A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation

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I. Introduction

Between the years 1913 and 1924, Russian art didn't just evolve, it inverted. The country experienced World War I, the collapse of the Romanov Dynasty, and the Russian Revolution, events that radically changed how art was perceived and produced. What began as fragmented, spiritually driven avant-garde abstraction gradually became the language of revolutionary Russian propaganda. *A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation* explores that journey starting with Wassily Kandinsky's spiritual improvisations, Kazimir Malevich's alogical compositions, Natalia Goncharova's war ideology and Gustav Klutsis' bold propaganda revealing how the Russian art scene reinvented itself through political upheaval rather than in spite of it. This transformation reveals that abstraction was never isolated from politics; instead, it provided the necessary groundwork and visual grammar that would later shape revolutionary language.

II. Illustrations

Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 33 (Orient I),* 1913, oil on canvas, 101 x 113 x 5cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/2409-wassily-kandinsky-improvisation-33-%28orient-i%29)

Beginning in 1909, at the time he was living in Munich, Wassily Kandinsky started a series of paintings he titled *Improvisations*–each assigned a unique number and conceived as spontaneous expressions of inner emotion. During his time in Munich, he was engaged in the expressionist group called *Der Blaue Reiter* with the fellow artist Franz Marc. They focused on making spiritual, symbolic and abstract art, making it a key pioneer of 20th century modernism and paving the way for Kandinsky's fully abstract paintings. *Improvisation 33*, also known as *Orient I,* was a pivotal, semi-abstract work that marked the start of Kandinsky's transition towards pure abstraction and dissolving recognizable objects into pure form. Kandinsky became one of the first artists to paint completely abstract compositions. He frequently described experiencing color in musical terms, often theorizing it, such as in his famous 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* when he says "A Dresden doctor tells of a patient, whom he

characterizes as "spiritual and exceptionally superior," who finds that a certain sauce invariably tastes "blue" to him."[1] In it, Kandinsky is giving the color blue a taste, almost personifying it. This condition allowed him to experience colors as sounds and sounds as colors, a condition known as Synesthesia. Instead of painting recognizable objects, he wanted to free the viewer from the visual distraction of seeing a painting; making the audience feel it. Because of this condition, he used painting, color and form, as a tool to make the audience evoke the sensations triggered by vibration, pitch and sound.

Through the use of curved lines, fragmented compositions and diagonals, it becomes evident that many of Kandinsky's works, including *Improvisation 33,* refer to The Garden of Eden and the Orient. This evokes the idea of it being the archetypal spiritual origin point and the traditional biblical belief that Paradise was in the Middle East. This idea becomes obvious not only in this painting, but also in others, such as one of the same collection titled *Improvisation 27 (Garden of Love)* from the previous year, in which he used vibrant colors and highly gestural lines instead of literal scenes. Going back to *Improvisation 33,* in the lower left portion of the painting–and on the right side as well–appear to be an abstract representation of people, that given the subject of most of his works, they most likely represent Adam and Eve.

In the context of this exhibition, Kandinsky's *Improvisation 33* doesn't aim to represent the birth of revolutionary Russian propaganda, but the end of an era when art was spiritually grounded before it pivoted towards an ideological tool. By using theosophical and orthodox motifs, he conceived abstraction as a gateway to transcend into the beyond. While artists like Malevich and Tatlin wanted to dismantle both the artistic and religious tradition in Russia, Kandinsky remained rooted to the transcendental landscape of the early 20th century in Russia.

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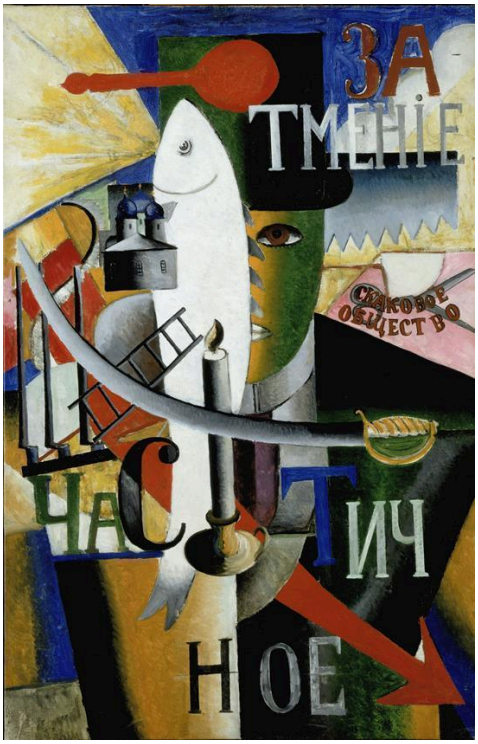
[1] Wassily Kandinsky, "The Effect of Colour," in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1911), 41.

In a sense, since *Improvisation 33* was painted in 1913–a powerful year in Russian art history–it acts as the threshold between spiritual abstraction and ideological abstraction. The visual language that began as a spiritual search for the divine, the beyond, would later be the base of the visual language of ideological abstraction.



Kazimir Malevich, *An Englishman in Moscow,* 1914, oil on canvas, 90.5 x 59 x 3.5cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/178-kazimir-malevich-een-engelsman-in-moskou)

Made only one year after Kandinsky's *Improvisation 33*, Malevich's *An Englishman in Moscow* is a cornerstone of the Russian alogical and Cubo-Futurist movements. Created during the height of Cubo-Futurism–a movement later described as anticipating Dada in its fragmentation and absurd juxtapositions–the painting embodies the societal fragmentation of the period. During the years 1912 to 1915, artists collaborated on manifestos and productions such as *Victory Over the Sun*, dismantling conventional representation of language and narrative. This painting also reflects the pre-war instability, which makes the absurd juxtapositions a mirror of society's fractured cultural hierarchy. After his brief studies at the Stroganov School of Art in 1904, Malevich gradually became more involved in Moscow's emerging avant-garde circles, an involvement that would intensify in the years leading to 1913. With the outbreak of World War I,

Malevich extended his art into satirical and patriotic posters known as “lubok,” suggesting an early intersection between avant-garde juxtapositions and propaganda.

By using fragmented and juxtaposed composition with colors, figures and cyrillic letters, Malevich isn’t criticizing English society as suggested by the title. Max Kozloff argues that the painting stages “the collusion of two forms . . . [which] illustrates the moment of struggle between logic, the natural law, bourgeois sense and prejudice.”[2] This suggests that this painting is less about a literal Englishman than about dismantling the cultural signs from the west, from European powers, as well as all Russian cultural signs and stereotyping the bourgeois. At its center stands a clearly recognizable human figure–half of his face is obscured by a fish–dressed in a top hat and a suit. Surrounding him are juxtaposed symbols: words and letter fragments, ladders, a lit-up candle, a spoon, an onion-domed church and a curved sword known as a “shashka.” These objects aren’t arranged hierarchically or narratively, denying perspectival stability and suspending the viewer in uncertainty. Several words are fragmented across the canvas, “ЗА ТМЕНІЕ,” translated to eclipse, “СКАКОВОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО,” translated to Racing Society and “ЧАС ТИЧ НОЕ” translated to partial– all broken into phonetic fragments. Their placement reinforces the themes of juxtaposition and instability. Language becomes unstable, mirroring the broader cultural dismantling in late Imperial Russia.

An Englishman in Moscow directly connects to the context of this exhibition as it marks a point where art was beginning to reintroduce symbolism while still maintaining formal fragmentation that reflects on the current situation of the country. By combining national Russian symbols in a fragmented, unhierarchical manner, Malevich’s goal was to dismantle Russian and

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[2] Max Kozloff, “Malevich as a Counterrevolutionary (East and West),” *Artforum,* September 2012, https://www.artforum.com/features/malevich-as-a-counterrevolutionary-east-and-west-212841/.

European identity. Méndez de Vigo argues that the alogical experiments of this period were not copies of Zurich Dada but developed independently as a critique of the dismantling of rationality and coherence.[3] In this sense, *An Englishman in Moscow* shouldn't be read as a Dadaist work, but as a parallel rupture within a different cultural context.

[3] Íñigo Méndez de Vigo y Montojo, foreword to *Russian Dada: 1914-1924,* ed. Margarita Tupitsyn *(MIT Press, 2018), n.p.*

Natalia Goncharova, *Angels and Airplanes, from War: Mystical Images of War*, 1914, lithograph, 12-13/16 x 9-3/8 in, Art Institute of Chicago. (https://www.artic.edu/artworks/122378/angels-and-airplanes-from-war-mystical-images-of-war)

Angels and Airplanes, from War: Mystical Images of War by Natalia Goncharova is a portfolio of 14 lithographs made in 1914, the year the war began, serving a patriotic purpose, inspired by traditional Russian lubki whose goal was to communicate news and spread political propaganda in a satirized way. In many of her lithographs of this portfolio, she referenced *The Book of Revelation* to frame the war as an apocalyptic struggle rather than a political conflict a series of catastrophic events unfold–plagues, war, beasts, angels–ending with a new heaven and earth; ultimately signifying Jesus' return and victory.

Natalia Goncharova was born in Chernsky Uyezd in 1881. She is considered by the scholar Anthony Parton to be a leading figure in the Russian avant-garde, pioneering the Neo-Primitivist movement during her time in Moscow's radical art scene, from 1909 until her

departure for Paris in 1914.[4] During those years, she was a founding member of various radical groups in Moscow, such as *Jack of Diamonds*, in 1910– featuring artists like her partner Mikhail Larionov, Pyotr Konchalovsky, among others–and *Donkey's Tail* in 1911–with contributions from Larionov, Malevich, Chagall and Tatlin.

Angels and Airplanes, from War: Mystical Images of War marks a shift in the Russian art, since it moved away from abstraction and transcendence into national identity and folklore. This lithograph utilizes a simple drawing style–consisting of flat figures, and a monochrome color palette and background. Goncharova makes the characters look like angels, which she positions in direct opposition to the airplanes with their long, sharp wings; by doing this, she portrays the war as something divine and extraordinary, rather than a mere political conflict. Anthony Parton notes that the airplane's descent at a downward trajectory–as if about to crash into the city–in apocalyptic terms, casting them as demonic squadrons that "are cast as the agent of evil, pitted against the forces of God," and the city is Babylon.[5]

Another aspect that is reminiscent of lubok prints is the halo positioned behind the angel's heads drawn from Orthodox icon tradition, a motif that Goncharova consistently borrowed throughout her career.[6] This divine juxtaposition however, contrasts with the sharp diagonals and angles throughout the entire lithograph, such as the bold, black lines and the harsh diagonals, mirroring the chaos that the world was experiencing with the outbreak of the war. Having chosen lithography–a printmaking process that involves in which an image is drawn onto a plate and then transferred through chemical means–over painting reflects the economic and

[4] Anthony Parton, "Introduction: Natalia Goncharova 1881-1962. The Journey," in *GONCHAROVA: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova* (Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 2010), 11.
[5] Parton, "Lifting the Veil: Abstraction and the Au-Delà 1910-1914," in *GONCHAROVA: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova* (Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 2010), 200.
[6] Jane Ashton Sharp, "Orientalism in Reverse," in *Russian Modernism between East and West* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 189.

political constraints Russia underwent at the time. Drawing was more economical and less time-consuming than painting, allowing Goncharova to quickly reproduce the design by pressing it, rather than re-painting the scene.

Within the framework of *A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation, Angels and Airplanes, from War: Mystical Images of War* sits at the threshold, the beginning of an era in which the Russian avant-garde started its transition from abstraction to political agitation. Yet the presence of divine imagery–angels and halos drawn from both divine imagery and the Book of Revelation–signals that this shift was not yet complete. Goncharova remained rooted in Kandinsky's ideas of art as a gateway to transcendence and spirituality.

Adolf Strakhov-Braslavsky, *The Language of the Revolution (Azbuka Revolyutsii),* 1921, lithograph illustration, 11 7/16 x 15 1/8, Museum of Modern Art, New York (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/16289)

By 1921, the Russian Revolution was at its turning point. What began as the February Revolution of 1917–the collapse of the Romanov dynasty–ended with the Bolshevik Revolution in October of the same year, leading to the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922. Since many Russians at the time were illiterate, the Bolshevik state started producing propagandistic posters with as little text as possible with the goal that people understand them without knowing how to read. This, however, was not the case for Strakhov's *The Language of the Revolution* which was "designed to impart civic values and a moral code to the new Soviet citizenry."[7] These posters were produced by art organizations created by the Russian state, one of the most notable being IZO Narkompros, created by the Bolsheviks at the height of the October Revolution. Artists like Malevich, Kandinsky, and Rozanova worked in these organizations–participation wasn't a choice but a condition of artistic survival.

[7] Jared Ash, "Popular Revolutionary Imagery, 1918-32," in *The Russian Avant-Garde Book 1910-1934,* ed. Margit Rowell (The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 158.

Adolf Strakhov-Braslavsky was born in Dnipropetrovsk–present day Ukraine–in 1896. Because of his production of paintings and lithographs dedicated to the Russian Revolution and Civil War in the early 1920s, he is considered a key pioneer in the socialist realism movement that would emerge in the early 1930s. This lithograph features propagandistic and patriotic imagery scattered throughout. The composition layers text hierarchically, from the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic header, to *The Communist Manifesto slogan,* down to the bold "Азбука Революции,"which gives the piece its name. On each side of the "Азбука Революции" there is a "N" and a "1" which signify the first issue of this azbuka alphabet. Directly below, there are the years spanning the Bolshevik revolution and the Civil War–from October 25, 1917 to November 7, 1921.

In the center of the composition, and as a way of "catching the eye," appear three characters that represent key figures of Russian folk, a worker in red, a peasant and a Red Army soldier representing the Soviet trinity of revolutionary types. They hold a banner that reads: "Вся власть Советам!" or "All power to the soviets!" represents one of the revolution's most iconic slogans. Below the main illustration, there is the letter "A" in all caps, red and bold, which resembles an illuminated drop cap, hence introducing the first word of the poem reading: "The arena of the world." Strakhov's idea was to create an *azbuka* or an alphabet, reminiscent of a children's book. It also includes a didactic poem that narrates the revolution as a story of collective suffering transformed into triumphal liberation by the Soviets.

Alongside the patriotic, revolutionary text, the poster is adorned with vivid imagery in a style evocative of traditional Russian lubok prints, reminiscent of a cartoon, though deployed toward an entirely different purpose. As the background, there is a sun setting with powerful rays piercing diagonally through the background and coloring the clouds on either side. On the

bottom part of the composition, there are cannons firing, and a tremendous amount of people in what looks like fighting. The ground in which the three main characters are standing has a forceful curving effect which makes it look like the world is small, the idea of nationalism, patriotism, striving to position Russia as the center of the world. The fact that the characters, the letters, and the banners are colored red was not incidental, but a conscious decision to make the poster look patriotic. Red not only symbolized the blood of the people, but beauty and honor as the word in Russian for red is krasny and for beautiful it is krasivy which are incredibly similar. Red became a symbol of high status, representing the Bolsheviks marking a new era for Russian culture.

This lithograph marks an era, not only in the context of Russian art, but also in the context of this exhibition. Given that it was made at the turning point of the Russian Revolution, Strakhov chose to use legible, symbolic imagery to impose a new identity, contrasting with Kandinsky's complete abstraction that transcended reality or Malevich's fragmented compositions that aim to dismantle Russian culture. Where Kandinsky sought transcendence and Malevich sought rupture, Strakhov sought to transform the avant-garde visual grammar into an instrument of the Bolshevik state.

Gustav Klutsis and Sergei Senkin, *Proletarskoe studentchestvo (Proletarian Student) no. 2,* 1923, journal with seven line blocks or half tone reliefs, 10 1/4 × 7", Museum of Modern Art, New York (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/298485?artist_id=12501&page=1&sov_referrer=artist)

Proletarskoe studentchestvo is the cover of the Soviet avant-garde journal of the same name, designed by both Gustav Klutsis and Sergei Senkin. *Proletarskoe studentchestvo* embodies the new visual language that Klutsis would later argue was necessary because traditional arts had become inadequate.[8] The cover reflects the emerging visual language of Soviet agitprop that Klutsis had pioneered in 1919 with his photomontage titled *Dynamic City*–a work he would later, in 1931, identify as "the first photomontage in the USSR."[9] Made in 1923

[8] Gustav Klucis, "Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art," in *Photomontage Between the Wars (1918-1939),* ed. Fundación Juan March (Fundación Juan March, 2012), 116.
[9] Klucis, "Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art," 116.

during Lenin's New Economic Policy, the cover's constructivist composition and lettering are fully attuned to the demands of revolutionary mass communication.

Formally, *Proletarskoe studentchestvo* reveals how the visual experiments of pre-revolutionary avant-garde Russia had to reorganize into a language of mass communication. Starting at the top of the cover, in small, yet bold letters, reads the phrase "Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!" which, just like Strakhov's *The Language of the Revolution* refers to the famous slogan of *The Communist Manifesto* translated to "Workers of all countries, unite!" In the context of Klutsis cover, it sits quietly at the top of the composition, functioning as ideological framing and setting the political tone rather than visual clutter. Directly below the line of *The Communist Manifesto* there is the main block of text in big, bold letters each interspersed with red and black, taking up much of the page. During this reorganization period, typography wasn't just seen as mere text, but as building blocks. Just like load-bearing columns, these letters were built to hold weight–to be unmissable and predominant on the page. The title of the journal, "ПРОЛЕТАРСКОЕ СТУДЕНЧЕСТВО" (Proletarian Student Body)–dominates the page, impossible to ignore. The choice of color isn't random, instead, it is tied to both politics and legibility, while red symbolized urgency, revolution and the Communist Party identity. Black on the other hand, represented authority, structure, and the color used on print worldwide. On the bottom left corner of the cover, written vertically in small black letters, there is "ОБЛОЖКА КЛУЦИСА" which means cover by Klutsis, its author. Including his name on the cover functioned as more than a credit line: produced in the same bold and geometric style as the rest of the composition, it signaled to the viewers that this journal was modern and revolutionary. The interlocking sections of text and the hierarchical writing of "МОСКОВСКОГО

СТУДЕНЧЕСТВА" is a reflection of the post-World War I and Civil War industrialization and its need to mimic dynamic movement such as that in cranes and factories.

As the final work in *A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation,* Klutsis' *Proletarian Student* represents the moment when the Russian avant-garde was absorbed into the structured language that would characterize the Soviet Union in the coming years. The trajectory of this exhibition demonstrates that abstraction was never politically neutral; rather, it generated the necessary tools that later enabled revolutionary communication. From Kandinsky's spiritual fragmentation to Malevich's alogical compositions and Goncharova's lubok-inflected symbolism, the avant-gardists created a system of visual grammar that destabilized traditional representation. In Klutsis' design, that visual vocabulary no longer appears as a rupture, but as a system–consolidated into instruments of collective communication. In this work, abstraction is no longer spiritual or destabilizing, but instrumental. What began as abstraction concludes as mass communication.

III. Annotated Bibliography

Ades, Dawn. "The Supremacy of the Message." In *Photomontage.* Translated by Elena Llorens Pujol. Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1976.
This book by Dawn Ades is a foundational survey of the photomontage medium, tracing its development from the Berlin Dada movement into Russian Constructivism. The chapter "The Supremacy of the Message" analyzes how the anti-art photomontages produced by George Grosz and John Heartfield transitioned to photomontages of political propaganda seen in the ones produced by Klutsis and Rodchenko. By distinguishing Dada's satirical photomontages from Soviet agitprop ones, this source provides a theoretical base for the context of *A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation.*

Ash, Jared. "Popular Revolutionary Imagery, 1918–32." In *The Russian Avant-Garde Book 1910-1934*. The Museum of Modern Art, 2002.
https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_155_300153266.pdf
This exhibition catalog by The Museum of Modern Art documents the role of the Soviet revolutionary printing culture between 1910 and 1934. Jared Ash's chapter examines how avant-gardists readapted their artistic practices toward state-commissioned propaganda following the October Revolution, analyzing the rise of key figures and institutions such as ROSTA and IZO Narkompros. Ash specifically discusses Strakhov's *The Language of the Revolution* and how it was a propaganda tool designed to transmit civil values to the Soviet citizenry. Because of this, it becomes essential for contextualizing *The Language of the Revolution* within the broader Soviet visual culture.

Bowlt, E., John. "A Brazen Can-Can in the Temple of Art: The Russian Avant-Garde and Popular Culture." *Modern art and popular culture: readings in high & low.* The Museum of Modern Art, 1990.
https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1764_300062991.pdf.
In the exhibition catalog *Modern art and popular culture: readings in high & low* published by MoMa, John E. Bowlt examines the relationship between the Russian avant-garde and the popular Russian visual culture. He argues that artists like Goncharova and Kandinsky drew deliberate inspiration from Russian indigenous traditions, including lubki and peasant crafts. Instead of adopting Western modernist viewpoint, Bowlt demonstrates that Russian avant-garde artists used that type of imagery to build a modernism that was distinctly Russian.

Bowlt, E., John. *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde Theory and Criticism 1902-1934.* The Viking Press, Inc., 1976.
https://monoskop.org/images/8/86/Bowlt_John_E_ed_-_Russian_Art_of_the_Avant-Garde_Theory_and_Criticism_1902-1934.pdf
This book by John E. Bowlt provides the readers access to the artist's own ideologies and ways of thinking. It compiles manifestos, key texts and critical writings from influential Russian avant-gardists such as: Tatlin, Malvevich, Goncharova, Rodchenko. It situates and exemplifies the avant-garde production to before and after the Russian Revolution. This book, since it features manifestos from important Russian artists, is key for interpreting and analyzing the artworks outside of formal analysis as well as to making

historical grounding on the historical context. Particularly useful in the context of this exhibition for analyzing the transition between the radical aesthetic theory and the rise of propaganda.

Burliuk, David, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Victor Khlebnikov. *"A Slap in the Face of Public Taste."* 1912. Translated by David Burliuk. *Marxists Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/mayakovsky/1917/slap-in-face-public-taste.htm
This futurist manifesto David Burliuk and other influential Russian avant-gardists rejects academic tradition and important literary figures. It calls for the overthrow of figures such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in favor of radical modernization. Similar to Dada's writings, it demonstrates the deliberate need to dismantle the tradition and culture in Russia and the west. It's an essential document to understand that rupture that defined Russian Futurism, and that some scholars compare to what in the later years would be coined as Dadaism. Useful for establishing the intellectual and cultural climate of upheaval that predates the era of state propaganda.

Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx. "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties." In *The Communist Manifesto.* Communist League, 1848. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm
Chapter four of *The Communist Manifesto* by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx outlines the position of the Communist Party in relation to its existing opposing movements. As a primary source, it's not an art historical source, but a foundational political document. For the context of this exhibition, it serves as a direct reference for the iconic slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!" that appears in both Strakhov's *The Language of the Revolution* and Klutsis' *Proletarskoe studentchestvo*. In both artworks, the phrase functions as ideological framing, rather than purely decorative text.

Tupitsyn, Margarita. *Russian Dada: 1914-1924.* MIT Press, 2018.
This monograph examines the concept that various scholars, such as Margarita Tupitsyn have coined as "Russian Dada." Tupitsyn explores the connections between Futurism, zaum poetry, suprematism and early propaganda and compares it to how Dada's texts and artworks sought to dismantle the notions of tradition and rationality. It situates the artistic productions within the political turmoil of World War I and the Russian Revolution. Because it provides both visual analysis and theoretical context, it is particularly useful for distinguishing between pre-Revolution alogical experimentation from the type of propaganda that would emerge in the midst of the revolution. Functioning as a critical source for ideological interpretation.

Kandinsky, Wassily. "The Effect of Colour." In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1911.
This chapter in Wassily Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is among the most influential sources for this exhibition. This chapter titled "The Effect on Colour" explains Kandinsky's relation to color and how he experienced it having synesthesia. It's

crucial for understanding the pre-revolutionary ideas art had, and how it got its transformative and radical power. Besides featuring foundational theory on how Kandinsky experienced color, it's written with a philosophical and metaphysical tone that outlines Kandinsky's complex relation with expressing the transcending, the inner necessity. It's useful to establish the foundations of early abstraction, through a type of art that's less concerned with radicality.

Kruchennykh, Aleksei. *Pebeda nad Solntsem (Victory Over the Sun).* Composed by Mikhail Matyushin. St. Petersburg, 1913.
This futurist opera production composed by Mikhail Matyushin combines transrational poetry, music and avant-garde stage design by Kazimir Malevich. By radically rejecting the traditional notions of narrative, language and realism, it becomes a key source when addressing the parallels between Swiss Dada and its equivalent in Russian culture. *Victory Over the Sun* marks a crucial moment for Suprematism because of the appearance of Malevich's *Black Square* used as the backdrop of the production. Since its more anarchical and anti rational than political, it's essential for understanding the ideologies that later paved the way to revolutionary propaganda, especially when analyzing Malevich's *An Englishman in Moscow* and other artworks by him.

Kozloff, Max. "Malevich as a Counterrevolutionary (East and West)." *Artforum.* https://www.artforum.com/features/malevich-as-a-counterrevolutionary-east-and-west-212841/.
In this *Artforum* essay, critic Max Kozloff argues that Malevich was fundamentally opposed to the political aim of the Revolution, therefore positioning Suprematism as an anti-rational philosophy that went against Bolshevik ideology. Kozloff's reading of *An Englishman in Moscow* positions it as a collision between the dismantling of bourgeois' logic, rather than as a political statement. This source is useful in order to establish Malevich as a figure of rupture in the avant-garde movement and whose ideologies were resistant to the visual language that later artists would embrace.

Klucis, Gustav. "Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art." In *Photomontage Between the Wars (1918-1939),* edited by Fundación Juan March. Fundación Juan March, 2012. https://monoskop.org/images/9/9f/Photomontage_Between_the_Wars_1918-1939_2012.pdf
This essay by Gustav Klutsis published by Fundación Juan March in the exhibition catalog *Photomontage Between the Wars (1918-1939)*, is a primary source in which Klutsis articulates with his own voice his own theoretical framework for Soviet photomontage. In it, Klutsis argues that traditional arts had become inadequate positioning photomontage as the next necessary visual language for the Soviet agitprop. Since it features Klutsis' own writing and ideas, it becomes an essential source for understanding the context behind *Proletarskoe studentchestvo* and broadly, the shift from abstraction to state-directed propaganda.

Parton, Anthony. "Introduction: Natalia Goncharova 1881-1962. The Journey." In *GONCHAROVA: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova.* Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 2010.

This book by Anthony Parton provides a comprehensive introduction to the artistic career of Natalia Goncharova beginning with her early developments of Neo-Primitivism, her extensive work in Moscow's art scene until her departure to Paris in 1914. Since this book is merely introductory about the artist, its use in *A World Upside Down: From Abstraction to Agitation* is purely for contextualizing the artist's role in the avant-garde scene, rather than to form an analytical opinion.

Sharp, Jane Ashton. "Orientalism in Reverse." In *Russian Modernism between East and West.* Cambridge University Press, 2006.

This chapter in *Russian Modernism between East and West* examines how Russian avant-gardists negotiated Western modernism and Eastern culture and how artists like Natalia Goncharova drew inspiration from Orthodox and folk imagery as a deliberate affirmation of Russian cultural identity against the modernism from the west. Though the chapter covers the broader argument about Orientalism and Russian national identity, it is useful for analyzing the motifs that Goncharova borrowed from Orthodox icon tradition.