVENESS we can see the construction of these pattern systems in the artist's materials, there is iron and steel copper tin and nickel glass and guttapercha straight and curved areas and volumes of every description and colour nuance. it is being made by several master-craftsmen who well know the work of their colleagues but not the beauty of their materials, this complicated structure taken as a whole represents a UNIFIED organism, is it not therefore for that very reason "artistic"?

There is one element to which special importance attaches—scale. the scale gives life to relationships in space. It is that which determines whether every organism remains whole or is destroyed—it holds all the parts together. the index for the growth of modern man is the ability to see and appreciate the relative scales of everything that has been made. it is right that this perceptivity shall pass judgment on man's concept of space on the way he reacts in time. cubism demonstrated in its constructions its modernity in relation to scale. but in painting and contre-relief we have in front of us an absolute scale which is this—forms in their natural size in the ratio 1:1. If however we wish to transform the contre-relief into an architectural structure and therefore enlarge it by one hundred times, then the scale ceases to be absolute and becomes relative in the ratio of 1:100. Then we get the American statue of liberty in whose head there is room for four men and from whose hand the light streams out.

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

Those of us who have stepped out beyond the confines of the picture take ruler and compasses—following the precept of economy—in our hands. for the frayed point of the paintbrush is at variance with our concept of clarity and if necessary we shall take machines in our hands as well because in expressing our creative ability paintbrush and ruler and compasses and machine are only extensions of the finger which points the way.

This path into the future has nothing in common either with mathematics and scientific studies or with raptures over sunset and moonlight—or indeed with the decline of the subject with its plague-ridden aura of individualism—rather is it the path leading from creative intuition to the increased growth of foodstuffs for which neither paintbrush nor ruler neither compasses nor machine were required.

We must take note of the fact that the artist nowadays is occupied with painting flags posters pots and pans textiles and things like that. what is referred to as "artistic work" has on the vast majority of occasions nothing whatever to do with creative effort: and the term "artistic work" is used in order to demonstrate the "sacredness" of the work which the artist does at his easel, the conception of "artistic work" presupposes a distinction between useful and useless work and as there are only a few artists buyers can be found even for their useless products.

The artist's work lies beyond the boundaries of the useful and the useless. it is the revolutionary path along which the whole of creation is striding forward and along which man must also bend his steps. "artistic work" is but an obstacle on this path and in consequence a counter-revolutionary concept. The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed all are creators and there is no reason of any sort for this division into artists and nonartists.

By this reckoning the artist ceases to be a man who is not producing useful things and must not strive to attain his title to creative activity by painting posters in the prescribed form and colour on which any attempt to pass judgment shows a GROSS LACK OF FEELING. Such work now belongs to the duty of the artist as a citizen of the community who is clearing the field of its old rubbish in preparation for the new life.

Therefore THE IDEA OF ARTISTIC WORK" MUST BE ABOLISHED AS A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT OF WHAT IS CREATIVE and work must be accepted as one of the functions of the living human organism in the same way as the beating of the heart or the activity of the nerve centres so that it will be afforded the same protection.

It is only the creative movement towards the liberation of man that makes him the being who holds the whole world within himself. only a creative work which fills the whole world with its energy can join us together by means of its energy components to form a collective unity like a circuit of electric current,

The first forges of the creator of the omniscient omnipotent omnific constructor of the new world must be the workshops of our art schools. when the artist leaves them he will set to work as a master-builder as a teacher of the new alphabet and as a promoter of a world which indeed already exists in man but which man has not yet been able to perceive.

And if communism which set human labour on the throne and suprematism which raised aloft the square pennant of creativity now march forward together then in the further stages of development it is communism which will have to remain behind because suprematism—which embraces the totality of life's phenomena—will attract everyone away from the domination of work and from the domination of the intoxicated senses. it will liberate all those engaged in creative activity and make the world into a true model of perfection. this is the model we await from Kasimir Malevich.

AFTER THE OLD TESTAMENT THERE CAME THE NEW—AFTER THE NEW THE COMMUNIST—AND AFTER THE COMMUNIST THERE FOLLOWS FINALLY THE TESTAMENT OF SUPREMATISM.

APPENDIX-C^{*}

DEFINITIONS OF “COMPOSITION” AND “CONSTRUCTION” DURING THE DEBATE OF 1921, INKHUK, MOSCOW

1) Ladovskii's Definition of a Technical Construction:

TECHNICAL CONSTRUCTION—a number of shaped material elements combined according to a particular plan or scheme to achieve the effect of a force.

The ideal technical construction should have the following properties:

1. The material elements transform the - of the active forces. The path of their motion constitutes the level at which communication takes place.
2. The tension (of the material elements) should be close to the limit of elasticity (this is what determines the proportions of the parts).
3. The molecular forces of the material should be used so as to maximize their mutual repulsion.
4. There must be no excess materials or elements, or excess material.

^{*} Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932, Introduction by Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska, (Exhibition Itinerary, Seattle, Washington: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, July 4-September 2, 1990) New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990, pp.85-110

2) The Objective Conclusion of Comrades Bubnova and Popova

The objective of construction, as a purposeful organization, is supplanting architecture as an art.

The means used by the engineer and the architect are different: the engineer organizes material to obtain the maximum for a given expenditure of energy, the architect uses material to achieve an aesthetic goal.

Construction is the goal, the necessity, and the purpose of organization.

Composition is a disposition of the materials that is ordered appropriately, but is a judgment of taste.

3) Conclusions on Construction (V. F. Krinskii)

Construction presupposes motions, forces, or directions, diagrammatically expressed by lines.

A system of lines is already a construction in its most basic form.

And any system of surfaces or spatial forms, each expressed in its motion, is a constructive structure.

A structural system embodies the law governing the interaction of the elements of the construction.

An architectural construction is built on the physical laws of gravity and equilibrium, which in any structure determine the interaction of the elements of the construction.

4) Conclusions on Construction (K.V. Ioganson)

1. There are 'constructions' in "nonobjective art. Explanation: i.e., when the Cubists, after their work in art, established the plane and the curved surface, volume and space as elements, simultaneously with the representation of the elements in real objects.

We can find as it were the seeds of construction in the art of primitive peoples and in Raphael and Michelangelo, but we should not that volume is its skull or a part of it, or that surface is a table (the difference between construction and composition).

All representational artists in painting and sculpture have been concerned with the

depiction and the construction of objects (and even more than that, the subject) using suitable media, while the “nonrepresentational” artists try to establish specific properties and qualities of materials and their appropriate (specific) use, i.e., the creation of new mechanisms of construction that are not pictorial or sculptural.

The combination and construction of lines, surfaces, etc. gives the outward appearance of the construction, its representation.

2. “Construction” (the external approach) in painting and sculpture is the representation of the construction of the objective world (the world in which objects are represented) as something mechanical or technical.

3. The specific (appropriate) use (the internal approach) of specific properties and qualities of materials (for example RODCHENKO: black circles, enamel paint, and its form, which is a circle).

4. Ideally, “constructions” in painting and sculpture should unquestionably be both things.

In the case of (2) above, the media are representational elements: point, line, surface, and volume.

In the case of (3) above, the media are:

materials and their specific properties and qualities, which need to be precisely established.

5) Conclusions on Construction (V.D. Bubnova)

Technical construction and the construction of a painting have the same inescapable basis:

1. The incorporated material
2. The system underlying its construction
3. The force effect

1. In both technical construction and the construction of a painting the material may be identical, but the properties derived from it are different.

2. In technical construction, the system of construction is established with mathematical precision.

The system of construction in painting is established by feel, with approximate accuracy.

3. The characteristics of a force effect depend on the properties derived from the material.

6) Protocol No. 1 of the session of the Commission to consolidate the conclusions of the discussion of March 1, 1921

In attendance: Shterenberg, Stepanova, Babichev, Ladovskii, Popova ...

From a comparison of the definitions encountered in the discussions and the conclusion it is clear that all the definitions may be reduced to one:

The definition of a construction may be separated into definitions of the plan and of the construction itself.

A construction is a functional organization of material elements.

The characteristics of a construction are:

1. The best use of the materials.
2. The absence of any superfluous elements.

The plan of a construction is the linking together of lines and the surfaces and forms defined by them—it is a system of forces.

Composition is the act of combination according to a set of conventional characteristics.

The characteristic which distinguishes [composition? —*S. O. Kh.-M.*] from construction is the absence of the organic quality.

The conclusions of (1) Krinskii, (2) Bubnova, (3) Popova, and (4) Loganson have been reduced to the following:

1. A line is the form of a force, the joining together of lines and the surfaces and forms that they define is a system of forces, and is the plan of a construction. An architectural construction is founded on the physical law of gravity.

2. Construction is the goal and the necessity of practical organization. Composition is an appropriately ordered arrangement of the materials, but one which is dictated by taste.

3. We find pictorial construction:

1. in nonobjective art, as the essential organization of the elements, and not in the representation of forms of organization;
2. in the manifestation of the construction of objects, and not in the objects themselves;
3. in the use of the qualities of the material.

7) Protocol No. 2 of the session of the Commission to consolidate the conclusions of the discussion of March 1, 1921

In attendance: Shterenberg, Stepanova, Babichev, Ladovskii, Popova

From a comparison of the conclusions arrived at in the discussions in question with the summary of the conclusions of the earlier discussions of Protocol No. 1 of March 1, 1921, it is clear that the definition of the objective of construction may be reduced to the following:

1. The objective of construction:
 - (1) The use of materials.
 - (2) The force effect.
 - (3) Organizational unity.
- (4) Totality of effect. The media are the expression of the functions of the forms.
2. The strict definition of technical construction, it appears, is not applicable to pictorial construction.

8) Conclusions of G. A. Stenberg on Construction

If we examine construction in painting by analyzing individual paintings, taking each element in turn, it turns out that:

The material, as a medium in painting appropriately employed for a particular form [which taken on its own is constructive], and the form itself, are elements of construction.

Color, which emphasizes and gives equilibrium to form, and the appropriate texture, are elements of construction.

A system of construction, of separate constructive forms on canvas, board, etc., derives from a distribution of elements according to criteria of taste.

An element that is not constructive is compositional.

Taking technical construction as the ideal, and comparing it with each of the elements of pictorial construction, the following becomes clear:

Convergence: Technical construction: Construction media, material, its property (weight, durability, elasticity, resistance, etc.). Pictorial construction: and its appropriate use.

Divergence: Technical construction: The system of construction is organized according to the utilitarian definition of a goal. Pictorial construction: System of construction is organized according to the disposition of individually constructive forms as a judgment of taste.

Conclusion: insofar as artistic taste constitutes the structural system of the pictorial construction, it is not a construction in the strict sense.

G. Stenberg March 12, 1921

9) Conclusions on Construction and Composition (A. Rodchenko)

A construction is an objective or a task performed according to a particular system, for which purpose particular materials have been organized and worked in a manner corresponding to their inherent characteristics and are used for their own purpose and contain nothing superfluous.

The practical solution of any space is a construction

Objective

System

Organization Construction

Material

Economy

The purposeful creation of a new organism can take place only when there is constructive organization.

The choice of materials from among those available, or the covering of blank areas with decoration, is composition.

The consolidation of any space is composition.

The filling in of blank areas by the individual disposition of separate elements is composition.

The (clear) expression of individualism and its objectives is always expressed by composition.

10) Declaration of the Objectivists

Objectivism proceeds from repudiation of the representational and the abstract world in art, and sees its purpose in the organization of the concretized properties of elements into a new material organism.

The following factors underlie practical and theoretical work on objectivization: concretization and spatiality.

Our modern consciousness has left the representational world and the abstract world behind, is moving towards the reorganization of the phenomenal world, the creation of a concrete, objectivized organism. Our productive activity is directed towards the manifestation of the forces of the material; the revelation of its concrete properties and the construction of a new material organism from its concretized elements.

In committing themselves entirely to the Contemporary World, and extending the boundaries of acquired experience, the Objectivists are striving for new formal achievements through objectivization and the application of their theoretical and practical principles.

In the exercise of their active productive force, the Objectivists **see** the reorganization of consciousness—as an application of the following relationship: the force exerted by active productivity is equal to that generated by the objectivized organism.

11) Program of the ‘Objectivist’ Working Group in INKhUK

1. The goal of the group is the creation of objective and concrete constructions in space and on surfaces.
2. The group is working not on the representation of elements, but the creation of a concrete organism both in space and on surfaces.
3. The work of the group is divided into laboratory and theoretical work.

Laboratory work:

1. Work on a variety of materials belonging to various art forms and industrial processes.
2. The creation of organisms working from the concrete properties of elements in art and industry.
3. The study of the properties of these elements.
4. The appropriate specialists are invited to assist in the solution of the technical problems encountered.
5. The verification of theoretical findings by laboratory experimentation.

Theoretical work:

1. Analysis and study of elements and their concrete properties.
2. Analysis of objects and their components.
3. Analysis of the concepts involved in construction on a surface and in space.
4. Establishment of a theoretical basis for laboratory experimentation.

12) Program of the Constructivist Working Group of INKhUK

The task of the Constructivist group is THE COMMUNIST EXPRESSION OF MATERIAL CONSTRUCTIONS.

Taking a scientific and hypothetical approach to its task, the group asserts the necessity to synthesize the ideological component with the format component in order to achieve a real transition from laboratory experiments to practical activity.

For this reason the groups inaugural program indicates, where ideology is concerned, that:

1. Scientific communism, based on the theory of historical materialism, is our only ideological premise.

2. The theoretical interpretation and assimilation of the experience of Soviet construction should motivate the group to make the transition from experimental activity divorced from life, to experimentation that has a basis in reality.

3. The specific components of effectiveness, .i.e., tectonics, construction, and *faktura*, which mobilize the material elements of industrial culture—transformed into volume, surface, color space, and light—ideologically sound, theoretically interpreted, assimilated by experience—are the foundations of the communist expression of material constructions.

The three paragraphs of this ideological section establish the connection with the format component.

Tectonics or the tectonic style derives its form on the one hand from the nature of communism, and on the other hand from the appropriate use of industrial materials.

Construction is organization. It derives its content from communism but from the point of view of tectonics it is equally structured by the content of the material itself.

Construction should be understood as the collective function taken to its limit, to every last detail, and not displaying the normal functionalism of tectonic release.

Material that is consciously selected and appropriately used for a particular purpose, without arresting the motion of the construction and without constraining its tectonics—indeed, preserving all this and not violating it—is what the group calls *faktura*.

These three basic elements enter into all categories of intellectual production.

The group considers the material elements to be:

1. The material in general. The study of its origin, its industrial transformation or products. Its properties, its significance.

Intellectual materials:

2. Light
3. Space
4. Volume
5. Surface
6. Color

The Constructivists view intellectual materials and the materials of solid bodies in ways that are equivalent.

Basic Tasks of the Group

1. In the ideological arena:

To demonstrate in word and deed the incompatibility of artistic activity with the functional dynamicism of intellectual production.

The real participation of intellectual production as an equal component in the creation of communist culture.

2. In the practical arena:

To issue a communication.

To publish a weekly bulletin—*V I. P.*, [Bulletin of Intellectual Production].

To print pamphlets and broadsheets on issues connected with the group's activities.

To produce designs.

To organize exhibitions.

To establish communications with all the Production Boards and Centers of the single Soviet administrative mechanism which to all intents and purposes realizes and organizes the forms of communist life in practice.

3. In the propaganda arena:

1. The group declares uncompromising war on art in general.

2. It declares that the legacy of the artistic culture of the past is of no value for the communist forms of constructivist structures.

13) From Construction to Technology and Invention (K. Ioganson)

The illusion of representational art in particular and of art in general has been sufficiently clarified from the materialist point of view. Moreover, it has been exposed by the "Left" group and ultimately completely overthrown by Constructivism.

Constructivism asserted that "the artistic heritage of the past is unacceptable;" and declared "uncompromising war on art in general;" etc.

Even in its early stages, Constructivism declared its goal to be not art, but "the communist expression of material constructions;"

In the final analysis art is falsehood, an opiate, unnecessary, and its representational illusion is just a childish play of lines, colors, words, sounds, etc.

There are two forms of construction: the first is aesthetic in nature, so-called "artistic" construction, the second is genuine "mechanical" construction, or one could simply say harmful and useful construction.

As has already been stated, Constructivism repudiates art as such.

Moreover, a construction is not a goal in its own right, i.e., a construction is not for itself, for art's sake, but for its redirection towards practical necessity. The construction is the object itself, built according to constructive principles, and thus it has no existence under, over, or outside the object.

From this point of view genuine Constructivism acknowledges the existence only of mechanical construction with a definite practical goal and purpose.

Artists who used to paint pictures are rejecting the picture and are going over to the construction or “into industr< as the customary expression has it. But this approach to the construction employs the devices, the method, and the tools of “the old art” without a practical objective or a definite goal, such as is required for mechanical construction, or indeed any kind of construction. The product of such slick but arbitrary treatment of materials as we see in the work of Tatlin and the most recent Suprematism is simply the representation of something, a false and harmful form of construction, i.e., “dear old art;” or a plaything.

The construction of any cold structure in space, or any combination of solid materials, is a cross with right angles, acute angles, and obtuse angles.

The time has come to shake off once and for all the whole array of devices, methods, techniques, materials, and tools of art, since they are useless, imperfect, grossly insufficient, and primitive, and to adopt the course of mechanical construction and inventiveness.

Down with art, long live technology!

Given the development of technology, art as a form of cognition (so to speak) is dying out, and technology and invention are taking over.

The product of art is a primitive form of the product of technology, and no more than a representation of it.

The artist is a primitive, a brush juggler, a deceiver, a parasite, and a fraud.

When I put forward the slogan “Down with art, long live technology;” I was not proclaiming technology as the goal of Constructivist efforts, in place of the art that has been cast aside.

Technology, in the form in which we find at present, devoid of invention, is a stagnant bog.

Technology is the application of laws and rules, and the utilization of the inventions that have been discovered.

Technology on its own is condemned to immobility and the absence of progress.

Technology is what invention was not.

The technological specialist lives at the expense of the inventor.

What is normally assumed to be invention is not always invention.

From painting to sculpture, from sculpture to construction, from construction to technology and invention —this is my chosen path, and will surely be the ultimate goal of every revolutionary artist.

Moscow, March 9, 1922