

# COSMOS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY RUSSIAN ART

(by Bella Kesoyan, 2018)

## Abstract

The research explores the changing idea of 'cosmos' in the Russian art of the twentieth century. The key word here is change. The aim of the essay is to build a timeline and explain the shift in the understanding of cosmos and its representation in visual art. There are three components to the analysis. The first factor is technological progress. As the idea of space travel transformed from being a mere fantasy to reality and eventually a fact of life, its representation in art became less abstract. The second factor is political climate. As the scope of the essay covers the period of the existence of Soviet Union, the question of how the developments in the people's expectations of the regime also influenced the perceptions of the cosmos and space travel is crucial. Last, Russian Cosmism, a philosophical movement, played a major part in providing the inspiration for artists in the beginning of the century. Although it virtually disappeared by the time of 'the thaw', the movement was revived in the last decades of the twentieth century.

## Introduction

The twentieth century was arguably the most turbulent period in the Russian history. In a span of hundred years, Russia officially changed five different names and underwent tectonic transformations from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union in the years following the October Revolution of 1917, and subsequently to the Russian Federation in 1991.<sup>1</sup> Despite the political and social turbulence, Russia contributed a number of technological innovations to the world during that period, most notably in the field of space exploration.

The image of cosmos has been recurring in the works of major Russian artists throughout the century. Ranging from Russian avant-garde icons, such as Kazimir Malevich and Lazar Markovich Lissitzky (El Lissitzky), to the Moscow Conceptualists of 1980s, from design objects and posters to badges and match boxes, the idea of conquering the universe has been a ubiquitous source of inspiration.

The present essay explores the evolution of the perspective of cosmos in the works of Russian artists of the twentieth century. Building on the existing research, the essay aims to create a timeline explaining the shifts in the perspective of cosmos throughout the century. The research to date appears to concentrate on isolated parts of the twentieth century or individual art movements; however, it is equally important to understand what drove the transitions from one period to another. Such high-level perspective on the subject gives a better understanding of not just the development of the art world during that time but also its interaction with external forces like politics, society, science, and philosophy.

The first angle considered in the essay is the interaction of science and spiritual devotion, which echoes the earlier philosophical ideas of Russia's 'special path' benefiting from its geographical location – scientific reason from the West combined with the spirituality of the East.<sup>2</sup> Both the concepts can be linked to the idea of space travel. To be able to fly into space, extensive scientific research is required; however, part of the purpose of the endeavour is spiritual, even to the point of the resurrection of past generations. Another angle is political climate. The time frame of the analysis perfectly coincides with the existence of the Soviet Russia, between 1917 and 1991. The essay looks at the transformation of the link between the idea of space travel and Communist ideology as reflected in the works of the artists of the time. Last, technological progress *per se* is used as a third factor influencing the perspective of cosmos in the twentieth century Russian art.

The century is split into three – interrupted – periods. Each period corresponds to a unique combination of the three factors outlined above. The beginning of each period is marked by a major turning point, when the representation of outer space underwent important changes both in the minds of the Russian nation and visual art. The end of each period is linked to the evidence of the artistic approach being largely exhausted. Such a method addresses the specificities of the understanding of the idea of cosmos at different times. To analyse each period, a single work of art is chosen to represent it and provide a solid basis for the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Russian Empire (1900-1917), Russian Republic (1917), Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (1917-1922), Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/Soviet Union (1922-1991), Russian Federation thereafter.

<sup>2</sup> The ideas expressed by Pyotr Chaadaev and the Slavophiles in George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists. The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

The first period is between 1917 and 1932, when space travel was still unattainable and remote. The most progressive artists and writers of the time attempted to reconstruct the universe and change the world through their art. The outer space was a representation of a better and brighter future. The chapter aims to analyse the influences of Russian Cosmist ideas and the October Revolution on the Russian avant-garde art following the year 1917. While still exploring the impact of both the factors separately, the analysis aims to follow the organic links between politics and philosophy in the works of avant-garde artists. In the conclusion of the chapter, the evolution of these influences and the factors behind their demise will be outlined, and the link to the following years in the history of cosmos in Russian art will be drawn. *A Suprematist Tale of Two Squares*, a work of El Lissitzky, will be central to the analysis undertaken in the first chapter, but the essay also draws on the works and the writings of Kazimir Malevich.

The second period highlighted in the essay is between 1957 and 1969. 1957 marks the year when the first Sputnik was launched by the Soviet Union, while 1969 was the year when the United States of America (US) landed a man on the moon. Since the 1950s, space flights became a long-awaited reality and part of popular culture. People were able to relate to the heroes of space travel and the Soviet art reflected this attitude. This chapter discusses in detail how and why the cosmos became representative of Soviet power during 'the thaw' and how it was reflected in the art of the time. Aleksandr Deineka is a major representative of Socialist Realism, and *The Conquerors of Space*, a painting of his, provides an important insight into the period and, therefore, is chosen as the basis for the analysis in the second chapter.

The third and final period is between the 1970s and 1990s. During this time, the ideas of Cosmism of the 1920s and 1930s were revived and translated into the new environment. The outer space did not represent the future anymore, and space flights existed parallelly to the everyday struggles of people. It once again became a representation of a better life, but now stripped of Communist ideology. *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, an installation by Ilya Kabakov, is a perfect example of this phenomenon.

The essay concentrates specifically on major works of art of the period and provides an in-depth analysis of each work. El Lissitzky, Aleksandr Deineka, and Ilya Kabakov are key building blocks of the art history of twentieth century Russia. They can be referred to as major innovators of their time, and their works are crucial for the research on the period in question. The works of art chosen for the research range between a painting, a book of prints, and an installation. For each period, a work has been chosen to best represent it in terms of the art movement, an artist, and a medium.

In the conclusion of the essay, the transformations between periods are aggregated in two century-wide trends. The first trend reflects the gradual materialisation of the idea of the outer space in people's minds. The second trend is related to one of the ways in which politics consistently influenced the perspective of cosmos for both the society and the artists: the struggle between 'private' and 'collective'.

The literature used in this essay provides a comprehensive understanding of the research done on the topic to date. The list is diverse and can be broadly divided into three areas: the broader historical context, art historical context, and philosophical context. The first and the most extensive area in the historical studies concerns both the standalone history of the Soviet space programme and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Some of the research is divided further between solely focusing on the technological aspect of the space industry and also considering its political aspect. The main Western publications include Asif Siddiqi's *Challenge to Apollo* and *The Red Rocket's Glare*, William E. Burrows' *This New Ocean*, Walter McDougall's *The Heavens and the Earth* (political history), and Rex Hall's *The Rocket Men*.

Among the publications by Russian authors, an important place is occupied by the works unveiling the misconceptions about the space program starting from Leonid Vladimirov's *The Russian Space Bluff*, published in 1971, followed by numerous works including Slava Gerovitch's *Soviet Space Mythologies*, A. Aleksandrov's *Path to the Stars*, and Peter Vail and Alexander Genis' *The World of the Soviet Man*. Some of the publications recognised as important contributions to the topic were written by cosmonauts themselves and include Alexei Leonov's *Two Sides of the Moon* and Valentina Ponomareva's *Cosmonautics in a Personal Dimension*.

An important place in the historical research about the space age is occupied by the publications about the three heroes of the Soviet space programme – Sergey Korolev, Yury Gagarin, and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. The authors of such works include James Hartford, James T. Andrews, Yaroslav Golovanov, and Sergey Belotserkovsky.

The literature on the art historical context can be divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used in this essay are the writings of the artists themselves, including that of Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Ilya Kabakov, and Aleksandr Deineka, and Soviet officials, for instance Nikita Khrushchev. Several published archives were used, including *Khardgiev's archive* and the works edited by Sergey Ushakin covering several aspects of Russian Modernism. The primary sources also include contemporary newspapers and magazines such as *Pravda*, *Tekhnika Molodegi*, and *LEF*, among others.

The secondary sources on the art history background include the works of internationally recognised academics, prominently Aleksandra Shatskikh, Andrew Spira, Margarita Tupitsyn, John E. Bowlt, and Ulrich Krempel on the first wave of Russian avant-garde; Christina Kiaer, Helena Goscilo, and Mike O'Mahony on Aleksandr Deineka; Toni Stoos, Renate Petzinger and Emilia Kabakov (*Catalogues Raisonné*), Boris Groys, Amei Wallach, and Tijana Vujosevic on Ilya Kabakov.

Moreover, the works drawing links between the historical background of and visual culture in the Soviet Union have been especially useful for this essay. Eva Maurer's *Soviet Space Culture* covers several dimensions of the visual culture in the twentieth century. Another example of the latter is *Russian Aviation, Space Flight, and Visual Culture* by Vlad Strukov. Iina Kohonen's study *Picturing the Cosmos* provides an extensive background to the use of photographs in contemporary press articles. Priscilla Johnson's *Khrushchev and the Arts* clarifies the official position of the Soviet government towards the arts during the 1950s and 1960s. Similar work was undertaken by Matthew Bown on the Stalinist era.

Julia Richers in Polianski's *Die Spur des Sputnik* also divides the history of cosmos in the Russian art in the twentieth century in three periods. However, her research differs from the present essay in two ways. First, she covers the broader aspects of visual culture rather than concentrating on a specific type of art and does not delve into any particular work of art. Second, she identifies a separate Stalinist era in between the avant-garde and the thaw periods, while this essay omits that era and identifies a yet another period beyond 1960s in the Moscow Conceptualists of 1980s.

Several exhibition catalogues are also used, including the publications by the Guggenheim museum, Centre de Pompidou, Fondation Beyeler, Fundacion Juan March, Tate Modern, and the 1958 Brussels International Exhibition.

Last, the philosophical context is considered through the writings of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Nikolay Fedorov as well as through the academic essays on Russian Cosmism, including George M. Young's *The Russian Cosmists*, Boris Groys' *Russian Cosmism*, and Elena Zaytseva's *Cosmic Shift, Russian Contemporary Art Writing*.

## **Chapter 1. The Revolution. The Dream.**

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the concept of space travel was still obscure and remote. The public and artistic perceptions of the cosmos were mainly driven by the philosophical ideas and debates of the time. The movement or, to be more precise, an idea of the world order that put space travel at the forefront and introduced the concept of changing the world through the exploration of the universe was Russian Cosmism, founded by Nikolay Fedorov, a self-taught librarian and one of the most celebrated Russian thinkers.

At the core of Fedorov's *Philosophy of the Common Task* is the idea of the active metamorphosis of the world through the 'cosmic evolution'.<sup>3</sup> The evolutionary process, according to Fedorov, culminates in a world where the human race, backed by thorough scientific work, overcomes the issues of mortality and illness, completing their essential obligation to each other in the eyes of God. The steady state of the world will be achieved at the moment when every generation, instead of procreating, starts resurrecting their fathers until the first man ever born walks again. Fedorov saw the key to unlocking immortality and, consequently, this ultimate world order in the development of science and the exploration of cosmos. According to S. Semenova, the concept of 'active evolution' is the key to Russian Cosmism, which emphasises the crucial role of the people themselves in transforming the universe around them.<sup>4</sup>

Fedorov first voiced his ideas decades before the October Revolution of 1917, but they were hardly accepted by the mainstream academic community of the time. Not until the new regime actively started promoting

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<sup>3</sup> Young, *The Russian Cosmists*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Similar to Young's concept of 'self-directed evolution' in Young, *The Russian Cosmists*, 8.

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, another major Cosmist and a mentee of Fedorov's, was due attention paid to the movement. Tsiolkovsky, a village *chudak* (crank) and a science teacher in a local school, became the ideal representation of the proletarian-born genius disregarded by the Tsarist regime. Although he was mainly promoted for his scientific research in the area of rocketry, his science fiction novels expressing his philosophical convictions also gained popularity.

With no visible technical advancements in space exploration at the time, science, and technology did not materially affect the first period in the history of cosmos in the twentieth century Russian art. Instead, the change in the artistic approach to cosmos was triggered by the October Revolution of 1917, which marks the starting point of the analysis. The editorial of the first issue of *Left Front of The Arts (LEF)* magazine in 1923 stated that '[the] October cleaned, formed, and reorganised'.<sup>5</sup> Under the post-revolutionary 'euphoric enthusiasm', the artists felt that the possibility of reshaping the world was closer than ever. Russian Cosmist ideas were in line with this thinking as they did not advocate passive observation either. Fedorov had an actual plan for the world transformation outlined in his philosophy. In the years following the October Revolution, many avant-garde artists were also working on what would potentially be a city of the future. Georgii Krutikov's *Flying City*, Malevich's *Architectons* and *Planits*, and El Lissitzky's *Prouns* were all created as the models for the new collective living in the outer space. The artistic community viewed the scale of the change in the social order as 'cosmic', which linked the Revolution to the ideas of space exploration and cosmos.

Defining the end of the first period is complicated, owing to the lack of a particular event that brought about a drastic change in the perception of cosmos in Soviet Russia. Instead, several small changes gradually transformed the country and society, slowly eradicating the influence of the avant-garde and Cosmist school of thought. As early as in 1923, the same article in *LEF*, which positively portrayed the Revolution, mentioned the unwelcoming treatment of the leftist artists by the ruling party.<sup>6</sup> However, it can be argued that the end of the first period came to pass nine years later, in November 1932, when an exhibition titled 'Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic' was held in Leningrad<sup>7</sup> in State Russian Museum.

Several other interesting developments took place earlier that year. For the first time, the term Socialist Realism was used to define the official policy of the Soviet Union with regards to arts.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, all independent artistic organisations were dissolved and replaced by state-directed unions.<sup>9</sup> These signs of suppression culminated in an exhibition that showcased the evolution of art in Soviet Russia over time, portraying Socialist Realism as the only acceptable art school of the communist regime. Kazimir Malevich was the only avant-garde artist who was allowed to exhibit, although his works were exhibited away from the main flow of visitors and removed altogether when the exhibition was transferred to Moscow.

From the artists' point of view, the exhibition signified their rejection by both the Party and rest of the artistic community. Vladimir Tatlin considered the omission of his works as 'his exclusion from the ranks of artists'.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition put an end to the acceptance of the avant-garde culture by the Soviet government, who officially proclaimed it out of alliance with the Party policy. While the perception of the artistic community towards the Revolution itself may not have changed, all the art produced after 1932 either solely served the regime and obeyed the state-directed requirements or was effectively removed from the public view for decades to come.

To follow the organic links between politics and philosophy in the works of avant-garde artists, it is important first to outline the historical context and environment surrounding the artists after the year 1917. The initial impressions of the October Revolution and relationships with the new regime varied significantly across the artistic community. However, the majority of the avant-garde artists greeted the new power with open arms for several reasons.

First, the Revolution promoted the idea of a new society, the move from the bourgeois individualistic Russia to a collective proletariat-centric regime. The avant-garde artists across the country viewed themselves as messengers of this new idea. The Revolution called on the artists to assist with the rebuilding of the society, and many considered it their duty to help. Among them, Marc Chagall, who back moved from Paris to Vitebsk, his home town, to get married, was determined to open an art school that would be accessible for the general public.

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<sup>5</sup> LEF, no 1 (March 1923): 4.

<sup>6</sup> LEF, no 1 (March 1923): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Currently St. Petersburg, Russia.

<sup>8</sup> Royal Academy of Arts. *Revolution. Russian Art 1917–1932*. (London: 2017), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art Under Stalin*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 69.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, *Revolution*, 31.

The People's School of Art, Chagall's school, was opened on 28th January 1919, but the admissions started as early as November 1918. The intention of the artistic community was to bring art to a wider audience and not only to a selected few: '...doors to the scientific and artistic holy of holies have been open to all workers...'<sup>11</sup> However, the reality was disappointing, as 'there were no workers present at the opening of this proletariat institution'.<sup>12</sup> The first intake consisted of around 150 local Jewish boys. In fact, the sizeable presence of Jewish artists in the avant-garde circles in general and Vitebsk, in particular, was significant. The immediate removal of the Pale of Settlement<sup>13</sup> by the new government was a strong argument for Jewish artists to get behind the Revolutionary ideology.

Another motivational factor was the initial lack of definition of what the revolutionary art would look like. In contrast with the academy-dominated art scene of Imperial Russia, the painters now appeared to be free in their creative process. Moreover, the official title of the Revolutionary Art was free to openly compete for. Avant-garde artists welcomed this competition.

The artist whose work is central to the debate about revolutionary art and the idea of cosmos is Kazimir Malevich. Born to Polish parents as one among fourteen children, Malevich showed interest in art early in childhood. After extensive studies in Kiev, Kursk, and Moscow, he became a member of the avant-garde group Donkey's Tail and, by 1912, aligned himself with the Cubo-Futurists. However, he was not satisfied with either style and continued to simplify his canvases to the point of full abstraction, culminating in the creation of the *Black Square* in 1915 and the establishment of Suprematism. 'My new painting does not belong exclusively to the Earth... And in fact, in man, in his consciousness, there is a striving towards space, a yearning to "take off from the Earth".'<sup>14</sup> By the time he was invited to Vitebsk to teach in the art school in November 1919, his Suprematist ideas were fully developed on canvas and rendered an ideal visual language of the Revolution. Malevich was an established artist and teacher, occupying several official positions in the new post-revolutionary structure.

The Vitebsk years were crucial for Malevich in his shift from the brush to pen. Several of his most important publications were created in Vitebsk. Malevich started to build on his theoretical foundations and explored the potential practical applications of Suprematism. After his arrival, he wrote to M. O. Gershenzon as follows: 'Here in my Vitebsk "exile" ... my paintbrushes seem farther away than ever.'<sup>15</sup> Using his leadership position in the school, he fostered his teachings among a group of young followers, who later came to be known as Unovis (Affirmers of the New Art).

Deeply interested in cosmic energies and the world around, Malevich studied the ideas of Nikolay Fedorov and other Cosmists, including Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. The idea of building a new world and the dominant role given to humanity in this process resonated with Malevich's writings. The process of the Affirmation of the New (Suprematist) World was to be followed through a revolution completely destroying the established social order. In agreement with Fedorov, Malevich gave people 'the ability to make discoveries and to announce that unlimited amounts of materials will be found, both in and above the Earth, to bring them to fruition'.<sup>16</sup> He imagined people working together as a collective towards the good of the future of humanity. In fact, Malevich even advocated the removal of national boundaries for the sake of the New World.<sup>17</sup>

The Soviet culture of collective spirit prevailing over individualism was also a perfect match for Malevich and Fedorov's worldviews. Therefore, Malevich, and consequently the Unovis members, viewed Communism as a stepping stone to the Suprematist world: 'After Communism there follows finally the testament of Suprematism.'<sup>18</sup> In Malevich's view, unlike Communism, Suprematism is not Earth bound, exists in parallel with it and has the power to unite the planet with other members of the universe.

These ideas were published in 1920 in *Miscellany No 1*, one of the most crucial works of the Unovis and arguably the most important piece of Suprematist writing: 'Collectivism is one of the ways of reaching the goal of "worldperson" within the movement's plan ... but to reach perfection, one must destroy oneself as an individual – like the religious fanatics do it in front of the Divinity, the modern saint must destroy himself in front of the

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<sup>11</sup> Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art*, (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 28.

<sup>12</sup> Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> An internal border created by the Russian Empire to limit the internal migration of Jews.

<sup>14</sup> From Malevich's letter to Matiushin in Kovtun, Evgueny and Charlotte Douglas. "Kazimir Malevich", 236.

<sup>15</sup> Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "On New Systems of Art" in *Malevich Writes. A Theory of Creativity. Cubism to Suprematism*, Railing, Patricia, ed. (Forest Row: Bookworks, 2014), 177.

<sup>17</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "The Question of Imitative Art", Vitebsk, 1920, 3.

<sup>18</sup> El Lissitzky, "Art in the 1920s" in *El Lissitzky*, ed. Lissitzky-Küppers, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 334.

“collective” and that “form” which perfects in the name of Unity, in the name of convergence.<sup>19</sup>

The replacement of galleries and private patrons with the state – now the sole buyer in the art market – played into this scenario. All private collections (including Shchukin and Morozov) were appropriated by the state by the year 1919. This move was initially intended and treated by the artists as liberating, as the financial motive and individual tastes were notionally removed from consideration. All art was supposed to serve the goals of the collective.

*Miscellany No 1* was published the same year as *A Suprematist Tale of Two Squares*, another major Suprematist work. *A Suprematist Tale of Two Squares* was executed in six ‘constructions’ by El Lissitzky and intended as a children’s book that told the story of reshaping the world. The *Tale of Two Squares* represents the visual synergy between the revolutionary ideas and notion of space travel and, therefore, forms an excellent basis for the analysis in this essay.

El Lissitzky, trained as an architect in Germany, created the *Tale of Two Squares* while working as a leader<sup>20</sup> of Architecture and Graphic Design Department in Vitebsk’s People Art School in 1920. Although Lissitzky lived in Vitebsk for only a year and a half, the transformation he underwent there under the guidance of Kazimir Malevich completely reshaped his artistic path. Before Vitebsk, El Lissitzky mainly executed native Jewish scenes, sometimes also working as a book illustrator. In Vitebsk, Lissitzky underwent a full conversion, first to Suprematism, following the footsteps of Malevich, and then to Constructivism.

El Lissitzky worked right beside Malevich, and although some of his ideas differed from Malevich’s, he was one of the greatest advocates of Suprematism in Vitebsk. El Lissitzky is also considered to have taken the leading role in the creation of *Miscellany No 1*. The word ‘constructed’ in the title page underlines his influence. Lavrentieva and Shatskikh pointed out compositional similarities between the illustrations in *Miscellany No 1* and the *Tale of Two Squares*.<sup>21</sup>

As the dissemination of Suprematist teachings was one of the key priorities of the Unovis members, both works were intended for mass distribution. However, the shortage of supplies did not allow the distribution scale desired by the Unovis. Therefore, five copies of *Miscellany No 1* were manually typed, and in 1920, Lissitzky only executed the original illustrations for the tale as gouache on paper. The *Tale* was finally published in 1922 in Berlin on high quality yellow matte paper with metallic staples binding the pages. Both publications aimed to describe and outline the principles of Suprematism although in different ways. Therefore, the *Tale of Two Squares* can be viewed as a continuation of *Miscellany No 1*.

The concept crucial to interpreting the perspective of the *Tale of Two Squares* is that of weightlessness, where the scale of the world view is shifted from the perspective of an individual man to a cosmic one. In his text ‘Art in the 1920s’, Lissitzky calls for the viewer to ‘circle like the planet round the picture which remains immobile in the centre’.<sup>22</sup> The viewer is removed from the action, observing the reconstruction of the planet happening before their eyes. The zero-gravity assumption is dominant in Suprematism. White canvas was considered true outer space by Malevich, as only white can truly relay the notion of infinity.<sup>23</sup> Objects within the white space move freely, obeying no laws of physics. The purpose of such movement remained open to the viewer’s interpretation.

The cosmic perspective also resonated with the Soviet idea of exporting the Revolution to the whole world. The idea of a global Revolution appealed to artists beyond Malevich and Lissitzky. For example, *The Monument to the Third International*, one of Vladimir Tatlin’s most recognised works, was designed with the purpose of hosting the full state apparatus of the planet Earth.<sup>24</sup> The new order had to include the whole world, and later, probably, the whole universe. The all-encompassing scale was also in line with the Cosmist philosophy. Young described Cosmism as ‘totalitarian’, as there were no other accepted evolutionary paths. Fedorov’s re-enactment of the world had to include all areas of life, all forms of art and, most importantly, all people.

Special significance lies in the fact that the *Tale of Two Squares* was positioned as a children’s book. It was

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<sup>19</sup> Kazimir Malevich, “About ‘I’ and Collective” in Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art (The Russian Edition)*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Position of the head of a single department in the School was called a ‘leader’.

<sup>21</sup> E. Lavrentieva, “Afterword” in El Lissitzky, *The Tale of the Two Squares in Six Constructions*, (Moscow: Ad Marginem and ABCdesign, 2018), 21; Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art*, 121.

<sup>22</sup> Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, 332.

<sup>23</sup> Kazimir Malevich, “Suprematism. 34 Drawings” in *Malevich Writes*, ed. Railing, 265.

<sup>24</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, *Revolution*, 76.

meant to interact with and teach children about a new force that in one strong blow replaced the chaos and the blackness of the old world with *Krasno Yasno*. Here Lissitzky draws a link to the deeply embedded Russian fairy tale culture. The word *Yasno* (clear) is a symbol of good character. The word *Krasno* (red) within the same context means 'beautiful'. Lissitzky addresses the book to children in hope that they will 'provide adults with a spectacle'.<sup>25</sup> Lissitzky likely chose children as his messengers because a child's consciousness is not yet set in the old values and they would have been more open to the newly built world.

Typography is an inherent part of the *Tale*. Lissitzky was adamant about making the text a part of the story, to be consumed on the same level as the story line. With angles, lines, and fonts differing even within a single word, Lissitzky provided guidance on the dynamics and rhythm of the story. A clear example of this is the phrase 'one strike' positioned in a way that mimics the image itself and visually reminds the viewer of a lightning strike, sudden and destructive. The words 'everything is scattered' are set in a way that appears to mimic the chaos of the construction above. Typography can also be interpreted as the lyrics of a song rather than a dry reading.<sup>26</sup>

The *Tale of Two Squares* identifies two main characters, the Black Square and the Red Square. In Malevich's initial definition, there are three squares symbolising the three levels of Suprematism, the White Square being the final stage, 'affirming the purity of human creative life'.<sup>27</sup> Colour for Malevich is a means of expressing sensation, where each square symbolises a step in the path of enlightenment. He referred to the three stages of Suprematism (black, coloured, and white) on many occasions and explained the concept in detail in the preface of his *Suprematism. 34 Drawings*, another publication created in Vitebsk in 1920. Lissitzky, however, only incorporated the Black and the Red Squares in his work and attached somewhat different meanings to them.

The Red Square is presented in the tale as an emblem of the Revolution, although not initially created as such. In 1915, when Malevich created the Red Square, he named it *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*. The transformation of the Red Square into the emblem of the Revolution was proactively pursued by Lissitzky, who was one of the biggest supporters of using the new art for propaganda purposes. Later on in his career, Lissitzky became the first internationally recognised artist and designer strongly associated with the Soviet State. But even as early as 1919 the artist was already actively creating propaganda posters that supported the new regime. *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919), one of his most recognised works, was a great success in adapting the Suprematist style to political propaganda.

The transformation of the meaning of the Red Square created a straight link between the avant-garde community and Revolution. The Red Square became the official emblem of the Unovis and was present on all works associated with the movement: 'Draw Red Square in your studios as a symbol of the Global Art Revolution!'<sup>28</sup> The *Tale of Two Squares* is also signed with the Red Square and Unovis signature, created by Lissitzky specially for this publication.<sup>29</sup>

Malevich first presented the Black Square as a central form of Suprematism in 1915. He defined the Square as the 'face of the new art, a living, royal infant and the first step of pure creation in art'.<sup>30</sup> In 1919, in *On New Systems of Art*, he stated that it was 'built in the fifth dimension as a basis on which the forms of all the creative conditions of discoveries and art should develop', the so-called 'null form'.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, the Unovis members adopted the habit of sewing a small black square onto their shirts as a symbol of allegiance to Suprematism.

Andrew Spira argued that the *Black Square* most resembled the icon painting traditions of Russia.<sup>32</sup> There are some implicit religious references in Malevich's writings.<sup>33</sup> Although the then-popular Tsiolkovsky was arguably a non-religious Cosmist, Malevich's writings had a lot more in common with Fedorov, to whose worldview, the ideas of Christianity were central. In the '0,10' exhibition in 1915, Malevich placed the *Black Square* in the corner under the ceiling, the place traditionally used for icons in Russian houses.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Odile Belkeddar, "Afterword" in El Lissitzky, *The Tale of the Two Squares in Six Constructions*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 22.

<sup>26</sup> In the recent exhibition in Pompidou centre, a read-out was provided that retained the original intentions of the artist:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOwF2W9YIOs>

<sup>27</sup> Malevich, "Suprematism. 34 Drawings" in Railing, *Malevich Writes*, 267.

<sup>28</sup> Ilya Chashnik, in *The Archive of N. I. Khardgiev*, ed. Aleksandr Parnis, (Moscow: Defi, 2017), 151.

<sup>29</sup> Belkeddar, *The Tale of the Two Squares*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Railing, *Malevich Writes*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Malevich, "On New Systems of Art", 178.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon*, (Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2008), 142.

<sup>33</sup> One of the examples of these references was presented earlier in the chapter on p. 28, in the quote from Miscellany No 1 on collectivism.

<sup>34</sup> Fondation Beyeler, *Following the Footsteps of '0,10'*, (Basel: 2015), 66.

In turn, Lissitzky, being more politically oriented than Malevich, did not refer to religion in his writings. The Communist Party was militantly atheist, and the allegiance to the Party required the open rejection of God. For Lissitzky the Black Square signified a starting point of construction of the new world (the aforementioned 'null form'), rather than a divine force. However, it is difficult not to draw a link from the *Tale of Two Squares* to the New Testament. In the tale, the squares are given god-like roles as they descend to the planet and proceed to change the world order only to eventually leave. Juxtaposing this with the idea of the export of the Revolution to the world and possibly the universe, one can infer that Lissitzky gave the ultimate power to the revolutionary idea and presented Communism as the new divinity.

Another significant difference between Lissitzky and Malevich's views reflected in the *Tale of Two Squares* was their attitude to 'labour'. While Malevich regarded labour as a concept of the past, a trait of the old world order, Lissitzky saw the future of the planet in labour. The *Tale of Two Squares* comes with instructions: 'Do not read, take paper – fold, take columns – colour, take blocks – build.' Lissitzky tells the viewer not to read but act, build or, rather, 'construct'. In fact, the typography of the page, where the above instruction is provided, suggests a mosaic of sorts. The viewer can pick any combination of words they like and play with it. This is what Lissitzky did in his six 'constructions' leading the viewer to participate in the building of the new world.

While Lissitzky was creating the *Tale of Two Squares*, he was already working on *Projects of the Affirmation of the New* (Prouns) – voluminous compositions that he viewed as a set of direct blueprints for the new world. His ultimate goal was to put each of the objects in its own space that will allow the composition to be altered, transformed, and developed. It was not meant as a finished piece of art but rather as a potential idea for someone to realise in the future: 'The proun begins with surface arrangements, then moves to specially modelled constructions before reaching the stage of constructing all forms of life.'<sup>35</sup> The parts had to be movable while remaining a whole. The constructions executed in the *Tale of Two Squares* show signs of transformation to Constructivism and Prouns. The three-dimensional features of the building blocks of the planet are already there, being constructed upon the Black Square, which takes the intended role of a 'null form'.

The *Tale of Two Squares* is unfinished. The last construction concludes the story of the Earth, but there is more to be done elsewhere. The squares continue on their cosmic journey. The typography stresses the word *Tut* (here), inviting the viewer to dream and imagine the other worlds of the universe - *Dalshe* (further), the potential of new life and promise of the future.

The 1930s brought significant changes to the political environment of the Soviet Union. The power was increasingly concentrated in Stalin's hands, who was in the process of destroying not only his political rivals but also anyone remotely unaligned with the regime. The remaining elements of the NEP reforms<sup>36</sup> were abandoned in favour of complete state domination. The ideals that inspired the artists right after the October Revolution were either rejected or transfigured beyond recognition. Modernist and avant-garde art were denounced, and artists whose commitment to the Party could be put under question were removed from public view and denied any opportunities to exhibit or work. Therefore, several artists had to accommodate the requirements of the Soviet government following the year 1932. The commissions came from a single source as a list of specific requirements that did not leave any room for artists' identity.

During the Second World War and shortly after it, the state policy towards arts either emphasised traditional and conservative elements, such as recalling the great Russian historical moments, or was directed at propaganda efforts to concentrate the social attention on the war. Consequently, cosmos did not play a prominent role again in the Russian art until the late 1950s, when the technical developments in the area of space travel brought it to the forefront of the government's attention.

## Chapter 2. The Thaw. The Fulfilment.

The second period in the history of the visual representation of the cosmos in the Russian art of the twentieth century can be defined in more precise terms than the avant-garde period. In fact, the beginning and end of the period can be pinpointed to very specific events in the history of space exploration. As explained in the introduction, the events marking the frontiers of the periods represent radical changes in the social and visual perception of the cosmos by the Soviet nation. The first Sputnik was launched by the Soviet Union into outer space on October 4, 1957. Sputnik I weighed only 84 kilograms and was spherical in shape with four antennas.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Shatskikh, *Vitebsk. The Life of Art*, 166.

<sup>36</sup> New Economic Policy (NEP) – mild return to the elements of a market economy in 1924.

<sup>37</sup> Eva Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture, Cosmic Enthusiasm in Socialist Societies*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.



With the launch of Sputnik I, the Soviet Union officially established its leadership in the space domain, indicating the beginning of a new period for the symbolism of cosmos in the visual culture. The news quickly spread worldwide; however, the first mention of it in *Pravda*, the main newspaper of the regime, was very subtle and can even be called passing.<sup>38</sup> However, following the international reaction, the next day, *Pravda* published a full-sized article celebrating the achievement on a grander scale, noting how 'artificial Earth satellites will pave the way to interplanetary travel' and how 'our contemporaries will witness how the freed and conscientious labour of the new socialist society makes the most daring dreams of mankind a reality'.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the United States successfully put a man on the moon on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1969. Several researchers have argued that even before that, a number of signs indicated the decline of the position of the Soviets.<sup>40</sup> As the Soviet space programme had very few public faces due to the extensive secrecy surrounding it, the untimely death of Yuri Gagarin, its most iconic cosmonaut, - in 1968 struck a strong blow through the hearts of the Soviet nation. Moreover, the death of Sergey Korolev, the main architect of the Soviet space programme, in 1966 was subsequently recognised as a primary cause for the slowdown of the technological development necessary to achieve the moon landing in time. However, as his identity was not disclosed until his death, it did not have the same impact on the wider public. In this essay, the final point for the period is still defined as 1969. Although the slowdown of the Soviet programme was gradual, the moon landing still indicated the formal and public defeat of the Soviet Union in its competition with the United States, thereby marking another change in the perspective of cosmos in the minds of people.

Following the Second World War and subsequent death of Josef Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union entered a period of reconstruction and rehabilitation. This period was named 'the thaw' in recognition of the several important changes brought about by Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, Stalin's eventual successor, in the late 1950s and 1960s. By denouncing Stalin's 'identity cult' and proclaiming a new period of honesty and openness in the history of Socialism, Khrushchev provided the nation with a sense of new hope. However, this time the idea of the new and improved future went hand in hand with technological progress, and the idea of conquering the universe became central to Khrushchev's new vision for the Soviet Union. In other words, the Soviet Union was reaching for the stars, both metaphorically and literally.

For instance, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's legacy was not only preserved but also magnified at the country-wide level. Now lovingly remembered as the 'Grandpa of Space Travel', Tsiolkovsky became the first face of the space programme prior to the cosmonauts. Interestingly, in contrast with the early years of the twentieth century, his philosophical ideas were forgotten. The Party concentrated on promoting his scientific accomplishments, putting technology once again at the forefront of its social goals.

The widespread propaganda efforts transformed the idea of space travel into a symbol of modern life and the future. The cosmonauts became the ideal template of the 'Soviet man'. Their successes were disseminated not only through vast media coverage but also by making space travel and space heroes an integral part of popular culture. In 1959, the character Bip-Bip was created in the magazine *Tekhnika Molodegi* (Technology to the Young), representing the first Sputnik, who after his flight is 'working for the wellbeing of the humanity'.<sup>41</sup> Considerable effort was put into consumer goods as well. Several ranges of merchandise were produced with the images of rockets, cosmonauts, and the famous space dogs Laika, Belka and Strelka. Examples are a model of vacuum cleaner, a Laika pack of cigarettes, and a Sputnik shaver. As the designs of the packaging and other consumer goods were approved at the high level, it could be said with certainty that the scale of this production was not only sanctioned but also encouraged by the Party.

The primary focus of this chapter is *The Conquerors of Space*, a painting by Aleksandr Deineka, executed in 1961 as a preparatory work for a large state commission. Finished just eight years before Deineka's death, the painting provides interesting insights into the perception of the cosmos and space programme by the artistic community.

Aleksandr Deineka was born in 1899 in Kursk, making him exactly 18 years old in 1917 at the time of the October Revolution. He is an example of the generation of artists whose path started with the emergence of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, his works were never truly political, and neither was the artist himself. Deineka only

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<sup>38</sup> James J. Harford, *Korolev: How One Man Masterminded the Soviet Drive to Beat America to the Moon*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 121.

<sup>39</sup> "Announcement of the First Satellite", *Pravda*, 5 October, 1957.

<sup>40</sup> Maurer et al., 2; Slava Gerovitch, *Soviet Space Mythologies, Public Images, Private Memories, & The Making of a Cultural Identity*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 19; Walter A. McDougall, *The Heavens and The Earth, A Political History of the Space Age*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 297.

<sup>41</sup> *Tekhnika Molodegi*, January 1959, 4.

became a member of the Communist Party in 1960, a year before he created *The Conquerors of Space*. Being a friend of the poet Vladimir Mayakovski, Deineka was often referred to as 'Mayakovski in painting'.<sup>42</sup> Deineka's works were devoid of cluttering details with a very transparent meaning. Although his most productive period was in the 1930s, his later works are still highly valuable both historically and aesthetically.

The impressive size of *The Conquerors of Space* was characteristic of the artist. Deineka admitted in 1957 as follows: 'I have always had a taste for big canvases... I reckon that art is meant to decorate our life... this is why I created mosaics for the metro with special enthusiasm.'<sup>43</sup> The painting depicts an idealistic picture of a space science laboratory. Deineka does not appear to strive for a realistic or even a vaguely believable image. *The Conquerors of Space* is a multifaceted symbolic representation filled with numerous messages and metaphors.

*The Conquerors of Space* was produced as a sketch for a mosaic that was initially supposed to decorate *Dvoretz S'ezdov* (The Palace of Congress) in Moscow along with the mosaics by other artists illustrating the path of the Soviet Union from the Revolution to the conquering of the universe. The mosaics were never executed, and the painting was allocated to Lugansk Art Museum (currently in Ukraine) in 1962 by the Ministry of Culture of USSR.<sup>44</sup>

Deineka's mosaic was intended to be the last one in the series, representing the space programme as the climax of the Soviet history to date. Therefore, *The Conquerors of Space* is a perfect subject through which the period can be examined. The painting was well-known and even printed on a postal stamp in 1970.<sup>45</sup>

The period from 1957 to 1969 can be distinguished as the time when space travel finally stopped being a dream and became a reality. This had several implications for the Soviet Union.

First, due to the countrywide popularisation of the space programme, people associated the success achieved by the cosmonauts with the Soviet Union itself. The idea that the new Socialist regime was at the forefront of space exploration, especially ahead of the United States, was a strong proof for many that the political agenda of the country was just as strong and progressive. On April 13, 1961, following Gagarin's flight to space, *Pravda* published a public address by the government and ruling party clearly indicating that the achievement was supposed to be credited not to specific individuals but to the Socialist regime. The statement implied that such a success would have never been possible in the Tsarist Russia.<sup>46</sup> The same message was repeated on the postal stamp next to the work of Deineka.

Second, the success of the space programme allowed the Soviet government to use it for the wider domestic discourse. Examples of this are extensively covered in the literature on the subject. Roshanna Sylvester and Iina Kohonen elaborated on the issues of feminism and how Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, became a poster idol for the idea of the 'new Soviet woman'.<sup>47</sup> Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock wrote on the religious aspect and government-sponsored spread of atheist ideas with the help of cosmonauts and space scientists.<sup>48</sup> Church buildings were turned into planetariums all over the country to both remove their divine purpose and teach the local population about space and atheism. Both Sylvester and Monica Rùthers explored the intended influence of the programme on children.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, some of those issues were explored in Deineka's painting.

Last but not the least, the space programme was portrayed by the Soviet government solely as a peaceful project.<sup>50</sup> Khrushchev insisted several times that he regarded the space programme only as a catalyst for further peace talks.<sup>51</sup> One of the most famous photos of Yury Gagarin at the time showed him letting a dove into the sky. The image of his young handsome face with an iconic smile, holding the main symbol of world peace in his hands, had a very powerful international effect. For instance, an Egyptian newspaper commented on how a person with 'such soul could never fire an atomic bomb'.<sup>52</sup> During the Cold War, the space programme was one

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<sup>42</sup> The Fundación Juan March, *Aleksandr Deineka, An Avant-Garde for the Proletariat* (Madrid: 2011), 403.

<sup>43</sup> Aleksandr Deineka, "Conversation About a Beloved Matter", in *Aleksandr Deineka, An Avant-Garde for the Proletariat*, 400.

<sup>44</sup> Yury Zubakin, "By the Testaments of Ilyich", 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Zubakin, "By the Testaments of Ilyich".

<sup>46</sup> "Address", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 121; Iina Kohonen, *Picturing the Cosmos*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2017), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 121 and 81.

<sup>50</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> One of the examples was his speech during the seven-year plan announcement in the *Pravda* Newspaper, "Extraordinary XXI Congress of Communist Party of the Soviet Union", January 28, 1959, 6.

<sup>52</sup> James T. Andrews, *Into the Cosmos*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 114.

of very few areas on which Khrushchev and President Eisenhower and, later, President Kennedy amicably interacted. Bradley Shreve makes an interesting point about how in the middle of the Cuban missile crisis and arms race, the discussion about the cooperation in the space programme managed to bring the leaders of both the countries to the table.<sup>53</sup>

Deineka also associated the success of the Soviet space programme with the 'unity and friendship of generations'.<sup>54</sup> His fascination with technological progress and its potential effect on the world could be clearly discerned in his article 'The Living Tradition', published in *Pravda* in 1964, where he also connected the development of the country with the art of Socialist Realism.<sup>55</sup>

*The Conquerors of Space* is executed using traditional triangular composition. However, the geometric pattern also has a very strong effect on the viewer's perception of the work. The pattern of the floor tiling repeats in the windows which divide the canvas into several sections. The geometric lines of the windows are also mirrored in the laboratory equipment and the balcony handrails. This type of composition helps Deineka visually separate the various small details and scenes happening in the background while still maintaining a clear point of focus. *The Conquerors of Space* is also compositionally divided into three clearly identified planes.

At the forefront of the picture, a male and a female engineer are depicted to be working on a space rocket. The size of the rocket is only marginally bigger than that of the engineers. Deineka draws parallels between the machine and the people. The two strong athletic bodies and their posture, together with the machine, create the visual image of a single organism. It is possible that in this composition, Deineka was influenced by *The Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*, a widely known sculpture by Vera Mukhina and an iconic work representing the quintessence of the Soviet Union, completed in 1937 for Paris World Fair. But instead of a hammer and a sickle, the man and the woman in *The Conquerors of Space* are holding a space rocket, a representation of a new technologically advanced country. Their hands appear to be meeting behind it, just like in Mukhina's work, and together, they create a central triangle.

The athleticism of the figures in *The Conquerors of Space* can be explained from both the artist's perspective and ideological point of view. Deineka was captivated by the anatomy of the bodies in action from very early in his career. A large part of his *oeuvre* was dominated by either sporting or military theme depicting large-scale figures in motion. Goscilo outlined Deineka's lifelong search for human perfection, which was generally, although not always, in line with the Soviet ideology.<sup>56</sup> Within the concept of human perfection it is worth noting the ethnicity and race of the people in *The Conquerors of Space*. All the heroes are white and tall, with clear Slavic facial features. However rather than a manifestation of societal prejudice this reflects on the Deineka's own world view of perfect bodies.

On the other hand, such an athletic representation of the main characters was key to how the space heroes were marketed by the government. Julia Richers noticed the comparison between the cosmonauts and titan Prometheus in one of the postal stamps of the time.<sup>57</sup> Cosmonauts were simultaneously put on a pedestal as heroes who were perfect but also shown among people to build an impression that every Soviet man and woman could and should achieve these heights in the future. Kohonen highlighted a very interesting photo of Valentina Tereshkova that was taken right after her landing in the capsule, where she is shown to be surrounded by common people, including women and children.<sup>58</sup> In this photo, Tereshkova is not above the people, but a member of the Soviet nation.

In *The Conquerors of Space*, Deineka does not depict anyone in particular. He does not paint the celebrated cosmonauts, but people who take part in the process and remain unknown to the public. He paints the collective effort to turn a dream into reality. Still Deineka translated the heroic aura of cosmonauts to his frontal figures. They are very different in scale compared to the rest of the scene. Although seemingly detached from the rest of the painting, they are still depicted within the same space. The disjunction between the foreground and background of the painting is clearly deliberate. The only connection between the composition at the front and rest of the painting is a male figure on the left observing their work. Another important detail is that none of the

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<sup>53</sup> Bradley G. Shreve, "The US, the USSR, and the Space Exploration, 1957-1963", 2 June 2003, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Aleksandr Deineka, "A Living Tradition", 1964 in *Aleksandr Deineka, An Avant-Garde for the Proletariat*, 400.

<sup>55</sup> Aleksandr Deineka, "A Living Tradition", 1964 in *Aleksandr Deineka, An Avant-Garde for the Proletariat*, 400.

<sup>56</sup> *Russian Aviation, Space Flight, and Visual Culture*, eds. Vlad Strukov and Helena Goscilo, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 53.

<sup>57</sup> Julia Richers, "Himmelssturm, Raumfahrt und 'Kosmische' Symbolik in der Visuellen Kultur der Sowjetunion" in *Die Spur des Sputnik*, eds. Igor J. Polianski, Matthias Schwartz (Hg.), 181 – 209, (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag), 2009, 201; similar image was depicted in one of the political posters in 1963 by Valentin Viktorov.

<sup>58</sup> Kohonen, *Picturing the Cosmos*, 16.

figures depicted in the work make eye contact with the viewer, as they are completely absorbed by their work or distracted by the launch of the rocket outside, facing away from the viewer.

At the back of the painting, a rocket launch is taking place at that very moment. The competition between the United States and the Soviet Union both in space and in the wider economy was intense and widely publicised in Russia. In that regard, Khrushchev stated during his seven-year plan announcement in 1959 that 'beating United States of America means breaking capitalism's top records'.<sup>59</sup> The only area where the Soviet Union managed to achieve such success was space exploration. Therefore, the success and realisation of the dream to be the first was key. In the painting, this success is represented by the launch. Deineka draws visual and symbolic parallels between the two rockets. On the one hand, they are identical to each other, and the repetitiveness of the motive helps the artist create a balance in the painting. Additionally, matching the colour of the launched rocket to the blouse of the woman working on the front helps create an additional link. On the other hand, symbolically, the launch of the rocket in the background shows the climax of the scientific work in the front, showcasing the undisputed success of the Soviet Union.

The launch is being observed by several different characters. The roles of the observers can be discerned by either their outfits or their positions. The head of the facility is seated at the bottom right corner. He is a middle-aged man with grey hair wearing a suit. Although he is visibly older than the others in the group, he does not appear to be weaker, his age indicates experience and is an asset rather than a burden. His leadership position is indicated by not only his posture and clothes, but also the fact that he is the only seated figure in the painting. He is surrounded by several advisors, both male and female. Although the background plays a non-essential role in the work, its details, in fact, bring much more clarity to the artist's understanding of the space programme than the centrepiece composition.

The strong presence of women in this work is very important. Although completed before Tereshkova's flight to space in 1963, the painting sends a very clear political message regarding women. Three out of the four women depicted are wearing trousers and just as athletic as the men. Some of them have short hair, indicating progressive thinking and disregard for the traditional Russian vanity – these women choose comfort during their work.

The female figure on the left is different. She is wearing a brightly coloured dress and heeled shoes. She also appears to be uninterested in the rocket launch, distracted by the telescope. Her possible role is that of a scientist, who is still working while most of the other participants are observing the launch. She is very confident and in control. In fact, one of the only two chairs in the picture is placed next to her, indicating the possibility that she may be the one who occupies it. The clothing, especially her bare arms, reveal a modern self-confident woman, and her work indicates her level of education. In the painting, she represents femininity, as defined by Deineka, surrounded with flowers but also offers another perspective on gender equality compared to the woman at the front. Coupled with an equally attractive male figure right next to her, the two project a very important message. While working together and achieving successes together, men and women still retain their traits and attractiveness during important work.

This was also the message projected by the public image of Valentina Tereshkova and Yury Gagarin. Outside of Tereshkova's working environment, she was always depicted with her family as being a good wife and mother. Although Gagarin was sometimes shown with his family too, his military uniform photos were more common, projecting the necessary level of masculinity.

Interestingly, there are few examples of the fine artists who focused on the space subject. The Soviet Pavilion of 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exhibition had numerous references to the space programme. The newspaper was called *Sputnik*,<sup>60</sup> and the cosmic display was central to the pavilion.<sup>61</sup> However, there were no space-themed paintings in the fine art exhibition.<sup>62</sup> This phenomenon can be partly explained by the secrecy surrounding the space programme or, more precisely, the selective disclosure of the facts.

Although the scale of the nationwide spread of the ideas was unprecedented, there were actually very few facts open to the public. The identities of the people who worked in the space programme were kept secret, as well as the scientific details. The only representatives of the space exploration known to the wider audience were cosmonauts themselves, and even then, the control over what exact information was distributed was very strict.

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<sup>59</sup> Pravda, "Extraordinary XXI Congress", 6.

<sup>60</sup> Sputnik, May 31 – June 7, 1958.

<sup>61</sup> Pavilion of the USSR, A Guide, USSR Section: Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, 1958.

<sup>62</sup> Exhibition of Soviet Fine Art, A Catalogue, USSR Section: Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, 1958.

Kohonen's study of the press photographs at the time shows extensive use of photo montage to erase certain details considered unnecessary by the censors, such as the identities of other cosmonauts in the programme who did not succeed. Therefore, the artists had, in fact, very few facts to work with. Andrey Sokolov, an illustrator for the Soviet media outlets *Ogonek* and *Pravda*, who created several cosmic landscapes, admitted in an interview that he had to mostly rely on his imagination when creating works.<sup>63</sup> Another interesting example of a painter who concentrated on the space subject was Alexei Leonov, a cosmonaut himself, but even his works were full of factual errors, made deliberately to satisfy the censors.

This lack of factual information about the space programme is clearly visible in Deineka's work. Michail Lazarev compares rockets in his painting to toys, drawing a comparison of the relative size of people and rockets.<sup>64</sup> Deineka's representation of rockets is very similar to the pictures printed on various space-themed consumer goods (pins, candy boxes, among others). As Richers noted, this was a derivative of the government's policy of secrecy. By increasing the production of space-themed goods in multiples and making it appear that the information was all around, the Soviet government got away with the nondisclosure of the facts concerning failures, people working in the programme, technical details or even the location of Baikonur, a major launching pad.<sup>65</sup>

Another reason why there may be few representations of the cosmos in the fine art from 1959 and 1967 is the general climate surrounding modern art during that period. Although Stalin's repressions were a thing of the past, the Soviet government was very conservative regarding the nurturing of young artists. On December 1, 1962, Khrushchev, accompanied by Vladimir Serov and Sergei Gerasimov,<sup>66</sup> visited an exhibition of modern art in Manezh called 'Thirty Years of Moscow Art'. This visit became historic mainly because of the expletives used by the leader of the Communist party during his visit. He threatened to expel the artists from the country and assured them that the government will never be supportive of such '*maznya*'.<sup>67</sup> In such a hostile climate, the modern art did not have the freedom to develop, and the strict control over the content of the paintings prevented the artists from exploring topics outside traditional landscapes, genre scenes or portraits.

The art genre that prospered under these conditions was that of political posters. The space programme brought the literal meaning of reaching for the stars into Khrushchev's political programme, and the Party worked very hard to put it at the forefront of its propaganda machine. The existence of real-life space explorers provided further inspiration to the poster artists and broadened their appeal to the mass audience. In those mass-produced posters during the 1950s and 1960s, the conquering of the universe went hand in hand with the idea of building a new country under Socialism. The posters were also instrumental in relaying different social messages to people through the space theme.

*The Conquerors of Space* is very similar to a political poster. Although lacking the slogan, the painting achieves the same goal targeted by the posters of the time. The work reads very clearly and is easy to relate to. Richers makes the point that as the messages of the Soviet posters were meant to be internalised by the people, they are a very important source for the understanding of the social mentality of the time.<sup>68</sup> *The Conquerors of Space* achieves the same level of insight and, therefore, importance. The fact that Deineka does not include any specific individuals in the work is also crucial. Every citizen was meant to look at the work and imagine themselves in the place of space heroes, building the new Socialist country together.

### Chapter 3. The Standstill and Perestroika. The Nostalgia.

After the year 1969, the dream shared by the Soviet people of conquering the universe began to fade. The images of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon pronounced the United States as the unofficial but unequivocal winner of the space race. This fact, however, did not put an end to either the Soviet space programme itself or the publicity around it. In fact, the number of mentions of space flights and cosmonauts in the press actually increased in the 1970s.<sup>69</sup> Extensive funding was still provided to the space programme, and

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<sup>63</sup> V. Lavrenyuk, and A. Sokolov, "Space Worlds of Andrey Sokolov", *Newspaper Military Review*, (2001).

<sup>64</sup> Michail Lazarev, "Aleksandr Deineka: The Artist Through Time", *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine*, N1, (2011).

<sup>65</sup> Julia Richers, "Himmelssturm, Raumfahrt", 202.

<sup>66</sup> Both Serov and Gerasimov were known for their extremely traditional views on art.

<sup>67</sup> '*Maznya*' can be roughly translated as doodling. In fact, during his visit, Khrushchev reiterated numerous times how his grandchildren could do a better job than the artists he was looking at. Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts, The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964*, (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), 101-104.

<sup>68</sup> Julia Richers, "Himmelssturm, Raumfahrt", 182.

<sup>69</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 297.

numerous successes were obediently reported by Pravda and other publications. The heavy funding of the Soviet space programme did not stop until the mid-1980s, when Michail Gorbachev came to power.<sup>70</sup> However, the effect of newspaper articles talking about new cosmonauts was no longer inspirational. The news stories became repetitive, the language mundane. The space flights were no longer a novelty but a part of life, just another State-sponsored industry like the military or aviation.

The July 2, 1971 issue of *Pravda* pronounced cosmonauts as the successors of war veterans.<sup>71</sup> The references to past successes and use of history to justify present actions were the favourite instruments in the Soviet government's toolbox, and military triumphs were the best examples of such successes. This phenomenon was common in the Soviet Union throughout its existence and formed the 'marketing' basis for the promotion of state interests. The most heavily used reference regarding space exploration was still the legacy of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. By 1970s the story had little basis in the actual facts of his life and career but was constructed with just enough facts that suited the narrative being promoted. Following the deaths of Korolev and Gagarin in 1966 and 1968, respectively, their names were added to the shrine, creating a holy trinity of Soviet cosmonautics.

However, by the mid-1970s, the sole reminder of past successes was no longer enough. Khrushchev linked the conquering of the space with the success of the Communism to an enormous degree, implying that 'the former made the latter possible, while the latter made the former stronger'.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, once it became clear that the space race had been lost, the reality of Communism itself was put into question as a consequence. Although the urban population was mostly living in single-family apartments by the mid-1970s (as opposed to communal living), the living conditions were substandard. The Soviet society entered a period of *Zastoy* (standstill), therefore strengthening the link between the stagnant living standards and perceived failures of the space programme. For people, it became harder and harder to keep rejoicing and justifying the investments into the space programme given the appalling living conditions on Earth.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the promise of the great future coupled with the conquering of the universe was disappearing quickly.

Another factor that played an important role in the deterioration of the appeal of the space programme in certain circles was the growing Samizdat culture. The widespread housing development provided more privacy and allowed the rise of underground opposition groups and even underground newsletters and book publications. Several books published in the West by Soviet immigrants were secretly smuggled and reissued within the Soviet Union, and distributed within trusted networks. Siddiqi provides the names of several authors, popular at the time, whose books contained previously unknown facts of the Soviet space programme. The most important of those books was Leonid Vladimirov's *The Russian Space Bluff*, published in London in 1971.<sup>74</sup> Among other things, Vladimirov revealed the discrepancies between the reality of various events and the way they were portrayed to people in newspapers and official speeches.

It cannot be claimed that such information was available to the general public, as the distribution was illegal and done with extreme caution. However, the underground artistic circles were a big part of the so-called 'Soviet intelligentsia', which formed the core of the readership. Although the disappointment that followed these revelations did not manifest as outspoken criticism towards the regime, it was present in the increased cynicism and mistrust the Soviet people developed towards the state and country. This mistrust is still a dominant feature of the mentality of people in contemporary Russia.<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, 1970s saw another shift in the perception of cosmos by the artistic community in the Soviet Union, which marks the start of the third period considered in this essay. Siddiqi calls this period 'nostalgia for the future', meaning the nostalgia for life that one could have had but is not going to have.<sup>76</sup> Such nostalgia pertains both to the periods when all the fallen heroes, such as Gagarin and Korolev, were still alive and to the Utopia those heroes tried to bring to life.

The post-soviet period saw another wave of interest in space exploration in Russia; however, the drivers of the interest differed from those of the 1970s and 1980s and are out of the scope of the present research. The essay concludes with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 as the event that severed the link between the space exploration and Communism.

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<sup>70</sup> David Scott, and Alexei Leonov, *Two Sides of the Moon*, (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 369.

<sup>71</sup> N. Denisov, "Soldiers of the Stars", *Pravda*, Issue N183, July 2, 1971, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 283.

<sup>73</sup> Asif Siddiqi provides an example of an official having to publicly justify heavy investments into the space programme in the 1970s, previously unthinkable in Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 295.

<sup>74</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 296.

<sup>75</sup> Edelman Trust Barometer, Global Survey, (2018), 6.

<sup>76</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 294.

Ilya Kabakov was one of the most renowned artists of the time, as recognised by today's scholars. Officially working as a book illustrator throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he was a member of several underground artistic groups, the most influential of which were the Moscow Conceptualists. The movement took a different look at the Soviet reality. Rather than preaching the Soviet values like the state-approved realists or denying them outright like dissident artists, they took the role of observers, objectively documenting the life of Soviet people. This approach kept the Moscow Conceptualists on the sidelines of the Russian art scene, with them operating underground, garnering little recognition at home.

The installation *The Man Who Flew into Space From his Apartment*, 1985 is central to the understanding of the attitude towards cosmos by both the artistic community and broader society. It is the first in the series of installations by Kabakov called 'Ten Characters' which was showcased in 1988 in New York. The exhibition was structured as a communal apartment in which every room was devoted to a specific character created by Kabakov. The exhibition included numerous installations, such as *The Untalented Artist*, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, *The Man Who Flew into His Picture*, among others.

*The Man Who Flew into Space* tells the story of a regular occupant of a communal apartment who one day leaves the meagre accommodation of an unimportant Soviet man in the hope of reaching the outer space. The installation was created as a full submergence into the world of the character. Kabakov paints a realistic picture of the living conditions of an average Soviet man, showing and explaining all the forces that push the hero out for good. The author himself is nowhere to be found; he is right with the viewer, observing what happened from the sidelines. Instead, the accounts of witnesses are presented to help the viewer understand what happened in the room.

The three witnesses – Nikolaev, Startseva, and Golosov – have different roles in the installation. While Nikolaev appears to be privy to the hero's thought process and able to explain to the viewer the reasons behind the hero's flight, he also states right from the beginning that he 'didn't know him well'. Startseva's story passes on the senses and sounds of the act itself, creating a picture in the minds of the viewers. The final story by Golosov has the purpose of revealing the consequences of the event and reaction of the local authorities to the flight.

The first glance at the room reveals that what the viewer is looking at is the aftermath. There is no doubt that the flight already took place. The roof is blasted away, revealing a hole that can fit a human. The room itself is empty, short of a catapult the hero used for his flight, model of the local area with the flight trajectory marked out with a metallic thread, couple of run down pieces of furniture, and some rubbish on the floor.

Groys argues that the room 'looks like a crime scene'.<sup>77</sup> It is the opposite of what a state-approved space flight launch ground will look like. The character in question is neither a scientist nor a trained cosmonaut. The emphasis is on the fact that he is a regular soviet '*tovarisch*', who at some point decided to realise his dreams.

The walls give a bit more context to the past happenings in the room. The Soviet posters used by the hero as wallpapers are covered with pieces of paper filled with drawings of the catapult and some calculations. The posters are there for the reasons of thrift. Kabakov himself provides us with this context within the account of Nikolaev. However, there is some significance to the hero's choice of posters. Only one of them directly refers to the Soviet space programme itself. It is on the far wall, half concealed by the only painting in the room. It is a poster promoting a brief period of cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union called the Soyuz-Apollo project, which ceased around 1980 when Ronald Reagan came to power.

The rest of the posters are mostly concerned with everyday Soviet values. There are posters promoting sports and Olympic games, children and schools, and various industries, including machinery and construction. The lowest level appears to concentrate on the heroic nature of the Soviet labourer, with the images of Lenin repeated a few times. While the slogans seem to be recognisable and widely used, the images are not memorable and appear to be generic examples of mass-produced Soviet propaganda. Wallach identifies the positioning of the posters as celestial based on the colour scheme. Starting from heaven as the top level, through the everyday life in the middle to hell in the lowest row.<sup>78</sup> Although hell is visible outright with the red colour dominating the lowest level, the rest of the posters rather appear to be interchangeable.

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<sup>77</sup> Boris Groys, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006), 6.

<sup>78</sup> Anei Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 73.

Groys argues that the posters helped the hero realise his project, stating that 'he had accumulated the energy inherent in the posters... the collective energy of the Soviet people'.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, Wallach's argument is that the posters are partly the reason why the hero felt the necessity to fly into space.<sup>80</sup> The reality is most likely somewhere in between. As a child of his time, Kabakov's hero attempted to live according to the official Soviet values. He even made his home in such a way to be constantly reminded of what he is supposed to think and stand for. However, as the hero puts it to Nikolaev, 'he wasn't quite an inhabitant of the Earth'. He does not feel that he belongs to the society he is in and the only way for him is to fly away to 'where he should be'. The posters in the installation represent the life the hero stopped associating himself with, the life that is now hanging over his head like the Sword of Damocles.

Another factor that Kabakov himself calls 'a necessary condition for departure' is *kommunalka* (communal flat), which Kabakov identifies as one of the central points of his artistic interest.<sup>81</sup> Following the October Revolution, communal flats became the primary type of accommodation in the Soviet Union until the early 1970s. In shared living spaces, where a small room of 80 sq. ft. potentially housed two generations of an entire family and privacy was non-existent, a person had to develop special behaviours that would allow him or her to exist in such conditions. Speaking your mind was unthinkable, for the fear of imprisonment, just as much as bringing good news, as that could cause envious retribution from your neighbours. This was very familiar to Kabakov, who identified his whole life in the Soviet Union in exactly the same way.<sup>82</sup> From a very young age he developed an *alter ego* that comfortably existed in public, while keeping his actual thoughts and desires hidden. Kabakov projects this double personality trait onto the hero of the installation by placing him in the communal apartment.

The only painting in the room is a picture of the Spasskaya tower being launched into space with thousands of people watching the spectacle. From Nikolaev's account, a friend has brought it there. Strangely, it does not feel out of place in the room full of propaganda posters. In a way, it identifies the climax of the real Soviet ideology. A spaceship into which, one can guess, only a selected few are allowed is taking off for the outer space, realising the Utopia, while the rest of the people are left behind on Earth.

Kabakov is considered to be at the heart of the second wave of Russian avant-garde, the wave that despite the name, has not associated themselves with the masters of the early twentieth century such as Malevich, Tatlin or Lissitzky. As Kabakov himself puts it, they are 'dead for him', as the avant-garde artists represent the past, which has no relation to the reality the artists have lived in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> It was not until 1970 that Kabakov even heard about those masters, by when he was almost forty and an already matured artist.<sup>84</sup>

Regardless of the apparent lack of connection between the two waves of Russian avant-garde, parallels are constantly drawn between the two periods. Kabakov's *Man Who Flew into Space* is one of the major examples of this. Vujosevic, Groys and even Kabakov himself compare the catapult that took the hero to the outer space to *Letatlin*, a winged apparatus created by Vladimir Tatlin in the early 1930s.<sup>85</sup> Both concepts are uncomplicated, although unique, and based on very straightforward principles. It is in their 'impracticality' and 'anachronism' that the scholars see a similar reach for Utopia.<sup>86</sup> Just as Tatlin knew perfectly well that *Letatlin* could not fly, Kabakov understood that a simple catapult could not actually send a man into space.

The utopian quest for a better life survived through the twentieth century and manifested itself through Kabakov. Just like early avant-gardists, Kabakov's hero is looking for a better life through the conquest of the universe. There is, however, one big difference. Whereas the art of Malevich and Lissitzky is removed from reality and constructed in a parallel plane, Kabakov places his hero right in the middle of the everyday. Malevich's New Man has to adhere to and recognise a certain new – Suprematist – world order to reach Utopia. Conversely, Kabakov's New Man concept includes and is accessible to everyone. The only requirement is the desire for a better life and willingness to act upon that desire.

The period under consideration coincides with the revival of the Cosmist ideas. The first book of Fedorov's philosophy was officially published in 1982, which gave rise to new debates regarding the Cosmist ideology.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Groys, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, 73.

<sup>81</sup> Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, 74.

<sup>82</sup> Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, 31.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with David A. Ross in *Ilya Kabakov*, eds. Groys, Boris, David A. Ross, and Iwona Blazwick, (London: Phaidon, 1998), 13.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with David A. Ross in *Ilya Kabakov*, eds. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Groys, *Ilya Kabakov. The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, 12; Tijana Vujosevic, "The Flying Proletarian: Soviet Citizens at the Thresholds of Utopia", (*Grey Room*, no. 59 (Spring 2015):78–101), 96; Ilya Kabakov, *Texts*, (Moscow: German Titov), 188.

<sup>86</sup> Vujosevic, "The Flying Proletarian: Soviet Citizens at the Thresholds of Utopia", 96.

<sup>87</sup> Young, *The Russian Cosmists*, 219.



Kabakov's hero has several things in common with Fedorov's *Philosophy of Common Task*. In agreement with Fedorov, he puts science on a pedestal, relying solely on scientific methods in his quest. Second, the flight to the cosmos and idea of appropriating the outer space for the purpose of living are the ultimate accomplishments that in Fedorov's mind will bring Utopia to life. However, where Fedorov sees the act as a collective effort undertaken by society as a whole, Kabakov's hero is completely alone. Although Nikolaev hints at a possible collaborator, there is no actual proof of anyone else participating in the project.

Another idea that Kabakov was the first to bring to the table is the concept of the right moment. The hero of the installation had to find a precise moment when, according to his calculations, he could have been lifted by the energy forces and taken into the outer space. This is something Kabakov struggles with on his own. In his own words: 'For as long as I can remember myself I remember the desire to escape the place I was in... and although more often than not I knew what I was running from, I did not know how or when it should be realised.'<sup>88</sup> Within the concept of the installation, the hero has to find a precisely right moment, otherwise his endeavour will fail.

Kabakov's hero is not a dreamer. He is a child of Khrushchev's generation who places his trust in scientific research and nothing else. However, Communism cannot take him to space anymore. Despite being a proper Soviet citizen, he is deprived of his happy ending.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, he takes matters into his own hands, going for it on his own, leaving the Soviet Union along with all its ideology, posters and communal living behind. He consciously removes himself from the collective and takes responsibility for his destiny. *The Man Who Flew into Space* takes back his liberties and individualism from the Soviet government, and by doing so, he concludes the circle started by the first avant-garde wave, where the dream of flying gradually turns from a private endeavour to the collective mission.

The primitive nature of the equipment the hero uses to reach his goal unavoidably raises questions about the success of his mission. Within the story, it can be seen that the police never recover the body of the 'cosmonaut'; however, his true fate is concealed. What we are left with is a pile of garbage, which in Kabakov's interpretation stands for the all of the past of the hero.<sup>90</sup> The final question is left with the viewer. Was the mission successful? Has he reached the Utopia he was looking for, or did the project fail? And if he did succeed, did the Utopia he found live up to his mental image?

Kabakov emigrated to the West in 1988, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union and only three years after creating the 'illegitimate cosmonaut',<sup>91</sup> directly following the footsteps of his own hero.

## Conclusion

The idea of the cosmos in the Russian art underwent two important transformations throughout the twentieth century: the move from abstracted to material representation and the move between space travel being a collective and private endeavour.

Upon the fulfilment of the long-awaited dream of space flight, the representation of the cosmos in art became less abstract. During the first decades of the century, the cosmos was present in the Russian avant-garde art as a visualisation of prime existential questions. In the works of Malevich, Lissitzky and others, the desire to fly (the *Letatlin*) or the desire to change the world (the *Tale of Two Squares* or the *Black Square*, among others) was represented through the cosmos, but the cosmos itself was not tangible at the time.

Once the space programme achieved its goals, successfully launching a man into outer space, the representation of space in art became more straightforward and unambiguous. The depictions of real cosmonauts, space stations and even cosmic landscapes strived to portray the cosmos as realistically as the censors would allow. The cosmos became a source of inspiration in its own right, even with the limited availability of information.

By the 1970s, the feeling of novelty dissipated. The idea of cosmos in art did not revert to abstraction and remained tangible, but its metaphorical role in art was revived. Specifically, the meaning Ilya Kabakov attaches to cosmos is the desire for a better future, the desire for 'somewhere else'.

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<sup>88</sup> Kabakov, *Texts*, 179.

<sup>89</sup> Maurer et al., *Soviet Space Culture*, 296.

<sup>90</sup> Boris Groys, *Papers about Ilya Kabakov*, (Moscow: AdMarginem, 2016), 31.

<sup>91</sup> A term used by Boris Groys in a number of publications referencing the work in question.

The shift between the space flights being a private endeavour and a collective mission of the whole country was not linear but circular. This transformation is closely related to the crucial role played by politics in the art's perspective of the space flights. The other two factors – the technological progress and the philosophical theories of the time – were only important during periods of their strongest influence on the society as a whole. The victory of 'collective' over 'private' was one of the main political messages of the Soviet Union. The 'private' represented Capitalism, the Tsarist Russia, and everything that Communism was striving to eliminate from the world.

Following the year 1917, the Revolutionary spirit and the yearning for artistic freedom awakened in the artists the desire to connect with the nation and achieve the new world through their art. As the concept of the new world was associated by the artists with the notion of the cosmos, the convergence of the avant-garde ideas with the ideas of the Revolution transformed the private dream of the space flight into a collective endeavour of the society as a whole. Lissitzky's *Tale of Two Squares* epitomises this notion of the emerging 'collective' Revolution.

As the Soviet regime developed, the sense of 'collective' grew stronger and, with it, the link between the Soviet Utopia and the outer space. 1960s saw the idea of space travel being the crown jewel of Socialist victories. The state brazenly promoted the idea that Communist regime alone made it possible, opening infinite possibilities for the Soviet people. Deineka's *The Conquerors of Space* reflects the strong feeling of national pride in its scale, metaphors, beautiful and strong heroes and the climax of the painting – a successful launch of the space rocket.

However, as the Soviet Union was approaching its collapse, the triumphant atmosphere faded and was substituted with nostalgic reminiscence. This was accompanied by the separation of the vision of the new world from the Communist regime in the minds of people and artists. They gradually stopped trusting the state to actualise the Socialist Utopia, and the vision of the space flight as the means to achieve a better future shifted back to individuals. Kabakov's hero reflects this reversal.

This leads to the conclusion that the twentieth century should be viewed in isolation when researching the representation of the cosmos in the Russian art. Therefore, the more fruitful expansion of this research could be in terms of depth rather than in terms of the length of the period considered. Exploring a wider range of art movements and including other branches of art like sculpture could add further insights into the topic. A particularly interesting route to take would be to consider the concept of outer space in the Soviet architecture, comparing its drivers to those of visual art.

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