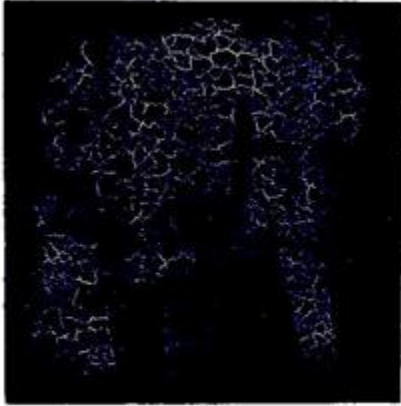


## “Black Square” - “MDM-18/My Dear Malevich”



“Black Square”, 1915



“MDM-18”, “My Dear Malevich”, 2007

What does finding Kazimir Malevich's “Black Square” in the form of a pixel (“MDM-18”/“My Dear Malevich”) - via a digitized portrait of Malevich - mean for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century digital art scene and as it relates to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Modernist Art? Does this singular pixel level arrangement echo back directly to Malevich's own totally abstract composition? The digital process becomes a metaphor for Malevich's own journey deep with himself - his discovery of the non-objective soul of art contained within the objective world as to constitute a form of visual poetry with his “Black Square” and other Suprematist forms.

Malevich, who died in 1935, may have been aware of the concept of a “picture element/picture point” - “Bildpunkt” (the German word for pixel) - in the 1888 German patent of Paul Nipkow. According to various etymologies, the earliest publication of the term “picture element” itself was in Wireless World magazine in 1927, though it had been used earlier in various U.S. patents filed as early as 1911. Nevertheless, was Malevich thinking in “pixels” without knowledge of the term and even many decades before the fact of the technology, which utilizes this basic component?

“MDM-18” and other pixelscapes from “My Dear Malevich” simulate the “0,10” exhibition in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg), Russia, 1915. It inaugurated a form of non-objective art called Suprematism.



“0,10” exhibition, 1915



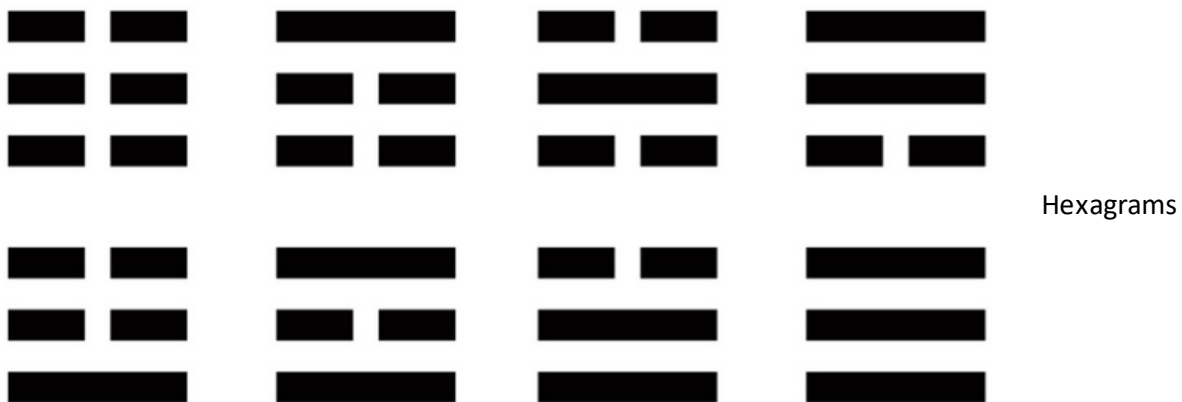
“My Dear Malevich” exhibition, 2007

The visual poetry (sensation) contained in “Black Square” and “MDM-18”/“My Dear Malevich” share the ironic connection between Modernist philosophy which moved visual art from figurative representational pictures of the physical world into an expressive and emotional world of abstraction, and the digital realm in which the purely abstract unit of one pixel off (0) - one pixel on (1), has been utilized to reproduce once again, the physical world to reveal the abstract soul at its very core. Non-objectivity permeates the various forms being produced in today's world of digitization re: the Arts. This abstraction (Glitch, Fractal, Algorithmic, etc.) moves towards the impersonal and detached just as Malevich's Suprematist works were viewed and ostracized as such by the Russian government at the time.

Malevich's philosophy re: Suprematism represented a complete break from past artistic endeavors. The result was a geometric form with the starting point – zero (0). Repeating the name of the exhibition, “0,10” at which he had launched Suprematism, Malevich established the concept of the “zero of form”. He wrote in From Cubism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism, “I have transformed myself in the zero of form.”

Perhaps the “void” (white space) as a part of his composition, “Black Square” could be viewed as “zero of form” – one pixel off (0) – and the black square as one pixel on (1). It is profound that the one pixel off – one pixel on combinations seen in the exhibition, “My Dear Malevich” simulate, or closely resemble many of the Suprematist paintings in the “0,10” exhibition. Just as his “Black Square” introduced a new way of perception, so has the binary system (0 and 1) facilitated process via the Digital Age (information and the Arts computerization).

The binary system (0 and 1) dates as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC. The “I Ching” binary system in China is based on the duality of yin (0) and yang (1). Malevich’s “Black Square” could be viewed as a yin-yang composition – yin, the “void” (white space) and yang, the black square. Gottfried Leibniz invented the modern binary number system (the basis for binary code) in the 1600s. Leibniz encountered the “I Ching”, and noted how its hexagrams correspond to the binary numbers from 0 to 111111. He saw the hexagrams as an affirmation of the universality of his own religious belief.



Malevich felt that art was a religion and Suprematism its Bible. Perhaps he viewed his Suprematist compositions much in the same way Leibniz viewed the “I Ching” hexagrams. It would be interesting to know if Malevich was aware of “I Ching” and Leibniz’s binary number system. There seems to be a blend of all of the aforementioned.

## Tom R. Chambers

Review by JD Jarvis, Art Critic/Artist and coauthor of "Going Digital: The Practice and Vision of Digital Artists" (ISBN 1-59200-918-2) [USA].

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