

## Call for papers

K. Revue trans-européenne de philosophie et arts

9, 2/2022

### Malevich

Unconditional revolution

*La rivoluzione, come il desiderio, è inevitabile e imprevedibile,  
e non finirà mai di sconvolgere i custodi del terreno dei bisogni*

Elvio Fachinelli

Kazimir Malevich, the painter, architect, educator and communist philosopher stands as the crossroads of great aesthetic and political tensions capable of stimulating the most essential framework of what we deem to be the destituent power. For this reason, we believe that his story goes far beyond a canonical biographical, historical and artistic dimension, without, however, suffocating it. To this extent, he embodies a destituent conceptual figure first of all because, by exhausting with his painting any form of representation down to the ground zero of the vision, he perceives the fulfilment/end of every work as a revolutionary programme.

From a historical standpoint, his personal story is astonishing and very well known; so much so that our purpose in dedicating an issue of “K” to Kazimir Malevich is precisely to remove the Russian artist from the narrow space of an icon of the avant-garde to which he had been relegated. Instead, we suggest that we should also welcome him as “one of the greatest spiritual and political pedagogues of the century”. Malevich was one of the first pedagogues of the Soviet experience, first as the Kremlin Commissar for the Protection of Valuables. Later, in 1918, he founded the People’s School of Fine Arts in Vitebsk, an institute that “aimed to transform everyday life and reshape the urban landscape with new aesthetic forms” (Enzo Traverso). Through his artistic production (whether written or imagined) Malevich never failed to engage in dialogue, with the specific situation in which he found himself entangled from time to time: the experience of the First World War, the October Revolution, the Civil War, the rise and fall of the Soviets within the rising Soviet power. Malevich’s relationship with the Bolshevik government in the aftermath of the revolution is significant in this regard when the creation of new forms was invited to support - even to the point of disavowing itself - the efforts of the new government under construction. Malevich’s success within the Bolshevik project stemmed from an artistic career dedicated to creating

new forms through a decisive abandonment of the mimetic-representational paradigm, which conformed with the traditional bourgeois artistic taste. This rejection exploded inside Malevich even before the massacre of the Great War, but with the war, its logic became even clearer: when facing the carnage, there is nothing to be seen because we should only see what we cannot see: the unimaginable. With the work *the Black square on white ground* (1915), we are faced with a gesture that rejects any distance and dualism between reality and its narrative. No image to be seen is recognisable. No transcendent duplicity of the image. Rather, pure objectivity as a form of absolute realism against all aesthetic realism. Along this direction, the painter's parable appears parallel to that of the rising Soviet cinema, which chose the same anti-realist vocation for itself, at least until the mid-1930s: a vocation made up of a specific use of montage, understood not as a tool for constructing narratives, but as a technique through which the revolutionary experience can be put into form. There is more to it: the extreme version of his masterpiece *White Square on a White Background* (1918), presents an even more rarefied and diaphanous tension than the forms exhibited previously, exposing the idea of a pure event through the dismissal of painting because painting in Malevich dares to display its end.

With Malevich, the artist's action is emancipated from its typical reproductive or figurative movement to become an unconditioned gesture free of any reference. Absolute forms seem to populate the paintings of Malevich and his pupils, as well as two-dimensional hyperspaces in which the colour, the workmanship and the material have a value in themselves. It looks as if they testify to the opening up of another form of freedom, definitively freed from the determinations of reality and the habits of representation. And this happens beyond all logic, foundation and capital that provokes and feeds them. We are faced with an unprecedented revolution in the image of the world that brings back to the canvas the truth of every revolution: its nihilism. Moreover, Malevich's extreme gesture of letting painting end in painting (with the religious culture of the icon ending with it as well), almost as if he wished to bid farewell to an entire cultural universe, is accompanied by a subtle and radical theoretical reflection in which, at the beginning of the 1920s, the revolutionary cruciality of a destituent existence is affirmed. An existence in which human activities must bid farewell to any working action that, as such, is a manifestation of hostility.

Communism, revolution, nihilism, art. Following the maelstrom created by these conceptual and political intersections, below are listed, some of the problematic focal point that will be developed analytically in K.'s issue dedicated to Malevich:

- What does it mean to think and practise revolutionary gestures that are so disruptive that they appear untimely even in the face of an ongoing revolution? In other words, it would mean rethinking the peculiar Marxism of Malevich, who, after inaugurating the artistic avant-garde of the Soviet Union with his 1915 *Black Square*, confessed his defeat, and perhaps also that of the Leninist revolution, by turning the clock back to the pre-revolutionary era of figuration, giving birth under Stalin to a series of naturalist canvases that appear unscathed by the events of the century.

- Malevich as a painter of the Great War: the creation of the black squares began in 1915. The aim is to verify how the carnage of the war imprints a shift in Malevich's pictorial work, imposing a form of pure and radical desertion on his artistic gesture: the vision of a void.

- To problematise the relationship between politics and art, between the political inauguration of new spaces of manifestation and the act of creation inherent in every properly artistic practice. The challenge that we recognise in Malevich's work is that of a dismissal of the respective claims of independence of the two fields: not so much to repeat the umpteenth variant of the subordination of one to the other, but to highlight their unrepeatably ontological co-partnership, where both, art and politics, allow new forms of life to appear.

- Malevich as a theoretical figure from which to reread the complex question of realism and artistic representation, of which Soviet cinema in the 1920s in particular - thanks to the work of some great directors: Kulešov, Ejzenštejn, Pudovkin and Vertov - gave perhaps one of the most complex testimonies in the entire history of world cinema, as a reaction to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

- The issue of inactivity and inoperativity as the “man’s effective truth” (conceived by Malevich in a brief 1921 text which significantly and dangerously took leave of the cult of work), is a figure concealed by all those traditions which, while attempting to redeem the man, have done their utmost to subjugate him to the tyranny of value, work and labour, thus disavowing his essential inoperative trait (Nancy, Agamben). The very experience of Suprematism reveals itself as the “eclipse of the work of art” since it is marked by the drive to bury, along with easel painting, the very status of the work of art.

- The issue of nihilism and the “nihilistic blackness” (Alain Badiou) which in its impatience destroys forms in such an iconoclastic impulse that it replaces every possible icon. Could it be, however, that this blackness is itself a work, focused on asserting itself against the existing?

- Proposals must be submitted by 20<sup>th</sup> February 2022 (2,500 characters max.)

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If the proposal is accepted, the paper must be delivered by 18<sup>th</sup> September 2022. After this date, the selected contribution will be automatically excluded from the issue of the journal.