

16-mm film strips from Hans Richter's unfinished film based on Kazimir Malevich's 1927 scenario. c. 1970. © Hans Richter Estate.

Malevich and Richter: An Indeterminate Encounter

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A meeting between Kazimir Malevich and Hans Richter in Berlin in 1927 has led to much speculation about a “close” relationship and artistic collaboration between two titans of abstraction to create a film whose realization was tragically prevented by historical circumstances.¹ The primary artifact of this encounter is a scenario by Malevich, now part of the lore of our genesis narrative of avant-garde film. Yet nearly everything about this encounter is far more indeterminate, including the historical moment of Malevich’s conception of the film, the date of his execution of the scenario, the degree of communication between the two, and the relationship of the incomplete film that was actually made some forty-four years later to Malevich’s and Richter’s ideas about abstract film. Surviving in 16-mm strips in Richter’s estate and in rushes and work prints at the Getty Research Institute, the film remained incomplete largely because its makers, Richter and his cameraman, Arnold Eagle, could no longer discern for themselves whether the creator was Richter or Malevich (they hoped for the latter). Is this perhaps an indication of a true collaboration after all, albeit one largely deconstructed by considerable expanses of time and intellectual distance? If so, what does the film embody, Malevich’s filmic space or Richter’s notion of “film as movement”?

Surviving documents afford a framework for investigation. They begin in the context of Malevich’s 1927 visit to Berlin, the purpose of which was primarily to show some seventy artworks at a special installation in the Novembergruppe’s Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung.² He had made a stop en route in Warsaw (March

1. For example, Werner Haftmann in his introduction to *Kasimir Malewitsch: Suprematismus—Die Gegenstandlose Welt*, trans. Hans van Riesen (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1962), p. 24. Margarita Tupitsyn describes a “close” relationship that inspired Malevich to write the scenario, Margarita Tupitsyn, *Malevich and Film* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, 2002), pp. 57–58. A similar account is offered in R. Bruce Elder, *Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-Garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), p. 168, n. 7.

2. The exhibition took place May 7–September 30, with the Malevich section opening May 14, organized by the Kartell der vereinigten Verbände bildende Künstler Berlin. Troels Andersen, *Malevich: Catalogue raisonné of the Berlin exhibition 1927* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1970), pp. 57–58.

8–27), where his works were exhibited at the Polonia Hotel and where he also lectured and was feted with a banquet that included many of the luminaries of the Constructivist-inflected Polish avant-garde. He traveled on to Berlin in the company of Polish poet Tadeusz Peiper, arriving on March 28 and staying until June 4. While some accounts have Malevich creating the scenario in Berlin as a specific response to Richter,³ it is as likely that the scenario that he would eventually hope to share with Richter—appearing in manuscript on three pages with explanatory color drawings—was created by Malevich in the USSR on the eve of his departure to Europe, which took place on March 1, 1927. The scenario was intended for a scientific-popular animated film, for which Malevich invented his term “Artistic-Scientific Film.” The scenario used devices that had by then been well developed by the Russian avant-garde, including moving geometric forms, which had previously been explored typographically in El Lissitzky’s *Tale of Two Squares* (1922) and on stage in Nina Kogan’s presentation in Vitebsk of a Suprematist ballet involving geometric figures that enclosed and concealed performers.⁴

In a letter sent in the days before his departure from Moscow, Malevich informed his wife, Natalya Andreevna Malevich (née Manchenko, 1900–1990), on February 23, 1927: “I’m on my way to the film studio. They want to make a Suprematist film. It seems that Suetin will have to do it, the animators will come to him.”⁵ In another letter around this time, he informs his assistants in Leningrad—the painters Boris Vladimirovich Ender (1893–1960) and Nikolai Mikhailovich Suetin (1897–1954) of negotiations with official powers regarding the making of the film and about the supposed arrival of a group of animator-cinematographers for its realization:

Evidently the Suprematist film will be realized and animators and also filmmakers will come to you. You, Nikolai Mikhailovich, need to be ready, that is, to show how Suprematist elements can be organized in space and how architectonics can be made from them. . . . It’s necessary to show the entire development of spatial Suprematism via aérovision, dynamism, statics, and the gothic style.

Hello to everyone, I’m leaving Monday. Awaiting more of your letters in Warsaw.⁶

3. Hans von Riesen, “Malewitsch in Berlin,” in *Avantgarde Osteuropa 1910–1930* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst [Kunstverein Berlin], 1967), p. 25; Oksana Bulgakowa, “Malevich in the Movies: Rubbery Kisses and Dynamic Sensations,” in Kazimir Malevich, *The White Rectangle: Writings on Film* (Berlin and San Francisco: Potemkin Press, 2002), p. 13.

4. The extra-filmic influences on Malevich’s scenario are discussed in Aleksandra Shatskikh, “Malevich and Film,” *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 138, no. 1084 (July 1993), p. 478.

5. *Malevich o Sebe; Sovremenniki o Maleviche: Pis'ma, Dokumenty, Vospominaniia, Kritika* [Malevich about himself; Contemporaries about Malevich: letters, documents, memoirs, criticism], vol. 1: ed. I. A. Vakar and T. N. Mikhienko (RA Moscow, 2004), doc. no. 3, p. 255. Translations from Russian throughout this article are by Oleg Ivanov.

6. *Ibid.*, doc. no. 150, p. 184.

This group was supposed to be headed by the painter and director Zinovy Petrovich Komissarenko (1891–1978), who had briefly studied in Malevich’s studio in the Moscow State Free Art Studios, which gives credence to the suggestion that Malevich’s scenario, in the polished and final form in which it currently exists, was created by the author before his departure to the West, as bureaucratic conditions mandated that the scenario be presented to a commission for approval before its realization would be permitted. Instructing his assistants and helpers concerning what had to be presented to the group of cinematographers and how, and making Suetin responsible for following these instructions, Malevich took his scenario along with his entire archive to Europe. But this plan for the making of the film was not carried out.

Upon arriving in Berlin, Malevich took up residence with the von Riesen family, German nationals who had lived in Moscow prior to 1915. One of the sons, Alexander von Riesen (1892–1964), assumed the role of Malevich’s interpreter. With the help of architect Hugo von Häring, Malevich made a crucial visit to the Dessau Bauhaus with Pieper,⁷ which in turn allowed him to meet with Walter Gropius and Lázló Moholy-Nagy, who engaged him to contribute a volume to the Bauhausbücher series entitled *Die gegenstandlose Welt*.⁸ Part II of this volume, entitled “Suprematismus,” bears a very close relationship to Malevich’s film scenario, as it articulates in greater depth what the film scenario outlines. But if the book delves more deeply into the meaning of non-objective art (as an expression of pure feeling and seeking no practical values) and uses reproductions of Malevich’s drawings where the scenario employs diagrams, they both reinforce the idea that the film was conceived with the didactic purpose of illustrating how Malevich’s Suprematism might be seen to progress from the *Black Square* (1913) through circles of various colors and on to relationships among forms that evolve eventually into spatial structures, culminating in a new Suprematist architecture. The gist of this text—and hence the basis of the film scenario—was largely conceived by 1925.⁹

Clearly aware of Richter’s films,¹⁰ Malevich sought out the director, commu-

7. The visit is recounted in Tadeusz Pieper, “W Bauhausie,” in *Zwrotnica* no. 12 (Kraków: 1927), translated as “At the Bauhaus” in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, ed., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 628–32, and in von Riesen, “Malewitsch in Berlin,” in *Avantgarde Osteuropa*, pp. 22–25.

8. Kazimir Malevich, *Die gegenstandlose Welt*, Bauhausbücher no. 11, trans. Alexander von Riesen (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1927); a reprint edition with the Russian text as a supplement and an excellent introduction by Stephan von Wiese is *Die gegenstandlose Welt* (Mainz; Berlin: Kupferberg, 1980); an English translation was based on the German (the original Russian text was lost at the time): Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World* (Chicago: Paul Theobald & Co., 1959).

9. The various versions of the book are discussed in Kazimir Malevich, *The World as Non-Objectivity: Unpublished Writings 1922–1925*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1976), pp. 363–68.

10. Information about Richter’s films had been included in Ludwig Hilbersheimer, “Dinamicheskaia zhivopis,” in *Kino-Fot* 1 (1922), p. 7, the first issue of Aleksei Gan’s Constructivist periodical.

nicating with him through von Riesen as interpreter.¹¹ Meeting with Richter and seeing his films confirmed the Russian artist in his belief that the German director could realize his scenario. That Malevich was not able to conduct any negotiations on this matter was likely owing to the language barrier separating them as well as his extremely tight schedule in Berlin.¹²

When his request for the extension of his visa was denied by Soviet authorities at the end of May, Malevich, planning to return to Europe the following year, left all the materials he had brought with him to Berlin. He attached a note to the completed scenario: “For Hans Richter” (this note was written on a separate page). Apparently, he thought that Alexander von Riesen would give the manuscript to Richter, but this did not happen. Hasty communications between Malevich and Richter may have ensued when Richter; his brother-in-law, Udo Rukser; Hanover Landesmuseum director and Constructivist champion Alexander Dorner; and the Russian-born wife of von Häring all signed an affidavit to take over Malevich’s papers and paintings, which were still on exhibition.¹³ Thereafter, Malevich corresponded with von Riesen, inquiring the following September about the possibility of exhibiting his works in Vienna, Dresden, and Hamburg. He asked about Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, von Häring, and, most notably, about Richter and the fate of his own “nonobjective” film, apparently assuming that von Riesen had passed his scenario on to Richter.¹⁴ But communication appears to have broken down. Malevich sent a postcard to Richter dated May 5, 1928, asking for the address of von Riesen and complaining that he had heard nothing from von Häring.¹⁵ Even this postcard did not reach its destination, and Richter received it only decades later through von Riesen’s brother, Hans.¹⁶ In 1932, while in Russia to work on his ill-fated film *Metall*, Richter paid a visit to an ailing Malevich in Leningrad, but in the presence of handlers nothing of substance could be said about the film project or the pictures Malevich had left behind in the West.¹⁷

11. Hans Richter, *Begegnungen von Dada bis heute. Briefe, Dokumente, Erinnerungen* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1973), p. 41. Published in English as *Encounters from Dada till Today*, trans. Christopher Middleton (New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2013), e-book.

12. On the language barrier between the two, see *ibid.*, pp. 41–42, and Hans Richter, “Begegnungen in Berlin,” in *Avantgarde Osteuropa*, p. 18. The lack of communication between the two stands in contrast to Ludwig Hilbersheimer, who remembered long walks and conversations with Malevich through an interpreter. Hilbersheimer, introduction to Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, p. 9.

13. *Begegnungen*, p. 50. The paintings entered the collection of the Stedelijk Museum in 1957.

14. Letter from Malevich to von Riesen dated September 6, 1927, Leningrad, in *Malevich about Himself*, pp. 195–96.

15. *Begegnungen*, p. 51.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Communication continued as Malevich wrote Richter on May 10, 1928, from Leningrad asking Richter to help movie actress Zoya Barantsyevich get a visa and permission from the authorities to enter Berlin for the purpose of studying cinema. See *Malevich about Himself*, doc. 170, p. 200.

17. *Begegnungen*, p. 50.

It was through Hans von Riesen and a remarkably auspicious fluke of history that Malevich's film scenario came to light, along with the bulk of the papers he left behind in Berlin. In 1934, von Riesen's parents hid Malevich's package in the family cellar. In 1945, the house was bombed, but in 1953, the contents were unearthed virtually unscathed, and Hans van Riesen began to organize the material with the help of a team assembled by the DuMont Schauberg publishing house for a series edited by Werner Haftmann.¹⁸ The scenario was discovered at the end of the 1950s by Haftmann while organizing Malevich's archive. Informed of the discovery, Richter found that he could not remember any collaboration with Malevich,¹⁹ a lapse about which he was later to write frankly in his memoirs. From the early 1960s, however, the growing fame of the Russian avant-gardist led Western researchers to baselessly assert that there had in fact been a fruitful collaboration between the two famous artists. No one was bothered that during the realization of this project, Richter was meant to have played less a creative role than an instrumental-technical one of realizing Malevich's scenario as a didactic, instructional film. One must consider the possibility that Richter was unable to realize Malevich's scenario because it was not his own concept but rather intended to show in a vivid manner the theory of the origin and evolution of Suprematism that Malevich had initiated and developed over the course of many years. Suprematism was born in painting, but according to Malevich its abstract geometrical system had the potential to become a new style equal to the great styles of past epochs. Would Richter have been able to identify with such an all-encompassing stylistic project, representing a new creation of form in all spheres of artistic culture, from ornament to architecture?

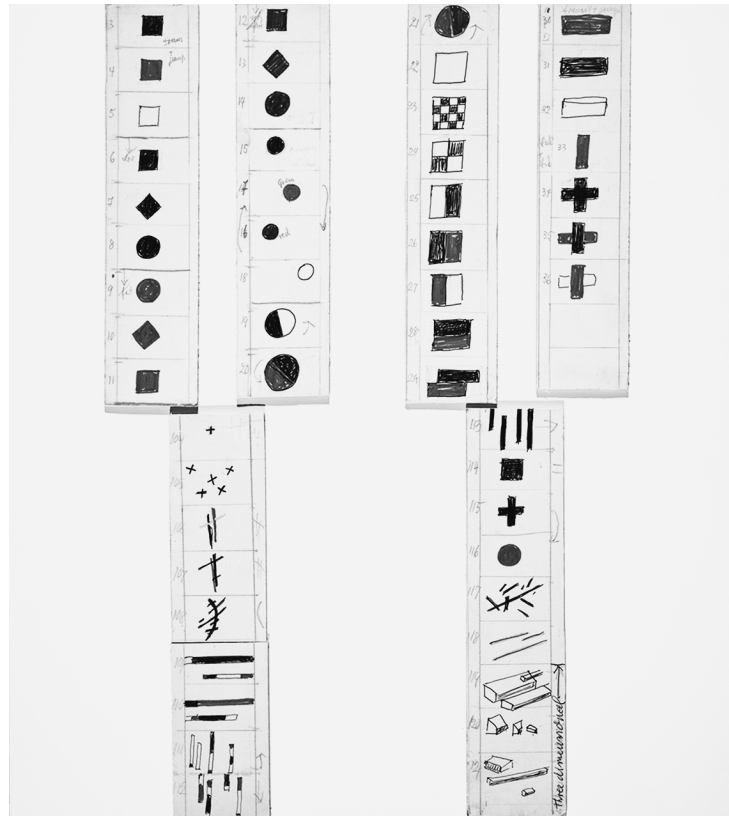
It may be possible to answer in the affirmative, as there is evidence that Richter indeed tried to play a purely instrumental role and by 1970 had the experience to do so successfully. During the 1930s, Richter had created industrial films for Philips, been head of film production at Central Film Studios in Zurich, and had made films for various chemical firms including Ciba, Durand & Huguenin, Geigy and Sandoz. While some of these films embody his avant-garde principles (especially those for Philips), others, such as "Kleine Welt im Dunkeln" (A small world in the dark),²⁰ were quite didactic, thoroughly professional industrial films with scarcely a glimmer of the mirth and "magic" so characteristic of Richter's avant-garde films.²¹ He had also pioneered a theory of

18. *Kasimir Malewitsch: Suprematismus—Die Gegenstandlose Welt*, trans. Hans van Riesen (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1962), p. 31.

19. *Begegnungen*, p. 41, and Hans Richter, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zurich: Verlag der Arche, 1967), p. 102. Richter mentions that he was surprised to see Malevich's film scenario reproduced in color (pp. 264–65) along with the caption "Film für Hans Richter."

20. "Kleine Welt im Dunkeln" (A small world in the dark). Produced by Tonfilm Frobenius SA, Basel-Münchenstein, 1939. Commissioned by J. R. Geigy SA.

21. These experiences are the subject of essays by Doris Berger, Edward Dimendberg, and Yvonne Zimmermann in Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Hans Richter: Encounters* (exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, published by Prestel, New York, 2013).

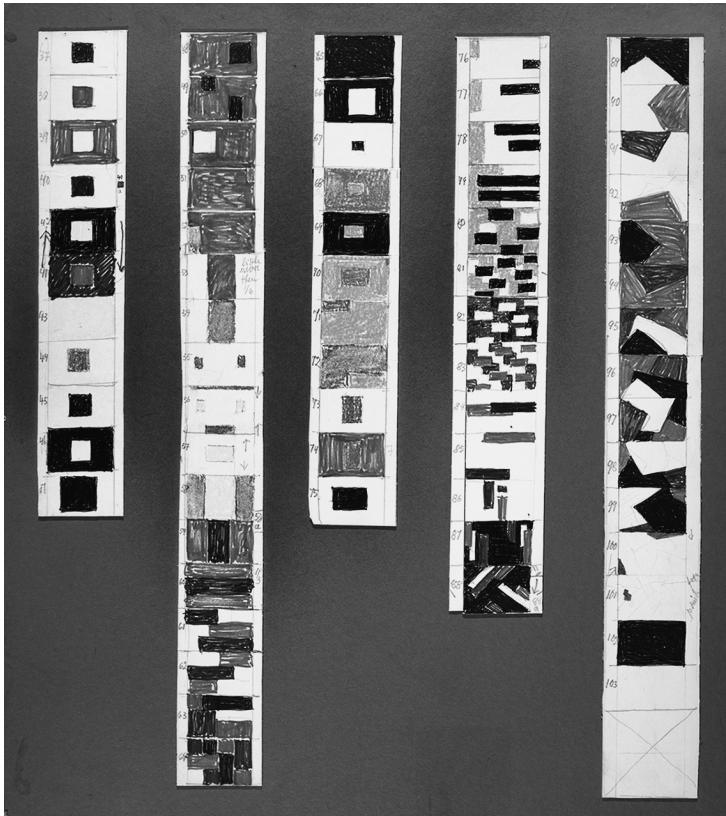


*Richter. Storyboard,
Part I. c. 1970.*

the documentary and, for fifteen years during the 1940s and '50s,²² taught film at the City College of New York. All told, his experience in filmmaking was broad and deep and equipped him to play an instrumental role. Yet Malevich's scenario also took him back to his earliest experimental works, one of which—*Rhythm 25*—had been lost. Thus, while the project took the form of film restoration, he could scarcely avoid making aesthetic decisions.

This inherent conflict between Richter the filmmaker for hire and Richter the creative artist can be seen in his collaboration with Arnold Eagle to finally make the film, an endeavor that resulted in at least two rough-cut work prints

22. Richter wrote several lectures and articles on the documentary beginning in the 1930s. These are best conveyed in his book begun in 1934: Hans Richter, *Der Kampf um den Film: Für einen gesellschaftlich verantwortlichen Film*, ed. Jürgen Römhild (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1976), translated as Hans Richter, *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema*, ed. Jürgen Römhild, trans. Ben Brewster (Aldershot: Wildwood House Ltd., 1986).



Richter. Storyboard, Part II. c. 1970.

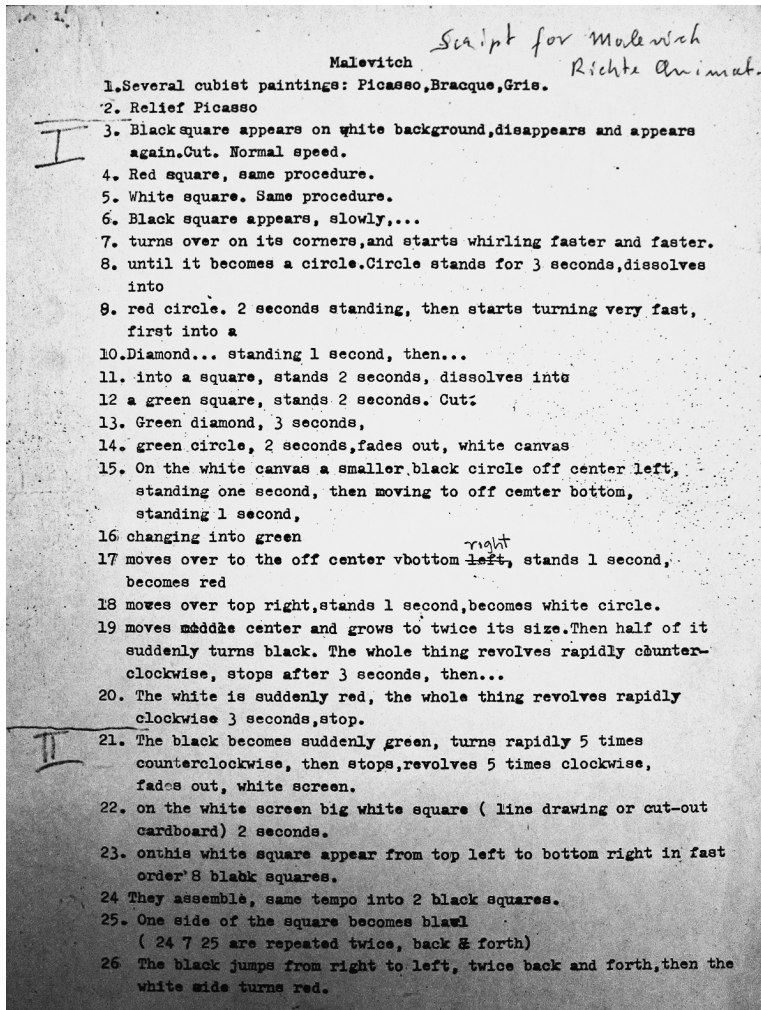
and over 120 takes.²³ In a contract drawn up between the two in 1968, Richter is to provide storyboards (“charts”) and take control of editing while Eagle will shoot the film in color and provide Richter with a key sheet corresponding with the animations. Narration in English, French, German, and Russian is envisioned based on van Riesen’s translation of Malevich’s scenario.²⁴

Yet only in June 1971 does any real work begin, with Richter scribbling a list of several crucial elements he is providing. These include color photographs of Malevich’s original scenario, Richter’s own “first sketches to the film” (storyboards Parts I and II), and a German translation of Malevich’s scenario.²⁵ As Richter notes in his reminiscences, one of the storyboards (Part I) was in fact a re-creation of his own work, and in production “the pictures illustrating his manuscript

23. Arnold Eagle Papers and Films related to Hans Richter, 1927–1990, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, accession no. 970021.

24. Contract between Hans Richter and Arnold Eagle, December 5, 1968, Hans Richter Estate.

25. Tupitsyn, *Malevich and Film*, p. 91. Richter’s note to Eagle dated July 17, 1971, is found in the Hans Richter Estate. The storyboards are in the Getty Research Institute (970021).



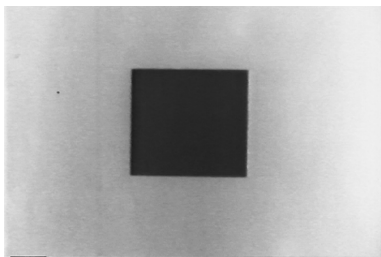
Numbered film script corresponding to Richter's storyboards.

became merged with those of my (long lost) film *Rhythmus 25*, the style and colorfulness of which had made Malevich want to work with me in the first place.”²⁶ By September 1971, the project had received a NEA grant, and an additional contract was drawn up in which Richter as director and editor assumes responsibility

26. *Begegnungen*, p. 49. Trans. Christopher Middleton, *Encounters from Dada till Today*, MS. Hans Richter Estate, p. 43. Richter's storyboard matches an image labeled as “Rhythm 25” in *Hans Richter by Hans Richter*, ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 137. The only differences are that the Getty images are numbered and some of the darker colors are slightly different.

for “the content and artistic considerations” of the project and Eagle has responsibility for “photographic and production arrangements.”²⁷

The interpretation of the scenario and storyboards is documented in a typescript whose numbers correspond to those in the margins of each frame in Richter’s storyboard. So, for example, number 4 corresponds to a red square, as seen in a still from the actual film. Crucially, instructions are given for squares to appear and disappear, then to spin until they turn into circles, which in turn spin and become diamonds (typescript instructions 7–10). Malevich’s scenario does indeed call for the “movement of the Suprematist square,” as is seen in an English translation from the Richter estate. Further instructions (typescript, nos. 15–18)



Still from Richter's unfinished film based on Malevich's 1927 scenario. c. 1970.

attempt to follow Malevich’s discussion of how the displacement of circles within a square will change their colors (English translation, no. 3). The various surviving takes—numbered to correspond with the typescript and storyboards—show Richter and Eagle working through Malevich’s instructions all the way to his conclusion, which involves architectons. Later pages of the typescript also show Richter beginning to incorporate instructions related to his own film, *Rhythmus 25*, and the additional corresponding takes relate entirely to Richter’s second storyboard (Part II). Interestingly, the




architecton sequence, although on the first storyboard, is numbered as the last sequence of takes. If this is where Richter’s and Malevich’s images “became merged,”²⁸ the material pertaining to Malevich is essentially separated from that related to Richter in the two surviving rough-cut sequences (which correspond to the discrete sets of instructions embodied in Richter’s storyboards),²⁹ and the project might still be divided into two films. A more crucial issue at the center of the enterprise is the nature of movement. Richter shed some light on how he assumed responsibility for this role during a visit he paid to Eagle’s studio in 1971 to check on the progress of the film, a visit filmed by Eagle’s student crew, apparently for a documentary that was never completed. In a surviving film fragment Richter com-

27. Contract between Hans Richter and Arnold Eagle, September 27, 1971, Hans Richter Estate.

28. *Begegnungen*, p. 49.

29. In each rough-cut print, sequences of takes not yet in numerical order but related only to storyboard Part I are followed by sequences of takes related only to storyboard Part II. The only exception, a segment pertaining to Malevich’s three-dimensional architectons, is appended at the end of each film (whether by intention or because of technical reasons). This order is given in the finding aid for the Arnold Eagle papers and films related to Hans Richter, 1927–1990, box 14, F31, and box 15, F32, which can be accessed online at: archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/970021/970021.xml;chunk.id=ref262;brand=default (accessed December 24, 2012).

latest phase, the three-dimensional, Suprematism shapes new elements from which pre-architectonic relations are derived, a foreshadowing of architectonic values.

1.  black Suprematist square
-  red Suprematist square
-  white Suprematist square

2. The movement of the Suprematist square yields the circle in various colours:



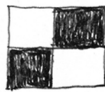
3. The circle has its definite place within a limited space: the black circle appears in the centre of the limited surface, as it is displaced toward the limit it takes on a green colour, and, when even more displacement occurs, a red colour; finally, by upward displacement, it becomes white, with the feeling of dynamism:



4. Changes within the circle introduce colour changes:



5. Decomposition of the Suprematist square into two white and two black cells: in two corners of the square a lightening begins, becoming pure white. Two corners of the square remain unchanged, black. A new form of quadratic relationship is thus developed:



*English translation of Malevich's scenario
from Richter, Encounters from Dada till
Today. Pages 40–42 (details). 1974.*

ments, “Of course, I followed the manuscript of Malevich exactly.” Then, moving to the animation strand with his storyboards, he continues:

But there are of course no . . . indications for movement. So the articulation of movement, that I had to do. And there my work comes in. I have not invented any forms which are not with Malevich. But whether this thing turns to the right or the left, whether this goes this way, or goes this way as I have indicated on the drawing, or whether these,

6. Now a displacement occurs in form No.5: the upper, black square is transformed into a white one, the white into a black one:



A new Suprematist element develops, and in the next stage takes on colour:



7. Form No.6 now continues to develop. It topples from the vertical to the horizontal position:



Thus the black surface (a) shifts its position, until separate Suprematist elements are formed, which become the basis for the formation of a whole system of relations:



8. Out of these elements, the Suprematist straight lines, develop now new basic forms, first the cross-form:



9. The cross-forms begin to develop into structures with dynamic feeling:



In this phase of the development of the cross-form element, an expansion of the Suprematist straight lines occurs, with the red element becoming thinner below than it is above. The same occurs in the case of the black element. With expansion, the straight lines can be decomposed into single, small members, or they can remain in the cross-form combinations, thus arriving in a diagonal position



these . . . movements . . . are photographed at the same time or developed one after the other as a kind of movement and countermovement, or here, or there, or there. That of course had to be left to me. And that's exactly what Malevich wanted. Because he didn't understand anything about the filmmaking. He understood only about his principles. And his principles I haven't changed.³⁰

Richter may well have been right in this, as Malevich clearly imagined an animation from the beginning and, unable to realize this in Russia, had sought out Richter to implement the project.

30. Richter interviewed by Arnold Eagle, audio track. Ibid., box 19A.

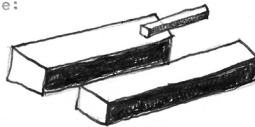
10. Here we see the element (a) contracting again into a square, two further elements in the colony make the cross-form, from the rotation of which derives the circle, thus making a new figure:



11. Here we have one of the possible kinds of colony of Suprematist elements:



12. Now we see the development of a Suprematist straight line into a spatial structure:



13. Form No.12 develops according to the same principle as do the elements on the flat surface, that is, it is decomposed and enters into combination with other elements. As the elements move, cubes and similar forms develop, expanding and forming elements of different sizes:



14. The forms developed in this way constitute architectonic fragments.

15. Out of the architectonic fragments issue architectonic systems.

16. These systems present the problems of the new architecture.

Work progressed to the creation of two silent rough-cut work prints. Yet by this phase of the work, Richter was beginning to have serious doubts about authorship.³¹ He and Eagle sought the expertise of the eminent film historian Annette Michelson to determine whether he was rendering a historically accurate version of Malevich's intentions.³² Evidently, Michelson was initially dubious at seeing Malevich's static designs being placed into movement. However, according to Eagle, after hearing how Richter had interpreted "Malevich's interest in cinema and movement," she declared

31. These doubts were compounded by unrelated accusations that he had copied drawings by Viking Eggeling for donation to various museums in Louise O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling: Artist and Filmmaker; His Life and Work*, trans. Catherine G. Sundström and Anne Libby (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971). The accusations stem in part from Ré Soupault, whose divorce from Richter was not a friendly one. Richter denied the allegations, which were eventually challenged in the scholarship. See Marion von Hofacker in "Kunsthistoriker gegen Künstler," in *Hans Richter: Malerei und Film* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), pp. 155–67.

32. Letter from Arnold Eagle to Hans Ruppel, May 12, 1981. Hans Richter Estate.

that she found Richter's attempts "acceptable" and was willing to pursue the investigation under certain conditions to be specified and subject to evaluation.³³ Before anything definitive could come of this, Richter announced that he had decided to abandon the project and return his grant to the NEA.

One can understand how in 1927 Richter's work could have appealed to Malevich. As an abstract painter and filmmaker, Richter had departed from mimesis, an essential prerequisite for the epochal change Malevich envisioned:

Until now there was realism of objects, but not of painted units of colour. . . . Any painting surface is more alive than any face from which a pair of eyes and a grin jut out. A face painted in a picture gives a pitiful parody of life. . . . But a surface lives, it has been born.³⁴

In Malevich's view, what film needed in the immediate historical moment was a painter, one securely embedded in the formal progression outlined in his Bauhaus book and film scenario:

Eisenstein and Vertov are truly first-class artists, with an inclination towards the left, for the first relies on contrast and the second on "showing the object," as such, but both still have a long way to go to Cézannism, Cubism, Futurism, and non-objective Suprematism.³⁵

Moreover,

In the West, important artist-painters are little by little beginning to work in the cinema, and, in beginning their work with a purely abstract element, they are beginning with our future source of new forms. This entry of the contemporary artist-painter into the cinema should bring us, and him, to a new essence and significance for the screen, as a new way of showing the masses the art of our new life.³⁶

In his response to contemporary Russian cinema, Malevich was seeking to pulverize the "object" and representation in film, so ardently embraced by his colleague Eisenstein, to arrive at an equivalent of Suprematist painting. Yet Richter, having already created an entirely non-mimetic medium, was just then proceeding in the opposite direction, embracing Eisenstein's montage technique in his first film involving non-abstract referential imagery, *Filmstudie* (1928), and he would collaborate with Eisenstein the following year on the film *Everyday*. Thus while the intersecting trajectories of Richter and Malevich left each artist prone to misunderstandings in their exchange, there is the possibility of enough indeterminacy in each artist's practice at the time of their meeting that Richter might have been

33. Letter from Arnold Eagle to Hans Richter (date not provided), Arnold Eagle Papers, Getty Research Institute, accession number 070021, box 1, folder 9, quoted in Tupitsyn, p. 89.

34. K. S. Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting" (1916), in *Essays on Art: 1915–1933*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Andersen (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968), vol. 1, p. 38.

35. K. S. Malevich, "And Images Triumph on the Screen" (1925), in *Essays on Art*, p. 230.

36. K. S. Malevich, "The Artist and the Cinema" (1926), *ibid.*, p. 238.

able to realize Malevich's vision. Despite the chance of misprision—if perhaps, as Norbert Schmitz suggests, Richter was still involved in “identifying objective functions of human perception, a peculiar mimesis of the functions of the sense organs,” whereas “for Malevich, film represents a liberation from such psychologically concrete, experienced functions”³⁷—both artists were deeply committed to painting and seeking a progression in their art in film. In his entirely non-mimetic films of pure light and its absence, of dissolution of figure and ground, of materialization of the screen in actual space, Richter had already realized film as architecture,³⁸ as was seen in his earliest film, *Rhythmus 21* (1921), which included passages where the screen is bisected into black and white exactly as depicted in Malevich's drawings in his film scenario. Moreover, Richter had achieved this by adding the transformative element of time, conceivably a move resonant with Malevich's Marxist-inflected “theory of the additional element,” the subject of the lengthy first section of his Bauhaus book.³⁹ According to this view of cultural evolution, every significant artistic advance is the result of the dynamic force of a “new additional element” that contravenes the “statics” of “our human existence of rest” and contributes to our “struggle for existence” against unconscious nature.⁴⁰ Malevich's scenario marked such successive moments “of disobjectivisation of the consciousness of old relationships of elements, and their new order in the painterly perception.”⁴¹ At stake is Malevich's distinction between static and dynamic, and whether, as film and theater historian Oksana Bulgakowa has suggested, he was both interested in a didactic popularization of his theory and wanted “to test the capabilities of film.”⁴² If Richter had already created, or was capable of creating, a non-mimetic filmic space that “addresses itself to the eye, to sight, rather than the body and its kinesis,”⁴³ and if he could abandon his reliance on rhythm—which, for Malevich, was unacceptable as “an ornamental form of movement”⁴⁴—then he might also have been capable of capturing Malevich's filmic space. The fact that Malevich's didactic project was never executed would be far less important if Richter's fragments conveyed the only instance of Malevich's filmic space in existence—a tempting prospect for further investigation.

37. Norbert Schmitz in Oksana Bulgakowa, ed., *Das weiße Rechteck: Schriften zum Film* (Berlin: Potemkin Press, 1997), p. 124, cited and trans. in *The White Rectangle*, p. 24.

38. See Philippe-Alain Michaud, “Toward the Fourth Dimension: *Rhythmus 21* and the Genesis of Filmic Abstraction,” in *Hans Richter: Encounters*.

39. See note 5 above and *The World as Non-Objectivity*, pp. 147–94.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 148, and 152.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

42. Bulgakowa, *The White Rectangle*, p. 23.

43. Annette Michelson, “Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*,” *October* 3 (Spring 1977), p. 85.

44. Kazimir Malevich, “The Cinema, Gramophone, Radio, and Artistic Culture,” in Kazimir Malevich, *The Artist, Infinity, Suprematism, Unpublished Writings 1913–1933*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1978), p. 168.