

Anti-Gravity to Neo-Concretism: The Epodic Spaces of Non-Objective Art

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Abstract : Making use of the notion of 'epodic spaces' this paper presents a reconsideration of non-objective art practices, proposing alternatives to established materialist, formalist, process-based conceptualist approaches to such work. In his Neo-Concrete Manifesto (1959) Ferreira Gullar (1930-2016) sought to create a distinction between various forms of non-objective art. He distinguished the 'geometric' arts of neoplasticism, constructivism, and suprematism - which he described as 'dangerously acute rationalism' - from other non-objective practices. These alternatives, he proposed, have an expressive potential lacking in the former and this formed the basis for their categorisation as neo-concrete. Gullar prioritized the phenomenological over the rational, with an emphasis on the role of the spectator (a key concept of minimalism). Gullar highlighted the central role of sensual experience, colour and the poetic in such work. In the early twentieth century, Russian Cosmism - an esoteric philosophical movement - was highly influential on Russian avant-garde artists and can account for suprematist artists' interest in, and approach to, planar geometry and four-dimensional space as demonstrated in the abstract paintings of Kasimir Malevich (1879-1935). Nikolai Fyodorov (1823-1903) promoted the idea of anti-gravity and cosmic space as the field for artistic activity. The artist and writer Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (1878-1939) wrote on the concept of Euclidean space, the overcoming of such rational conceptions of space and the breaking free from the gravitational field and the earth's sphere. These imaginary spaces, which also invoke a bodily experience, present a poetic dimension to the work of the suprematists. It is a dimension that arguably aligns more with Gullar's formulation of his neo-concrete rather than that of his alignment of Suprematism with rationalism. While found in experiments with planar geometry, the interest in forms suggestive of an experience of breaking free-both physically from the earth and conceptually from rational, mathematical space (in a pre-occupation with non-Euclidean space and anti-geometry) and in their engagement with the spatial properties of colour, Suprematism presents itself as imaginatively epodic. The paper discusses both historical and contemporary non-objective practices in this context, drawing attention to the manner in which the category of the non-objective is used to categorise art works which are, arguably, qualitatively different.

Keywords : anti-gravity, neo-concrete, non-Euclidian geometry, non-objective painting

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