1918: Russian Artists of the Anarchist Revolution

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Three artists spent the night in the mansion, since outside the museum a studio was set aside for making art. As the artists told it, that memorial morning We were awakened by shouts of "We'll shoot! Hands up!" Armed soldiers ordered them to get dressed, took them out to the courtyard and together with anarchists sent them off to the Kremlin." [1] This is Alexandr Rodchenko's description of the Cheka's raid on the anarchist-held Morozov Museum in Moscow in the early morning of April 12, 1918 published in *Anarkhiya* (Anarchy). The report survives as an undated fragment in the New York Public Library, where North America's only copy of the short-lived revolutionary newspaper was allowed to disintegrate, neglected and forgotten, until the remains were microfilmed some years ago.

The obscurity of *Anarkhiya* mirrors the fate of Rodchenko's anarchism. Open any history of the Russian avant-garde during the civil war and you will read how Rodchenko and his fellow artists threw themselves, organizationally and artistically, into the most militant phase of a Bolshevik revolution. [2] What this narrative buries, however, is a messy history of artistic rebellion and political repression which engulfed Rodchenko and other avant-gardists in the years 1917 through 1919, as they strove to transform art production into an anarchist quest for liberation.

In 1918 Rodchenko, spurred by calls for a revolutionary art in *Anarkhiya*, created a series of paintings entitled *Black on Black*. The April 1919 "Tenth State Exhibition: Non-objective Creation and Suprematism" was the venue where he first presented his work, accompanied by a manifesto entitled "Rodchenko's System." Rodchenko's manifesto effected a 'revolution of the psyche' that was steeped in the ideology of egoism then dominating the Moscow wing of the anarchist movement. As we shall see, it was also an important challenge to the anarchism of Kazimir Malevich, who encapsulated his revolutionary credo at the same exhibit in a cycle of White on White paintings. Rodchenko's paintings marked an important intervention in the Russian anarchists' "revolutionary art" debate. My purpose is to elucidate that intervention, the context in which it unfolded, and Rodchenko's retreat from anarchism in ensuing years.

Let us return to the night of April 11 through 12, 1918. The month before, on March 3, 1918, a delegation of Bolsheviks acting on behalf of the Soviet government concluded a separate peace with Germany at Brest-Litovsk, ceding a quarter of Russia's arable land, a quarter of its population, and three-quarters-of its industry to German imperialism. [3] Preceding the conclusion of negotiations the Bolshevik Party had split into a Leninist 'right' wing, which favoured a separate peace, and a more numerous left' wing, which opposed the action. The position of the Bolshevik left echoed the sentiments of the majority of workers and peasants' soviets, where negotiations with Germany were condemned and resolution after resolution called for a revolutionary war to defeat world capitalism. [4]

In the early months of 1918 anarchist opposition to the negotiations was unequivocal. Paul Avrich cites Aleksandr Ge, a prominent anarcho-communist, who delivered a speech at the Central Executive Committee of Soviets on February 23 in which he threatened: "The anarchist-communists proclaim terror and partisan warfare on two fronts. It is better to die for the worldwide social revolution than to live as a result of an agreement with German Imperialism." [5] Russian anarcho-syndicalists took the same position, calling for the organization of "relentless partisan warfare" by guerrilla detachments throughout the length and breadth of Russia. [6] And they were serious.

During February and early March the local clubs of the Moscow Federation of Anarchists organized detachments of "Black Guards," armed with rifles, pistols, and grenades in preparation for guerrilla war—or Bolshevik attacks. [7]

In Moscow there were at least 25 anarchist clubs where the detachments gathered. These clubs were more then meeting places; they were radical cultural institutions. [8] For example, the "Dom *Anarkhiya*" (House of Anarchy), where the federation's official paper *Anarkhiya* was published, also featured a library and reading room, "proletarian art printing" facilities, a poetry circle, and a large theatre hall. [9] The Morozov mansion discussed in Rodchenko's article was the former residence of one of the richest men in Russia. Under anarchist occupation it served as commune, artists' studio, and people's museum." [10]

The ostensible reason for the raids of April 1918 were a number of expropriations conducted by the Black Guards, but the real motivation was to shut down the anarchist movement. [11] Russian anarcho-syndicalist Gregorii Maximov's study of the repression of the Russian anarchist movement, The Guillotine at Work, contains a number of articles and related documents which lay bare the Bolshevik strategy. [12] The Cheka issued an official release in the wake of the raids declaring their purpose was to disarm "bands styling themselves as Anarchists." "The All-Russian Committee Against Counter-Revolution (Cheka)," states the release, "invites all citizens who have suffered from the attacks of robber bands to appear at the militia headquarters for the purpose of identifying the hold-up men detained during the disarming of the Anarchist groups." [13] Thus the anarchists were criminalized.

Simultaneously, the Moscow Council of People's Commissars, acting on behalf of the Moscow Soviet, branded them with an additional smear. The Council reported that "counter-revolutionary groups" had joined the Anarchist armed detachments in order to utilize them "for some kind of covert action against Soviet Power." Consequently "the Council of People's Commissioners, the Soviet and Moscow Province and the Presidium of the city soviet of Moscow found themselves facing the necessity of liquidating the criminal adventure, of disarming the Anarchist groups." [14] "Liquidation" has an appropriate ring in light of subsequent events. During the Cheka's surprise raids 40 anarchists were killed or wounded, and over 500 were taken prisoner. [15] In prison they were stripped and lined up for examination by "the well-to-do of the city—invited, as we have seen, by the Cheka to identify "thugs and bandits." [16] That morning *Anarkhiya* failed to appear and the next day the anarcho-syndicalist paper Golos Truda (Voice of Labor) was shut down. By the end of the week, writes Maximov, "not a single anarchist publication was left in the city." [17] Shortly afterwards the Bolsheviks moved against anarchists in every region under their control. [18] Maximov documents the progress of Bolshevik repression in late April and early May as anarchists were rounded up, their publications suspended, and their clubs and communes destroyed. [19]

In late April the Moscow Anarchist Federation regrouped and relaunched *Anarkhiya* for a brief period—one of its early issues commemorated the raids with a poem ("That Day") and a roughhewn woodcut of a defiant anarchist raising the black standard—but thereafter anarchist organizations operated under threat of repression, with increasingly grave consequences. [20] And the persecution broke up the anarchist ranks.

Some went underground to launch an anti-Bolshevik bombing campaign that brought waves of arrests in 1919. [21] Others threw themselves into the struggle to defeat the Whites and served in the Red Army. [22] A number even joined the government as loyal "Soviet-Anarchists," only to be jailed in the early 1920s. [23] For a time the Ukrainian anarchists of Nestor Makhno's insurrectionary army escaped the repression and provided refuge for those fleeing the Bolshevik clamp-down, but when the civil war ended they too were crushed. [24]

Who were the artists of the anarchist movement during these turbulent years? To Rodchenko's name we can add a host of other avant-garde artists and theoreticians: Rodchenko's wife, the nonobjectivist painter Vavara Stepanova; Alexei Gan, who organized the House of Anarchy's "proletarian theatre" group; the young worker-artist A. Lukashnin'; K. Malevich, leader of the Suprematist school of painters; the painter Nadezhda Udaltsova (a Suprematist); the poets Vladimir Mayakovskii and Vasilii Kamenskii who, along with Futurist painter David Burliuk, founded the anarchist "House of Free Art" club in Moscow; and Vladimir Tatlin, the path-breaking avant-garde sculptor. [25]

The key anarchist journal where these artists debated the events of their time and art's relation to the revolution was *Anarkhiya*.

They chose *Anarkhiya*, I would argue, because they shared the individualist, working-class orientation of the journal and the Moscow Federation which it represented. The Federation's secretary, Lev Chemyi, was an uncom-

promising individualist who expounded an "associational" anarchist individualism derived from the 19th century German anarchist, Max Stirner, author of the anti-statist individualist manifesto, *The Ego and His Own* (1848). [26] Chernyi's position—that only the free association of independent individuals could provide the foundation for an anarchist society—was seconded by *Anarkhiya*'s editor, German Askarov, who was firmly' opposed to any tendencies that undermined the freedom of the individual in the name of some higher collective principle. [27] In sum, Stirner's anarchist philosophy was an important current in the Moscow Federation, with its stress on individual autonomy, its emphasis on agitation among the working-classes, and its distaste for coercive statist and collectivist institutions.

The Ego and His Own presented a sustained argument that anarchist liberation could only be accomplished if all habitual subservience to authority ended and each unique ego became self-determining and value-creating. Anti-statism, Stirner argued, was an inescapable facet of egoism because when the individual achieved "self-realization of value from himself" he inevitably came to a "self-consciousness against the state" and its oppressive laws and regulations. [28] In fact, Stirner was hostile to any obligatory rules or regulations 'for the good of the collective' and derided all contemporary theories of socialism, including communism, for sanctioning them.

Free unions of egoists, he concluded, were the only social formation possible in a truly anarchist society. [29] Among the classes of his day Stirner singled out the proletariat—the "unstable, restless, changeable" individuals who owed nothing to the state or capitalism—as the one segment of society capable of solidarity with those "intellectual vagabonds" who approached the condition of anarchistic egoism which he propagated. [30] Liberation for the proletariat did not lie in their consciousness of themselves as a class, as Marx claimed. It would only come if the workers embraced the egoistic attitude of the "vagabond" and shook off the social and moral conventions that yoked them to an exploitive order. [31] In other words, for Stirner, the true revolution lay in each proletarian's egoistic psyche: this would set the revolt against the state in motion. Once the struggle for a new, stateless order was underway the vastness of the working class ensured the bourgeoisie's defeat. "If labor becomes free" Stirner concluded, "the state is lost." [32] These were the proletarian, anti-statist goals Askarov, Chemyi and others propagated in *Anarkhiya*.

The Ego and His Own also contains an important critique of metaphysics and the capability of certain types of knowledge in the repression of the individual. Among the anarchists of the Federation A.L. and V.L. Gordin were the most radical proponents of this dimension of Stirner's thought. The Gordins were arch-materialists who argued religion and science were social creations, not eternal truths. [33] Their *Manifest Pananarkhistov* (Pananarchist Manifesto), published in 1918, opened with the following declaration: "The rule of heaven and the rule of nature—angels, spirits, devils, molecules, atoms, ether, the laws of God-heaven and the laws of Nature, forces, the influence of one body on another—all this is invented, formed, created by society." [34] Here the Gordins took a page from Stirner, who condemned metaphysics and dismissed the idea of absolute truth as a chimera. Stirner argued the metaphysical thinking underpinning religion and the notions of absolute truth that structured a wide range of scientific theories laid the foundation for the hierarchical division of society into those with knowledge and those without. From here a whole train of economic, social and political inequalities ensued, all of which were antithetical to anarchist egoism. Ideas, Stirner countered, were indelibly grounded in our corporal being. The egoist recognized no metaphysical realms or absolute truths separate from our experience; "knowledge," therefore, was ever-changing and varied from individual to individual. [35] The Gordins agreed, arguing that revolutionary knowledge should emerge from "inventiveness and practical aptitude, technical skill and muscle power"—the activity of labor—rather than from the "abstract reasoning" of the bourgeoisie. [36]

Hostility to abstract reasoning and bourgeois culture, militant individualism, and a belief in a new libertarian and proletarian era: these positions defined the Stirnerist anarchism of the Moscow Federation. And in 1918 they set the terms for debating the relation of art to the anarchist revolution in the pages of *Anarkhiya*.

On March 25, 1918, the anarchist Baian Plamen (pseudonym) published a "Letter to Our Comrades, the Futurists," in *Anarkhiya* that resonated with the Federation's antipathy for the culture of the bourgeoisie and the role of art under its patronage. Plamen railed against "socially passive Futurists" in the anarchist ranks who proclaimed their radicalism while serving "the bourgeois way of life" by decorating the cafes of the wealthy and designing useless "artifacts." [37] This was a swipe at Rodchenko, Udaltsova, and Tatlin, who, from July 1917 to January 1918, had designed a Moscow cafe-theater ("The Cafe of the Revolutionary City") for Nikolai Filippov, a wealthy capitalist

who owned most of Moscow's bakeries. [38] Under the direction of the Futurist Genii Yakulov the artists renovated Filippov's haunt in the latest avant-garde style. Rodchenko contributed hand-crafted lamps and other decorative elements; stylish tables and benches were made; and Tatlin and Udaltsova organized the construction of relief elements projecting from the cafe's ceiling and walls. [39]

The establishment opened on January 30th and quickly became notorious as Moscow's most radical artistic experiment. [40] However where the artists saw revolution Plamen saw co-optation. The criticism stung, and Tatlin quickly rushed to the defence with a rejoinder—"My Answer to 'Letter to the Futurists'"—in *Anarkhiya*'s March 29 issue. [41] Tatlin concurred with Plemen that art for the ruling class—"emperors and ladies"—was undesirable, but rejected Planem's claim that he and his followers were "futurists." Condemning the "isms" of the avant-garde as "the chronic sickness of contemporary art" he proclaimed his own work to be a new, revolutionary "gateway" through which-artists could "throw off the old to admit a breath of anarchy."

Tatlin's break with the "isms" of the avant-garde dates to the beginning of World War One. He had been painting in a variety of modernist styles ranging from Fauvism to Cubism, but in the winter of 1913 through 1914 he developed new art forms—the relief and counter-relief—that transformed the terms of avant-garde experimentation. In his reliefs, nonfigurative forms of various colors and textures (factures) were lifted from a two-dimensional surface and projected into space. Tatlin called the resulting compositions "selections of materials" because they were composed out of real elements with various structural and painterly characteristics. The next step was to break away from the surface entirely with the counter-reliefs, which were suspended in space by wires. These exhibited architectural characteristics, since the process of creation necessitated structural relations develop between the object's various components. [42] Thus Tatlin broke with avant-garde modernism on two counts. He developed new art forms (the relief and counterrelief) and he eliminated the metaphysical preoccupations driving Cubism and other avant-garde "isms" in favor of the "materials" of his creations. [43] The materialism of each element (surface, texture, color, structure, etc.): this was-the anarchist "gateway" through which he urged his comrades to pass. It remained for Rodchenko to give this passage an egoistic valiance.

By 1918 Rodchenko was well-versed in Tatlin's non-objective art, having met the artist in 1915 and-collaborated with him on numerous projects, including Filippov's cafe. He had also conducted his own experimentations with the properties of paint on canvas throughout 1915 to 1917, and by 1918 "color" was the element he made his own. Here is Rodchenko's description of his work, published in the April 28, 1918 edition of *Anarkhiya*: "Constructing projections on ovals, circles and ellipses, I often distinguish only the extremities of the projections with color, which gives me the possibility of emphasizing the value of the projections and the color, used as an auxiliary means and not an end. By thoroughly studying the projection in depth, height and breath, I discover an infinite number of possibilities for construction outside the limits of time." [44] Rodchenko's Construction of 1918 is an example of this phase of his production. In this work Rodchenko applied color in circles to bring out its properties of projection, creating 'forms' that emerge, recede, rise, and fall on a flat surface where the conventions of three-dimensional illusionism are totally effaced.

During this same period Malevich, leader of the Suprematists, was working with color and depth in his own abstractions. And, like Rodchenko, he published extensively in *Anarkhiya*, where he also laid claim to a relationship between art and anarchism. Malevich's nonobjectivism, first manifested in 1913 in the form of a stark black square painted on a white background, was rooted in the metaphysical mysticism of theosophy and notions of a "fourth" dimension beyond the sensate third. Noting that the basis of our perceptions were physiological, Malevich argued humanity was evolving toward a higher state of being that would unite us with all living things, and ultimately, the universe itself. Evoking the third dimensions of space and depth on two-dimensional surfaces using non-objective forms such as circles, triangles, squares and lines, his "Suprematist" paintings functioned as an analogue for the perception of this "higher" dimension, a dimension apprehended by a consciousness that was irrational rather than rational, 'felt' rather than grasped analytically. The hallmark of this consciousness was "simultaneity"; freed of third-dimensional moorings, things once separate and distinct merged, defying all logic and common sense. [45] This illogic formed the basis for the poetics of Suprematism's most important literary allies, Alexei Krucherlykh and Velimir Klebnikov, who utilized trans-rational language (zuam) to create "unresolved dissonances" that tapped our inner psyche and opened us to "simultaneity." [46]

At the turn of the century many anarchists, artists included, fused speculative mysticism with revolutionary politics. For Malevich and his allies the Russian revolution signaled that Suprematism's time had arrived and he propagated this idea in *Anarkhiya*, where he declaimed Suprematist "egoism" as the visionary individualism of the anarchist revolution. For example, *Anarkhiya*'s March 27, 1918 issue featured a proclamation by Malevich entitled "To the New Limit" which ran: "We are revealing new pages of art in anarchy's new dawns…The ensign of anarchy is the ensign of our 'ego,' and our spirit like a free wind, will make our creative work flutter in the broad spaces of the soul. You who are bold and young…Wash off the touch of dominating authorities. And, clean, meet and build the world in awareness of your day." [47]

Asserting the revolutionary hegemony of Suprematism, Malevich was more than ready to take on his non-objectivist rivals. In the same issue of *Anarkhiya* (March 29) where Tatlin's reply to "Plamen" appeared he published his own "Reply" in which he blasted the "counterrevolutionary" cafe art of Taft and his comrades and dismissed their artistic anarchism as a "revolt" against tradition that paled in comparison with the Suprematists' spiritual-artistic revolution, which had pushed humanity to "the limit of an absolutely new world." [48]

1918 also saw Malevich embark on a series of paintings that were unprecedented in his production. This cycle—the White on White paintings—was unveiled on April 27, 1919 at the "10th State Exhibition Of Non-objective Creation and Suprematism." Malevich's accompanying statement, entitled "Suprematism," elucidated the aim of his latest work. [49] Hitherto the Suprematists had painted color forms floating against a white ground. Non-objective for and pure color had overcome the old artistic practice of representation and its methods of color-mixing that simulated "things and objects," however the persistence of color frustrated Malevich because aesthetic deliberations over the arrangement of color were far removed from the higher Suprematist state of mind. [50] Even if an artist's work was "constructed abstractly but based on color interrelations," Malevich wrote, his will would remain "locked up" by "the walls of aesthetic planes, instead of being able to penetrate philosophically."" [51] The move to White on White broke through this limitation, liberating the artist to approach the new Suprematist consciousness in a medium from which the old world was finally, completely purged. Devoid of color, the White on White forms dissolved into a void. In "Suprematism" Malevich celebrated the new-found liberation of his egoist "will," free to soar, uninhibited, beyond the known world, writing: "I am free only when—by means of critical and philosophical substantiation—my will can extract a substantiation of new phenomena from what already exists. I have breached the blue lampshades of color limitations, and have passed into the white beyond: follow me, comrade aviators!…the white free depths, eternity, is before you." [52]

As we have seen, Malevich was just as committed to the anarchist revolution as Rodchenko, however their artistic differences were profound, and at the April 1919 exhibit this became clear to all concerned when Rodchenko's *Black on Black* paintings and his manifesto, "Rodchenko's System," faced off, literally, against Malevich's "Suprematist" statement and his *White on Whites*. During the days leading up to the exhibition Rodchenko's wife and fellow non-objectivist Vavara Stepanova kept a diary where she discussed the critical purpose of Rodchenko's work. Throughout Stepanova called Rodchenko "Anti," a pseudonym of opposition and negation that Rodchenko apparently also used in *Anarkhiya*. [53]

The exhibition, wrote Stepanova, was "a contest between Anti and Malevich, the rest are rubbish. Malevich has hung five white canvases, Anti black ones." [54] Stepanova praised "Anti" for his powerful distillation of "pure painterly effects, without being obscured by incidental elements, not even by color." She also recorded her (and presumably Rodchenko's) view of the implications the *Black on Black* series held for Malevich. "Anti's works" were "a new step in painting after Suprematism…the destruction of the square and a new form, the intensification of painting for its own sake, as a professional feature, a new interesting facture and just painting, not a smooth coating in a single color, the most unrewarding—black." [55] We can probe the anarchist foundations of the "destruction of the square"—clearly a reference to Malevich—through a reading of "Rodchenko's System" as a step-by-step process of egoistic affirmation and negation. [56]

Let us begin with Stirner. "Rodchenko's System" opened with Stirner's most fundamental materialist axiom, "At the basis of my cause I have placed nothing," and its fifth aphorism was another passage from Stirner: "I devour it the moment I advance the thesis, and I am the "I" only when I devour it…The fact that I devour myself shows merely that I exist." These aphorisms hold the key to Rodchenko's manifesto, but to grasp their import we have to return, once more, to The Ego and His Own.

In the section of his book entitled "The Owner," Stirner argued the self-affirming ego "devoured" everything, even the very notion of an "I." Positing the notion of an "I", Stirner argued, assumed there was an absolute condition of "being" that transcended our uniqueness. Such "Absolute thinking," wrote Stirner, "is that thinking which forgets that it is my thinking, that I think, and that it exists only through me. But I, as I, swallow up again what is mine, am its master; it is only my opinion which I can at any moment change, i.e. annihilate, take back into myself and consume." [57] For Stirner the sensuous, devouring ego was the irreducible core of uniqueness and the cornerstone of the mastering "I" that had no essence; that was, in effect, the "nothing" at the foundation of his philosophy. "I am not an ego along with other egos," wrote Stirner: "I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique that I take everything for my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop man, nor as man, but as I, I develop—myself. This is the meaning of the—-unique one" [58]

Suprematism celebrated the evolution of humanity. Malevich's anarchist ego was a manifestation of a dawning collective consciousness that penetrated to a realm which was unabashedly metaphysical. Far from asserting uniqueness, the transrationalism of Malevich and his poetic allies sought to break down the 'false' barriers separating the self and the universe. In Stirnerist terms, this was just one more instance of groveling subservience to a mysterious 'higher' condition apart from the self,

Quoting Stirner, Rodchenko set himself against all this; in fact, he 'devoured' it. For his second aphorism ("colors disappear—everything merges into black") Rodchenko took a passage from Kmchenykh's transrational play *Gly-Gly*, a play in which Malevich and Knichenykh both figured as dramatis personae. [59] Putting this transrational poet into service to trumpet Rodchenko's paintings was an egoistic put-down that would not have been lost on Malevich. An aphorism from the German psychologist Otto Weininger's book *Ober die letzten Dinge* (1907) and two quotations from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) served the same end. Here Rodchenko transformed Weininger's psychological insight into an elliptic commentary on himself. By "murdering" Suprematism he was achieving "self-justification" of a consummately egoistic sort, since, following Stirner, the "self" that justified the act was itself devoid of an "essence." it was the "nothing" that the "murderer" aspired to prove." Finally, the Whitman passages, which praised the invigorating role death plays in the process of life, indicated that Rodchenko's "voyage of the soul" necessitated both deaticin (his paintings) and negation (again, Suprematism) and introduced the affirmative section of "Rodchenko's System."

Alluding to his debt to Tatlin, Rodchenko attributed his own "assent' to the downfall of all "isms," including Suprematism, whose "funeral bells" were rung by the *Black on Black* series. From this point on the motive of his work, wrote Rodchenko, would be "invention (analysis)" utilizing the material constituents of the object ("painting is the body") to "create something new from painting." Once through Tatlin's "gateway," Rodchenko's egoist anarchism stripped art of metaphysics and distilled its base elements, the painterly "body" and the creative "spirit." Having mastered the "isms" of the avant-garde he would now master painting itself, moment by moment, in a process of free invention. These-were the qualities Stepanova celebrated in her diary, where she wrote that "Anti", the "analyst" and "inventor," created work that presented nothing but "painting." The Black on Blacks held no room for color," and their facture gained an extraordinary presence as a result. [60] In her diary Stepanova related that the "lustrous, matte, flaky, uneven, [and] smooth" surfaces of the *Black on Blacks* so impressed the anarchist painter Udal'tsova that she asked for one to be taken down so that she could feel it. The exhibition, Stepanova concluded, was a tremendous success for "Anti" and "his mastery, his facture." [61]

In *The Revolution of Everyday Life* Raoul Vaneigem has observed that each artist creates "with the mission of completing his personal self-realization within the collectivity." "In this sense," he argues, "creativity is a revolutionary act." [62] In early 1919 Rodchenko proclaimed his creative ego embodied the goals of revolutionary Russia, but could his painterly anarchism ever hope to overcome the Bolshevik reign of terror, repression, and ideological assaults then besieging that revolution?

Rodchenko's plight recalls the plaintive objections he once raised in *Anarkhiya* during the revolution's hopeful early days. [63] He wrote of attending a meeting of the Marxist-dominated "Proletarian Culture" organization, where he had heard a vitriolic speech on "proletarian art-from one "comrade Zalveskii," who condemned Cubism and Futurism as the "last word in bourgeois art" and the antithesis of proletarianism. The pre-revolutionary Cubists and Futurists, countered Rodchenko, were "daring inventors" who, though "hungry and starving" under the

old order, had produced "revolutionary creations." The bourgeoisie "hated" the Cubists and Futurists because it "want[ed] to see only itself and its taste in the mirror of art." Now Zalevskii demanded that the workers emulate their oppressors. "But the worker," wrote Rodchenko, did not want to "strangle his brother, the rebellious artist." "I am sure," he concluded, "that working people want true creators, not submissive bureaucrats." Rodchenko voiced his objections freely in 1918 because he addressed a large working-class readership from the platform of a thriving anarchist movement. Though beset by adversaries he could still appeal to the readers of *Anarkhiya* for support and rally other artists to the cause of self-liberation. But by 1919 the movement had been smashed and its artists stood very much alone. The situation only worsened in 1920 as the Communist Party's drive to crush the anarchists reached its crescendo.

Rodchenko's decision to capitulate came in early 1921. Condemning artistic production as irrelevant "individualism," he and erstwhile anarchists Gan and Stepanova formed "The First Working Group of Constructivists" and drew up a statement in which they dedicated themselves to the design of useful objects guided by "the philosophy and theory of scientific communism." [64] The date of their manifesto—the 18th of March—has a grotesque finality that is not coincidental. The night before the Bolsheviks had crushed the last' flicker of resistance to their rule at the island fortress of Kronstadt, where a free Soviet held out for sixteen days until its rebellious inhabitants were subdued in an orgy of killing. [65] Alarmed by anarchist involvement in the rebellion the Cheka swept Russia's cities and towns, throwing hundreds of anarchists, including Askarov and Chernyi, into prison. [66] Plainly the time was ripe for a retreat into Marxist orthodoxy.

During the 1920s and '30s Rodchenko found his creativity increasingly hemmed in by Marxist ideologues who were only too happy to dictate the shifting terms of art's role in the Bolshevik utopia. The process culminated in the 1930s, when "Anti' took to painting bitter portraits of himself in clown suits (Romance, 1935), dressed up in the mirror image of the Communist bureaucracy's artistic circus. [67] Then only the Black on Blacks persevered as brooding, silent reminders of a freedom once gained, now obliterated.

Rodchenko (sidebar)

At the basis of my cause I have placed nothing.
—M. Stirner, "The Sole One."
Colors disappear—everything merges into black.
—A. Kruchenykh
Muscle and pluck forever!
What invigorates life invigorates death.
And the dead advance as much as the living advance
—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass.*
Murder serves as a self-Justification for the murderer. He thereby aspires to prove that nothing exists.
—Otto Weininger, *Aphorisms*
I devour it the moment I advance the thesis, and I am the "I" only when I devour it.
The fact that I devour myself shows merely that I exist.
—M. Stirner.

Gliding o'er aft through all, Through Nature, Time, and Space. As a ship on the waters advancing, The voyage of the soul—not life alone, Death. many deaths I'll sing.
—Walt Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*

The downfall of all the "isms" of painting marked the beginning of my ascent.

To the sound of the funeral bells of color painting, the last "ism" is accompanied on its way to eternal peace, the last love and hope collapse. and I leave the house of dead truths.

The motive power is not synthesis but invention (analysis). Painting is the body, creativity the spirit. My business is to create something new from painting, so examine what I practice practically. Literature and philosophy are for the specialists in these areas, but I am the inventor of new discoveries in painting.

Christopher Columbus was neither a writer nor a philosopher, he was merely the discoverer of new countries.

That Oaf (sidebar)

Shots. Shots.
A crackling machine gun.
Again. Guns!
God! What is it? Why?
October, it's the same as then.
5 am. Morning
Jump out of bed.
Devils, Don't know. What they crushed. The Clubs. People, dull and rude. Don't know who they killed. They're bandits—they say—Criminal dirt, gathered at midnight.
People. Can't [see] their faces.

Notes

All quotations from *Anarkhiya* are taken from the New York Public Library holding unless otherwise noted.

1. Alexandr Rodchenko, "O Muzei Morozova," *Anarkhiya* n.d. This was the second installment of a two-part article:

2. With the notable exception of the German art historian Hubertus Gassner. See Hubertus Gassner, "The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization," *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* Exch. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 298–319.

3. Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 182.

4. Ronald I. Kowalski, *The Bolshevik Party in Conflict: The left Opposition of 1918* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 148–154.

5. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 182; citing *Pravda*, February 25, 1918, 2.

6. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 182.

7. Ibid, 183.

8. Gregorii Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work* (Chicago: Alexander Berkman Memorial Fund, 1940), 406.

9. Ibid, 408.

10. Rodchenko, "O Muzei Morozova," *Anarkhiya*, n.d.

11. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 184.

12. "The April Pogrom in Moscow," in Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 383–393.

13. "Release of the Extraordinary Committee to Struggle Against the Counter-Revolution (Cheka), *Znamia Truda*, April 13, 1918 in Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 383.

14. An Official Communication," *Znamia Truda*, April 13, 1918 in Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 384–385.

15.- Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 184.

16. Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 357.

17. Ibid, 356.

18. "Pogroms Follow in Petrograd and in the Provinces," in Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 396–404:

19. Maximov, *The Guillotine at Work*, 410.

20. "TofDen," *Anarkhiya*, April 23, 1918. The artist and poet are not identified.

21. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 189–195.

22. Ibid, 188–189.

23. Maximov, "The Persecution of the Anarchist Universalists," *The-Guillotine at Work*, 503–505.

24. For a history of Ukrainian anarchism see Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement* (1918–1921) trans. by Lorraine and Fredy Perlman.(Detroit: Black and-Red, 1974).

25. Gassner, "The Constructivists," *The Great Utopia*, 303; the 'activities of Gan and Lukashin have been gleaned from the pages of *Anarkhiya*; Tattin, Rodchenko, and Lukashin' were all members of the anarchist "Initiatory Group"

of artists. See the undated "Letter to the 'Federal Council of Anarchist Groups,'" reprinted in German Karginov, Rodchenko, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 60.

26. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 177

27. Ibid.

28. Max Stirner, T*he Ego and His Own* trans. by Steven T. Byington (New York: Benjamin.R. Tucker, 1907)

29. Ibid, 361.

30. Ibid, 414–415.

31. Ibid, 148–149.

32. Ibid, 150–151.

33. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 179.

34. Brat'ia Gordinii, *Manifest Panarzarkhistov* (Moscow: 1918), 5–7 cited in Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 177–178.

35. Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 180–190; 473.

36. Brat'ia Gordinii, *Manifest Pananarkhistov*, 29 cited in Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 178.

37. A.A. Strigalev and L.A. Zhadova, notes on Baiam Plemen [pseudonym], "Open Letter to the Futurists," *Anarkhiya*, March 25, 1918, in "Documents," Tatlin ed. Larissa Alekseevna Zhadova, (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 185.

38. Karginov, *Rodchenko*, 91.

39. John Miller, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); 127–128.

40. Karginov, *Rodchenko*, 92.

41. Vladimir Tatlin, "My Answer to 'Letter to the Futurists'," *Anarkhiya*, March 29, 1918 in Zhadova, ed. *Tatlin*, 185.

42. A.A. Strigalev, "From Painting-to the Construction of Matter," in Zhadova; ed. Tatlin, 19.

43. On metaphysics and Russian avant-garde art see Charlotte- Douglas, *Swans From Other Worlds*, (Ann Arbor: UM Research Press, 1976), 49–62.

44. Rodchenko, *Anarkhiya*, April 28, 1918 in Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), note 10, 32.

45. Theorists of the fourth dimension argued the passage of time we experience in the third dimension was actually movement in the fourth, hence the growth and decay of matter in time was a fiction that hid the universe' real, unchanging condition.

Evoking the idea of two-dimensional forms moving into three dimensions on the canvas alluded to our own movement in fourth-dimensional "hyper-space." See Linda D. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 274–299.

46. Charlotte Douglas, "Views From the New World: Kruchenykh and K. Malevich: Theory and Painting," *The Ardis Anthology of Russian Futurism*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer and Carl R. proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis Press, 1980), 361–362.

47. Kazimir Maleyich, To the New Limit," *Anarkhiya* March 27, 1918 in K.S. Malevich, *Essays on Art: 1915–1933* vol. 1, trans. by Xenia Glowachki-Prus. and Arnold McMillin, ed. by Troels Andersen, (London: Rapp and Whitling, 1968), 56.

48. Kazimir Malevich:" Reply," *Anarkhiya*, March 29, 1918 in Malevich, *Essays on Art* Vol. 1, 52–54.

49. Kazimir Malevich, Suprematism: Statements from the Catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition: Non-objective Creation and Suprematism in *Russian Art of the Avant-Guarde: Theory and-Criticism, 1902–1934* ed. and translated by John E. BowIt (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 143–145.

50. Malevich, Suprematism, Statements from the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition'," 144

51. Ibid, 1–45.

52. Ibid.

53. A fragment from the New York Public Library's edition of *Anarkhiya*—includes an article signed "Anti." Unfortunately too little of the article survives to analyse its contents.

54. Vavara Stepanova, "Notes from the Diary on the Preparation and Management of the 10th and 19th State Exhibitions," entry April 10, 1919 in Alexandr Rodchenko and Vavara Stepanova, *The Future is Our Only Goal*, ed. by PeterNoever, (Munich: Presetel-Verlag, 1991), 124. 55 Ibid.

56. Alexandr Rodchenko, 'Rodchenko's System,' Statements from the Catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition: Non-objective Creation and Suprematism,'" in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 149–151.

57. Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 453.

58. Ibid, 482–483.

59. Bowit, ed. *Russians of the Avant-Garde*, note 2; 305.

60. Stepanova, "Notes," entry April 10, 1919 in *The Future is Our Only Goal*, 125.

61. Stepanova, "Notes," entry April 29, 1919 in *The Future is Our Only Goal*, 126.

62. Raoul- Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans, by Donald Nicholson-Smith. (New York: Rebel Press, Left Bank Books, 1994), 113.

63. Rodchenko "O Doklad T. Zalevskago v Proletkult'," *Anarkhiya* n.d.

64. Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 94.

65. Paul Avrich, ed. *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Paperbacks, 1973), 138.

66. Avrich ed., *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, 156; Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 230 Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 230–31

67. Khan Magoinedov, Rodchenko: the Complete Work, 278

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