NICOLETTA MISLER

PAVEL FILONOV AND MIKHAIL MATIUSSHIN

The topic of my presentation today is the relationship between Mikhail Matiushin and Pavel Filonov. I agree with Alla Povelikhina that Filonov’s and Matiushin’s ideas about “organica” were quite different, but even so it is still rewarding to compare their reciprocal conceptions, since the two men were very close, worked in the same institutions (the former Academy of Art and Ginkhuk), and often exchanged students in the 1920s. Liudmila Ivanova (1904–1977), for example, a very interesting artist of the 1920s and 1930s, took lessons from both artists and retained the influence of both as we can see in a comparison of her Filonovian and Matiushinesque pieces, an influence which lasted even into her more realistic landscapes of the 1940s.¹

Filial devotion to the master on the part of the student is yet another force that brings Filonov and Matiushin close together (Malevich, too), i.e., both artists created a group of students and disciples within their own particular movement of Analytical Art, See-Know and Suprematism and these pupils professed an almost religious faith in the vision of their mentors. Filonov and Matiushin were indeed, the exponents of two different faiths (or perhaps we shall say sects) and their interrelationship, therefore, was complex and serious.

It is not by chance that Filonov’s paintings often serve as backgrounds to Matiushin’s group photographs.² First of all, the two men retained a profound and reciprocal respect of each other, even when they were not in direct contact—which is, perhaps the most unusual aspect of their artistic interaction, particularly in the mid-1910s when jealousy, gossip, and a naive claim to stylistic or philosophical precedence dominated the panorama of the Russian (and not only Russian) avant-garde. Let us take the well-known 1913 photograph³ showing Filonov, Alexei Kruchenykh, Malevich, and Iosif

². See, for example the photographs No. 17, 23, and 27 on pp. 116, 120, and 122 in H. Klotz et al.: Matiushin und die Leningrader Avantgarde. Catalog of exhibition at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (Karlsruhe, 1991).
³. This photo is reproduced, for example, on the cover of C. Bauermeister and N. Hertling: Sieg über die Sonne. Aspekte russischer Kunst zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts. Catalog of exhibition at the Akademie der Künste (Berlin, 1983).
Shkolnik against a background of an upside down piano, chair, and window. The reason they are shown together with the piano upside down symbolizes their performance of a totally new or "trans-rational" genre inasmuch as they were all involved in the two experimental performances of that destined year of 1913, i.e., Kruchenyh, Malevich, and Matiushin in *Victory Over the Sun*, and Filonov and Shkolnik in *Vladimir Maiakovsky: A Tragedy*, presented concurrently in December. But despite the irreverent and *zaum* mise-en-scène of the photograph, the only character who seems to be treating this as a joke, is the mischievous Kruchenyk. The other characters are serious and it is to Matiushin and Malevich, the two "knights of space" that Filonov addresses himself for here are the potential leaders of a new society united beneath the sign of a prophetic belief in a new dimension (not only a plastic, but also a spiritual one). Indeed, after publishing his own first manifesto on *Made Paintings* the following year, Filonov wrote a formal letter to Matiushin, asking him to join a new association under the rubric of Universal Flowering. Filonov wrote the letter subsequent to the death of Elena Guro (April 26, 1913) when Matiushin wished to link the new venture with the name of his late wife, an idea rejected by Filonov who was not especially keen on her artistic endeavors. The idea of establishing the new association lasted throughout 1914, Malevich referring to the Universal Flowering Group in a letter to Matiushin of December 1914.

In his letter to Matiushin, Filonov states: "We have based ourselves on an idea which derives *organically* from the deep needs of Russian art"; again, in his 1923 "Declaration of Universal Flowering," Filonov plays with the idea of juxtaposing European and Russian art, reconfirming that the former encourages a speculative aesthetic and the latter an *organic* one. For Filonov the meaning of the word organic in these contexts could be either that of a coordinated interconnection of the parts within the whole (as with an organism) or could derive from the concept of an organism in itself, i.e., something living, moving, and pulsating, a notion that reverberates throughout Filonov’s works, and with increasing intensity. In the same letter Filonov defined this new tendency in art as "double naturalism"; his autobiographies help clarify the formation of this "double naturalism": "During my academic years oil..."