



fig. 1
*Larionov (center) in the hospital after being wounded in World War I,
1915.*

The Third Path to Non-Objectivity

Evgenii Kovtun

Western scholars have sometimes failed to make a distinction between Abstractionism and non-objectivity, and use the terms interchangeably. Yet Vasilii Kandinskii and Kazimir Malevich are linked only by non-figuration—at which they arrive by disparate, quite unshared paths. The nonrepresentational element in their work grows out of different roots; Kandinskii and Malevich stand in as sharp an opposition as Hume and Hegel do in philosophy.

The abstract artist proceeds from the particular to the general, turning away from the tangibility of objects. In Kandinskii one may often observe a “semi-figurative” sketch gradually being translated into a pure abstraction. This is the path “from the bottom up.”

Non-objectivity comes about by an opposite process. The artist starts from general structural regularities that are universal in character and makes them tangible in non-objective forms. This is the path “from the top down,” from the general to the particular. Hence there are no natural or earthly realia, not even any that are “cleansed” of figuration, concealed behind Malevich’s non-objective forms. Non-objectivity “populates” space with a new reality which comes into being according to laws analogous to those of nature.

Contemporary scholars rightly distinguish two currents within the movement toward non-figuration: that of Kandinskii, i.e., what could be called expressive abstraction, and that of Malevich, i.e., geometric abstraction. Artists of the one persuasion—in the words of Lev Iudin, a pupil of Malevich’s—prefer to “experience” (thus Kandinskii), the others, to “construct” (thus Malevich and Mondrian). Yet even at the time, a third, middle, path to non-objectivity could be discerned in Russian art; its adherents attempted to reconcile opposing trends, wanting simultaneously to experience and to construct. This was the path first taken by Mikhail Larionov with his Rayism.

Art historians have caused quite a muddle in pinpointing the origin of Rayism, dating it as far back as 1909—a time when Larionov was producing Primitivist works. Iurii Annenkov, writing in 1966, was the first to set out a spurious chronology of Larionov’s work: “Nineteen nine was the decisive year in the artistic biography of Larionov and Goncharova, and in the destinies of art in general: in that year both exhibited paintings which laid the foundation of the first abstract movement, dubbed ‘Rayism’ (Larionov’s term) . . . Numbers of ‘Rayist’ paintings by Larionov and Goncharova appeared, between 1909 and 1912, at the avant-garde exhibitions of Jack of Diamonds, Free Aesthetics, and Donkey’s Tail.”¹ As it happened, Annenkov listed precisely those exhibitions which did not show Rayist works and managed to keep silent about those which had them in abundance.

Following Annenkov, other writers added their voices to the confusion. Waldemar George, author of a 1966 monograph on Larionov, moved the Rayist work *Steklo* (*Glass*) from the 1912 Mir iskusstva (World of Art) exhibition to 1909. We note the same antedating in the catalogue of the 1969 Larionov show in New York. The author of the catalogue essay, François Daulte, headlined one of its sections “The Rayonniste Period (1909–1912)” and advanced the fiction that Larionov had made his first declaration on Rayism in 1910 in A. Kraft’s studio.² Camilla Gray, who had access to Russian sources, did not make such gross misstatements, but even she assigned *Glass* to 1909 and had it exhibited in a one-day Larionov show which took place in 1911 at the Society of Free Aesthetics in Moscow. Yet among the 124 canvases listed in the catalogue of that exhibition neither *Glass* nor any other Rayist painting appears.

What was Larionov’s reaction to the misdating of his works? As indulgent as could be; he even abetted it. As early as in the catalogue of the *Exposition Natalia Gontcharova et Michel*

Larionov held in June 1914 at the Galerie Paul Guillaume in Paris, he changed the dates of many works, assigning them to earlier times. Larionov was inarguably among the pioneers of non-figurative painting (in the 1940s, which saw a wave of enthusiasm for Abstractionism, researchers sought out "precursors" of the movement; Michel Seuphor's 1949 book about the origins of abstract art recalled the by-then-forgotten Rayism)³ and was not averse to being ranked as the very first. In Larionov's solo shows in New York (1969) and Brussels (1976), his *Abstraknaia kartina* (*Abstract Painting*) was assigned to 1907 (!)—to a time, that is, when the artist was interested in signboards and was painting his *Parikmakbery* (*Barbers*). *Abstract Painting*, executed in the spirit of "painterly Purism," is clearly a work of the early 1920s, and entirely out of place with Larionov's Primitivist works.

The earliest "trace" of Rayism can be observed in Larionov's illustrations to a small book by Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Starinnaia liubov'* (*Old-Time Love*), which was published in mid-October 1912. Larionov thereafter showed Rayist canvases simultaneously at two exhibitions: *Glass and Etiud luchisty* (*Rayist Study*) at the World of Art exhibition in November 1912, and *Luchistaia kolbasa i skumbriia* (*Rayist Sausage and Mackerel*) at the Soiuz molodezhi (Union of Youth) exhibition which opened on December 4th. Prior to this there had been no mention of Rayism either in the press or in exhibition catalogues.

The most representative showings of Rayism were at the *Mishen'* (*Target*, Moscow, 1913), *No. 4. Futuristy, luchisty, primitiv* (*No. 4: Futurists, Rayists, Primitives*, Moscow, 1914), and *Moskva. 1915 god* (*Moscow: The Year 1915*, Moscow, 1915) exhibitions. By this time, Natal'ia Goncharova, Aleksandr Shevchenko, and Sergei Romanovich were already working by the canons of Rayism. A special role in the rise of Rayism was played by a remarkable painter of Larionov's group, Mikhail Le-Dantiu. Il'ia Zdanevich implies in an unpublished article of 1918 that Le-Dantiu was the force behind Larionov's Rayism. He writes: "Rayism is taking shape—the unsuccessful realization of a colleague's brilliant discoveries."⁴ And indeed, in Le-Dantiu's paintings of 1912 and 1913 one may make out the appearance of Rayist structures.

In 1913 Larionov published a brochure, *Luchizm* (*Rayism*), and an article, "Luchistaia zhivopis'" ("Rayist Painting"), in the *Oslinyi kbvost i mishen'* (*Donkey's Tail and Target*) miscellany. The artist laid down the main tenets of his theory most succinctly in a pamphlet entitled *Luchizm Larionova* (*The Rayism of Larionov*), which was distributed to the public at a debate at the *Target* exhibition and from which the following is excerpted:

Doctrine of irradiability. Radiation of reflected light (color dust). Reflectivity. Realist Rayism, depicting existing forms. Rejection of forms in painting as existing apart from their imaging in the eye. Provisional representation of the ray by the line. Erasure of the barriers between nature and what is referred to as the surface of the painting. The rudiments of Rayism in antecedent arts. The doctrine of the creation of new forms. Spatial form. Form—which arises from the intersection of rays from various objects—isolated by the volition of the artist. Conveyance of sensations of the non-finite and the transtemporal. The structuring of paint according to the laws of painting (i.e., of faktura {density} and color). The natural downfall of all preceding art, which, thanks to Rayist forms, has become, like life, merely an object for the artist's observation.⁵

Rayism, according to Larionov's thinking, would sever painting from objectivity and turn it into an autonomous and self-sufficient art of color. The painting would cease to be a reflection of the world of objects—it would become itself an

object, a part of reality aesthetically organized by the artist.

We do not see objects themselves—they are a kind of Kantian "thing in itself"—but we perceive aggregates of rays emanating from objects, which are depicted in the painting as lines of color. Larionov divides Rayism into a Realist species, which retains traces of objectivity, and a wholly nonrepresentational species, in which external links with the visible world have been sundered.

Larionov's tenet on light and color is of particular interest. Light refracted through particles of matter causes coloration, or "color dust," as the artist calls it. Here he anticipates the view expressed by the philosopher Pavel Florenskii in 1919:

Thus light is continuous. Not so optical media, which become saturated with light and pass it on to us: they are not continuous, they are granular; they constitute a kind of finest dust and themselves contain other dust, so fine as to defy any microscope, yet consisting of separate granules, distinct bits of matter. Those glorious hues which adorn the heavenly sphere are nothing but a means of relating indivisible light and fractured matter: we may assert that the coloration of sunlight is that aftertaste, that change of aspect, which is imparted to the sunlight by the dust of the earth, and possibly by the even finer dust of the sky.⁶

The critics looked upon Rayism as one of the varieties of abstract art; but the matter was more complex. Impressionism, preoccupied with color values, relegated plastic construction to the background. Cubism, by contrast, developed the structural element at the expense of the painterly. Velimir Khlebnikov, speaking of the Russian avant-garde, observed quite cogently: "As the chemist splits water into oxygen and hydrogen, so these artists have broken down the art of painting into its constituent forces, now isolating the element of color, now that of line."⁷

Larionov had no wish to sacrifice either. His Rayism was an astonishing attempt to combine the apparently incompatible: the vibrating color of Impressionism and the clarity of construction peculiar to Cubism. Their outward non-objectivity notwithstanding, the Rayist works of Larionov—with their movement toward nature, their luminous and intricately vibrating painting—call up natural sensations and associations. His *Luchisty peizazh* (*Rayist Landscape*, 1912–13, fig. no. 3) is a case in point. The painterly-spiritual visionariness of Kandinskii and the stark non-objectivity of Malevich's Suprematism alike were alien to Larionov. Always receiving creative impulses from the visible world, he was unable to sever all links with nature. This singularity—Rayism's opposition to both Abstractionism and Suprematism—was noted at the time by Nikolai Punin, who held that the theory of Rayism had been advanced by Larionov "as a barrier against certain rationalistic tendencies of Cubism" and in practice was "the fruit of very subtle realistic juxtapositions."⁸

The Rayist canvases, especially those labeled "Realist Rayism," revealed the nature of Larionov's painterly gift and laid bare the wealth of *faktura* which was vehicle for the "color dust." Without a subject and virtually or entirely without an object, these works left the viewer one-on-one with painterly values. Larionov remarked on this himself: "What is precious to the lover of painting finds its maximum expression in the Rayist painting. The objects we see in life play no role there, while what constitutes the very essence of painting can be shown best of all: the interplay of color, its saturation, the interrelations of color masses, depth, *faktura*—by this persons interested in painting may become totally absorbed."⁹ Non-objectivity may instantly expose the poverty of an artist's painterly gift, but it is also capable of announcing the wealth

of another's.

Larionov's Rayism did not appear ex nihilo; the artist himself pointed to the "rudiments of Rayism" in the art preceding it. In the late paintings and drawings of Mikhail Vrubel' (such as *Shestikrylyi serafim* [*Six-Winged Seraph*, 1904] and the *Proroki* [*Prophets*, 1903-4] cycle) one discovers plastic structures which, as it were, presage the Rayist structures of Larionov. Nikolai Tarabukin reports that "in N. A. Prakhov's possession there was a pencil drawing of a male nude done as if in a 'Rayist' manner. Thus even this shortlived movement in painting, 'invented' by M. Larionov, was to a certain extent anticipated by Vrubel'."¹⁰ A fair number of such "Rayist" drawings by Vrubel' are to be found in the collection of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

The artist Pavel Mansurov linked the emergence of Rayism even more specifically with Vrubel' in his account of an episode in Larionov's (and in Vrubel's) career which had been unknown to scholars. In 1899, Vrubel', working on his ceramic panel for the main façade of the Hotel Metropol' in Moscow, invited a number of students from the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture to be his assistants. Among these was Larionov, who spent some two weeks working under Vrubel'. We shall not find any direct results of this contact in Larionov's work; but at the end of his account, Mansurov makes a canny observation about the backgrounds in Vrubel's paintings, which resemble "frost-covered windows."¹¹ This might seem a superficial hallmark, a chance resemblance, yet latent tendencies in the development of Vrubel's plastic form, astutely detected by Larionov, are discernible in it.

The art historians without reservation assigned the Russian artist a place among the pioneers of Abstractionism, and Larionov readily accepted this role. But they failed to notice in Larionov's Rayism—outwardly non-objective—values and qualities unknown to abstract art: the readjustment toward "naturalness" and a painterly response to visible reality that was non-objective yet permeated by a vital sense of the values of nature. Rayism is neither lyrical nor expressive abstraction. As for Larionov, he was indeed a "precursor"—but of other painterly-plastic undertakings, which still await detailed investigation.

In 1912, the same year in which Rayism originated, Pavel Filonov, presenting the first fruits of his creative work, wrote an article entitled "Kanon i zakon" ("Canon and Law")—an early outline of the principles of analytical art. This marked a new understanding of the world and a new creative direction taken in opposition to Western Cubism and Russian Cubo-Futurism. Filonov wrote:

I am given to understand that Cubo-Futurism and Picasso could not have failed to influence my theory in one way or another. I am perfectly aware of what Picasso is doing although I haven't seen his paintings; but I must say that he personally hasn't influenced me any more than I have him, and he hasn't ever laid eyes on me, even in his dreams. On the other hand, there's not a thing that is done in our or whatever other line that wouldn't have had an influence on me, positive or negative. His influence was one of the negative ones. What in our thinking could we have borrowed from Cubo-Futurism, whose mechanical and geometrical foundations have led into a blind alley? Here is what Cubo-Futurism comes down to: purely geometrical representation of the volume and movement of things in time, hence also in space; of mechanical tokens of objects in motion, i.e., mechanical tokens of life, rather than of an organically movement-creating life, pervasive, transfiguring, and manifesting itself as such at any given moment of rest or motion.¹²

Cubism, as Filonov understood it, was the logical and willed construction of form abetted by the geometrizing of the

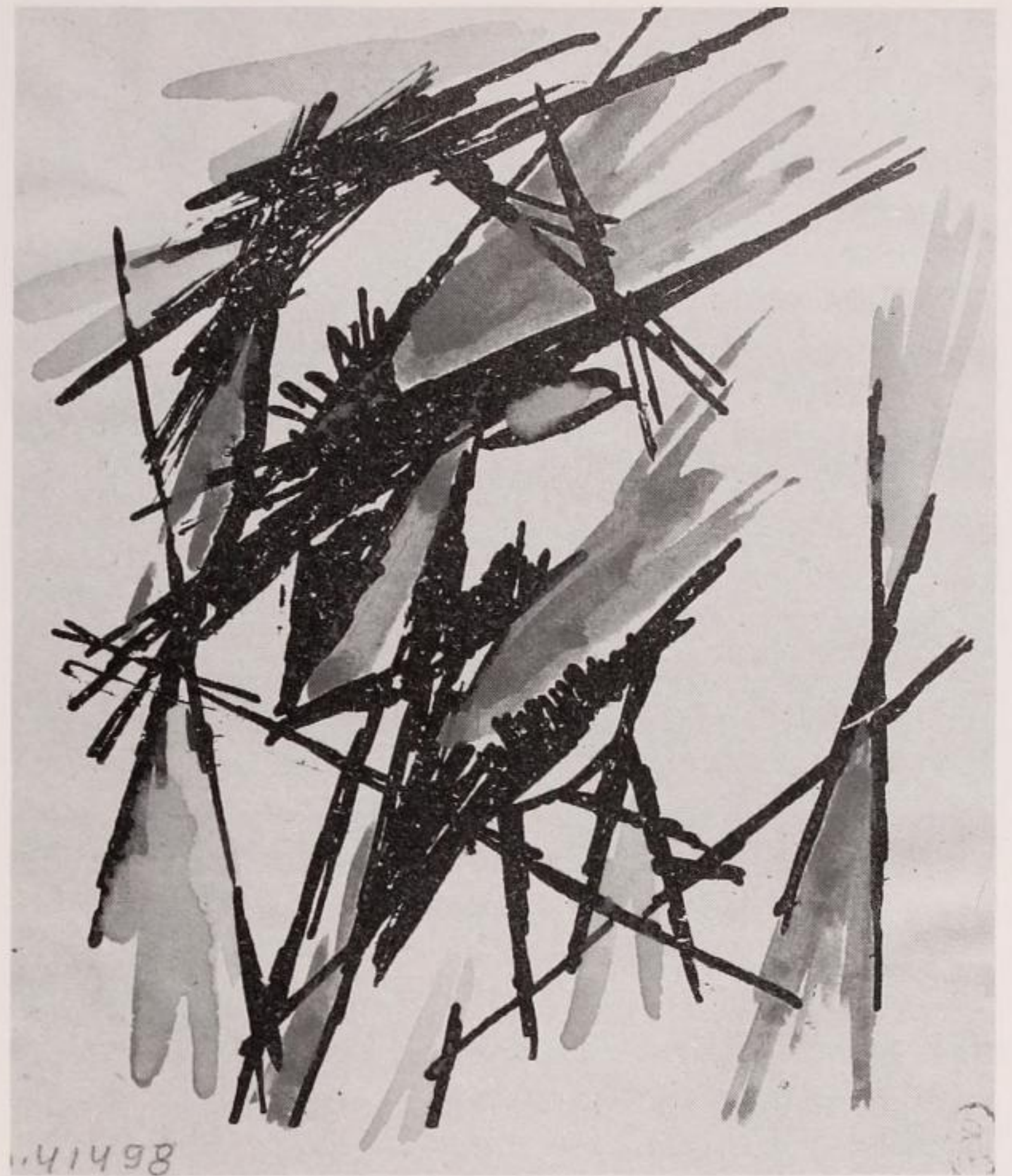


fig. 2
Mikhail Larionov
Portrait of a Man (Rayist Construction), 1913.
Lithograph with painted additions, 11.2 x 9.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

fig. 3
Mikhail Larionov
Rayist Landscape, 1912-13.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 94.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

depicted object. This is the way of the canon, the way of a framework and rules of construction prepared in advance. The logical, rational element dominated in Cubism, and this did not suit Filonov any more than such an approach to creative work suited Khlebnikov, who wrote:

*If the world were caught in a net
Of numbers a hundred score,
Would minds be nobler than before?
No—more pitiful yet.*¹³

Filonov set his analytical method in contrast to Cubism. He distinguished two approaches to the creation of a painting—the “preconceived” (by canon) and the “organic” (by law):

*In revealing the structure of a form or a painting, I have the option to proceed according to how I envisage the structure of the form, i.e., in a preconceived way; or to proceed after observing and laying bare the law of its organic development. Consequently, my revelation of the structure of the form will be either preconceived, i.e., canonical, or organic, i.e., according to law.*¹⁴

This is Filonov's first use of “organic,” a term that occupies an important place in his conception of art.

The primacy of nature, to be sure, was proclaimed by all movements, even the most non-objective ones. But Cubism evolved in a different direction, where the secondary products of the material culture of man determined the forms of art. The geometrizing of Cubism and its mechanization of forms, particularly acute in the work of Fernand Léger, reflect this growing orientation toward the secondary, a process that the French Purists carried to its logical conclusion, likening the painting and its forms to the machine.

In analytical art, the relationship between artist and nature is entirely different. Filonov is consciously oriented toward the primary, that is, toward nature. For him, the evolution of life is the pattern or model which, when followed by the artist, yields a work of art. He strives to imitate not the forms which nature creates but the methods by which it “operates.” This is the organic path in artistic creation.

A painting by Filonov grows like a living organism. From the points of contact of a brush or pen—called *edinity deistviia* (units of action) by the artist—there emerge complex varieties of *faktura* of differing “timbre.” “Draw each atom persistently and accurately,” Filonov wrote, “persistently and accurately work the color into each atom, so that it perfuses it as heat does the body or becomes organically joined to the form, as in nature the cell tissue of a flower is fused with its color.”¹⁵ Filonov's “units of action” are the indivisible particles, the color-imbued “atoms” which make up the infrastructure of his paintings.

The cardinal difference between Filonov and the artists of the avant-garde surrounding him lies in his aspiration to make visible what is in principle invisible. He wanted to expand the possibilities of representational art by adding the invisible (yet supremely important) elements of nature, society, and man's spiritual world to the ranks of images.

Filonov considered that the artists of his time—both Cubists and Realists—maintained too narrow and one-sided a relationship with nature, capturing only two of its properties—color and form—in their work, whereas any phenomenon has an innumerable quantity of no less valuable properties. He wrote: “Since I know, see, intuit that there are in any object not just two attributes—form and color—but a whole world of visible or invisible phenomena, their emanations, reactions, waxings and wanings, genesis, being, known or secret properties, which in their turn have sometimes

incalculable attributes, I unequivocally reject the ‘two attributes’ dogma of contemporary Realism and all its sects on the right and the left as unscientific and moribund.”¹⁶

This is why Picasso's “reformation” appears to Filonov “scholastically formalistic and bereft of revolutionary significance.” Picasso, like Il'ia Repin, paints merely the form and color of the “periphery of objects,” plus or minus the “orthography of a school, a nation, a tribe, or a master.”¹⁷ From such a vantage point, “even Picasso with his violin is a Realist”: “the violin is whole, the pitcher is whole; the violin and pitcher are broken into pieces and artificially placed on the canvas.”¹⁸

“I see, know, intuit”—these are the three modes of creation Filonov describes as at the artists's disposal.

The Realist paints by sight. He operates with color and form. His paintings also render the invisible—a psychological state or the features of man's inner world—but through the visible.

The Cubist paints not only by sight but also by knowledge: Picasso's pitcher is painted simultaneously from various sides and from within. He also paints what is invisible (from a fixed perspective) but in principle visible.

Filonov reproduces *what is in principle invisible* (in such works as *Formula petrogradskogo proletariata* [*Formula of the Petrograd Proletariat*, 1920–21, plate no. 342] and *Pobeda nad vechnost'iu* [*Victory over Eternity*, 1920–21]). He renders the invisible not through the visible, as the Realists and Cubists do, but through novel plastic solutions. This constitutes Filonov's qualitative breakthrough, and this is what makes him unique; no wonder that Kruchenykh called him the “eyewitness of the invisible.”

Filonov theorized about the difference between the *glaz vidiashchii* (seeing eye) and the *glaz znaiushchii* (knowing eye). The first comes to know by the transmission of form and color; with the aid of the second, the “knowing eye,” the artist, supported by intuition, reproduces processes that are invisible or hidden. Filonov described the process thus:

*From a certain angle of vision, from one side, or, to a certain degree, from either the back or the front of an object, everyone always sees only a part of what he is looking at. Further than that even the acutest seeing eye does not reach; but the knowing eye of the investigator and inventor, the master of analytical art, strives for exhaustive seeing, insofar as that is possible for man. He gazes with his analytical faculty and with his brain, and with these he sees into places which the eye of the artist does not begin to reach. Thus, for example, one may, seeing only the trunk, branches, foliage, and blossoms of, let us say, an apple tree, at the same time know, or by analysis strive to know, how the slender fibers of the roots take up and absorb the fluids of the soil, how these fluids ascend by way of the cells of the living wood, how they are disbursed in a continual reaction to light and warmth, made over and transformed into the molecular structure of the trunk and branches, into green leaves, into white and red blossoms, into green and then yellow and then pink apples, and into the coarse bark of the trunk. This is what should interest the master, not the appearance of the apple tree. The trousers, shoes, coat, or face of a man are not so interesting as the emergence of thought and its processes in the man's head.*¹⁹

In depicting these processes, Filonov renders them by invented form, that is, non-objectively. In most of the artist's paintings one may observe a combination of two principles, the figurative and the non-objective, wherein lies the uniqueness of Filonov's structures. When Malevich or Mondrian paint a non-objective canvas, there is nothing figurative in it, whereas a Filonov painting may “begin” as a figurative one and “continue” as a pure abstraction. Or a lengthy non-objective

“overture” may usher in a figurative image, as in Filonov’s large canvas *Tsvety mirovogo rastsveta* (*Flowers of Universal Blossoming*, 1915).

Filonov’s *Formula kosmosa* (*Formula of the Cosmos*, 1918–19) evidently was his first pure abstraction, whereupon followed the non-objective *Belaia kartina* (*White Painting*, 1919, plate no. 340), *Victory over Eternity*, *Oktiabr’* (*October*, 1921), and, finally, the brilliant *Formula vesny* (*Formula of Spring*, 1928–29, fig. no. 4). The last is an entirely non-objective painting, but one replete with the life of nature. No flowering trees here or landscape background; instead, the artist produces a powerful sensation of the vernal exultation of nature, of its living “organics,” via pure color, breaches of deep blue, an unceasing movement of microstructures, and the capricious rhythm of large forms. This painting is not a state but a process comparable to a biological one. Filonov’s *Formula of Spring*, the crowning achievement of his painting, marks, as does Larionov’s Rayism, the third path to non-objectivity.

On this path we also encounter the school of Mikhail Matiushin, a broad movement in painting which is only beginning to be studied. It developed from the 1910s to the 1930s in parallel with Suprematism, but was overshadowed by Malevich’s school; it is only in our day that the shadow is thinning. Exhibitions of Matiushin’s work in Leningrad (1990) and Karlsruhe (1991), held thanks to the initiative of Alla Povelikhina, were the first to document the range and genuine significance of this movement. It reached its culmination in the 1920s, in the Workshop of Spatial Realism at the Petrograd Academy of Arts and in the Section on Organic Culture at Ginkhuk (the State Institute of Artistic Culture) in Leningrad. But it traced its beginnings to the work, ideas, and person of the poet and artist Elena Guro, who died in 1913.

In the annals of the Russian avant-garde one encounters the formula “Larionov–Goncharova”; “Matiushin–Guro” became another such formula, but with a difference: if in the first pair, Larionov played the leading role, in the second the creative initiative and the spirit of experimentation were Guro’s. This state of affairs was acknowledged by Matiushin more than once in his diary—for example, in 1934: “Lena sensed the link between color and sound, wanted to express landscape by sound. M[isha] did not grasp this yet.”²⁰

With the urban focus in poetry and Cubism’s geometrizing in painting at their height, Guro’s work turns, ahead of the times, to nature. She appeals to the “redeeming earth” and strives to match the creative process to the rhythms of nature. “Try to breathe as firs rustle in the distance, as the wind sweeps and surges, as creation breathes; to emulate the breathing of the earth and the strands of the clouds.”²¹

The movement toward nature produced in Guro’s work a spirituality of rare elevation and purity. Yet this spirituality is free from any schematic abstraction or Symbolist freight of meaning. The most capacious, cosmically grandiose images of her prose and poetry are always warmed by a sympathetic and spontaneous feeling for nature: “And they tipped the cup of heaven for all; all drank and heaven was not lessened.”²²

Guro’s painting no less than her writing gives evidence of a movement toward nature. Guro’s palette, unlike that of Cubism, contains no ochre, umber, heavy earth tones, or areas painted in a local color of red, blue, or yellow. If in their contacts with nature the Cubists gravitated toward inorganic forms, to the world of crystal and rock, Guro orients her painting toward the forms and hues of animate nature, toward the organic world. Multiple gradations and shadings of green—the color shunned by the Cubists because of its too “earthy” associations—create a translucent glow in her canvases. Guro’s aspirations in painting may also be ascertained from the lines of her diary: “I will build a palace from the



fig. 4
Pavel Filonov
Formula of Spring, 1928–29.
Oil on canvas, 250 x 285 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

apertures of heaven. All who arrive there will receive bright greenish-with-a-touch-of-pink or watery-blue crystals of sky. And more—there will be fluffy silvery raiments, delicate ones.”²³

Guro achieves a high degree of generalization of color and form, without losing the immediacy of impressions from nature. The objects in her canvases seem to have lost their weight and to exist in an airy state of suspension, while the material substance of her pigments has been transformed without remnant into luminously vibrating, softly shimmering smoke wreaths of color, as if endowed with a spiritual property.

There is yet another singularity to the organization of color in Guro’s paintings: the simultaneous deployment, as of voices in a Bach fugue, of several colors which, as they develop and change interdependently, set off and enrich one another. In the 1920s, Matiushin and his pupils theorized about this device of color-interweaving, grounding it in the dynamics of three-color relationships: “primary color,” “environment,” and the “color coupling” which occurs between them. “Hitherto,” Matiushin wrote, “artists have had difficulty placing two interrelated colors, and would lean more heavily on one of them. Rarely did any of them suspect *how* from the joining of two colors a third emerges. This enigmatic ‘third color’ was what we kept encountering in our work from life.”²⁴

Guro’s ideas on art, as developed by Matiushin, gave rise to a new movement in Russian painting—as contemporaries, too, realized.²⁵

Matiushin’s creative orientation was the same as Guro’s: “Nature tells us: ‘do not imitate me while depicting me. Yourselves create as I do. Study My Creation.’”²⁶ To this axiom—“Yourselves create as I do”—all of Matiushin’s school adhered, exploring the “means” and “methods” by which nature “operates.” It is only in this sense, and not as a return to figuration, that one must understand Matiushin’s words: “I was the first to give the signal for a return to nature.”²⁷

On April 14, 1923, he wrote in his diary: “At the society yesterday I revealed our motto: *Zor-Ved* [*Zrenie i Vedanie* (Seeing and Knowing)].”²⁸ And on May 22nd, the journal *Zhizn’ iskusstva* (*The Life of Art*) published his manifesto “*Ne iskusstvo, a zhizn*” (“Not Art but Life”), which shed light on both halves of this formula. “Knowing” is not “knowledge.” “Knowing” means penetration into an inaccessible realm by means of intuition—the faculty upon which the work of Matiushin and his followers, and their investigations into space and color, were broadly based. As early as 1916, appraising what innovation Suprematism had wrought, Matiushin observed: “Objectivity has properties unknown to human reason, whose essence may be grasped not in objects’ tangible form but as transformed by a higher intuitive intelligence.”²⁹ Now, seeing interacting with knowing, that is, intuitive reason, formed the basis of *rasshirenoe smotrenie* (expanded viewing), whose theory and practice Matiushin was working out with his colleagues. His students from the Workshop of Spatial Realism—Boris, Georgii, Mariia, and Kseniia Ender, as well as Nikolai Grinberg—joined him at the Section on Organic Culture at Ginkhuk. Gifted artists and musicians, they made up the original core of Matiushin’s group. Within their professional spheres, all of them possessed the indispensable faculty of intuition. Matiushin commented of Boris Ender: “Boris is very talented, and much in painting is revealed to him.”³⁰ Not “known” but “revealed”—precisely the point.

Matiushin’s school attained its peak in the 1920s. Non-objective principles and properties, distinct from those of Suprematism and even contrary to them, appeared in the works of Matiushin and of the Enders. The curved line rather than the straight was the basis of their plastic structures; color evolved according to the organic laws of nature. This is why we witness



fig. 5
Mikhael Matiushin
On the Death of Elena Guro, 1918.
Watercolor on paper, 38.1 x 27 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

fig. 6
Matiushin and Ol'ga Gromozova at Guro's grave, Uusikirkko, 1913.

in the work of Boris and Mariia Ender an astonishing regular phenomenon: while distancing itself from the object, entirely forswearing it, their painting nonetheless approaches nature, provides, as it were, a purified concentrate of natural sensations. This quality emerges with particular intensity in Mariia Ender's *Opyt novoi prostranstvennoi mery* (*Experiment in a New Spatial Dimension*, 1920, plate no. 329) and in numerous works of Matiushin's disciples.

"Organic" was the key word in the theories of Filonov and Matiushin. Though Larionov did not use it, the essence of Rayism is kindred with that concept. The movements these artists inaugurated in painting marked the third path to non-objectivity—a path that revealed in non-objectivity new qualities and values.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Walter Arndt



fig. 7
From left, Mariia, Boris, Kseniia, and Georgii Ender, ca. 1905.

fig. 8
Boris Ender, 1914.

Notes

1. Iurii Annenkov, "Mikhail Larionov i Nataliia Goncharova," in his *Dnevnik moikh vstrech* (New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 213–14.
2. François Daulte, "Michel Larionov," in *Michel Larionov*, catalogue for exhibition organized by Acquavella Galleries, New York (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1969), n. pag.
3. Michel Seuphor, *L'Art abstrait, ses origines et ses premiers maîtres* (Paris: Maeght, 1949).
4. I. M. Zdanevich, "Okrest iskusstva M. Le-Dantiu," 1918, Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, f. 177, d. 37, l. 5.
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10. N. M. Tarabukin, *Vrubel'* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. III.
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12. P. N. Filonov, "Kanon i zakon," 1912, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656.
13. V. Khlebnikov, *Zangezi* (Moscow, 1922), p. 27.
14. Filonov, "Kanon i zakon."
15. P. N. Filonov, "Ideologiiia analiticheskogo iskusstva," in *P. Filonov*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the State Russian Museum, Leningrad (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei, 1930), p. 42.
16. See P. N. Filonov, "Deklaratsiia 'Mirovogo rastsveta,'" *Zhizn' iskusstva* 20 (1923), pp. 13–15.
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18. Pavel Filonov, letter to Vera Sholpo, June 1928, in E. F. Kovtun, "Iz istorii russkogo avangarda (P. N. Filonov)," *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1977 god* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), pp. 229–30.
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20. M. V. Matiushin, diary, February 9, 1934, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 15. The entry was made by Mariia Ender, who recorded Matiushin's words.
21. E. Guro, "Bednyi rytsar'," Manuscript Division, State Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, St. Petersburg, f. III6, ed. khr. 3, l. 48.
22. Elena Guro, "Bednyj rycar' (The Poor Knight)," in *Elena Guro: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Anna Ljunggren and Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988), p. 192.
23. Elena Guro, "Elena Guro's Diary," in *Elena Guro*, p. 63. Entry for June 5, 1911.
24. M. V. Matiushin, "Tvorcheskii put' khudozhnika," 1934, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656.
25. After the breakup of the Union of Youth, Matiushin endeavored to organize a new artists' group. In a letter to Matiushin, Filonov noted: "You want to link your group's idea with the ideas of Elena Guro." Pavel Filonov, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, 1914, Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 25, ed. khr. II, l. I oborot.
26. M. V. Matiushin, diary, April 16, 1923, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.
27. M. V. Matiushin, diary, December 1922, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.
28. *Ibid.*
29. M. Matiushin, "O vystavke 'poslednikh futuristov,'" *Ocharovannyi strannik. Al'manakh vesennii*, 1916, p. 18.
30. M. V. Matiushin, diary, April 14, 1923, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.

The Great Utopia

*The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,
1915–1932*

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

State Tret'iakov Gallery

State Russian Museum

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

G U G G E N H E I M M U S E U M

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Kazimir Malevich
*Red Square (Painterly Realism: Peasant Woman
in Two Dimensions)*, 1915
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

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Prefaces

Thomas Krens, Michael Govan

x

Vladimir Gusev, Evgeniia Petrova, Iurii Korolev

xiii

Jürgen Weber

xiv

Contents

The Politics of the Avant-Garde

Paul Wood

1

The Artisan and the Prophet: Marginal Notes on Two Artistic Careers

Vasilii Rakitin

25

The Critical Reception of the 0.10 Exhibition: Malevich and Benua

Jane A. Sharp

38

Unovis: Epicenter of a New World

Aleksandra Shatskikh

53

COLOR PLATES 1-318

A Brief History of Obmokhu

Aleksandra Shatskikh

257

The Transition to Constructivism

Christina Lodder

266

The Place of Vkhutemas in the Russian Avant-Garde

Natal'ia Adaskina

282

What Is Linearism?

Aleksandr Lavrent'ev

294

The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization

Hubertus Gassner

298

The Third Path to Non-Objectivity

Evgenii Kovtun

320

COLOR PLATES 319-482

The Poetry of Science: Projectionism and Electroorganism

Irina Lebedeva

441

Terms of Transition: The First Discussional Exhibition and the Society of Easel Painters

Charlotte Douglas

450

The Russian Presence in the 1924 Venice Biennale

Vivian Endicott Barnett

466

The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture

Svetlana Dzhafarova

474

Fragmentation versus Totality: The Politics of (De)framing

Margarita Tupitsyn

482

COLOR PLATES 483-733

The Art of the Soviet Book, 1922-32

Susan Compton

609

Soviet Porcelain of the 1920s: Propaganda Tool

Nina Lobanov-Rostovsky

622

Russian Fabric Design, 1928-32

Charlotte Douglas

634

How Meierkhol'd Never Worked with Tatlin, and What Happened as a Result

Elena Rakitin

649

Nonarchitects in Architecture

Anatolii Strigalev

665

Mediating Creativity and Politics: Sixty Years of Architectural Competitions in Russia

Catherine Cooke

680

Index of Artists and Works

716