

Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928

Volume Editor ANNA LAWTON

Texts Translated and Edited by
ANNA LAWTON and HERBERT EAGLE

With an Introduction by ANNA LAWTON
and an Afterword by HERBERT EAGLE

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VOLUME EDITOR **Anna Lawton**

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To Vladimir Markov

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Preface

This is the first collection of Russian Futurist manifestoes, programmatic declarations, and essays on literature to appear in English translation. The purpose of this collection is twofold: to provide English-speaking students of the avant-garde with a primary source of reference and to enhance the general reader's appreciation for a movement that profoundly affected aesthetic developments in all the arts.

No serious study of Futurism can be undertaken without a direct knowledge of the manifestoes that constitute its theoretical foundation; yet the reading of theoretical declarations outside their historical context may well frustrate the nonspecialist. This volume therefore includes an introduction that highlights the significance of Futurism as an international phenomenon originating in Italy, then sketches the history of Russian Futurism over approximately two decades. Whereas other, more thorough surveys of Russian Futurism have concentrated either on the prerevolutionary or the postrevolutionary stages, this Introduction provides a general overview that shows the movement's basic continuity within change and relates specific moments to the documents included in the collection. This volume also includes an afterword that deals with the long-lasting legacy of Russian Futurist theories—those of its principles that found a fertile ground in Formalism, Structuralism, and semiotics.

The Russian Futurists applied new aesthetic principles, not only in poetry, but in theoretical writings as well. Therefore the texts in this volume have been a challenge to the translators. Oddities of style, bluntness of language, irregular punctuation, capricious spacing—all have been preserved to the extent that it was possible. Creative neolo-

gisms have been matched by English equivalents. Poetry has been rendered with a rhythm as close as possible to the original. As the look of a text was as important as its content, great care has been devoted to preserve the original layout. The authors' names thus follow the texts of the manifestoes but precede other texts such as essays, articles, and book excerpts.

Each text is complete with an annotation and numbered notes. The latter appear at the back of the volume so that they do not distort the appearance of the original format. Occasional lettered notes to the text were in the original and are part of the translation. Russian names that appear in the text reflect the most common English spelling; those in the endnotes and annotations are given in modified Library of Congress transliteration. Titles of primary sources in Romance and Germanic languages are not translated. Those in other languages, including Russian, are given in English only, although the original-language titles may be found in the Title Index.

My work has been supported by the following grants: the Purdue University XL Grant, the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend, two Short-Term Grants of the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center, and two Senior Scholars Exchange Grants of the International Research and Exchanges Board. Herbert Eagle's work was supported in part through a sabbatical grant from the University of Michigan.

I conducted my research partly at the Library of Congress, partly at the Moscow Central Archive on Literature and Art and at the Lenin Library. But the most invaluable source of materials was Vladimir Markov's personal collection. To him I owe my deepest thanks, not only for the materials he made available to me but for his constant, expert advice—and most of all, for having inspired me to undertake this endeavor some fifteen years ago, when, as a graduate student at UCLA, I first became acquainted with his work on Futurism.

In the course of my work, friends and colleagues have been generous with information and advice, among them John E. Bowlt, Zina Breschinsky, Patricia Carden, Caryl Emerson, Darra Goldstein, Gerald Janecek, Marzio Marzaduri, Marjorie Perloff, Marina Raskin, Richard Stites, Ronald Vroon, and many others. My sincere appreciation goes to all of them.

In particular, I thank my collaborator on this volume, Herbert Eagle, who besides contributing his translations and notes provided me with overall editorial advice and material help.

Herbert Eagle thanks his colleagues Omry Ronen, Assya Humesky, and Michael Makin for providing information and some material especially helpful for the annotations and for placing events in their larger context. Vladimir Markov's *Russian Futurism* and *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov* were also invaluable in this respect. Special appreciation goes to Carol Gog for typing a substantial part of the manuscript and to Badria Jazairi for typing the latter portion of the manuscript on very short notice. Finally, Herbert wishes to underscore how much fun it was to work with me in devising English equivalents for the neologisms, clever phrasings, and rhetorical pyrotechnics of the Futurists.

ANNA LAWTON

Washington, D.C.

**Russian Futurism through
Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928**

Introduction

ANNA LAWTON

Futurism in the World

Futurism emerged on the literary scene with the publication of "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro*, February 20, 1909.¹ Marinetti, whose business acumen matched and possibly surpassed his poetic talent, saw *Le Figaro* as the ideal forum to launch his new movement and endow it with an international flavor. Paris at that time was the cultural center of Europe and the cradle of countless incipient movements in art and literature. The eyes of the European intellectual community were on Paris, and every event taking place there was likely to attract international attention.

Marinetti's "Manifesto of Futurism," rather than a polite announcement, was a calculated piece of bombast meant to shock. Futurism did not ask for acceptance, it imposed itself. The "Manifesto" declared that Futurism was about to revolutionize the public aesthetic sensibility and assume the leadership of the literary and artistic avant-garde. Although even before the turn of the century, such movements as Impressionism and Symbolism had brought about significant innovations in art and literature and marked the beginning of a whole new approach to aesthetics, the influence of these movements had hardly been felt in Italy, where cultural life was stagnating, anchored to a venerable tradition. Marinetti and the group of young artists and poets

1. See the new critical edition by Jean-Pierre Andreoli-deVillers, *Le premier manifeste du futurisme* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1986).

that gathered at his apartment in Milan set out to awaken national consciousness.² Initially their objectives were purely aesthetic; later they got involved in politics and sought to achieve a total renewal of Italian society. They rebelled against their own class and directed their attacks at the "narrow-minded, self-satisfied bourgeoisie" basking in its privileges and reveling in the facile glory of an artistic past several centuries old. The pomposity and shortsightedness of the leading classes was responsible, in Marinetti's view, for keeping Italy from becoming a modern, industrialized nation with a cultural life on a par with that of other European countries. And so the style and methods the Futurists eventually adopted in their crusade had one main goal: *épater les bourgeois*.

As early as 1905, Marinetti established the publishing house Poesia and issued a magazine of the same title, the purpose of which was to acquaint the Italian public with contemporary foreign poetry, in particular with the French Symbolists. Marinetti himself started his career as a Symbolist and for a while wrote and published exclusively in French. The international orientation of *Poesia* is evident in the choice of poets who appeared on its pages: Emile Verhaeren, Alfred Jarry, Paul Claudel, W. B. Yeats, and Valery Bryusov. The magazine was circulated all over Europe, including Russia. It promoted public debates, literary contests, and public opinion surveys. As Victor Shklovsky wrote, "Art does not change little by little; new phenomena accumulate without being perceived, later they are perceived in a revolutionary way."³ The appearance of "The Manifesto of Futurism" was the final stage in a process that had been taking place, with Marinetti and his magazine at its center, for four years. The birth of Futurism was indeed perceived as a revolutionary act, however, owing in great measure to its style of presentation.

The program outlined in this manifesto is still vague, but the main tenets and values of Futurism are brought forth with irrepressible force: anarchic vitalism, rebellion against "passéism" (orientation toward the past), destruction of academies and museums, urbanism, confidence in the achievements of the technological era, celebration of the machine as a symbol of the new aesthetics, love for the "beauty of

2. The main exponents of this first phase of Futurism were the poets Luciano Folgore, Corrado Govoni, Paolo Buzzi, Francesco Cangiullo, Enrico Cavacchioli, and Auro D'Alba; the painters Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrá, Gino Severini, Fortunato Depero, Luigi Russolo (also a musician), and the architect Antonio Sant'Elia.

3. Victor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), p. 125.

speed." Marinetti endorsed the new aesthetic principle of the "beauty of speed" in his hyperbolic fashion by asserting that "a roaring automobile is more beautiful than the Winged Victory." According to this manifesto the development of technology produced profound changes both in the physical world and in the human psyche. With trains, automobiles, airplanes, telegraph, and telephone, the world acquired a new dimension, speed, that affected not only the traditional way of life but the poetic perception of it as well. The Futurist poet's task was to devise a language capable of expressing his new perception of the world instantaneously and directly.

In subsequent manifestoes, Marinetti characterized "liberated words" and "wireless imagination" as the main features of his new poetic language.⁴ The idea behind those formulas was that the elements central to the logical linguistic structure (conjunctions, adverbs, adjectives, verbal conjugations, and punctuation marks) had to be eliminated to reduce the language to its essential parts (nouns and verbs in the infinitive). Bare words, "liberated" from their syntactic shackles, were to be juxtaposed by analogy. Marinetti called this new technique the "wireless imagination," borrowing from the terminology of science and technology (the wireless telegraph) and having in mind the elimination of syntactic conducting wires. The "destruction of syntax" eventually inspired Marinetti to attempt a "typographical revolution," which consisted in emphasizing the freedom and autonomy of the word through the use of different typefaces and inks.⁵ The analogies between words were expressed visually in Marinetti's "tables of liberated words," where the iconic element reinforced the phonetic one and vice versa and where their dynamic interaction produced an endless number of analogical associations.⁶ Marinetti's

4. F. T. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint, trans. R. W. Flint and A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972); idem, "Destruction of Syntax-Wireless Imagination-Liberated Words" (1913), in *Futurist Manifestoes*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking, 1973).

5. *Ibid.*, "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility" (1914), in Flint, *Marinetti*.

6. We shall see that the Russian Futurists, too, considered analogy the cornerstone of their poetics. But it must be noted here at the outset that their understanding of analogy often differed from Marinetti's. This is especially true with the Cubo-Futurists, who made analogy an issue in their troubled relations with the Italian Futurists. The crux of the matter was that while Marinetti relied mainly on the analogy of representational images, the Cubo-Futurists worked more abstractly on the analogy of sounds. But there were some Russian Futurists who were closer to Marinetti, first among them Vadim Shershenevich, the leader of the Mezzanine of Poetry, who adopted Marinetti's ideas on the "word-image" almost literally.

many manifestoes, though interesting for their program of global reform of art and society, are thus most remarkable for their style. Starting with "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," Marinetti's virtuoso handling of oratorical devices, striking poetic images, narrative segments full of adventure and suspense, and his overall tone of bravado initiated a trend of manifesto writing that became the hallmark of all subsequent avant-garde movements around the world. With Futurism a new literary genre was born: the manifesto.⁷

Although Futurism as such developed only in Italy and Russia, its impact was felt all over Europe as well as in America and the Far East. Marinetti energetically carried the banner of Futurism to all the major European capitals; organized art exhibits, public debates, poetry recitals; and personally financed the publication and distribution of Futurist books and other printed materials. Because of its controversial nature, Futurism inspired individual artists and poets as well as movements and groups. Those attracted to the basic principles and values of Futurism, however, often made an effort to dissociate themselves from Marinetti.⁸

In France, Futurism was treated with skepticism and condescension. The fashion of the day was Cubism, with which Futurism shared some basic features. Guillaume Apollinaire was at first supportive of Futurism and wrote the manifesto "L'antitradition futuriste" (1913) before disavowing his association with the Futurists.⁹ The journal *SIC*, edited

7. Vladimir Markov states, "Marinetti . . . raised theoretical declaration to the level of a work of art, and in fact overshadowed with his own manifestoes even the best of his poetry and prose." *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1967), p. 5. Marjorie Perloff quotes from Marinetti's reply to a letter by the painter Gino Severini: "I have read with great attention your manuscript, which contains extremely interesting things. But I must tell you that it has nothing of the *manifesto* in it. . . . I therefore advise you to take it back and reword it, removing all that I have already mentioned, and intensifying and tightening it, recasting the whole new part in the form of *Manifesto* and not in that of the review article about futurist painting. . . . I think I shall persuade you by all that I know about *the art of making manifestoes*, which I possess, and by my desire to place in *full light*, not in *half light*, your own remarkable genius as a futurist." Perloff comments: "To give one's text 'the form of Manifesto' . . . was to create what was essentially a new literary genre, a genre that might meet the needs of a mass audience even as, paradoxically, it marks the transformation of what had traditionally been a vehicle for political statement into a literary, one might say, a quasi-poetic construct." *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 81-82.

8. This survey of the international developments of Futurism can only be very schematic, limited to a quick overview to give an idea of the vast resonances of the movement. Those who wish to learn more about specific events connected with Futurism should consult the Selected Bibliography.

9. See "On the Futurists' Controversies," Marianne W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory, 1909-1915* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 205.

by Pierre Albert-Birot, was a forum for Futurist writings for many years. Furthermore, Albert-Birot's experiments in the theater—*théâtre nuniste*—paralleled the Italian concept of Futurist performance. Futurist elements may be perceived in the "parossist" and "integralist" poems of Nicolas Beaudouin and Henri-Martin Barzum, as well as in certain works by Blaise Cendrars and Jean Cocteau. An important and singular aspect of French Futurism is its "feminist" component, represented by the manifestoes issued by Valentine de St-Point, "Manifeste de la femme futuriste" (1912) and "Manifeste futuriste de la luxure" (1913). Such later movements as Dadaism and Surrealism were in some measure indebted to Futurism even though they emerged in reaction against it. Echoes of Futurism were heard in Belgium, where August Joly published his manifesto "Le futurisme et la philosophie" (1912) and where several avant-garde journals, notably F. Berekelaer's and J. Peeter's *Het Overzicht* and E. Lecomte's and A. Orliac's *La Nervie*, issued Futurist writings.

The English Imagists, members of the movement founded by Ezra Pound, and the less known Vorticists displaced typical Futurist features, although the British steadily maintained their independence of thought and the national character of their movements. Marinetti, during a series of lectures in England (May–June 1914), was accused of paternalism in addressing the British avant-garde. A group of poets and artists including L. Atkinson, D. Bomberg, F. Etchelles, C. Hamilton, W. Roberts, E. Wadsworth, and Wyndam Lewis voiced their indignation in an open letter to the *Observer*, June 14, 1914.¹⁰

Germany was hospitable to Futurism from the very beginning. Herwarth Walden was a dedicated supporter of the Futurists. He made space for them in the pages of his journal *Der Sturm* and promoted art exhibits and conferences. Some critics believe Futurism was the catalyst that brought about a revolutionary change in German cultural life and a source of inspiration for some German Expressionists.¹¹

In Poland, Futurism began with the works of Jerzy Jankowski and later flourished in the group the Cracow Avant-Garde, headed by Tadeusz Peiper and Julian Przybos. Adherents of Futurism among the Polish poets were Kasimir Wierzynski, Bruno Jasienski, Tytus Czy-

10. The letter read: "There are certain artists in England who do not belong to the Royal Academy nor to any of the passeist groups and who do not on that account agree with the futurism of Signor Marinetti. An assumption of such agreement either by Signor Marinetti or by his followers is an impertinence." For a brief account of Marinetti's relationships with the British avant-garde, see Anna Lawton, "Marinetti in Inghilterra: Scritti inediti," *Il Verri*, no. 10 (June 1975): 138–50.

11. Zbigniew Folejewski, *Futurism and Its Place in the Development of Modern Poetry* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1980), p. 6.

zewski, and the theorist Jan Brzekowski. A Czech movement close to Futurism was Poetism. Associated with this movement were Vitezlav Nezval, Jaroslav Seifert, Frantisek Halas, Vilem Zavada, and others. But even before the appearance of an organized avant-garde group, Futurist elements were to be found in the works of the poet Stanislav Neumann. In Yugoslavia one can mention two Serbo-Croatian Futurist poets, Antun Gustav Matos and Janko Polic-Kamov. Among the Slovenes, Futurism found especially fertile ground (possibly because of this region's proximity to Italy). The main representatives of Slovene avant-garde poetry are Anton Podbevsek, Srecko Kosovel, and Vladimir Premru, among others. Mention should also be made of the Bulgarian Geo Milev and his journal, *Scales*, as well as the Romanians Ion Vinea and Marcel Janco, who contributed to the journal *Contemporary*. Hungary's promoter of Futurism and editor of the journals *Today* and *Action* was Lajos Kassak.

Futurism reached as far north as Sweden and as far south as Spain and Portugal. In Stockholm the closest to Futurism was the poet Per Lagerkvist, but most of the writers associated with the journals *Ultra* and *Quosego* display Futurist features to a greater or lesser degree. In Spain, Gabriel Alomar's article "El futurismo," published in 1905 in the journal *L'Avens*, in some respects anticipated Futurism. This article is more concerned with sociopolitical issues than with literary matters and therefore has little in common with Marinetti's program of aesthetic reforms. Nevertheless it does share some of Marinetti's hostility to tradition and to the bourgeoisie. Alomar fiercely sustained his claim that he was the inventor of the word *futurism*.¹² Futurism, however, did not get a foothold in Spain, although Marinetti's subversive "Proclama futurista a los Españoles" was translated and published by Ramón Gómez de la Serna in the avant-garde journal *Prometeo* (vol. 3, 1910). Portugal offered a mode of Futurism very close to the Italian one. Several poets with Futurist inclinations contributed to the journal *Orpheu*. The first manifesto to shock the Portuguese public was "Manifesto Anti-Dantas" (1916),¹³ by José de Almada Negreiros, followed by his "Ultimatum futurista às gerações Portuguezos do século XX" (1917). The latter was published in the journal *Portugal futurista*, sponsored by a group of enthusiastic poets and painters, among them Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Alvaro de Campos, and Santa Rita Pintor. The group published only one issue of the journal, which was quickly confiscated by the police.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

13. Julio Dantas was a member of the cultural establishment, the author of popular plays in a traditional vein.

Spanish and Portuguese cultures in Latin America were also influenced by Futurism. Creationism, founded in Chile in 1912 by Vicente Huidobro, was the first Latin American movement with some affinity to Futurism. It was followed by Ultraism, launched by Rafael Cansinos Assens and Guillermo de Torre. In Argentina the Ultrist theater of José M. de Pinho Henriques is worthy of note. Peru had a Futurist poet in Alberto Hidalgo. But Brazil was the Latin American country with the most cohesive avant-garde movement. Futurism, as a term, was loosely used to identify the most daring and controversial aspects of Brazilian Modernism. Futurist elements were present in the sculptures of Victor Brecheret, the canvases of Anita Malfatti and Di Cavalcanti, the music of Villa-Lobos, and the poetry of Oswald de Andrade, Mario de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Sergio Milliet, and others. The avant-garde aesthetics that were based on the rejection of tradition and the necessity for new and independent expression also satisfied the nationalistic aspirations of Brazilian artists (and of Latin American artists, in general). Avant-garde action, in its search for a national identity, represented a break with the Old World as well as with the Northern American states. Therefore, while accepting the principles of Futurism, those artists dissociated themselves from European culture past and present. Mario de Andrade even resented being called a Futurist and stated his position in several articles.¹⁴

Futurism touched the United States only superficially, mostly in painting and the performing arts. The first exhibit of Futurist paintings from Europe took place in San Francisco during the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915). It was New York, however, that inspired the Futurist works of Joseph Stella and Max Weber. Also in New York, Marius de Zayas published the magazine *291* (1915), which contained features of the new typography practiced by both the Italian and the Russian Futurists: letters as iconic signs, words arranged so as to form visual images, phonetic value of letters emphasized or minimized by shape and color. The Russian Futurist David Burliuk settled in New York in the 1930s and continued his activity as a writer and publisher, though little remained of his original Futurism.

Futurism traveled not only across the Atlantic after Columbus but also across the Asian plains along the path traced by Marco Polo, eventually reaching China and Japan. In Japan several avant-garde groups found a unifying center in the magazine *Futurist School of Japan*. Collaborators on the magazine included Ikada Katsumi, Hachimori Torataro, Uebayashi Masuo, and Nakajima Miyoshi. The Chinese

14. Folejewski, *Futurism and Modern Poetry*, pp. 112–13.

poets Hu-shi and Kuo-Mo-jo were strongly inspired by Futurism, and so were, to various degrees, the other contributors to the magazine *New Youth*.

When we allow for national diversity and technical differences, Futurism and the movements it inspired present a set of constant features. Futurist aesthetics have their roots in the irrationalism that permeated literature and the arts at the turn of the century. Such movements as Symbolism, Impressionism, and Cubism emerged as a reaction against the positivism of the nineteenth century and opposed intuitive epistemological processes to strictly rational ones. The same trend was present in philosophy, in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and especially Henri Bergson, whose theory of "simultaneity"—the idea that time and space are a continuum—informed the theory of all avant-garde art. Moreover, what occurred was a Romantic revival, an updated version of that wave of personal introspection and lofty aspirations that stirred so many passions at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus the Symbolists sought to attain knowledge through mystical correspondences with the world beyond. The Impressionists revealed the immateriality of people and landscapes, their normally hidden ethereal qualities. The Cubists, devoid of mysticism and relying on scientific knowledge, placed the aesthetic object in a new dimension, a dynamic relationship of space and time. This search for the essence of things generated a specific concern with form and produced a heightened awareness of the given medium and its potential.

This new trend was in some measure a consequence of the latest developments in science and technology. After Einstein's theory of relativity was recognized as a legitimate principle of scientific research, it was no longer possible to see the world as regulated by strictly logical axioms. The traditional Newtonian architecture of the universe collapsed, spatial and temporal dimensions overlapped, and syllogistic cognitive processes ceased to be functional. Futurist aesthetics, with its emphasis on speed, dynamism, and simultaneity, reflected the poetic perception of a chaotic universe. The Futurists, however, perceived chaos not in negative terms, as a disruption of order, but as a natural condition. This is the main difference between Symbolist and Futurist ideas of chaos. The Symbolists sought to escape from it into an ideal world. The Futurists did not recognize any world other than the surrounding one, and they made new rules that would fit the reality of a chaotic universe. They glorified the machine that endowed man with those "super qualities" necessary to participate fully in the new life. In literature they elevated chaos to the status of a poetic principle. Para-

doxically, this notion yielded a carefully thought-out system supported by a substantial body of literary theory.

Finally, Futurism initiated an aesthetic revolution by imposing a new angle of vision. The world perceived anew—the “world backwards” as Aleksei Kruchenykh entitled one of his booklets—marked the beginning of the twentieth-century sensibility. The inheritance of Futurism, although filtered through and enriched by the experience of many and varied avant-garde movements that followed, is still visible today in some radical art forms. Concrete poetry is based on the principle of “the word as such,” the word as an object that is valuable per se. The emphasis on its visual as well as phonetic properties is meant to show the special way in which the word exists (the word’s own way of being). The Futurist’s rejection of literary canons opened up endless possibilities for today’s poetry and prose. Rhythms and rhymes now depend solely on the poet’s inspiration and on the inner demands of a given composition, rather than on preestablished rules. The idea of dynamism and dialectical interaction has contributed to the elimination of genres and has produced a more fluid narrative form in prose, where the writer moves freely from the lyric to the descriptive, from introspection to chronicle. Abstract paintings and sculptures are the legitimate descendants of the Futurist idea of bringing to the fore the dynamism of matter, the state of matter in constant evolution that cannot be fixed in static form. Architecture and urban planning in the last three decades have realized the wildest dreams of the Futurists. The sketches of the Futurist city by the Italian architect Antonio Sant’Elia, with its complexes of skyscrapers connected by complicated nets of aerial freeways, suspended bridges, and underground tunnels, once looked like a wild science fiction fantasy. Today they seem to have served as a blueprint for many major metropolitan centers. Results of the Futurist experiments are evident in contemporary music. As in poetry, in music too, the Futurists sought to destroy harmony and to endow cacophony with aesthetic value. Noteworthy are the compositions of Luigi Russolo, who “invented” the “music of noises” and devised a complex contraption called the “noise intoner.”¹⁵

But it is in theater and cinema, perhaps, that Futurism had the most profound and long-lasting impact. The Futurists revolutionized stage performance in many ways. They eliminated genre distinctions and sustained the idea of “total theater,” a combination of various performance elements. They found their inspiration in forms such as the

15. Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: Dutton, 1971), pp. 33–40.

circus, the cabaret, and the music hall. They eliminated psychology, the foundation of the realist theater, and transformed stage performance from an intellectual experience into a sensual, intuitive one. From a sophisticated reciter of lines the actor turned into a performer combining the qualities of an acrobat and a clown. The Futurists eliminated slice-of-life type sets and preferred a bare stage that revealed the mechanics of the performance. They eliminated causality in the development of the plot and introduced eccentricity and a serial structure. They demanded the participation of the audience in the performance. The Italians developed a special form that reflected the demands of the new theater—"the theatrical syntheses"—which anticipated many of the features of the theater of the absurd.¹⁶ The Russian Futurists contributed extensively to the development of avant-garde theater, which in those years flowered under the direction of Vsevolod Meyerhold, Nikolay Evreinov, and Alexander Tairov. Vladimir Mayakovsky was extensively involved in playwriting and stage production, but mention should also be made of Kruchenykh, who contributed an original opera libretto in "transrational language," and of Ilya Zdanevich, the author of five "transrational" *dras* (as he called his plays).¹⁷

But the hallmark of Futurist performance was the Futurist "evening." It consisted of a wild "happening" in which the Futurists declaimed their verses, read manifestoes and lectures, performed concerts of "noises," and exchanged verbal and even physical abuse with the audience. The idea behind the evening was to expand the stage, to go beyond the boundaries of the artificially limited performing space, to turn the whole city into a stage and life into a performance.¹⁸

Futurism also contributed to the development of avant-garde techniques in cinema. The Italian Futurists issued one manifesto on cinema and produced several films. The Russians produced only one film, but Mayakovsky participated as an actor and a screenwriter in a

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–65.

17. Maiakovskii's major plays are: *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, staged originally by Meyerhold with sets and costumes designed by Filonov; *Mystery-Bouffe*; *The Bedbug*; *The Bathhouse*. On Maiakovskii's involvement in theater and cinema, see A. M. Ripellino, *Maiakovskii e il teatro russo d'avanguardia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1959). Music for the opera *Victory over the Sun* was composed by Mikhail Matiushin; the sets were designed by Kazimir Malevich. Zdanevich's *dras* are described in Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 350–63 and Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments 1900–1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 164–88.

18. Anna Lawton, "Futurist Manifestoes as an Element of Performance," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 19 (Winter 1985): 473–91.

number of films. But what is significant is not so much the Futurists' direct contributions to cinema as some of the aesthetic principles of Futurism that cinema adopted. The relationship between Futurism and cinema has yet to be studied, but some Futurist features are obvious in the films of Dziga Vertov and in Sergei Eisenstein's idea of the "montage of attractions."¹⁹

Futurism in Russia, 1912–1916

Futurism developed at almost the same time in Italy and in Russia. It is true that the first Russian Futurist manifesto, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," did not appear until 1912. Nonetheless, it represented the crystallization of a literary mood that had been gathering in Moscow and St. Petersburg for approximately two years. While Futurism in Italy was a compact phenomenon under the leadership of one man, Marinetti,²⁰ in Russia it was heterogeneous, with many groups constantly engaging in literary warfare. Each group claimed to be the only true representative of Futurism; each launched vitriolic attacks against the "pretenders." Yet at times, temporary alliances of convenience occurred.

Today the general public tends to identify Russian Futurism as a whole with the single group of Cubo-Futurists, who numbered among their members several poets of talent. Nevertheless, the other major groups that emerged before the Revolution, the Ego-Futurists, the Mezzanine of Poetry, and the Centrifuge, played an important role in shaping Russian Futurism into a complex and vital movement. All these groups were short lived. They began to disintegrate as early as 1914 and gradually died out over the next two years. Cubo-Futurism, however, produced two offspring: the transrationalist Company 41° and the productivist Left Front of the Arts (Lef). Although opposite in

19. Anna Lawton, "Dziga Vertov: A Futurist with a Movie Camera," *Explorations in National Cinemas* (Pleasantville, N.Y.: Redgrave, 1977), pp. 65–73; idem., "Rhythmic Montage in the Films of Dziga Vertov: A Poetic Use of the Language of Cinema," *Pacific Coast Philology* 13 (October 1978): 44–50. A brief discussion of the connection between Futurism and cinema is to be found in Eric Rhode, *A History of the Cinema* (New York: Penguin, 1979), in the chapter "Aspects of the Soviet Cinema"; also in Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, pp. 120–42.

20. Marinetti's headquarters were in Milan. A number of avant-garde poets were, however, grouped around the Florentine magazine *Lacerba*. Among them were Giovanni Papini, Ardengo Soffici, and Aldo Palazzeschi, who were originally associated with Marinetti's Futurism but eventually disavowed it, objecting that Futurism was becoming "Marinettism."

nature, organization, and goals, these two groups were the ones to take over and carry the banner of Futurism in the 1920s.²¹ It is therefore necessary to consider two distinct phases in the history of Russian Futurism, the first bearing an anarchic-revolutionary character with a tinge of romanticism, typical of the historical avant-garde; and the second (where Lef is concerned) marked by an unsuccessful effort to embrace the Revolution and build the culture of the future communist society.

Cubo-Futurism

Before acquiring the name Cubo-Futurism in the second half of 1913, this group was known as Hylaea.²² In the winter of 1910 the founders (the three brothers David, Nikolay, and Vladimir Burliuk and their friend Benedict Livshits) were vacationing at the Burliuks' estate in the Kherson region. Hylaea was the old Greek name for that region, the ancient land of the Scythians where in mythical times Hercules performed his tasks. It was a name pregnant with poetic suggestion to the initiators of a trend in art and literature who looked back to prehistory in order to build the future. Two other poets, Vasily Kamensky and Velimir Khlebnikov, joined Hylaea at the very beginning. Even before this group came into being, Kamensky and Khlebnikov collaborated with the Burliuk brothers on the publication of the almanac *A Trap for Judges* (1910), which was vaguely Futurist in intention but not in substance. Moreover, Khlebnikov had published what later became his most famous transrational poem, "Incantation by Laughter," in *Studio of the Impressionists* (1910), another almanac with avant-garde claims, which also included some poetry by David and Nikolay Burliuk. In 1911, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Aleksei Kruchenykh joined Hylaea; together with Khlebnikov they brought to the group extraordinary creative input. Hylaea was now ready to embark on a more aggressive program. One year later, its first official publication, the almanac *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, appeared; it carried the homonymous manifesto.²³

The tone and imagery of this first declaration recalled the by-then-

21. After 1921, 41° ceased to exist, but its main exponent, A. Kruchenykh, kept promoting transrational poetry almost single-handedly. Another movement worthy of note is the Imaginist group, formed in 1919, which developed from the Mezzanine of Poetry.

22. The term *Futurists* appeared for the first time in connection with the Hylaeans in the title of their almanac *Futurists*. "Hylaea." *Croaked Moon* (1913). The title page read: "The miscellany of the only Futurists in the world, the poets of Hylaea."

23. See text, in this collection.

famous statements by Marinetti about the rejection of the past and the orientation toward urbanism and technology. It also proclaimed for the first time the idea of the "self-sufficient word," which became the cornerstone of Cubo-Futurist theory. In their second almanac, *A Trap for Judges*, 2 (1912), the Hylaeans published another important manifesto,²⁴ more programmatic than the previous one, in which they reaffirmed in more precise terms their commitment to a new kind of word-oriented poetry. The most radical expression of this orientation is what Kruchenykh named "transreason" (*zaum'*) or "transrational language" (*zaumnyi iazyk*). This term appeared for the first time in Kruchenykh's essay "New Ways of the Word" (1913),²⁵ but Kruchenykh had already published three poems in transrational language a few months earlier, in his book *Pomade*. Among them was the famous "Dyr bul shchyl," which is to this day the most often quoted example of transreason. Kruchenykh, without formal training in poetics, had no aesthetic inhibitions and was able to carry the idea of the self-sufficient word to extravagant lengths, reaching a level of abstractionism that bordered on the absurd.

In general terms, the Cubo-Futurists proposed to treat the poetic word as an object in itself devoid of any referent. The "word as such" was considered a phonetic entity possessing its own ontology. Transrational language, rich in sound but devoid of conventional meaning, was organized by phonetic analogy and rhythm rather than by grammar and syntax. The reader was required to restructure his mental processes, from rational to intuitive, in order to grasp the message.

The main practitioners of transreason were Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov. Although they collaborated on many lithographed booklets and cosigned a number of declarations, their views on transrational language were substantially different. Khlebnikov's poetry aimed at revealing the primeval meaning of existing word roots, expressed through consonantal sounds rather than conventional semantics. He dreamed of a universal language based on similar-sounding roots. Kruchenykh considered transreason the manifestation of a spontaneous, noncodified language. His poetic idiom consisted of raw verbal material, which acquired expressiveness and meaning only through contextual relationships. As an example of transrational poetic expression, Kruchenykh cited the Russian religious sectarians who in moments of ecstasy start speaking in foreign tongues or nonexistent idioms.

24. See text, in this collection.

25. See text, in this collection.

The other Cubo-Futurists, although sharing the common concern for verbal experimentation, were not transrationalists. Possible exceptions are Elena Guro, marginally associated with the group, who created a transrational language based on children's speech, and Vasily Kamensky, who consistently used transreason in the first edition of his long poem *Stenka Razin, the Heart of the People* (1918). Mayakovsky, the most popular and charismatic figure in the group, created his own strikingly original poetic language by using conventional words in a nonconventional way. He deformed the meaning of words by foregrounding their component sounds in structuring the verse line and by making odd semantic juxtapositions. The result was a tremendous broadening and enrichment of the verbal base.

All in all, the Cubo-Futurists did accomplish an aesthetic revolution that largely surpassed the literary field. Their contributions to the other arts cannot be the subject of this essay, but their connection with painting must be mentioned, if only because they chose to stress their ties with Cubism in their name. Many of the Cubo-Futurists were artists as well as poets and worked closely with leading art groups such as the Jack of Diamonds and the Union of Youth. The painters most closely associated with the Cubo-Futurists were Mikhail Larionov, Natalya Goncharova, Olga Rozanova, and others, who illustrated the poets' publications. The Hylaeans shared their predilections for primitivism with Larionov and Goncharova, and some of Larionov's paintings are believed to have had an impact on the poetry of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh.

But the true connection between literature and painting lies deeper. It is to be found in the Cubo-Futurist understanding of the poetic word as a "living organism." In their essay "Poetic Principles" (1914),²⁶ David and Nikolay Burliuk used this expression as part of their contention that the poetic word is "sensible," possessing not only aural but visual properties. Other Futurists went even further, pointing out the "palpability" of the word (this notion was also strenuously maintained by the Formalists of Opoiáz) and the word's "smell."²⁷ This synesthetic understanding of art, which was common to the whole avant-garde, produced among the Cubo-Futurists some remarkable results. While roughing up the texture of the text to make it "palpable" through an unorthodox use of the verbal material, they also performed a typographical revolution. Conventional layouts exploded under the effect

26. See text, in this collection.

27. See "Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists," the selection from "Moment philosophique," and "Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyan sky" in this collection.

of Futurist dynamite, and the debris was picked up and rearranged for visual effect. Kruchenykh, however, mostly did not even bother re-assembling the scattered letters and let them lie around the page in colorful disorder. For all its declared spontaneity, the effect of the explosion was obviously calculated to emphasize the shape of words and letters and thereby enhance their visual expressiveness. Notable in this respect are Kruchenykh's previously mentioned lithographed booklets (often produced in collaboration with Khlebnikov), which were written in longhand by the author and illustrated by avant-garde artists. As we shall see, this practice was eventually continued and developed by the members of 41°, Ilya Zdanevich, Igor Terentyev, and others. Another example of visual poetry is Kamensky's "ferro-concrete" poems, very similar to Marinetti's tables of liberated words and Apollinaire's *calligrammes*. In these poems the words are often composed figuratively to form a picture. Mayakovsky's solutions to the visual aspect of poetry were not so spectacular but just as valuable and more durable. His most notable technique is the "stepladder line," where the verse is divided into syntagmatic segments, each one of them arranged on successive "ladder steps" in a descending progression.²⁸

The year 1913 was the golden year of Cubo-Futurism and of Russian Futurism in general as an avant-garde force. If the Futurists did not succeed in throwing Pushkin and the other venerable masters into the waters of oblivion, they certainly were able to inject a new perspective into the appreciation of art. Their rather rude tactics created considerable resentment within the cultural establishment and among its well-to-do patrons, but what was to be done? A sort of fatal fascination has always surrounded the "barbarian" destroyers of a dying civilization. And so it happened that, never ceasing to heap abuse on the Futurists' hooliganism and charlatanry, the "pharmacists" (as the philistines were called in avant-garde circles) and their wives agreed to get themselves "slapped in the face." Futurist evenings of poetry reading and manifesto declamation became fashionable season events to which the respectable public flocked with a confessed feeling of condescending curiosity—after all, the performance smacked of the circus—and an unconfessed feeling of exciting, sinful transgression. An aura of scandal made the Futurist evenings irresistible. The proximity of those social outlaws on stage created the illusion of a daring adventure and

28. On the Russian Futurist visual experiments in poetry, see Janecek, *Look of Russian Literature*; Perloff, *Futurist Moment*; and Juliette R. Stapanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision* (Houston, Tex.: Rice University Press, 1986).

of impending danger. One never knows what to expect from Genghis Khan!—even if he is armed only with wooden spoons (quite harmful to good taste when worn in the buttonhole à la Burliuk) and dressed in a clownish yellow blouse (the clownishness only conceals the raging belligerence of a Mayakovsky). To tell the truth, the public's fear was not totally unjustified. It was not unheard of for the Futurists to switch from verbal to physical violence, though such occurrences were more frequent in Italy, where Futurist evenings often ended in a fistfight or salvos of rotten eggs and ripe tomatoes. But in Russia, too, the public was occasionally subjected to physical abuse, judging from Kruchenykh's "spilling of hot tea on the audience."²⁹ More contemporary avant-garde exponents (in the West, of course) would express their contempt in a more explicitly obscene way. But that was the time of the avant-garde infancy, when *épatage* consisted mainly of nose-thumbing.

And yet the Russian Futurists took their task, if not themselves, seriously and with extraordinary zeal devoted their energy and talents to the cause of a global aesthetic revolution. The name change from Hylaea to Cubo-Futurism undoubtedly served that cause. At the same time it created a great deal of ambiguity in the relationship with the Italians. It may be true, as the Hylaeans firmly maintained, that it was the press that started calling them Futurists. They seem nevertheless to have welcomed the publicity benefits of being associated with the Marinetti cyclone, which had been storming all over Europe for more than four years. To concede any Marinettian influence, though, was another matter altogether. The Cubo-Futurists, rightly or wrongly, never did. Actually, in an excess of concern over a possible misunderstanding of their alleged absolute independence from the "Stranger," they went so far as to falsify some publication dates and never missed an occasion to pile contempt and scorn on their name-giver.³⁰

All this was bad news to Marinetti when he set foot in Russia on January 26, 1914. He went there on a cultural mission—so he thought—invited by the association Les Grandes Conférences, with the intention of making new alliances and broadening the Futurist

29. Benedict Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, trans. John E. Bowlt (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1977), p. 151. The Futurist evenings were held in theaters, halls, and cabarets. Among the latter, the most famous was the "Stray Dog" in St. Petersburg, where in February 1914, Marinetti presented one of his lectures.

30. The Russians referred to Marinetti as the "Stranger" in a polemic leaflet; see "We Are the Futurists" in this collection. On specific relations between Russian and Italian Futurism, see Anna Lawton, "Russian and Italian Futurist Manifestoes," *Slavic and East European Journal* 20 (Winter 1976): 405–20; and idem, *Vladimir Shershenevich: From Futurism to Imaginism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1981).

front. Alas! Owing to an unfortunate or planned coincidence there were no Futurists in Moscow at that time. Mayakovsky, David Burliuk, and Kamensky were on a poetry-reading tour of the Southern provinces. Livshits and Khlebnikov were awaiting Marinetti in St. Petersburg, planning a well-publicized boycott of his lectures (fortunately the scandal was avoided at the very last minute). The only confreres who met Marinetti at the railroad station with the welcoming delegation were Vadim Shershenevich and Constantin Bolshakov, members of the Mezzanine of Poetry and therefore "enemies" of the Cubo-Futurists. But not all the news was bad. The mission's failure was more than compensated for by Marinetti's personal, if mundane, success. The public and the critics regaled him with treatment reserved for foreign celebrities. Standing ovations, banquets, rave newspaper reviews, floral showers on stage (adieu, rotten eggs and tomatoes!), and—*mamma mia!*—hundreds of perfumed ladies' notes. This was flattering indeed, even to the "duce of Futurism," who as a rule sought the "voluptuousness of being booed." And so Marinetti found himself in the embarrassing position of wanting to "slap in the face" his Futurist brothers (brothers?!) rather than that amiable public.

The need for fisticuffs became most urgent during an altercation with Livshits at a dinner party. The dispute polarized over their differences regarding the idea of transreason. Marinetti would not budge from his conviction that transrational language was nothing more than the Russian version of his concept of liberated words and wireless imagination while Livshits just as stubbornly claimed that transreason was an altogether different notion, probing deeper into the ontology of the poetic word. In any case, on that evening wild "liberated words" darted back and forth across the table, and soon the literary dispute degenerated into a nationalistic squabble that had little to do with poetry.³¹

Or perhaps it did, because what separated the Cubo-Futurists from the West was not only a different set of poetic devices but the vision of a poetic universe that had its roots in the Slavophile ideology of the preceding century. On that vision the movement developed its original and truly national character—which does not mean that the Russians had not heard of and appropriated some of the "shouts, drumbeat, and grenades" coming from beyond the Alps.³² They had

31. On Marinetti's trip to Russia, see Livshits, *One and a Half-Eyed Archer* and Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 147–55. On that occasion Livshits showed solidarity with his Hylaeian fellows, though as a poet he was a well-educated intellectual of European orientation, an exception among the group.

32. V. Shershenevich, *Futurism without a Mask* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1914), p. 13.

indeed. And no disclaimer will ever change the fact that their declared hatred for the past, their iconoclastic fury, their debasement of Art, their rejection of Beauty, their emphasis on intuitive rather than rational mental processes, their concern for technology and urbanism, and—above all—their use of manifestoes not as mere theoretical supporting statements but as a publicity medium all are features of an avant-garde that bears the trademark “made in Italy.” But for centuries the Russians have had a knack for processing Western cultural imports in their intellectual workshops. Often the results were less than satisfying, but occasionally, as with Futurism, they came up with a brilliant product.

The basic trait that distinguished the Cubo-Futurists from the Italians was an underlying archaism, a leaning toward a primitivism of forms and often of themes (water nymphs, bogeymen, and other figures of Slavic folklore are at home in Khlebnikov’s poems). Their search for the “word as such” was a voyage backward to a prehistoric age, where words sprouted like fragrant flowers in the virgin human soul (“Euy!” Kruchenykh would shout on observing the delicate beauty of a lily);³³ where the word in its pristine purity created myth; and where the human being, in a prelogical state of mind, through the word discovered the universe.

But what about the “future?” The “future” of course was the ultimate destination, to be reached—yes, on a “winged engine” (Khlebnikov’s words)—but after having recovered the original linguistic substance and having annihilated the ages standing in between, which had corrupted that substance with the poison of civilization. What else do Khlebnikov’s Martians announce if not a future linguistic Golden Age of interplanetary communication?³⁴

The return to the origins of language, therefore, was clearly a point of departure for the Cubo-Futurists’ creative imagination. It also accounted for an ostentatious emphasis on their “Asian soul” and their claim to be the proud descendants of the Scythian warriors or, more simply, for their sense of *narodnost’*, their spiritual ties with the Russian land and its people (folk songs and tales, naïf paintings, icons, and medieval miniature books are all part of the Cubo-Futurists’ cultural baggage). And much could be said about Khlebnikov’s panslavism. In fact, his Martians and other inhabitants of the galaxy would have had to acquire at least some rudimentary notions of Russian in order to benefit from the Esperanto he built on Slavic roots. One of the

33. See “Declaration of the Word as Such” (1913), in this collection.

34. See “The Trumpet of the Martians” (1916), in this collection.

many Slavic neologisms Khlebnikov created was the name *budetliane*, a calque of the Western word *Futurists*, which was used mostly for nationalistic polarization.

On the other hand, technology and urbanism, the most characteristic themes of that Italian Futurism they opposed, became an integral part of the *budetliane* aesthetics. Like their foreign counterparts, they rejected Symbolist mystical correspondences with the ethereal world. They looked at the skies through the telescope of science fiction and more often directed their attention to earth, to the buzz and bustle of the contemporary metropolis. What they saw there, however, was not indiscriminately exciting to them as it was to Marinetti. In fact, apart from occasional flirtation with the aesthetics of war and violence, the Cubo-Futurists' attitude toward the machine and the big city—no matter what they trumpeted in their manifestoes—betrayed a great uneasiness. Mayakovsky's urban landscapes are often nightmarish settings (the Gogol and Dostoevsky models were not after all "thrown overboard from the Ship of Modernity") in which animated and surrealistically misplaced objects threaten to subvert the hierarchical order based on human supremacy. The "revolt of things" reaches its culmination in Khlebnikov's poem "The Crane,"³⁵ in which a machinelike bird of colossal dimensions (the creature looks like a patchwork of chimneys, parts of trains, rails, bridges, and other metal scraps) threatens humanity with annihilation.

We should not be surprised, therefore, that Marinetti threw up his hands in despair and went back home convinced that those "pseudo-futurists live in *plusquamperfectum* rather than in *futurum*."³⁶ He might have found more likely soulmates among the members of the Mezzanine of Poetry and the Ego-Futurists, but there is no evidence that he ever paid any serious attention to these groups. Ironically, the visit meant to unify and strengthen the Futurist front had the opposite effect. It marked the beginning of the end for the *budetliane*. Many of the internal contradictions that had kept their group alive through dynamic tension now surfaced as irreconcilable differences. Khlebnikov was the first to walk out, slamming the door on what he perceived to be much too great a deference toward the Stranger on the part of some of his colleagues—that "untalented windbag" Nikolay Burliuk, that "madman and scoundrel" Nikolay Kulbin, and so on.³⁷ He retreated to his native Astrakhan and to his utopian dream of a

35. The first part of "The Crane" appeared in *A Trap for Judges*, 1 (1910). The second part, titled "The Revolt of Things," appeared in *Creations* (1914).

36. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 158.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Society of Globe Presidents. Livshits followed suit and joined the army. The others were soon to be dispersed by the war and the Revolution, with Kruchenykh taking refuge in Tiflis and David Burliuk moving east to Vladivostok and finally to the United States (how appropriate for a Cubo-Futurist to reach the West by the eastern road!). This prompted the embattled Mayakovsky to write a funeral oration to Futurism, which is at the same time a prophecy of Futurism's Second Coming.³⁸ Eventually Khlebnikov made up with his confreres, in 1916, and even mellowed enough to admit Marinetti into the Parliament of the Martians, together with H. G. Wells.³⁹ But by that time bigger and quite terrifying events were about to befall the country. As Khlebnikov himself had foreseen in his visionary fantasies, a mechanical crane, "his beak clothed in tatters of human meat," was going to devour an epoch. And with it the Futurists, who of that epoch were the rebellious but true sons.

Ego-Futurism

"Il faut être absolument moderne," Rimbaud said. That could have been an appropriate slogan for the Ego-Futurist dandies of St. Petersburg. But the founder of the group, Igor Severyanin,⁴⁰ lacking a broad education and a knowledge of French, was not able to quote Rimbaud. He had, however, a vague notion of Western Symbolism, Decadence, and—of course—Futurism, and he compensated for his lack of erudition with a sure grasp of the literary mood of the day, a peculiar poetic talent, and a firm commitment to being *moderne*. To him this meant first of all an orientation toward the future (although his urbanism and technology themes were limited to sophisticated urban dwellers riding in luxury cars) and a cheap amorality that combined Decadent poses and motifs with his philosophy of "egoism." This Oscar-Wildean son of the most Western of all Russian cities, St. Petersburg, while indulging in "ice creams of lilacs" and "pineapples in champagne,"⁴¹ was the first to introduce the word *Futurism* into Russian literature.

The group of Ego-Futurists came into being in October 1911 and a few months later (January 1912) issued the manifesto "The Tables."⁴²

38. See "A Drop of Tar" (1915), in this collection.

39. See "The Trumpet of the Martians."

40. Pseudonym of Igor Lotarev (1887–1942).

41. "Ice Cream of Lilacs," Severianin's famous poem, appeared in the Ego-Futurist miscellany *Eagles over the Abyss* (1912). *Pineapples in Champagne* (1915) is a collection of verse by Severianin.

42. See text, in this collection.

The signatories called themselves the Rectorate of the Academy of Ego-Poetry;⁴³ recognized as their predecessors two minor Decadent poets, Constantine Fofanov and Mirra Lokhvitskaya; and in a very schematic way outlined the principles of their ego-philosophy: a boundless individualism, intuitivism, madness, pseudomysticism, and lyricism. There seems to be little that could be considered Futurist in this program. "The Tables" are actually a tardy echo of Russian Decadence—an impression reinforced by the reference to the "predecessors" of Ego-Futurism—laced with ill-digested Nietzschean ideas. Until recently critics have therefore dismissed this group as negligible in the complex Russian Futurist movement. Now, their role reevaluated, the Ego-Futurists have been recognized as an important facet. In fact, their ties to early Russian Modernism, more evident than those among the Cubo-Futurists, are significant inasmuch as they show a continuity of development.⁴⁴

A few months before the founding of the academy and the appearance of "The Tables," Severyanin issued a booklet entitled *Prologue Ego-Futurism*, where in the form of a long poem he expounded the foundation of the Ego-Futurist aesthetics, using the word *Futurism* for the first time in a Russian context. In *Prologue* we find the Marinettian idea that the poetry of the past is inadequate to express the spiritual life of the contemporary individual and that technological reality requires a new rhythm in poetry and a new orchestration of sounds. Other Futurist features of this declaration include the rejection of reason and logic, the devaluation of Pushkin, and an immodest and premature boasting about the author's fame and significance.

It is Severyanin's poetry, however, that gives us a sense of what Ego-Futurism was. The setting is urban, but unlike the coarse urbanism of the Italian Futurists or the Cubo-Futurists, Severyanin's environment is high class and refined. His is a salon poetry rather than a

43. Besides Severianin, the signatories were Konstantin Olimpov (pseud. of Konstantin K. Fofanov, 1890–1940), a madman and the son of the "predecessor" of Ego-Futurism, Konstantin M. Fofanov; George (Georgii) Ivanov (1894–1958), whose poetry was not particularly Ego-Futurist and who eventually joined the Acmeists and, after the Revolution, became one of the most prominent of the Russian émigré poets; and Graal-Areiskii (pseud. of Stepan Petrov, 1899–?), an astronomer and poet whose early poems are of Symbolist descent, the later ones showing the influence of Severianin. He too eventually joined the Acmeists.

44. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 61–62. Particularly evident are Severianin's ties to Mikhail Kuzmin (1875–1936), a refined aesthete who opposed to Symbolist poetry his exquisite verses based on classical eighteenth-century forms and displayed a Mozartian virtuosity in light poetic genres. His name is associated with the little known movement Clarism.

factory poetry; it features aesthetes, effete intellectuals, princesses, inspired poetesses, and glamorous courtesans—a glamorized popular image of high society rather than high society itself. Technology goes hand in hand with the vestiges of a decadent era: automobiles and “liqueur Crème de Violettes,” dirigibles and “brooks full of lilies,” trains and “a purple trance.”⁴⁵ In their attire and behavior Severyanin and his fellow Ego-Futurists emphasized the image of the snobbish urbanite by deliberately caricaturing themselves. This stance contributed considerably to their popular success in the provinces, where the public took them seriously and where they were often the only known Futurists. Severyanin captured the popular imagination and reached stardom with his sleek pomaded hair parted in the middle; his melancholy, darkly circled eyes; his impeccable tails; and an ever-present lily in his hands. Behind this facade of cheap glamor, however, Severyanin was a poet; a Futurist poet, moreover, whose work deserves serious attention. He must be credited with the creation of bizarre neologisms; the use of foreign, or foreign-sounding, words of a mundane type; and experimentation with new rhythms and rhymes. In short, his work represents a successful attempt to rejuvenate poetic vocabulary and to restructure verse in a looser, more spontaneous way.

No less important to the history of Ego-Futurism is Ivan Ignatyev.⁴⁶ Every enterprise, to be successful, needs an organizer skilled in public relations. No one knew this better than Marinetti. The Russian Futurists, too, learned this lesson well, and each of their groups included one member who fulfilled that role. For the Cubo-Futurists it was David Burliuk; for the Ego-Futurists, Ivan Ignatyev. He joined the Ego-Futurists soon after “The Tables” appeared and by February 1912 was already able to publish the first issue of the newspaper *Petersburg Herald*, designed as a forum for Ego-Futurist poetry and essays. Unfortunately, the newspaper proved unprofitable and had to be discontinued by the end of that year, after its fourth issue. But during its brief existence it got an enthusiastic response “from all corners of Russia,” including “Vladivostok, Kostroma, Rybinsk, and Smolensk”—if we are to trust Ignatyev’s assessment.⁴⁷ A more durable enterprise was the “Ego” press, in existence since November 1911, which eventually, under Ignatyev’s leadership, took over the name of the defunct newspaper. Under the new imprint “Petersburg Herald,” Ignatyev pub-

45. *Brooks Full of Lilies* (1911) was the first collection of Severyanin’s “poezas” and included “A Purple Trance.”

46. Pseudonym of Ivan Kazanskii (1882–1914), who signed his works with either his real name or his pen name.

47. See “The First Year of Futurism,” in this collection.

lished nine miscellanies and numerous volumes of verse. He accomplished all of this in less than two years, before ending his life with a dramatic suicide in January 1914.

If Ignatyev's poetry may be overlooked with no substantial loss to the student of the movement, his historical surveys and theoretical essays are essential for an understanding of Ego-Futurism. His accounts provide precious material, given the dearth of memoirs from that group.⁴⁸ Furthermore, he must be credited with keeping the group together after Severyanin quarreled with Constantine Olimpov and walked out to promote himself as an independent literary star, and this in October 1912, only one year after the establishment of the academy. For the next two years Ego-Futurism operated and developed under the leadership of Ignatyev, but because of Severyanin's celebrity status, Ego-Futurism quite incorrectly continued to be identified with him.

His former fellows, however, categorically condemned the renegade. "The Gates of Return were closed to Severyanin forever," and all that preceded the schism was contemptuously renamed Ego-Severyaninism.⁴⁹ Beyond these polemics, the break marked a noticeable change for the Ego-Futurists. Ignatyev, as the new leader, thought it appropriate to redefine the philosophical principles of the movement and to put together a "Charter" to replace the now-obsolete "Tables."⁵⁰ In effect, this declaration reaffirms the Ego-philosophy of its predecessor with emphasis on individualism and intuition but presents one new feature: a stated interest in verbal experimentation.

Except for Ignatyev, the signatories were all new and, as it turned out, more prone than their older brothers to radical formal solutions.⁵¹ The most daring among them was Vasilisk Gnedov, truly a misplaced Cubo-Futurist with his predilection for folksy neologisms and his penchant for *épatage*. He even had the distinction of surpassing Kruchenykh's abstractionist achievements when he "wrote" the "Poem of the End" (if one can term it "writing," for the poem consists of the title alone on a blank page).⁵² Another member, Pavel Shirokov, displayed

48. See "The First Year of Futurism" and "Ego-Futurism," in this collection. The only other book of memoirs is Severianin's novel in verse, *The Bells of the Cathedral of Feelings* (Tartu, 1925).

49. See "Ego-Futurism," in this collection.

50. The "Charter" is incorporated in "Ego-Futurism," in this collection.

51. Pavel Shirokov (1893–1963), Vasilisk (Vasilii) Gnedov (1890–?), and Dmitrii Kriuchkov (1887–?).

52. "Poem of the End" is included in *Death to Art* (St. Petersburg, 1913). The other poems in this collection consist of one or two lines, or one single word, or even one single letter.

some thematic features reminiscent of Mayakovsky. Ignatyev himself wrote visual poetry and some alogical prose, where grammar and syntax are "destroyed" in a Cubo-Futurist manner.⁵³ These similarities were by no means signs of a rapprochement between the two groups, however, for attacks against the Hylaeans, always considered natural enemies and by now dangerous competitors, never ceased and actually intensified, fueled by Ignatyev.

The one who did make an alliance with the Hylaeans—now sporting the newly acquired name of Cubo-Futurists—was the renegade Igor Severyanin. But the alliance was short lived and rather stormy. In January 1914, Severyanin joined David Burliuk and Mayakovsky on a tour of the Crimea to give a series of poetry recitals. After the first two performances he quarreled with them over money and went his own way. A permanent verbal cross fire thereafter punctuated the relationship between Severyanin and the Cubo-Futurists. Nevertheless, this ill-conceived alliance produced some concrete results. Severyanin had his poetry printed in two Cubo-Futurist miscellanies and cosigned the manifesto "Go to Hell!"⁵⁴

Why did the Cubo-Futurists even consider accepting Severyanin into their ranks? As noted above, the first signs of the disease that brought prerevolutionary Futurism to an end began to appear around that time. Marinetti's visit threw the Cubo-Futurists into disarray, and Ignatyev's death caused the disintegration of the Ego-Futurist group.⁵⁵ An alliance (moreover, with a first-class celebrity) looked like a good expedient for injecting new life into the movement and reviving public interest. Futurism would have gained strength and credibility had its adherents operated on a united front, and that is why they "rejected their accidental labels Ego and Cubo and united into the one and only literary company of the Futurists."⁵⁶

But practical reasons aside, they had little in common. If we think of Cubo-Futurism as a sui generis manifestation of Slavophilism, then Ego-Severyaninism is its antipode. Born in the northern capital, the city Peter the Great conceived of as a "window on the West," this

53. Ignat'ev refers to his visual poetry as "Melo-letera: Graph" and gives a sample of his prose in "Ego-Futurism."

54. *The Milk of Mares* (1914) and *The Roaring Parnassus* (1914); "Go to Hell!" (see text, in this collection) was printed in the latter, and the alliance explains the positive reference to Severyanin's volume of verse *Thunder-Seething Goblet* as well as the negative comment about the Petersburg Herald, which was on Ignat'ev's side.

55. An epilogue to Ego-Futurism is the group under the leadership of Viktor Khovnin that was associated with the magazine *The Enchanted Wanderer*. Both magazine and group ended their operations at the beginning of 1916.

56. See "Go to Hell!"

mode of Futurism was particularly sensitive to foreign influences and suggestions. Too far from the rural heartland that nurtured the Cubo-Futurists' sensibility in spite of their "urbanism," Severyanin drew his inspiration from echoes of French Decadence and Italian Futurism. Unlike Khlebnikov, who probed into the remote linguistic past like an alchemist distilling Slavic roots to turn them into the gold of a universal language, Severyanin borrowed a bagful of exotic-sounding words and composed bizarre, but poetically convincing, "poemettes," nocturnes, "mignonettes," preludes, rondels, "quinzels," and "intuittas." He used French exclusively for sound effects, at times distorting the original words to fit his rhymes, but more often to make them sound absolutely new and strange—after all, French was even too familiar to the Russian aristocracy.

Among the Cubo-Futurists, only Mayakovsky found something worthy in Severyanin and, notwithstanding their rivalry, considered him a true poet of the big city. Marinetti would have agreed, had he paid any attention to Severyanin's celebration of limousines and express trains, and he would have liked his mundanely optimistic attitude toward the incipient era of the machine. In fact, there is no hint of "the revolt of things" in this "Northerner" who knew no spleen and who very "modernly" fox-trotted his way through life and literature.⁵⁷

The Mezzanine of Poetry

Not all the Moscow Futurists opposed Severyanin and his Ego-fellows. The members of the Mezzanine of Poetry were considered almost a Moscow branch of Ego-Futurism, for they contributed frequently to Ego-Futurist miscellanies, and some of their volumes of verse were published by the Petersburg Herald. The Mezzanine, however, was an independent group that did not subscribe to the whole of Ego-Futurist philosophy. In particular, it rejected the Ego pretensions to mysticism and metaphysics while retaining a romantic orientation and a marked predilection for intuition over logic. Furthermore, its leaders, unlike their northern counterparts, were well educated and familiar with French poetry, qualities that gave the whole group a

57. This is true only of Severianin's Futurist years, which preceded the October Revolution. In the 1920s and 1930s, as an exile in Estonia, he suffered because of financial problems and isolation. Now, his work is being reevaluated in the USSR. The Moscow Central Archives of Literature and Art (TsGALI) acquired a part of Severianin's manuscripts from his widow, and the publishing house Eesti Raamat in Tallin prepared a thick volume of his poetry and prose to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1987. "Severianin" in Russian means "Northerner."

more genuine European background.⁵⁸ Therefore, while the Mezzanine members shared the dandyism of the Severyaninists, they did not participate in the masquerade. The Mezzanine's "parties,"⁵⁹ as well as its poetry, lacked the phony paraphernalia of the Ego-Futurists' artificial paradises; they were distinguished by good taste, good manners, and sobriety of style, with just the right touch of eccentricity. These Muscovite gentlemen were also more genuinely urbanist than the Ego-Futurists, and so were led into an alliance (also short lived) with Mayakovsky. Of all the Russian Futurists, they were the ones with the most direct ties to Marinetti and his movement. Moreover, they made an important contribution to Russian poetics by experimenting widely with nonmetrical verse inspired by the French *vers libre* and by pushing the rhyme to its extreme possibilities.

The Mezzanine was organized in the summer of 1913 by Vadim Shershenevich but started its active life only in September, when its first miscellany, *Vernissage*, appeared. The Mezzanine had a brilliant beginning, but like a burst of fireworks it flashed through the skies of Russian Futurism and died out before the end of the year. The opening of the Mezzanine was announced without fanfare—not through a manifesto but more discreetly through an invitation—and the announcement was not signed. It is known, however, that the author was Lev Zak,⁶⁰ the second major figure in the group. The Mezzanine had three other full members and many minor contributors.⁶¹ As expected, it found a sympathetic echo in St. Petersburg, but in Moscow it was the target of vicious attacks from the critics and from the other Futurists.

These attacks were perhaps prompted by the Mezzanine itself, for from its very debut it was quick to "throw down the gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists's," as M. M. Rossiyan'sky (Zak) proposed in one of his articles.⁶² There he establishes the fundamental difference between the

58. Vadim Shershenevich (1893–1942) translated poems by Jules Laforgue and verse theory by Charles Vildrac and Georges Duhamel. Later, in the 1930s, he translated Baudelaire, Villon, and Rimbaud, as well as Shakespeare and Brecht. He was also a translator of Marinetti.

59. See "Overture," the Mezzanine invitation to its "vernissage," in this collection.

60. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 101. Lev Zak (1892–?) was an artist who wrote poetry under the pen name of Khrisanf, theory under the pen name of M. M. Rossiian'skii. Together with Shershenevich he was a coeditor of the Mezzanine miscellanies.

61. The full members were Konstantin Bol'shakov (1895–1940), who with Maikovskii and Shershenevich represents the true urbanist trend in Russian Futurism; Riurik Ivnev (1893–1981), who after the Revolution rejoined Shershenevich, at that time leading the Imaginists; and Sergei Tre't'iakov (1892–1939), an urbanist of interiors in his Mezzanine period; after the Revolution he was very active in the Lef group.

62. See "Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists," in this collection.

Mezzanine and Cubo-Futurism and at the same time gives a definition of what was to become the central core of Mezzanine theory: "The word is not just a combination of sounds, it has its own meaning, its own history . . . its own smell." Therefore, in Rossiyan'sky's view, transrational language is the result of a "misunderstanding of the essence of the word" and "the Cubo-Futurists who rose in defense of the 'word as such' are in reality driving it out of poetry." His statement that the poetic word is more than sound alone touches on the idea that it is the combination of the word's "sensible" properties—color, smell, palpability—that evokes "the image," that ineffable substance of poetry. Rossiyan'sky returned less directly and more poetically to this topic in a conversation with himself (Khrisanf) in "Moment Philosophique,"⁶³ and he displayed his skillful handling of verbal texture in the few poems he published.

But it was Shershenevich who really picked up on the idea of the "word-image" and developed it in his theoretical writings, first as the leader of the Mezzanine, later as an independent Futurist, and after the Revolution as the founder of Imaginism.⁶⁴ He first mentioned the word-image in his "Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyan'sky,"⁶⁵ describing it as the true poetic signifier. Words, Shershenevich thinks, were initially generated intuitively, and they "signified not because they had a definite meaning or a clear sense, but because they preserved a certain image." But with time and automatic repetition, that image became a cliché, a conventional "content," no longer suggested by intuition but governed by logic. Therefore, only the word-image constitutes genuine poetic material.

At first this idea does not seem too far from the Cubo-Futurist concern for the primordial value of the word. But—and this is what both parties perceived as an insurmountable difference—Shershenevich stresses the pictorial aspect of the word-image, which the Cubo-Futurists considered passé; they believed they had moved on to a more advanced stage of phonetic abstractionism. Another cause of their hostility was the appeal Marinetti had for Shershenevich. Although it is now clear that the fundamental idea of the word-image has national roots,⁶⁶ Shershenevich quotes extensively from Marinetti, a foreign source of inspiration. In his initial treatise, *Futurism without a Mask*, Shershenevich already gave Marinetti star billing by proclaim-

63. See text, in this collection.

64. Lawton, *Vadim Shershenevich*.

65. See text, in this collection.

66. See the works of Aleksandr Potebnia and Aleksandr Veselovskii, and in particular Andrei Belyi's "The Magic of Words," *Symbolism* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910).

ing him "the first daring exponent of universal Futurism." Although Shershenevich expresses conflicting feelings toward Italian Futurism, he is obviously impressed by its leader. In the Conclusion Shershenevich imitates the rhetorical style of Marinetti's manifestoes and appropriates his felicitous expression "the Beauty of Speed." But the most Marinettian of all his books is *Green Street*.⁶⁷ Here he talks about poetry as a "series of images"; about the image's "expressiveness based on exceptional novelty"; about the need for the image to be "short and fast as a bullet"; about poetry as the "expressive transmission of the dynamics of the contemporary city"; about the "rhythm of our epoch which lies in its poetic form"; and about the Futurist express train whose goal is "not to take you to" some specific destination but to move "toward the new" and away from "the paralytic past" while involving the reader in the dynamics of its motion.⁶⁸ The conclusion to this book, "Two Final Words,"⁶⁹ reiterates most of the same ideas in a grand finale of explosive images that, needless to say, "smell" of Marinetti's sulfur.

Shershenevich's attraction to Marinetti was not a superficial infatuation but the result of firsthand knowledge of his manifestoes, poetry, and prose. In fact, Shershenevich was the only serious Marinetti scholar among the Russians, and he translated a considerable number of Marinetti's works.⁷⁰ He also expressed his support for the Italian leader on the occasion of Marinetti's visit to Russia. As mentioned above, only Shershenevich and Bolshakov among the Russian Futurists greeted the Italian leader on his arrival in Moscow.

All this, of course, was a cause of friction with the Cubo-Futurists, who on the occasion of their alliances with Severyanin, excluded both the Mezzanine of Poetry and the Petersburg Herald group from "the only literary company of the Futurists."⁷¹ One month later, however, having quarreled with Severyanin, the Cubo-Futurists accepted Shershenevich and Bolshakov, the two leading poets of the Mezzanine, into their camp. This alliance was not totally unreasonable because Shershenevich respected Mayakovsky as a poet and planned to form

67. In *Green Street* (Moscow: Pleiada, 1916), in addition to expounding his theory on the word-image, Shershenevich conducts a polemic with the critics. Half the book is devoted to Shershenevich's answers to his "detractors" and reveals a considerable degree of self-pity and paranoia.

68. See "From *Green Street*," in this collection.

69. See text, in this collection.

70. The collection *Manifestoes of Italian Futurism* (Moscow: Russkoe Tovarishchestvo, 1914); the long poem *The Battle of Tripoli* (Moscow: Universal'naia Biblioteka, 1916); and the novel *Mafarka, the Futurist* (Moscow: Severnie Dni, 1916).

71. See "Go to Hell!"

an independent group of Futurist urbanists, made up of Mayakovsky, Bolshakov, and himself. The plan never materialized. The main results of the alliance were two joint publications, the first of which was optimistically called *The First Journal of Russian Futurists*.⁷² But the alliance broke up before the second "journal" (which was indeed planned) was able to see the light.

When Shershenevich wrote *Green Street*, in 1916, the Mezzanine of Poetry had not been in existence for more than two years, and Futurism as a whole was rapidly fading from the literary scene. Actually, this book is Shershenevich's Futurist swan song. In the Preface he disassociates himself from all existing Futurist groups and accepts being called an independent Futurist only because "the Futurist theory corresponds the most to my views on the image." He goes on to clarify this statement: "I am mainly an *imaginist*"—he declares—"i.e., the images first of all."⁷³ Also belonging to the same period is his collection of verse, *Automobile Gait*,⁷⁴ which includes a selection of his best poetry from earlier volumes and sums up his Futurist period. Apart from the formal aspect, which is daring and inventive and deserves separate study, Shershenevich's poetry is a curious but well-blended mix of Ego-Futurist mundane motifs and Mayakovskian urbanist imagery. Femmes fatales and fragile Pierrots inhabit a city modern and alluring, yet at the same time, threatening and dehumanizing. While in his declarations Shershenevich glorifies skyscrapers, cars, and electricity, in his poems the pervasive presence of the devil and other evil forces throws a dark shadow on the elegant boulevards of the metropolis. All in all, Shershenevich's poems convey a tragic sense of life that reminds the reader of Mayakovsky's and that was completely absent in the Ego-poetry of Severyanin.⁷⁵

So, with Ignatyev dead in St. Petersburg, Severyanin free-lancing, Khlebnikov and Livshits breaking with their group, the Mezzanine vacated, and the remaining scattered Futurists unable to coalesce, the movement was headed for total disintegration. And Shershenevich, after having valiantly lost his battle for Futurism against hostile critics, rival colleagues, and an insensitive public, picked up his bleeding

72. One single issue, no. 1–2, appeared in Moscow in March 1914. The second joint publication was the second edition of *The Crooked Moon* (1914).

73. This is the first instance where the word *imaginist* appears, and moreover in a strange form (*imazhionist*).

74. See "Foreword to *Automobile Gait*," in this collection.

75. Shershenevich's personal tragedies, such as the suicide of his first wife and the violent death of his second love, are recorded in his unpublished memoirs, *The Magnificent Witness* (1932), held in the Central Archives of Literature and Art (TsGALI) in Moscow.

heart and walked back stage for a few years, like one of his unhappy Pierrots.

Centrifuge

This group was the last offshoot of Futurism before the Revolution. It appeared at the beginning of 1914 and for the next two years flowered in Futurism's withering garden like a splendid autumnal rose. This should not surprise anyone inasmuch as such poets as Boris Pasternak and Nikolay Aseyev, whose early works already showed the brilliance of genius, were active members. True masterpieces came out of this "centrifuge," which was meant to separate "the cream of poetry from the less valuable writings."⁷⁶ As a rule, however, Centrifuge was more active in uniting than separating. In fact, it is to the group's credit that it gathered under its imprint Futurists of all credos and affiliations, regardless of age, sex, and talent. In the books and miscellanies Centrifuge published, one can find almost all the Ego-Futurists, some Hylaeans, and even two Mezzanine members, Ivnev and Bolshakov. Not all, however, received the same treatment. Centrifuge had its saints and its devils. Ignatyev was celebrated posthumously as a Futurist martyr, whereas Shershenevich was branded with the mark of infamy and categorically rejected. This orientation reflected the sympathies and antipathies of Sergei Bobrov, the despotic leader of the group.

Bobrov brought Centrifuge into being with the publication of *Brachiodopod* in 1914. This miscellany contained a manifesto Ego-Futuristically called "Charter."⁷⁷ The document has a certain historical interest because it shows the Centrifuge's orientation toward the Petersburg variety of Futurism, but it is negligible from a theoretical point of view.⁷⁸ It is nothing more than a polemic against the Cubo-Futurists and Shershenevich, who themselves had printed devastating critiques of Bobrov's earlier works in their joint publication *The First Journal of Russian Futurists*. Not all the Hylaeans fell under Centrifuge's fire, however. Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky were singled out as exceptions, and later attempts were made to woo them into the Centrifuge. The program of the group, if not clearly expounded, is at least poet-

76. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 259.

77. See text, in this collection.

78. Besides Bobrov (1899-?), the other signatories of the "Charter" were Nikolai Aseyev (1889-1963) and Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), who were two founding members of Centrifuge. By a strange coincidence this manifesto also bears the signature of Il'ia Zdanevich (1894-1975), who was never associated with Centrifuge, either before or after. He eventually moved to Tiflis and became a member of Company 41°.

ically expressed in another piece printed in *Brachiopod*, the manifesto-like "Turbopaeen."⁷⁹ In it the authors play with the Futurist image of a turbine, promising to "smash the dumbbells' heads" but at the same time dreaming of flying off and soaring "above the world." Although the poem sounds like a mindless merry-go-round, we can perceive in the image of the ascending soul Bobrov's fundamental notion of "lyric."

To Bobrov the "lyric" was something very special, nothing less than the spiritual essence of poetry.⁸⁰ In this respect he was a true descendant of the Symbolists. Clear evidence of his literary origins can be found in his earlier works published by a post-Symbolist group, very aptly called "Lyric," to which Bobrov belonged before branching out with Centrifuge. Like most of the Symbolists and unlike many Futurists, Bobrov had had an excellent education. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he was a man of vast erudition. He had an astonishing knowledge of European literature, particularly French poetry,⁸¹ and was a fine connoisseur of Russian poetry as well, especially that of Pushkin's time. Among the Symbolists, Andrey Biely, who was one of Bobrov's teachers, influenced Bobrov the most with his theories on metrics. But what Bobrov rejected of that movement was its orientation toward metaphysics, so that even when he expounded his notion of lyric, Bobrov shunned any mystical justification and resorted to a "scientific" explanation of the source of poetic creation. As if that were possible! Bobrov only succeeded in irritating the reader with his faulty borrowings from mathematics, chemistry, and other sciences. His idea did have merit, though, inasmuch as it anticipated the analytic method of investigation of the poetic text that was eventually fully developed by the Formalists. This "scientific" orientation toward the poetic material, and Bobrov's experimentation with metrics, qualified him as a Futurist. And this was the label the press attached to Centrifuge after the appearance of *Brachiopod*. The Centrifugists, however, never referred to themselves as Futurists, mainly because of their dislike for the clownish exploits associated with that name.

Bobrov was practically the only theoretician within Centrifuge. Pasternak's essay "The Wassermann Test"⁸² is more polemical than theoretical. It seems to be a pretext for exposing Shershenevich as an

79. See text, in this collection. The authors of this unsigned manifesto are supposedly those mentioned in the text: Aseev, Pasternak, and Bobrov.

80. See "Foreword to *The Lyric Theme*" and "Two Words about Form and Content," in this collection.

81. Notable is his article "Life and Works of Arthur Rimbaud," *Russian Thought*, no. 10 (1913).

82. See text, in this collection.

example of what was vulgar and fake in the poetry of the day. Shershenevich is presented as the main exponent of a trend that aims at the "dethronement of genius" and the vulgarization of poetry, only to satisfy the demand of the "consumer-mob." Pasternak accuses Shershenevich of exploiting cheap "figurative images" that have always been "linked with the concept of poetry in the mind of the man on the street" and that—worst of all—came out of the Italian boot. In his opinion Shershenevich's handling of images shows "a complete absence of mystery" or, to use Bobrov's language, of "the lyric basis."

On the side of "true Futurism" Pasternak places all the Ego-Futurists, plus Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, and even Shershenevich's ex-colleague Bolshakov (albeit with reservations). But he does not include himself or any of the Centrifugists. This fact, along with Pasternak's participation in Bobrov's determination to keep clear of the Futurist label, raised the question, in later years, of whether Pasternak was indeed a Futurist. This question came "principally from critics who lack an understanding of, or sympathy with, avant-garde art."⁸³ Russian Futurism was in fact so varied and contradictory as to be able to accommodate both the Cubo-Futurists' cacophonies and Pasternak's "music of words." Besides, on occasion, Pasternak "wrote poetry that was hardly less avant-garde than Kruchenykh's."⁸⁴

The third major Centrifugist, Nikolay Aseyev, was a born Hylaeen. In his early poetry the theme of the big city, with a fantastic Hoffmannesque slant, is prevalent. He later moved away from urbanism and became more and more involved in old Slavic themes and folklore. This made him no less a Hylaeen; he merely switched from the Mayakovsky to the Khlebnikov variety. This change was underlined by Aseyev's stepping aside from Centrifuge (without, however, breaking with it). In 1915, together with Grigory Petnikov, he organized the small group Lyroon as well as a publishing enterprise. It soon became evident from the Lyroon publications that this new group was more akin to Hylaea than to Centrifuge. Its Slavic orientation and folksy nature placed it at the opposite pole from the intellectual, Westernized background of Centrifuge. In addition, its emphasis on verbal experimentation with archaisms and dialects revealed a fascination with Khlebnikov, who, needless to say, got star billing in the Lyroon miscellanies.

Bobrov never acknowledged Lyroon as a split, and he maintained a paternalistic attitude toward it. In the meantime, being in need of a

83. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 269–270.

84. *Ibid.*

patron, he briefly became involved in the small publishing enterprise *Peta*, headed by a rich but ambitious and untalented madman, Fyodor Platov. This collaboration did not last beyond the publication of one miscellany,⁸⁵ but it enabled Bobrov to continue his *Centrifuge* enterprise with Platov's money.

The last to join *Centrifuge*, in 1915, and to play a central role in the group was Ivan Aksyonov. Had he emerged on the literary scene two years earlier he would probably have joined the *Hylaeans*. In fact his poetry is literally Cubo-Futuristic, inasmuch as it is structured like a Cubist painting. Aksyonov was an urbanist who painted Cubist cityscapes with words and who brought this technique to a level of virtuosity unmatched by the *Hylaeans* themselves. His interest in Cubism is also evidenced by his brilliant book on Picasso, which besides being an insightful analysis of Picasso's art contains thoughts on aesthetics, anecdotes, and a polemical treatise.⁸⁶ Aksyonov's kinship with the Cubo-Futurists did not, however, extend to their orientation toward the ancient culture of the Slavs. On the contrary, Aksyonov was a refined Westernizer with a firsthand knowledge of European poetry and verse theory. In this last category his main interest was metrics, and not only was he acquainted with all the most recent works on the subject, but he himself wrote articles, which unfortunately remained unpublished.

The storm of 1917 swept away many things, and among them the *Centrifuge*. Although a few books with the *Centrifuge* imprint continued to appear for a few more years, the group was no longer in existence. Prerevolutionary Futurism was dead. Or perhaps dormant, waiting to be awakened under new forms and circumstances. In any case, the first avant-garde came to an end, and Futurism became history.

Futurism in the USSR, 1917–1928

Company 41°

The title of this section contains a slight anachronism: when 41° made its official appearance in Tiflis, in 1919, the Caucasus was not yet a part of the USSR. Georgia was a democratic republic with a Menshevik government, and its capital was a haven for all sorts of cultural and political refugees. They flocked from the north to this hospitable

85. *Peta* (Moscow, 1916).

86. Ivan Aksenov (1884–1935), *Picasso and Environs* (Moscow: *Centrifuge*, 1917).

southern city to avoid the hardships of war and revolution, or simply to dodge the draft.

A remarkable number of Moscow and Petrograd literati and artists were attracted to Tiflis because of the warm weather, the balmy air, the wealth of colors and fragrances, and the variety of food the city offered. But apart from affording hedonistic pleasures, Tiflis was also a booming cultural center. From 1917 to 1921 the picturesque alleys of the old city, the tree-lined boulevards, the luxuriant parks with their open-air cafés served as an exotic background to the activities of a cosmopolitan avant-garde.⁸⁷ Here, with local artists and poets, mingled Russians of all ages and orientations: the Symbolist Constantin Balmont, the Acmeists Sergei Gorodetsky and Osip Mandelstam, the future Constructivist Boris Agapov, the avant-garde stage director Nikolay Evreinov, and the Futurists Kamensky, Kruchenykh, Olga Rozanova, Kirill and Ilya Zdanevich, Igor Terentyev, to name some of the main figures. Tiflis had a bustling creative life of its own. Among the most prominent exponents of contemporary Georgian culture were the painters Lado Gudiashvili and David Kakabadze and the poets Paul Iashvili, Titsian Tabidze, and Grigol Robakidze. They were the members of a well-known avant-garde group, the Blue Horns, nationalistic and yet French oriented. Armenian poetry, although less prominent, had a very popular representative in the person of Karadavish (the "black dervish," a pseudonym of Akob Gendzhian). Already in his fifties he proclaimed himself the first Futurist of Armenia and enjoyed the public's favors and the respect of his northern colleagues. For many, Tiflis was an oasis outside of history. Uncertain about Russia's destiny and their own fate, these disenfranchised children of a fading age were living a splendid interlude. When the interlude was over, some decided to go back north, others boarded ship to Europe, and Tiflis became a veritable bridge between East and West.

The assembling of talents so numerous and varied and the heated cultural atmosphere generated a plethora of groups, associations, magazines, publishing enterprises, artistic cabarets, art exhibitions, and all sorts of public performances, from quasi-serious lectures to circus acrobatics. As early as 1916, Kamensky starred at the Efimov circus, where he recited his poem *Stenka Razin* galloping around the ring on horseback in a smartly tailored cossack's uniform. Kruchenykh

87. L. Magarotto, M. Marzaduri, and G. Pagani Cesa, eds., *L'avanguardia a Tiflis* (Venice: University of Venice, 1982). This book includes articles in English, Russian, Italian, and French.

arrived in 1918, after having already spent three years in the Caucasus engaged in odd jobs. Together with his closest collaborators, the Zdaneviches, and Terentyev,⁸⁸ he immediately plunged into the Tiflis intellectual cauldron and organized first the Futurists' Union and subsequently the Futuruniversity (*Futuroseuchbishche*).⁸⁹ Under those labels, the group sponsored some fifty lectures in a little more than one year. They performed first at the restaurant Imedi, then at the more famous Fantastic Tavern,⁹⁰ and on special occasions in the conservatory auditorium. They covered many topics—poetry, painting, theater, true Futurism (themselves) and pseudo-Futurism (everyone else)—but their main focus was transreason. The success of those evenings was due in great measure to the performing talent of Kruchenykh and Ilya Zdanevich. While displaying different styles and personalities, they shared the gift of captivating an audience. Handsome and haughty, Zdanevich regaled the public with a virtuoso reading of his *dras*⁹¹ in an elegant tenor voice, whereas the plebeian Kruchenykh indulged in ostentatious vulgarity, both in mimicry and words, and almost hypnotized the audience with relentless, monotonous repetitions of sounds.

The Futurists were not the only animators of the Fantastic Tavern. Poets of other tendencies, in great numbers, presented and discussed their works. Among them were several women, most prominently Tatyana Vechorka and Sofia Melnikova, both later associated with 41°. While Vechorka was a Futurist poet in good standing, Melnikova was an actress of the Theater of Miniatures and an exquisite interpreter of late Acmeist verses full of eroticism and exoticism. Melnikova's un-Futuristic orientation, however, did not prevent Ilya Zdanevich from being ardently in love with her. Later, 41° celebrated her with the publication of its first miscellany titled *To Sofia Georgevna Melnikova* (1919).

Company 41° made its appearance in the summer of 1919, after the Fantastic Tavern suspended its activities. It was a relatively easy feat

88. Il'ia Zdanevich (1894–1975); Kirill Zdanevich (?) was primarily a painter; Igor Terent'ev (d. 1941).

89. This term was originally used by Khlebnikov in his poem "Malusha's Granddaughter," *The Croaked Moon* (1913).

90. The Fantastic Tavern, a descendant of the St. Petersburg cabaret the Stray Dog, was founded and managed by Iurii Degen, himself from St. Petersburg. Unlike the Stray Dog, however, the Fantastic Tavern was not a commercial enterprise drawing well-to-do bourgeois patrons. Entrance was free of charge and no drinks were sold.

91. *Dra* is a transrational word that in Zdanevich vocabulary means "play"; he wrote five: *Yanko the King of Albania* (Tiflis, 1918); *Donkey for Rent* (Tiflis, 1919); *Easter Island* (Tiflis, 1919); *zGA YAkaby* (Tiflis, 1920); and *Ledentu as a Beacon* (Paris, 1923).

for Kruchenykh and Co. All the ingredients were already in place. A brisk shake-up, and 41° emerged from the magician's hat complete with a publishing enterprise and a newspaper. The newspaper, intended as a weekly, came out only once and carried the first manifesto of the 41°. ⁹² Not much is revealed about the group by this very succinct declaration. ⁹³ Fortunately, unlike other episodes in the history of Russian Futurism, this phase is well documented in numerous memoirs. ⁹⁴ No one, though, ever explained the name satisfactorily. Instead, the members of 41° took pleasure in providing a number of contradictory explanations. They suggested that 41° indicates Tiflis's geographic position on that parallel, or the percentage of alcohol in vodka plus 1, or the body temperature that leads to delirium, or references to the Bible. Ultimately, one can speculate that 41° is simply a transrational designation with no meaning at all.

And so, within the framework of 41°, transreason reached its peak and became in Terentyev's words "a grandiose abomination." ⁹⁵ The Futurist commitment to debase art by integrating it into life was pushed into the realm of the absurd. Whereas a few years earlier the Hylaeans had stressed the "sensuous" property of the word, Terentyev declared transreason to be "anal," an organic quality antithetical to the intellectual nature of Western literature. Scatology therefore became a hallmark of 41° and a "national" characteristic. Terentyev published one volume of verse ⁹⁶ and contributed poems to several books and miscellanies, but his main contributions were in literary theory and criticism. Often he combined the two in his absurdist manner, as in the books on Kruchenykh and Ilya Zdanevich, where he displayed keen critical insight into the work of his colleagues. ⁹⁷

Ilya Zdanevich can without a doubt be considered the best poet of 41°. Better educated than his colleagues, he was born in Tiflis, spent the roaring years of the avant-garde in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and came back to his native town on the wave of the cultural migration

92. See text, in this collection.

93. Besides the founding members, Kruchenykh, Il'ia Zdanevich, and Terent'ev, the manifesto carried the signature of Nikolai Cherniavskii, a minor poet whose typographical rendition of transreason was very close to I. Zdanevich's.

94. For example, A. Kruchenykh, *15 Years of Russian Futurism* (Moscow, 1928); V. Kamenskii, *The Way of an Enthusiast* (Moscow, 1931); I. Terent'ev, "The Transcaucasian Lef (Company 41°)," *Lef*, no. 2 (1923); T. Nikolskaya, "Russian Writers in Georgia," in Ellendea Proffer and Carl Proffer, eds., *Ardis Anthology of Russian Futurism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1980), pp. 295–326.

95. See "From Kruchenykh the Grandiosaire," in this collection.

96. *The Cherubim Whistle* (Tiflis, 1919).

97. *Kruchenykh the Grandiosaire* (Tiflis, 1919) and *Record of Tenderness* (Tiflis, 1919).

to the south. His most impressive achievements are five *dras* in transrational language. They were inspired by two basic theatrical genres, the puppet folk theater (*vertep*) and the opera. From the puppet theater Zdanevich retained a sort of raw primitivism (a loose episodic structure, slapstick comedy, blasphemous references to the Bible, and scatology), and from the opera he borrowed some musical features (choruses, duets, etc.). The *dras* are masterpieces of transreason, where incoherent transrational language comes across as absurdly coherent. Very much aware of the importance of a correct diction to bring out the full value of transrational words, Zdanevich elaborated a system of phonetic transcription with the emphasis on words and syllables established through capital letters and italics. His scripts are typographical oddities of intriguing beauty.⁹⁸

Transreason was also Kruchenykh's main concern. His Caucasus period yielded an unprecedented crop of publications. Several lithographed booklets came out similar to those previously published in Moscow but even more imaginative and colorful. Other books showed Zdanevich's influence in the bizarre handling of typography.⁹⁹ Kruchenykh dedicated as much attention to the theory of transreason as he did to its visual aspect. After moving to Baku in 1921, he published the "Declaration of Transrational Language," later reprinted in many books,¹⁰⁰ which restated and reinforced his basic ideas on aesthetics. Once more Kruchenykh pointed out the fundamental difference between the common language, which is constrictive because of its logical structure, and the transrational (poetic) language, which is liberating. He reaffirmed the primitivism of transreason with references to "proto-images" and folklore figures. He drew parallels between poetic transreason and the language of religious sectarians, madmen, lovers, and children. But he also made an important distinction: besides being different from rational speech, transreason is also different from random speech (slips of the tongue, blunders, stuttering, etc.). Therefore, transreason as a poetic medium presupposes an aesthetic awareness—"orchestration and texture."¹⁰¹ He identified various kinds of phonetic texture in words (tender, heavy, coarse,

98. On this subject, see Janecek, *Look of Russian Literature*. Later, in the emigration years in Paris, Zdanevich used his typographical expertise to prepare small editions for collectors illustrated by artists such as Picasso, Chagall, and Matisse.

99. For a bibliography and description of Kruchenykh's books, see Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 338–50.

100. See text, in this collection.

101. *Verbal Texture* (Moscow, 1923).

dry, moist, etc.) and described other types of textures such as rhythmic, semantic, syntactic, and graphic.

The third pillar of Kruchenykh's aesthetics, together with transreason and texture, is "shift" (*sdvig*), or "dislocation." The term came from painting and indicated any deliberate distortion of aesthetic conventions. Kruchenykh's understanding of shift, however, was more focused. He developed a new branch of aesthetics, shiftology, and even devoted a treatise to it.¹⁰² Here Kruchenykh argues that poets who use shifts consciously for artistic purposes operate in the realm of transreason—art—whereas poets who use shifts unwittingly, as in slips of the tongue, operate in the realm of random speech and produce unwanted and ridiculous results.¹⁰³ His main target in the latter category was Pushkin. Combing Pushkin's poetry, Kruchenykh came up with some very funny shifts, unworthy of a venerable master.¹⁰⁴ Kruchenykh's examples are untranslatable because shift involves phonetic wordplay, but an approximate illustration is possible. Shift occurs when two back-to-back words become phonetically spliced. The rhythmic redistribution of syllables then produces a curious effect whereby the end of the first word and the beginning of the second word generate a totally incongruous new word. For example, "the underlined syllables in the phrase 'gromy lomaiut' ('thunders break') form *mylo*, which means 'soap' in Russian. Russian schoolboys knew this before Kruchenykh and enjoyed composing ditties in which completely innocent words produced, after a collision, vocables with a clearly obscene meaning."¹⁰⁵

The chronology of the publications of 41° is a bit confusing because Kruchenykh and his Tiflis colleagues were already printing in 1917; when 41° was officially established they adopted its imprint, which they continued to use even years after the dissolution of the group.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Kruchenykh moved to Baku at the end of 1919; Terentyev could not make up his mind where to settle and wandered for two years between Tiflis and Baku; and Ilya Zdanevich eventually left for Paris, via Batumi and Constantinople.

The south was being conquered by the Red Army, and the cultural scene was changing. Those who gathered in Baku tried to recreate the literary atmosphere of the previous years and at the same time to

102. *Shiftology of Russian Verse* (Moscow, 1923); see excerpts in this collection.

103. See "From *Shiftology of Russian Verse*," in this collection.

104. Kruchenykh wrote the treatise *500 New Witticisms and Puns of Pushkin* (Moscow, 1924).

105. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 342.

106. I. Zdanevich used the 41° imprint for his Paris publications throughout the 1960s.

integrate into the new system. Gorodetsky worked for Narkompros (the Commissariat of Education); Kruchenykh worked for ROSTA (the telegraphic information agency). Also present in Baku were Kirill Zdanevich, Vechorka, and Khlebnikov on his way back to civilization after years of wandering on foot all over Russia.¹⁰⁷

In 1921 the activities and the spirit of 41° moved back to Moscow together with Kruchenykh. There Kruchenykh found a congenial atmosphere in the ferment of new directions in literature and the arts that followed the overthrow of the old sociopolitical structure. His old friends Mayakovsky, Aseyev, Tretyakov, and others were already involved in the construction of a new culture for the proletarian society, and Kruchenykh enjoyed their support and partially joined in some of their ventures. He published books with MAF,¹⁰⁸ contributed to *Lef*, and added a pinch of Soviet rhetoric to his works. But, practically, his concerns did not change. According to Pasternak in 1925, Kruchenykh was "the most tenacious" of the old guard, and he was at that time standing "on the extreme edge" of art. It is interesting that while Pasternak doubted the validity of the later developments in his own poetry and that of Mayakovsky and Aseyev, he expressed his admiration for Kruchenykh's ability to hold on tightly to art in "its primeval stage" and not "allow art to grow up."¹⁰⁹

Kruchenykh pursued this aim indefatigably until 1928. His production in those years was prodigious, ranging from editing and publishing to public lectures, theoretical and polemical writings, poetry and drama. His closest collaborators who followed the transrationalist line were Terentyev and Kirill Zdanevich, and occasionally Khlebnikov until his death in 1922. The Lefists, in contrast, talked a great deal about transreason but tried to fit it into the uncomfortable mold of their "productivist" art. In any case, after 1928 both the transrationalists and the productivists—the last progeny of Futurism—were unceremoniously removed from public life and either faded out of sight like Kruchenykh—and more tragically, Mayakovsky—or found a niche in the newly established cultural fortress of Socialist Realism.

Left Front of the Arts (Lef)

In the years immediately after the Revolution the Soviet government confronted the gigantic task of providing the country with a new

107. Kruchenykh with Khlebnikov and Vechorka published the miscellany *The World and the Rest* (Baku, 1920).

108. Acronym for Moscow Association of Futurists, a short-lived publishing enterprise established by Maiakovskii and Osip Brik in 1921.

109. See "From *Calendar*," in this collection.

sociopolitical structure. In the cultural field the newly established Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) tried to come to grips with the writers' groups and associations that mushroomed overnight. In Moscow and Petrograd the headquarters of publishing houses, newspapers, and magazines were swarming with cultural activists eager to secure a place for their own brand of art in the new society under construction. Competition was fierce and alliances of convenience between rival groups were common.

The main protagonists in the literary field, covering a wide spectrum from the traditionalist right to the avant-garde left, were Proletkult, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, the Divide, the Imaginists, the Constructivists, and the reconstituted group of the Moscow Futurists that eventually sported the militant name of the Left Front of the Arts (Lef).¹¹⁰ Each of these groups claimed to be the only true representative of proletarian literature—the literature of the new leading class. And each one of them sought government support to establish their supremacy over the others. While seeking material support from the government, they all, however, sustained their independence and artistic freedom.

The Futurists were particularly radical in their actions and declarations. They viewed themselves as revolutionary veterans whose original subversive struggle in the field of aesthetics was validated in the political field by the October Revolution. But while the Futurists' background gave them a senior status vis à vis the other groups, it also made them vulnerable to criticism. Accusations from rightist critics and writers, and on occasion from the government, focused precisely on the Bohemian, antisocial, aesthetics-oriented role they played before 1917. The Futurists, although invited to share in the new cultural leadership, never acquired total credibility and had constantly to prove themselves.

Before Lef was established, there were earlier attempts to give Futurism an official status and access to a printing press. In March 1918 three former Cubo-Futurists, Mayakovsky, Kamensky, and David Burliuk, issued a collection of revolutionary proclamations and poems called the *Futurist Gazette*. Although the title suggested a periodical publication, no other issues followed for lack of material support. The Futurists realized that having lost their former middle-class Maecenases, they needed a new patron. And they hoped to find it in the Soviet government. Their idea, which became a cause of constant friction

110. For a detailed history of Lef, see Halina Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Arts* (Munich: Sagner, 1981).

with the authorities, was not to become dependent on government directives but rather to secure the survival of Futurist avant-garde art by imposing it as the cultural ideology of the Soviet state.

The key figures in the organizing phase were Mayakovsky and Osip Brik. Upon an invitation from the Commissar of Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, they joined the Division of Fine Arts of Narkompros (IZO) in the summer of 1918. Lunacharsky was an intellectual who had partaken of the past avant-garde experience and was therefore sympathetic toward avant-garde art. He also realized that the Futurists' cooperation would validate the administration of culture by the government. As a result, the Futurists got financial support for their publishing enterprise IMO (Art of the Young) and were able to voice their views from the pages of the Narkompros newspaper *Art of the Commune*.¹¹¹ Contrary to the wishes of Lunacharsky, who had planned the newspaper as an outlet for a plurality of views, *Art of the Commune* soon became a propagator of the Futurist aesthetics as the basis of the new culture.¹¹² As an organ of IZO, *Art of the Commune* focused mainly on the fine arts; but because of Mayakovsky's involvement the newspaper also advocated the establishment of a parallel section for literature controlled by the Futurists. The Literary Department of Narkompros (LITO) was eventually established, but by that time the monopolistic attitude of the Futurists backfired. It became more and more difficult for Lunacharsky to support a radical Futurist program when his original policy was to integrate all cultural groups. The Futurists, with the sole exception of Brik, were thus excluded from LITO, and the literary section took on a rather conservative character. In the spring of 1919, *Art of the Commune*, having come under fire from Proletkult and aesthetically rightist circles in the government, was suddenly discontinued, and the publishing enterprise IMO lost its government subsidy and had to fold up. Lunacharsky was no longer able to help Futurist publications even if he wanted to, because the publishing affairs of Narkompros had been taken over by the new State Publishing Firm (Gosizdat). Furthermore, Narkompros itself was criticized by none other than Lenin for supporting both the Futurists and Proletkult.

In the next two years the Futurists' position got more and more entangled owing to a comedy of errors. Lunacharsky on the one hand

111. Many exponents of avant-garde art who belonged to IZO supported and collaborated with *Art of the Commune*, among them, Nikolai Punin, David Shterenberg, Nikolai Altman, Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Puni, and Marc Chagall.

112. See Lunacharskii's article "A Spoonful of Antidote," quoted in Brik's "We Are the Futurists," in this collection.

bore the brunt for supporting the Futurists while on the other was publicly chastised by the Futurists themselves for withdrawing his support. In the meantime the Futurists printed occasional articles in the supposedly hostile Proletkult journals, after Proletkult, previously independent, was subjugated to Narkompros. Confusing? Indeed. By 1921 the administration of culture, as well as of the economy, had reached an impasse. A radical solution was needed.

Lenin suddenly found the solution with the announcement of his New Economic Policy. As a result, private and cooperative publishing enterprises were permitted, under the condition of a free market, for the production of fiction, art books, theory and criticism, and the like. The government, for its part, kept the monopoly on political and scientific literature published by Gosizdat. This conjuncture ultimately proved extremely favorable to the Futurists. After a failed attempt to compete on the free market through the publishing enterprise MAF, they finally got the full government support they had sought all along. The government, faced with more than a hundred private publishers capitalizing on trivial popular taste or anti-Soviet sentiments, felt compelled to rally around Gosizdat those writers' groups that were sympathetic to the communist ideology. By making concessions to those groups and subsidizing their publications the government hoped to counteract the negative influence of the private press. And so, thanks to historical contingencies, at the end of 1922 the Futurists were officially acknowledged as the Left Front of the Arts, and their journal *Lef* was approved for publication. This, however, was a mixed blessing because in practice it gave Gosizdat editorial control. Furthermore, Gosizdat was not interested in the Futurists' publications and agreed to support them only because of a Central Committee decision. Its support was limited, its actions aimed at disrupting rather than facilitating the Futurists' activities.

In any case, when the first issue of *Lef* appeared in March 1923, the Lefists intoned their victory song. Their program consisted of three elements: (1) "*Lef must bring together the leftist forces. . . . Lef must create a united front . . . for the integration of a new culture*";¹¹³ (2) "*We have to reconsider our tactics*" but keep fighting against the old enemies in the new society: passéists, aesthetes, proletarians with a conservative taste, epigones, philistines, bureaucrats, and the like;¹¹⁴ and (3) "*It's time to undertake big projects. The seriousness of our attitude toward ourselves is the only solid foundation of our work . . . Futurists! . . . Constructivists! . . . Productivists! . . . Opozazists! . . . Disciples! . . . All*

113. See "What Does Lef Fight For?" in this collection.

114. See "Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?" in this collection.

together! Moving from theory to practice, think of mastery, of professional skill. . . . *Lef is the defense of all creators.*"¹¹⁵

This program reveals the dilemma that plagued Lef from the very outset and finally assured its demise. It is clear that the Lefists were not willing to renounce their role as an avant-garde—"a united front." At the same time they felt compelled to replace their discredited Bohemian image with that of conscientious art workers. Tactics, too, had to be changed. While the Lef program proclaimed a change of tactics, however, it reiterated the old strategy. The old enemies targeted for annihilation were still very much part of the establishment, and the establishment did not need an avant-garde. The Lefists, no matter how professional they looked, were perceived—correctly so—as a destabilizing element. The working classes, meanwhile, those very same people in whose name Lef was going "to undertake big projects," were intellectually far less sophisticated than Lef and hence were alienated. For example, notwithstanding the small printing of *Lef*, many copies remained unsold. But Mayakovsky himself was popular among the masses. With his charismatic personality he drew huge crowds to poetry readings and lectures in factories, workers' clubs, and city squares. Because of his popularity Lef managed to survive until the end of the 1920s.

Among the signatories of the Lef program some were well-known prerevolutionary Futurists—Aseyev, Mayakovsky, Tretyakov; others—Brik¹¹⁶ and Boris Kushner—were marginal figures who became prominent after the Revolution; still others—Boris Arvatov and Nikolay Chuzhak—were newcomers. Three of them, Aseyev, Chuzhak, and Tretyakov, had just arrived from the Far East, where they had been active in the Futurist group *Creation*, organized by David Burliuk in Vladivostok in 1918, which published a journal by the same name. Many of the writings of the Moscow Futurists who did not have access to a printing press appeared in *Creation* and became very popular in that region. When Burliuk left for Japan in 1920 (subsequently for the United States), the Far East Futurists moved to Chita and two years later joined Mayakovsky in Moscow.¹¹⁷

115. See "Whom Does Lef Warn?" in this collection.

116. Osip Brik (1888–1945) was connected with early Futurism because of his generous support of Futurist publications. Later he was one of the most active organizers of Lef and, in practice, the main editor of the journal, even if the title belonged to Maiakovskii. He was also associated with the Opoiiaz circle and became prominent as a Formalist critic. He was Maiakovskii's best friend. Their friendship was not spoiled by the fact that Brik's wife Lilia had an ongoing romantic relation with Maiakovskii. See Vahan D. Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978).

117. Chita was the new administrative center of the Soviet Far East.

But the Lef front was much larger than its hard core. The transrationalists Kamensky, Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Terentyev published some of their works in *Lef*. Pasternak was briefly associated with *Lef*; he printed some of his poetry in it but felt uneasy with the proclaimed utilitarianism of the Lefists. *Lef* even had a token proletarian poet, Aleksey Gastev, among its contributors. But this was not sufficient to help the Futurist cause. In reality, the Lefists were losing their battle against the traditionalism of the Proletarian Writers, who were more accessible to the masses. In the pages of *Lef* we can also find the Formalist critics Yuri Tynyanov and Victor Shklovsky, the prose writers Isaac Babel and Valentin Kataev, the film makers Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, the photographer and artist Alexander Rodchenko, the stage director Vsevolod Meyerhold, and others. Lef's objective was to encompass representatives of all the arts. Nonetheless, literature, and more precisely "the creation of language," remained its main concern.

In article after article, declaration after declaration, the Lefists tried to justify their verbal experiments as necessary work for the construction of the language of the future communist society. At the same time they used their future goals to validate past experiences. Somehow forcing the anarchic spirit of the early years into the utilitarianism of the present day, Tretyakov mapped out the Futurists' itinerary as a continuous track starting in the transrationalism of the Hylaeans and finishing it in the rationally organized world of the commune.¹¹⁸ To sustain this theory the Lefists had first of all to dispel the idea that transrational poetry was a mark of individualism or an idle exercise for eccentric poets. Therefore, they put forth the argument that society itself is the language laboratory where transreason is first created and that the poet is the sensitive instrument registering the changes in the society's subconscious and giving them a conscious aesthetic organization. Arvatov notes that the studies of the Formalists have demonstrated that "transrational language can be found in writers and poets in all historical periods," but he credits the Futurist transrationalists with being "the first to reveal this ever-present role of poetry through the form of their works itself"; in other words, "the transrationalists laid the poetic form bare and began to do, openly and consciously, what until their time had been done unconsciously." While strongly supporting verbal experimentation, however, Arvatov goes so far as to admit that "a meaningless, absolutely transrational speech is impossible" and that "the term *transreason* was a good one while we were

118. See "From Where to Where," in this collection.

fighting against the ideologism of the old poetry; from a scientific point of view, of course, this term will not pass the test of serious criticism."¹¹⁹ (These half-hearted disclaimers were to become more pointed years later, in the pages of *New Lef*. By that time the Lefists were under heavy fire. Critics even used a hypothetical connection with Marinetti to accuse the Lefists of being fascists.¹²⁰ It was therefore highly desirable to renounce Lef's Futurist past, and yet, Tretyakov still insisted: "We of Lef take our initiative from the 'Slap in the Face of Public Taste.'" ¹²¹)

Lef felt the need not only to validate the work of the early Futurists but also to correct some of their positions, first of all, that on the classics. At a time when Proletkult spearheaded the restoration of the national literary heritage, the Lefists could no longer proclaim their "hatred for the language" of the venerable masters.¹²² In a circum-spect way they would "even welcome these ordinary books which are no worse and no better than others, and educate the illiterate on them."¹²³ As for Pushkin, he was co-opted by Lef as the poet who played a revolutionary role in his time, introducing folk songs "into the Francophile salons," and was hailed as a true Futurist *ante litteram*: "a live contemporary Pushkin lives with us a hundred years later in the verbal and conceptual explosions of the Futurists."¹²⁴ The Pushkin connection was later reinforced in *New Lef*: "Pushkin in his own day was one of the most ardent Futurists, a decanonizer, a profaner of tombs, and a churl."¹²⁵

Occasionally Lef would engage in open confrontation with the conservative forces. Whether through a militaristic call to arms or a lengthy polemical essay,¹²⁶ the message was one and the same: we, the Futurists, are the builders of a new language and, therefore, of a new psychology; we are building the man of the future, and thus the task of Futurism is identical with the task of communism; we are art workers, and the aim of our productivist art is to serve society; we do not recognize any other art form but ours.

These declarations did not intimidate anyone. If anything, the cultural administration considered them an annoyance. It became clear by the spring of 1924 that Lef could not survive without the support of

119. See "Language Creation," in this collection.

120. See "We are the Futurists," in this collection.

121. See "Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!" in this collection.

122. See "Slap in the Face of Public Taste," in this collection.

123. See "Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?"

124. See "From Where to Where?"

125. See "Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!"

126. See "Lef to Battle!" and "Lef's Tribune," in this collection.

other groups, so it sought an alliance with the rival group MAPP (Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers). While recognizing their differences in matters of aesthetics, the two parties were united by practical objectives: access to publishing enterprises and press organs, agitation and propaganda in the name of the proletariat, and elimination of the cultural remnants of the past: the so-called fellow travelers.¹²⁷ MAPP, which at the time did not enjoy government support either, entered the agreement with Lef in the hope of strengthening its position on the left front. But in those days the government was trying to balance the cultural spectrum, and in May 1924 the party issued a resolution in support of the fellow travelers. The left responded by broadening its coalition; the Constructivists were welcomed into the Lef-MAPP alliance. But for Lef this was the beginning of its rapid decline, which culminated in the Party Resolution on Literature of June 1925.

The resolution finally granted party support to proletarian literature, but while MAPP was recognized as a communist group and given assurance of a dominant role in Soviet literature, Lef was denied communist legitimacy. This decision was anticipated in Trotsky's book *Literature and Revolution* (1924), in which he described the Futurists as the products of a bourgeois intellectual milieu that had never been exposed to real revolutionary struggle and he rejected the aesthetics of Lef as unsuitable to the communist society. In addition, the Party Resolution forced the Proletarians to accept a temporary policy of tolerance toward fellow travelers. Thus, Lef lost its publishing organ and became a peripheral factor in Soviet cultural politics.

Furthermore, the alliance with the Constructivists, instead of strengthening common goals, exacerbated some aesthetic differences and was soon dissolved. Lef was also weakened by internal struggles. Chuzhak, who had sustained from the very beginning a rigidly dogmatic view of Lef's role, in contrast to the other members of the editorial board, who favored a plurality of approaches and a loose structure,¹²⁸ went south in the fall of 1924 and joined the YugoLef group. This group was founded in Odessa in that same year by Semyon Kirsanov with the aim of disseminating Lef's ideas of art and literature in the south.¹²⁹ Actually, after welcoming Chuzhak, the YugoLef group generated further polarization within the movement

127. The "fellow travelers" were writers who went along with the Revolution but did not support government policies in the arts. A prominent group of "fellow travelers" was the Serapion Brothers (see n. 21 to "What Does Lef Fight For?" in this collection).

128. See the postscript to "Lef's Tribune."

129. See "The Black Sea Futurists," in this collection.

and brought about a confrontation during the Lef convention in January 1925 that left Lef paralyzed and unable to function for a couple of years. Only toward the end of 1926 had the Lef group sufficiently reorganized its ranks to be able to apply for permission to publish the journal *New Lef*. The application was approved by the Central Committee, and the first issue of *New Lef* appeared in January 1927.

It soon became evident that the qualifier added to the title reflected a real "new" orientation. With Chuzhak back on the editorial board, *New Lef* renounced its Futurist approach to art and literature and presented a very coherent program focusing on the "literature of fact."¹³⁰ This program favored prose over poetry, and among prose genres, sketches, travel notes, and diaries—in other words, nonfiction genres based on documentary materials. Transrational language practically disappeared from the pages of *New Lef*, and poetry was apparently represented by uncomplicated verses on relevant socio-political issues. This tendency toward the "literature of fact" found a parallel in the cinema, which was perceived as the documentary art form par excellence, and in still photography. This explains *New Lef's* lack of interest in painting and graphic visual effects and its display of Rodchenko's photographs and Vertov's and Eisenstein's movie stills.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on the "literature of fact," the editors of *New Lef* managed to publish interesting and stimulating materials. Shklovsky contributed insightful studies of Tolstoy and Pushkin; Mayakovsky's verses were never dull, even when polemical or agitational; Kushner's travel sketches were masterpieces of the genre; and Brik's criticism of contemporary proletarian prose was witty and devastating. Because of its narrow focus and its consistency between theory and practice, *New Lef* had a less troubled life than its predecessor. But toward the end of 1928 a major disruption occurred that eventually caused the demise of the journal and of Lef as a whole.¹³¹ Mayakovsky found the *New Lef* program too stifling. Instead of bringing together different leftist currents as *Lef* did, *New Lef* now voiced the unanimous view of its editorial board. Mayakovsky resigned his post as main editor and was soon followed by Brik, Aseyev, and Rodchenko. Chuzhak and Tretyakov remained in charge until the end of the year, when the journal ceased to exist.

The days of Futurism were clearly and definitely over. Mayakovsky and Brik planned to organize still another group, Ref (Revolutionary

130. See "More Left than Lef," in this collection. Chuzhak also edited a volume of collected essays, *The Literature of Fact*, reprint (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972).

131. See "More Left than Lef."

Front of the Arts), but this project never materialized. The absurdity of the dream of a Soviet avant-garde encompassing communist ideology and Futurist aesthetics finally became clear to the last of the Futurists. Some took it realistically. But Mayakovsky reacted like the full-blooded romantic he always was. In early 1930 he joined RAPP, the conservative and dogmatic Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. This spiritual suicide was then followed by the real one. Two months later, Mayakovsky put a bullet through his brain. The reasons for Mayakovsky's suicide are certainly many and complex, involving personal as well as professional matters. In any case, they are a matter of speculation because Mayakovsky himself chose not to offer any explanation. His suicide note reads: "Do not charge anyone with the responsibility for my death and, please, do not gossip. . . . Comrades RAPP-ists, do not charge me with lack of character. Seriously, there is nothing to be done. Goodbye." (March 12, 1930).¹³²

Futurism died together with its most flamboyant representative. In 1936, after a few years of neglect, Mayakovsky's name was revived by a direct order from Stalin.¹³³ But Futurism was not. In the rare instances it was mentioned in connection with Mayakovsky, it was treated as a juvenile lapse. Mayakovsky became "the poet of the Revolution," and a Moscow square was named after him, dominated by a gigantic bronze effigy. But this canonized image of the poet bore little resemblance to Mayakovsky the rebel and the Futurist.

132. Quoted in Wiktor Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky* (New York: Orion, 1970), p. 526.

133. This happened on the initiative of Lilia Brik, who wrote to Stalin complaining about the indifference of the cultural administration toward Maiakovskii's revolutionary role and agitational work. Stalin reacted with the following letter to Nikolai Ezhov, the head of the secret police: "Please direct your attention to Brik's letter. Mayakovsky was and remains the best, most talented poet of our Soviet epoch. Indifference to his memory and his work is a crime. In my opinion, Brik's complaints are justified. Get in touch with her (Brik) or call her to Moscow. Enlist the services of Tol and Mekhlis in the matter, and please do all that we have neglected. If you need my help, I'm ready. Regards, Stalin." Quoted in Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, p. 119.

Cubo-Futurism

Slap in the Face of Public Taste

To the readers of our New First Unexpected.

We alone are the *face of our* Time. Through us the horn of time blows in the art of the word.

The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics.

Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity.

He who does not forget his *first* love will not recognize his last.

Who, trustingly, would turn his last love toward Balmont's perfumed lechery? Is this the reflection of today's virile soul?

Who, faintheartedly, would fear tearing from warrior Bryusov's black tuxedo the paper armorplate? Or does the dawn of unknown beauties shine from it?¹

Wash Your hands which have touched the filthy slime of the books written by those countless Leonid Andreyevs.²

All those Maxim Gorkys, Kuprins, Bloks, Sologubs, Remizovs, Averchenkos, Chornys, Kuzmins, Bunins, etc.³ need only a dacha on the river. Such is the reward fate gives tailors.

From the heights of skyscrapers we gaze at their insignificance! . . .

We *order* that the poets' *rights* be revered:

1. To enlarge the *scope* of the poet's vocabulary with arbitrary and derivative words (Word-novelty).

"Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (Poshchecchina obshchestvennomu vkusu) is the first and most famous manifesto of the Hylaea group (later renamed Cubo-Futurism). The manifesto opens the homonymous almanac, published in Moscow in 1912.

2. To feel an insurmountable hatred for the language existing before their time.

3. To push with horror off their proud brow the Wreath of cheap fame that You have made from bathhouse switches.

4. To stand on the rock of the word "we" amidst the sea of boos and outrage.

And if *for the time being* the filthy stigmas of Your "Common sense" and "good taste" are still present in our lines, these same lines *for the first time* already glimmer with the Summer Lightening of the New Coming Beauty of the Self-sufficient (self-centered) Word.

**D. BURLIUK, ALEXANDER KRUCHENYKH,⁴ V. MAYAKOVSKY,
VICTOR KHLEBNIKOV**

(Untitled)

From *A Trap for Judges*, 2

Finding the principles stated below fully expressed in the first issue of *A Trap for Judges*¹ and having already given impetus to the much-discussed and wealthy (if only in the sense of Metzl & Co.) Futurists,² WE nonetheless believe that we have traveled this path through and, leaving its reworking to those who do not have any new tasks, we now use a certain form of orthography in order to focus public attention on the new tasks already arising before us.

We first brought to the fore the new principles of creativity which were clear to us in the following order:

1. We ceased to regard word formation and word pronunciation according to grammatical rules, since we have begun to see in letters only *vectors of speech*. We loosened up syntax.
2. We started to endow words with content on the basis of their graphic and *phonic characteristics*.
3. Through us the role of prefixes and suffixes was fully realized.
4. In the name of the freedom of individual caprice, we reject normal orthography.
5. We modify nouns not only with adjectives (as was usual before us), but also with other parts of speech, as well as with individual letters and numbers:
 - a. considering as an inseparable part of the work its corrections and the graphic flourishes of creative expectation.

This manifesto was published without a title as the lead manifesto in the almanac of the Hylaea group, *A Trap for Judges* (Sadok sud'ei), 2 (St. Petersburg: Zhuravl', 1913), which appeared a few months after *A Slap*. It complements the previous manifesto with precise programmatic declarations.

-
- b. considering handwriting a component of the poetic impulse.
 - c. and therefore, having published in Moscow "hand-lettered" (autographic) books.³
 6. We abolished punctuation marks, which for the first time brought to the fore the role of the verbal mass and made it perceivable.
 7. We understand vowels as time and space (a characteristic of thrust), and consonants as color, sound, smell.
 8. We shattered rhythms. Khlebnikov gave status to the poetic meter of the living conversational word. We stopped looking for meters in textbooks; every motion generates for the poet a new free rhythm.
 9. The front rhyme (David Burliuk), as well as the middle and the inverse rhyme (Mayakovsky), have been worked out by us.
 10. The richness of a poet's lexicon is its justification.
 11. We believe the word to be a creator of myth; in dying, the word gives birth to myth, and vice versa.
 12. We are enthralled by new themes: superfluousness, meaninglessness, and the secret of powerful insignificance are celebrated by us.
 13. We despise glory; we know feelings which had no life before us. We are the new people of a new life.

**DAVID BURLIUK, ELENA GURO, NICHOLAS BURLIUK,
VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, KATHERINE NIZEN, VICTOR
KHLEBNIKOV, BENEDICT LIVSHITS, A. KRUCHENYKH**

[The Word as Such]

In 1908 *A Trap for Judges, 1* was in preparation.¹ Part of the works (of the Cubo-Futurists) ended up in that miscellany, part in *The Studio of the Impressionists*.² In both collections, V. Khlebnikov, the Burliuks, S. Miasoedov,³ and others outlined a new aesthetic direction: the word was being developed as such.

From then on a poem could consist of *a single word*,⁴ and merely by skillful variation of that word, all the fullness and expressiveness of the artistic image could be achieved.

However, the expressiveness was of a different kind—an artistic work was perceived and critiqued (or at least was intuitively felt) simply as word.

The work of art is the art of the word.

As an inevitable consequence, tendentiousness and bookishness of all kinds were eliminated from literary works.

A closeness to the passionlessly passionate machine.

The Italians inhaled the Russian air and started producing crib notes on art, word-for-word translations.

They made no verbal artifacts until 1912 (the year their big collection was issued),⁵ or later.

That's understandable: the Italians relied on tendentiousness. Like Pushkin's little devil,⁶ they sang praises to modernity and carried it on their shoulders, but instead of preaching modernity they should have

Written in 1913 this text was subsequently published by Kruchenykh, without a title, in *The Unpublished Khlebnikov*, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1930). It was reprinted in *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Leningrad, 1933), with the title "The Word as Such" (Slovo kak takovoe).

jumped on its back and sped off, they should have delivered it as the sum of their works.

After all, preaching which does not result from art itself is wood painted to look like iron. Who would trust such a lance? The Italians turned out to be vociferous braggarts, but taciturn artist-writers.⁷

They ask us about the ideal, about pathos? It's not a question of hooliganism, or of heroic deeds, or of being a fanatic or a monk. All Talmuds are equally destructive to the wordwright, what constantly remains with him is only the word as (such) itself.

A. KRUCHENYKH, V. KHLEBNIKOV

From *The Word as Such*

A. KRUCHENYKH AND V. KHLEBNIKOV

ABOUT ARTISTIC WORKS

1. that it be written and perceived in the twinkling of an eye!
(singing splashing dancing, scattering of clumsy constructions, oblivion, unlearning. V. Khlebnikov, A. Kruchenykh, E. Guro; in painting, V. Burliuk and O. Rozanova).¹

2. that it be written tightly and read tightly, more uncomfortable than blacked boots or a truck in the living room
(plenty of knotted ties and buttonholes and patches, a splintery texture, very rough. In poetry, D. Burliuk, V. Mayakovsky, N. Burliuk, and B. Livshits; in painting, D. Burliuk, K. Malevich.

What is more valuable: wind or stone?

Both are invaluable!

Examples: 1st type—from V. Khlebnikov

(the princess and the werewolf are flying over the Earth
And, to defend himself from the icy air
of the frosty height
from a lynx
he turned into a bear.

¹This is the first part of the fifteen-page booklet *The Word as Such* (*Slovo kak takovoe*) (Moscow, 1913), written by A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov, and illustrated by K. Malevich and O. Rozanova. Here the authors express their own personal views rather than speak for the entire Hylaea group.

She asked: "To where?"
 he turned around and in the wind he barked:
 to Petersburg . . .
 sensitive to the cold
 the princess shrank along . . .
 and now to Earth they fly tumblerlike
 Where the gold of St. Isaac lures them
 And direct from the heights, from the Sun's radiant station
 They fly to a girl's school of all-round education.
 (Comic poem in *The Croaked Moon*)²

Or from E. Guro:

Finland
 . . . Lulla, lolla, lalla-lu,
 Liza, lolla, lulla-li.
 Whisser, whisser³ the pine trees,
 ti-i-i, ti-i-u-u . . .⁴

(exactly whisser! the leaf-bearing trees whisper, but the conifers whisser)
 or

Explodity
 of fire
 melancholy
 of a steed
 roubles
 of willows
 in the hair
 of wonders
 (A. Kruchenykh, *Explodity*)⁵

while in the works of the first type the similes are usually limited to one word, in the second type they extend to several lines and consist mainly of nouns, in this way ultimately effective in "roughing up" the language, for ex.:

. . . "the rags of my lips stained with someone else's gilds
 the smoke of my hair over the fire of tin eyes . . ."
 (V. Mayakovsky)⁶

"Sky is a corpse"!! No more!
 Stars are worms—drunk with fog

I suppress the pain with rust-ling, with deceit
 Sky is a stinking corpse!!

 Stars are worms—(purulent living) rash!!
 (D. Burluk)⁷

in the following poem the line is dominated by the first vividly expressive consonant: it colors the line and produces the effect of rising, slowing down, *finale* for example:

I grew lazy I am a priest
 why build all from earth all the time
 I withdrew to the palace of bliss
 I lie and warm myself near a swine
 on the warm mud
 swines' exhalations
 and reek of dogs
 I lie and put on pounds.
 A messenger knocked at the door . . .
 etc.⁸

in the first 8 lines the dominant letter r is positioned in the following way:

r, r
 r
 r
 r
 r, r

the poem starts with two r's and the same two letters appear at the end of the poetic sentence (not the grammatical one), therefore the period is placed only after the 8th line and not before.⁹

the poets who preceded us used a completely different method of orchestration, for ex.—

An angel was flying in the midnight sky
 softly singing a song . . .¹⁰

The coloration here is given by an anemic s . . . s . . . s . . . We are just as dissatisfied with the pictures painted in jelly and milk as with verses built on

sa-sa-sa
 si-si-si
 ti-ti-ti
 etc.

This kind of food would only give a healthy man an upset stomach.

We have provided a model for another sort of sound and word combination:

dyr bul shchyl
 ubeshchur
 skum
 vy so by
 r l ez¹¹

(as a matter of fact, in this five-line poem there is more of the Russian national spirit than in all of Pushkin)

this is not a voiceless, languorous, creamy toffee of a poetry (a game of solitaire . . . a fruit candy . . .) but a formidable *chant*:

Everyone is young young younger
 In the belly a devilish hunger
 So come after me you all . . .
 I am casting a proud call
 Behind my back to each
 This very brief speech!¹²
 We'll be eating stones and grass
 Poisons, sweetness, bitterness
 We will swallow emptiness
 The abyss and the highest place
 Birds, wild beasts, monsters, fish,
 Wind, clay, salt, and ripple from our dish! . . .

(D. Burluik)¹³

before us language was required to be: clear, pure, honest, melodious, pleasant (tender) to the ear, expressive (vivid, colorful, juicy).

we could easily carry on in the perennially playful tone used by our critics to expand further on their view of language, and we notice that their requirements (oh, horror!) apply more to womanhood as such than to language as such.

in fact: clear, pure (of course!), honest (ahem! ahem!), melodious, pleasant, tender (absolutely right!), finally: juicy colorful you . . . (who's there? come on in!)

it's true in recent times they tried to turn womanhood into the eternal feminine, into the beautiful lady,¹⁴ and in this way the *skirt* became *mystical* (this must not confuse the uninitiated—on the contrary! . . .) We think rather that language must be first of all *language*, and if it has to remind us of something, then better the saw or the poisoned arrow of a savage.

from the above it is evident that

before us the wordwrights were concerned too much with the human "soul" (the puzzles of the spirit, passions, and feelings), but they understood poorly that it is bards who create the soul, and since we—the Futurian bards—paid more attention to the word than to Psyche, which our predecessors had reduced to a trite cliché, she died in isolation, and now it is in our power to create a new one . . . do we want to?

. . . ! No! . . .

let them better live by the word as such than by themselves.

in this way we resolve (without cynicism) many of our forefathers' fateful questions. To them I dedicate the following poem:

let's promptly end
 this *unworthy vaudeville*—
 oh, of course
 this will surprise no one
 life is a *silly joke and a fairy tale*,
 old people used to say . . .
 we do not need a pointer
 and of this rot we won't make head or tail¹⁵

the Futurian painters love to use parts of the body, its cross sections, and the Futurian wordwrights use chopped-up words, half-words, and their odd artful combinations (transrational language), thus achieving the very greatest expressiveness, and precisely this distinguishes the swift language of modernity, which has annihilated the previous frozen language (see a more detailed discussion in my article "New Ways of the Word" in the book *The Three*). This expressive device was alien and incomprehensible to the faded literature before us, and to the powdered ego-foppists¹⁶ (see the Mezzanine of Poetry) as well.

the ungifted and the apprentices like to labor

(Bryusov the industrious bear; Tolstoy, who rewrote and polished his novels 5 times, Gogol, Turgenev) the same can be said of the reader. wordwrights should write on the cover of their books:

once you've read it—tear it up!

Grunts the steed and does not want to learn
 (laziness seized the ardent)
 the steed smiles all alone
 in front of the quick and the strong

 running hundreds of meters
 and overtaking all
 it unnoticed measures with its eye
 those who drag along

 the swift one is the laziest
 the wise one—the silliest
 and the brave one under fire,
 in its neck tucks its ears!⁷

this year the Futurian show-house (theater) will open
 these are new show-house words
 (invented by: V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh)

visage-man, countenance-man, impersonator = actor
 personas = characters
 groupepeople = troupe
 softspeaker = prompter
 action, tion, sion = scene act
 sagarama = drama
 etc.

The current year of our artistic life had a great beginning: 6 Futurian books¹⁸ were published, on September 29 an exhibition of the works of the incomparable N. Goncharova opened, an exhibition of the unbearable Larionov is forthcoming, on October 6 there will be a Futurian evening etc., etc.

The Letter as Such

They no longer argue about the word as such, they even agree. But what is their agreement worth? You need only recall that while talking about the word, after the fact, they do not say anything about the letter! The born-blind! . . .

The word is still not a value, it is still merely tolerated.

Otherwise, why would they clothe it in a gray prisoner's uniform? You have seen the letters in their words—lined up in a row, humiliated, with cropped hair, and all equally colorless, gray—these are not letters, these are brands! But ask any wordwright¹ and he will tell you that a word written in individual longhand or composed with a particular typeface bears no resemblance at all to the same word in a different inscription.

After all, you would not dress all your young beauties in the same government overcoats!

Of course, not! They would spit right in your eye; but the word—it remains silent. Because it is dead (like Boris and Gleb),² your word is stillborn.

Ah, accursed Sviatopolks!

There are two propositions:

1. That mood changes one's longhand during the process of writing.
2. That the longhand peculiarly modified by one's mood conveys that mood to the reader, independently of the words. Also, one has to pose the question of graphic signs, visual signs, or simply tactile signs as if

¹'The Letter as Such' (Bukva kak takovaia) was written in 1913 and subsequently printed in *The Unpublished Khlebnikov*, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1928–33).

felt by the hand of a blind man. Of course, it is not mandatory that the wordwright be also the copyist of a handwritten book: indeed, it would be better if the wordwright entrusted this job to an artist. But there haven't been any such books until recently. They were issued by the Futurians for the first time. Namely: *Old-Time Love* was rewritten in longhand for printing by M. Larionov, *Exploidity* by N. Kulbin et al., *Duck's Nest* by O. Rozanova.³ Here, one can at last say: "Every letter is . . . A-1!"⁴

It's strange, neither Balmont nor Blok⁵—and they would seem to belong to our generation—thought of entrusting their babies not to a typesetter, but to an artist. . . .

A piece may be rewritten in longhand by someone else or by the creator himself, but if he does not relive the original experience, the piece will lose all the charm acquired by means of free handwriting during "the wild snowstorm of inspiration."

V. KHLEBNIKOV

A. KRUCHENYKH

From *Explodity*

A. KRUCHENYKH

Emotional experience cannot be put into words (frozen ones, concepts), word-tortures, gnoseological isolation. Therefore, we strive for a transrational free language (see my declaration of the word),¹ that is the means of expression a person resorts to at crucial moments. Here is an example, the speech of the flagellant, V. Shishkov:² “nosoktos lesontos futr lis natrufuntru kreserefire kresentre fert cheresantro ulmiri umilisantru”—here, we have the genuine expression of an excited soul, religious ecstasy.

I cite my verses in the transrational and universal language (of vowels):

i
che
de
mali
gr
iu
iukh
d d d
d d d
se
v
m'

¹This is the last part of Kruchenykh's booklet *Explodity (Vzorval')* (St. Petersburg, 1913), handwritten by the author and lithographed. It includes illustrations by Malevich and Kul'bin.

.....

m'
 serzhamelepeta
 serial ok
 risum
 meleva
 alik a lev amakh
 li li liub biul

because of a foul
 contempt for
 women and
 children in our
 language there will be
 only the masculine
 gender³

on April 27 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon I instantaneously mastered
 to perfection all languages Such is the poet of the current era
 I am here reporting my verses in Japanese Spanish and Hebrew:⁴

iké mina ni
 sinu ksi
 iamakh alik
 zel
 GO OSNEG KAID
 M R BATUL'BA
 VINU AE KSEL
 VER TUM DAKH
 GIZ
 SHISH

Declaration of the Word as Such

(4) **THOUGHT AND SPEECH CANNOT KEEP UP WITH THE EMOTIONS OF SOMEONE IN A STATE OF INSPIRATION**, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but also in a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), a transrational language.¹ Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression. (Example: go osneg kaid etc.). (5) **WORDS DIE, THE WORLD IS ETERNALLY YOUNG**. The artist has seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word "lily" has been soiled and "raped." Therefore, I call the lily, "euy"²—the original purity is reestablished. (2) consonants render everyday reality, nationality, weight—vowels, the opposite: **A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE**. Here is a poem exclusively of vowels:

o e a
i e e i
a e e E³

(3) a verse presents (unconsciously) several series of vowels and consonants. **THESE SERIES CANNOT BE ALTERED**. It is better to replace a word with one close in sound than with one close in meaning (bast-

¹"Declaration of the Word as Such" (Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo) appeared as a leaflet, in the summer of 1913. It laid the foundation for the theory of transrational language and was subsequently reprinted in several of Kruchenykh's books.

cast-ghost). If similar vowels and consonants were replaced by graphic lines, they would form patterns that could not be altered (example: III-I-I-III). For this reason it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to translate from one language into another; one can only transliterate a poem into Latin letters and provide a word-for-word translation. The verse translations that exist at present are merely word-for-word translations; as aesthetic texts they are nothing more than coarse vandalism. (1) A new verbal form creates a new content, and not vice versa. (6) **INTRODUCING NEW WORDS**, I bring about a new content **WHERE EVERYTHING** begins to slip (the conventions of time, space, etc. Here my view coincides with N. Kulbin's, who discovered the 4th dimension: weight, the 5th: motion, and the 6th or 7th: time).⁴ (7) In art, there may be unresolved dissonances—"unpleasant to the ear"—because there is dissonance in our soul by which the former are resolved. Example: dyr bul shchyl, etc. (8) All this does not narrow art, but rather opens new horizons.

ALEXEI (ALEKSANDER) KRUCHENYKH

New Ways of the Word (the language of the future, death to Symbolism)

A. KRUCHENYKH

nobody would argue if I say that we have no literary criticism (judges of verbal creation)

they would not consider as critics those vampires who feed on the blood of the “great deceased,” or those who suffocate anything that is young and alive

vampires, gravediggers, robbers, parasites—these are the only names that our critics deserve

to gnaw at each other’s throats, to peck at each other, to drown in “a spoonful of water”—these are their regular occupations, their desired prey

our critics delight in settling a score, or in conducting a political or a family investigation, and keep putting aside questions of *the word*

Russian readers (even they!) despise such critics and reject with a feeling of revulsion the cud that they offer instead of food

but it is to the disgrace of those who sincerely appreciate and love the arts that no one has yet pronounced the necessary word

It is not surprising that *we*, the bards of the future, are pelted with the dirt of “petty criticism.”

We, like warriors on a foggy morning, have attacked by surprise our idle enemies—and now they, to the amusement of the victors and of the whole world, kick each other, pull each other’s hair, and all they can throw at us is *dirt* and *abuse*

The essay “New Ways of the Word” (*Novye puti slova*) was published in the collection *The Three* (St. Petersburg, 1913), which also included works by Khlebnikov and Guro. It was illustrated by Malevich. The editor, Matiushin, dedicated the collection to the memory of his late wife, Guro, who died earlier that year.

we are not frightened by such warriors, and their confoundment is our goal!

look, you thick-lipped ones!

we are displaying a weapon cleverly sharpened and of better temper, a weapon that you lasciviously wanted to take up and only cut your hands with. . . .

before us there was no verbal art

there were the pathetic attempts of servile thought to present everyday reality, philosophy, and psychology (which were called novels, short stories, epic poems, etc.), there were rhymes for domestic and family use, but

the art of the word

did not exist

strange? there is more: everything was done to suffocate the primordial feeling of our native language, to husk the fertile seed from the word, to emasculate it and send it out to roam the world as "the clear clean honest euphonic Russian language" although this was no longer language, but a pathetic eunuch unable to give anything to the world. It is impossible to cure and improve this language, and we were absolutely correct in declaring "throw Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, etc. overboard from the ship of modernity"¹ so that they do not poison the air! after the *byliny* and *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*,² verbal art took a plunge, and by Pushkin's time it stood on a level lower than it did at Trediakovsky's time³ (although the "means of communication" had been perfected—see below).

Clear and conclusive proof of the fact that up to the present the word has been shackled is provided by its *subordination to rational thought*

until now they have maintained:

"rational thought dictates laws to the word, and not vice-versa."

We pointed out this mistake and provided a free language, transrational and universal.

Previous poets arrived at the word through rational thought, we arrived at unmediated comprehension through the word.

In our art we already have the first experiments of the language of the future. Art marches in the avant-garde of psychic evolution.

At present there are three units in our psychic life: sensation, representation, concept (and the idea), and a fourth unit is beginning to take shape—"higher intuition" (P. Uspensky's *Tertium Organum*).⁴

In art we have declared:

THE WORD IS BROADER THAN THE THOUGHT

the word (and its components, the sounds) is not simply a truncated thought, not simply logic, it is first of all the transrational (irrational parts, mystical and aesthetic). . . .

gladiators and swordsmen [*gladiatory i mechari*] the thought is the same, but the words are different, and so much so that I would sooner say that laughers [*smekhiri*]⁵ and swordsmen [*mechari*] share the same sense than say that swordsmen [*mechari*] and gladiators [*gladiatory*] do, because it is the phonetic composition of the word which gives it its living coloration, and the word is perceived and keenly affects you only when it has that coloration.

gladiators—it's dull gray foreign; swordsmen—it's bright colorful and conveys a picture of a mighty people armored in copper and chainmail.

at the stock exchange and at Metzl's company⁶ one is bound to use the former, like an abacus—a word as dead and colorless as telegraph code—in art this word is a corpse at a banquet

Lermontov marred the Russian bard's chant (poetry) by introducing that stinking corpse and by parading it in *l'azure*. . . .⁷

morgue—this is a funny word and reminds you of a fat German with a mug of beer, whereas *corpserie*⁸ even conveys the feeling of a mortuary

university—this word can excite only dogs, whereas “a school of all-round education”⁹ convinces us of the importance of the referent etc. etc.

Important is every letter, every sound!

Why borrow anything from the tongueless “Germans” when we have something magnificent of our own?¹⁰

Russian readers have grown used to emasculated words, and they see in them algebraic symbols that mechanically solve the problems of petty thinking, meanwhile everything alive, superconscious in the word, everything which connects it to its wellsprings, its sources of existence, goes unnoticed.

Art can be concerned only with the living, it cannot bother with the dead!

The writers themselves felt miserable, they understood all the superfluousness of what they created.

“Oh, if one could express one's soul without words” (Fet). “A thought put into words is a lie” (Tiutchev)¹¹

three times true!

Why not get away from rational thought, and write not by means of word-concepts, but of words freely formed?

And if a poet is not up to that task, it means that he has not mastered his material! . . .

People of exceptional integrity—the Russian religious sectarians—made that decision.

Possessed by religious inspiration (and inspiration is always exalted) they started speaking in the language of the “holy ghost” (according to their own magnificent expression) and drank “the living water.”

And so, a *new* word was created, which was not a lie, but a genuine testimony of faith, the “revelation of things unseen.”¹²

“namos pamos bagos” . . .
 “gerezon drovolmire zdruvul
 dremile cherezondro fordei”

(from the speech of the flagellant Shiskov)¹³

It is remarkable that some sectarians (loners) simple folk from the peasantry, suddenly started speaking not only in transrational language, but also in *many foreign languages previously unknown to them!*

And yet the linguists (and the critics, too) indifferently pass by these true prophets! . . . But do not think that we are merely imitators of those lone fellows.

The artist discerns striking colors on an old wall—they give him an impulse and he creates a work of art as far removed from nature as the White Sea is from the Black! . . .

What is surprising is the senselessness of our writers striving so hard for *meaning*.

Wishing to depict the incomprehensibility, the alogicality of life and its horror, or to depict the mystery of life, they make recourse time and again to the same (as always, as always!) “clear neat” common language

this is the same as feeding a starving man cobblestones, or trying to catch small fish with a rotten net!

We were the first to say that in order to depict the new—the future—one needs *totally new words and a new way of combining them*.

This absolutely new way will be the combination of words according to their inner laws, which reveal themselves to the wordwright, and not according to the rules of logic or grammar as was the case before us.

Contemporary painters discovered the secret (1) that movement generates relief (a new dimension) and that, in turn, relief generates movement;

and (2) that irregular perspective generates a new 4th dimension (the essence of Cubism).

Similarly, contemporary bards discovered: that irregular structuring of a sentence (in terms of logic and word formation) generates *movement and a new perception of the world* and, conversely, that movement and psychological variation generate strange “nonsensical” combinations of words and letters.

Therefore, we loosened up grammar and syntax; we recognized that in order to depict our dizzy contemporary life and the even more impetuous future, we must combine words in a new way, and the more disorder we introduce into the sentence structure the better.

The sleek Symbolists are terribly afraid of not being understood by the readers (of such journals as *The Small Light* and *Russian Thought*);¹⁴ we, on the contrary, rejoice at that! the short-witted Symbolists are constantly afraid that they might say some rubbish, some nonsense (from the point of view of those same readers).

Everybody knows that preschoolers try hard to look bright and grown up! . . .

Dostoevsky already noted: “every writer has his own style and consequently his own orthography,” but then he himself “encroached” only upon the comma and the soft sign! . . .

And I suddenly thought: what if I turn
 upside down the sofas and the chair.
 what if I twirl the clock into the air? . . .
 it'll be the start of a new era,
 the discovery of new realms.
 the end of the clew of things
 was hid right here in this room,
 stuck by an evil yesterday
 by the days' gloom
 right here in this room it was!
 I suddenly realized that that was it
 and that one must fear nothing
 but look for the sign that's hid.

The Organ-Grinder, E. Guro¹⁵

Irregularities in the speech structure are admissible:

1. grammatical irregularity—unexpected twist
 - a. lack of agreement in case, number, tense, and gender between subject and predicate, adjective and noun: lake ran past white flying¹⁶
 - b. elimination of the subject or other parts of speech, elimination of pronouns, prepositions, etc.

- c. arbitrary word-novelty (pure neologism): he doesn't give a "shoot" (*A Trap for Judges, 1*),¹⁷ dyr bul shchyl etc.
 d. unexpected phonetic combination:
euy, rlmktzhg . . . (Let's Grumble).¹⁸

Here it is not going too far to mention those fine fellows from *The Target*¹⁹ who just the other day began appearing in print and who borrowed our speech now made only of vowels, now only of consonants, now of scattered letters and words, and who covered their tracks by referring to 1912 as the time when they wrote (!) these imitations! (That's original!)

- e. unexpected word formation:

Thunder boom, rocket blast, roar, racket?
 Then in that black embreak another deathling
 Falls face down, goes to ground,
 And gluts earth with rivulets of blood.

"These gather-goods are mine," MOR says
 And fingers what was once a young man
 Who lies before him like a plowed field,
 Face down, fresh sown with seeds of lead.

(V. Khlebnikov, *Union of Youth*, vol. 3)²⁰

Thanks to these unexpected shifts, the impression of war goes as far as to deceive our emotions.

For further examples of neologisms, see also E. Guro, *A Trap for Judges, 2*

2. semantic irregularity:
 a. in plot development:

I forgot to hang myself
 I am flying to the Americas
 somebody
 climbed on the ship
 right under their nose

(*Explodity*. See also "The Cockerel of Wisdom," *A Trap for Judges, 2*)

b. unexpected simile:

the pokers crackle like fire . . .
(*Worldbackwards*)²¹

These categories do not exhaust all the possible irregularities and unexpected shifts: (that's why they are irregularities) one might note as well, for example, unusual meter, rhyme, typography, color, word order, etc.

Our goal is simply to point out irregularity as a device, to show the necessity and the importance of irregularity in art.

Our goal is to underscore the great significance for art of all strident elements, discordant sounds (dissonances) and purely primitive roughness.

When puny and pale man felt the urge to rejuvenate his soul by getting in touch with the strong-rough African gods, when he fell in love with their wild free language, and with the primitive man's cutting teeth and gaze, animallike in its sharpness, the seven nannies²² suddenly started yelling and tried to save the straying child—A. E. Redko²³ shouts: you will wallow in brutality, egoism (see *Russian Wealth* July, current year); Benois slyly yells: your way leads to the abyss; Bryusov warns: don't talk nonsense; the others simply cackle hiss and spit.

And all of them offer their advice, their sickly bloodless philosophy, without even suspecting that what they offer is merely poor poetry (the former prophets know that very well!). . . .

Before us they used to write boring dragging narratives (3000 pages!) sickening to the modern precipitous soul, which perceives the world keenly and directly (intuitively), as though penetrating things and phenomena (the transcendental is in me and is mine) and not simply standing aside and listening to descriptions and narratives.

Our new devices teach a new understanding of the world, shattering the impoverished constructions of Plato, Kant, and other "idealists," where man stood not at the center of the universe, but behind the fence.

Previously, the painters' world had only two dimensions: length and width; now it has acquired depth and relief, movement and weight, the coloration of time etc., etc.

We started seeing the *here* and the *there*. The irrational (transrational) is conveyed to us as directly as the rational.

We do not need intermediaries—the symbol, the thought—we con-

vey our own new truth, and do not serve as the reflection of some sort of sun (or a wood log?)

The idea of Symbolism necessarily presupposes the limitation of the artist, and a truth hidden somewhere by some *righteous uncle*.

Of course, with such a premise how could you expect any joy, spontaneity, and persuasiveness in the artistic work? It is not surprising that our sour Symbolists are becoming extinct and are switching to commercial enterprises—to *The Cornfield*²⁴ and *The Small Light*. . . .

We were the first to find the thread leading through the labyrinth, and now we carouse there with ease.

Symbolism cannot sustain the scrutiny of contemporary gnoseology and of the spontaneous soul. The more subjective truth is, the more objective it is. Subjective objectivity is our way. One must not fear total freedom—if you don't have faith in the human being, it's better not to have anything to do with him!

We split the object open!

We started seeing the world through to the core.

We learned how to look at the world backward, we enjoy this reverse motion (with regard to the word, we noticed that *it can be read backward, and that then it acquires a more profound meaning!*)²⁵

We can change objects' weight (the eternal *force of gravity*), we see buildings hanging in the air and the weight of sounds.

In this way, we present a world with new content. . . .

Creation is always inspired, god may be black white rough or multi-armed—he is a *mystery*, but not a *zero*, even if repeated a hundred times in a row.²⁶

The Italian "amateurish" Futurists, with their endless ra ta ta ra ta,²⁷ are like Maeterlinck's heroes who think that "door" repeated a hundred times opens up to revelation.

These mechanical tricks—soulless, monotonous—lead to *the death of life and art*.

We select *crafty* ways that confuse novices with their unexpected ups and downs not to tease the reader with jabbering nonsense and an annoying bark, but to seek out new means for portraying the intertwining paths which throw us (seekers of the future) into a quagmire, and into the void. In art there can be discordant sounds (dissonances), but there cannot be coarseness, cynicism, and impudence (which is what the Italian Futurists preach), because it is impossible to mix war and fighting with creative work.

We are serious and solemn, not destructive and coarse. . . .

We hold a high opinion of our motherland!

Do not give yourself to the imitation of things foreign.

Do not use foreign words in your literary works, they are fitting only in one case: when you want to give them a pettily derogatory meaning.

Remember: once Pushkin was asked what he thought of the mind of a woman with whom he had had a long conversation, he answered: "I don't know, you see, we spoke French! . . ."

Invent new native words!

A new content *becomes manifest only* when new expressive devices are achieved, a new form.

Once there is a new form, a new content follows; form thus conditions content.

Our verbal creativity is generated by *a new deepening* of the spirit, and it throws new light on everything.

Its genuine novelty does not depend on new themes (objects).

A new light cast on the old world *can produce a most fantastic effect*.

Those who do not possess the new light convulsively grab at new themes, but their position is all the more pathetic: the new wine instantly breaks through the old wineskins—this is how the vain attempts of Bryusov-Verbitskaia, Balmont-the-eternal-balalaikist, Sologub-the-sweet-cake, Andreyev-the-retired, and the Yawners-Ego-Futurists (I. Severyanin, I. Ignatyev, Vasilisk Gnedov et al.) have ended up.

Not to speak of M. Gorky, Kuprin, Chirikov,²⁸ etc.—"the everyday life realists"—or "the classics" whom nobody reads.

Is there any comparison between the joy of existing in the new dimensions, and whatever wretched consolation one may find in the previous worlds?

Do not yield to reprimands and "good advice" coming from cowardly souls whose eyes are eternally looking backward.

The Liberation of the Word

BENEDICT LIVSHITS

I

In the vicious circle where from time immemorial Russian literary critics have been spinning around thanks to traditional ignorance and hereditary intellectual laziness, sometimes one can observe curious phenomena. Amid the flurry raised in the critics' camp by the still anonymous statements of HYLAEA,¹ the most ridiculous accusation (and at the same time the one most characteristic of the arbiters of public taste) raised against us was that of epigonism. Try to make a fool to pray to God, and he simply smashes his forehead on the ground. Everybody still recalls the time when one had to force our critics to abandon their beloved catastrophic concepts of "artificial grafting," "input from the West," etc., by conveying to them different concepts of an evolutionary nature, which they had not heard of. Alas, this ordeal turned out to be too much for them; as happens with the mentally retarded, the complex formula of causal conditionality was turned by our critics into the incomparably more simple: post hoc, ergo propter hoc. We have to pay for the sins of our *Kulturträger* fathers. Continuity is fine, but why must everything have its very beginning in Russian Symbolism? Why should the primacy of the verbal conception, which we put forward for the first time, have anything in common with the purely ideological values of Symbolism?² Didn't the Symbolists of blessed memory share the fatal, slavish

¹ The essay "The Liberation of the Word" (*Osvobozhdenie slova*) opens both editions of *The Crooked Moon* (Moscow, 1913 and 1914).

conviction that the word, as a means of communication designed to express already known concepts and the connections between them, in poetry too had to serve the same purpose? From whose mouth, before us, came the assertion that if communication could occur not through the word, but through some other means, then poetry would be free from the sad necessity of expressing the logical connection between ideas, like music has been since time immemorial, and like painting and sculpture have been in recent years?

No more substantial are the critics' objections that our understanding of poetry's task is arbitrary, not based on any objective data, and that to our constructions any number of other structures can be counterpoised as equivalents. We do exist—this is enough to expect from us.

We recommend that the literary historians who are following us (for whom our declaration is, of course, simply the babble of uninitiated ones), turn to the mercenaries of Propper:³ there, in his camp, everything is clearly explained. But, inquire the more thoughtful ones, how did you acquire the conviction that your understanding of poetry is the only possible one among those manifesting themselves to the contemporary creative consciousness? Such a question can only arise in our country where, with an ease that raises no eyebrows, all sorts of movements—ephemeral and hollow, such as Ego-Futurism and Acmeism—crop up; such a question can only be born in the ears of our self-appointed judges who try in vain to catch the swaying sense of those dandelion-slogans. And he must listen to such questions, he who has already stepped beyond the threshold of the great liberation of the word!

II

Almost every new movement in art began with a declaration of the principle of creative freedom. We would repeat the basic methodological mistake of the majority of these declarations if we attempted to talk about creative freedom without defining our view of the mutual relationship between the world and the poet's creative consciousness. We consider it impossible to create in a vacuum, to create "out of oneself"; in this sense, every word of the poetic work is doubly dependent on causality, conditioned, and consequently doubly unfree: first, because the poet consciously seeks and finds his creative inspiration in the world; second, because no matter how free and spontaneous the poet

may regard the choice of one or another expression of his poetic energy, this choice is always determined by a complex of subconscious elements, which in turn are conditioned by an accumulation of external causes.

But, if we are to understand as free that creativity *which places the criteria of its value not on the plane of the mutual relationship between reality and consciousness, but in the realm of the autonomous word*, our poetry is indeed free, uniquely and for the first time; for us it makes no difference whether our poetry is realistic, naturalistic, or fantastic: *with the exception of its starting point, our poetry does not stand in any relationship to the world, is not coordinated with it*, and all further points of possible intersection with the world ought to be considered from the outset as purely random.

But such a rejection of the widely assumed relationship between the world and the poet's consciousness as the poet's criterion of creation is *by no means a rejection of every objective criterion*. The poet's choice of one or another form of expression for his creative energy is far from arbitrary. The poet is bound, first of all, by the plastic affinity of verbal expressions. Second, by their plastic valence. Third, by their verbal texture. Next, by the requirements of rhythm and musical orchestration. And finally, by the common demands of pictorial and musical composition. To avoid any misunderstanding, we must make the clarification that although some of the points mentioned above (but only poorly understood and very crudely outlined) were in some cases coingredients in prior discussions of poetic values, we were the very first, entirely consistent with the whole system of our approach to poetry, *to give the character of exclusivity to these basic aspects of an objective criterion*.

Denying all coordination between our poetry and the world, we are not afraid of carrying this argument to its logical conclusion and saying: our poetry is indivisible. It has no place for the lyric, the epos, or the drama. Leaving, for the time being, the definition of these categories as they used to be, we ask: can a poet, indifferent as such to everything but the creative word, be a lyricist? Is it possible to turn the epic's energy from kinetic to static; in other words, is it possible, without radically distorting the concept of epos, to imagine the epic construct artificially fragmented, not according to the intrinsic necessity of the causally developing sequences of phenomena, but according to the requirements of the autonomous word? Is it possible for the drama, which develops according to its own exclusive laws, to be subjected to the inductive influence of the word, or at least to be in agreement with it? Wouldn't it look like the negation of the very

concept of drama—the resolution of the collision of psychic forces, which constitutes the basis of drama, not through the laws of psychological behavior, but through other laws? There is only one answer to all these questions: negative, of course.

III

In conclusion: if it is a mistake to assume that the principles expounded above have been completely realized in the works of the poets who acknowledge them, it is a bigger distortion of the truth to state that the new current, in the final analysis, can be reduced to word formation in a narrow sense. In vain our excessively sagacious and obliging friends, who are helping us constitute our movement, are pushing us toward that narrow path with a zeal worthy of a better fate. Adapting whatever occurs around them to their narrow understanding, they, in our view, with complete honesty miss the most important aspect of the new current—its foundation: the change of point of view in approaching the poetic work. Just as we want “to throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc. etc. overboard from the ship of modernity” not because “we are enthralled by new themes,”⁴ but because from the new viewpoint, from the new angle, their works have lost a very considerable part of their now no longer valid charm, in the same way one cannot seek (as does, for example, Bryusov) the essence and the criterion of evaluation of the new current in the correspondence or noncorrespondence of our neologisms with the spirit of the Russian language, or of our sentences with academic syntax; one cannot seek it in our means of experimentation with new rhymes or in the juxtaposition of apparently incompatible words. All of this is peripheral to the new current, all of this is but a means relevant to our transient today, which, without detriment to our poetry, we will perhaps reject tomorrow. But, what sets us apart from our predecessors and our contemporaries by an unbridgeable gap is the exclusive emphasis that we place on the creative word, free for the first time, freed by us.

Medved', Spring 1913.

Poetic Principles

NIKOLAI BURLIUK WITH DAVID BURLIUK

Thus on a canvas of cer-
tain connections,

Outside of space there lived
the Face''

(V. Khlebnikov)¹

The assertion that the poetic word is *sensible* is the premise to our attitude toward it as a *living organism*. The word changes its qualities according to whether it is handwritten, printed, or thought. It influences all of our feelings. Earlier, when we said "tree" we had to awaken, by means of this logical generalization, the memory of a definite tree, and afterward we experienced only the *memory* of that tree. Now, our path is the direct contemplation of aesthetic values.

It follows that *the word is able to convey an object only insofar as it represents at least part of the object's qualities*. Otherwise, the word is only a *verbal mass* and serves the poet independently of its meaning. We can reject the word as a life-actant, and use it instead as a myth-creator.

First of all, we have to distinguish between the author's handwriting, the copyist's handwriting, and printed type. Some words should not be printed in any way because they require the author's longhand. Recently, this has been understood to some extent; for example, the author's last name has been presented in his own handwriting.²

It is easy to understand the enormous value autographed editions carry for the true lover of literature. The "Literary Company"³ has

¹ The essay "Poetic Principles" (Poeticheskie nachala) was printed in *The First Journal of the Russian Futurists*, no. 1-2 (Moscow: Futuristy, 1914). The journal was planned as a bimonthly but never went beyond the first issue. An attempt to unite all Russian Futurists, it included the Cubo-Futurists and the Mezzanine of Poetry, the only two groups then in existence.

issued handwritten books. I will not talk about the role of typefaces, since this is obvious to everyone.

The layout of the written text on the white field is of tremendous importance. This was very well understood by those refined Alexandrians, Apollonius of Rhodes and Callimachus, who arranged the written text in the shape of lyres, vases, swords, etc. etc.

Now, let us turn to vignettes. You will all remember "Melancholy" by Durer,⁴ in which one cannot tell where the written text ends and the drawing begins. An even better example is Gauguin. "Soyez amoureuses vous serez heureuses," "Soyez mystérieuse,"⁵ etc. This is the Elysium of vocables, where the ornate letters mourn over their past. . . . It has been my dream that someone would study the graphic life of letters, that "voice from the depths of the grave"⁶ which is the passion for metaphysics. How many signs, musical, mathematical, cartographical, etc., lie in the dust of libraries. I understand the Cubists when they introduce ciphers into their paintings, but I do not understand poets who ignore the aesthetic life of all those

∫ ~ + § × ♂ ♀ √ = > Δ
etc. etc.

In the past the life of letters was better understood, which is clear from the fact that we no longer feel any difference between capital letters and small letters, especially in German. Take the manuscripts of the 14th and 15th centuries. With what love not only the illuminations, but also the letters are embellished and strengthened in these books. The same is true for our church books, even those from the 18th century. Here I have to mention the exemplary life of Fyodorov,⁷ a Moscow scholar (recently deceased). In vain did he point out during the difficult time of Symbolism and Decadence the aesthetic role of letters.

The relationship between color and the letter was not always understood as *coloring*. In hieroglyphics color was just as essential as the graphic aspect; in other words, the sign was a *colored spot*. As you may recall, the Aegean Sea owes its name to a black flag,⁸ and our sailors still owe their allegiance to a colored flag. In the transition from *iconographic* to *symbolic* to phonetic script we lost the *skeleton* of the language and ended up with verbal rickets. Only a deep-rooted good taste saved our copyists and painters, who embellished capital letters and inscriptions on signboards. *Often, only barbarism can save art.*

In the 1870s, in France, Jean-Arthur Rimbaud had already written his "Voyelles," where he says, prophetically:

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,
Je dirais quelque jour vos naissances latentes.⁹

Scent and word. I am too young to have a collection of scented letters from women, but you, aging erotomaniacs, you can trust the fragrance. A woman's scented letter speaks better on her behalf than your tuxedo smelling of cigar smoke. The Chinese and the Japanese are said to perfume their books, so that the book has its own language of fragrance.

When I was still a high school student in Kherson, I used to take great pleasure in walking through the old cemetery dating from Catherine's time,¹⁰ and in reading the grave inscriptions, which sounded different in stone than in copper.

". . . Korsakov
he built this town and besieged Ochakov."

In striving to endow letters with a third dimension, we are not indifferent to their sculptural shape.

Is word-creation possible, and to what degree? Where do we seek the criterion for the beauty of a new word? Should the formation of a new word proceed from an existing root, or should it be random?

Answering the first question theoretically, I would say that word-creation is possible, ad infinitum. In practice, to be sure, the situation is a little different: *the word is linked to the life of myth, and only myth is the creator of the living word*. Consequently, the second answer becomes clear: the criterion for the beauty of the word is the myth. As an example of true word-creation, I would cite Khlebnikov's "The Peacer" [Miriaz']¹¹ a *word-myth* published recently in the miscellany *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*. I will not dwell at length on the mutual relationship between myth and word. *The word derived from a root has less of a future than the one formed at random*. All that is beautiful is random (see the philosophy of chance). The destiny of the two children of chance has been different: the rhyme, to be sure, is held in well deserved esteem, but the slip of the tongue—*lapsus linguae*—this centaur of poetry, is held in disfavor.

I am asked: does poetry have a national character? I reply that all Arabs are dark, but not all of them deal in blackening, and furthermore that *ostrichs [strausy] hide in the bushes [Strauch]*.¹² Yes. The path of art leads through nationalization to cosmopolitanism.

Once more, I must remind you that true poetry does not bear any relationship to correct orthography and good style—those embellishments of the *pismoovniki*, the *Apollons*, the *Cornfields*,¹³ and other "organs" of general enlightenment.

Your language is suitable for trade and domestic activities.

Go to Hell!

You've had your year since the publication of our 1st books: *Slap, Thunder-Seething Goblet, A Trap for Judges*, etc.

The appearance of the New poetry affected the decrepit practitioners of petty Russian literature who are still creeping along as might a white marble statue of Pushkin dancing the tango.¹

The commercial octogenarians obtusely guessed the value of the new poetry earlier than the public which they have stupefied, and "as usual" they looked upon us with an eye to lining their pockets.

K. Chukovsky (who's not dumb!) toured all the fairs in various towns with marketable goods: the names of Kruchenykh, Burliuk, Khlebnikov. . . .²

F. Sologub grabbed I. Severyanin's cap to cover his balding little talent.

Vasily Bryusov, as usual, chewed the cud of Mayakovsky's and Livshits' poetry on the pages of *Russian Thought*.

Stop, Vasya, that's not a cork! . . .³

Later, didn't these octogenarians stroke us on the head in order to hastily sew for themselves out of the sparks of our provocative poetry an electric belt for communicating with the Muses? . . .⁴

These characters gave a herd of young people who previously had no occupation a reason to throw themselves at literature and show their grimacing faces: those overblown windbags, the Mezzanine of Poetry, the Petersburg Herald, and other such groups.⁵

The manifesto "Go to Hell!" (Idite k chertu!) was published in the almanac *The Roaring Parnassus* (St. Petersburg: Futurist, 1914), at the time of a short-lived alliance between the Cubo-Futurists and I. Severyanin.

And along with them crept out that gang of Adams with neatly parted hair—Gumilev, S. Makovsky, S. Gorodetsky, Piast⁶—who at first tried to stick the label of Acmeism and Apollonism on their dull songs about Tula samovars and toy lions, and then started a motley round dance around the by-now-established Futurists. . . .

Today we spit out the past that was stuck to our teeth, by declaring:

1. *All Futurists are united only by our group.*
2. *We have rejected our accidental labels Ego and Cubo and have united into the one and only literary company of the Futurists.*

**DAVID BURLIUK, ALEXEI KRUCHENYKH, BENEDICT
LIVSHITS, VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, IGOR SEVERYANIN,
VICTOR KHLEBNIKOV**

We, Too, Want Meat!

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

Soldiers, I envy you!

You have it good!

Here on the chipped wall is the five-fingered shrapnel imprint made of bits of human brain. How clever to attach to the stupid battlefield hundreds of severed human heads.

Yes, yes, yes, life's more interesting for you!

You do not have to think about the 20 kopeks you owe Pushkin and about why Yablonovsky writes his articles.¹

Anyway, this is not the point!

Verses, verses, a billion verses (this was yesterday).

Two billion poets' feet started shuffling happily in the entrance hall, but. . . .

In came Mayakovsky—

And why do many fearfully conceal the sexless children of the cachetic muses?

Let's get it straight.

People say that I am a Futurist?

What's a Futurist? I don't know. I never heard of such a thing. There have never been any.

You heard this tale from Mademoiselle Criticism.² I'll show "her"!

You know, there are good galoshes, the brand's "Triangle."

And yet, not a single critic would wear them.

The name scares them.

¹The article "We, Too, Want Meat!" (I nam miaso!) appeared in the Moscow newspaper *Virgin Soil*, October 16, 1914.

Galoshes, they would say, must be of an elongated-oval shape, but here it says "Triangle." They'll pinch the feet.

What's a Futurist—it's a brand name like "Triangle."

Under this label performed even the one who embroidered these verses:

Yesterday I was reading, Turgenev
once again fascinated me,³

as well as those who shouted, like flagellants in a state of ecstasy,

Dyr bul shchyl . . .⁴

And moreover, the brand "Futurist" is not of our making. We called our first books—*A Trap for Judges, Slap in the Face of Public Taste, The Missal of the Three*—simply collections by the Literary Company.

It was the newspapers that gave us the name "Futurists." Anyway, why get all worked up. It's funny! If Vavila had shouted: "Why am I not Eugene?" what difference would it make?⁵

Futurism for us young poets is a toreador's red *muleta*, we need it only for the bulls (poor bulls!—I compared them to the critics).

I have never been to Spain, but I think that it would not occur to a toreador to wave his red *muleta* in front of a friend who is wishing him good morning. We, too, have no reason to nail a sign to the good-natured face of some village bard.

In all our demonstrations, this is what came first on our banner:

"Every creative work is free."

Come!

We will meet everyone fairly. But only if the fat figure of Apukhtin does not loom between their eyes and reality,⁶ only if their tongue is clean and not corroded by the phrases of the "venerable ones."

Today's poetry is the poetry of struggle.

Every word must be, like the soldier in an army, made of healthy meat, of red meat!

Those who have it—come to us!

So what if we were unfair.

When you are speeding through hundreds of pursuing enemies, you cannot be sentimental: "Oh, we ran over a chicken."

Our cruelty gave us the strength never to surrender to life, to carry on our banner.

Freedom to create words and from words.

Hatred for the language that existed before us.

To reject with indignation the wreath of cheap fame made of bath-house switches.

To stand on the rock of the word "we" amidst the sea of boos and outrage.⁷

From *Secret Vices of the Academicians*

ALEXEI KRUCHENYKH

ILE (OR STYLE) OF THE LITERATI

A sleepy whistle!

monotonous, a thin sucking sound, a kingdom enveloped in the convulsions of sleep—asleep are the wrinkled foreheads the cheeks and the hair, asleep are the faded trees, the bird shaking one leg hung in mid air. . . .

in the desert of streets a puff of wind rises, and pierces the ears with its whistle from one end of the world to the other . . . metal objects have become rust covered.

shwist shwist—the doors shout, but nobody hears them.

people have unlearned how to speak, and in the night only whistle in their sleep. . . .

Eugene fell at her feet, by boundless
Contrition all undone, while—soundless
But for a shivering start he felt—
She gazed upon him as he knelt
With neither shock nor anger surging . . .
His aspect stricken and distraught,
His eye that pleaded and besought,
She marked them well.¹

Secret Vices of the Academicians (Tainye poroki akademikov) (Moscow, 1915) was printed in the usual Kruchenykh style of calculated typographical disorder and illustrated by I. Klyun. It included essays by K. Malevich and Klyun himself.

here you can only hear the piercing sound: s-s-s . . . and moreover:
ing-ing-ing² . . . or

Onegin, a dear friend of mine,
Born where Neva flows, and where you,
I daresay, gentle reader, too
Were born, or once were wont to shine

here again is his favorite sound: er
poets avoid rhymes on verbs because they are very easy and because
they overfill the verse with many and varied er . . . ed . . . es . . . ing . . .
but Pushkin moved all this inside the line and thus gave more elbow-
room to the *es* and *ing*! the whole of *Eugene Onegin* can be expressed in
two lines:

ioni—voni
es—and—ing

The sleep whistle triumphs!

The slush creeps!

but the poor reader, since his school days, has been so intimidated
by Pushkin that he does not dare utter a word, and to our day the
secret of the "Pushkin mystery"³ has remained a mystery

here is another example:

Mr. Yushchinsky's bill from the Triumphal Gates Laundry

1 bed sheet	5 kopeks
2 starched shirts	20 "
5 collars	30 "
2 pairs of cuffs	20 "
3 pillowcases	9 "
1 sweater	5 "

if we compare these lines with the above eight-line fragment from
Onegin:

Eugene fell at her feet, etc. etc.

it turns out that the style of the laundry bill is superior to Pushkin's! in
fact: in the eight lines of the bill we can observe rare and sonorous,
truly Russian letters, such as: Ъ (y), Ш (shch), Ф (f), Ю (iu), Ж (zh) . . .

(and they are so rare in that novel in verse); all in all there are more sounds here than in Pushkin, and there is no ing-ing, ed-ed, etc. etc.

In the bill we also see ciphers, which create visual variety.

And, if a poet's style is determined by the number of words, it should also be measured by the number of letters—the letter is like the word (sound, shape, and image). Pushkin is watery—and so is Lermontov and all the Realists and the Symbolists:

“and all the dull earthly songs could not replace the celestial sounds . . .”⁴

or:

. . . an *incorporeal* kiss (F. Sologub)—it's all the same nonsense and slush.

the eternal feminine now
in an imperishable body walks the Earth . . .
(V. Solovyev)⁵

It is sickening to live, sickening to breathe amidst this puffing and piffing. And they keep adding to it: they have introduced alliterations so that in every word, without fail, you will encounter a cute little pair

pe-pe-pe
pi-pi-pi
se-se-se
la-la-la

etc.

and even if the given letter is sonorous, after 20 repetitions in a row it will become irksome and soundless

the Symbolists knew alliteration, but they did not know *alphabetation*.

In their poetry (as well as in world poetry) there is only the drowsy rhythm of the salon dance (one two three), the rhythm of love, or of a person soundly asleep . . .

love love love
praise praise love
(Balmont)

Could there be anything more deadly and monotonous?

quiet, quiet, I am falling asleep,
do not wake me—

using Balmont's own words . . .

Even in the poetry of the Italians:

fara fara fa

rata rata ta

.....

There hasn't been a single line close to our daring word-chopping,
close to the following Futurian verses:

dyr bul shchyl

u beshchur

skum

vy so bu

r l ez

(*Pomade*)⁶

Or a clean spondee:

ziu/ tsiu/ e/ sprum/

(*Let's Grumble*)

And that's why we declare that we are the only live people in the
world.[. . .]

Poetry has ended up in a blind alley, and its only honorable way out
is not to use epithets and words that have outlived their time—but to
switch to transrational language:

sarcha krocha buga

navikhrol

opokhromel . . .

(*A Trap for Judges, 2*)⁷

This is completely different from dead literature!

Here, nothing cramps the individual and there is no need to bargain
with one's artistic conscience!

We do not wish to make poetry in the antediluvian language, nor do
we wish to be "neither here nor there," and we sing like only we are
able to

daring and bold:

Dance tune:

kvab

tarad

pin
pur
kvara
kuaba
vabakr
trbrk
brktr
.....

Would we go dream in the desert, knowing what the desert is like and what the hermits do there?!

But we would not go to the other America either, that extremist twaddle about contemporaneity as a patented panacea for all misfortunes and ailments—this theme is no more elevated than any other!

let us be true to the word as such
and in our art let us proceed
from it, from the core of its intrinsic tasks
let us be wordwrights
and not laughwrights! . . .

From Now On I Refuse to Speak Ill Even of the Work of Fools

DAVID BURLIUK

A UNIFIED AESTHETIC RUSSIA

The artistic season, to the thunder of the invigorating war storm, has been marked by unprecedented phenomena.

We went to exhibitions where "diehard" works were peacefully hanging on the walls, to the joy of the "rigorous" critics, and next to them there were some signboards on display, electric fans,¹ "still-lives," and various other "eyesores" by the "shouters" and the "protesters"—those who are called Futurists, and for whom it seemed inconceivable to be displayed with, even more to hang next (and so close) to, those pieces painted so wisely with all the understanding not only of a school (the tradition of past "centuries"!) but also of the tastes and appetites of the quickly passing crowd.

This is just to point out a fact. But this is not why I climbed on the broken gun carriage of an Austrian howitzer—not for this does my hoarse voice resound.

My speech, little concerned with the success of a final result, has as its aim instead a demonstration of the change of mood and thought in those desperate heads—the heads of the Futurists, and, of course,

¹The article "From Now On I Refuse to Speak Ill Even of the Work of Fools" (*Otnyne ia otkozyvaius' govorit' durno dazhe o tvorchestve durakov*) was published in the almanac *The Vernal Forwarding Agency of the Muses* (Moscow, 1915), which as Burliuk's article shows, was the last serious effort to unite all Futurists (and even quasi Futurists and non-Futurists) on a single aesthetic front. It consisted of more than one hundred pages and included poetry by most of the Cubo-Futurists and Centrifuge poets. It was illustrated by David and Vladimir Burliuk and A. Lentulov.

first of all, my own. Much time will go by (other things will get in the way), and for some there is absolutely no hope—they will never understand how their old bottles glued to a tail, or their electric fan nailed to a board suddenly appeared on display next to the manufactures of Kuidzhi-Kryzhitsky-Vershiny-Lukomore.²

In the three years preceding the war we lived through a stormy revolution in all our arts.

The daring favorites seized power. The crowd, leaving the old generation behind, ran to the pedestal of the new idols.

The citadel of old taste was holding firm in the hands of the public and the art critics—but bearing in mind that in a besieged fortress a month counts as a year of normal service (and in Sebastopol, as nearly five years), we are not at all surprised. 3 years went by . . . and what: our alert general public, even if it did not comprehend and understand, at least accepted Cubism, Futurism, and the *Freedom of the creative act*.

The citadel's doors are wide open.

Now to rage and rave, to preach, to pound with a fist on the reader's forehead would be like breaking into an open doorway!

They accepted us—they have agreed and are agreeing to listen to us. *The time to be creative has begun* for this generation that made its appearance so noisily on the heels of the Symbolists, and that showed such an antagonistic and irreconcilable attitude toward them.

Recently, the little book *The Archer*³ was published—Futurists stick out in it like cockroaches among the thoroughly soaked logs of Symbolism (such is the climate).

Every Symbolist has a Futurist tucked under his arm.

A touching unity, which reinforces once more my thought that the uncivilized newcomers have been accepted into the flock of authors from all the arts, with *as much* love and equal rights *as possible*.

Since this statement of mine does not constitute the view of any group or party, but simply a public confession of my *personal* views (which, however, are probably symptomatic of the epoch that we are entering, and therefore are worthy of attention), I am addressing both the public (a china crucible, where a gold-iron-copper-lead mixture is alloyed) and the representatives of the arts—those on the right and those on the left, and also those which nobody but the artists themselves consider art. I address them and argue: carry this bright thought in your mind, like I do: "Every art, even a very minor one, even an attempt which does not (alas!) reach its goal, *is a virtue!*"

The shabby old man, who, in the shadow of his umbrella draws the arch of a big circus, is worthy of every respect; according to the

rules of *Lasierung*⁴ practiced by Calame,⁵ he is a daring, all-destroying innovator.

The Futurist who, in the public eye, gets intoxicated with the articulated sounds of his native language is worthy of every respect!

The attempt at art is in itself a virtue.

Not accepted! "nonviolent resistance to evil"⁶ in the name of life as rebellion, of the growth of ethical ideals—this is fine—and so be it for ever!! Here I reaffirm that loving acceptance of *all art*, including the most minor and even "that which is not art," has nothing to do with a "correspondence-with-friends" type of mood.

After all the confusion—*necessary, invigorating*—not only of those years we lived through, but also of the current ones, Russia, Great Russia will need (and this has already begun) a sufficient quantity of Culture, as well as "a dense railroad network." In the world of artistic life, which is the subject of our talk, this means respect for other people's opinion.

The admissibility of beliefs different "from mine"!

I address myself to all the priests of art—even the anonymous ones whose name is "dilettante," and whose sacrificial altar pollutes the air only in brief moments of freedom from the hard labor of life. Let everyone have his own god! A free path to his own belief! In the world of art, this means that "he sees the world in his own way," and pursues and respects beauty as he understands it.

Let the strong not intentionally suffocate the weak.

The weak, even in a pack, will not tear the strong to pieces.

In the world of aesthetic relationships, *respect for other people's opinion (for their work) is the only possible behavior worthy of a cultured person.*^a

Without complicating the matter, I am going to say two words about creativity.

A nonanonymous work, during the author's own lifetime, is part of his higher, better "I."

Criticism, up to this very moment, assumed the role of "torturer," with single-minded determination. It did not take this into consideration, and attacked, with brutal cruelty, the fruits of creativity—"the sweet sounds and prayers" (just as the poet said).⁷

It is not surprising that in our "people's court" it always seems like public posing at the pillory.

The court of our contemporaries. . . . How many times have we, even as young children, seen its justice! "About the dead either say

a. "Do not do unto others that which you would not have them do unto you." Of course, this is the crux of human relations; this is the world of real relationships.

something good or say nothing." This is the "judgment of history" . . . !!

The critics do not often clip their own nails, they are generally oblivious to what I have just said.

We hope that from now on this unfriendly attitude toward "birds of a different feather," or "horses of another color," will give way to a better disposition, directed specifically toward theoretical problems, investigations of the creative process, and toward the works of art themselves.

One last point is left, and it is the most difficult. As follows logically from what has been said, "Respect for another's opinion" (culture) is necessary, and in art this means "the respect for another's work," even popular art. Hence it follows: no one will ever despotically affirm in all fairness that life in which there is "any" kind of art is not already a virtue, that we need this kind of beauty more than we need that kind.

That life must be observed with the right eye or the left eye, but not with both eyes, etc.

To make such statements is to *forget* that life and particularly *Russia*, in general needs art—any art its sons are gifted at. And one can offend Great Russia only in one way, by producing a *small* amount. Of Art.

If there is quantity, then quality (suiting all tastes!—don't worry!) will emerge.

And how charming in their fear are the museum curators, the purchasing committees who pick works for the national galleries!

Afraid to "pollute" their well-lighted, formal exhibition halls, they are being so economical, cautious, selective—forgetting that a museum is nothing more than a cemetery, where the general lies next to the soldier, the Great poet next to the shoemaker.

They forget that a museum should be like the herbarium of a good scientist, where specimens of all the flora have been collected, if the scientist's aim is to give a full representation of a given locale!

The museum committees work in a spirit of narrow-minded hatred for mankind, and in twenty five years the cultivated museum goer will have to thank them for the fact that the creative genius of our own people is represented in such an incomplete, egotistical, *one-sided* way.

I address my words also to them: "even the smallest amount of art is a virtue." Respect other people's opinion—this is a sign of culture.

Oh, public! oh, crucible of fireproof china! You, too, can be fairer in a more conscious way. Love art! Love complete artistic freedom. This is the beginning of everything. *Do not fear the original*—do not even fear the pursuit of originality, in the same way as *to this day you do not fear*

clichés and the repetition of old forms (there is not even the shade of a reproach in what I am saying!).

Fear empty walls in your homes!

Fear empty shelves in your libraries!

Bow before the “names,” but remember that all of them have been made by your thousand-headed-hearted worship, and that it is in your power to lift your head to the sky of creativity, where each day gives rise to ever newer luminaries of the powerful human spirit.

A Drop of Tar

“A speech to be delivered
at the first convenient
occasion”

Ladies and Gentlemen!

This year is a year of deaths: almost every day the newspapers sob loudly in grief about somebody who has passed away before his time. Every day, with syrupy weeping the brevier wails over the huge number of names slaughtered by Mars. How noble and monastically severe today's newspapers look. They are dressed in the black mourning garb of the obituaries, with the crystal-like tear of a necrology in their glittering eyes. That's why it has been particularly upsetting to see these same newspapers, usually ennobled by grief, note with indecent merriment one death that involved me very closely.

When the critics, harnessed in tandem, carried along the dirty road—the road of the printed word—the coffin of Futurism, the newspapers trumpeted for weeks: “ho, ho, ho! serves it right! take it away! finally!” (Concerned alarm in the audience: “What do you mean, died? Futurism died? You're kidding.”)

Yes, it died.

For one year now instead of Futurism, verbally flaming, barely maneuvering between truth, beauty, and the police station, the most boring octogenarians of the Kogan-Aikhenvald type¹ creep up on the stage of auditoriums. For one year now, the auditoriums present only the most boring logic, demonstrations of trivial truths, instead of the cheerful sound of glass pitchers against empty heads.

¹“A Drop of Tar” (Kaplia degtia), the only Futurist manifesto written by Mayakovsky alone, appeared in the almanac *Seized: The Drum of the Futurists* (Petrograd, 1915), published by Osip Brik.

Gentlemen! Do you really feel no sorrow for that extravagant young fellow with shaggy red hair, a little silly, a bit ill-mannered, but always, oh! always, daring and fiery? On the other hand, how can you understand youth? The young people to whom we are dear will not soon return from the battlefield; but you, who have remained here with quiet jobs in newspaper offices or other similar businesses; you, who are too rickety to carry a weapon, you, old bags crammed with wrinkles and gray hair, you are preoccupied with figuring out the smoothest possible way to pass on to the next world and not with the destiny of Russian art.

But, you know, I myself do not feel too sorry about the deceased, although for different reasons.

Bring back to mind the first gala publication of Russian Futurism, titled with that resounding "slap in the face of public taste." What remained particularly memorable of that fierce scuffle were three blows, in the form of three vociferous statements from our manifesto.

1. Destroy the all-cansons freezer which turns inspiration into ice.
2. Destroy the old language, powerless to keep up with life's leaps and bounds.
3. Throw the old masters overboard from the ship of modernity.

As you see, there isn't a single building here, not a single comfortably designed corner, only destruction, anarchy. This made philistines laugh, as if it were the extravagant idea of some insane individuals, but in fact it turned out to be "a devilish intuition"² which is realized in the stormy today. The war, by expanding the borders of nations and of the brain, forces one to break through the frontiers of what yesterday was unknown.

Artist! is it for you to catch the onrushing cavalry with a fine net of contour lines? Repin! Samokish!³ Get your pails out of the way—the paint will spill all over!

Poet! don't place the mighty conflict of iambs and trochees in a rocking chair—the chair will flip over!

Fragmentation of words, word renewal! So many new words, and first among them Petrograd,⁴ and conductress! die, Severyanin! Is it really for the Futurists to shout that old literature is forgotten? Who would still hear behind the Cossack whoop the trill of Bryusov's mandolin! Today, everyone is a Futurist. The entire nation is Futurist. **FUTURISM HAS SEIZED RUSSIA IN A DEATH GRIP.**⁵

Not being able to see Futurism in front of you and to look into yourselves, you started shouting about its death. Yes! Futurism, as a specific group, died, but like a flood it overflows into all of you.

But once Futurism has died as the idea of select individuals, we do

not need it any more. We consider the first part of our program of destruction to be completed. So don't be surprised if today you see in our hands architectural sketches instead of clownish rattles, and if the voice of Futurism, which yesterday was still soft from sentimental reverie, today is forged in the copper of preaching.

V. MAYAKOVSKY

The Trumpet of the Martians

People!

The human brain today still staggers on 3 legs (3 spatial axes)! We, tilling the human brain like ploughmen, will glue to this puppy a 4th leg, namely *the axis of time*.

Lame puppy! You will no longer torture our ears with your nasty bark.

The people of the past showed their limited intelligence in assuming that the sail of state could be built for the axes of space alone.

We, cloaked only in victories, are starting construction of a young union with its sail along the axis *of time*, warning you in advance that our size is larger than Cheops, and that our task is courageous, grand, and rigorous.

We, rigorous carpenters, once more throw ourselves and our names into the seething cauldrons of marvelous tasks.

We have faith in ourselves, and with indignation reject the vicious whisper of the people of the past who dream of biting us in our [Achilles] heel.

After all, we are barefoot (Consonantal error).¹ But we are beautiful *in the firm betrayal of our past*—which has just entered the age of

The manifesto "Trumpet of the Martians" (Truba Marsian) was printed as a scroll in Kharkov in 1916. It was published by the group Lyroon (*Lirnia*), headed by Nikolai Aseev and Grigorii Petnikov. Lyroon grew out of Centrifuge and showed an orientation toward Khlebnikov's poetry and theory.

victory—and in the unrelenting fury of the next hammer aiming at the terrestrial globe which has already begun to shake under our tramp.

Black sails of time, rustle!

VICTOR KHLEBNIKOV, MARIA SINYAKOVA,
BOZHIDAR, GRIGORY PETNIKOV, NIKOLAY ASEYEV²

“LET THE MILKY WAY SPLIT INTO THE MILKY WAY OF THE INVENTORS AND THE MILKY WAY OF THE CONSUMERS.”

Here are the words of a new holy war,—

Our questions are directed to the empty space where no man has ever been—we will imperiously brand them on the brow of the Milky Way and on the plump idol of the merchants—questions such as how to free the winged engine from that fat caterpillar, the freight train of elders. *Let different age groups separate and live apart!* We have broken the seals on the train attached to our engine of audacity—nothing is there but the graves of youths.

There are seven of us. We want swords made of the pure iron of youths.

Those who have drowned in the laws of families and in the laws of trade, those whose speech is limited to: “I eat,” cannot understand us, who do not give a thought to any of these things.

The right to world unions according to age. The divorce of generations, the right to separate existence and activities. The right to individuality for everything up to the Milky Way. Away with the noises of ages! Let the sound of uninterrupted times, the black and white palette, and the brush of destiny rule. Let those who are closer to their death than to their birth surrender! Let them fall to the ground in this fight of times, under our savage attack. And we—we, having tested the ground of the continent of time, have found it fertile. But grabbing hands *from there* have seized us and prevent us from accomplishing our marvelous betrayal of space. Has there ever been anything more inebriating than this betrayal? You! how would you react to the danger of being born a man, if not *by the theft of time?* We are calling you to the land where the trees talk, where there are scientific unions that look like waves, where there are vernal armies of love, *where time blooms like a bird-cherry tree* and moves like a piston, where the transman³ in a carpenter’s apron saws time into boards and treats his tomorrow like a

lathe turner. (Oh, equations of kisses—you! Oh, death ray, killed by the death ray placed on the bottom of a wave.) We go there as youths and suddenly someone dead, someone raw-boned seizes us and prevents us from shedding the feathers of this idiotic *today*. Is this good?

Nation of youth, raise the winged sails of time! Before you lies the second theft of the consumers' flame.

Be more daring! Remove your boney hands, *yesterday*; may those horrible pupils be shred before Balashov's blow.⁴ This is a new blow in the eyes of the vulgar populace of the space. Which is more: the consumers or the inventors? The consumers have always been creeping in herds after the inventors, now the inventors are driving away the barking of the consumers, who in packs have crept after the lonely inventor.

All the industry of the terrestrial globe today, from the point of view of those same consumers is "a theft" (the language and habits of the consumers) from the first inventor, Gauss.⁵ He initiated the study of lightening. And during his lifetime he did not even have 150 rubles a year for his scientific work. *You* try to sanctify the joy of your perpetrated theft with monuments and laudatory articles, and in this way appease your pangs of conscience, suspiciously located in your worm-shaped appendix. Those who are now supposedly on your banner, Pushkin and Lermontov, were at one time killed by you like rabid dogs, out in the fields, beyond the city! Lobachevsky⁶ was demoted *by you* to the rank of parochial school teacher. Montgolfier⁷ was put in a lunatic asylum. And we? A combat detachment of inventors?

These are your deeds! One can write thick volumes about them!

This is why the inventors, with full awareness of their special breed, their different morals, and their particular mission retreat from the consumers into the independent nation of *time* (devoid of space) and raise iron bars between *them* and themselves. The future will decide who will end up in a zoo, the inventors or the consumers, and who will gnaw at the poker with their teeth.

V. KHLEBNIKOV

ORDERS

1. *The glorious contributors to Futurian publications are transferred from the category of humans to the category of Martians.*

Signed: The King of Time, Velimir I

2. *We invite Wells and Marinetti to the parliament of the Martians, as guests with the right to a consultative vote.*

Items on the agenda.

"Ulla, ulla,"⁸ Martians!

1. How free ourselves from the dominance of the people of the past, who still have a shadow of strength in the world of space, without soiling our hands with their life (the soap of word-creation), having let them wallow in the destiny of wicked wood lice which they have built for themselves. We have been destined to conquer Our rights to freedom from the dirty habits of the people of past centuries by means of *measure and time*.

2. How to free the fast locomotive of the younger generations from the freight train of the older ones which has been attached to it in an unbidden and insolent way?

Older people! You are holding up the course of mankind and are preventing the seething locomotive of youth from taking the mountain that stands in *its* way. We have torn off the seals and have verified that the cargo is gravestones for youth.

Under the guise of a cargo slyly attached to our haughtily whistling dream, the dirt of the precelestial people is carried along!

Ego-Futurism

ACADEMY OF EGO-POETRY
(Universal Futurism)
19 Ego 12
Forerunners:

C. M. FOFANOV AND MIRRA LOKHVITSKAYA¹

The Tables

- I. The Glorification of Egoism:
 1. The Unit is Egoism.
 2. The Deity is the Unit.
 3. Human is a fraction of God.
 4. Birth is a fractioning from Eternity.
 5. Life is the fraction outside of Eternity.
 6. Death is reintegration of the fraction.
 7. Human is Egoist.
- II. Intuition. Theosophy.
- III. Thought until madness: madness is individual.
- IV. The prism of style—restoration of the spectrum of thought.
- V. The Soul is Truth.

The Rectorate:

Igor-Severyanin
Constantine Olimpov (C. C. Fofanov)
George Ivanov
Gaal-Arelsky

The manifesto of the Academy of Ego-Poetry was originally published as a leaflet in St. Petersburg in January 1912, by the newly formed group of the Ego-Futurists headed by Igor Severianin. In subsequent publications they referred to this first announcement as "The Tables" (Skrizhali). A few months before this manifesto, in November 1911, Severianin published the pamphlet *Prologue Ego-Futurism*, a poem in traditional iambs that announces the birth of a new kind of poetry. Severianin often hyphenates his names.

Egopoetry in Poetry

GRAAL-ARELSKY

Life was born out of a primeval mist. Bright stars flared up in the overturned chalice of the universe. Dark planets began to close the circle of their invisible orbits. Motion was born, time was born, man was born. In his conception, nature was reflected vividly and figuratively, incomprehensibly and divinely. Fear of death, which so unexpectedly breaks the thread of life, and the desire to somehow prolong his short existence, compelled man to create religion and art. Death created poetry. Poetry and religion have been inseparably linked throughout the ages, and indeed they will be until heaven finally descends to earth. But, from the very earliest period in man's life, the idea of a universal synthesis arose in his consciousness. He strove to find that invisible thread which could join the credos¹ of all peoples. A whole series of philosophical teachings pass before us—those of Egypt, Greece, and Rome: of the North, still silently sleeping in the azure snows; and of the brightly colored and ecstatically bursting East. Egypt recognizes its powerlessness. The deserts fill with pyramids. All is ashes. Everything passes, and everything repeats itself once more. The East creates Nirvana; Greece, Beauty. Three poles. They cannot come together and unite. And then, in the shady gardens of Galilee, amidst azure lakes and a quiet bright happiness, Christ is born. He says that love is that very thread which all have sought in vain.

Centuries pass, as before; the orbits close and, as before, the ques-

¹"Egopoetry in Poetry" (Egopoeziia v poezii) appeared in the miscellany *The Orange Urn* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Herald, 1912) dedicated to the memory of K. M. Fofanov. Graal-Arelskii (pseud. of Stepan Petrov, 1899-?) was an astronomer besides being a poet.

tion remains unresolved. Science comes upon the stage. It collects facts and erects upon them a temple of Reason. The building grows. The bricks are put in place carefully and quickly. Absolute reality. *Cogito ergo sum.*² But again centuries pass. Science turns out to be relative, like everything else. It doesn't have what it takes to pass through the centuries without changing. Reason is only a camera. We can recognize only that world which is formed in our consciousness, apprehended by our five senses. The world which rules in our intellect is not real, but imaginary. If we survey all of man's searchings we notice the following fact: man strives to transform his ideals into the "unearthly," into a universal mystery. Thinking that apprehension of the "ineffable" requires the death of nature, he tries to rise above that egoism which nature has put within him. He tries to graft into himself an altruism which is alien. It is called Culture. All of history lies before us. Nature created us. Only She should rule us in our actions and efforts. She placed egoism inside of us; we should develop it. Egoism unites all of us, because we are all egoists. There are differences only in stages of biologic evolution. One man requires happiness for himself, another for those around him, a third for all of humanity. The essence always remains the same. We cannot feel ourselves to be happy if there is suffering around us. Thus, for our own personal happiness we require the happiness of others. In the universe there is nothing moral or immoral, there is only Beauty, world harmony, and the force of dissonance which is opposed to it. In its searchings, poetry need be guided only by these two forces. The aim of Egopoetry is the glorification of egoism as the only true and vital intuition.

God is eternity. Man, in being born, is separated from it. But in him there remain those very laws which lead life on earth toward perfect Beauty. The soul is life. Tossing reason aside, we must strive to fuse ourselves with nature, dissolving into her transparently and infinitely. That feeling of clear enlightenment and understanding outside of Reason, that universal harmony, is intuition. All roads lead to true happiness, to fusion with eternity. Every new dawn speaks to people of his happiness and, like a bright road, calls them to the Sun.

The First Year of Futurism

I. KAZANSKY

. . . I cannot understand . . .
. . . What this wild word "triolet"¹ means!?
(From provincial reviews of Futurism)

Every physics teacher, upon reaching the topic of inertia in his explanations, considers it absolutely necessary to recount the following rather typical anecdote.

Once, in one of France's southern provinces, a vast number of caterpillars were crawling across a railway bed. At that very moment, an express train was to come through, its locomotive knifing into the midst of this living flood. The wheels of the locomotive spun in place and, no matter how hard the engineer tried, the train would move neither backward nor forward. In the end, it seems, the steam engine blew up. . . .

Our so-called, *pardon*,² "Criticism" is precisely this sort of green flood of fat, dumb caterpillars, capable of destroying all that is tender, keen, valuable, progressive.

In the last decade or, more precisely, during the last five years, the Russian press has been forced to expand its activities. First with the "days of freedom,"³ and then with all manner of "American"-style go-getters like Mr. Kornfeld⁴ providing the undemanding passerby with sensational news and resorting, in the hunt for the reader's spare nickel, to a cardsharp's tricks. All of this, however, has taken place

"The First Year of Futurism" (*Pervyi god futurizma*) appeared in the third almanac of the Ego-Futurists, *Eagles over the Abyss* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Herald, 1912). The author, Ivan Kazanskii (1882–1914) became well known under the pseudonym of I. V. Ignat'ev (see the following text) as an Ego-Futurist poet, theoretician, and publisher. He founded the newspaper *The Petersburg Herald* (only four issues appeared) and a publishing house by the same name.

only in the realm of technique, special sections, and graphics. Not a single glimmer from these new rays has, however, penetrated into the dark corner of "Criticism."

And if, *four years ago*, Ellis⁵ lamented the "vandalism in contemporary criticism," then at present that vandalism has been raised to the *fourth power*.

The same "rehashing things in your own words," the same tendency to distort, the same arbitrary conclusions, preoccupation with typographical errors, insulting inflation of trivia, and silence about essentials.

That's the sort of "critical" setting into which Ego-Futurism was fated to be born.

Last November (1911), the "Ego" press published its first salvo—Igor-Severyanin's⁶ pamphlet *Prolog Ego-Futurism* which created an unusual stir.

The dailies and weeklies screeched with outrage, and only a single critic, I. V. Ignatyev,⁷ was the *first to recognize* the overriding significance of Igor-Severyanin (cf. *The Nizhny Novgorodian*, no. 78, 25.XI, 1912).

Thus, the *maître* of the new intuitive school is Mr. Severyanin.

The "I," which has been placed upon a pedestal at the very moment that "Pushkin has become a Derzhavin,"⁸ that "Mt. Olympus's fur trim of dreamy woods has become a desert," and that certain Ones (the Impressionists) have departed before the arrival of the others (the Ego-Futurists), the "I" has agitated the sleepy sea of "criticism." Criticism, which didn't even grow to understand the Departed, now has thrown itself with malice upon the Oncoming Daring One.

This was the first fistful of grain sown on *Russian* territory.

Properly speaking, it is not even necessary to underscore the word *Russian*, because even without it the term *Ego-Futurism* indicates what we are presently talking about with adequate clarity. However, universal *Ego-Futurism* is constantly being confused with Italian-French *Futurism*, whose founder was already recognized three years ago to be the editor of the Rome future-journal *Poesia*, F. T. Marinetti.

Precisely the following question is then always heard from the Uninitiated: "In what does the credo of Ego-Futurism exactly and substantively consist?"

This question is answered by the program of the Academy of Ego-Poetry, published in January 1912.⁹ [. . .]

The names of the members of the rectorate then began to appear on the pages of the *Ego-Futurists' first periodical publication*, the newspaper *The Petersburg Herald*,¹⁰ founded and published by I. V. Ignatyev,

beginning on February 12, 1912. Despite the fact that the newspaper's first issue was rather mild and vague in its external appearance, it raced like a hurricane "from the Urals to the Altai, from the Amur to the Dnieper."¹¹ The provincial intelligentsia was rocked by the wind and welcoming messages flew to Petersburg from all corners of Russia, from Vladivostok, Kostroma, Rybinsk, Smolensk. . . . The new movement interested the entire serious reading public. And at this point "Criticism," that mediator between Reader and Author, began to play its key role. Lispering with an idiotic giggle, Criticism tramples the New as it is trying to get to its feet, instead of helping it rise. "Sickies . . . Decadents . . . Jaded people . . . Madmen. . . ." Everyone blew his own whistle. The Blacks¹² rang the warning bell, crying out about "the gutting of the Russian language" (*The Citizen*), while the Reds pressed their alarm at the "servants of the fattened bourgeoisie" (in three feuilletons in the *Rybinsk Kopeck*, the *Volga Messenger*, and the *Northern Morning*): groundless unreceptiveness, immoderate rowdy insults, parrotlike cries of "decadent! decadent!" (and do you know the difference between Decadence and Mystical Anarchism,¹³ Mr. Pig-Snouted Criticism?). There you have Ego-Futurism's reception at the hands of the unclean garbage rotting away in Opinion's trough. But all of this will not lead to anything. "Criticism" is making attempts at suppression. The Reader is steadfastly demanding information about the New Shining Movement. So there must be some compromises. That is why in Russia there isn't a single run-down little paper which hasn't devoted at least a tiny column to Ego-Futurism, which is growing ever stronger, brighter, and more mature.

This is evident, as well, in the second issue of the *Petersburg Herald*, published in March 11, 1912.

These attacks and triumphs, worthy of Suvorov,¹⁴ have impelled the Directorate to arrange a series of editorial victory parties, banquets, and *soirées*,¹⁵ which are the talk of all of Petersburg.

The refined pastimes of reading *poesas*,¹⁶ and drinking vials of *Crème-de-Violettes*,¹⁷ constitute a protest by intellectual *intimes* against the petit-bourgeois public excesses of the Italian-French Futurists, with their herd psychology and extreme intolerance. (One might mention here their public burning of the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saens and others).

At the beginning of this spring, we intended to arrange an open poeso-concert. Invitations had been sent out, among them one to A. I. Kuprin,¹⁸ whose reply is printed on page one. A draft of the program had already been promulgated:

Ego
Estate
"IVANOVKA"

Pudost station, Baltic Railway. Gatchina Mill. In the park adjoining Paul I's Hunting Palace, on the Estrade
by the marble urns, at the prelude of May 1912.

The first spring concert of Universal-Futurism, organized by the Directorate of the Newspaper *The Petersburg Herald*.

Co-performers:

Igor-Severyanin.
I. V. Ignatyev.
Constantine Olimpov.
I. S. Lukash.¹⁹

Beginning precisely at midnight.

Lilac illumination in the park. Aeolian bells. Invisible ocarinas and pipes.

Kiosks of:

Seclusion.
Ego-anthologies.
Milk and black bread.

Chalet of Cupid.

Buffet on the East Veranda of the Palace next to the Estrade. Wines from the gardens of Prince Yusupov: Cusenier brand Crème-de-Violettes liqueur. Gatchino pink trout; Umbers; Bonbons-Violettes²⁰ from "Gourmet." Fleur d'orange Tea. Gondolas to ferry across the Makhalitta.

"Dream Princess,"²¹ "A la Vie,"

Entry by Papier-Vergé Invitations.

Return train at 5 A.M.

The date of the concert will be announced in all
of the Capital's newspapers and periodicals.

Newspaper Director I. V. Ignatyev.

However, first, inclement weather throughout May, and secondly, some friction within the administration, led the Directorate to the idea of replacing the organization of the poeso-concert by the publication of their *first literary miscellany*, dedicated to the memory of Fofanov.^a

The Orange Urn, featuring the participation of Valery Bryusov,²²

^a. Among foreigners, we would designate Oscar Wilde and Charles Baudelaire as forerunners of Ego-Futurism.

initiated a new era in the life of *The Petersburg Herald*; it transformed itself from a newspaper into a Publishing House, into which literary giants trod willingly, as into new lands.

Consequently, that fire which was sought in vain by everyone has appeared in the hands of the contemporary Prometheuses—the Ego-Futurists. It burns only for the glory of Art, shunning Materialism and Politics, since “Where there is Politics and Gold, there is no Art.” In our midst are united such contrasting figures as Mr. Leonid Afanasyev (in the miscellany *Glass Chains*) and Mr. Fyodor Sologub, Mr. A. Skaldin (from *Apollon*) and Mr. Valery Bryusov.²³

Furthermore, the present miscellany has given rise to new *débuts*.

In July, Mr. I. V. Ignatyev traveled to Nizhny-Novgorod, where the publication of the periodical “I” by local Ego-Futurists was planned.

Also in July, *Russian Thought* took the side of the Ego-Futurists. Thus, the rights of the new literary empire were recognized by the most powerful of the rulers of the Word.

In August, “The Petersburg Herald” printed *Glass Chains* and published the first collection of the poesas of Mr. P. Shirokov,²⁴ *Roses in Wine*, which sold out within two weeks.

In September, “Ego” resumed operation with the printing of “The Doctrines of Universal Ego-Futurism.”

1. Recognition of the Ego-God (Unification of two contrasts).
2. Attainment of the universal soul (All-justification).
3. Glorification of Egoism, as one’s individual essence.
4. Limitlessness of artistic and spiritual searchings.

With respect to the first point of the doctrine, we have heard it remarked that Mr. Minsky,²⁵ a relatively long time ago and relatively in detail, addressed the question of the soul’s constant balancing between two contrasts, for example, Good and Evil. Without referring especially to Minsky, we may note that *Ego-Futurism is the quintessence of all schools*.

One cannot deny the fact that the Epicureans already recognized all-justification. They gave us the following example of “all-justification”: the murderer, when he kills, is justified from his own personal perspective. The judge, in punishing the murderer, is also right from his perspective. And, of course, the law, which determines the course of both the judge and the prisoner, is right as well.

This view is correct, but it is fitted to the needs of government, to the “order” of systematization, and not to the point of view of one’s own Ego-I, the point of view of ego-anarchism.^b

b. In qualified anarchism the “I” dissolves without leaving a trace.

The second point, "attainment of the universal soul," gives rise to the following question: if one speaks of attainment of the universal soul, does this not mean that the Ego-Futurists recognize the soul. Then how precisely do they explain this recognition: as a matter of fact or of necessity?

There can only be one answer: the soul is recognized as a fact, since the program of the Academy of Ego-Poetry states (point V): "The Soul is Truth," i.e., the Immortality of the Soul is an axiom.

"But," they reply, "how would you refute Mr. Fyodor Dostoevsky, who said: 'My soul rebels and returns the ticket to immortality.'"²⁶

It's not a matter of refutation. It is clear that Mr. Dostoevsky was incorrect when he said the above.

The thought of the Uninitiated now turns to another issue.

"Yes, I see that Ego-Futurism is something colossal, creating a total revolution in Art. The Ego-Futurist cathexis is dear to my heart, but what must I do, to what rituals must I adhere, to be considered a true Ego-Futurist?"

The doctrines answer: "Every artist or thinker who maintains doctrinal solidarity with the founder is an Ego-Futurist."

The aim of every Ego-Futurist is self-affirmation in the Future.

In general, the Ego-Futurist bases himself upon Intuition.

If you are not an intuitive, do not approach Ego-Futurism. It shines only for those possessing a soul. For those who are impotent of Soul and Verse, there is the Guild of Poets,²⁷ where Cowards and Freaks of Modernism turn for shelter.

There a soul is not needed, just as is the case among the foreign Futurists, who have deathified the pronoun "I," and who do not know all-justification (they negate the immortal soul, embracing anonymous collective creation).

The above paragraphs would serve to begin a summation and evaluation of our intuitive school of the future consciousness of life and art. But that is not an urgent matter. We always know our own value; our work is there for all to see. In weighing the work of this year (for our like-minded readers and subscribers), we have lost any hope that that Boor, our Criticism, has matured to even the slightest degree.

Let us wrap ourselves in the toga of Indifference and thus repeat the words of the unforgettable Huysmans (*A rebours*):

"Where can one hide from the infinite flood of human stupidity?"[. . .]

Ego-Futurism

I. V. IGNATYEV

1. Not for the first time (and probably not for the last), it is incumbent upon us to address the question:

What is the essence and what are the merits of Ego-Futurism?

Our critics, not waiting for an answer from the taciturn "société" of the new movement, have been attempting to ferret out the "secret" essence for themselves.

They seek and they do not find—the task, evidently, is not an easy one: it's a question of forcing the ever-moving imperishable Stream of the Lamb's Font into a stable framework.

But, despite this difficulty, we, too, will strive to penetrate its ever-changing depths and attempt to record the phases of its constant play of colors.

2. How can one grasp the expansive word "Ego-Futurism?" How can one comprehend this vast "I—Future?"

Our critics would like to understand it as "I will be evaluated and recognized in the Future," "The Future is mine, for me." However, why should the Future be *precisely* for the Ego-Futurists? After all, every individual, not to mention the artist, is obligated to live in the Future.

After all, everyone "lives"; "lives" in the past, in the present, in the future. In the past there is no life. You don't live there—you let the time go by.

Ego-Futurism (Ego-Futurizm) (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Herald, 1913) appeared as a sixteen-page booklet. It is Ignat'ev's most serious attempt to present an overview, and an explanation, of the movement. It is given here almost in its entirety.

The present has the properties of a bourgeois hibernation, which in the daily routine is called a peaceful, sober life.

Nonetheless, even in the graveyard of the past and in the swamp of the present, the Future flares up with a bright, perhaps unhealthy and dangerous, fire.

We mean to say *unhealthy* for the sober and well-meaning, for we already anticipate the joyful laments of our bookish reporters (those very same "critics"!), who chew up everything that comes their way and are choking on (Ego) Futurism. (The fault lies with their queasy stomachs, accustomed to proper, lukewarm, overcooked mush!)

To what indescribable ecstasy will these gentlemen be brought, upon learning that the (as yet still weak) beacons of the Future are unhealthy fires?

What's to be done if everything which cannot be put into Mr. Bourgeois' decorous "sphere" is unhealthy and mad?

For this is how Ego-Futurism is understood by the press: "Madness!"

Take a look through all of the Russian periodicals for 1912-13, and you quite literally will not find a single run-down little magazine which did not dedicate to Ego-Futurism a handful or two of—"madmen," "idiots," etc.

However, we will let this assessment rest on the conscience and propriety of our press (if it has any). The press, after all, "knows best!" So does "Criticism."

Once the former has taken to playing the role of cud-chewing liar and card shark, why shouldn't the latter pass its brainless blockhead off as a psychiatrist's skull?

So the press, our interpreter to the public, grasped Ego-Futurism ("madness!") as "I—Future!" Isn't that so very deep, so penetrating, and so . . . ordinary!

None of our competent brethren, our Alexanders and Vladimirs,¹ knew that Ego-Futurism made its appearance in the most unusual fashion. It was the "unexpected pleasure" of a poet (Igor-Severyanin), who was universally slandered by all of our "criticism" for being an Ego-Futurist. And only now, standing in back of Bryusov and Sologub,² "criticism" politely offers a "Welcome!" . . .

This is also one of the characteristic manifestations of our "materialistic ethics!"

Those very lips which have insulted and spat are now pressed to the hand of the newly arrived authorized talent, just as soon as the wind has started to blow in the opposite direction.

Here is the only proof offered to show that Ego-Futurism is "ridiculous and laughable."

They say to us:

"The Ego-Futurists have lost their *leader*."

Yes, Igor-Severyanin has renounced Ego-Futurism in print, but has Ego-Futurism renounced him—that is the question.

We don't want to say that the Ego-Futurists are awaiting the "Second Coming" of Igor-Severyanin. The Gates of Return are closed to him forever. They no longer exist, they have been walled over; but, at the same time, a new entrance has appeared higher up—but not for former adherents. At this entrance, no need for Igor-Severyanin is even apparent.

"The Moor has done his work!"³

Severyanin has torn the thread of his own Ego-Severyaninism, for that Ego-Futurism which existed up until the departure of the "maître" of the "school" is only Ego-Severyaninism.

3. Consequently:

"Ego-Futurism" (1911–12) is "I (Severyanin)-Future," although all four names concluded the "Tables of the Academy of Ego-Poetry"⁴[. . .]

The "Tables" do not tell us anything new. These are the same obeisances so common in literature, from which even the theosophist Igor-Severyanin does not save himself, for as much as he is talented, even genial, as a poet, to the same degree are he and his colleagues terrible seekers after God.

And if we can draw from his poesa "Ordinary People" only a single valuable indication of the seeds to recognition of the Ego-God (the November 1912 Doctrines of Igor-Severyanin), then from the Tables one can take with a reluctant heart only that the 1912 Ego-Futurists (let us call them the Ego-Severyaninists to distinguish them from the 1913 Ego-Futurists of the Association) recognize: (a) the glorification of Egoism; (b) Intuition-Theosophy; (c) the soul in its quality of Truth, and (d) Thought until Madness, for only Madness (at root) is individual and prophetic.

4. For Igor-Severyanin, his intoxicants and his role as *maître* are now offshoots from himself ("My brain was enlightened by intoxicants . . ."; "Not a pupil and not a teacher . . ."), but they are close and dear to him.

Otherwise he would not have placed the entire cycle "Ego-Futurism" in his first real book *The Thunder-Seething Goblet*.

This contains his best pieces, written during the period of his ostra-

cism; they are without reproaches, sunny and Balmontian "to ecstasy."

Isn't this why we also are afraid that Severyanin's goblet has been drained to the bottom, just as his abandoned cohorts feared? (*A Candi Ra*, Petersburg Herald, 1913.)

Is it possible that in the prolog "Ego-Futurism" two "future I's" (of Severyanin) are speaking:

a. Severyanin, the former poet published since 1903, but having gained notoriety only in 1911 when he "thundered over all of Russia and became acclaimed" although only for a "while."

b. With certainty one must agree with the revelation of Igor Severyanin, who foresaw in 1911 the "coming Poet" (i.e., himself), who

—Is close! Is close!
He will sing, he will soar!
He will make the ancient muses
His odalisques, his lovers.

And who, in fact, in 1913 had conquered literature within two years through the publication of his poesas in the decorous journal *The Griffin*.

5. Only that poet is a Poet who holds in his power the keys to the gates of the Future.

Only that critic is worthy of the name who seeks, in the trash heap, the dust-covered, secret bunches of pearls, and is not afraid to recognize them for what they are.

And only those editions which are the organs of rejected and persecuted individuals (for every talent is individual) are Editions of the New, Unspoken.

Igor-Severyanin has had to shut himself up in his own publishing house since 1913. He has published three volumes of poesas. And simply because he has done something progressive, has tried to say a new word, because he has "gone his own way," they have silenced him with a circular trap.

Is there any editor here who would give the poet the opportunity to appear before a wider audience?!

It is still good that Severyanin is an Ego-Futurist. He believes, he overcomes Fate—he is destined to be a wolf ("I am a wolf, and criticism is the beat of the hunter"),⁵ it is still good that he does not howl. Another in his place would have howled a long time ago and sent both himself and his work *ad patres*.

Severyanin's November "doctrines" brought some news—of the civil war between himself and Olimpov.

All of the points in the "doctrines," except for the unification of contrasts ("recognition of Ego-God") are popularizations, watered-down versions of the quintessence of the "Tables."

The weakest spots in Ego-Futurism are its borrowings and its fadishness.

It is hardly necessary to dispute the influence of Western Futurists on the Russian "universalists."⁶

Without a doubt, Russian (Ego)-Futurism (both the term and the work itself) is the fruit of Western currents.

But, in contrast to accepted opinion, the influence of the Italian-French Futurists on the Ego-Severyaninists was not great. In fact, the affinity one notes is with American poetry:

". . . I know not the filthy, I know not the base:
all people are right"
". . . I despise, praising . . ."

This is Severyanin.⁷

Compare:

". . . The roots of all that grows, I am willing and ready to water."
This is Walt Whitman, canonized by K. Chukovsky⁸ as the first Futurist and considered (along with E. Verhaeren) only as a forerunner by the Italian-French Futurists.

In the prose of the Ego-Severyaninists⁹ (see *The Petersburg Herald*, no. 2, 1912, and *The Orange Urn*, 1913), Whitman's influence is even less debatable.

Severyanin and Olimpov have started a polemic.

They have both been at work, they have both impudently slandered one another in manifestoes, and have gone their separate ways.

It seems that this fragile, not-yet-completely-formed "Something of Futurism" is threatened by collapse: Severyanin has left; Olimpov, as it turns out, is almost unproductive.

Ego-Futurism is destined to flare up once again in the form of the *Intuitive Association*, united by its "Charter":

1. Ego-Futurism—the incessant striving of every egoist to attain the possibilities of the future in the present.
2. Egoism—individualization, consciousness, worship, and praise of the "I."
3. Man is essence. Deity is the shadow of man in the mirror of the

Universe. God is nature. Nature is Hypnosis. The Egoist is an Intuitive. An Intuitive is a Medium.

4. Creation of Rhythm and Word.

Aeropagus:

Ivan Ignatyev
 Pavel Shirokov
 Vasilisk Gnedov
 Dimitry Kryuchkov¹⁰

Of Severyaninist Ego-Futurism only the letters and signboards remain; within them a new energy, of a different strength and color, lives on! Instead of the faded Severyanin all-justification ("I am indifferent; at times I forgive, at times I am sorry"),¹¹ a new slogan has begun to flash:

Battle!

After all, isn't life a continuous battle?

Even in our veins, an irreconcilable battle is carried forward by our blood cells against eternal enemies, and, were it not for that battle, the body would die.

Igor-Severyanin "believed," but faith without deeds is a dead thing: his poesiatic pamphlets are salvos into the trash "at the forest's edge."¹² By "faith" alone, he would remain even now in the same place where he stood before, he would write ordinary little poems. And even if the most glorified "maître" did not exist, Ego- (or some other kind of) Futurism would have emerged without him sooner or later. [. . .]

8. Ego-Futurism as Ego-Futurism is arising only on the "grave" of Severyanin the Ego-Futurist.

Through the Intuitive Association we can point to the following achievements:

- a. Movement and a disregard for the theme in prose.
- b. Renewal and a disregard for meter in verse.
- c. Abrupt shifts in the area of rhyme.
- d. Ego-prism.
- e. Contemporaneity and
- f. Mechanization.

We have adopted all of the above in a process of approximative sectioning, since the *opuses* of the Ego-Futurists are difficult to analyze because of their "massiveness."

Movement in prose can be noted in I. V. Ignatyev's *opus* "Following the . . ." (*Strike! But Hear Me!* Petersburg Herald, 1913, 50 kopecks):

. . . heart has a cold Wait you'll know who I am the check please It's falling Like in an elevator to go or not to. I Want to Give myself. To Dominic; You write and write, and they don't pay you any money Tell what a creep works for our side and yours turn on the light—"Yours Truly" doesn't think, it's known to me he having repudiated good breeding gives itself "Chevalier"!!! Cavalier Ca madame would you please four hundred Schopenhauer in chagrine forty-four twenty-nine Twenty ten twenty eleven twen . . . Cavalier Cav enough? Keep the change. . . .¹³

Disregard for the theme is illustrated by Vasilisk Gnedov, a great master in the realm of Ego-Futurist prose:

At beside the ball

Tearflows unmerry burst out weeping dreamflowlike speedily duck-quacked to the birches revellers desirers by Merryboat scattered transwandering rumbingly. Voices coupled themselves at twenty shouts. . . .¹⁴

Somewhere, I believe in "The Review of the Press" in *New Times*, some writer noted with respect to the participation of V. Bryusov and F. Sologub in Ego-Futurists miscellanies:

The old-codger Symbolists are scurrying to hang onto the britches of the Ego-Futurist kiddies. . . .

The Ego-Futurists certainly do not deny the hereditary link between themselves and the Symbolists.

Severyanin is exotic in the manner of Balmont, I. Ignatyev is akin to Hippus, D. Kryuchkov to Sologub, Shershenevich to Blok—just as among their *confrères* the Moscovites (the "Cubo-Futurists") D. Burliuk is akin to Balmont and to F. Sologub, Mayakovsky to Bryusov, and Khlebnikov to Chulkov.¹⁵

Our official criticism carries forward to its inquest and doesn't see the virtues of the Ego-Futurists.

Here are two poesas by V. Shershenevich:

The crowd was buzzing like a tram wire
And the sky was arched like an *abat-jour* . . .
The moonlight showed through a cloud,
Like a woman's leg through stylish *ajour*.

And in the bespattered park among the fireworks
 Of summons and phrases, ecstasies and poses
 A naked woman sadly waned out,
 Standing on a bench in her gloves of roses.
 And the crowd giggled, changing in laughter
 Its harsh pain and blame—and there
 At her feet a little girl in lilac
 And on her cheeks tears flowed like rhymes
 And when the woman trustingly wanted
 To squeeze milk out of her drooping breasts,
 Blood trickled down her body and traced
 A pattern of rococo-styled red lace.

(*The Alwayser*, Petersburg Herald,
 1913, 65 kopecks)

I forgot the year, but it was Friday, I remember,
 Entering the doorway in a modest coach,
 I ordered the gray-haired doorwoman
 To lift me up to your sixth floor
 You from the window, feverishly violet,
 Saw me arriving and went out the door;
 Alone in the lift, pulling the rope,
 In tender anticipation I took off my right glove
 And as the lift's rope was getting shorter
 Reaching its end, I was on the fourth—
 I heard the voice of your enticing song
 And from below another one the devil wrought—
 Suddenly and squeamishly the lift stopped
 And I was stuck between two floors
 And fought and cried, irksomely shouted
 As if I were a trapped mouse.
 And through the roof ever higher you rose
 And ever louder and clearer the devil sang
 And I heard only his singing voice
 And down I fell.

(Ibid.)¹⁶

In this very same miscellany *The Alwayser*, we find a short article devoted to the "new rhyme."¹⁷

Up to the present, the following euphonic correlations between verses have been in use:

1. Masculine rhyme (iambic)—with accent on the last syllable (*retire-desire*).

2. Feminine rhyme (trochaic)—with accent on the penultimate syllable (*donkey-monkey*).
3. Dactylic rhyme—with accent on the antepenultimate syllable, three from the end (*associate-negotiate*).
4. Hyperdactylic rhyme—with accent on the fourth syllable from the end (*nationally-rationally*).
5. Blank verse (unrhymed).
6. Dactylotrochaic rhyme (*durable-rubble*).
7. Internal rhyme (for Z. Hippius, "Misplaced Rhymes").
8. Front rhyme. As a constant to the banal end rhyme (Ibid.).
9. Tautological rhymes (*smile-wall-smile-all*).
10. Half-rhymed verse (Semiblack verse) *a-b-c-b, a-b-a-c*.
11. Assonances (*Hoover-removal*).
12. Dissonances (*theater-mutter-meter-salt-peter-luster*).

With the further subdivisions: (a) Synonyms; (b) Single root rhymes; (c) Verbal rhymes; (d) Noun rhymes; (e) Adjective rhymes; (f) Compound ("fused") rhymes; (g) Monotonic rhymes (*Do-new-imbue*, etc.).

In the recently published Ego-Futurist volume (I. V. Ignatyev, *The Scaffold*, Petersburg Herald, 1913), the author obviously adheres to the following system:

Vowel rhymes: *eyes-I-fire-my-Mimi-goody-cockatoo-kiddy-moody*.

Consonant rhymes: *rock-brig-sick-bib-sap-sieve-if; gather-cheese-eater; church, brush, azure-age; chase-its-analyze* (gutturals, labials, dentals). Any of these words can rhyme with any of the neighboring words. In addition, the liquid consonants *m-n-l* and *r* rhyme: *name-ozone; El-dare*, etc.;

as do the "hard-soft" paired vowels:

all-yawl;

moody-mutely;

cockatoo-Tuesday;

if-fire.

"Diphthongs" also provide rich material for rearrangements (independent of the poem's meter): *rye-disarray-destroy-toil-tail-style* (In a given meter, the "diphthongs" can be used to create dissonances).

Here we can see that the Ego-Futurists are moving significantly to the left.

The "curve" of our progress can be followed in the series of publications issued by the Petersburg Herald press: (a) the newspaper *The Petersburg Herald* (nos. 1 and 2); (b) the miscellanies *The Orange Urn, Glass Chains, Eagles over the Abyss*—with these the airplane "Ego-

Futurism" sped down the runway and then took off, beginning with the almanac *Gifts to Adonis* and the subsequent *A Candi Ra, Strike! But Hear Me!*, and *The Alwaysser*.¹⁸

Two small collections by Vasilisk Gnedov also belong to this second period: *A Treat for the Sentiments (Rhythmeas)* and *Death to Art* (15 poems with a preface by I. V. Ignatyev).¹⁹

"Hasn't the agony of the present, the past, and the shoddy been clear to every follower of art?" asks the prefacer. "Isn't everyone tensely anticipating the last beat of its pulse?"

The art of the day has died. . . .

"Theater" is dead, "Painting" is dead, "Literature" is dead.

Castrated life is dead.

The people, having turned art and life into a pig-out, bustle around the bier of art (and that of life, too) which frightens them—but oxygen and their revival potions are only hastening the awaited moment. . . .

Every follower of art would be flattered to receive its last breath, and even in the antechamber of the end more than one cheating throat has cried out:

"I, only I, was the first to capture the last spark of life. I! I!!! I erected the last step, I tossed the ladder from the Barge of Yesterday to the Airplane of Today. . . . I!!!!"

The word has approached its limit. It has been refined to perfection. The tangled ball of human psychoperturbations is unwinding from the reel of contemporary wordness with childish ease.

The man of today has replaced the uncomplicated natural word-flow with cliché phrases. There are a multitude of languages at his disposal, "dead" ones as well as "living" ones, with complicated literary-syntactic laws, instead of the unintentional symbols of the Primordial.

When man was alone, he did not need means of intercourse with other beings like himself. Man "spoke" only with God, and this was so-called Paradise.

No one knows that time, but we don't know whether, in the future, we will remain in unawareness of it.

Man has comprehended the earth, the water, the firmament—but not completely.

They will be disclosed in their entirety—and the unknown will fall, pierced by the sword of knowing, and perhaps "Lost Paradise" will return to man.

As long as we are collectivists, living communally, we have need of the word.

When every individual is transformed into a self-unified Ego-I words will fall by the wayside of their own accord.

One will not need communication with the other.

. . . Even now the human membrane is capable of calling and answering sounds from unknown shores.

Intuition, the missing link which comforts us today, will in the End

fuse the circle of another world, another border—from which man departed and to which he will once again return. This, evidently, is the infinite path of nature."

The eternal circle, the eternal flight—that is the end-in-itself for the Ego-Futurist. "Life" for him is "Expectation" (*The Always*), in which he cries like an "unconsoled widower." And when all of the rungs have been climbed, "the East is prayerfully unclear and in the heavens there is a discernible fire"; the poet Ego-Futurist "awaits" not repose, but a "new Zodiac," which will trace the unknown for the wizards—joyful, vigorous with a new vigor:

Once more in the whirl of monsters true
And interplanetary ships
I hurl myself to Future's Border . . .
(*Strike! But Hear Me!*)²⁰

Some of the Ego-Futurists are making attempts to "reintegrate the Fractions"; others are, so to speak, "stenographing" our speech.

In *Strike* one can find "Melo-letera: Graph,"²¹ which is the first venture at collecting "multiplicity in unity."

"To the reader" (this term sounds strange here, for the reader must also be a viewer, and a listener, and most of all, an intuitive) is given: word, color, melody, and a *schema* of rhythm (movements), *noted down* at the left.

The entire collection *Death to Art* is devoted to "stenographing."
The poems with the greatest coloration are:

"Rumblit:"
"Silver Thread—Yoking. Brows."

Here before us arises an electrified, prolonged impressionism, especially characteristic for Japanese poetry:

"Sinn:
A—"

And that's all? That's all. Just one letter, the title and a dash. There isn't even (oh, what a *passage!*)²² a period at the end.

Let the preface explain it:

"It has long been time to realize that every letter has not only sound and color, but also taste, as well as a dependence on meaning which is

inseparably linked to the adjacent letters, and a sense of touch, weight, and spatiality. For example, how much can be expressed by the single truncated two-syllable word *Vesna* (Spring). From the letter *s* we get an impression of sunniness, from the *a*—joy, the attainment of something long awaited, etc.—an entire extended poem.”

In such a situation, every reader can have his own individual perception, since “contemporary creativity allows complete freedom for personal comprehension.”

“. . . In words there are *pendant* structures, irreproachable accuracies, tonal-expressivity, and character.

And everyone knows that this is not the end. The future, far-off path of literature is silence, where the word is replaced by a book of revelations—by Great Intuition.”

9. Is not the singing of contemporaneity (let’s call it—mechanized) the art of the future, Futurism? The bard of contemporaneity is not in any sense a futur-ist,” but a “present-ist.”

In order to be a poet of the future one must prophesy.

Even contemporary poets are trying to move in this direction. Instead of verses, gazelles, poesas, rhythmicas, there appear “revelations.”

The little volume by Rurik Ivnev²³ (who can be assumed to be an Ego-Futurist since two of his *opuses* are found in *The Alwayses*) is adorned with just such a subtitle.

What a coincidence! Ivnev’s “Revelations” are also titled Self-immolation, “the only correct path”:

Just once to shake off life’s time
And press my lips to the fire.

Because:

Spreading arms toward the unearthly
I grasp the ultimate sense.
My former torments grow clear
The sunset glow of numbers grows clear.

In Ego-Futurism, there is more “ego” than “futurism” (of the Italian-French type).

Nonetheless, we do find the absence of adultery and the presence of mechanized creations (“The Third Entry,” “Onan” in *Strike! But Hear Me!*; “A Little Gang of Cursers” in *Gifts to Adonis*).[. . .]

Mezzanine of Poetry

Overture

Darling!¹ Please, come to the vernissage of our Mezzanine! Both our landlady and we, the tenants, eagerly request your presence. We are all ready for the reception—the rooms are lit up, the table is set, the fireplaces are glimmering—and we are waiting for you. Of course, to come or not to come depends on you. We would be very happy if you came and liked it here, at our place; and perhaps we would be sad for a few days, and would be angry at each other if you did not feel at ease in the rooms of our mezzanine; but, in any case, please do not be too haughty, and most of all do not tease us: we all have a terribly vulnerable sense of self-esteem. By this invitation to our Mezzanine, we want to do something pleasant for you and for ourselves—wouldn't it be a pleasure for you to meet our wonderful, charming landlady, and spend some time in her company? Our rooms look so cozy to us, and our landlady so divine, that we simply cannot keep from showing them, and her, to you: we need to share our delight with someone, otherwise our souls will burst like bottles of champagne which have been kept at an excessively warm temperature. I have to confess that in general we are all a little crazy; in other words, I want to say that all the tenants of the Mezzanine are terrible eccentrics, but this is of no importance whatsoever. One of them, for example, fancied himself a Pierrot with an unpowdered face, and so

¹“Overture” (*Uvertiura*) opens the first almanac of the Mezzanine of Poetry, *Vernissage* (Moscow, September 1913). It was written by the almanac's editor, Lev Zak, and published anonymously. About Zak, see “From Moment Philosophique,” n. 4, in this collection.

he stuck a beauty spot in the shape of a heart to his right cheek and tried to convince everyone that all misfortune comes from the fact that people do not tell enough lies. Another is convinced that he conquered a big nation with the stroke of a pen, and I could tell you about the oddities of all the others if I thought it important. But the fact is that this is not the most important thing. The most important thing is that all the tenants of our Mezzanine are hopelessly in love with their landlady, and this love fills their souls to the brim. In the morning, when the Most Charming One is still asleep, all of them keep a vigil by the door of her bedroom, in order not to be late in greeting her: "Good morning," and to have the chance, as soon as she comes out, to present her with a large rose. During the day, when she is busy with domestic chores, they all run after her around the Mezzanine, pick up the handkerchief she has dropped, stealthily kiss the edge of her dress, loudly pay her the wittiest compliments, help her in the kitchen, look her in the eyes, shiver at every movement she makes, gain hope, lose hope, feel cheerful, feel sad, feel their hearts sinking, feel they are dying of tenderness, of a very sad tenderness, forever. And even if this tenderness is very sad, we are all happy because we know it, and because thanks to our almost hopeless love we proudly look at things from the top of a very high mountain. It's true, our love is almost completely hopeless: the Most Charming One is unattainable, and when we accompany her in the evening to her bedroom door, she answers our "good night" with a gracious smile and enters her bedroom alone, a bedroom which none of the tenants of the Mezzanine has as yet seen, and they all tiptoe away in different directions, and each one, loving and yearning, retires to his room, to worship her in his own way. And yet, our love is not completely hopeless, only almost hopeless: we know that there were some that our landlady loved, and therefore each one of us still has the very smallest of hopes. Of course, we don't dare—we absolutely don't dare—think that one evening the Most Charming One might invite one of us into her bedroom, but everyone nurses the thought of being worthy of her kiss. She has allowed some of us to kiss her hand—today, at the vernissage, you will be able to tell those happy ones: probably, they will be talking a lot of nonsense, but in such a tone that you will feel like covering them with kisses. By the way, if you, darling, come today to the vernissage, you will see those friends of the Mezzanine who are said to be in especially high favor with the landlady. I assure you that we are not jealous in the least, on the contrary, we have for them the greatest esteem—completely unlike our neighbors, who at times wave a handkerchief from their window to our landlady, trying to entice her

to their place, and who at all costs want to dispel the rumor that these friends of the Mezzanine have won the attention of the Most Charming One. And indeed, why shouldn't you come to the vernissage, anyway? After all, you have not seen our landlady for such a long time, and since then she has changed considerably, although she has not aged a bit, on the contrary, she looks younger. And that last time, did you take a good look at her face? You know, you walk around all the time arm in arm with "superficialness,"² darling. As for us, the tenants of the Mezzanine, it will be more intriguing than frightening to meet us: it won't be frightening because we are very nice people, and we never treat our guests worse than they treat us; it will be intriguing because we are somehow different from everybody else. We love what is near, and not what is far away. We talk about what we know, and not about what we have only heard of from others. From the windows of our Mezzanine we see the baker's house, and, darling, we won't tell you a story about an ancient castle with magnificent towers, and if we are sad we would rather compare our sadness to a penknife than to the stormy ocean—where is that ocean? We have not seen it, and even if we had, we couldn't fall in love with it, which is to say we couldn't understand it as well as we do the rooms of our Mezzanine. We would rather compare the ocean to a tureen full of seething broth than a tureen to the ocean. I can see, darling, that these words have already scared you, and you are saying: "*Fi donc*,"³ how prosaic this all is," but we, the tenants of the Mezzanine are convinced that the baker's house is in no way less poetic than an ancient castle, and that the broth is by no means worse than the ocean. The image of the Most Charming One, which each one of us has locked in his soul, makes all things, all thoughts, and all passions equally poetic. We experience the same things as all lovers do. A man in love walks along the street and everything he sees, in some way or other, reminds him of his beloved; the same happens to us: in everything we see the face of our charming Poetry. Yes, darling, we are greater romantics than others, we are romantics from head to toe. Therefore, don't be afraid, and come to the vernissage of our Mezzanine. All the outside, all the street noise, all the trivial human actions, the feelings, the thoughts trickle through the glass window panes and turn into lofty music. We will treat you to a dinner which, while not copious, will be refined in its simplicity; and, in refined and simple dress, the Most Charming One will come out to meet you.

Stop the foolish
Pranks and spleen.

Get candles, please,
 and light them quick.
Meet on the stairs
 The vernissage guests!
If you're too lazy,
 We'll tell our lady.
Hello! Here are our rooms—
 Dining and living.
Be our guest and don't forget
 The vernissage of the Mezzanine!

Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists

M. ROSSIYANSKY

- a. The basic position of the group of Futurists that issued "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" and other publications is the following: "the word is self-sufficient, poetry is the art of combining words, similar to the way music combines sounds." Starting from this absolutely correct basic position, the Cubo-Futurists arrive at the absurd. This happens thanks to their lack of understanding of what the word is.
- b. The word is not just a combination of sounds. Every word has its own root, its own meaning, its own history, and therefore evokes in the human mind a multitude of indescribable associations, which are nonetheless identical for everyone. These associations give the word its individuality. One can say that every word has its own smell. A poetic work is not so much the combination of word-sounds as of word-smells. What distinguishes the word *mezhd* ("between") from the word *mez* ("between") is not meaning (their meaning is exactly the same), and is not so much sound as that undefinable quality that the poet must use.
- c. The Cubo-Futurists who compose "poems" in "a personal language whose words do not have a definite meaning,"¹ such as:

Dyr bul shchyl
Ubeshchur
skum
vy so bu
r l ez

¹ "Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists (Perchatka kubofuturistam) was printed in *Vernissage* (Moscow, September 1913). About the author, M. Rossiianskii, see "Moment Philosophique," n. 4.

are like a musician who while shouting: "true music is a combination of sounds: long live the self-centered sound!" demonstrates this theory by playing on a soundless piano. The Cubo-Futurists do not create combinations of words, but combinations of sounds, because their neologisms are not words, but comprise only one element of the word. The Cubo-Futurists, who rose in defense of the "word as such," in reality are driving it out of poetry, and are turning poetry into nothing.

- d. Their misunderstanding of the essence of the word as poetic material leads the Cubo-Futurists to all kinds of absurdities. One such absurdity is point No. 3 of the "Declaration of the Word as Such": "it is impossible to translate from one language into another; one can only transliterate a poem into Latin letters and provide a word-for-word translation." This demand is again one more way toward the complete destruction of the word. Isn't it obvious that a Russian word written in Latin letters and thus rendered in other European languages for German, French, and other readers, is no longer a word, but only a combination of sounds which does not evoke the associations intended by the poet? (By the way, it would be interesting to see what kind of word-for-word translation the Cubo-Futurists would provide for the German-French-Italian version of the poem quoted above.)
- e. The complete destruction of content (plot) is not, as the Cubo-Futurists assume, the opening of new fields for art; on the contrary, it is a narrowing of the art's field. The Absolute, the lyric force which becomes manifest in verbal combinations (which may be plotless), casts its gleam on those objects, thoughts, and feelings that are dealt with in those combinations. The Summer Garden in St. Petersburg acquired a special charm and physiognomy after the mention made of it in *Eugene Onegin*. Poetry is not only the revelation of the Absolute through an ornamental method of creation, but also the knowledge of things, the revelation of the Absolute in the external world.
- f. Having examined the theoretical arguments and the poetic creations of the Cubo-Futurists without any preconceived opinions and without the mockery with which the public of all shapes and sizes masks its indifference to the fate of art, we reach the conclusion that both they and their detractors, relying on a superficial attitude toward the basic element of poetry—the word—destroy poetry itself, and not only do not open new roads, but close the old ones behind the gates of their obtuseness. While throwing down the gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists, we cannot help but feel sorry

that our adversaries do not know elementary logic, are confused about what constitutes the essence of poetic material, and, while ready to “throw overboard from the Ship of Modernity”² those who up to now have been its helmsmen, are not yet able to tell their course by the stars and do not understand the mechanism and the function of even the simplest of all navigation instruments—the compass.

From "Moment Philosophique"¹

M. ROSSIYANSKY

When I was a little boy I used to get terribly angry at grown-ups who kept secrets from me. At home, the grown-ups often had secrets—they whispered and spoke among themselves in French in my presence (and I didn't understand French). [. . .] Now that I am, evidently, no longer a little boy (because people address me by my name and patronymic), understand some French, and am not compelled to tell anybody that I am still afraid of the dark; now that the obliging but despotic Devil follows me everywhere; now there are times when I experience exactly what I did before: suddenly I start feeling that I am surrounded by a secret. [. . .] Didn't you ever have that feeling? Didn't you ever feel angry that there is a secret everywhere? Truths and axioms, grandmother's cute little pieces that usually sit on your desk, obligingly, like a pen knife, are suddenly locked away in a safe with a secret combination. How to open it? And is there indeed anything hidden in it? Secrets, secrets! [. . .]

Right now I am in precisely that mood where I am ready to convince the first person who happens to come by that he is surrounded by plots and secrets, and that I, it seems, have guessed those secrets and discovered that plot—in a word, I am having my *moment philosophique*. [. . .]

Therefore, my dear fellow, get serious for a minute, stop looking in

Printed in the second almanac of the Mezzanine of Poetry, *A Feast during the Plague* (Moscow, October 1913). The title of this almanac alludes to Pushkin's homonymous "little tragedy," whose theme is the rapturous attraction of the human being to ominous dark forces, and a courageous affirmation of life.

the mirror at your wonderful jacket, don't throw orange peels in my face with an ironic giggle, and don't raise your eyebrows or turn up your lips with contempt at all that I am going to tell you.

I know, you are a positivist, and in Russian this means that you are a positive man. You know by heart a number of charming words, such as, for example, "progress," "humanity," "humaneness," etc. You believe in science and have even bought yourself Edison's invention—the phonograph—and in the summer you take pictures with a Kodak camera. You praise the 20th century every time the elevator takes you up to the fifth floor, and apparently you are going to buy yourself a car. You consider Pushkin a great poet, and perhaps you have even read him; however, I am convinced that you could not answer the following question: "What flower does Pushkin look like?" and yet, this is so clear and simple. You are a man of our time—which means, without prejudices. One evening, when you had thirteen guests at your table, and the ashen-eyed Irene, who was the evening's hostess, asked you what could be done about it, you burst out laughing at her superstition and thought you had reassured her. You do not believe that a broken mirror or three candles in a room are evil omens. You reject even the smell of foreboding. You have no doubt that the lines on your hand cannot indicate anything definite. But, my dear fellow, when you were still a very little boy why did you, every night at bedtime, have to turn your blanket so that the red flowers would be by the wall and not on the other side of the bed? Didn't you feel that if you did not do that you would have a terrifying dream that night? Why, in the morning on your way to school, as you reached the corner of Miasnitskaia Street, did you have to say to yourself three times: "Once a swan, a crab, and a pike"?? Didn't you believe that this would prevent you from getting a failing grade in Latin? "That's kid's stuff, kid's stuff," you tell me, but, by the same token, don't I have a right to answer you: "No, it's not kid's stuff." They are not kid's stuff, I tell you, all those funny and frightening superstitions, all those ineffable premonitions, all those prejudices which we ourselves create and which we are ashamed of, are not kid's stuff. Just because your lauded science cannot explain what happened one evening to an acquaintance of mine, who opened the door to his room, paused to listen, and said: "My brother in America has just died," and in fact the next day received a telegram about the death of that brother, is there good reason to dismiss the whole story as a fabrication and deny, in general, the possibility of premonitions? Or perhaps you do not entirely deny their existence? Perhaps you would only say that in time premonitions will also be explained by electricity—even now we have such super-

natural things as the wireless telegraph? Oh, poor man; oh, stupid man! Because you do not know what flower Pushkin's verses smell like, because music as well as art and poetry are closed off to you (you may listen to music, but you will not hear the *music*, you may look at paintings, but you will not see the *art*. You may read verses, but never, never will you feel the *poetry*), because you need electricity in order to illuminate premonitions and forebodings, because mankind has looked for centuries at the world from the electrical point of view, to this day we do not understand apparitions, premonitions, witchcraft, just as they were not understood in Cicero's time. Poor and stupid people! We live and we try to observe life in the greatest possible detail, but what we get to know is only the *content* of life, and not life itself. That clairvoyant who felt the death of his brother from a distance, was able to feel the *form* of life.

"Oh, you, with your metaphysics. I have to go to the tailor's for a fitting!"

Well, you are talking exactly like the student Aristarchus.³ How can you go to the tailor's for a fitting, if you do not yet know whether this is a worthwhile action? Perhaps it would be much better for you to pierce your heart right now with this fruit knife, hang yourself, or tear your suit to shreds. Don't you feel that first of all we have to free ourselves from this mystery in which we are enveloped against our will? Wait, wait! I am going to tell you about the poet Khrisanf.⁴

I was lying on the couch and sorting out the keys to the secret lock. The Devil was sitting in the corner, harassing me with his grimaces. Invisible musicians in red tuxedos, hired by the Night, were performing silence, and only rarely did the light night noises of the street link themselves into the music. Khrisanf came in, looking as usual like a shaven old man (this was after his last trip to Paris) in his old-fashioned black frock coat; he carefully put his top hat on the table, threw his light blue gloves on top of it, took a porcelain cup and a brush out of the lady's purse which he carries everywhere, sat down, and started painting on the cup's porcelain surface—this is his constant occupation, without it, like an old woman without her knitting, he cannot sit peacefully or have a conversation. Besides, his porcelain painting brings him some profit: in the past, Khrisanf worked as a pharmacy assistant, then practiced black magic and had a palmistry studio, later was a pyrotechnist, and still later a movie projectionist, but now he takes his blue, red, and orange little cups to the china merchant, Mr. Bourlon, 3 Boulevard Turque,⁵ who pays him very well.

I: Dear Khrisanf, why, in your poem "Arctic Balsam" did you write:

"Passion is blood stained like a needle"? Needles are not always blood stained, are they?

Khri.: Of course, the needle is not always blood stained. But even if the needle was never blood stained, I would write it that way.

I: Why?

Khri.: Because I feel that that's the way it had to be, *mon chère*.

I: Did anyone demand that you write exactly those words?

Khri.: The preceding stanza demanded those words.

I: The preceding stanza? But there, if I am not mistaken, it says: "Both sword and fate." I do not understand why sword and fate must demand that passion be blood stained like a needle.

Khri.: *Mon chère*, there is no doubt that sword and fate do not necessarily demand that passion be blood stained like a needle, but it is absolutely evident that in my poem, in this poem by Khri., the words "both sword and fate" demand to be followed by no other words than "passion blood stained like a needle." Try to understand, in order for this cup which I am now decorating to look the way I want it to, i.e., in order for you, when you look at it, to experience that "most important thing," that "spirit" which guides my hand in this work, I must without fail paint a purple flower next to this green one, and I am completely indifferent to whether such a purple flower exists in reality, or whether it doesn't exist at all. In reality, a green flower does not demand that next to it be placed a purple one. But in the making of this very cup, I am constrained by precisely that demand, and I can say without reservations that this flower is purple because that one is green, and that "passion is blood stained like a needle" because of "sword and fate."

Enough, enough, my dear Khri., I understand even more than you think! Look, I am trying a key to that secret lock—listen, I am turning it, and the lock opens up with a clang: we have discovered a new causality, and this is the key to all those strange stories about ghosts, premonitions, and superstitions! . . .

Ah, go, go to your tailor, my dear positivist, and I who am a little of a metaphysician and a Futurist will lie on the couch for a while and dream of a future era where people learn to look not only at paintings, poetry, and music but at life itself from the high point of view of form, and where your scientific laboratories are run by astrologers and chiromantists.

Actually, you are already gone, you ran away. . . . Or maybe you have never existed, and I have honored with my conversation that positivist of positivists, my eternal master and lackey, the Devil.

Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyansky

Dear Mikhail! When I read your answer to the Cubo-Futurists in *Vernissage*, I gave a lot of thought to your arguments concerning what a word is. Your analysis of the component parts of the word did not satisfy me, although I knew that you deliberately schematicized your article out of purely editorial considerations. You tried to simplify everything and reduce it almost to an axiom which would have to be proved only for the Hottentots—remember that this is what we called our sober-minded, logical public. I will not argue with you; I didn't write the letter for that. I may elucidate a few minor differences of opinion in a personal letter to you.

Thinking about what you had to exclude for the sake of clarity, I realized that you left out the differentiation of the word's elements. Actually, we can examine the word from four points of view. First of all, there is what you called—very accurately, in my opinion—“*word-smell*.” For further clarity, I am taking the liberty of assuming that by that term you meant the inner physiognomy of the word. Beyond this, the word includes certain sounds, and therefore we can say that from a certain point of view there is the “*word-sound*.” In addition, there is what has guided everybody up until our Futurist experiments. The word carries in itself a certain meaning, the content. Therefore, let's also single out the “*word-content*.” However, the content is introduced into the word by mental work. Words, when they were generated

“Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyansky” (Otkrytoe pis'mo M. M. Rossiiankomu) was printed in the third and last almanac of the Mezzanine of Poetry, *Crematorium of Common Sense* (Moscow, November–December 1913).

intuitively, signified not because they had a definite meaning or a clear sense, but because they preserved a certain image. This is completely clear and has been known for a long time. In order not to dwell on it, I will present this primitive example: the word *hoof* [*kopyto*] originally did not denote the end of the leg, at all; it pictured something that dug [*kopalo*] the ground.

To this circumstance we owe the well-known onomatopoeic quality of our words, their vitality, and this is why rationally built languages sound so dead (nowadays the rational mind cannot generate images, so it generates words according to meaning). We have to take into consideration this pictorial aspect of the word, and denote it as the "word-image."

If we go to the heart of the historical process, we will clearly see that the gradual substitution of content for the predominant element of the word, namely the image, inevitably produces imageless words and, as a consequence, disfigured words.¹ In fact, each expression at the moment of its birth was not a combination of "word-contents," but a fusion of "word-images." I find it difficult now to tell who first used the expression: "to nourish the hope." But it is clear that this was an image combination. Time, with its characteristic love for neatness and tidiness, thoroughly erased the image, and left us with a cliché which says a great deal to our understanding but is empty for our imagination. I think that if we were to discard the outdated word *nourish*, and replace it by the more contemporary *feed*, then the expression "I feed the hope" would sound strange, not only because one word has been replaced by another, but also because this new word makes one understand *pictorially* the imageness [*obraznost*] of the expression.

I feel that, having read these old and boring tirades, you will carefully look at the date of the letter, perhaps focus your attention on catching a fly, and surely wait impatiently for someone's phone call. You frown and ask: "Why did he, whose verses I love so much, write me this boring letter, almost a recommendation on behalf of his old stuff."

Wait, I'm going to explain why I rehashed this boring material. I often think about this riddle: Why does poetry in our country evolve, though slowly, while artistic prose has hardened into a monument to our inertness?

It seems to me that the reason for this has to be sought in a misapprehension of the prose writer's task. Quite some time ago our poets, leaders in mass popularity, arrived at the idea of the freedom of poetry. Flashes of realism are so rare that it's not even worth talking about them. Poetry has been liberated from a servant's role, and now

this proud slogan suits it well: Art for art's sake. But why doesn't anyone pay attention to prose? We don't have any prose. Prose has served and is serving now logic, now life, now psychological experimentation. Prose for prose's sake we do not know. True, there were some attempts to renew prose: one may note A. Biely's prose symphonies.² He was almost on the right path, but his passion for phonetic and semantic orchestration diverted him from the main thing. B. Livshits³ proposed to destroy grammar; but this is absurd and pointless. What does a method of renewal consist of? I know that our writers and philologists consider use of the word's semantic element mandatory in artistic prose. But this conviction is not so much an absolute truth as a habit. After all, "word-content" as literary material does not distinguish artistic prose from prose in general, so that we are inclined to ignore the question: "How does the writer use the word in artistic prose?"

That is it, dear Mikhail, and remember what I was so tediously saying to you at the beginning! The writer must use the "*word-image*" in artistic prose. He must renounce "*word-contents.*" We leave them to pedantic scientists and philosophers. We need the word's virgin state: its image. If we adopt this method, we will see that prose is a combination of word-images, just as poetry is a combination of "*word-smells.*" In prose we will deal with the physiognomy of a word, while in poetry we are dealing with the physiognomy of that very word's physiognomy. I am not going to argue with your exclamation mark (and, perhaps, question mark as well): "How can we reject the word's content when the whole process of our discourse is a combination of "*word-contents.*" It is difficult, but not inconceivable; after all in poetry we have been able to work exclusively on the "*word-smell.*" A little effort, and we will be able to cope with this new difficulty, and, it seems to me, we will obtain pure artistic prose. I think you will ask why I did not write all of this according to the new method. Well, this is an essay, a boring analysis, and not a work of art. To make myself even more clearly understood, I am enclosing in this letter samples of the new prose.⁴ Do not blame me for my conciseness, which has generated some ambiguity. You would understand me even if I used half-words or quarter-words, and, besides, I cannot afford to write long letters which would take three stamps.

I would be very happy to have you argue with me and refute these

a. Two pieces are mine, and one story is by our dear Khrisanf. His story is more epic. The lyricism of my pieces can be explained by the fact that they are excerpts from a big novel.⁴

little trinkets of mine, which are dearer to me than many other things. Actually, I would be no less happy if you tore apart my positions and clarified for me the many things which I find valuable in their incompleteness.

VADIM SHERSHENEVICH

P.S. In order to hinder your attack and build my defenses, I will take the liberty of adding two more words. Of course, I am not about to demand from a prose writer a philological relationship to his work. I proposed to combine words into images, and to take into consideration mainly "word-image" qualities in the combination process. However, I am afraid that my explanation has confused the matter even further. To avoid being reproached for a pretentious striving for originality, I will add that throughout I have been "guided" (think about this word: so little of the image has remained in it that I myself used it almost unconsciously)⁵ by the idea of the need for a differentiation of the arts.

V.S.

Foreword to *Automobile Gait*

VADIM SHERSHENEVICH

In publishing *Automobile Gait*, I feel it impossible not to write a foreword.

A foreword is an automobile's horn. This horn with its howl and its piercing sound grabs the passerby's attention by the hand as it announces an approaching tef-tef.¹ On the other hand, a horn allows the sportscar driver to speed as he pleases and to experience a voluptuous sensation: breaking a record—ignoring the danger of running over dumbfounded pedestrians and lazy cows romantically nibbling the meager grass.

It is a habit among the pharasees to exclaim with pathos in a foreword: "Who needs this book?!" This question mark must be eliminated. Every poet is convinced that the reader needs his book. I, too, am convinced of this.

Our era has changed human sensibility too much for my verses to be similar to the works of past years. In this I see the principal worth of my lyrics: they are contemporary through and through.

Poetry has left Parnassus; the clumsy, old-fashioned, deserted Parnassus is "for rent—now vacant." Poeticisms, i.e., the lunar trinkets, "people—forward,"² ivory towers,³ rhymed rhetoric, stylization are on sale at a discount. This explains my supposedly unpoetic and anti-aesthetic verses. The "poetic" and the "beautiful" have been pawed

Automobile Gait (Avtomobil'ia postup') (Moscow: Pleiada, 1916) is Shershenevich's last collection of Futurist poetry. Afterward he founded the association of the Russian Imaginists. The Foreword was written in the summer of 1914 and shows clear traits of Marinettism (see also the following excerpts from *Green Street*).

by the hands of past centuries to such an extent that they can no longer be beautiful. Beauty manifests itself in everything, but it has been plundered more in marble than in manure.

Urbanism with its dynamism, its beauty of speed, its intrinsic Americanism, trampled our integral soul; we have hundreds of souls, but each one of them is able when necessary to contract and stretch with the utmost expression. We have lost the ability to understand the life of a motionless statue, but the movement of cholera bacilli at the time of an epidemic is comprehensible and fascinating to us.

This is not the place to try to prove these or any other of the poet's aspirations, it is not the place to argue about these or any other formal problems, about what is contemptuously called "technique." Incidentally, it is precisely this technique that transforms a versifier into a poet.

I consider it unnecessary to explain my methods, since this is the task of the critic and the attentive reader. Only one device needs some explanation, since it may be misinterpreted.

I have in mind the enjambments of words from one line to the next by means of a hyphen, which I use often regardless of the rules of contemporary poetics.⁴ It is certainly not to be original or to shock the reader that I do this. It is not new, and I have neither the time nor the desire to shock.

I was guided by the conviction that the connection between two lines should be achieved by a purely poetic device, and these enjambments made possible the linkage of lines by means of naked form, without relying on the much-discussed meaning. [. . .]

In conclusion, I want to point out that I hesitated to call this collection "Book No. 2." The fact is that my "Book No. 1" (*Carmina*)⁵ today is infinitely far from me; I almost do not consider it mine. However, had I called *Automobile Gait* "Book No. 1," I would have condemned myself to an endless series of "Books No. 1." I hope that in one year this collection, too, will be alien to me.

From *Green Street*

VADIM SHERSHENEVICH

Pushkin wrote: "*Poltava*¹ did not enjoy any success. Perhaps it did not deserve it, but I was spoiled by the success of my previous and much weaker works. Furthermore, this work is completely original, and originality is what we struggle to achieve."

Indeed, if we approach any work of art critically, we will see that only what is new and original is capable of moving us, of amazing us, of forcing its way into the mass of our thoughts, our impressions, just like a frenzied motorcar that bursts into an idle crowd and races away leaving a wounded body on the ground. This convulsively writhing body is that very impression which remains in our consciousness.

If that car honks its horn from a distance, the crowd moves over and the car rushes by without running over anybody, leaving behind only a thin plume of exhaust. Isn't this horn a symbol? If our soul is already prepared, alerted, if the work of art reminds us of something, we do not feel its strength and beauty, we simply remember.² [. . .]

Poetry is the art of combining self-sufficient words, word-images.

The poetic text is an uninterrupted series of images.

The imageness [*obraznost'*] of each word is perceived even more sharply under the influence of another image, since we perceive everything by juxtaposition and comparison.

The broader, the more unexpected the images, the more potential they have for surviving the day of their birth.

Green Street (*Zelenaia ulitsa*) (Moscow: Pleiada, 1916) is Shershenevich's second theoretical treatise and marks his transition from Futurism to Imaginism.

A repeated image is no longer an image, but a tedious and worn-out cliché. To acquire the utmost in expressiveness—the basic value of poetry—one has to renounce image categories once and for all. There is no such thing as eccentric versus natural, or simple versus complex images. In a long chain of images, where one is linked to the other like clockwork gears, there is only one criterion for success: expressiveness, based on exceptional novelty. As soon as an image gets old, trite, it will start slipping like an old gear, impairing the work of the clockwork mechanism.

“Images are not flowers which can be picked and selected with petty thrift, as Voltaire used to say. They constitute the very essence of poetry. Poetry must be an uninterrupted series of new images, otherwise it is only anemia and chlorosis,” writes Marinetti.³

General economy of words, necessary in poetry, demands brevity in the image itself. Short, fast as a bullet, fast, the image has no right to develop into a long explanatory thread. The intuition of the reader himself will unfold and extend the image, if necessary. Just as the milkman does not forbid his customers to boil the milk, but himself does not sell boiled milk. [. . .]

Each poet must forget that there is history, that past centuries existed. He describes only what is the knowable today. After all, the poet is a spy ferreting out the mysteries of unsuspecting life. I am spying on today’s mysteries, and the 15th century, too, had its spies, or if it didn’t this means that the epoch was not worthy of its own poets.

Valery Bryusov wrote:

Be a cold witness to everything . . .⁴

This fatal, scholarly lie poisoned a large number of poets. In fact, “a cold witness” is not a poet. He is a notary of history, a clerk from the chronicle department, but not a poet.

A poet has no right to stand to the side observing; he must be in the center, his soul the focal point collecting light rays and burning through the paper of the heart.

Every epoch differs from the others not by its episodes, anecdotes, or facts, but by its general rhythm.

There was the century of footsteps, the century of horses, the century of automobiles (20th), there will be the century of airplanes.

If we denote the rhythm of the 18th century by a , then the rhythm of the 19th century would be a plus x , and the rhythm of the 20th, a plus x plus y .

Accordingly, the rhythm of the art of these centuries will be: a_1, a_1 plus x_1, a_1 plus x_1 plus y_1 .

The task of the contemporary poet is expressive transmission of the dynamics of the contemporary city. These dynamics cannot be conveyed by means of content. No matter how much we talk about the city, we will not convey the city by our talk. The rhythm of our epoch lies only in its form, and therefore a formal method must be found.

Let us turn to the manner of composition of the poets who preceded us. Usually, they picked an image to constitute the basis of the piece—a leit-image, so to speak—and the whole poem, radiating, developed it logically. All the other images were subordinated to this leit-image.

This device, totally legitimate and essentially correct in conveying the old tempo of life, slow and regular, is absolutely unfit today.

The street chaos, the city traffic, the roar of railroad stations and harbors, all the complexity and swiftness of contemporary life, the soul of the soul of the 20th century, cannot be conveyed except through the inner movement of the verse.

This verse movement depends on a plurality of themes—polythematism. This verse movement is achieved through nonsubordination of the other images to the leit-image. Every line carries in its womb a new image, sometimes directly opposed to the preceding one. All these images follow a maximum of disorder.⁵ Thanks to this competition of images, a high degree of tension and concentration of the images themselves is spontaneously achieved. As soon as an image occurs which is weaker and more anemic than the others, this gang of images will jam together, squeeze out the weak one, and the empty space will cause a defect in the entire line and the entire poem. The images must not be stored away smoothly in the dormitories of the reader's perception with the tidiness of boarding school girls preparing to go to bed. This type of tidiness and consistency yields not a synthesis of the city, but the path of a horse tied to a pole. It doesn't matter that an image displaces the preceding one by contradicting it; this causes the reader's perception to be constantly on guard, to catch the unrefined and strong lyricism of the images, like a wolfhound catches its prey.

On the boulevard, hundreds of automobiles, streetcars, bicycles flash every second before my eyes—and yet, I am able to retain them in my consciousness. Why do people say that a comparable disorder due to speed in poetry does not do anything for the audience? [. . .]

Man is naturally inclined toward tradition. Once he has said something, he considers it shameful to recant his error. He stubbornly persists, and only when clearly defeated does he deftly wriggle out of

the impasse and begin blaming others for what he himself has been reproached for. This traditionality causes a man to be afraid of going against what he hears and—alas!—to drag others along. Someone once reproached the Decadents for their lack of principles and their immorality. To this day, this opinion governs the mind of the average citizen.

The same sort of thing is taking place in the attitudes of the public and the press toward Futurism. Somebody once declared that the Futurists do not have a goal, that they are heading for the abyss, toward the destruction of culture, to nihilism—and everyone, with a single voice, is trying to convince himself and others of this. They are all assuring themselves with such staunchness that Galileo would be envious.

Futurism has no aim by its very nature—so say its adversaries. They say this about Italian Futurism, and especially about Russian Futurism, which does exist after all, in spite of all those “Chukovskian” statements.⁶ It not only exists but it is ahead of Italian Futurism, because the latter is only an *ars vivendi*,⁷ while Russian Futurism deals exclusively with art. Italian Futurism is a social movement; Russian Futurism, a revolution in art. Italo-Futurism flees the shores of passéism⁸ because the tentacles of passéism are suffocating it; it is flight from captivity. Russian Futurism flees passéism like a man who steps back in preparing to leap forward. This is to foil his antagonist’s strength; this is foresight.

Universal Futurism moves away from our old earth toward a new earth—but toward an earth, to be sure, because outside of earth, outside of the earthly, there is no life. The banner of Futurism, which flutters in the breeze of contemporaneity, reads: “I do not like mysticism. The closer to the sky, the colder!” To earth, first of all!—this is *l’art poétique*⁹ of Futurism.

Futurism does not lead to a goal—babble the critics + the public. But whoever said that Futurism is an express train with reserved seats which will take you, with every comfort, from Chukhloma¹⁰ to New York? No one! It will just take you out of Chukhloma. Hurry! The train leaves at 5:45. Where to? Does it really matter? You will be in motion, the tunnels of your old passions will flash before the car’s windows. Where are you taking us to? The Futurists do not take you “to,” but “from.” You see, even a pilot who sets a spectacular record does not fly to the heavens, but away from the earth. What pilot would ever say that he is flying to the sun, to the sky? No one would. And not because he does not hope to reach the sky, but because he does not need the sky. He flies from the earth, and his goal lies in this very process of

taking off, in the speed of motion, in the thrill of cutting through space.

Such is Futurism! Futurism exhorts you to come out of the moldy cellars of habit, where the soul still young, was crumpled—habit, which lay like creases on the dress of unrest and passion. After all, life itself takes us not to a new era, but away from the old one. Futurism is getting away from the old and will reach the new, because such is the law. The earth is round, like life and time, and it is impossible to get out of it. And if Futurism calls you from those remote narrow alleys to harbors, to city squares, from paunchy, stocky mansions, to skyscrapers shining in the sun, from horsecars and cabbies with their old mares to trams and automobiles, this is not because harbors and automobiles are more beautiful than villages and broken-down horses, but because such is the law. The mathematical representation of beauty = ∞ . It may be a zero or an infinitely large number. It's not a matter of beauty. The anemic past weighs too heavily on the soul with its austere style. Futurism calls you toward the new, with which we'll be on a friendly footing. We have been born with the new, it regards us as people of its own age, as brothers, while the paralytic past pats us on the head or scolds us like a teacher whose mood depends on his malfunctioning stomach.

People will shrug off this speech of mine, as though answering: "Get going! It's not worth spending so much energy on the first burst! You won't have enough strength left for the journey itself!"

But the Futurists do not celebrate the machine in vain! They know that it takes the most electricity to start the elevator of public taste, or to light up an electric bulb. The elevator goes, the bulb burns while consuming almost no energy, and a good half of the electric bill reflects the click of the switch.

Futurism has an absolutely well-defined goal. This goal consists of knowing not where to go to, but where to go from. For "to" itself is a logical consequence of "from." If you know the position of the cannon at the moment it fires, you know where the cannonball will fall. But, you should not forget that the cannonball, once fired, gets wild and describes a curve (excesses, shocking behavior).

Two Final Words

VADIM SHERSHENEVICH

I declare that in today's Futurism there are many elements that have no foundation (for example, primitivism, nationalism, etc.); too much effort was expended in muffling the critics' premature funeral marches, that song of triumphant petty demons.¹ In order to shout out those marches, one had to raise one's voice to the howl of ocean steamer foghorns. Gradually, the dust from the demolition of the old mansions is being swept away, and in the very same place ferroconcrete twenty-story buildings are being raised holding up the sky of your ecstasy with the smoky chevelure of our wildness.

Even if we deny the past, we must recognize that that same past nonetheless provided us with a strong medical warning.

And we, united by our sense of modernity, throw open the curtains of your habits; we talk, shout, sing, state our directives. Drop from words their meaning and content, which got stuck on the pure image of the word like masticated paper. The conversational word is related to the poetic word in the same way as a dead crow is related to an airplane. In art there is neither meaning nor content, and there ought not be. Poetry and prose are the very same thing. Typographical convention is no criterium for a distinction. Literature is the art of combining self-sufficient words. Any sort of meaning in literature is our inescapable evil. We must liberate poetry from the almshouse of

¹"Two Final Words" (Dva poslednikh slova), printed as an appendix to the book *Green Street*, is a manifestolike piece that passionately reaffirms all of Shershenevich's old themes in a striking Marinettian style and at the same time represents his farewell to Futurism.

philosophical and other sorts of experiments. Verses are not a transparency on which to write scientific problems. Do not abase both science and art! Any sort of stylization is useless and harmful, because the stylizer digs like a rat, with his head in the garbage of past centuries, and grabs with his hands the money and the hearts of beautiful but silly women. Learn how to grasp our automobile words. The days and the seconds are intoxicated through "doping,"² and rush by at a speed of forty hours per second. Old poetry as the lacework of the moon, of barcarolles and of strolls by the lake of logic with Mr. Reason, with whom she had an illicit relationship and by whom she gave birth to a couple of sickly kids, Naturalism and Symbolism—this poetry has died of exhaustion.

Today shaggy pieces of signboards are more beautiful than an evening gown, and the streetcar rushes along its steel equal sign, the night, rearing up, disgorges from its foamy mouth fiery expresses of luminous advertisements, the buildings take off their iron hats in order to grow taller and bow to us.

We reject the past, all past schools, but we have dissected their corpses without fear of toxic infections because we have been vaccinated with youth, and through these corpses we have learned about their diseases. We saw how slavonicisms and poeticisms ate out the poetry of our contemporaries like grave worms. We saw renowned poets who wanted to cross the street of triviality but had their legs bound up by the tight skirt of exact rhymes and meters, and the automobile of life, the 20th-century streetcar, fell upon these befuddled fellows, hurling at them its "blue swords."³ We saw geniuses, like the geniuses who all their life cleared the way to their thrones; after their death Pushkin scholars crept into their grave, and, becoming intimate with the corpses, pulled old junk out of the coffin to upset the stomach of the new generation. These scholars drowned the truthful shout of poets in a collodion of notes and annotation.

We have no time for imitation! Much of our work looks to you like comical buffoonery; but carve into your hearts, fattened with laughter, the monogram of the present day, and learn to be yourself, learn to look at everything with your own eyes. We would be the first to welcome you if you booed us for our backwardness, for our unmodernity! First outrun us, then jeer at us. Break the monocle of the centuries which cuts into the body! All the time you walked looking backward, and so you did not notice that inadvertently you stepped into store-rooms and basements. Your today is an imposter: he is a reproduction of yesterday. The thick books of contemporary poets are heavier than funeral orations. The sound of the drum rolled out long ago.⁴

"Muse! Flee Hellas, and hang on Mount Parnassus this sign: for rent, now vacant"!

And now our orchestra of automobiles, locomotives, steamships, and streetcars echoes that drum:

"Yes! The Muse has come to us, to our noisy and rapid-paced city. She got bored with watching how the poets selected and canned the fig leaves of Mount Olympus. The Muse left you for our city, a city under a canvas tent, where electric wires have been connected to the sun and a switch has been installed, where in the main office frayed fringe of moonlight is sold by the yard, and cloud jelly by the pound. All romantic paraphernalia are for sale at the best discounts! The Muse is in our city. She does not make false steps, she does not sprain her ankle in shoes with a French heel, because she does not walk, she rushes by in a motorcar and shouts to the crowd:

"Gentlemen! Look at me! The machine has pierced every second with its screech. I blow my horn to celebrate these days. Like bridges my arms extend across the Atlantic! The reflection of everything is in me—everything is reflected in me: the foaming-up of shipyards and factories; the bellies of the railroad stations; the flywheel of the sun disk which spins in the gears of the clouds; locomotives that look like professors who, while on the run, have lost tufts of smoky hair and wear mustaches of steam; skyscrapers with their swelling abscesses of balconies—and if you do not understand my exclamations, it is only because you are afraid of being people of today. Learn how to value and understand the only beauties of the world: "THE BEAUTY OF FORM AND THE BEAUTY OF SPEED."

Centrifuge

Turbopæan

CENTRIFUGE revolved,
Threw the wheels aloft:
Deafening whistle's whine
Flash of arms entwined!
—CENTRIFUGE'S thresher,
Smash the dumbbells' heads!
Wonder whirling circles
Of a soul now rushing away;—
Brilliant streams, shafts' calls,
Smokey assault of spring,—
Unattainably soar
Cast down white foam noise.
From endless summer tear
Structure-building fires,—
From heaven's parted deck
The fractured BRACHIOPOD;
Flowing—speed like bird,
Our light, light eye fly off!—
—Above the world to nest
Aseyev, Pasternak, Bobrov.
O, wondrous channels tight,
Allhundreds openmind,
Blissfulmake CENTRIFUGE
The whistling circleflight.

"Turbopæan" is a manifesto in verse, published in the first Centrifuge almanac *Brachiopod* (Moscow, 1914). It is not signed, but it is reasonable to assume that it was written by the three poets mentioned in the text, who were also the founding members of Centrifuge (Bobrov, Aseyev, and Pasternak).

Charter

We, desiring least of all a civil war in Russian Poetry, have replied with silence to the repeated advances of the passéists. Not wanting further to encourage the impudence of that high-handed gang which has conferred upon itself the name Russian Futurists, we announce to their face, so that society can be delivered from the delusion which they use for their own personal designs, the following:

1. You are traitors and renegades, for you dare to jeer at the work of *the first Russian Futurist*, the late I. V. Ignatyev (see p. 130 of *The First Journal of Russian Futurists*).¹

2. You are false pretenders, for (A) the commander-in-chief of the Futurist armies, F. T. Marinetti, during his stay in Moscow, called You, particularly You, passéists; in vain did You attempt to present to him false passports, forged with Your own hands, as Futurist; so naive was the job that he did not want to verify their authenticity; (B) the eldest Russian Futurist, I. Severyanin, publically (in the newspapers) designated Your place to be at the farthest reaches of the land, for You and Your activities have long fallen below the norms of any codex which prevails in the Empire.²

3. Having organized yourself as a Trust of Russian Mediocrites,^a

Like the previous manifesto, "Charter" (Gramota) appeared in *Brachiopod*, but in contrast to "Turbopaeon" its tone is extremely polemical. It was written in answer to the alliance between the Cubo-Futurists and the Mezzanine of Poetry. "Charter" is an allusion to the third manifesto of the Ego-Futurists by the same title and emphasizes the strong Ego-Futurist orientation of the Centrifuge group. The text of that manifesto is to be found in "Ego-Futurism," in this collection.

a. We do not have in mind Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, poets who are obviously young in years and not responsible for their comrades.

You maliciously and shamelessly forget about decency and spread your slanderous gossip about poets who think differently than You (see p. 141 of *The First Journal of Russian Futurists*).³

4. You are cowards, for while fighting for the removal of the visor and stigmatizing the use of pseudonyms, which you equate to being anonymous, You cover up Your own camp's insinulators with fictitious names (pp. 131, 141, 142).⁴

5. You are cowards a second time, since in seeking to blacken Your opponents in poetry by whatever means and in presenting articles which supposedly rehabilitate Your credibility in the eyes of the future generations You deliberately omit everything which is compromising to You (p. 130).⁵

In reiterating in this charter all of the epithets which characterize You, we sign with our full names, speaking directly to your face: if you have some means of justification, we are prepared to answer for our words. But if Your justification will only consist of new gossip and insinuations made anonymously or through pseudonyms, then You, who are falsely calling yourselves "Russian Futurists" will be faced with the necessity of accepting your true service record as PASSÉISTS.

NIKOLAI ASEYEV

SERGEI BOBROV

ILYA ZDANEVICH⁶

BORIS PASTERNAK

Foreword to *The Lyric Theme*

SERGEI BOBROV

The poet, in general, has no obligation to theorize. . . . We know very well what follows upon this phrase, what sorts of verbal storms arise. More or less like this: "Affirming the primacy of creativity over cognizance, we, in essence, do not reject knowledge, because authentic knowledge is intuitive, in contrast to inauthentic knowledge; although of course, on the other hand . . ." The above then continues in convoluted and extended form, after which the chatter ends; we are left to pay our compliments, *faire bonne mine*,¹ and depart. Everything in its place.

However: we do not want to be incomprehensible. We have no desire to trace the path of the professors of the Academy. Accordingly, we are impatient; we only present examples from those authors whose tendencies correspond to our own. We take the facts not as they are, since we count on their possessing no autonomous existence. We introduce into the chain of our judgments a *fantastic vector*; we carry forward our thought *lyrically*. What does this mean? In the first place: our aspirations correspond to the world's third line (i.e., the world is (1) existent; (2) formal; and (3) let us say, active—active in the fantastic quality of its design). Second: we do not resort to any sort of substantive or formal direction of thought; we lift thought to nonexistent hyperbole and thus we arrive at a grasp of only one of its aspects, the

The Lyric Theme (Liricheskaia tema) (Moscow: Centrifuge, 1914) represents the theoretical foundation of the group Centrifuge. This treatise had already appeared as an essay in the Symbolist journal *Works and Days*, No. 1–2 (1913) under the title "On the Lyric Theme." The "Foreword," which did not appear in the original edition, displays the rhetorical features of a manifesto.

one which, by summing up in itself both the formal and the contentual, is clearly more elevated than either; only this one is the voice which can be heard. Let them not approach us with all manner of possible armaments; our words are the light sound of a bell—and that is all; we will not speak with them.

However, let us resume. Thus:

The poet, in general, has no obligation to theorize. The truth has been known to all for a long time. We can present a mass of evidence showing that true poets have theorized anyway. But such examples, in the first place, would serve only to refute what has just been said; second, these poets felt no inescapable need to theorize. Regardless of whether a poet happened to know one thing or another, he was, in the final analysis, after all, either a good poet or a worthless rhymester. Here theorizing counts for nothing. No matter how much some modernist or other theorizes, his verses do not become any better. And conversely.

However, there are times when it is necessary to write and also to write about writings (in the final analysis, about one's own . . .). When people lose their conception of the essence, existence, meaning, form, and movement of art, and become capable exclusively of a more-or-less talented *commerage*,² the time has come to speak to them in their own language. Everything which is now valuable in Russian literature is rapidly quieting down, disappearing, fading, diffusing in a fog. Everything which is openly shoddy, pretentious, senseless, stupidly self-satisfied, smugly respectable—is becoming renowned and venerated. We will not present examples; we hope that this situation is abundantly clear. We will not argue *with them*; we will travel our own path, which in our view is comprehensible. Even now, in coming forth with a notebook of aphorisms, we are playing a double game: on the one hand, we are speaking with *them* in *their* language; on the other hand, we are not for a moment abandoning poetry. Our aphorisms are good or bad to the same degree as our verses are good or bad.

Two words in conclusion: we happened to hear that our experiment is incomprehensible; unfortunately, becoming more comprehensible is not within our power. Here we can only recall Mallarmé, who once said: "*l'ancien souffle lyrique*."³ These three words are the substance, the form, and the lyric of our aphorisms.

November 1913.

Moscow.

The Wassermann Test

BORIS PASTERNAK

In our century . . . of democracy and technology, the concepts of a calling and a personal gift are becoming unhealthy prejudices. "Laisser faire, laisser passer"¹ has even penetrated the realm of artistic production. During the blessed days of the handicraft and guild system, the distinctiveness of human abilities was still a living truth; not only did the producer heed the voice of this truth, but the consumer was also ruled by it in his demands. It is to this gray antiquity that we must now consign such expressions as talent, *feu sacré*,² etc., which have been deprived of their sense.

Estate lands have stopped being a class privilege. Even earlier, free choice of profession appeared on the scene along with the petty bourgeoisie: this is its heroic role.

But if craft, at one time founded on the lyricism of conception warmed by the intimacy of personally cherished device, was akin to art; and if that sort of craftsmanship, oscillating between *Meisterwerk* and *Meistergesang*,³ has perished; then is it not natural that its unique Georgian epoch expected creative work itself.

As always, the first sign comes from the market. The reader does not have to deal with the management of *Dei gratia*,⁴ just as he is not concerned with the question of whether the pattern on his cloth was devised by a Lancaster weaver or was anonymously tossed out by a machine. The democratization of demand was noted ecstatically from every mansard and mezzanine, by every cooperative,⁵ retaining terminology which is useless because it has lost all sense.

"The Wassermann Test" (Vassermanovaia reaktsiia) appeared in *Brachiopod* (Moscow, 1914).

Doubts about one's personal calling, which hitherto brightened the history of giftedness with a halo of martyrdom, have now been cast off. And not because they have been scattered by a sudden beatitude at all levels of devoted labor, but rather because those doubts have found a curious self-confirmation. The secret manifesto of the consumer-mob on the dethronement of genius and the annihilation of the last heraldic distinctions was the spiritual proletariat's declaration of its right to artistic labor.

The client-reader has become lord of a new form of industry. In this situation, lack of talent has become the only sanctioned form of giftedness. This has spared the bearer the willfulness of the independent craftsman.

We do not recognize the reader now. Either he accepts indiscriminately everything which the very latest industry turns out for his disposal, or he rejects, with the same indifference, all of the market's novelties—out of a blind mistrust for the very same thing, a "year" which is not old enough. The date, just the date, that is what attracts him or repels him.

But there isn't a reader who is able to distinguish the poet from the false pretender, since there isn't a reader who awaits and needs the poet. There is the reader out in front and there is the reader behind, that is all. Habit is the good genius of the latter, and the unusual is the opiate of the former.

The sciences have attained a high degree of specialization.

There are objects which defy jurisdictions, wavering between one specialization and another.

Certain objects of microbiotics, living and growing forms, are of this type; one science gives them over to be considered by another.

In such cases, the denial that a given form belongs to its domain turns out to be the only determination given by the first science.

Often the methodological motives for such a refusal constitute the very same elements from which the neighboring science will compose a formula for recognizing the object as belonging to it.

Here we see displayed the medial construction of methods, their mutual guarantees within the unity of scientific consciousness.

Artistic products are subject to investigation, falsely, by all sorts of theories, but these theories do not present the slightest interest for aesthetics.

The point of origin of Futurism, in general, is such that the exemplars which are falsely ascribed to it fall under the jurisdiction of the social sciences and economics.

True Futurism exists. We can call upon Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky (with some reservations), and Bolshakov⁶ (in part), as well as the poets of the "Petersburg Herald" group.

There is a true Futurism. This in itself essentially leads us to expect a false Futurism as well. Reality anticipates our conjectures. Among its treasures it has the kind of Futurism which is ours, which we have theoretically posited.

We are accustomed, thank God, to the way in which the consumer himself creates all of the products of the textile and nontextile industries which suit him, through the elastic medium of the anonymous entrepreneur. The nontextile industry has been enriched by a new form. The reader has become a producer by means of the poet, to whom he is indifferent. Such revolutions are prepared by the force of things. Their consequences are complex and reciprocal. The consumer can no longer recognize the worth of a product, because the reason for the latter's shortcomings is precisely the rule of this ignorant consumer and his cohort in industry. He is satisfied simply by the probable presence of certain features with which he is familiar, but these features are at best secondary and incomplete; furthermore, they are consumer features, not features of the actual crafting work. Along with this, industry has become emancipated; the choice of trade or profession is left to the individual's arbitrary whim. So it is in our domain: the reader has emancipated production to an unprecedented degree, by presenting to anyone who desires it the patent for producing whatever quatrains he pleases.

And just as with the change in guild systems and the guild consciousness of the craftsman there appeared the impoverished (by its ignorance) program of an indiscriminating clientele based on the entrepreneurial codex, so now we are meeting with the first striking example of how consumer psychology draws its new basis with attractive inks on a neutral surface to which its middlemen are indifferent. The reader's codex as regards verse.

V. Sershenevich, a sacrificial victim of the legal accessibility of poetry writing as an emancipated trade, gives us an instructive example for the economist.

His latest concoctions⁷ show a complete absence of that mystery which the uninitiated do not even suspect exists; on the other hand, in return they abound in everything that the public has always regarded as the generic trademark of poetry. The correspondence between these two facts is so complete that we are forced to equate the consciousness of the producer with the consciousness of the consumer, and that equation is a formula for the uncreative middleman consciousness.

The lyrical operator, call him what you will, is first and foremost an integrating principle. The elements which undergo this integration or, rather, which are brought into play by it, are profoundly insignificant in comparison with the process itself.

The consistent prosaism of Shershenevich's lines (we are speaking about the verses published in the Journal of "Futurists") flow not out of that ballast of everyday life with which he burdens his metaphorical apparatus. We repeat: these are all only elements, and we refuse them any independent significance. As such, they would have a modulating influence on the general structure of the verse, if the lyrical whole provided a fermenting medium for their motion. It is sufficient to point to the example of Mayakovsky, whose cacomorphy of images from the point of view of the ordinary reader is justified by the motion of his lyrical thought. Thematism, in other words, *quantité imaginaire*,⁸ is absent from Shershenevich's verses. But this is precisely the very element which does not yield to definition by the purchaser and cannot, therefore, become a condition of supply and demand. This principle is generally above the understanding of our industrialist; we propose to his more fortunate neighbors, the poets Mayakovsky and Bolshakov, that they explain to their partner that what is meant by the theme is in no way the leading idea or the literary plot, but precisely that which compels Bolshakov to fracture grammar in the verses:

To improvise is to smile art . . .
So gazes were, knees slipping, no, not close . . .

Or

Because to spin ages are closed . . .
Because to spin to dream the heart . . .⁹

This trait, uniquely constituting the gist of the Bolshakov genre, is the lyrical basis of his pieces, that integral of infinite functions without which a finite metaphor would be subject to the fate of a constant, the fate of Shershenevich's metaphors. To put it plainly, if this element, toward which Shershenevich as a critic exhibits a curious deafness,¹⁰ was not present in a number of Bolshakov's verses, then the collection of his similes would represent an idle simulation of confused perception, nothing more. And we would locate, without difficulty, the economic causes of such a confusion.

Figurative imagery—this is what is always linked with the concept of poetry in the mind of the man in the street. And since the historical place of the verses we are investigating lies in the history of market demand, we should not be surprised by that half-baked novelty with

which Futurism fills, beyond all necessity, its figurative nests of poetry, in no way touching that other uniquely essential thematic side of which the public is ignorant.

However, even the structure of a Shershenevich metaphor is such that it does not seem to have been invoked by the poet's internal need of it, but rather to have been inspired by the conditions of external consumption.

If one wants to compare a metaphor with that patterned look to which only the poet holds a key—and that only in the worst of cases; with that lock through whose keyhole one can only spy on the reclusive lady hiding in the *stanza* (see Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, for this play on words, *stanza* meaning both "chamber" and the poetic form); then the keys to Shershenevich's bolts are in the hands of lovers from the crowd.

The origin of Shershenevich's metaphors is the fact of similarity or more rarely an associative link based on similarity, and never one based on contiguity. However, only the phenomenon of contiguity gives rise to that characteristic of coercion and spiritual dramatism which can be justified metaphorically. An autonomous requirement of association by similarity is simply unthinkable. As a result, this is a type of association which can only be demanded from without. Can it be that Shershenevich does not know that a word which is impenetrable in its coloration cannot borrow coloring from the word to which it is compared? Such a representation is only colored by the sickly necessity of association, that patchwork which rules in a lyrically forced consciousness. The same ignorance leads him to the Apennine boot, to that very person who gave Shershenevich the first push in his turning to Futurism; to that very one whose footsteps probably have not been erased, even to this very day, from the rugs of Moscow's corridors.¹¹

Shershenevich's manner of thought is scientifically descriptive. This is a form of thought which does not touch all of the syntactic richness of the academic language, not to speak of attempts to deviate from this norm; it bursts forth with a hail of categorical propositions of the type: *S is P*. Simple sentences, interminable lines of subjects, predicates, and adverbs lie in straight rows, separated by dots—symbols of the previous line's patient presentiments which the next line also happens to approach.

We are not very interested in these figurative wonders which garrison the monotonous windowboxes of his clichéd propositions. Their nature is such that they throw us right back into the realm of a fact, of a scientific phenomenon, of a protocol. This is how a reflective man in

the street thinks—brought up on definitions, judgments, descriptions. In precisely such a style, he writes his heartfelt letters from the Volga or Switzerland. We should not be surprised that this quality of his thought is also expressed in a product which has been Futuristically manufactured according to his blueprint.

Two Words about Form and Content

E. P. BIK

Not so long ago, the camp that calls itself the most left responded to the question: What is the nature of the new art and how does it differ from the old art? Their answer was the following formula: "(1) Pre-Symbolist art: content prevails over form; (2) Symbolist art: an equality of form and content; (3) Futurist art: form prevails over content."¹

We were waiting for such a formula. It is absolutely necessary, for otherwise we would not understand what we are talking about. An artist is essentially determined by his attitude toward form and content. Consequently, these few words give us a complete basis for judging the world view and the theoretical baggage of those who are attracted to such a position.

In appearance this formula possesses everything which such a formula should possess. It not only distinguishes Futurism from the recent Symbolism, but it also indicates the former's place in literary art in general. But, alas, this only holds for the formula's external side; its internal side is empty. We must note that the recent [Russian] Symbolist school cannot be juxtaposed to all the rest of world literature (and where was that Symbolism? French Symbolism is something entirely different from Russian Symbolism. Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud—did they have much influence on Russian literature? In Germany, can the super-aesthetes of the Stefan George school, notwithstanding the fact that he is an excellent versifier, and Rilke alone constitute Symbol-

The essay "Two Words about Form and Content" (*Dva slova o forme i sodержanii*) was published in *The Second Centrifuge Miscellany* (Moscow, 1916). E. P. Bik is one of the many pseudonyms of S. Bobrov.

ism? Is that all? There remain: Wilde, Hamsun, D'Annunzio, Ibanez, Deglaus, Przybyszewski, and all the Manns).² Not even to mention that fact, we must utterly reject the above formula. The first part of it relates to Pre-Symbolist poetry, i.e., predominantly to Realist poetry. Only the center of the formula can be comprehended directly; its ends, the first and third part—are negative. That is to say, the Realists (and who is this, by the way?) rejected form, the Futurists reject content. Thus, in literal terms, Realism is formless, Futurism contentless. But both of these definitions (leaving aside their own formlessness and contentlessness) are entirely senseless. Symbolism certainly has not conferred upon itself exclusive right to the formula: "content is equal to form"; this indicates its philosophical cognizance of the whole essence of art, but no Symbolist has attempted to apply this maxim in fact. Indeed, you cannot order yourself: Be harmonious! If, in the construction of some verses, there were attempts to affirm this proposition (in the final analysis, through external devices), then these instances are an indirect proof of what we have said.

Cognition is inconceivable without a subject and an object. But the object cannot exist without form and content. Content is the element of its ability to be made, form is the element of its making. Let us take the most simple example. The metaphorical phrase "the trees smile" (Gogol) can appropriately serve as such. In this metaphor as in any existing thing, we can find three moments: (1) the moment of content; (2) the moment of form; (3) the active (lyric) moment. Or: (1) the passive moment; (2) a moment opposed to it, conventionally defined as active; (3) the moment of pure activeness. Or: (1) the moment of resultant, but not integral, virtue; (2) the moment of virtue as an internal compulsion; (3) the moment of pure and "essential" virtue. The first moment is the essence of metaphor, linked with all metaphorical teaching; it is founded on the linkage which forces an expression to become a metaphor and which unites the two words (in this case, precisely two) entering into the metaphor—this is the most simple and most elementary point. The second moment is the cross-sectioning of the metaphor into three parts: lexically figurative, substantially figurative, and forceful; this is the metaphor in the sense of that which comes into being through it, its determination is individual; here arise all of those elements which induce the expression to deviate from the metaphor, here the words break down the metaphor. The third moment, the most important and the most complex, is the unification of splintered directions of a formal and substantial nature; here the diad of form and content present a unity in the sense that the elements of the diad, in uniting, do not destroy each other; the triad of

form consisting of (1) the lexical figuration, (2) the substantial figuration, and (3) the force (allusion—in part) rests in a completely undefined way on the formal assertion of the metaphor. It arises unequivocally, for here the third element discards the first two parts in the external form of the expression, destroying their contradictoriness through a qualitative transformation by means of the third part. The third element is the sap beneath the sluggish element of content; it is the sun scattering the cloud of form. The third element appears before us as the conqueror of the previous two. The poorly understood synecdoche of content and the sharp metonymy of form are nothing before the infinite metaphor of the lyric.

What we have said applies both to the Realists and to the Symbolists. The wooden allegories of the dashing “innovator,” garnished with the cheapest and most simple rhetorical figures, are subordinate to our schema, just as much as Tyutchev’s most complicated anacolutha.

It is completely clear that without any of the elements discussed above, figurative speech simply would cease to exist. It would not be able to arise. In what then does the formula for “Futurism” which has been presented consist? And what is left of it after all of this? It has been, all in all, a purely everyday discussion, not the least bit theoretical. Quite simply, it means that Realists have turned all of their attention to the content (how trivial and shallow that is!), Symbolists have divided their inclinations equally between content and form, whereas “Futurists” like form. Now, freed from its quasi-scientific and quasi-theoretical framework and deprived of any grandiosity, this formula appears to us to be the simplest of trivialities. It is now very clear that it has been blurred out in order to intimidate and confuse the inexperienced reader. This formula in its essence is profoundly untrue, demonstrating its author’s unfamiliarity with the creations of those about whom he speaks, and thus his complete lack of understanding of Realism, Symbolism, and the new art (leaving its name *ad libitum*). The Realists knew and loved form (nothing need be said about such distorted manifestations of Realism of the order of Nadson and Zola), the Symbolists cared very little about content, deliberately defining it in a remote and hazy fashion. And if “Futurism” had rejected content, we would not have heard such hymns to the substantive conquest of the world.

That is all. What are these “theoreticians” worthy of, who parade before us with such intellectual baggage and such culture?

Company 41° and Beyond

Manifesto of the "41°"

Company 41° unifies left-wing Futurism, and affirms transreason as the mandatory form for the embodiment of art.

The task of 41° is to make use of all the great discoveries of its contributors, and to place the world on a new axis.

This newspaper will be a haven for happenings in the life of the company as well as a cause of constant trouble.

Let's roll up our sleeves.

I. ZDANEVICH

A. KRUCHENYKH

I. THERENTYEV

N. CHERNYAVSKY

The "Manifesto of the '41°'" appeared in the newspaper 41° (Tiflis, 1919), which was to be the organ of the homonymous Futurist group organized in Tiflis in 1919. Several poets and artists, including the 41° members, emigrated from the north to the Caucasus to avoid both the World War I draft and the Civil War. Although the 41° remained in existence until 1920, only one issue of its newspaper was published. This manifesto was later reprinted in A. Kruchenykh, V. Khlebnikov, G. Petnikov, *The Transrationalists* (Moscow, 1922).

From *Kruchenykh* *the Grandiosaire*

I. TEREITYEV

Grand-losaire

Kruchenykh is the most solid Futurist, both as a poet and as a man.

His creative work is a twisted¹ steel cable able to bear any weight.

About himself he says:

I forgot to hang myself
I'm flying to the Americas
(from his book *Explodity*)

and in the "crucial moments" of his life Kruchenykh says his prayer:

beliamatokiiai²
(ibid.)

With these two sentences he can walk across the whole universe without stumbling over anything! Because there is absolutely nothing said in them, they are a great nothingness, an absolute zero whose radius, like the radius of the universe, is immeasurable!

[. . .]

Kruchenykh the Grandiosaire (Kruchenykh grandiozar') (Tiflis, 1919). In this book, by paying homage to his inspirer and confrere, Terent'ev expounds his own aesthetics. Together with Kruchenykh he was the most militant advocate of the absurd.

When he delivers a public lecture, his face convulsively distorted by yawning looks fierce; he shouts out words full of juicy dullness and leads you into a stupor with his monotonous sentence construction.

Civilized gentlemen in the audience object to him, but at that very moment you start realizing how irrefutable Kruchenykh is, and that from his grimacing slobber a blotch-nosed Aphrodite is being born, before whom professors of all kinds are compelled to politely bow and scrape.

[. . .]

The external forms and terms of Kruchenykh's works are as absurd as their essence. He "forgot to hang himself," and now he compulsively publishes one booklet after another, writing them by hand in lithographic ink. None of these booklets contains more than 100 letters, two/three sentences, a catchy title. And there you have a new book by Kruchenykh, an original manuscript, the illustrations, the disorderly lines, where the letters f-l-y a-r-o-u-n-d, landing in a square, a triangle, or in a crossbar sprouting branches.

These books are neither corrected nor copied by the author. They are a precise trace of the blood that has dropped spontaneously from the pen onto the paper; they smell of phosphorous, like fresh brain curls.

[. . .]

But all of this extreme irrationality, this theater of the absurd, is only a way to the other, even greater nonsense of transrational language. All of Futurism would be just a useless venture if it did not arrive at this language, which is the only one for the poets of the "worldbackwards."³

The first Futurian words were hurled forth by a resounding voice, like the golden-throated coin of a Shakespearian ragamuffin:

Dyr-bul-shchyl
Gly-gly-vogguly
Chagogdubiia
go-osneg-kaid

Here for the first time Russian poetry spoke through a masculine larynx, and instead of the feminine "-annykh, -ienykh, -ienii" this

throat threw out the sound "G"—"gly-gly." Masculinity expressed itself not in the plot, which would rest on the surface, but in the very heart of the word—in its phonetics.

[. . .]

Verses must not be like a woman, but like a gnawing saw. This is the obligation which the first transrational poet Kruchenykh took upon himself.

But, of course, he satisfies this obligation, to the same small degree as any other, because he is an artist to whom it is not important to establish in Russian poetry an epoch of "masculinity" or any other epoch. He must live, remaining a pure zero.

[. . .]

In transrational language one can howl, squeak, ask for what nobody asks for, touch upon inaccessible themes coming right up to them; one can create for oneself, because the birth of the transrational word is as deep a mystery for the author's consciousness as it is for a stranger.

But transrational language is dangerous: it will kill anyone who writes verses without being a poet.

If one does not like transrational poetry, the mousetrap snaps shut all by itself.

Sometime in the future a new Dal or Baudouin⁴ will compose a universal dictionary of transrational language for all nations.

A new Grot⁵ will put order into orthography.

Then a new Futurist will also appear.

And that will be our Aleksei Kruchenykh. . . .

Dostoevsky believed that Russia "will save Europe," at the present time the Russian nation vows to make Europe "learn" from us; all or nothing. Either teach her, or at least teach her a lesson, create a grandiose abomination.

Kruchenykh's latest morphological investigations, in his book *Melancholy in a Robe*,⁶ have established the unquestionable anal nature of the protoroots of the Russian language, where "ka"⁷ is the most significant sound.

[. . .]

European Futurism lies between the boundaries of some casual ideology and the technological mastery of speed.

We, on the other hand, are organic and boundless, and that's why Kruchenykh once uttered the solemn "kakatruth"⁸ that the Italians are the Russian Futurists' hirelings.

The natural properties of the Russian language had already allowed Pushkin to insult Europe with his rhyme; this is the connection between our essential anal nature and our attitude toward Europe.

Kruchenykh, being a Russian, could not be just a Russian Futurist poet. He allowed himself *all sorts of inadmissible acts* and became a grandiose zero, like Russia after her abortive war: the dungwash of ribaldry.

[. . .]

Declaration of Transrational Language

1. Thought and speech cannot keep up with the emotions of someone in a state of inspiration, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but also in a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), a *transrational* language. Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression (Example: go osneg kaid etc.).¹

2. Transreason is the (historically and individually) primordial form of poetry. At first it is a rhythmic-musical excitement, a protosound (the poet should write it down, because in further reworking he may forget it).

3. Transrational speech generates the transrational protoimage (and vice versa)—something not precisely defined, for example: the formless bogeymen Gorgo, Mormo; the misty beauty Ylayali; Avoska and Neboska, etc.²

4. One resorts to transrational language: (a) when the artist wants to convey images not fully defined (within himself or without himself), (b) when he does not want to name the object, but only to hint at it—a transrational feature: “he’s kind of strange, he has a square soul”—here a usual word is given a transrational meaning. The invented first names and family names of literary heroes, names of peoples, localities, cities, etc. also belong here. For example: Oile, Bleiana, Vudras and Baryba, Svidrigailov, Karamazov, Chichikov, et al. (excluding,

The manifesto “Declaration of Transrational Language” (Deklaratsiia zaumnogo iazyka) appeared as a leaflet in Baku in 1921 and was subsequently reprinted in several of Kruchenykh’s books. Besides reaffirming basic ideas from Kruchenykh’s early declarations, it sums up the poet’s experience and intensive work while in Tiflis (1917–20).

however, names which are explicitly allegorical, such as: Pravdin, Glupyshkin³—here the symbolism is clear and well defined).

(c) When one loses one's reason (hate, jealousy, rage . . .).

(d) When one does not need it—religious ecstasy, love. (The glossa of exclamation, interjection, murmurs, refrains, children's babble, pet names, nicknames—such transreason is plentiful among writers of all schools.)

5. Transreason awakens creative imagination and sets it free, without insulting it with anything concrete. Thought causes the word to contract, writhe, turn to stone; transreason, on the contrary, is wild, flaming, explosive (wild paradise, fiery languages, blazing coal).

6. Consequently, we have to distinguish three basic forms of word-creation:

I. Transrational—a. The magic of songs, incantations, and curses.

b. "Revelation (naming and depiction) of things unseen"⁴—mysticism.

c. Musical-phonetic word-creation—orchestration, texture.

II. Rational (its opposite is the language of the clinically insane, possessing its own laws as determined by science; but whatever is beyond scientific understanding must be included in the realm of the aesthetics of the random).

III. Random (alogical, accidental, creative breakthrough, mechanical word combination: slips of the tongue, misprints, blunders; partially belonging to this category are phonetic and semantic shifts, ethnic accent, stuttering, lispings, etc.).

7. Transreason is the most compact art, both in terms of the time span between perception and expression, and in terms of its form, for example: Kuboa (Hamsun), Kho-bo-ro,⁵ etc.

8. Transreason is the most universal art, although its origin and its initial character may be national, for example: Hurrah, Evan-evoe! etc.

Transrational works can provide a universal poetic language, born organically, and not artificially like Esperanto.

From *Shiftology of Russian Verse: An Offensive and Educational Treatise*

A. KRUCHENYKH

Shiftology, shiftics is the science of shift.

Intro.

"Here we go again: shiftology, texture, form, technique. When will poets finally sing from the soul, like a youth playing the balalaika," etc. etc. Such voices still resound from the remotest corners of literature.

"We have to solve all the world's problems in no time, and in addition have a heart-to-heart talk with Mars—this is the only task worthy of poets and wizards, and we will settle for nothing less!"

Not so very long ago, for instance, poets considered it their sacred duty to predict the coming of the Antichrist and the destiny of Rome and the East. They did not care whether they used "hand-me-down" garbage or employed the same rhymes over and over again—*volya/dolya* (will/fate), *krov'/lyubov'* (blood/love), *glazki/skazki* (eyes/fairy tales), *ochi/nochi* (eyes/nights), *sny/vesny* (dreams/springtime) (30% of Blok's rhymes)—the "idea" was magnificent: "The Woman in the Sun," "we will set the universe free," etc. This was mystical Sherlockholmesism.¹

Shiftology of Russian Verse (*Sdvigologiya russkogo stikha*) (Moscow, 1923) is a large book by Kruchenykh's standards, featuring fifty pages of theoretical and polemical observations on the subject of "shift." Together with *Verbal Texture* (Moscow, 1923) and *Apocalypse in Russian Literature* (Moscow, 1923), it belongs to the "series on theory" of the group MAF (Moscow Association of Futurists).

In this book I will demonstrate that to this day many meters, even venerable ones, are profoundly deaf and incredibly "irritating"; I will demonstrate that shiftology—the basis of verse—is unknown in our poetics!

We are still children in the technique of speech, and yet in our works we tackle each and every problem of the universe and are ashamed to learn art as such.

The easy laurels and the hack lemons are eating up literature, and everyone hopes that in time all poets will turn into Demian Biednys or Vodislav Khudosevichs.² The cheep trocheeists bloom like double-dyed flowers. So, death to the poets, long live the NEP-versifiers!

Strange as it may seem, it has fallen upon the Futurists, principally destroyers, to guard the poetic craft and the technique of versification! But, when your own house is on fire everyone becomes his own fireman! Pick up your crowbar! A smoky and flashing light will brighten our way! . . . [. . .]

Theoretical Position for All Future Students of Shift.

It is impossible to teach all possible artistic effects because the work of art is a live organism. However, shiftology brings them to the fore and gives us a new tool, a new way of reading, a new alphabet.

Where there seemed to be a slip of awareness, one would discover a shift, some hidden creative work which at times betrays many of the author's secrets!

One must establish a special "shift police force" for the prompt capture of shifts, which would leave their authors gaping in amazement.

Semantic shift.

Double entendres, puns, reading between the lines, parallel meanings, symbolism.

The shift produces new words—neologism [. . .] or undefined transrational words.

Transrational language is always a shift language!

It contains fragments of shattered worlds!! . . .

[. . .]

The shift penetrates verses throughout (especially contemporary verses); it is one of the most important parts of the verse. It modifies the word, the stanza, the sounds.

The shift conveys movement and space.

The shift conveys multiplicity of meanings and images.

The shift is the style of our contemporary life.

The shift is a new discovery of America! . . .

Instead of a Foreword

From *Calendar*

BORIS PASTERNAK

Dear Kruchenykh, what do you need this foreword for? You have no need of recommendations. And it's too late to convince those people who are still unaware of this fact. It's not a job for me; that would be too tiresome. You are the most tenacious of us, we should take you as an example. There's your praise. And here are my best New Year's wishes for your booklet. Recalling our condition when we heard you read it, I want to wish your readers that same break in the clouds which revealed to us thousands of things which are impossible in canonical art.

The visibility of literature was vanishing. Memory of meaning was dying out, like the recollection of a ridiculous demand quickly retracted. There was a faint whiff of theater, but of the circus type. All categories had skidded. Only the keenness of a general, naturalistic, immediate excellence remained, as with gifted entertainers. Your fluent, fragmentary power of observation made us laugh where there wasn't any direct comedy, and through this laughter vast, typical landscapes flowed into our consciousness, one after the other, called up by a deft, almost sleight-of-hand gesture kindred to art's fundamental hoodwinking element.

A few words about the latter. Your role in this field is bizarre and educational. You stand on the extreme edge. One step, you will be beyond it; that is in raw Philistinism, which has more fancies and whims than one would think. You are a living fragment of art's imag-

Pasternak's introduction, "Instead of a Foreword" (Vzamen predisloviia), dated December 25, 1925, to *Calendar* (Moscow, 1926), a collection of Kruchenykh's recent poetry.

inable frontier. Even art's coarsest formula, the effect formula (that triggers a reaction) is broader than the area which you have delimited for yourself. The instants of risqué clownishness and of spontaneous inspiration are inseparable from one another in the lyric device. It is a lightening whole. But even this whole is not narrow enough for you, and from this elementary pair you completely remove the second element, that of inspiration.

If one excites the level of terseness of form to fanatic brilliance, then one must say that you are the tersest of all. There are thousands of examples: those whom you attack, as well as those whom you do not touch out of friendship. Among them *Mayakovsky, Aseyev, myself, and a great number of others*, about whom, as time goes by, the following question becomes more and more pertinent: "*Is it still art, or is it simply a long-stabilized widely broadcast banality.*" This question, obviously, does not apply to you. The question "*is what you give out art yet*" is the only possible one in your case, and one that has long been answered. And you are holding on so tightly to art in its primeval stage that we shouldn't fear any transitions. There won't be any. You won't allow art to grow up.

25 XII 1925.

**Left Front of the
Arts (Lef)**

What Does Lef Fight For?

The year 905.¹ After it, reaction. Reaction settled in because of autocracy and the double yoke of merchant and industrialist.

Reaction made art and life according to its own image and taste. The art of the Symbolists (Biely, Balmont), the mystics (Chulkov, Hippisus), and the sex psychopaths (Rozanov);² the lifestyle of the petty bourgeois and the philistines.

The revolutionary parties waged war on lifestyle, art rose to wage war on taste.

The first impressionistic flaring was in 1909 (the anthology *A Trap for Judges*).

The fire was fanned for 3 years.

Fanned into Futurism.

The first book of the Union of the Futurists was *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1914—D. Burliuk, Kamensky, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov).

The old regime correctly assessed the experimental work of tomorrow's dynamiters.

They answered the Futurists with cuts from the censors, prohibitions against public performances, and barking and howling from the entire press.

The capitalists, of course, never patronized our whip-lines, our splinter-strokes.

The article "What Does Lef Fight For?" (Za chto boretsia Lef?) appeared in the first issue of *Lef* (no. 1 [1923]: 1-7) as the programmatic declaration of the group, in the section "Program."

Surrounded by a parochial lifestyle, the Futurists were forced to mock it with their yellow blouses and clownish makeup.

These "not-so-academic" means of struggle, the premonition of something larger still to come, immediately scared away the aesthetes who had previously joined up (Kandinsky, the Jack-of-Diamonders,³ etc.)

On the other hand, those who had nothing to lose joined Futurism, or simply used its name as a banner (Shershenevich, Igor Severyanin, The Donkey's Tail, etc.).⁴

The Futurist movement, led by artists who did not have a firm grasp of politics, occasionally painted itself with the bright colors of anarchy.

Those would-be-youngsters who covered their aesthetic rot with the leftist banner marched next to the people of the future.

The war in 1914 was the First test of national unity.

The Russian *Futurists broke off definitively* with the poetic imperialism of Marinetti, whom they had already booed at the time of his visit to Moscow (1913).⁵

The Futurists were the first and the only ones in Russian literature to *curse the war* drowning out the saber rattling of the war-singers (Gorodetsky, Gumilev, etc.), and to fight against it with all the weapons of art ("War and the World," by Mayakovsky).⁶

The war initiated the Futurist purge (the Mezzanine people broke off, Severyanin went to Berlin).

The war forced one to see the coming revolution ("A Cloud in Trousers").⁷

The February revolution deepened the purge, split Futurism into "right" and "left."

The rightists became the sounding board of democratic virtues (their names could be found in *All Moscow*).⁸

The leftists, waiting for October, were christened "the Bolsheviks of the arts" (Mayakovsky, Kamensky, Burliuk, Kruchenykh).

The first to join this Futurist group were the Productivist-Futurists (Brik, Arvatov) and the Constructivists (Rodchenko, Lavinsky).⁹

The Futurists, from the very beginning, while still in the Kshesinsky palace, tried to reach an agreement with the groups of proletarian writers (the future Proletkult),¹⁰ but these writers thought (judging by all evidence) that the revolutionary spirit was completely exhausted by agitational content alone, and they remained true reactionaries in the area of form, incapable of joining forces in any way.

October cleaned up, shaped up, reorganized. Futurism became the left front of art. "We" became it.

October taught by work.

By the 25 of October we had already gone to work.

Clearly, after seeing the babbling intelligentsia take to its heels, nobody asked us many questions about our aesthetic credo.

We founded the then-revolutionary "Izo," "Teo," "Muzo";¹¹ we led the students in the storming of the academy.

Along with our organizational work, *we produced the first art objects of the Revolutionary era* (Tatlin's monument to the Third International; Meyerhold's production of *Mystery-Bouffe*; Kamensky's *Stenka Razin*).¹²

We did not indulge in aestheticism, producing things for self-gratification. We applied our acquired skills to the agitational-artistic work required by the Revolution [the ROSTA posters,¹³ newspaper feuilletons, etc.).

For the purpose of propagandizing our ideas, we organized the newspaper *The Art of the Commune*, and a touring program of readings and discussions in factories and plants.

Our ideas captivated the workers' audience. The Vyborg district organized the kom-fut.¹⁴

Our art movement showed our strength through the organization of left front strongholds all over the RSFSR.¹⁵

Parallel to this was the work of our comrades from the Far East (the journal *Creation*) theoretically confirming the social necessity of our movement, our social identification with the October Revolution (Chuzhak, Aseyev, Palmov, Tretyakov).¹⁶ *Creation*, having been subject to all kinds of persecution, took upon itself the whole struggle for a new culture within the territory of the DVR¹⁷ and Siberia.

Gradually losing their illusions about a two-week existence for the Soviet Government, the academicians began to knock on Narkom doors¹⁸ individually and in small groups.

Not wanting to risk using them for responsible work, the Soviet government granted to them—actually, not to them but to their European names—out-of-the-way cultural and educational posts.

The persecution of leftist art began in these out-of-the-way places, reaching a splendid culmination in the closing down of *The Art of the Commune*, and the like.

The government, busy with the problems of the war fronts and economic devastation, paid little attention to aesthetic squabbles; it merely tried to keep the home front quiet and to reason with us about respect for the "big names."

Now we are enjoying a respite from war and famine. *Lef is obligated to exhibit the panorama of the art of the RSFSR*, to establish a perspective, and to occupy a position suited to our status.

The art of the RSFSR as of the 1st of February, 1923:

I. Proletart. Part of it has degenerated into the art of official writers, oppressed by their chancery language and the repetition of political ABCs. Another part fell under the influence of the academy, and only the organization's name would recall the October Revolution. The third and best part, after having followed the pink Biely's,¹⁹ is retraining itself on our things and, we believe, will march forward with us.

II. Official literature. From the theoretical point of view each one has his own opinion on art: Osinsky praises Akhmatova, Bukharin praises Pinkerton.²⁰ In practice, only the best-selling names adorn the pages of journals.

III. The "latest" literary trends (Serapions, Pilnyak, etc.)²¹ having appropriated and diluted our devices are flavoring them with Symbolist spices and are adapting them deferentially and heavy handedly to the light tone of NEP-literature.

IV. Political turncoats.²² From the West comes an invasion of the enlightened elder statesmen. Alexei Tolstoy is already polishing the white horse of his collected works for a triumphant entrance in Moscow.

V. And finally—disturbing the decorous outline—in different corners there are the *individual leftists*. People and organizations (Inkhuk, Vkhutemas, Meyerhold's Gitis, Opoyaz et al.)²³ Some are trying heroically to plow the tremendously hard virgin soil by themselves, while others are still cutting through the shackles of old junk with the files of their verses.

Lef must bring together the leftist forces. Lef must survey its ranks, after having discarded the past that stuck to them. Lef must create a united front to blow up old junk, to fight for the integration of a new culture.

We will solve the problems of art not by majority vote of a mythical left front which so far exists only as an idea, but by action, by the energy of our steering group which year after year leads the work of the left and of those who have always guided it ideologically.

The Revolution has taught us much.

Lef knows.

Lef will:

Working at strengthening the conquests of the October Revolution by strengthening leftist art, *lef will agitate art with the ideas of the commune and open for art the road to tomorrow.*

Lef will agitate the masses with our art, fashioning an organized force within them.

Lef will confirm our theories with an active art, raising art to the highest professional standards.

Lef will fight for the aesthetic construction of life.

We do not simply claim a monopoly on revolutionary spirit in art. We will prove it in open competition.

We believe that through the correctness of our agitation, through the force of the things we are doing, we will demonstrate that *we are on the true path to the impending future.*

N. ASEYEV

B. ARVATOV

O. BRIK

B. KUSHNER

V. MAYAKOVSKY

S. TRETYAKOV

N. CHUZHAK

Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?

The Revolution has shifted the theater of our critical actions.

We have to reconsider our tactics.

"To throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy from the ship of modernity" is our 1912 slogan ("Foreword" to *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*).

The classics were nationalized.

The classics were honored as our only pulp literature.

The classics were considered permanent, absolute art.

The classics with the bronze of their monuments and the tradition of their schools suffocated everything new.

Now, for 150,000,000 people the classic is an ordinary textbook.

Well, now we can even welcome these ordinary books which are no worse and no better than others, and educate the illiterate on them: in our evaluation, we have only to establish the correct historical perspective.

But, with all our might, *we will fight against the transferring of the working methods of the dead into today's art. We will fight against speculations in false clarity, in our affinity with the venerable masters; fight against offering in books dusty classical truths disguised as new and renewing.*

Before, we fought against praise, the praise from bourgeois aesthetes and critics. "We pushed with horror off our brow the wreath of cheap fame made of bathhouse switches."¹

¹"Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?" (V kogo vgryaetsia Lef?), *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), "Program," pp. 8-9.

Now we accept with joy the far from cheap fame which has followed October's step into the modern era.

But *we will strike* on both sides:

against those who with the evil intention of restoring the old ideology assign to the old academic junk an active role in today's world,

against those who preach a class-unconscious, universal art,

against those who replace the dialectics of artistic labor with the metaphysics of prophets and priests.

We will strike on one side, on the aesthetic side:

against those who through ignorance, resulting from their strictly political specialization, pass out the traditions inherited from their great-grandmothers as the will of the people,

against those who regard that most difficult art labor as simply a holiday vacation,

against those who replace the inevitable dictatorship of taste with an institutional slogan of general elementary clarity,

against those who leave a loophole in art for idealistic outpourings about eternity and the soul.

Our previous slogan was: "To stand on the rock of the word 'We' amidst the sea of boos and outrage."²

Now we expect only recognition for the correctness of our aesthetic work in order to dissolve with joy the small "we" of art into the huge "we" of Communism.

But *we will purge our old "we"*:

of all those who try to turn the revolution in art—which is part of the October mandate—into a sort of Oscar-Wildean self-indulgence in aesthetics for aesthetics' sake, revolt for revolt's sake; of those who accept from the aesthetic revolution only the superficial layer consisting of casual methods of struggle,

of those who elevate isolated stages of our struggle to the status of a new canon or model,

of those who, diluting our slogans of yesterday, are trying to sugar-coat themselves into guardians of our already aged innovations, having found cozy stables in fashionable cafés for their tamed Pegasus,³

of those who bring up the rear, are permanently 5 years behind, picking the dry berries of rejuvenated academism from the flowers that we threw away.

We fought the old way of life.

We will fight the vestiges of that way of life in today's society.

We will fight those who replaced the poetry of private houses with the poetry of private house-committees.⁴

Before, we fought the bulls of the bourgeoisie. We shocked the public with yellow blouses and painted faces.

Now we fight the victims of those bulls in our Soviet society.

Our weapons: example, agitation, propaganda.

LEF

Whom Does Lef Warn?

This is to us.

Comrades in Lef!

We know: we are the leftist masters, we are the best workers in the field of contemporary art.

Before the revolution we stored up the most faithful blueprints, the most skillful theorems, the craftiest formulas of the new art forms.

Obviously, the slippery globe-shaped belly of the bourgeoisie was a bad place for construction work.

On the road to the revolution, we stored up a great number of truths, we studied life, we were entrusted with the most real construction of the future ages.

Earth shaken by the rumble of war and revolution is a difficult ground for grand constructions.

We temporarily stashed our formulas away in folders, helping the days of the revolution grow stronger.

Now, the globe of the bourgeois belly is no more.

Sweeping away the old junk with the revolution, we have cleared the ground for the construction of art.

No more earthquakes.

Cemented by blood, the USSR stands firm.

It's time to undertake *big projects*.

The seriousness of our attitude toward ourselves is the only solid foundation of our work.

"Whom Does Lef Warn?" (Kogo predosteregaet Lef?), *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), "Program," pp. 10-11.

Futurists!

Your services to the arts are great; but, do not think you can survive on the interest from yesterday's revolutionary spirit. By your contribution to today, show that your outburst is not the desperate howl of a suffocating intelligentsia, but a battle—working shoulder to shoulder with all the people, with all who strive toward the victory of the commune.

Constructivists!¹

Beware of becoming the next aesthetic school. Constructivism in art alone is a zero. It is a question of the very existence of art. Constructivism must become the highest formalistic engineering of all life. Constructivism in the production of bucolic pastorals is nonsense.

Our ideas must develop out of the things of today.

Productivists!²

Beware of becoming isolated handicraftsmen. Teaching the workers, learn from them. By handing down aesthetic orders to the factory from your offices, you will become mere customers.

Your school is the factory.

Opoyazists!³

The formal method is the key to the study of art. Every flea-rhyme must be taken into account. But beware of catching fleas in a vacuum. Only in conjunction with a sociological study of art will your work be not only interesting, but necessary.

Disciples!

Beware of handing out the accidental distortions of the semiliterate as innovations, as the last word in art. The innovation of the dilettantes is a locomotive on chicken legs.

Only mastery gives the right to set aside the old.

All together!

Moving from theory to practice, think of mastery, of professional skill. The hackwork of the young who have the strength for great achievements is even more repulsive than the hackwork of the feeble academicians.

Masters and disciples of Lef!

The question about our existence is being decided.

The greatest of ideas will die if we do not formulate it artfully.

The most artful forms will remain black threads in a black night, they will generate only vexation and irritation in those who stumble into them if we do not use them to share the present day—the day of the revolution.

Lef is on guard.

Lef is the defense of all creators.

Lef is on guard.

Lef rejects all the fossils, the aesthetes, and the art consumers.

LEF

Our Linguistic Work

The ancients used to divide literature into poetry and prose.

Poetry and prose had their own linguistic canons.

Poetry had its sugared meters (iambs, trochees, or the mishmash of "free verse"), a peculiar "poetic" vocabulary (steed, but not horse; youth, but not boy; and so on, "smiles-unstable" [*ulybki-zybkii*], "birch trees-tears" [*beriozki-sliozki*]), and its "poetic" little themes (it was love last night—now it is flames, blacksmiths).

Prose had its peculiarly stilted heroes (he + she + the lover = novella writers; the intellectual + the girl + the policeman = realist writers; figure in gray + the mysterious woman + Christ = the Symbolists), and its literary-aesthetic style (1. "the sun set behind the hill" + either love or death = "outside the window the poplars rustle"; 2. "I'll tell you this, Vanyatka" + "the president of the orphanage board was drinking hard" = some day we will see the diamonds in the sky; 3. "how strange, Adelaida Ivanovna" + the sinister mystery thickens = in a white wreath of roses).

Ancient poetry and prose were both equally far from practical speech, from street slang, from the precise language of science.

We dispersed the old linguistic dust and retained only the scrap iron of old literature.

We do not want to distinguish between poetry, prose, and practical language. We recognize only a single linguistic material, and we will process it according to today's methods.

"Our Linguistic Work" (Nasha slovesnaia rabota), *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), "Practice," pp. 40–41.

We work on the organization of language sounds, on the polyphony of the rhythm, on the simplification of verbal constructions, on the accuracy of verbal expressiveness, on the manufacture of new thematic devices.

All this work for us is not an aesthetic end in itself, but a workshop for the best expression of the facts of the contemporary era.

We are not priest-creators, but master-executors of the social demand.

Our practice printed in *Lef* is not "absolute artistic revelations,"¹ but examples of work in progress.

Aseyev. Experiment in linguistic flight into the future.

Kamensky. Wordplay in all of its resoundingness.

Kruchenykh. Experiment with the use of jargon phonetics to give form to antireligious and political themes.

Pasternak. Use of dynamic syntax to fulfill the revolutionary task.

Tretyakov. Experiment with march constructions to give an organization to revolutionary anarchy.

Khlebnikov. Achievement of maximal expressiveness by means of conversational language cleansed of all previous poetic elements.

Mayakovsky. Experiment with polyphonic rhythm in narrative poems with broad social scope.

Brik. Experiment with laconic prose on a contemporary theme.

Vittfogel. Experiment with communist agit-skits without the usual imperialistic craziness of revolutionary mysticism.

V. V. MAYAKOVSKY

O. M. BRIK

From Where to Where? (Futurism's Perspectives)

S. TRETYAKOV

All those who wish to define Futurism (in particular, literary Futurism) as a school, as a literary current unified by common devices for the treatment of material, and a common style, find themselves in an extremely difficult position. Usually they have to wander helplessly between different groups—classify the Ego- and Cubo-Futurists, look for intuitions established once and for all and the aesthetic canons related to them, and hesitate in confusion between the “singer-archaist” Khlebnikov, the “tribune-urbanist” Mayakovsky, the “aesthete-agitator” Burliuk, the “transrationalist-grumbler” Kruchenykh. And if to this we add “the specialist in room navigation in the airplane of syntax,” Pasternak, then the landscape will be complete. Still more confusion is caused by those who “fell off” Futurism: Severyanin, Shershenevich, and others. It was so easy to define Futurism in 1913 as a publicity-hungry board of charlatan-acrobats who preached the autonomous word and the eccentric image, but it is rather difficult to recognize that very same Mayakovsky in his transition from “the street, the faces of the Great Danes of years” to the *Mystery* and the “International.”¹

Of course, it's simplest to shout that the Futurists during the past ten years have come to their senses, that they have stopped being Futurists and do not want to abandon their name only out of stubbornness. It was even simpler to state that Futurism never existed: that there were and are talented individuals, very good, of course, and accepted regardless of the “labels” with which they have covered themselves. The

¹“From Where to Where?” (Otkuda i kuda?), *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), “Theory,” pp. 192–203.

most temperamental commentators even got into a white heat and yelled: "Look, they are all different from each other! What kind of a school is this? This is a bluff!" And now? The Futurists conduct their research in the most opposite directions: Meyerhold is heading toward a replacement of illusionistic theater with the demonstration of its working processes; Mayakovsky, realistically simplifying things, tends toward a dynamic plot, detective stories, the boulevard novel of intrigue; on the other hand, there are the extremely complicated phonoconstructions of Kamensky and Kruchenykh. Don't these facts constitute grounds for those joyous charges about the movement's disintegration? But, alas, all these heterogeneous lines get along fine together under the common roof of Futurism, firmly holding on to each other! And at the same time, those who look more Futurist than the Futurists in their techniques—the Imaginists, the Severyaninists, the Nichevoki—are to these very Futurists more alien even than Friche.²

This is how the critics and the average citizen go astray, either mixing up Futurism with all things "left" and incomprehensible, or the opposite, trying to demonstrate the nonexistence of this troublesome fact. But what's the problem?

The problem is that Futurism was never a school, and the mutual cohesion of heterogeneous people into one group was not based, of course, on a factional label. Futurism would not be what it is if it finally settled on some given aesthetic clichés, and ceased to be the revolutionary ferment that without respite impels us toward creativity, toward the search for ever newer forms. Schools may branch out of Futurism, and they do. One can talk about the Mayakovsky school, the Khlebnikov school, the Pasternak school. But, here, one has to be cautious, because the abnormal calm that the popular dead-end concept of "school" carries in itself would be harmful to Futurism, if it does not have an educational purpose.

Dead-end and distorted groups and groupings, having acquired for themselves a kopeck's worth of Futurism, are trying to at least refresh their trash and old rubbish with Futurist varnish, in order to turn it into popular goods, not alien to some kind of "moderne."

It is important to keep in mind that imitation is useful only for learning. One has to assimilate a poet, go beyond his work, and then reject him in the name of independent training, in order to arrive at autonomous devices of work, as is necessary for a class which is creating its own epoch.

We need Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov as emery boards for sharpening linguistic weapons, but certainly not as new Nadsons³ for mass production of "rot-literature" popular with contemporary misses, nor as objects of the new domestic coziness.

Futurism was never a school. It was a socioaesthetic tendency, the strivings of a group of people whose common point of tangency was not even positive tasks, not even a precise understanding of their "tomorrow," but rather a hatred for their "yesterday and today," a relentless and merciless hatred. Fat-assed petit-bourgeois daily life, into which the art of the past and the present (Symbolism) entered as kindred parts, shaping the stable taste of a peaceful, serene, and secure existence, was the fundamental stronghold that Futurism rejected and attacked. The blow to aesthetic taste was just a detail of the more general blow that left a mark on everyday life. Not one of the ultraprovocative stanzas or manifestoes of the Futurists generated as much uproar and shrieking as did their clownishly made up faces, the famous yellow blouse, and the asymmetric suits. The bourgeois mind could bear all sorts of gibes at Pushkin, but it was beyond its strength to bear mockery of pants style, ties, or flowers in the lapel. Of course, Futurism did not succeed in smashing the citadel of bourgeois taste, the social moment was too unsuitable for that, even then; the revolutionary energy that was accumulating began to speak through Futurism, the energy of that class which in five years, no longer through words but by decree, by civil war, by its own merciless dictatorship would proceed to extirpate the channels of petit-bourgeois sensibilities.

From the very first Futurist performances, from the very nature of this work, it was already clear that Futurism aims not so much at the establishment of an aesthetic dogma that would replace Symbolism, as at exciting the human psyche in its entirety, at pushing the psyche toward the greatest possible creative flexibility and toward rejection of all possible canons and concepts of absolute values. Here, Futurism revealed itself as a new world-sense.

The work on this world-sense was conducted gropingly, in the dark, with all sorts of failures and deviations. The driving force behind this work was not a precise notion of the future (we even sensed and announced the revolution already in the air, without an idea of its true nature), but that fat roachfish of everyday life which pressed us from behind.

The poetry of the Futurists, not only agitating for a new idea, was criss-crossed from the very beginning by agit-explosions about the human being sensing the world anew.

Poetry is a worn-out wench
And beauty is blasphemous trash
(Burluk)

The world must fit one's consciousness tightly,
like a blacked boot.

Dyr-Bul-Shchyl

(Kruchenykh)

A barefooted diamond cutter of faceted verse lines
Fluffing up the feather beds in other people's homes,
Today, I'll set fire to the universal feast
Of the rich and the motley poor.

(Mayakovsky)

The creators are set apart from the consumers.

(Khlebnikov)

The steady betrayal of one's own past . . .

(Khlebnikov)

There are brief excerpts from early Futurist works, but Mayakovsky went on with "A Cloud in Trousers," "War and the World," "Man"; Khlebnikov with "Ladomir," and others⁴—on the whole these works were preachings about the new human being.

Propaganda about forging the new human being is essentially the only content of the works of the Futurists, who without this leading idea invariably turn into verbal acrobats; and to this day they still look like jugglers to all those for whom the fundamental preaching of the new world-sense is alien.

The term world-sense—unlike the terms world view or Weltanschauung, which are based on knowledge, on a logical system—denotes the sum of emotional (sensual) judgments that arise in the human being. Since these judgments move along the lines of sympathy and repulsion, friendship and enmity, joy and sadness, fear and courage, it is often difficult to define logically the entire complex fabric of causes and motives that generate these sensations.

No Weltanschauung could be vital if it was not alloyed to a world-sense, if it had not become the living driving force which determines all actions of the human being, his everyday physiognomy.

The level of energy in the individual, the joy in involvement, of fierce persistence devoted to his production collective, the degree of his infectious enthusiasm for work—this is the practical significance of the world-sense.

Futurism as world-sense was born in an extremely difficult and gradual way. It began with sharply individualistic self-assertion, with aimless passion, purely sportive motivations; but little by little it started

recognizing its own social value. In connection with the tasks of the proletariat rising on the horizon of history, it snapped off its unnecessary branches of revolt for revolt's sake, and began to grow through the tensions of the battle alongside the rebellious producers of social values, tensions which only during the revolution acquired tangible forms.

And so, what guided Futurism from the days of its infancy was not the creation of new paintings, verses, and prose, but the production of a new human being through art, which is one of the tools of such production.

The baby was born with teeth.

From the very beginning Futurism already opposed:

The immutability of everyday life and public taste
and all patents on durability,
starting with bronze monuments—
with a protest against all sympathies for the
petit-bourgeois way of life, putting them up
for reevaluation.

The veneration of the fetishes
of beauty, art, and inspiration—
with art as a true production process,
defined by rational organization
of the material, according to a plan based on
social requirements.

Metaphysics, Symbolism, and mysticism—
with the utilitarianism of our constructions.
The construction of real and useful things.

Wasn't the urbanism of the Futurists a blow to the Russia of the provincial landowners—that urbanism so hateful to the enemies of Americanism, those followers of the latest peasant-clad version of Slavophilism who are now trying to resurrect themselves psychologically in the form of all sorts of new-folk-country poems!

And our jeering at the idols: Pushkin, Lermontov, etc.—this was a direct blow to the brains of those who, having absorbed from their school days the spirit of passive submission to authority, never made an effort to understand the true role of Futurism, a role that the now obsolete Pushkin played at his time, introducing into the Francophile salons what were in essence the most ordinary "*chastushki*";⁵ but now, trite and familiar after a hundred years, he has become the measure of refined taste and has ceased to be dynamite! Not the dead Pushkin of

the academic volumes and of the Tverskoy Boulevard,⁶ but a live contemporary Pushkin lives with us a hundred years later in the verbal and conceptual explosions of the Futurists, who today are carrying forward the work that he performed on the language the day before yesterday. Nobody, of course, even took the chance of thinking about this.

The present must be alive—this is the first point of the Futurists' demands. Never encumber the flight of creativity with a fossilized stratum (no matter how highly respected)—this is our second slogan. The Futurist would cease to be a Futurist if he started rehashing even his own things, if he started living on the interest from his creative capital. The Futurist would risk becoming a *petit-bourgeois passéist*, and would lose flexibility and force in his formulation of the problems of method and device in the struggle for a creative, well-conditioned, class-serving human personality.

As Mayakovsky stated in especially sharp terms:

"If there is a people—
Art will join it"

These words first arose at the time of the revolution, when for the first time Futurism was able to recognize in their entirety both its tasks and the significance of the ideas it fostered. If there had been no revolution, Futurism could have easily degenerated into a plaything for the consumption of the sated salons. Without the revolution, Futurism, in forging the human personality, would never have gone beyond the anarchic attacks of the loners and the aimless terrorism of words and paint. It would have been too harmless.

The revolution brought forth practical tasks: action on mass psychology, organization of the class will. The tournaments in the arena of aesthetics came to an end, it was necessary to deal with living life. Futurism put its mind to the "applied" minor arts which are avoided with such disdain by all "the priests of pure, inspired art," who are neither able nor willing to work "on order." Working on the agit-*chastushka*, the newspaper feuilleton, the agit-play, and the march song, the Futurists' calling was strengthened: art in life, toward its complete integration into life! The good-for-nothing who would like to see in all this only hackwork would be making a big mistake—true mastery did not disappear, although the work is now designed to fit today's needs. Here were the first roots of the theory of productivist art as put forth by the Futurists.

In essence, the theory of productivist art holds that the artist's

creativity must not have as its aim all manner of embellishment, but rather must be applied to all production processes. A masterfully made object of practical and expedient use—this is the calling of the artist, who thereby drops from the cast of “creators” into the corresponding workers’ union.

The movement toward a more organized form of human society—the commune—demands the concentration of all types of energy (including here even aesthetic organizing energy) in the shock-brigade direction. The expediency of every effort and the need for the product these efforts engender must be taken into account. Up to now, all arts, and especially literature, have developed more for showing than for service.

The artists contrived to treat even the revolution as a merely narrative plot, without reflecting on the fact that the revolution must reorganize the very construction of speech, of human emotions. As already said, the agitational moment in art was from its youth related to Futurism. The Futurist has always been an instigator-agitator. And revolutionary agitation turned out to be for him not an alien appendage, but the only possible means of applying art in its genuine form to the practical tasks of life. The revolution, for the Futurist, did not become a plot, or an episode, but the only reality, the atmosphere for the daily, continuous reorganization of the human psyche toward the achievement of the commune.

The theory of productivist art dealt primarily with the fine arts, and in fact was marked by a shift of focus from material and volume (Cubism, Futurism) to a compositional assemblage of materials, justified by its practical end (Constructivism), which already represents a big step forward toward “making a useful thing.”⁷

In literature, the theory of productivist art has been merely outlined. Agit-art is only a semisolution to this problem, because agit-art uses “the artistic suspension of disbelief,” i.e., a method from the old art, in order to alienate consciousness from the real environment and lead it through the back streets of fiction so as to place it in front of this or that agit-statement. The latter is thus invested with a great force of impact.

Here, we need to step forward.

The old art is, to a certain extent, a means of mass hypnosis. The sect of creators-producers of aesthetic products is juxtaposed to the inarticulate mass of consumers. The people feel that they are the organizers and managers of this material only when they are in the illusory world. The reader lives with fictitious characters on fictitious roads, performs fictitious deeds and misdeeds, only to return after all that to

the state of an inarticulate and blind atom of a chaotic, unorganized society. And there, in his everyday life, where he really needs the word, he does not find it.

The poet works out words and word combinations, but attributes them to fictitious characters. He is forced to justify his research in the field of speech construction by fiction, while the only justification for the use of speech should be dialectical reality itself, at present equipped with inarticulate, inexpressive speech which fails to keep up with the aspirations of this era. Practical life must be colored by art. Not narratives about people, but living words in living interaction among people—this is the domain for the new application of verbal art. The task of the poet is to produce the living, concretely useful language of his time. This task may seem utopian, since it says: art for everybody—not as a consumer product, but as a production skill. And this task is being accomplished, in the final analysis, through the victory of the organizational forces of the revolution, transforming mankind into a harmonious productivist collective where labor will not be a forced activity as in capitalist society, but will be one's favorite activity, and where art will not call the people into its magic lantern chamber of entertainment, but will color every word, movement, and thing created by the human being, and will become a joyful energy which permeates production processes, even though the price will be the death of those special art products we have today, such as the poem, the painting, the novel, the sonata, etc.

The theoretical task. As a direct consequence, the task of building a new aesthetics and of establishing the correct view on art arises. Metaphysical aesthetics, as well as formalist aesthetics, which talk about art as an activity which generates a particular kind of feelings (the aesthetic suspension of disbelief), must be replaced by the study of art as a means of emotion-organizing action on the psyche, in connection with the problem of class struggle. The separation and opposition of the concepts "form" and "content" must be reduced to a study of the methods for working up the material into a useful object, of the function of this object, and of the means of its employment.

The very term "function" instead of "content" has already appeared in Futurist literature. The understanding of art as a process of production and use of emotion-organizing objects leads to the following definition: form is a task realized on stable material, and content is that socially useful action performed by an object of collective use. The conscious calculation of the useful action of work as opposed to its purely intuitive spontaneous growth and the calculation of the mass of

consumer demand, instead of sending the literary work off "into the world for universal consumption" as was done before—these are the new means of organized action of the art workers.

Of course, as long as art exists in its previous form and remains one of the sharpest class tools for action on the psyche, the Futurists must lead the struggle within this art front, taking advantage of the mass demand for the products of aesthetic production—the struggle for taste—and placing their materialistic viewpoint in opposition to idealism and passéism. On the spine of every literary work, even if it is aesthetically built, there must be in the perception of the consumer a maximum of contraband in the guise of new devices for the treatment of verbal material, in the guise of agitational ferments, in the guise of new militant sympathies and joys which are hostile to the old, slobbering taste which retired from life or is crawling after life on its belly. We will fight from within art, using its own means, for art's destruction, so that verses which were supposed "to give smooth and gentle relief"⁸ will explode like a wad of gun cotton in the reader's stomach.

Thus, these are the two basic tasks which Futurism is carrying out:

1. Having mastered to perfection the weapon of aesthetic expressiveness and persuasiveness, to force the Pegasus⁹ to carry the heavy pack load of practical obligations in agitation and propaganda work. Within art, to carry on a work that will break down art's self-sufficient posture.

2. By analyzing and realizing the driving possibilities of art as a social force, to throw the energy which it generates into the service of reality, and not of reflected life; to color every human production movement with the mastery and joy of art.

In both the first and the second task, what stands out is the struggle for an original system of human experiences, feelings, and characteristic human actions, for the sake of psychological structuring of the human being. Here, an inescapable struggle against banal everyday life is developing.

What we subjectively call everyday life, or more precisely vulgarity (in the etymological sense this word means "vulgarity is," i.e., "established itself"),¹⁰ is the system of feelings and actions which have become automatized by repetition in conformity with a particular socioeconomic basis, which have become a habit, and which are extraordinarily durable. Even the most powerful revolutionary blows are not capable of tangibly smashing this inner life routine, which is an exceptional obstacle to the people's acceptance of the tasks dictated by the shift to productivist mutual relationships. Objectively, we term

everyday life that unchangeable order and character of things with which the human being surrounds himself, to which, regardless of their utility, he turns as fetishes of his sympathies and memories, and of which, ultimately, he becomes a slave.

In this sense, everyday life is a deeply reactionary force, a force which during the crucial moments of social upheavals hinders the organization of class will for delivering the decisive blow. Comfort for comfort's sake; coziness as an end in itself; a whole chain of traditions and a respect for things which are losing their practical significance, from neckties to religious fetishes—this is the everyday-life quagmire which tenaciously grips not only the petty bourgeoisie, but a good part of the proletariat—especially in the West and in America. There, the establishment of an uncritical way of life has become an instrument of the ruling classes to pressure the prolepsyche. One need only mention the activities of those emotionally opportunistic organizations, such as the notorious YMCA in the Anglo-Saxon countries!

Not everyday life in its stagnation and dependence on a stereotyped system of things, but life as reality sensed dialectically, in a process of continuous formation. Reality is the path to the commune which we cannot forget for even a minute. This is the task of Futurism. One has to create the person-worker, energetic, ingenious, solidarity disciplined, who feels the call of duty as a class-creator, and who, without hesitation, puts all his production at the disposal of the collective. In this sense, the Futurist must be, least of all, the owner of his production. He must struggle against the hypnosis of the name, and the patent of priority connected with the name. Petit-bourgeois self-importance, beginning with a name tag on the door and ending with a stone name tag on the grave, is alien to the Futurist; his sense of worth comes from awareness of himself as an essential gear of his production collective. His true immortality lies not in the possible preservation of his own verbal composition, but in the larger and more complete assimilation of his production by the people. It does not matter whether his name is forgotten. What matters is that his achievements enter the life process and there generate new improvements and new training. Not the politics of locked skulls of patented protection against all thoughts, all discoveries and designs, but the politics of skulls open to all those who want, jointly, side by side, to search for a form overcoming both stagnation and chaos in the name of the maximal organization of life. And, at the same time, attacking with sharpness and decisiveness, maneuvering with the greatest flexibility, in the struggle for a new individuality. Where, if not from the RKP,¹¹ must one learn

these brilliant practical dialectics which are shaping the new ethics—the prize and the victory at any cost, in the name of the utmost of achievements, as durable as the North Star!

Now, in the period of the NEP one must conduct the struggle for class consciousness more sharply than ever. NEP from the socio-economic point of view is a silent fight for mastery between proletarian and bourgeois production. NEP from the cultural point of view is the smelting of the primordial pathos of the first years of the revolution into a trained practical effort that will succeed not by dint of emotions and flights of the imagination, but because of organization and self-control. “Bookkeeper’s pathos,” strict control and assessment of every penny of constructive action, the “Americanization” of the personality, parallel with the electrification of industry, demand the smelting of the passionate tribune, who was able to tear through the elemental fault line with a sharp explosion, into a deliberate and businesslike control-mechanic of the new period of the revolution. And this new type of worker must feel a fundamental hatred toward all things unorganized, inert, chaotic, sedentary, and provincially backward. He finds it difficult to love nature the way the landscape painter, the tourist, or the pantheist once did. He is repelled by thick pine forests, untilled steppes, unutilized waterfalls which tumble not according to our order, rain and snow, avalanches, caves, and mountains. He finds beauty in those things upon which one can see the mark of the organizing human hand; he finds greatness in every object of human production designed to overcome, subject, and master the elements and inert matter.

Alongside the man of science, the art worker must become a psycho-engineer, a psychoconstructor. NEP, and with it the entire today’s reality within the RSFSR,¹² is frightening not only because of the onslaught of idealistic belching, the tendency toward the good old way of life, and mysticism (the hallmark of organizational helplessness). Every movement, every step of the people, their inability to achieve harmony in work, even their inability to walk in the street in a sensible way, to get on a streetcar, to get out of an auditorium without crushing each other, is a sign of the counterrevolutionary action of tongue-tiedness, blindness, and lack of training. These are all frightening factors requiring large-scale efforts. And it’s a pleasure to feel that even in the ranks of the proletarian poets there is at least a Gastev¹³ whose propaganda for production training is worth a brilliant poem. People do not know how to talk, they waste an endless amount of time grunting out simple things, but ask them about language as a phenomenon subject to conscious organized action and at once they let out a

cry about "the great, the free, the beautiful," etc., Russian language (mostly smoke-dried, we might add). And the question of a rational suit—is it possible to encroach upon the fashion magazine which dictates to the masses the will of the capitalist manufacturers!! We are not going to go any further—the question of the form of sociopsychological inertia is a rather broad theme not only for the encyclopedia and the system, but also for a good declaration.

Recognizing this fact precisely, and taking up a sharply tendentious orientation toward the communist task, Futurism must delineate the objects of its sympathy and its antipathy, the materials to be processed and those to be discarded.

And if the maximal program of the Futurists is the integration of art and life, the conscious reorganization of language according to the new forms of life, and the struggle for the emotional training of the producer-consumer's psyche, then the minimal program of Futurist-speech-producers is to place their linguistic mastery at the service of the practical tasks of the day. Until art is dethroned from its self-made pedestal, Futurism must use it, opposing it in its own arena: agitation as opposed to daily-life representation; energetic work treatment as opposed to lyric poetry; the inventive adventure novella as opposed to the psychologism of belles lettres; the newspaper feuilleton and the *agitka* as opposed to pure art; the oratorical tribune as opposed to poetic declamation; tragedy and farce as opposed to petit-bourgeois drama; productivist movement as opposed to emotional experiences.

The task of the Futurists must remain agit-work against the old, enervated aesthetics, to the same degree as before, since for the Futurists art can be effective only within a militant movement. Where is the foundation of this work? Where is that society of new consumers which could replace the obtuse clay wall on which Futurism knocked in the year 1913? Such a society exists—it is the workers' audience which is swiftly growing in its self-awareness, and especially the working youth who, to a greater degree than the middle-aged worker, are not afflicted by that bourgeois-daily-life scab of lazy, cautious habitualness characteristic of the older worker, who has been under the petit-bourgeois influence of the village and the urban tradesmanship and handicraft. And for sure, it is to this youth—and not to intellectual audiences—that the semaphores of Futurism are leading.

Only in everyday work with the working masses and with youth is it possible to propel Futurism forward as the world-sense of inextinguishable youth, mocking courage, and stubborn persistence. Futurism has proved to be just such movement by each one of its

stone-cutting lines, leaving its imprint on all the other (not entirely poorhouse) literature of its decade.

The work of Futurism is parallel with and identical to the work of communism; Futurism is fighting for that dynamic organization of the personality without which movement toward the commune is impossible. And since communism, in its gigantic superhuman effort of rooting out the old socioeconomic system, has not yet established and defined its line on the issue of the organization of the individual and the social world-sense to a satisfactory degree, Futurism remains a separate movement with a separate name. Only one other name may in the final analysis replace the name "Futurism"—that is: "Communist world-sense, communist art." Dialectical materialism applied to the problem of organization of the human psyche through the emotions must inevitably lead to that moment when Futurism as a movement, as one of the sociorevolutionary fighting divisions, will be absorbed and assimilated into the world-organizing communist front; it will become a communist world-sense.

Setting up the mileposts of each advancement, Futurism will very shortly feel that it has become something more than a working group which is replacing—continually replacing—the old aesthetic tastes by its new constructions. Futurism, in its fight against everyday life, cannot limit itself to words, wishes, and slogans. It must feel itself in the midst of everyday life as a demolition squad, indefatigable and joyful.

The new human being in reality, in his everyday actions, in the construction of his material and mental life—this is what Futurism must be able to demonstrate. And, if it does not get swamped by the waves of the literary establishment, Futurism will do that, because Futurism is the religion of eternal youth and renewal in persistent work on the appointed task.

Language Creation (On “Transrational” Poetry)

B. ARVATOV

When the works of the “transrationalists” (Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh) first appeared, they were perceived by the public and by the majority of the scholars:

- 1. as an unprecedented fact;*
- 2. as a fact possible only in poetry;*
- 3. as a phenomenon of a purely phonetic order (sound play, “sound combination”);*
- 4. as a sign of the degeneration of poetry and poetic language;*
- 5. as an innovation which did not possess an independent, positively organizing significance, i.e., as something pointless.*

In this article I will try:

- 1. to show that all 5 of these positions are erroneous;*
- 2. to provide a sociological explanation for so-called transreason and its role in poetry.*

As for the last point, I have to limit myself to the formulation of a working hypothesis. The current state of poetics and linguistics does not allow me to lay claim to anything more ambitious.

I

1. In a whole series of “Opoyaz” works (by Yakubinsky, Jakobson, Shklovsky) it has already been established that “transrational” language can be found in writers and poets in all historical periods.

“Language Creation” (Rechetrochestvo), *Lef*, no. 2 (1923), “Theory,” pp. 79–91.

Therefore, I will quote some examples from the studies of the "Opoyazists," and will not dwell any further on this question.

Already Chukovsky, referring to Khlebnikov's poem,

Bobeobi sang the mouth
Veeomi sang the eyes . . .¹

wrote:

"Actually this poem is written in the meter of 'Hiawatha' and of the 'Kalevala.' If it is so sweet to us to read in Longfellow:

Came the Choctaws and Comanches,
Came the Shoshonies and Omahas,
Came the Hurons and Mandans,
Delawares and Mohawks,²

then why do we laugh at Bobeobi and Veeomi? In what way is Choctaws better than Bobeobi? Obviously, in both poems we find a gourmand's relish for exotic, oddly sounding words. Bobeobi is just as 'transrational' to the Russian ear as Choctaws-Shoshonies, and 'gzi-gzi-gzeo.'³ And when Pushkin wrote:

From Rushchuk to old Smyrne,
From Trapezund to Tulcha,⁴

wasn't he delighting himself in the same sort of enchanting orchestration of transrational-sounding words." (Cited by Shklovsky, "About Poetry and Transrational Language," *Poetics*.)⁵

Yakubinsky finds in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* an example of pseudo-French transreason:

1. Vivarika. Vito seruvaru, sidyabnika . . .
2. Kyu-yu-yu . . . letrintala—de bude ba i zatrevagala . . .

Another example:

Ivan Matveevich playfully sang his favorite rhymes:

Vuy nuar ne po si dyabl
sentere zhe se kukh
pon betsima tsiturname
tsiturname tsitama.⁶

Not even the most skillful linguist would be able to figure out the meaning of those words. However, according to Ivan Matveevich,

they contained the complex essence of his agitated feelings. (Cited by Yakubinsky, "About the Poetic Combination of Glossemes," *Poetics*.)⁷

Shklovsky quotes from Gorky: "Sikambr," "Umbraku," followed by a young boy's poem:

Doroga, dvurogo, tvorog, nedotroga,
Kopyto, popyto, poryto . . .⁸

Everybody is familiar with Hamsun's words: "Ylayali," "Kuekha," and Rozanov's "Brandelyasy." The use of "transreason" by the proletarian writers is typical: "drysk," "miakushka," etc. (in M. Volkov's works we find "Zakovyka").⁹

2. "Transreason" is a constant occurrence in practical language, in everyday speech. From my personal practice I may quote: "rakh-chakh-chakh," "tiutelki-potiutelki," "tiutiunechki," "enbentere," "shmarovoz," etc. Among contemporary Moscow actors rhythmical "transreason" is very popular: "lamtsy-dritsa . . . tsa-tsa," and also "iamtil-iamtil."¹⁰

Among the forms found in contemporary society one may note the names of movie theaters ("Union" became a "transrational" word),¹¹ cigarettes ("Mursal," this example is taken from Vinokur, "The Futurists Are the Language Builders," *LEF*, No. 1). To a substantial degree all personal names are "transrational," i.e., lacking any objective meaning (Ivan, Tatyana, Moscow), as are many family names (Kuprin, Timiryazev); people's names have become so distorted by "irrational" use that they have even lost their established connection with the individual as the referent of the given name ("Vaska-the-Cat," "I am standing on Ivan the Great,"¹² etc). That's why many writers of the past showed their love for "transrational" creations through their characters' names: Chichikov, Svidrigaylov¹³ (see Kruchenykh, *The Transrationalists*, Moscow, 1922).

"Transrational" language is especially common among children. Shklovsky quotes:

Pero
Tero
Ugo	Dari-shepeshka
Tero	Topcha-poncha
Pyato	Pineviche
Soto etc.
Ivo
Sivo ¹⁴

Among religious sectarians one often finds examples of poetic and conversational "transreason." This is again an example from Shklovsky:

Pentre fento rente fintri funt
Nodar misentrant popontrofin.

And further:

1. Nasontos resontos furr lis
Natrufutru natri sifun.
2.
Savitray sama
Kaptilastra gandrya
Sunkarda nurusha
Myak ya divi lucha.
Etc.¹⁵

It is interesting to note the traditional use of "transrational" forms in the telegraph code adopted in communications among industrial firms. However, "transreason" here is only apparent because in reality it is a conventional substitution for precisely established linguistic facts. Nevertheless, "transrational" creativity is undoubtedly there and, therefore, invites linguistic treatment.

As will be shown in what follows, in practical language the range of distribution of "transreason" is significantly broader and deeper than one might conclude from the examples cited above. For the time being, however, those examples suffice to disprove the current opinion that "transrational" forms are meaningless in everyday life: they are there—this means that they do have some kind of social relevance. Exactly what kind will be explained in the next section.

3. People tend to see "transreason" as a "combination of sounds," and if they recognize its formal significance it is only as a musical or acoustic value. "Transreason" appears to be an abstract, phonetic composition. This concept alone would be enough to put "transrational" forms outside the domain of verbal forms, because language in all its manifestations possesses three continuous and necessary facets: phonetic, morphological-syntactic, and semantic. And yet, we talk about "transrational" *language*, the "transrational" form of *speech*. Finally, the problem of "transreason" would never have been raised if it did not fall into the range of linguistic facts. "Transreason" is interesting precisely because it is not a mere combination of sounds (recita-

tive, melody, vocal music), but a form which is pronounced and realized in a social context (verses, conversation, the flagellants' ecstasy, lovers' talk), i.e., a form of language.

The critics' mistake comes down to the following.

Any act of life is realized in a strictly defined environment and is completely dependent on it. In other words, the function of every single phenomenon is totally determined by the presence of a universal, canonical mass model based on phenomena of the same type. In exactly the same way, every pronounced-sound composition is inevitably perceived against the background of a given language system, and consequently penetrates it as a new element, subordinates itself to all the norms, and becomes active only because we associate this new composition with the usual forms of our language creation.

In this sense, there are not, and there cannot be, purely phonetic forms. Any combination of sounds is necessarily connected to the semantic values habitually associated with these and with other similar combinations of sounds, with analogous morphemes, etc. That is why "transreason" is not a phonetic, but a phonological (Jakobson's term), and even morphological, phenomenon.

Tretyakov correctly writes about the works of Kruchenykh (see *The Bogeyman of Russian Literature*, Moscow, 1923):

" Sarcha krocha . . .
where there is *parcha* [brocade], *saryn'* [mob], *rychat'* [to growl].
and *krov'* [blood]¹⁶

The much-talked-of "verses":

Dyr bul shchyl
Ubeshchur
etc.

are perceived as a series of stems, prefixes, etc. with a specific sphere of semantic characteristics (*bulyzhnik* [cobble-stone], *bulava* [mace], *bulka* [roll], *bulykh* [plop], *dyra* [hole], etc.).

In other words, transrational forms possess the properties of that language system with which they are associated. They are integral linguistic facts, which do not differ formally from the already existing linguistic material. In order to stress this point, I put the words "transreason," "transrational" etc. in quotation marks: a meaningless, absolutely transrational, speech is impossible. The individual is the product and the crystallization of the collective, and therefore every manifesta-

tion of his vital activities has a social character; the "unintelligible" mumbling of a sleeping person, or the screams of the mentally deranged, are as much social acts as an ordinary conversation about today's weather. The question is actually our degree of understanding—a quantitative, rather than a qualitative difference (parents understand the "transreason" of their children better than outsiders do).

The classification of such words as Shoshonies, Mursal, Union, "drysk" as "transreason" causes some confusion. However, in reality, *in practice*, in our day, it does not matter whether a given form is a new invention (ex.: "krocha"), has been historically formed (ex.: "Ivan"), or has been borrowed from a foreign language ("Mursal"); in all three cases that form is used "transrationally"; the only condition essential to that use is social recognition. "Ivan" is commonly known as a Russian male name; "Union" is commonly known as a foreign word; "drysk" is recognized by the context as folklore, etc. The only important fact is that the given form be referred to some language system; this suffices to give it social validation. Therefore, Kruchenykh was right when he wrote about the national quality of his "dyrbulshchyl." Only in that national quality can one find the basis of the objective significance of a given kind of "transreason."

The extent to which the "transrationalists" were aware that their work proceeded from these premises is revealed by those examples where the poets deliberately built poetic forms on the level of a defined, precisely codified language. I will quote only Kruchenykh's experiments in "German" "transreason":

Der giben gogay klops shmak
Ays, vays pyus, kaperdufen . . .
Bitte . . .

in "Tartar" "transreason":

Khyr-byr-ru-ta
Khu-ta
Ychazhut
Zhachygun
Khalbir kharakha
Ba-chy-ba
R-ska

In "Caucasian" "transreason":

Muekh
Khitsi

Mukh
Ul
Lam
Ma
Uke

And also

Shokretyts
Mekhytso
Lamoshka
Shksad
Ua
Tyal.

There is only one difference between Khlebnikov's "bobeobi" and "Mursal": the latter has a formal, "skeletal," traditional-normative motivation. The conservative consciousness demands that a given word ("Mursal") at a given place and time fulfill a precise, practical function, and it is content only with such a self-validation. But, in the works of Khlebnikov or Kruchenykh, the transrational form is laid bare, is given without any disguising delusions, as the product of a conscious process of language-creation.

4. Kruchenykh defines transrational forms as having an indefinite meaning. Actually, it would be more correct to say: function. Kruchenykh's definition (see above: "*sarcha krocha*," etc.) is correct, but incomplete. The negative definition circumscribes, but does not "define." The basic and positive characteristic of "transreason" is the innovative nature of its forms. Any kind of "transreason" introduces into the system of a given practical language certain devices which are unusual for that system and which extend beyond the limits of the "accepted" formulas. On the formal level, certain names possess such properties: they enrich the verbal material ("Mursal"). As a consequence, not only can a transposition of sounds be "transrational," but so can a syntactic or semantic transposition: "a square soul," Kruchenykh noted, is as "transrational" as "bobeobi." Khlebnikov's syntax is often "transrational":

"Then to the woods a dark man was visible."

"And in answer to the request to run a race."¹⁷

Etc.

The "transrational" is anything which adds to the common mass of devices used in everyday speech newly created devices which do not

have a specific communicative function ("Cheka"¹⁸ is not a "transrational" word, because it has a predetermined objective meaning which is necessary for fulfilling its straightforward utilitarian tasks). Pure "transreason" is thus understood only as an extreme expression, which takes the realization of the language-creation process to its limits. The difference between "bobeobi" and any other compositional innovation, for example any inversion, is only quantitative. Methodologically, these phenomena are of the same order. Consequently, Jakobson is right when he remarks that all poetry has a relatively "transrational" character, even the poetry of Pushkin, Nekrasov, and others. Every time we rearrange the word order (inversion), the elements of the word itself (neologism), or some other materials (for example, the poetic etymology of the word), we add to our speech something "transrational," something that is not required from a practical standpoint. In other words: any manipulation of the form, of the quality of speech, of its style, any linguistic experiment carries in itself the features of "transrationality."

I will cite Jakobson's example of poetic etymology (in *New Russian Poetry*, 1 edition):¹⁹ the proverb "Strength breaks the straw [Sila solomu lomit]." This sentence is built in such a way that the middle word seems to be formed from the two neighboring ones. For practical purposes, one could say: "The strong beats the weak [*silnyi slabogo pobezhdaet*]," but in the proverb additional linguistic work has been performed, assonant words have been chosen in a specific way, so that together they express meaning by way of a metaphor. Socially, this type of work is utilitarian, because this coupling of words acquires an aural and a psychoassociative expressiveness, it is easily memorized, etc., i.e., it fulfills the task of orally transmitted proverbs. This evaluation is valid if we analyze the given sentence as a concrete form of social life (the proverb). It is sufficient, however, to approach it simply as a linguistic form, i.e., to analyze it from a purely linguistic point of view in order to consider its "poetic etymology" as a "transrational" phenomenon, as an additional, new element not directly necessary for expressing meaning, i.e., in practice not mandatory for the existing language system—as an aesthetic element, which at first sight in no way contributes to the development of the language itself.

All that has been said above must be applied in full to any word-play—puns, witticisms, synonyms, and homonyms—to every "bon mot" arising in practical speech. All of them are "transrational" forms, a "transrational" operation on the language which does not have a specific communicative function, which is undefinable in a practical sense, and which is always additional and new. These are all devices

and forms in the social process of language creation. Their practical significance will be explained below.

The question of the term itself remains to be discussed. The term "transreason" was a good one while we were fighting against the "ideologism" of the old poetry; from a scientific point of view, of course, this term will not pass the test of serious criticism. The individual types of "transrational" works must be classified under perfectly defined linguistic categories of the language-creation process (phonology, syntactic composition, etc.).

5. What has been said above is sufficient to dispel the myth of the degenerate nature of "transrational" poetry. Language creation cannot be decay or corruption: language creation is a positive organizing force. I am now going to turn to the question of the influence of "transrational" creations on the canons of bourgeois poetry.

II

1. In what follows, I will not talk about "transreason," but about compositional language creation as a universal phenomenon which includes pure "transreason" as one particular element. I use the term "compositional language creation" as opposed to the term "communicative language creation," which produces those verbal forms which have already received a precisely determined function in the practical language (the "Boborykin intelligentsia," the contemporary "sov-dep," etc.).²⁰ Conversely, compositional language creation does not have any practical foundation, and at first sight it seems to be an end in itself. Therefore, fiction and poetry, and all aspects of social "word-play" (see above) appear to be the main forms of this kind of language creation.

One must ask: what social significance does compositional language creation have, and first of all in its everyday uses.

Every language system has two components: the material and the forms in which this material is contained. Language is society's live, flowing energy, evolving together with it and dependent on it. However, like any other form of energy, language can be socially realized only when it employs those forms which are "generally understood"—that is, firmly established skeletal forms—when it freezes into immutable, permanent crystals. Naturally, such social formulas kill the verbal material, turn the language energy into static energy, and are therefore in clear opposition to the language's need to de-

velop. The evolutionary tendencies of the language run up against its frozen forms and need to find a way to break through these forms, in order to bring about their destruction, transformation, or, at least, partial displacement. But for the forms to be able to change, to be altered, they must possess one indispensable property: plasticity. However, the practical forms of speech which demand definiteness do not allow any "freedom," or, equivalently, plasticity. Utilitarianism is always associated with the strictest fixation of devices. And yet, bourgeois society, naturally, unconsciously, achieves language plasticity outside of the directly utilitarian sphere of action: in puns, witticisms, facetious sayings, "illustrative" similes, etc. Within this language-creation process, mass-produced daily, millions of devices, forms, neologisms, new roots, etc. are born. All of this newly formed reserve of terms which do not have precise, objective use enters into the sphere of practical action, is subjected to a thorough natural selection, and becomes a unique sort of army "reserve" of language, from which new practical forms are drawn—forms which are no longer part of compositional language creation, but of communicative language creation.

For example, all the contemporary abbreviated and spliced words that were born of the revolution ("sovdep," "Cheka," "Lef," etc.) could not have made their appearance if, previously, there had not been in everyday "experiments," in social "transreason," word parts which were separated from one another and spliced with parts of other words. Word plasticity was an essential condition enabling the telegraph to produce the practical form "top-of-tops" [*glavkoverkh*]. Compositional language creation is the unconscious experimental laboratory of communicative language creation. Consequently, poetry is also such a laboratory. Not coincidentally long before all "sovdeps" in 1914, Kamensky turned the expression "*mirovoe utro*" (world morning) into "*mirutr*" (in *The Croaked Moon*), and Kruchenykh in our own time turned the expression "*zverinaia orava*" (savage crowd) into "*zverava*" (in *The Starving One*).²¹

Since revolutionary periods in the history of language are directly linked to a high degree of plasticity, one can assume the existence of the following sociolinguistic law: the language of the revolutionary, culturally qualified social groups must abound in verbal "play." Some empirical data confirm the correctness of this conclusion: for example, the journalistic works of the Humanists and the "Sturm und Drang," Marx's articles, contemporary "leftist" literature, etc.

Children's language and psychotics' language also display a high degree of compositional language creation, although for other reasons: in children's language there is a great deal of plasticity thanks to

the fact that the skeletal forms have not yet solidified; in the psychotics' language, they have already died.

2. Thus, poetry has never been anything but an *experimental* laboratory of language creation. But until Futurism appeared, poetry's social role was not acknowledged, it was hidden under the fetishistic cover of poetic canons and other similar "ideological" principles. Experimentation went on chaotically, in an uncoordinated, and incomplete way.

The historical significance of the "transrationalists" lies precisely in the fact that they were the first to reveal this ever-present role of poetry through the form of their works itself. The "transrationalists" laid the poetic form bare and began to do, openly and consciously, what until their time had been done unconsciously. Thanks to them, the sphere of the creative process broadened, as did its methods and the sum of its achievements. Poets turned into conscious organizers of verbal material. This brought about the destruction of the boundaries limiting language creation: the poet was no longer tied by compulsory traditional norms, and freedom of experimentation—the only condition for an expediently organized action—was achieved. It was not by chance that Khlebnikov created many of his innovations outside of the poetic canons—they were presented in their naked form, precisely as experiments (see, for example, his article on neologisms derived from the word "letat'" [to fly] in the almanac *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*).

Conscious creation differs from spontaneous creation mainly because it is organized, planned, and systematic. While, for example, compositional work on the word "to love" has always been undeliberate and inconsistent, we find in Khlebnikov's works a few pages especially devoted to neologisms from that root. This is a concentrated, quantitatively rich, and widely elaborated supply of laboratory material. In the past, for example, the methods for the creation of neologisms were unsystematic, but Khlebnikov shows us a classified system of works; he produces, although rather primitively, the "normals" of language creation, and by so doing he facilitates the process of language organization and brings it into the stream of primary technical rules. In this sense, to use Mayakovsky's expression, Khlebnikov is a poet for the producers, a poet for the poets.

For example, he quotes words created from a given root:

1. O, laugh it out, you laughsters;
O, laugh it up, you laughsters.
Why they laugh with laughsters, why they laugh belaulgh-
ingly . . .²²

2. Go, mightknight!
 Stride, mightknight! mightster, mightster!
 Mightful one, I'm mighty!
 Mighty one, I might! all-mighty, I might!
 The mightrichness of the mightrich, etc.²³

or from a given form:

1. Twist it, turn it inside out
 Clever juggler!
 Twisted-curls twisted-clouds
 Twisted-pains, twisted-legs
 Twisted-togas twisted-clouds, twisted-evenings twisted-eyes . . .²⁴
2. We sing for you, Rodun
 We sing for us, Byvun,
 We sing for you Radun . . .²⁵

[.]

An example from Khruchenych:

Starvcrowd . . . Starvman . . .
 Starvation . . . Wildstarvation . . . Starvwoman . . .
 Starv-oar, roar
 Woarld croaked . . .²⁶

Also from Kruchenykh, with reference to "poetic etymology":

1. Frost . . . blizzardrost. . . .
 Blizzard . . . frostard . . .
2. Buzzes the earth, itches the earth . . .²⁷
 Etc.

It is not the task of this article to analyze language-creation devices; therefore, I will limit myself to the examples quoted above.^a

3. In the article mentioned above, "The Futurists Are the Language Builders," Vinokur raises the question of the practical use of "trans-

a. About Khlebnikov, see the excellent work by Jakobson, *New Russian Poetry*, 1st edition (Prague, 1921).

rational" creation, and answers it in the following way: "transrational" words do not have an objective meaning and they appear to be isolated, a nonsocial fact. Their use in society is possible only to the degree that society accepts "transreason," that is, as names (see above, "Union," "Mursal," etc.). According to Vinokur, cigarettes could just as well be named "Euy" (a "transrational" word by Kruchenykh) and it would be as legitimate as the existing "Ira."

I have already discussed the social nature of "transreason."

Now, I will turn to its social use in nomination. Every nomination arises not accidentally, not spontaneously—not out of an individual's wish or a social contract. Names belong to the order of social tradition.^b It is a common practice, for example, to borrow cigarette names from foreign languages ("Mursal," "Java," "Kir," etc.) or from qualifiers ("English," "Ambassador," etc.). A typical example of the origin of names is what occurred recently with the work "Nanuk" in London. "Nanuk" was the title of a movie; the movie was an unprecedented, universal success, and the word "Nanuk" became more popular than Lloyd-George. Immediately, the cigarette brand "Nanuk" came out, the candy "Nanuk," etc.

If Kruchenykh's term "Euy" became popular for some reason, cigarettes by that name might become socially acceptable, but not otherwise.

It is not inconceivable that the director of some tobacco factory would decide to name his products with Kruchenykh's "transrational" vocabulary. But this would be just a unique, accidental occurrence.

It cannot happen any other way. The social use of experimental achievements always presupposes the presence of a firm criterium, of a purpose. But "transreason" has no purpose and cannot have one.

A *direct* social use of *ready-made products* generated by individualistic "transrational" language creation is impossible. Vinokur's proposal is as utopian as Kruchenykh's and Khlebnikov's fantasies about a "universal" language which would originate from "transreason."

One must also reach the same conclusion with regard to other products of language creation: neologisms, etc. All of them are significant not because of their form, but because of their methods of formation. Forms, in their invariant aspect, are assimilated by society only by chance, as an exception rather than a rule. And this is understandable. Poetic language, by and large, is based on its opposition to practical language, and the *direct* transplanting of the poetic product

b. One should sharply distinguish between verbal names and conventional symbols: for example, algebraic signs, ciphers, graphics, etc.

into the ground of the practical language is impossible in the wide majority of cases. When we find in society new verbal forms that first appeared in poetry, they usually turn out to be original social products. They originate independent of individual, conscious and intentional creation, but parallel to it: for example, the words "letun," "letnyi," "poletchik,"²⁸ invented by Khlebnikov in 1913 are of this type; much later, these words appeared again for a second time, and with no relation to Khlebnikov, in the professional jargon of aviation.

4. Thanks to the "transrationalists" and the Futurists in general, language creation moved from the stage of spontaneity to the stage of consciousness. But it persists in remaining nonutilitarian in function and, consequently, anarchoemotional, "intuitive," and "inspirational" in method.^c It would be ridiculous to deny the achievements of the "transrationalists" not only on the theoretical plane (a revolution in "point of view"), but also in the sphere of concrete inventions. The "transrationalists" were the first to clear the way for linguotechnique (analogous to: psychotechnique, biotechnique, psychoanalysis, Taylorism, industrial energetics, etc.). There is hardly any need for further evidence of their progressive work. Our epoch is characterized by the fact that mankind, because of the increasing collectivization of the productive forces of society, is moving from *systematicity in knowledge* (in this case, theoretical linguistics) to *systematicity in practice, to organization* (the construction of language). Mankind is beginning consciously and intentionally to create and advance those elements of life that, up to now, seemed to be beyond the jurisdiction of society's organizational-practical interference (psychology, the "laws" of physiology, the labor process and along with these, language). Transition to this kind of activity is achieved gradually: through individual experiment (Taylor, Steinach, Kravkov, Freud, Khlebnikov, etc.),²⁹ from isolated attempts, to collective, scientifically recognized, and systematically organized experimentation with a concrete social and technical purpose.

Only when theoretical linguistics shifts to constant cooperation with language creation in the field of practical production (magazine, newspaper, professional jargon, etc.); only when the inventors are no longer guided by their own personal motives, but by the recognized demands of the sociolinguistic process of production—only then will the products of compositional language creation also become, after natural selection, useful products of communicative language crea-

c. Khlebnikov's works, for example, are overflowing with archaisms clearly unfit for everyday use.

tion. The linguistic form will be generated as a concrete form for practical use (for example the formation of slogans through the method of "poetic etymology," etc.). The language will be built as a direct social tool.

Some attempts are already being made in the West and in Russia in technical intellectual circles to pose scientifically the problem of style in practical literature—in newspapers and magazines. But problems of style are problems of compositional language creation.

Therefore, we observe two similar processes: the practical language assimilates the problems of the poetic language, while the poetic language aims at becoming utilitarian. The synthesis of these two processes, it seems, will take place in the near future, and will depend on the degree that the social collectivizing tendencies remain active and are not eliminated by historical regression. Since the possibility of such an occurrence is minimal, we can draw the following conclusion: a course of action to achieve organized language creation must become the fighting slogan of the day. The engineering culture of language (Vinokur's expression) is the practical task of our epoch. The "trans-rationalists" are its partial, individualistic heralds—the proletariat must become its complete realizers.

Lef to Battle!

Some to Lef, some for firewood^{a 1}

The first two issues of *Lef*, just as we expected, have generated an extraordinary upsurge in the literary industry.

Lef welcomes the fiery debate needed by the revolution.

Lef answers all who put it on the list of the deceased with a firm ho-ho-ho! . . .

Lef is consolidating interest in itself—the resentful interest of some and the friendly interest of others.

The best proof of this is the July 3rd debate in the Conservatory auditorium. The auditorium is full beyond capacity.

600 young people break down the barriers at the entrance.

The supportive speech of the worker Sukhanov:

"Lef is the gravedigger of bourgeois art."

Friendly support for Lef on the part of the younger generation.

The opponents are helpless, they vent their bitterness by denying even the possibility that proletarian culture might exist.

A. V. Lunacharsky² dissociates himself from these statements.

He recognizes Lef's industrialism as a tremendous achievement.

The third issue of *Lef* comes out under the attentive gaze of those who are awaiting Lef's answer.

We answer the volley with sustained fire.

We stand firmly on the concrete of the sympathy of those who need

¹ "Lef to Battle!" (Lef k boiu!), *Lef*, no. 3 (1923), "Program," p. 3.

^a Oak, pine, aspen, and other Species.

Lef's experiments and the advancement of art in the thick of revolutionary work.

Lef's command:

To the left—

single file—

forward march!

LEF

Lef's Tribune

Lef makes use of its tribune in order to answer accusations of a, so-to-speak, basic nature that have been raised time and again for ten years, at literally every meeting on Futurism.

In order not to answer these questions for the thousandth time, Lef will provide a general answer and will refer its opponents to the appropriate page of this journal.

THE FUTURISTS ARE CHARLATAN ADVERTISERS

This is one of the oldest accusations. Only the statement: *The Futurists are a bunch of madmen* came earlier. But the latter has already disappeared from the scene. Life evolves, notwithstanding.

Madness can no longer be cited to prove anything when the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism* uses letters scattered as though by an explosion on its cover, when *Pravda* prints slogans and headlines with letters of different sizes and in different positions, when linguistics and poetics make transrational poetry an object of study and find for it a *normal* place in the organic language system.

This argument has migrated abroad where it is used by the soft-spoken "normal" idiots of the emigration to cover not only Futurism, but the whole proletarian revolution ("Mass psychosis," "Red insanity").

"Lef's Tribune" (Tribuna Lefa), *Lef*, no. 3 (1923), "Theory," pp. 154–64.

However, "charlatan-advertisers"?

A charlatan is one who sells people a low-quality product while concealing its poor quality.

An advertiser is one who shamelessly attracts public attention to his product.

The epithet "*advertiser*" referred mainly to two things: the strange, unusual exterior appearance of the Futurists (they dressed in gaudy, *unpleasant* outfits—Mayakovsky's yellow blouse—they painted their faces), and the Futurists' statements about the necessity, the originality, the greatness of their poetry and the poetry of their adherents.

These people are ungifted, wanting to attract attention to themselves not by means of their poetry's *great content* but by the *boom*, the fuss, the phony effects surrounding their performances!

That's what they were shouting about the Futurists.

One must recall that operating in a deeply *passéistic* milieu (saturated with an idolatrous respect for the past), the Futurists could not wait for their declarations and new poetic forms *by themselves*, gradually and unobtrusively, to breach the thickness of bourgeois consciousness. That way was too slow. Besides, the "thoughtful and ingratiating" whisper of an unpretentious conversation over a cup of tea would have been too poor a propaganda tool for those who called art out into the city streets and squares.

There was concern only about the device's effectiveness, not at all about its ethics. However, what kind of ethics could there be with regard to the bourgeois-intellectual middle class? In order to make yourself heard you have to turn ears in your direction, and in order to make ears turn you have to call out loud.

The call was heard.

Now, the other side of our advertising campaign: the insult to good taste, "the slap in the face of public taste."

Raising a voice against ingrained manners, habits, and notions; striking the beautiful, the tender, the gracious and other such delights of idle minds in the name of the oncoming men of truthful, direct, and strong action, men of simple and sharp judgment; the Futurists incorporated this protest into the very forms of propaganda for their group (their advertising).

"Are you wearing a jacket? Well, trade your jacket for this yellow blouse!

Not possible? Why not?"

"You, young man, have made up your face to underscore your natural features, as fashion dictates—you lined your eyebrows, your lips, under your eyes. . . .

I, too, will make myself up, although differently—I'll paint stripes all over my face.

Not possible? Why? This is also color, and also skin."

"You, sir, have put a small bouquet in your buttonhole? And I will put a wooden spoon in mine. You have put a flower in your front pocket, and I'll put it in my pants fly. What are you shouting for, young man?"

The philistine soul could not stand that kind of insult, an insult to fashion, to all that was socially accepted, established, solid. It would have been good if the soul agreed: "Let them fool around." But, no. It pranced, stamped its hooves, and squealed like a live pig.

This was the trench that the Futurists dug between themselves and the philistine on the front of art and of material existence. And they dug it with sharpness unprecedented in the history of culture. Because of this "advertising," the Futurists immediately became outlaws. And to this day, there are dilettantes whose sacred jacket got insulted by our yellow blouse back then, and who are not against taking that blouse out of the closet of history and producing it as material evidence of "Futurist scandal." But they forget that this yellow blouse, which has already become a great symbol of protest against philistine fetishism, must remain at the ready for any question, at any point in social construction.

Now, as for being charlatans.

Being charlatans, the Futurists knowingly prepared products which were unfit for social use and in a deceptive way foisted them off on the consumer, making a profit for themselves. Isn't that so?

Time has shown the following:

1. Because of their challenging position and the cleverness of their belligerent slogans, the Futurists denied themselves the possibility of getting published, except in independently scraped-together crumbs.

2. Since the Futurists were "not allowed in the house" of prerevolutionary philistinism, the philistine did not take them seriously a priori, having been infused with the badgering and hooting of the gang of newspaper and nonnewspaper critics.

3. The label "Futurist" (which in the language of the philistine meant first of all "unreliable") very often was a great obstacle for the Futurist in the performance of his nonliterary work as well.

All this made it extremely difficult for the audience to assimilate the principles and the production of the Futurists, all the more so because the Futurists did not cook light, ready-to-swallow cud, but proposed for art the condition of being difficult; this difficultness was characteristic of the path of replacing the marinated language of old poetry

with a constant, conscious elaboration of language according to the tasks imposed on speech use by life.

Nevertheless:

1. When October called upon art to do the work that the "fine arts" have always considered dirty (agitational materials, posters, popular songs, slogans, feuilletons), the Futurists showed what an enormous role their work on sound, image, and rhythm played in the linguistic resolution of these problems.

2. The younger generation of poets learned from the works of the Futurists, even while they were abusing them in abusive language. Bryusov, a man who could easily be suspected of lack of sympathy toward Futurism—since he is one of the Symbolist poets who served mainly as a target of Futurist attacks—characterizes literary Futurism as a group whose presence has made the past decade beautiful.

3. The works of the Futurists prepared the ground for extremely important research in the field of language (the Opoyaz group), which in its turn is preparatory work for the establishment of a science of conscious language construction. And this represents a significant victory of the proletariat (the class-organizer) on the cultural front.

If the Futurists also made more than a few unsuccessful experiments, they were the first to reject them as soon as their unsuitability became clear; furthermore, usually the Futurists themselves disclosed these failures, firmly criticizing themselves and energetically proceeding along the path of research toward new forms necessary for the epoch. So where is the charlatanry? Where is the poor-quality product? Where is the profit in being a Futurist?

Khlebnikov died a pauper. How many Futurists manage to survive on the profits of their *literary* work?

And yet, if any of the Futurists would retreat to the rear and start writing little verses and poems in "honest" Pushkin iambs, his livelihood would be guaranteed. And the Futurists know how to write in iambs, because advanced research into new forms is inconceivable without a thorough knowledge of the devices of previous literary groups.

FUTURISM IS THE REFUSE OF DECAYING BOURGEOIS ART, HOW DARE IT CALL ITSELF PROLETARIAN ART

It's absolutely true, Futurism was born and raised in the environment of bourgeois society. It's equally true that all its activities were

aimed at the rapid destruction of fetishistic, self-centered, chaotic, and individualistic bourgeois art.

Can one blame Futurism and find it guilty for that? No.

That Futurism grew up in a bourgeois-capitalist environment is just as true as that the whole movement of revolutionary socialism grew up and developed in that same environment.

What matters is that Futurism, using devices and methods for treatment of literary material built up from the time of its inception, became the antithesis of bourgeois art, which had only been able to lead the public away from life into a romantic-symbolist fantasy to reflect reality, but was not able to *build* this reality. Futurism was born at the time when art in its entirety became a "created legend"¹ for the salons (and for the philistine masses eager to imitate those salons), and sharply opposed to that legend real, though rough, life; to idealistic flights into a higher world it opposed the machine; to language that tickled the ear lightly and pleasantly it opposed words as rough as blackened boots.² Futurism was the antithesis of bourgeois art, and only from the point of view of bourgeois art could it be called refuse.

But, they say, excuse me! What about Severyanin, Marinetti?³

As for the first, let's say that he made his formal contribution but got stuck in one place, composing restaurant romances for each and every admirer of the "refined." At this point, Futurism parts company with him. Didn't Futurism have more than a few fellow travelers? Didn't the Imaginists abandon Futurism when the basic core of Futurism proclaimed that service to the proletarian revolution was its only and inexhaustible task? A fellow traveler is good and necessary up to a point, beyond that he becomes either a dead weight or an enemy.

As for Marinetti and Italian Futurism, what he and the Russian Futurists have in common (besides the rotten eggs that the Russian Futurists threw at Marinetti in Moscow in 1913) is that their *basic sphere of interests*, as opposed to passéism (the sanctuary of all antiquities and traditions), *focused on the industrial* production of our era. Industrialism is the highest form of the organization of production. Capital links up with it because industrialism is its tool for profit and power over the proletariat. The proletariat is struggling to take possession of that same industrial machine. Capital breaks up outmoded bourgeois production units. It needs qualified workers and specialists (it lets workers share the profits, establishes for them better living conditions, Taylorizes them), but it is careful not to allow its slaves to get organized on an international scale and keeps them divided by means of the psychological barriers of nationalist ambition; it inoculates them with the ethics of moderation and submissiveness, which guarantee

order. It needs soldiers willing to fight. But the nation's "great past" is by now unconvincing, therefore these soldiers are inoculated with the adventurism of a fight for a "great national future," which conceals behind its facade the seizure of markets, colonies, neighboring territories, etc. In this way, the Futurism of Marinetti, vociferously supporting nationalism and imperialism, finds its justification and application in capitalist society.

Russian Futurism, on the other hand, received its charge from the Russian revolutionary proletariat, which through the events of October called forth the RSFSR⁴ to electrification and industrialization.

And Futurism, by cooperating in the creation of versatile, inventive, daring people, who have nothing to lose behind them and before whom awaits the happiness of the world commune, has not only been consciously fulfilling this task since October, but to a significant degree (albeit unconsciously) had already objectively been serving the interests of the working class: (1) by dispersing the fog of the "eternal, absolute, fatal, traditionalistic" in bourgeois art, which had also enveloped the minds of proletarians growing up in that bourgeois milieu, (2) by reinforcing the protest against petty bourgeois lifestyle, morals, wars, to which Mayakovsky's works bear witness, beginning with "A Cloud in Trousers," "War and the World," etc.

The Marinetti issue must be put to rest. He is our enemy, although he bears the same name: Futurist. He is no less of an enemy to Russian Futurism than the Mensheviks are to communism, although they, too, carry a common slogan: "Proletarians of all countries, unite." What matters is not the word, but how and for what it is used.

The path of Russian Futurism has been difficult since the day of its birth. It was born in a poisoned atmosphere, it was fed poisoned food. But a deadly hatred for that atmosphere and that food, together with rigorous self-criticism and self-examination, made it possible for Futurism not to dwell on its early achievements, but to move forward, propelled by a sense of dialectical reality and by the principle of social expediency.

But how dare it call itself proletarian art?

A remark. The first person to link the words "Futurism" and "proletarian poet" was Lunacharsky,⁵ who in 1918 characterized *Mayakovsky* as a marvelous *proletarian poet*. Later, comrade Chuzhak⁶ discussed Futurism as proletarian art. As for the Futurists, they did not lay any claims to this title. Actually, is it possible to talk about proletarian art now, in a transitional period? No. Now one can only feel out the paths which might lead one to proletarian, and through it, to communist art. Now one can only assess those art movements which

are *objectively necessary* to the proletarian revolution, which consolidate, reinforce the proletariat, the class which is the organizer of the great fight against capital. Only in this sense did comrade Chuzhak call Futurism a proletarian art: in the sense of its speech-organizing role, its productivist approach to work on words, its fierce protest against the use of trite literary forms, the toxins of bourgeois poisoning.

And what about the prolet-poets?⁷ Aren't they proletarian art?

Not yet, either. It's true that the prolet-poets have something which the Futurists do not have: a blood relation to the proletarian masses; but all the production of the prolet-poets, as of today, displays the sharp influence of the bourgeois concept of art and its forms. The point, after all, is not to talk about the proletariat, but to shout with every sound, every epithet, every shift of speech, that the new master of the world, the proletariat-organizer, has come.

The art of the Russian poet-proletarian, still completely under the influence of the sympathies and the interests of urban artisanship, or of a calloused peasant understanding of social life, is still far from the art of the industrial proletariat.

One must not turn the words "proletarian art" into a bugaboo, and must not be afraid to look for it in all places where people work to break through the gates to socialism. It's important to establish objectively how this or that type of research might be useful to the proletarian cause, without flying into a useless rage—"Whaaat? Your petty-bourgeois Futurism carries in itself elements of proletarian art? I'll never condone that!—or into a presumptuous patriotism—"Proletarian poets? Oh, they are genuine proletarians, their themes are the themes of the revolution. This means that it's proletarian art!" In both cases, judgment is not based on substance, or even on form, but simply on the label. And such a judgment is needed only by those people who are too lazy to sense all the difficulty and all the labor of this incipient drilling through social layers toward an oncoming proletarian culture. Those people would rather put up convenient labels here and there, and rest content with the thought that everything has already been done.

Thus, if you are looking for proletarian art of a pure kind, it is not to be found: neither among the Futurists (and they do not claim this title), nor among the prolet-poets. If you are looking for the points along which the construction of prolet-art is going on, then *objectively* the Futurists without any doubt are making a great contribution to this construction; this is clear after just a cursory glance at the works of the

most restless and searching prolet-poets, who had an opportunity to learn a lot from the Futurists.

FUTURIST WORKS ARE INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO THE MASSES

All things in this world which are incomprehensible eventually become comprehensible through persistent intellectual work. To comprehend a given phenomenon means to find a place for it within a series of other phenomena, to figure out how to make use of it. Incomprehensibility occurs only in two cases: (1) when a person has *difficulty in comprehending* because his experience is insufficient, and (2) when a person *does not want to comprehend*.

Difficulty in comprehension is overcome by labor, by persistent investigation. Has such labor been expended to understand Futurism? Among the masses it has not. Among the masses the idea took root that poetry is something like cream of wheat—it slips into the mouth on its own, it is swallowed and digested all by itself. At the same time Futurism, seeking to master language in order to give utmost expressiveness, versatility, and effectiveness, called upon every reader to do the very same kind of *work*. Futurism considered the difficulty in assimilating its production to be one of its merits, because its task was to turn *everybody into an active master of the language*. And wherever Futurism was approached not as easily swallowable cud, people began to understand it very quickly.

Usually, in the life of a newly born current in art we witness the *reluctance* of people to stop and think about the new forms of expression. After all, this would mean that many of an individual's habitual tastes and ideas might be wiped away, and that one would have to *rethink oneself all over again* in one's individual entirety. Not everyone likes to think. It's much simpler to *brush aside* the proposed experiment with the words: "Nonsense," "I don't understand a thing." But, after all, if you don't understand it, it doesn't necessarily mean that the thing is unsuitable. The history of shifts in literary directions is a history of exclamations: "Nonsense! Charlatanism! I don't understand!" These words have been shouted in turn against Karamzin, Pushkin, Nekrasov, the Symbolists and now the Futurists.⁸

The bounds of this incomprehension are entirely unstable and subjective. There are people (especially among literature teachers) who still wail that they do not understand *any* of Mayakovsky; and the

young people who study with those teachers laugh heartily and loudly at such statements and cope perfectly with Mayakovsky. There are people who pick out individual words from the works of the Futurists and are petrified in bewilderment over them.

The example of the transrationalists is even more striking. The Futurist-transrationalists work on the phonic aspect of language. They look for expressive sounds. They use sound itself as an agitational blow against the public taste. Mayakovsky protested *with words* against mellifluousness, against petty poets who "scraping rhymes on their violins cook up a soup out of love and dove," and Kruchenykh protested against the same things with the *sounds*, "*dyr bul shchyl*." It's not the fault of the Futurists if the reader sought in the verses of the transrationalists the usual *narrative* about something and did not find it. Their verses were a *laboratory* of soundlanguage: they studied soundlanguage in various combinations, without taking up the task of narration. It is as ridiculous to feel outraged because the transrationalists are not intelligible from the point of view of logical plot, as it would be to ask for a chicken cutlet at an experimental poultry farm designed for the development of high-quality birds.

The masses don't understand? We have already shown that one cannot indiscriminately extend this statement to the masses as a whole. If the masses don't understand because they have difficulties in understanding, they can be trained. Time and effort are spent training the masses in Marxism, mathematics, and indeed in simple literacy, but no time is spent training them in poetry—the school for mastering living language. Unfortunately, the fact is that the masses are instilled by the general bourgeois way of life with the impression that the function of art is to fill leisure time in the easiest way possible, without expending effort, that the work of art must "penetrate into the soul" by itself. Futurism is ready to help the masses with explanations where they have difficulties. I hope nobody would urge art to stand still for an eternity on "intelligible" forms simply because the consciousness of the masses is as yet insufficiently developed.

If we want to talk about those works of art whose task is to bring into the consciousness of the reader, as rapidly as possible, fact, opinion, command, then in this respect the Futurists have always displayed the utmost consideration for the psychology of the audience for which they worked, and they showed great inventiveness in the production of "accessible" works—feuilletons, agitational pieces, popular songs. One example is the Futurists' journalistic activity, especially the work of Mayakovsky, who wrote the verse captions for more than 3000

agitational posters dealing with the issues of the day during the time he worked at ROSTA,⁹ from 1918 to 1922.

But now we hear a new cry:

BUT THIS IS NOT FUTURISM AT ALL

This is what those very same critics and teachers are shouting about the Futurist verses that they were finally able to understand. What a stupid and deceitful hatred for the Futurists! What a limited view, made out of thin air—as though Futurism were a movement whose main concern was the production of unintelligible things and nonsense. The fact is that Futurism is a live movement, in dialectical development, which displays many stages in its work. And if some wish to oppose yesterday's Mayakovsky—the "Futurist"—to today's Mayakovsky—the "non-Futurist"—then we see here only a protest by those who have been defeated, people unwilling to surrender, against the fact that Futurism has inevitably been assimilated into life.

By now, it's embarrassing not to understand Futurism. For ten years its words have been resounding, acquiring for the movement the right of citizenship. The Futurists are even printed in Anthologies (over which they do not rejoice). There is only one thing left: to bury as soon as possible this hateful movement and declare that the last stage of Futurism is not Futurism at all. Sorry, scum, nothing will come of it.

The methods of War Communism and the methods of the NEP are very different, but for this reason the RKP¹⁰ does not cease to be a Communist Party, does it? No. The same is true for the Futurists: the orientation is one and the same, but constant self-criticism and adjustment to reality introduce something new into the work, while time fulfills its function and turns the "fragmentary-unintelligible" things into things as simple and understandable as the axe and the sewing machine.

Finally, there is one more venomous observation.

THEN WHY DO THE FUTURISTS, WHO WRITE VERSES IN "FUTURIST" LANGUAGE, NOT USE IT IN ORDINARY SPEECH?

First of all, the "Futurist" language, as some kind of deliberate gibberish, does not exist. What exists is an expressive language which

makes use of all available devices and means of word construction and phrase construction. I have already discussed the transrationalists: their works are significant inasmuch as they force us to approach sound consciously as a representational medium. After all, the word is an object, an action, a quality expressed through sound, and man seeks to make this sound as expressive as possible, so that in its composition, its rhythm, and in the efforts of our vocal muscles, it is similar to what it expresses.

Poetry is a form of speech whose task is to affect our consciousness not only through naked meaning, but also through *sound* (consequently, there are assonances: rhymes, sound orchestration), through *rhythm* (consequently, there is verse meter), and through *image*, i.e., through a juxtaposition of things which brings these very things to life in our psyche.

Everyday prosaic speech pursues the goal of the easiest linkage among people (communicative means). Its task is to convey as quickly as possible information, orders, explanations, etc. In this kind of speech, words are not *sound-figurations* of things, but *symbols* denoting general groups of objects (concepts).

Of course, the figurative means of poetic speech are important in this kind of speech, too. But one can only introduce them gradually, so-to-speak by reaching an agreement with the audience on the meaning of each new word and turn of phrase, so that the linkage between the speaker and his audience won't be cut. It is part of the task of the Futurists to turn everyday language into an extremely flexible and expressive language (see *Lef*, No. 1 and 2, comrade Vinokur's articles on the problem of the conscious construction of practical language). However, this task is much more difficult than the task of working on verse, where a person disposes relatively freely of his verbal materials and is not so pressed for time. In living speech one must be able to find quickly (improvise) the word or the turn of phrase which is exactly to the point. This requires special training. A rhetorician, a wit, a teaser, in other words, an orator—this is the category of people who know how suddenly to improvise another's speech with the greatest expressiveness. The Futurists are carrying out studies along these lines.

One should also note that the people who pose this question get all confused, usually when in the process of posing it. Perhaps because it can be applied equally to Pushkin, Nekrasov, and other poets. All of their poetry is written differently than the way conversational speech is built. The only difference between these poets and the Futurists is that the Futurists are not at all inclined to consider the division into poetic and prosaic language as something established once and for all.

On the contrary, accepting in poetry locutions of prosaic language (see Arvatov's article in *Press and Revolution*, 1922, No. 2, "Mayakovsky's Syntax"), and introducing into everyday speech the maximum in phonetic, rhythmic, and figurative expressiveness, the Futurists make it possible *for the masses to become complete masters of their language*, able to find, in accordance with the tasks for the use of that language those forms that are the most effective in every given case.

SERGEI TRETYAKOV

In conclusion, I will answer the following questions that were addressed to *Lef*:

1. Does *Lef* embrace all of the left front of art?
2. What is the position of transrational works within *Lef*?

I answer:

1. The collective of the magazine *Lef* by no means embraces all that carries the left front label, which is apparent from the declarations of *Lef*. The magazine *Lef* is the joint responsibility of the seven individuals who constitute its editorial board. The goal of *Lef* is the unification of all those unorganized forces of the left front of art which recognize its principles, but it is totally responsible only for the members of its editorial board. Those individuals who are not part of the editorial board are only coworkers and *Lef* takes responsibility for them only within the framework of the materials which they print in the magazine.

2. The transrational works which may give certain people the impression of being aesthetically self-contained manifestations are printed in *Lef* as examples of laboratory work on the elements of the word: phonetics, rhythm, semantics. *Lef* is pleased to note the transrationalists' shift in orientation, from isolated experiments to the construction of socially meaningful things, as is illustrated by all the transrationalist pieces published in *Lef*, with the exception of V. Kamensky's poems in issue No. 1.

S.T.

Lef and MAPP

Lef has reached an agreement with MAPP,¹ the avant-garde of young proletarian literature.

What's the meaning of this agreement?

What do we have in common?

We see that proletarian literature is threatened by the masters of sweet speech and ingratiating words, who got tired too soon, got contented too fast, and who received the repentant émigrés too unconditionally and with open arms.

We deliver an organized rebuff to the call: "Backward!," to the past, to the funeral banquet.

We maintain that literature is not a mirror which reflects the historical struggle, but a weapon in that struggle.

Lef does not conceal by this agreement the differences between its professional and production principles and those of MAPP.

Lef unswervingly develops the work which it has outlined.

Lef is glad that its march has converged with the march of the vanguard of proletarian youth.

Lef welcomes MAPP.

AGREEMENT

Between the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers MAPP
and the Group "Lef"

The present stage of the proletarian revolution in Russia is characterized, among other things, by the revival and reinforcement of bour-

¹"Lef and MAPP" (Lef i MAPP), *Lef*, no. 4 (1924), "Program," pp. 3-5.

geois and petit-bourgeois ideology due to a partial reinstatement of capitalist relations. In this situation, the danger of an ideological degeneration of the proletariat, and most of all of the proletarian intelligentsia and proletarian youth, becomes quite real. The most vulnerable section of the proletariat's ideological front appears to be the arts section, in particular literature; this can be explained to a great extent by the lack of a precise class-conscious policy on the arts. A clear sign of the weakness of the literary section is the dispersion and disorganization of the proletarian and truly revolutionary literary forces. In the meantime, the splinters of prerevolutionary bourgeois-aristocratic literature and the unprincipled, transitory, petit-bourgeois literary groupings display a significant degree of unity, and enjoy a predominant influence in the literature and arts sections of most of the press organs and publishing houses of the party and the Soviets.

This places a very important task before the proletarian and truly revolutionary literary organizations: the rallying of all their forces for the struggle against the corrupting influence of bourgeois-aristocratic and pseudorevolutionary² literature, and for the formulation of a basis for a correct class-conscious art policy. This need is intensified by the fact that the onset of a period of decisive battles with the West demands a class-conscious sharpening of all the tools of the proletarian struggle.

With a view to satisfying this need, the *Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers (MAPP)* and the group "Lef" conclude an intergroup agreement.

The agreeing parties:

1. *Without interrupting their experimental work, will concentrate their creative activities on organizing the readers' psyche and consciousness for the communist tasks of the proletariat.*

2. *By means of oral and published statements, will conduct a steadfast denunciation of the bourgeois-aristocratic and pseudorevolutionary literary groups, and will bring forward their own principles of a class-conscious art policy.*

3. *Systematically, will establish mutual relationships with publishing enterprises and press organs, will fight against the predominance within these institutions of reactionary and pseudorevolutionary groups, and will secure their own participation by depriving those groups of their predominant influence.*

4. *Will avoid polemics among themselves, at the same time not abandoning discussion and objective friendly criticism.*

5. *Will organize activities designed to serve the material needs and the professional interests of the proletarian and revolutionary writers.*

For the practical realization of the proposed tasks this organization

agrees to appoint a Committee of 3 members, specifically entrusted with:

1. Making a plan for, and actually conducting literary-political and purely literary campaigns, and coordinating the oral and written statements of the organizations entering into this agreement.

2. Ascertaining the socioliterary physiognomy of publishing houses, press organs and literary groups; accordingly, planning and pursuing a precise line of action and practical activities related to those organizations and organs.

3. *Enlisting new literary groups and writers into this present alliance.*

MAPP:

IU. LIBEDINSKY

S. RODOV

LEF:

V. MAYAKOVSKY

O. M. BRIK

LEOPOLD AVERBAKH

Reader!

We have issued the first number of *New Lef*.

Why have we issued it? How is it new? Why *Lef*?

We have issued it because the cultural situation in the realm of art has become a complete swamp over the last few years.

Market demand is becoming for many the measure of the value of cultural phenomena.

Given the weak ability to purchase cultural objects, the measure of demand often compels people of the arts to occupy themselves, willy-nilly, with a simple time-serving conformity to the awful taste of the NEP.

This is the source of the slogans proclaimed even by many of the most responsible comrades: "an epic (impartial, supraclass) canvas," "a grand style" ("the age of peace" instead of "the day of revolution"), "man does not live by politics alone," etc.

This virtual nullification of the class-conscious role of art and its direct participation in class struggle is apparently adopted with pleasure by the right-wing fellow travelers; these slogans are savored by the remnants of the internal emigration.

The workers of "Proletarian" art, wavering to the utmost, thirsting for the quickest recognition, and least well armed by culture, have also fallen under this rotten influence.

Lef, the journal, is a stone thrown into the swamp of everyday life and art, a swamp which is even threatening to reach its prewar proportions!

"Reader" (Chitatieiu), *New Lef*, no. 1 (1927): 1-2.

How is it new?

What is new in the situation of Lef is that, in spite of the lack of coordination among its workers, in spite of the absence of a common compact voice in the journal, Lef has prevailed and is prevailing in many sectors of the front of culture.

Much of what formerly was declaration has become fact. In many areas where Lef promised, Lef has delivered.

These achievements have not turned the Lefists into academics. Lef must move forward, using its achievements only as experiments.

Lef remains Lef.

Always:

Lef is a free association of all workers in left-wing revolutionary art.

Lef sees its allies only in the ranks of workers in revolutionary art.

Lef is a union organized only along the lines of work, deeds.

Lef caresses neither the ears nor the eyes—and art as reflection of life is replaced by the work of building life.

New Lef is a continuation of our perpetual struggle for a communist culture.

We will struggle both with the opponents of new culture and with the vulgarizers of Lef, the inventors of “classical constructivism” and decorative productivism.

Our constant struggle for quality, industrialism, constructivism (i.e., expediency and economy in art) is at present parallel to the country’s basic political and economic mottos and should attract to us all workers for a new culture.

We Are the Futurists

OSIP BRIK

People who are maliciously inclined toward Lef like to say:

What is Lef? Futurists. What are Futurists? Marinetti. Who is Marinetti? An Italian Fascist. Consequently . . . the conclusion is clear.

All of this is pure rubbish, since the Russian Futurists arose long before Marinetti became well known in Russia.

And when Marinetti came to Russia in January 1914, the Russian Futurists met him with complete animosity.

Here is an item from the journal *The Spark*, No. 5, February 2, 1914:

"The king of the Futurists, the Italian Marinetti, arrived in Moscow and gave two lectures on Futurism and its future, meeting with great success, only . . . not among his confederates. On the contrary, the Moscow Futurists met Marinetti with hostility and refused all contact with him. They do not agree with his views about the future of Futurism."

Upon arrival of Marinetti in Petersburg, V. Khlebnikov issued a special leaflet:

"Today some natives and the Italian settlement on the Neva, for personal reasons, have thrown themselves at the feet of Marinetti, thus betraying the first step of Russian art on the path of freedom and honor, and placing Asia's noble neck under the yoke of Europe.

"People, who do not want a horse collar around their neck, will remain, as in the shameful days of Verhaeren and Max Linder, passive contemplators of this dark deed.

"People of strong will have remained on the sidelines. They remem-

"We Are the Futurists" (My-futuristy), *New Lef*, no. 8-9 (1927): 49-52.

ber the laws of hospitality, but their bows are drawn and their foreheads show anger.

"Stranger, remember, you have come to another country.

"Sheep of hospitality wear the lace of servility."¹

The Russian Futurists have gone their own way and have not accepted Marinetti.

But they have made use of certain of the Italian Futurist's slogans, and remain true to them to this very day.

Here are some of them:

"We want to celebrate love of danger, a familiar ease with energy and with courage."

"The main elements of our poetry will be: bravery, boldness, and rebellion."

"Up to this time literature has celebrated pensive immobility, ecstasy, and dream; we want to praise aggressive motion, feverish insomnia, the gymnast's stride, the dangerous leap, the slap in the face, and the fist's punch."

"We announce that the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. The racing car, with its body adorned by huge exhaust pipes with exploding breath; the snarling automobile, seeming to fly like an artillery shell, is more beautiful than the statue of the Winged Victory."

"Beauty does not exist outside of battle. There are no masterpieces without aggressiveness. Poetry should be a cruel attack against unknown forces, demanding that they bow down before man."

"We are on the farthest promontory of the ages . . . What is the point of looking back if we must smash the secret doors of the impossible."

"To take delight in the time-honored picture—that would be pouring our sensitivity into a funeral urn instead of hurling it forward with the strong motion of active creation. Do you really want to tarnish your greatest strengths in this way, in a useless delighting in the past, from which you will inescapably return more jaded, diminished, trampled?"

"For dying invalids and prisoners, come what may. Perhaps this wondrous past is a balsam for their wounds, once the present is forbidden them. But we do not want that past; we are young, strong, alive Futurists!"

The October Revolution was understood by the Futurists as a powerful call to emancipation from the past and to battle for the future.

They zealously took up work in the organs of Soviet power.

On December 7, 1918, under the auspices of the Division of Representational Arts of the People's Commissariat on Education, the first

issue of the weekly newspaper *Art of the Commune*, an organ of the Futurists, came out.

Here Mayakovsky's poems "Order to the Army of the Arts," "It's Too Early to Rejoice," "Poet-Worker," "The Left March," and others were first published.

However, from the very first issues, the Futurists tore away from the protective tendencies of the People's Commissariat.

Mayakovsky's lines

"It's time
for bullets
to pepper the museums' walls
Hundred-throat guns to shoot the old junk"

provoked a scandal.

A complaint was lodged with A. V. Lunacharsky and the People's Commissar considered it necessary to explain the situation in an article in *Art of the Commune*, No. 4.

Here is the article:

A Spoonful of Antidote

"Some of my closest collaborators were more than a little troubled by the first issues of the newspaper *Art of the Commune*. Against this background, we must confess, there even arose a slight conflict between the members of the Commissariat of Education-Northern Region and their colleagues in the Commissariat's Division of Representational Arts.

"I admit that I, too, am troubled.

"They tell me that the Commissariat's politics in matters of art are strictly defined. It is not in vain, they tell me, that so many heroic efforts have been expended to preserve all sorts of artistic monuments of antiquity; it is not in vain that we have even risked censure for safeguarding 'the nobility's wealth'; we cannot allow an official organ of our Commissariat to picture all artistic property from Adam up to Mayakovsky as a heap of trash to be subject to destruction.

"There is also another side to this matter. Tens of times I have announced that the Commissariat of Education should be impartial in its relationship to individual directions in artistic life. As far as questions of form are concerned, the artistic tastes of the People's Com-

missar and all other representatives of government should not be taken into account. We must grant the opportunity for free development to all artistic personages and groups. We must not allow one current to rub out another, whether it be armed with an acquired traditional glory or a fashionable success.

"All too often in the history of humanity we have seen how a bustling fashion has pushed forward the new, striving to bring the old to ruin as quickly as possible; and how, afterward, a subsequent generation has wept over the ruins of beauty, scornfully bypassing the recent princelings of fleeting success. All too often we have seen the reverse as well, when some artistic Kashchey the Immortal² has consumed the lives of others and, by shielding a young plant from the sun, has condemned it to destruction, thus crippling the advance of the human spirit.

"It's no problem that worker-peasant power occasioned significant support for the artist-innovators: they had been mercilessly repudiated by the older generation. Not to mention the fact that the Futurists were the first to come to the aid of the Revolution, and were, among all intellectuals, the most kindred and responsive to it. In fact, they proved in many respects to be good organizers, and I expect most positive results from the free artistic ateliers and the numerous regional and provincial schools which they have organized according to a broad plan.

"But it would be a problem if the artist-innovators ultimately formed a state school of art, and made themselves official operatives of an art which, although revolutionary, would be dictated from above.

"Thus, there are two traits which are somewhat frightening in the young countenance of this newspaper in whose columns my present letter is appearing: its destructive inclinations with respect to the past and its tendency, while speaking in the voice of a particular school, to simultaneously speak in the voice of official power.

"However, I would hope that these persons who have been alarmed by the newspaper would not credit all of this with exceptional significance. It is of no small import that the militant Futurist Pougny,³ on the backporch of the very same journal whose portals are adorned with Mayakovsky's rapturous sculptures, toils with all his might to save the traditions of Mstera icon painting, expressing anxiety over the local authorities' prohibition against exporting icons from Mstera.

"I can assure each and every one of you that the really talented among the innovators are perfectly aware of and even acknowledge the fact that antiquity contains much that is wondrous and fascinating; like the Augers they smile and wink at one another while they ar-

rogantly defame everything old, knowing full well that this is only a youthful pose and, unfortunately, expressing how well they feel it suits them."

Comrade Lunacharsky was entirely right. In fact, the Futurists, in earnest, embarked on a destruction of the past and attempted to use their service positions for this purpose. But nothing worked out for them. The guardians of "the nobility's wealth" turned out to be stronger and kicked the Futurists out of all the commissariats.

But the Futurists have not renounced their project and have bequeathed it to Lef.

Anatoly Vasilevich [Lunacharsky] was right that, among the Futurists, there were those who were troubled about Mstera icon painting and who recognized the wonder and fascination of the past. But those people left Futurism very quickly and did not end up in Lef. They moved into the category of "the dying, the invalids, and the prisoners" for whom "this wondrous past is a balsam for their wounds, once the present is forbidden them."

The Futurists bequeathed to Lef the deepest respect for the past as past, and an uncompromising hatred for that very same past when it attempts to become the present—and not even barrels of antidote can cure us of this Futurist fever.

The Black Sea Futurists

S. KIRSANOV

Practically speaking, I do not remember the October Revolution. I was too young (10 or 11) for direct participation and conscious observation. However, I mark the end of 1917 as the date of my literary debut.

The Kerensky regime continued in Odessa longer than in other cities. On the wall of the third-form classroom in the Odessa high school where I studied, a portrait of Nikolas hung until the renowned days of the cruiser "Diamond."¹ Once, during a "free" period, I read my poem to our class. I have preserved the last part:

We are going to get our turn
To drop bombs on everyone,
Izkomzap and Rumcherod,
Iskomiuz and Iskomsev,
To the will of the Black Sea
Tsiksorsod sends its decree,
And there rings from waves of will:
"Take Nikolka off the wall."²

My classmates, most of whom were the sons of officials, beat me up on account of this poem. The class monitor, a wonderful person (five years later I met him in a Red Army uniform), left the class without lunch and, reading my creation, said tenderly:

"Oh, what a Futurist you are!"

From then on, that nickname stuck with me. But the desire to write

¹"The Black Sea Futurists" (Chernomorskie futuristy), *New Lef*, no. 8–9 (1927): 83–86.

poetry left me for a long time. I wrote my next poem, by now consciously Futurist, in 1920, when Odessa had finally been captured by the Reds.

Odessa in those days was a very literary city. The South-Russian Association of Writers, formed by Bunin, Yushkevich, and others, was the most reactionary organization, and there was the Bohemian "Collective of Poets." In addition to these, there were the poets' cafés "Trash," "The Fourth Paean," "The Furnished Island," and several small circles like "The Green Lamp," etc. The writers numbered about five hundred.

The entire left consisted of the poet Alexei Chicherin, who made a living with literary evenings at which he read Mayakovsky's poems. The lines from "Man": "Well, Vladim Vladimich, how do you like the abyss?" he changed to "Well, Alexei Nikolaevich, how do you like the abyss?" which caused great confusion for his naive public.

By the way, not long ago, at his poetry evening entitled "Kanfun," Chicherin fiercely attacked Mayakovsky, having probably forgotten about this former source of his own existence.

At the age of thirteen I arrived at the "Collective of Poets," leaving them speechless with my transrational poetry; within a short time I found collaborators.

A large number of the leftists worked in the Southern ROSTA.³ They served the entire South. Today's Moscow writers Yuri Olesha, Valentin Kataev,⁴ and others, at that time abandoned their beloved poetic work and turned out thousands of posters and agitational jingles.

At that very time, the verse scholar George Shengeli was active in Odessa.

Those who were most left organized themselves into a group whose aim was to harass all the old things.

One time, Shengeli set up a "poeso-evening." We decided to "épat-er."⁵ We bought a turtle, printed leaflets, and one of us made himself up to look like Shengeli. At the most lyric moment in Shengeli's poetry reading, the turtle was let loose on the podium, leaflets flew down on the public from the balcony, and a Shengeli No. 2 appeared in the hall to a general uproar. The evening was ruined, and Shengeli was finished in Odessa.

I must add that in addition to his scholarship and his poetry, Shengeli was known for his original appearance. He had thick black side-whiskers and wore over his shoulders a wool blanket instead of a cloak. Once, while Shengeli was reading his verses, a timid child's voice rang out in the hall:

"Mommie, is that Putskin?"⁶

This had such an effect on the *maitre* that he left Odessa to seek more glorious laurels.

The left writers who were united in the "Collective" took part in the May Day celebrations in 1921. It was then that I, for the first time, stepped out of an automobile before the Odessa workers and read the verses of Mayakovsky, Aseyev, Kamensky, Tretyakov, and Kirsanov.

After this, most of the others departed in various directions; I was left alone.

It fell upon me to represent the entire left in Odessa. A colossal difficulty.

On the one hand, there was the Russian Association of Writers; and on the other, Mama and Papa didn't recognize Futurism.

Nonetheless, people were found, and in 1922, on the model of MAF (the Moscow Association of Futurists), the Odessa Association of Futurists (OAF) was organized.

There were few of us, and all the work was experimental. There were several public performances.

After a year, I happened to learn that there was another left group besides us. Both groups joined together and the "Odessa Lef" arose. *Politprosvet*⁷ let us have a broken-down house, and we (that is, about fifty Futurist poets, actors, artists, and jazz-bandits) fixed it up with our own hands, put up a roof, and opened a theater. At the same time, a press campaign began. We published the proclamation "For an October in the Theater" and the article "What is Lef?"

The opening of a Futurist theater and the publication of articles provoked discussion and an unbelievable uproar. Various speakers appeared, and the streets blossomed with posters advertizing the debates. Some unknown speakers gathered a mass of people at their lectures and unconscionably distorted our projects. One speaker went so far as to announce quite literally:

"Lef is carrying us away into a beautiful golden fairy tale of enchanting nonexistence."

We, the Lefists, gave them what for, unmasked them, and routed them. For the first time, Mayakovsky came to Odessa to explain to us the current tasks of the Left Front. But later we too met with defeat. The theater was transferred to the "Massdrama Collective" (something like the Moscow Kamerny Theater)⁸ and everyone dispersed.

Once more I remained a party of one. At the same time, the "Southern Association" continued to blossom, and a new quasi-proletarian writers' group "Spring Currents" arose, later renaming itself "Currents of October." The name alone testifies to the lack of talent, and to

the tastelessness, of these writers. A struggle was called for, but there were no people to carry it on.

L. Nedolya arrived from Moscow. He, I, and several other comrades formed YugoLef.⁹

At first, this was simply a literary circle. We appeared at clubs and factories, and carried out experimental work.

Our first large-scale practical project was done on May 1. *Agitprop*¹⁰ put at our disposal several trucks, in which we set out to agitate for the new, and also for art—for Lef.

In one day we put on more than 80 performances. We served 1,050 people. My share was 30 performances, that is, over a period of eight hours I read 60 poems. Isn't that a record?

Not a revolutionary holiday passed without our participation.

The field of activities broadened, and so did the organization. One Lef club became insufficient, so a second club was opened. The membership of YugoLef topped 500.

Branches sprang up in a number of Southern cities (Sevastopol, Ekaterinoslav, Zinovyevsk, etc.) and even in some villages. In Odessa, YugoLef had seven ateliers, two clubs, a theater, and a cafeteria. In this way, a group of people united by a single idea was transformed into a cumbersome organization, where the greater part of our efforts went not into inventive work in the arts, but into administration and management.

The YugoLef press, which had published five issues of a journal and several pamphlets, fell into decay, as a sort of intraorganizational bureaucratism set in. At that point, some of the most active workers, including myself, requested the intervention of the Moscow Lef.

L. Nedolya and I were sent to Moscow, as an All-Union Conference of the Left Front of the Arts was called. Lef condemned the organizational passion of Lef itself, but, upon our return, we found it already impossible to cure this illness in YugoLef, and the organization was disbanded.

Here we find confirmed once again the validity of the axiom: Lef is strong as a qualitative organization, not as a quantitative one.

This concludes my recollection about the struggles and the work of the Odessa Futurists.

In January 1926, I left for Moscow.

Broadening the Verbal Basis

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

Before us it was customary to divide organized words into "prose" and "verse." These two concepts were considered the basic literary categories. The person who produced "this" was called an "author"; authors were divided into poets and prosaists, the remaining people were readers, and an author was linked to a reader by means of a book. Readers paid money for books.

In addition, there were those who revolved around books, juggled them, or didn't let them go, or drove up the price of a book—this was criticism.

The Revolution upset this quite simple literary system.

Prose was destroyed because of the absence of time for writing and reading, because of a skepticism toward fictional events, and because of the pallor of these fictions as compared to life. There appeared poems which no one printed because there was no paper, no one had money for books, but books were sometimes printed on money which had gone out of use. The glory of writing authors was replaced by the glory of nameless letters and documents; attempts were made to replace predatory criticism by the organized distribution system of the Central Press. The link to the reader through the book became a vocal link streaming across the stage.

The organization of the economy, i.e., the problem of raising it to the prewar norms, led people to believe, quite simply by analogy, that the old norms should be applied in our cultural life as well.

"Broadening the Verbal Basis" (Rasshirenie slovesnoi bazy), *New Lef*, no. 10 (1927): 14–17.

The Leningrad *Star*,¹ in its sad debut, with Alexei Tolstoy editing, made approximately the following announcement:

"We are renewing the tradition of the thick journal, which was interrupted by the Revolution."

We of Lef see the Revolution not as a break in traditions, but as a force destroying these traditions along with all of the other old structures.

Unfortunately, even the literature of our tenth anniversary jubilee is viewed by the Voronsky-Polonsky-Lezhnevsky² type critics from the very same traditional viewpoint (hatched by the flies of history).

Having already dealt with the entire five-year plan of Soviet literature in an article last year ("Red Virgin Soil"—"A Matter of Corpse"; it is true that they have already carried out the corpse, but it is not Lef's, it is Lezhnev's), scornfully calling it an "oral period," Lezhnev, in a review article in the jubilee number of *Izvestiya*, simply leaves out the names of the Lefists (Aseyev, Tretyakov, Kamensky).

We, Lefists, are guilty, obviously, not because of our names—we have beautiful names (who, for example, would quarrel with the name Mayakovsky; would Lunacharsky?). It wasn't a matter of names—the work obviously did not please.

Let us decipher Lezhnev—he, evidently, wants to say:

1. In literature, there is either poetry or prose. Why is Lef making slogans? Such a literary form has never existed. Slogans cannot circulate in books; slogans cannot be accepted as a supplement to the magazine *The Light*; slogans are not bought and read, and their criticism comes not from the pen, but by force of arms. Since I can have nothing to do with you, you, as a punishment, will not enter into any history of literature.

2. Literature is that which is printed in a book and read in a room. Since it was cold in my room and Comrade Bukharin proposed that there be, in all, one common heated premises in a building, I, a room inhabitant, did not read you. And the fact that you were heard every day at factory and Red Army meetings—that means of interaction is not provided for by any literary handbook. For that reason, you are not literature, but oral lore.

3. For the critics, literature is a thing which can be critiqued. To do this, one must take the book home, underline and copy out things, and express one's own opinion. But if there is nothing to take home, then there is nothing to critique, and if there is nothing to critique, then it isn't literature. I am not your porter—to be sent running to auditoriums. And where is there a critical approach which can take account of the influence of the direct word on an audience?! All authors were born

in prep schools, and determining how many workers'-corps and provincial writers began to work after direct conversation with you is none of my business.

Therefore, we'd better hush the Lefists up.

To hush them up—that means to shout at the top of our lungs: “You performers, clowns, tricksters, you have made off with the rules of versification!”

Relax, Lezhnevs.

We did not want to annoy you. All of the unpleasantness has come about because the Revolution was not made especially for you. It was not made for us either, rather, not for us alone, nevertheless we have worked only for the Revolution.

It is the Revolution which said: step lively, don't give us boring details; one must not speak, but move forward; in short, condense your thoughts into a slogan!

It is the Revolution which said: cold apartments are empty, books are not the best fuel. Today heated vans have become apartments; the inhabitants warm themselves at meetings. So if you have verses, you can have the floor during the regular conduct of the meeting.

It is the Revolution which said: fewer handicraftsmen—we are not so rich that we can first supply and then critique. We need more of a plan. And if there are some troubles, report them to the competent authority. And we reported to each other and to you about these troubles during nights of arguments and conversations at editorial offices, at factories, and in cafés during the nights and days of the revolution—which resulted in the Lef position and terminology (the social requisite, productivist art, etc.); Lef's stand became famous, despite the fact that it involved no author. We also count all of this as the literary asset of the Revolution's first decade.

We understood and proclaimed: that literature is the processing of the word; that the era dictates to each poet through the voice of his class the form of that processing; that an article by a member of a Workers' Corps and *Eugene Onegin* are equal; that today's slogan is higher than yesterday's *War and Peace*; and that within the bounds of the literature of a single class there is only difference based on skills, and not difference based on higher and lower genres. What was perhaps true during the early, materially poor, years of the Revolution, is inapplicable and purposeless now, when we have paper, when we have printing presses.

No—this is a Revolution, and not a break in tradition.

The Revolution has not annulled any of its achievements. It has increased the force of its achievements through material and technical

forces. The book will annihilate the tribune. In its time, the book did annihilate the handwritten manuscript. The manuscript is only a beginning of a book. The tribune and the public platform will be carried forward, expanded, by the radio. The radio—that is one of the further advances of the word, the slogan, poetry. Poetry has ceased to be that which is only seen by the eyes. The Revolution has given us the audible word, audible poetry. The fortune of the small circle who heard Pushkin today has smiled on the whole world.

This word is becoming more necessary day by day. The elevation of our culture, pushing aside the representational (posterlike) emotional (musical) coloration which hypnotically subdues an uncultured person, gives growing significance to the simple, economic word. I would be happy to see on Soviet Square a series of milestones of time, upon which the facts and dates of the Revolution's first ten years were simply enumerated. If these signposts were well crafted (by us) and memorable, they would become literary monuments. The journal *Life of Art*, in comparing the film *Poet and Tsar* with Yakhontov's literary montage "Pushkin," gave preference to Yakhontov's work.³ This is a happy bit of news for writers. The inexpensive word, the simply pronounced word, defeated the expensive and well-equipped art of cinema.

Literary critics will lose their characteristic traits of dilettantism. The critic will have to know something. He will have to know the laws of radioaudibility; he will have to be able to critique a voice which is not supported from the diaphragm and recognize bad timbre in the voice as a serious *literary* minus.

Then there will be no place for the stupid words uttered with near reproach by the likes of Polonsky:

"Is he really a poet?! He simply reads well!"

They will say: "He is a poet *because* he reads well."

But, after all, that is acting!

No, the good quality of an author's recitation lies not in acting. V. I. Kachalov⁴ reads better than I do, but he cannot recite like I do.

V. I. reads

"But I to him—

the samovar!"

He says: Take the samovar (from my "The Sun").
But I read:

"But I to him . . .

(the samovar)

(pointing to the samovar). The word "pointing" is omitted in order to focus on conversational speech. This is a crude example. But in every poem there are hundreds of the most subtle rhythmic, metrical, and other *active* particularities which can be conveyed only by the author himself and only by the voice. Verbal mastery has been restructured; the critics too must think about their own job.

From the press organs, the critic-sociologist must direct the editor. Once something is written it is too late to criticize. The critic-formalist must carry on the work in our institutes for advanced study of verbal mastery. The critic-psychologist must measure the pulse on the podium and the voice on the radio, as well as concern himself with bettering the poets' pedigrees.

Lezhnev! Take off your dress coats, buy working clothes!

I am not voting against books. But I demand fifteen minutes for the radio. I demand, more loudly than the violinists, the right to the phonograph record. I not only consider it correct that poems be featured on holidays, but also that readers, reciters, workers, all be invited for instruction on how to read with an author's voice.

Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!

S. TRETYAKOV

The first year of *New Lef* has passed.

For a year we have held out in our trenches, in spite of the fact that the sweet slime of prewar norms in the realm of art and everyday life has been pouring from the front of militant passéism as from a spitting volcano.

Not only have we held out, not retreating an inch, but we have even regained certain sectors of our front.

Lef's distinct uncompromising focus on the literature of fact and on the photograph has been added to our assets.

The attack of the right front is continuing and growing stronger.

Let us note the directions in which our engagements will spread in the future.

Militant passéism—that is the first and principal enemy.

We say that ideology does not lie in the material which art makes use of. Ideology lies in the devices through which that material is worked up; ideology lies in form. Only expediently formed material can become a thing with direct social function. Changing a theme is trivial. Peasant women will not become women cadres merely by so labeling them.

But a militant passéist does not agree. He preserves the prerevolutionary model of the artist in its entirety, with a "soul" which remains inviolable. For him, the one compromise—changes in theme—is sufficient.

"Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!" (S novym godom! S "Novym Lefom"!), *New Lef*, no. 1 (1928): 1–3.

This is how the most perfunctory response to the present day is made. Under the helmet of Yegorya the Victorious, the icon painters overlay the face of a Red Army man, or under women in peasant dress they write, instead of "lasses"—"Komsomolkas."¹ Composers insert communal words into the melodies of a café chanteuse; writers describe the Civil War and the rising of the factories in muted Chekhovian tones or in the manner of the Dostoevskian hysterical-criminal novel; the theaters pound out, in the hackneyed constructivist-decorative style, the very same *Iarovaia*² in different variants. The cinema dreams about the "Pickfordization" of the everyday worker's life instead of its "Fordization," and represents gallant "Sov-Douglasses" and sweet "Sov-Marys."³

The militant passéist, under the pretense of schooling, drags us to the cemetery, to the tombs of the classics, forgetting that today Pushkin is already 129 years old and that he is intolerably toothless; at the same time, the passéist remains completely silent about the fact that Pushkin, in his own day, was one of the most ardent Futurists, a decanonizer, a profaner of tombs, and a churl. It does not pay for the passéist to speak about this. Instead, clambering up into all the chinks in the newspapers and magazines, he throws dust in the eyes of the masses with articles and reviews, passing off an opportunistically rosy, watery porridge of AKs and AKhRRs for a real revolution.⁴

The second enemy—an age-old one, which we have always attacked, but now raised to a threatening height on the shoulders of militant passéism—is art as a social narcotic.

Lef's attention and fire is directed toward the quarters where numbers are growing, determining the place of art in the social budget. Lef is afraid that these numbers are growing not at the expense of, but simultaneously with, the growth of physiological narcotics (alcohol, cocaine, waste of sexual resources).

Time and again, Lef has to explain that the social-narcotic function is characteristic of art of the feudal and capitalist period, and that carrying into our present conditions the old forms of art and the previous circumstances of their use is reactionary; it preserves the previous, socially harmful, function of art.

The passéists try to persuade us (many of them even sincerely) that their art shows life, stimulates independence. In fact, this art fatally stupefies the brain, stifles the intellect, unleashes primordial instincts, takes one away from life, creates exotica (that is to say, cock-and-bull stories) where there should be factual stories, and divides reality into two halves: the boring-practical-prosaic half and the fascinating-invented-poetic half.

Lef places under suspicion all art in its aesthetic-stupefying function.

Lef is for working out the methods for a precise fixation of facts.

Lef places the uninvented literature of fact above invented belle lettres, noting the growth in demand for memoirs and sketches among the active strata of readers and protesting against the fact that at publishing houses, up to the present time, a good article, requiring a trip, research, and selection of material, brings less than half the pay for an ordinary belletristic novella, for whose realization one needs only a finger to suck on.

The third enemy is the attraction of the passéist to the person "of the interior," elemental, of the emotions, in contradistinction to the rational person, the person of calculation, of note, of intellect.

The search "for the harmonious person," the lament about "artistic illiteracy," about the fact that the activist-builder is growing up like a lout and is not interested and does not want to be interested in musical nuances, poetic rhythms, the color composition of paintings; the attacks against the industrious rationalists—all of this is a campaign against the standardized activist who is really needed by socialist construction. It is his replacement by a figure entirely suspect, bordering on disorderly conduct, neurasthenia, decadence, hooliganism.

We stand categorically with that Komsomol member, Comrade Fridman, who writes in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 12/18/27: "One technician is much more necessary than ten bad poets."

We would be agreeable even to omitting the word "bad." It is inadmissible and disgusting that we have in the literary organization of the USSR 12,000 (*twelve thousand*) poets and belletrists, and our newspapers do not have enough literate feature writers and reporters.

The passéist, who once pretended to be offended by the "impermissible devices" of the Futurists, who once threw up his hands out of all of his intellectual delicacy upon witnessing an attempt on the honored corpse, now makes use of a complete arsenal of whatever devices he pleases, and displays any sort of sleight of hand.

Moreover, the passéist has learned to swear by Marx and Lenin.

Isn't it characteristic that the Polonskys⁵ (in *The Red Gazette* there is an example) are trying to characterize Lenin, that most antifetishistic of people (Lening, who answered questions about the new art with careful words: I'm not a specialist on that), as an inflexible persecutor of Lef? Well, so what! "Reminiscences" are not paper, they can bear everything.

But Lef has an ally. It is the slogan of the cultural revolution. It is a directive which has tremendous social resonance, with which, in its

principal formulation, the ideological work which has been done by Lef over the last five years coincides exactly.

When Comrade Bukharin is disgusted by the chauvinist exotica of the literary Russophiles,

when Comrade Bukharin speaks of the type of energetic builder whom we need, counterposing him to the spontaneous "good fellow,"

when Comrade Bukharin says that "if one fine day the materials and documents about our Revolution disappeared and there remained only the artistic literature, then from it one might obtain an untrue representation of our contemporary life,"—in all of these instances we welcome a blow against militant passéism which is badly needed today.

We know the swift quills of the militant passéist are already hastily adapting the slogan "cultural revolution" to ideas about the acceptance of our heritage and the flight to a saving "back to . . .". And all kinds of "thunder-of-victory-ringers" are already prepared to swear, with this new slogan, over every ballerina's move, over every radio-broadcast Kamarinskaya.⁶ This does not fluster us. One must struggle for a slogan; one must win the battle for its correct realization. A thought correctly grasped and placed on the rails of the matter will crush the two-legged paperdoll for whom the entire system of ideas is nothing other than a stamped-over view of the domicile of irrelevant, prewar, bourgeois tastes.

We of Lef take our initiative from the "Slap in the Face of Public Taste."

Just as back then, we are ready with a furious hand to slap the aesthetic stabilization of today; but we have a comradely handshake for whoever is happy to go with us along the road of doing class-necessary things, of building a beautiful-in-reality life, and not one concocted by the artist; of organizing real people, and not the paper ones invented by belletrists.

What's New

S. TRET'YAKOV

[. . .]

There was a moment during the epoch of *The Art of the Commune* when verse seemed an absolutely appropriate material for newspaper leads. There was a time when a broad audience literally could not exist without a demand for huge numbers of sharp, publicistic, uplifting verses from Lef and the continuers of Lef, the proletarian poets who banded together along the lines of the group "October."¹

And once again: the wide recognition, accommodating and pacifying, did not extend to Mayakovsky with his highly concentrated inventions.

No. The dramatism, eccentricity and publicistics of Mayakovsky was accepted only with a correction for intimacy, lyricism and archaism, which was more distinctly expressed in the poetry of Esenin.²

The epos shifted over into the lyric even in the titles: "Ballad about . . ." was changed to the title "Song about . . ." a pretty girl, a great outing, a guitar, etc.

Mayakovsky, divided by Esenin, gave the lyric publicistics of Zharov,³ i.e., that standard poetic production which Soviet publications demand, more out of habit than out of real necessity, for now we are undoubtedly going through a sharp decline in the readers' appetite for verse.

The drop in effort on the part of the left front of art to participate in poetry was also felt within the Lef group. Aseyev, already in "Proskakov,"⁴ transforms his verse into commentary material to prose doc-

"What's New" (Chto novogo), *New Lef*, no. 9 (1928): 1-5.

uments of unusual force, giving a number of readers the basis for asserting that Aseyev's verses are not adequate for "covering" the Proskakov epos.

The very same Aseyev is writing *The Made-up Beauty*,⁵ his first big prose attempt. The very fact of Gorky's attack on the prosaic part of this book, and of his completely ignoring the verses, shows to what extent attention is now concentrated in precisely the area of prose.

As Mayakovsky was reading in the Red Hall of the Moscow Kom-somol, the young organization members knowing him by heart and loving him, called out: "Down with Mayakovsky-the-poet, long live Mayakovsky-the-journalist!" And Mayakovsky applauded this outburst. Or, giving an order about how and what to write from abroad, they said: "Write us a lot about what is abroad, only write it in prose."

Leaving the giggling about this theme to the writers of couplets and to the Talnikovs,⁶ I must in all seriousness state that the call "to write in prose" to a poet of such colossal poetic energy as Mayakovsky from an audience which loves him signifies a definitive shift in the consciousness of today's active reader. The fact that Mayakovsky has transported his verse as a whole into newspaper and feuilleton work, counterposing it to the ode and the romance, is a step once again opposing Mayakovsky-the-newspaperman to the poets of the literary pages.

The Novosibirsk Magazine *The Present* publishes a notice: "Please write in prose."

On the pages of *New Lef* verses are steadily drying up. In the portfolios of the publishing houses, verses are now the most problematic and the least marketable product, valued very little.

Now the maximum of the left movement has transferred over to the line of the assertion of documentary literature. The problem of the fixation of fact; raising the interest of the activists in reality; the assertion of the primacy of realness over fiction, the publicist over the belletrist—this is what in Lef is now most burning and immediate.

The memoir, travel notes, the sketch, articles, feuilletons, reportage, investigations, documentary montage—opposed to the belletristic forms of novels, novellas, and short stories.

The fight for fact against fiction divides today's Futurists from the passéists. In this matter the position of Lef is all the stronger, since in its affirmation of documentary literature, Lef succeeded in guessing the progressive interest of the broad masses of readers in today's reality, defending the newspaper as the leading literature for the activists, and predicting the completely exclusive attention of the reader to the literature of fact (the success of memoirs).

If a year ago the defenders of the belletristic tradition were still snubbing us with the contemptuous cry: "Where is your prose?" this year, when it is already impossible to contradict the facts, they are muttering: "Imagine, a novelty! We ourselves knew long ago that documentary literature is interesting to a high degree. We ourselves have nothing against recommending to writers that they shift from the description of fictional people to the description of those who really exist (so writes Y. Sobolev in *Evening Moscow*).⁷ But you, Lefists, do not know how to work in the genre of documentary literature."

That is how Talnikov's raid on Mayakovsky's American sketches goes, and Mayakovsky-the-feuilletonist gets a reproach: why is he such a bad sketch-writer? That is how Gorky's avalanche on Aseyev goes, with reproaches about the distortion of facts. That is to say, what has always been repeats itself.

The first stage—"What nonsense!"

And the second: "We have known it for a long time, without you, you Lefist ignoramuses."

Both Gorky and Talnikov, even if their raid on Lef was not done in consonance, signify the convulsions of the belletristic canonizers, who are forced to recognize their defeat. The traditionalists, having left their trenches, are retreating to their second defensive line; recognizing the primacy of the literature of fact, they are hastily sorting out within it the large forms (book-length) from the small newspaper and magazine pieces. The big forms they are willing to take under their special patronage, but for the small ones, just like Talnikov, of course, they will badger us with the contemptuous nicknames of—newspapermen, chroniclers of the everyday, photographers.

The next stage of our struggle, for which we, christened with the nickname "little reporters," are inventively primed is the newspaper. There will be battle not for the literature of fact as an aesthetic genre (into which it will probably degenerate), but for the literature of fact as a method of utilitarian publicistic work on present-day socialist problems—raising literacy, doubling the harvest, collectivization of agriculture, raising the productivity of labor, and other everyday matters, respectable kilometers from where the defenders of inspired fiction and artistic synthetics prefer to soar aesthetically through the clouds. It is intolerable to them that the "writer," that salt of the earth, appear under suspicion; and so now the "little reporter" is growing into a leading figure of the contemporary period.

More Left than Lef

N. CHUZHAK

Glory to the Heroes

A misfortune has befallen the house of Lef.¹ Let's hope it is not all of literature's misfortune (don't crack jokes before it's time, gentlemen), but only our own little, domestic, but nonetheless authentic unquestionable misfortune. The pseudoleftist infection, which has now seized a couple of stories of the superstructure, the "leftist" disease of far-from-infantile rightism, has not spared our little "left front of the arts" either. It has snatched from our ranks several comrades who are not young in the arts, but who suddenly have become . . . "more left than Lef," and it also threatens the further development of everything healthy in art. *The dustheap of people continues to grow* (RAPP also has its schism, only they keep quiet about it), and this, evidently already general, literary calamity must not become the occasion for playing at a questionable leftism. . . .

This is certainly not the first time that various comrades favored by right-wing attention have, under the smoke screen of some sort of ultraleftism, taken leftist "dogma" as a point of departure. The only difference is that some do this on the sly, slipping sideways, while others rent the premises of the Polytechnic Museum and publicly bow in homage to that which, yesterday, they no less publicly cursed. A heroic "growing wiser"? This has happened in the realm of theater and in cinema. Now it is happening in photography and in literature. This phenomenon, of course, is not accidental.

¹"More Left than Lef" (Levee Lefa), *New Lef*, no. 11 (1928): 27-32.

Usually in such cases there are debates. Certain people render a judgment: "They're renegades." Others, interceding to soften the verdict, cite a forgotten poet:

"They did not betray us, they simply grew tired
Of bearing their cross—
Left by the spirit of anger and sadness
they faltered half-way."²

Grew tired, they say, not so much due to persecution as due to the infertile, repellant caresses of the bourgeois. And, having faltered halfway, they turned into the alley of the expectation of great and rich beneficences.

But of those latter of our comrades, the ones "grown wiser," one cannot, after all, even say that they have been so luxuriously "endowed." No, what sort of "endowment" could there be when they, like us, are no better off than when they began. We are without a journal, in a state of disorganization; they are in Platonic expectation of a moment of transference from the ranks of fined criminals. Poor illegitimate children of contemporaneity! Having made an authentic revolution in art they now meekly await the time . . . of their adoption! On this account was it worth so noisily "amnestying Rembrandt," evoking vulgar little grins from the enemies' camp. On this account was it worth crying on the shoulders of those enemies, in the name of some sort of "closeness" in the journalistic rabbit hutch ("Boots pinch!" is the old cry of all those "who have not betrayed"), rending the air with vulgarities about the "lion," who, they say, "is more terrifying having escaped to freedom than is the lion in the cage?" In general, was it worth dropping out of Lef so manifestly, confusing *reactionary* declarations with an elementary primer for *industrial work*?

Pitiful argumentation!

Just like what we have done during these last two years of the existence of *New Lef*: in talking about turning the compass needle toward *newspaper* work, we only succeeded in preventing our comrades from working for the newspapers. Just like the fact that only by delivering ourselves from the theory of "the new Leo Tolstoy" (the newspaper) was it possible *in practice* to set out for the newspaper. And, most of all, just like our comrades who, having given themselves over with enthusiasm to their work of liquidation while still in Lef, have now in good conscience carried out a certain elemental task—the task of *pulverizing* anything whatever which comes from the acquisitive bourgeois—which they naively take to be the "social imperative" of the epoch.

Heroic . . . self-repudiation!

 About trash

Well, so what:

"Glory to the heroes
 Although
 they
 have received enough tribute.
 Now
 let's talk—"3

Yes, we have come to this: now every Judas can screech about our disaster. People whose entire biography is one continuous apostasy can celebrate their penny-ante victory over Lef. They can even hint at the fact that our "more left than Lef" comrades, for whom the Lefist boot was too tight, can also be "endowed" with something if only they are "deserving."

"Seriously think through the path you have taken, determine your line clearly, and then, maybe, you can be *deserving* (*Be deserving, be deserving, comrades!*—N. Chuzhak) of a more substantial place than an accidental berth in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*,⁴ whose patience also has its limits. *We are prepared to help you*—at least in uncovering the social significance of your defeat."

This is what Judas Grossman-Roshchin,⁵ in *Nalitpost*,⁶ No. 22, promises those "more left than Lef"—who have, at an earlier time, already been "deserving," and more than once. It is he, Judas Roshchin, who is "ready to help" our comrades along the path toward further "amnesty" and "moving to the left." An experienced helper!

How does Judas Roshchin help our comrades "think through the path you have taken." What is Lef according to Roshchin? I quote:

"They say that Lef's liquidation campaign (i.e., *the funeral of 'fictiveness'*—N. Chuzhak) is a *particular kind of Pisarevshchina*.⁷ Maybe." (This is on p. 20.)

And on p. 21 we now read: "Lefovshchina is an echo of the old populism."

On page 22 the picture changes sharply. Lef is no longer Pisarevshchina, no longer populism, but . . . "Lef's pathos is a Spenglerism turned inside out."

Didn't you know that, comrades?

Further on, we read: "In the history of Soviet literature, Lef enters as a shameful specimen of slovenliness carried to the point of cynicism . . . [In Lef] one hand washes the other, but both of them are

yellowed . . . the unconcealed face of obscurantism . . . the pitiful mongrel of positivism. . . . A vile dance. . . . A collaboration of dark forces. . . . Petty thievery, hiding its collective face under a blood-red mask. . . . Sabotage, having as its aim that the literary machinery [of the proletariat] remain in the hands of the old proprietors of the word. . . ."

Oh, it's sinister!

(To tell the truth, among the bewitched, the renegades are the most bewitched.)

And—the conclusion:

"We must guard against the careless assertion that Lef has already perished, against the thoughtless hope that since Mayakovsky has straightened himself out, his entire line has also straightened itself out. Nothing of the sort. We joyfully welcome the authentic repudiation of deviations. *We are prepared in every way to help* all those seeking the correct path. But our assistance is expressed in the firmness of our line, in the vigilance of our eye, and in our intense will. . . ."

Well, don't be sad about that, gentlemen: people with a "vigilant eye," sharp hearing, and a *good nose* can always be found!

He Has Not Learned Anything

It is simply amazing how the most various of our enemies have come together in their general hatred of our little "left front," and how single-mindedly they now strive, no matter what happens, to finish off someone who is already down. You saw the animalistic hatred with which Judas Roshchin in *Nalitpost* (page 23) gnashes his teeth (his pen):

"We cannot reform Lef—we must destroy it."

Doesn't Lef's long-standing benefactor Vyacheslav Polonsky⁸ write the same thing (in *Izvestiya*, No. 260)—and, after all, Polonsky and *Nalitpost* are enemies!

Listen:

"One-half year ago, on the pages of *Izvestiya*, the author of these lines appeared with an article which posed the question of the abnormality of the existence, under the name of "Left front," of a literary group which in fact had no real basis for calling itself a left front. Life has confirmed our analysis. One-half year ago, when *New Lef* was still aggressive and availed itself of the VAPP⁹ leadership's most intimate support, our words may have appeared to some an exaggeration. Now

there can be no argument. *New Lef* is finished: with the departure of Mayakovsky, Aseyev, and Brik from *New Lef*, there is no more *Lef*—not new or old.”

Polonsky doesn't even say: “We must destroy *Lef*.” No, for him it is enough to say “there is no more *Lef*” for us to be completely destroyed.

But that's not enough. Polonsky would not be Polonsky if he didn't concern himself about our *replacement*. Never fear. Polonsky already has his candidate for our heir. Evidently, it is Polonsky himself. Read, citizens: “With the collapse of *Lef*, there arises the question which we posed last year. The group that illegitimately used the banner “Left front” has passed from the scene. But the need for a left front in art and literature cannot die. Under the present conditions, on the threshold of a new literary period when writing finds itself in a state of some disorder, when crisis phenomena can be observed not only among the fellow travelers, but also in the proletarian writers' sphere, the need for uniting revolutionary workers in art and literature into a powerful—no longer fictional, but actual—left front becomes evident with special acuteness.”

And—the addendum:

“Only the presence of such a left front can *seriously help literature* overcome its temporal, accidental as well as deliberate, crises.”

Well, at this point you can laugh.

Poor Vyacheslav Polonsky! Poor Polonsky, after all this to understand nothing and to have learned nothing. Poor Polonsky, even now still taking himself too “seriously” and still ready to “seriously help literature” (in the sense of pulverizing it!).

But haven't you noticed that now no longer you, but more blood-thirsty “helpers,” are going out “on guard duty” in case of a crisis.^a

Let's get to the point

And how many of these there are, nonetheless! How many who are “helping” literature “overcome its temporal crises!” How many incoherent stewards, drivers, healers, “selflessly dedicated” pursuers,

a. This article was already typeset when, in the Constructivist collection *Business*, we came upon more malicious snickering directed at a “drowning” *Lef*. There one also finds the most vulgar attacks upon Mayakovsky. The citizens, having picked Mayakovsky clean, celebrate their premature funeral feast over the poet's body. They can only have one motive, it seems: let him have it from the Aduевs!¹⁰

literary uncles—all of whom write nothing and yet are members of the literary welfare department! Just look at our journalistic trusts, which are publishing journals which could have safely come out twenty years ago, and you can easily verify that the problem is not so much the expeditious herdsmen as *the work itself*. Let Fyodor Raskolnikov,¹¹ Vyacheslav Polonsky and even Judas Roshchin join our uncles, let them, but—just let them show us some sort of exemplary *production*, and not an empty space, with which, the devil take them, they want to teach us literature.

And here is something else remarkable: they are all, without fail, “more left than Lef.” One must take note of this astounding demand for “leftness.” Now we can find only A. I. Svidersky¹² on the right.

Not long ago the following characteristic occurrence took place in Red Hall. A certain dyed-in-the-wool uncle was holding forth “on Literature” and began, in the best tradition (to kick someone who is down isn’t difficult), to oppose the right-wing Svidersky for his rightism. From the audience came a cry to the orator: “And what about *Red Virgin Soil*?”¹³ The orator moved right on. From the audience, more insistently: “But tell us about *Red Virgin Soil*, which, it seems, you edit!! The orator remains silent. After all, what can he say when, from the point of view of *production*, he has “nothing to show!” It is much easier to prance around on a “leftist” horse than to make a genuinely leftist (since you like this word so well) thing. We do not take it upon ourselves to judge whether “rightist” or “leftist” (for the most part, mediocre) literature is being printed in our terribly red “Virgin Soils,” but it is time indeed to say that the oldness in this raging virgin soil can certainly be felt.

We are now living in a literature under the sign of political deviations. From left to right, from right to left. And we would like to live not according to labels. We will willingly surrender (as a form of cultural inheritance) the word “left” to our talented successors. We would simply be comrades: *in an essential way*. Of course, it is not a question of whether you are more left or more right than Lef, but rather of whether you speak about the essence of matters and, even more importantly, *of what you do and how you do it*. Are you now administrating what you yesterday despised, or boldly putting the torch to what you yesterday worshiped? Most important, do you have something to offer to us?

Try to approach literature not as a sign of registration in one or another constituency, but by seeing in it a cross section of *the production process*—and all of literature will appear to you in a new light. Then it will be clear to you that “compact” production cells such as Lef

("compact" for reasons which do not depend on us) are significant because of *specific qualifications*; it will be clear why the forcible pulverization of such maximally compact cells is a genuine impoverishment of literature. It is bad when even a quantitatively insignificant portion of the necessary productive base of a stable mechanism collapses; it is bad when the inventors go off "into nowhere," and, of course, noisily active craftsmen "let go" are no longer threatening to any Polonsky, since the consumers can sleep peacefully in the presence of such recently scattered inventors.

Yes, the dust pile of writers is growing. It is really incomprehensible to anyone that only under conditions of a universal degeneration can the first Judas Roshchin who comes along glide over us, whistling and curtseying?!

What next?

The so-called left front of the arts, in essence the front of *inventors in art*, would have certainly long ago been destroyed if it depended on the will of its numerous "helpers," but it didn't. . . . In reality, inventiveness in art, i.e., Lef, is not dying only because *there continues to live a demand on the part of our epoch of transition to socialism, a demand precisely for inventiveness along all roads*. This inventive front survives only because of its organic fusion to the epoch, and not at all because of the kindness of a petty bourgeois who grants it a patent.

The petty bourgeois needs art for some sort of emotional darning of his holes and, only in the most extreme cases, as an aesthetic, i.e., oblique and merely experientially representational, stimulus to a short-lived activity. The art of direct action, art as *an immediate rationalizer* of existence, scares away the petty bourgeois. The slogans of the art of production and the art of the everyday still continue to be parts of our maximal program, but we, nonetheless, did not succeed in "taking out a patent" on these epochal achievements with that dirty-faced brat who has sprawled out on top of the pathways of art.

The dirty-faced brat would not mind pressing down the slogans of rationalization in general, but, fortunately, this "cultured" petty bourgeois who spreads himself everywhere and the objective needs of the epoch are not one and the same thing. *The objective needs of the epoch force us to retool ourselves more and more intensively as we move along the approaches to socialism*, and the dirty-faced brat, in order to retain in his

hands at least a portion of his influence, willy-nilly must come to register himself "also among the left-wingers."

That very same objective necessity for *retooling* also pushes the inventors in art into a tenacious struggle against the dominance of dead passéism.

An order for life

Lef never enjoyed any special recognition in this struggle, but even the enemies of the inventive front would not deny that Lef displayed great consistency throughout and at times even an unbelievable *vitality*. No amount of shouts, persecutions, or petty jibes in the press prevented Lef from moving ever more strongly toward the fundamental problems of the revolutionary epoch. Lef was the first to cleanse art of mysticism, the first (at the cutting edge of its time) to *materialize* art. In particular, Lef struggled mightily against all sorts of irrationality in literature, and it sharpened literature's attention to the idea of *the primacy of fact*.

During the last two years of existence of the journal *New Lef*, we would seem to have accomplished quite a bit in this area. It would appear that there is no corner of our latest priestly literature, trading in the illusion of "art," which we have not exposed. It would appear that there is no play at deflecting attention from the present-day truth which we have not unmasked.

And yet: there remained for us still to accomplish much more than we did accomplish. And—*it should have been done*.

We still have done almost nothing in the area of the methodology of the literature of fact, and, in general, our *organic* work here has only been hinted at. Too much strength was wasted on criticism; the struggle against religious obscurantism took a massive amount of our attention. As a result, for these last two years we didn't find the time to think about the principle of *organization* of our work on fact. Only here, for the first time (see the editorial), are we discussing the paths this work might take—through the forces of the *newly united* and correctly functioning *production collective*. (Some people must part with the psychology of the "indispensible craftsman.")

The inventive front is faced with very important work in the area of *accessory*, practical, educational, as well as "mass" and "children's" booklets. Everyone knows what confusion reigns in this area pres-

ently. No sort of rationalization on this colossally neglected front has "settled in." This is a genuine sector which still awaits October's touch! Need one be surprised that the organizational question is even more important than the methodological one? For questions of method were, in any case, settled during the years of the Revolution, but practice cryingly lags behind the reviewers' wishes. *Only a skillful organization of writers, artists, and pedagogues, set on rational industrial foundations can here provide the necessary production. But where is this organization?*

Just as important, if not even more important, is the task of forming a front of left-wing inventors in the realm of *cinema*. In our cinema they are still working with grandfather's devices. The best of what has been made, in one way or another, came from Lef. But even Lef has large-scale *misunderstandings* in cinema. We still have not found a common language in relation to "nonfictional" things, and we still, as in the realm of literature, *have no methodology whatsoever for the cinema of fact.*¹⁴

The front of *genuine factual artists* [faktoviki] must inevitably supply all of this, and, of course, supply it they will—as long as they do not get carried away with anarchistic "leftism." No amount of injury from without, and no kinds of specious deviations can slow down this necessary organic work for very long. The question of retooling the class individual along all the approaches to socialism is a question of life and death. It's either you or the dirty-faced brat—who will do the other one in. The dirty-faced brat can still spread himself caddishly throughout the land for a long time, but he who is objectively called forth by life will inevitably be victorious.

That is why it is naive to say: Lef has completed its work, Lef can go . . . "to the left of Lef." No, friends, it is not that way: *Lef is "destroyed"*—*long live the unified front of inventors along all paths!* A front which has been made precise and is bound by a unity of purpose—and which will not die so easily.

Afterword: Cubo-Futurism and Russian Formalism

HERBERT EAGLE

As a theory and methodology for the study of literature and the arts, Russian Formalism has had a major impact on the development of criticism in the twentieth century. Its emphasis on the structural features of the text itself, and its insistence that literary study be scientific and autonomous, set the stage for subsequent developments first in Czech and later in French Structuralism, and ultimately in semiotics internationally. Formalist views on the imminent properties of verbal art, on the function of art in renewing perception of reality, and on the mechanisms of literary evolution all bore an unquestionable relationship to the emergence of Futurism in Russia and particularly to the theoretical propositions and poetic practice of the Cubo-Futurists. Certain aspects of this relationship are manifestly clear and have been commented upon by a number of scholars.¹ The predominant view, however, is that the bold experimental thrust of Cubo-Futurism provided an example, a case study, for the linguists and literary scholars who came to be known as the Formalists. Whereas this view is correct in many senses, it downplays the extent to which the manifestoes and programmatic statements of the emerging Cubo-Futurists already comprised or implied the major tenets of Formalism, at least in its early stages.

The Russian "Formalist" movement in its first stage (the name

1. See, for example, Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambience* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 21–31, 77–118; Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), pp. 41–86, 212–29, 251–71; Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 29–60, 117–63.

“Formalism” was applied to it only later) consisted of two groups, the Moscow Linguistic Circle (founded in 1915) and the Petrograd-based Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka), better known by its initials in Russian as the Opoyaz (founded in 1916). Among early Formalism’s major figures were the linguist-literary theoretician Roman Jakobson, the linguist Lev Yakubinsky, and the literary scholars Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Osip Brik, and Yuri Tynianov.² Among the Formalists’ most important and influential publications in the early years were Shklovsky’s essay “The Resurrection of the Word” (published as a separate pamphlet in 1914,³ before the formation of either of the groups); two collections of studies on the theory of poetic language issued by the Opoyaz in 1916 and 1917 and then republished in one volume titled *Poetics* in 1919⁴ (these included seminal studies by Shklovsky, Brik, Eichenbaum, and Yakubinsky, among others); Jakobson’s studies *Recent Russian Poetry* (Prague, 1921) and *On Czech Verse, Primarily in Comparison with Russian* (Berlin, 1923); Eichenbaum’s *Melodics of Russian Lyrical Verse* (Petrograd, 1922) and *Anna Akhmatova* (Petrograd, 1923); and Tynianov’s *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924).

Throughout this period, a number of the Formalists maintained contact with certain of the Cubo-Futurist poets and participated in the life of the avant-garde in general. The circle patronized by Nikolay Kulbin, a wealthy professor who dabbled in impressionism and cubist painting and lectured on the avant-garde, included Shklovsky as well as the Futurists David and Nikolay Burliuk and Velimir Khlebnikov. The latter’s famous “Incantation by Laughter” was published in Kulbin’s book *The Studio of Impressionists* in 1910. Thus, Shklovsky was personally acquainted with the development of Cubo-Futurism from its earliest years and became its staunchest defender in academic circles. For example, in the winter of 1913–14, Shklovsky, in a lecture at the Stray Dog Cabaret, explained the important work of Futurism in furthering language⁵ (this was the basis of the essay “The Resurrection of the Word”). In a second study, “Premises of Futurism” (1915), Shklovsky defended Futurist *zaum* (transrational language), arguing that its difficulty was consistent with the general evolutionary necessity for art forms to renew perception through a process of deautomatization.⁶ A third article on this subject, “Transrational Language and

2. See Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, pp. 63–69.

3. Viktor Shklovskii, *The Resurrection of the Word* (St. Petersburg, 1914).

4. *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language*, vol. 1 (1916), vol. 2 (1917); republished as *Poetics: Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language* (Petrograd, 1919).

5. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 140–41.

6. Viktor Shklovskii, “Premises of Futurism,” *Voice of Life*, no. 18 (1915): 6–8.

Poetry," appeared in the first of the Formalist *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language* in 1916. Thus, Shklovsky's earliest theoretical works on art and poetry were directly linked to elements of the Futurist program, elements explicitly indicated and discussed in Cubo-Futurist manifestoes and articles as well.

Jakobson's acquaintance with both Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov also went back to the early years: "Jakobson's friendship with Majakovskij is attested to by numerous affectionate references to 'Roma Jakobson' scattered throughout Majakovskij's writings. . . . In the case of the hermit-like Xlebnikov the relationship was almost equally friendly. As early as 1914 Jakobson discussed with Xlebnikov the possibility of reforming the graphic aspect of traditional poetic language. In a letter . . . the young linguist endorsed Xlebnikov's idea of using in verse mathematical symbols and 'syncretic graphic signs.'"⁷ Jakobson attended gatherings of the Cubo-Futurists, whereas Mayakovsky could occasionally be seen at meetings of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Thus, when Jakobson lectured to the Circle on "Khlebnikov's Poetic Language" (which became the basis of his monograph *Recent Russian Poetry*, in which Mayakovsky's verse is also analyzed), Mayakovsky was in attendance.

Brik's links to the Futurists and to Mayakovsky in particular were considerably closer. Brik met Mayakovsky in Petrograd in 1915, and his apartment became a veritable Futurist salon, frequented by Khlebnikov and Shklovsky as well. During the period 1915 to 1917, Brik was the publisher of the Futurist miscellany *Seized the Futurists' Drum*, of two of Mayakovsky's long lyrical poems (*A Cloud in Trousers* and *The Backbone Flute*), as well as of the two Formalist *Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language*. *Seized* contained critical reviews of Mayakovsky's poetry by Shklovsky and Brik as well as Mayakovsky's manifesto "A Drop of Tar."⁸ During the early 1920s contacts among Shklovsky, Brik, Tynianov, and the Futurists continued. After Mayakovsky founded *Lef* in 1923, Brik published an article on the Formal method in its very first issue,⁹ and Tynianov published a key article, "On the Literary Fact," in its pages in 1924.¹⁰ In 1927 and 1928 Shklovsky and Brik published several Formalist studies in *New Lef*.¹¹

7. Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 65.

8. In this collection.

9. Osip Brik, "The So-called Formal Method," *Lef* 1 (1923): 213-15.

10. Iurii Tynianov, "On the Literary Fact," *Lef* 2 (1924): 100-116; later reprinted in his *Archaisms and Innovators* (Leningrad, 1928).

11. Osip Brik, "Rhythm and Syntax: Material on the Study of Poetic Speech," *New Lef* 3-6 (1927); Viktor Shklovskii, "In Defense of the Sociological Method," *New Lef* 3 (1927); idem, "Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*," *New Lef* 1 (1928).

If one juxtaposes the writings of the Formalists through the mid-1920s with the various manifestoes and statements of the Cubo-Futurist group (and their continuation in the 41° group, *Lef*, and *New Lef*), essential similarities can be seen in three related areas: (1) the nature and function of poetic language, and hence the resultant tasks of literary investigation; (2) the role of art in renewing perception; and (3) the process of literary evolution.

Literature as the Art of the Word: Literary Science as the Study of Poeticity

The central tenet of the emerging Formalist theory held that poetic language gained its aesthetic quality as a result of its special structures and that the task of literary research was to uncover those structures and explain how they functioned. As Jakobson put it in 1921 in his book *Recent Russian Poetry*, the proper focus of literary study was *literariness* (*literaturnost'*), that which makes a given verbal text "literature." Somewhat later Jakobson formulated this central quality of literature as follows, terming it *poeticity*: "Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion: when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and internal form acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality."¹²

Indeed, many of the earliest Formalist studies were dedicated to "words and their composition," to the "weight and value" of their "external and internal" properties. The focus of these studies was poetry, that domain of literature where the material itself was most unquestionably palpable. Even before the founding of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the Opoyaz, Shklovsky had sounded this theme in the 1914 brochure *The Resurrection of the Word*, now considered the very first properly Formalist publication: "If we should wish to make a definition of 'poetic' and 'artistic' perception in general, then doubtless we would hit upon the definition: 'artistic' perception is perception in which form is sensed (perhaps not only form, but form as an essential part)."¹³ Shklovsky proceeded to present examples of epi-

12. Roman Jakobson, "What Is Poetry?" *Free Directions* 30 (1933–34): 229–39. The citation is taken from the English translation by M. Helm in *Semiotics of Art*, ed. L. Matejka and I. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), p. 174.

13. See Shklovskii, "Resurrection of the Word." The citation is taken from the English translation by R. Sherwood in *Russian Formalism*, ed. S. Bann and J. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 41–42.

thets that had become banal and devoid of meaning because the sense of their "form" (their origin, their formation) had been lost.¹⁴ He ended the article by lauding "the Futurians" (*budetliane*, from the Russian verb "will be"; this is the name the Cubo-Futurists gave to themselves) for creating new words and new devices whose form could be sensed.

The first two collections of studies on the theory of poetic language published by the Opoyaz group, in 1916 and 1917, were primarily addressed to Shklovsky's implied agenda: What were the formal qualities of verse that made it what it was? How was verse structured, and what did its formal patterning imply about the way verse worked? In studying the complex structure of verse language, the Formalists turned first to its euphonic properties. In his article "The Accumulation of Identical Liquids" the linguist Yakubinsky argued that combinations of identical liquids (the sounds *l* and *r*), which are usually avoided or mispronounced in everyday speech, are not only tolerated but used as deliberate devices in poetry.¹⁵ In "On Poetry and Transrational Language," Shklovsky suggested that the euphonic stratum of language is capable of transmitting pleasure and meaning in its own right, as it does in the speech of children and in the verbal formulas and incantations of religious sects.¹⁶ Brik's article "Sound Repetitions" sought to classify various kinds of alliteration taking place within words as well as at their beginnings. His typology demonstrated that sound repetition was not limited to a few striking moments, but that it in fact permeated the entire texture of a poem.¹⁷

Throughout the 1920s the Formalists devoted articles and monographs to the analysis of various levels of verse's complex structure. In "Rhythm and Syntax," Brik showed how parallel syntactic structure acted as an auxiliary rhythmic ordering, complementing the poem's meter.¹⁸ Eichenbaum's study *The Melodics of Russian Lyrical Verse* (1922) examined three fundamental sources of rhythmic organization in verse: traditional "prosodic" features (syllables and stresses), sound repetition, and phrase intonation. In his *On Czech Verse, Primarily in Comparison with Russian* (1923), Jakobson studied the relationship be-

14. Shklovskii's proposals were not entirely original here, based as they were on observations made by earlier scholars, especially Aleksandr Potebnia and Aleksandr Veselovskii.

15. L. Iakubinskii, "The Accumulation of Identical Liquids in Practical and in Poetic Language," in *Poetics*, pp. 50–57.

16. Viktor Shklovskii, "On Poetry and Transrational Language," in *Poetics*, pp. 13–26.

17. Osip Brik, "Sound Repetitions," in *Poetics*, pp. 58–98.

18. See n. 11.

tween the *dominant* organizing level of verse in a given language and the structural features of the language itself. Tynianov's *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924) was in many ways the culmination of this research, for Tynianov explained and illustrated the effect of rhythmic and euphonic patterning in creating the special semantics of verse language.

Tynianov announced that the task of his work was "to analyze specific transformations in the *meaning* and *sense* of a word as a function of the *verse* construction itself."¹⁹ The *dominant* aspect of this construction was verse rhythm, which created in the poetic text an opposition between two antagonistic orderings: one created by the segmentation of the poem into verse lines, and the other by the text's normal syntactic and semantic groupings. In other words, the verse rhythm produced a dynamic anticipation of successive, and *comparable*, groupings of words (the verses), inviting an anticipation of semantic similarity, which could then be resolved or frustrated. Thus, the word in verse had to be understood in terms of its function in a dynamic system, a system that places the word in semantic tension. Central was the idea of the multivaluedness of the word: "A word does not have a single definite meaning. It is a chameleon in which there arise, every time, not only different shades, but also sometimes even different colors."²⁰ In recent times, Tynianov's basic premise has been reformulated with great clarity by the Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman:

A poem is a complexly structured meaning. This signifies that entering into the integral structure of a poem, the meaningful elements of a language are connected by a complex system of correlations, comparisons, and contrasts impossible in an ordinary language construct. This gives each element separately and the construction as a whole an absolutely unique semantic load. Words, sentences and utterances, which in the grammatical structure are found in different positions, which are devoid of similar characteristics and, consequently, are noncomparable, prove in the artistic structure to be in positions of identity and antithesis and, consequently, comparable and contrastable. This reveals in them unexpected new semantic content impossible outside of poetry.²¹

One of the major characteristics of all the Formalist studies discussed above is that they considered poetry in terms of "imminent"

19. This citation is taken from a later edition, Tynianov, *Problema stikhotvornogo jazyka: stat'i* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1965), p. 22.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

21. Yuri Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text* (Leningrad, 1972). The citation is taken from the English translation of this work, ed. and tr. D. B. Johnson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), p. 35.

properties relating to the structure of its verbal material. In no case are the author's biography, sociohistorical determinants, or philosophical ideas made the object of literary study. Eichenbaum's retrospective essay "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'" (1927) emphasized precisely this position: that literary investigations ought to be scientific and autonomous, examining literature as a "social phenomenon *sui generis*."²²

To what extent, then, did the programmatic statements of the Futurists, and the poetry cited and composed in support of those statements, serve to anticipate, inspire, and promote the theoretical positions adopted by the Formalists? In the case of the Cubo-Futurists, one would have to answer, to a significant degree. The early Hylaeen manifestoes presented the new poetry as tightly (if speedily) crafted objects, intentional linguistic mechanisms of the very sort that Formalism sought to analyze. Writing of the "new aesthetic direction" in a draft for "[The Word as Such],"²³ Khlebnikov asserted that henceforth an artistic work would be "perceived and critiqued . . . simply as word." The literary work would possess "a closeness to the passionately passionate machine," and thus "tendentiousness and bookishness of all kinds" would be eliminated. In accordance with this view, the Cubo-Futurist manifestoes in which Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh participated referred rather consistently to the "poet" using the neologism *rechetvoets* (which we have rendered as "wordwright"), thus emphasizing the poet's role as word-creator rather than his philosophy or his emotions.

In the article "New Ways of the Word" (1913),²⁴ Kruchenykh lamented the habits of the contemporary critics and asserted that "we have no literary criticism" in the sense of "judges of the act of verbal creation." He rejected Symbolist aesthetics, as the Formalists also would a year or two later: "The idea of Symbolism necessarily presupposes the limitation of the artist, and a truth hidden somewhere by some *righteous uncle*. Of course, with such a premise how could you expect any joy, spontaneity, and persuasiveness in the artistic work?" Indeed, Kruchenykh's rhetoric captures well the sense that poetry is an experimental endeavor whose aim is the generation of new meaning: "Our new devices teach a new understanding of the world,

22. Eichenbaum, "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" in his *Literature: Theory, Criticism, Polemics* (Leningrad, 1927). The citation is taken from the English translation of the article by Irwin Titunik in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 33.

23. In this collection.

24. *Ibid.*

shattering the impoverished constructions of Plato, Kant, and other 'idealists,' where man stood not at the center of the universe, but behind the fence."

At the center of Cubo-Futurist theorizing stood the specially crafted verbal material, the very same "hero" which was soon to become the object of Formalist investigations. The first Hylaeian manifesto "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" championed "the art of the word."²⁵ Within two months, a much more detailed description of this art was forthcoming in the untitled manifesto that opened the miscellany *A Trap for Judges*, 2.²⁶ In terms of later Formalist studies, what was notable was the emphasis on parts of words (prefixes, suffixes, consonants, vowels) and their potential for conveying meaning and emotion. The signers of the manifesto (virtually all of the Hylaeians) expressed their determination to suspend all rules (of word formation, of pronunciation, of grammar and syntax, of orthography, of punctuation, of meter, of rhyming) and "to endow words with content on the basis of their graphic and phonic characteristics." How was this to be accomplished?

What lay behind the bold and inflammatory language of the Cubo-Futurist manifestoes was not absurdity or inconsistency but a radical semiotic program. By breaking the normal rules for combining sounds, morphemes, words, or phrases, the Cubo-Futurists effectively placed a greater distance between the signifier (the palpable sign-vehicle, the sound or grapheme) and the signified (its possible meaning). The accepted linguistic codes no longer determined the meaning of the sign with any certainty; the sign was free (or, at least, freer)—Tynianov's forthcoming "multivaluedness" of the word in poetry was carried to its extreme, with definitive indications of meaning reduced to a bare minimum. In such a radical practice, would anything at all be communicated? The Cubo-Futurists intended to communicate in their poetry, and their manifestoes addressed the question of how they would achieve this. One of the key concepts was *zaum* (transreason), *zaumnyi iazik* (transrational language). If by "reason" we understand that component of language which can be elucidated by dictionaries, that component which is codified as "conventional" signs, then *zaum* refers to the qualities of the sounds themselves, to that which is communicated by the phonic level without reference to the defined meanings.

What, for example, might be communicated by the various vowels and consonants in and of themselves? In the lead manifesto in *A Trap*

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

for *Judges*, 2, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh suggested that vowels conveyed “time and space (a characteristic of thrust),” whereas consonants conveyed “color, sound, smell.” In semiotic terminology one might characterize this as an appeal to the “iconic” nature of sounds as signs, their physical resemblance to that which they signify. The perceptual experience of vowels is one of greater *duration* (compared with consonants); hence the iconic resemblance to similar entities involving duration or expanse: time, space, thrust. The resemblance between particular consonants and certain colors, sounds, or smells might presumably be based on analogous “brightness,” sonorousness, or sharpness. Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh presumed that all word roots originally bore such iconic resemblances to what they signified but that the sensation of this level of language had been suppressed through exclusive attention to the rational, conventional determination of word meaning. As Kruchenykh wrote in the “Declaration of the Word as Such”:²⁷ “The artist has seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word ‘lily’ has been soiled and ‘raped.’ Therefore, I call the lily, ‘euy’—the original purity is reestablished.” The sequence of sounds “euy” evoke for Kruchenykh the image, color, smell, texture—in short, the experience—of the lily.

In a poem such as Kruchenykh’s “*dyr bul shchyl*” (included by him as an example in the manifesto *The Word as Such*)²⁸—

dyr bul shchyl
ubeshchur
skum
vy so by
r l ez

—the author claimed there was “more of the Russian national spirit than in all of Pushkin.” Disregarding for a moment Kruchenykh’s brash, irreverent hyperbole (in itself programmatic), is it possible in any sense to justify this claim for a poem that contains virtually no actual words? In answering affirmatively one might cite the resemblances to the *structure* of particular categories of Russian words (nouns, verbs, adverbs, exclamations) and to particular morphemes suggestive of meaning: *dyr* suggesting *dyra* (hole), *bul* suggesting *byl* (was), *shchyl* suggesting *shchel’* (a chink), etc. The phonetic aspects of the text carry certain semantic potential as well. Thus, the denser-

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

than-usual presence of certain consonants and of the vowel *y* might suggest Turkic influence, as these sounds are typical of those languages. Kruchenykh's own comment would appear to relate the phonic dissonances iconically to a sense of spiritual dissonance: "In art, there may be unresolved dissonances—'unpleasant to the ear,'—because there is dissonance in our souls by which the former are resolved. Example: *dyr bul shchyl*, etc."²⁹

Of course, the Cubo-Futurists did not argue that such transrational effects take place only in poems that do not use known words. On the contrary, a transrational level may be present in any poem. Thus, argued Kruchenykh in the "Declaration of the Word as Such:"

A verse presents (unconsciously) several series of vowels and consonants. THESE SERIES CANNOT BE ALTERED. It is better to replace a word with one close in sound than with one close in meaning. . . . If similar vowels and consonants were replaced by graphic lines, they would form patterns that could not be altered (example: III-I-I-III). For this reason it is IMPOSSIBLE to translate from one language into another; one can only transliterate a poem into Latin letters and provide a word-for-word translation. The verse translations that exist at present are merely word-for-word translations; as aesthetic texts they are nothing more than coarse vandalism.³⁰

This is a point upon which the Formalists surely would have agreed, for many of their studies (in particular, those of Jakobson)³¹ argued the crucial importance of a poem's sound texture to its essence, to its meaning.

In defending his values on the validity of *zaum* Kruchenykh sought support in the writings of other poets and in such examples as the speaking-in-tongues practiced by various religious sects. In his 1913 article "New Ways of the Word" he wrote:

"Oh, if one could express one's soul without words" (Fet). "A thought put into words is a lie" (Tiutchev).

three times true!

Why not get away from rational thought, and write not by means of word concepts, but of words freely formed? . . .

Possessed by religious inspiration (and inspiration is always exalted)

29. See "Declaration of the Word as Such," in this collection.

30. *Ibid.*

31. See, for example, Roman Jakobson, "The Girl sang in the church choir," *Orbis Scriptus: Dmitrij Tschizewskij zum 70. Geburtstag* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1966), pp. 385–401.

they started speaking in the language of the "holy ghost" (according to their own magnificent expression) and drank "the living water."³²

In defending *zaum* in his articles of 1914–16, Shklovsky took a similar tack, citing poetic examples as well as occurrences in folklore, nursery rhymes, and religious rites.

The Cubo-Futurists extended their argument about the iconic potential of signifiers to graphic as well as phonic signs. They claimed that the sculptural shape of letters, the typeface, and the orthography all affect the meaning of a verbal text. "Why clothe all letters in the 'gray prisoner's uniform' of standard type?" ask Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh in the manifesto "The Letter as Such."³³ As the rationale for publishing poetry volumes in the writer's handwriting they state that "longhand peculiarly modified by one's mood conveys that mood to the reader, independently of the words. . . . A piece may be rewritten in longhand by someone else or by the creator himself, but if he does not relive the original experience, the piece will lose all the charm acquired by means of free handwriting during 'the wild snowstorm of inspiration.'" In *The First Journal of the Russian Futurists*, Nikolai Burliuk commented, "In the transition from *iconographic* to *symbolic* to phonetic script we lost the *skeleton* of the language and ended up with verbal rickets. Only a deep-rooted good taste saved our copyists and painters, who embellished capital letters and inscriptions on signboards." Burliuk went on to note that the use of natural rather than conventional signs in writing extended also to the sense of smell in the days when women scented their letters, as well as among the Chinese and Japanese, who were said to perfume their books.³⁴

The research of the Formalists on verse structure, of course, went beyond *zaum* and other iconic or natural signs. The studies of Tynianov, for example, focused to a much greater extent on the special *correlations* of words achieved by virtue of the rhythmic ordering. This dynamic feature, central to the art of poetry (as Tynianov believed), was just as relevant to the poetry of Khlebnikov or Mayakovsky as it was to the poetry of previous centuries. And both of these poets used structures and devices that heightened the potential for correlation. Their neologisms made the language's morphemes more perceptible and invited semantic comparisons. Khlebnikov's famous poem "Incantation by Laughter" was composed almost entirely of created

32. In this collection.

33. *Ibid.*

34. See "Poetic Principles," in this collection.

words built on the Russian root *smekh* (laughter).³⁵ That Khlebnikov could create an entire narrative out of a single root demonstrated the semantic potential of Russian prefixes and suffixes, particularly when placed by the verse structure in positions of parallel juxtaposition and comparison.

Another correlational device central to Khlebnikov's poetry was paranomasia. The poet juxtaposed words close in sound in such a way as to imply a close semantic relationship between them as well (a technique sometimes referred to as "false etymology"). Frequently the narrative of Khlebnikov's poems changes abruptly when he replaces one word by another nearly identical in sound to the anticipated word but of course different in meaning, as in the following lines:

Reki vlivalis' v more tak,
Chto kazalos': ruka odnogo dushit sheiu drugogo.³⁶

The rivers were flowing into the sea so that,
it seemed: the hand of one strangles the neck of the other.

The poem "shifts" on the close resemblance in Russian between the word for river (*reka*) and the word for hand or arm (*ruka*). The river suddenly turns into a hand (the subsequent syntax notwithstanding). Such a shift was termed by Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh a *sdvig* (the word in Russian means "displacement" or "shear," in the sense of a sudden physical force).

Mayakovsky achieved similar effects of sharp correlation of words through his use of unusual rhymes, foregrounded by extremely short lines and later by "stepladder" typography—thus producing discrete and compact visual (and intonational) units related to one another through sound and spatial disposition, as in the following example from *A Cloud in Trousers* (1915):

Vot i vecher
v nochnuiu zhut'
ushel ot okon,
khumuryi,
dekabryi.

V driakhluiu spinu khokhochut i rzhut
kandeliabry.³⁷

35. See Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 7–8.

36. The lines are from Khlebnikov's poem "The Elephants Fought with Tusks so That."

37. The cited lines are from the beginning of the first canto.

Now the evening
 into the night horror
 went from the windows,
 sullen,
 Decembrish.

Into its decrepit spine bellow with laughter and roar
 candelabras.

Unusual semantic collisions are created by the phonic and spatial similarities between *nochnuiu* and *driakhluiu* ("night" and "decrepit"), *zhut'* and *rzhut* ("horror" and "roar"), *ot okon* and *khokhochut* ("from the windows" and "bellow with laughter"), *dekabryi* and *kandeliabry* ("Decembrish" and "candelabras"). The pairs of words seem to "infect" one another in meaning, just as in the model of poetic semantics Tynianov was later to propose.

Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh compared the Futurists' techniques of juxtaposing words and word fragments in a verse composition to the manner in which the Cubists (termed by them "the Futurian painters") treated parts of the body and objects in their painting: "The Futurian painters love to use parts of the body, its cross sections, and the Futurian wordwrights use chopped-up words, half-words, and their odd artful combinations (transrational language), thus achieving the very greatest expressiveness, and precisely this distinguishes the swift language of modernity, which has annihilated the previous frozen language." . . .³⁸ The importance of the new ways of combining words were stressed again by Kruchenykh in "New Ways of the Word": "We were the first to say that in order to depict the new—the future—one needs *totally new words and a new way of combining them*. This absolutely new way will be the combination of words according to their inner laws, which reveal themselves to the wordwright, and not according to the rules of logic or grammar as was the case before us."³⁹

The dynamic nature of the Cubo-Futurist conception of poetry was also noted by Benedict Livshits in his 1913 manifesto "The Liberation of the Word."⁴⁰ Why should the . . . conception, which we put forward for the first time, have anything in common with the purely ideological values of Symbolism?" he asks. The Symbolists, argued Livshits, shared the "slavish conviction" that words are "designed to express already known concepts and the connections between them." As opposed to this static view of language, in which words are fixed to

38. See "From *The Word as Such*," in this collection.

39. In this collection.

40. *Ibid.*

the ideal entities they represent, the Cubo-Futurists created a poetry "free from the sad necessity of expressing the logical connection between ideas." Instead, the poet could work with the meaning-creating potential that resided in the verbal material itself: "Such a rejection of the widely assumed relationship between the world and the poet's consciousness as the poet's criterion of creation *is by no means a rejection of every objective criterion*. The poet's choice of one or another form of expression for his creative energy is far from arbitrary. The poet is bound, first of all, by the plastic affinity of verbal expressions. Second, by their plastic valence. Third, by their verbal texture. Next, by the requirements of rhythm and musical orchestration." If we recall that the effect of euphony and rhythm on the meaning of chameleonlike words in verse was the principal subject of Tynianov's *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924) as well as an important component of Yuri Lotman's later semiotic analyses of verse, we can appreciate how close Livshits's formulation was to the theoretical directions in which later Formalism and literary Structuralism would proceed.

Verbal Art as the Renewal of Perception

Shklovsky's analysis of the new verbal techniques of Cubo-Futurist poetry (during the years 1914–16) was closely related to his overall theory of art. He rejected the Symbolist view of art as "thinking in images" and the contention that images in art convey truths with rapidity and economy. Rather, Shklovsky saw the relationship of art to everyday reality as one of "making strange" (*ostranenie*) and "making difficult" (*zatrudnenie*). The function of art was to revive perceptions that had become automatized in everyday life. In Shklovsky's view, practical language abbreviates and simplifies to produce rapid comprehension, whereas language in its aesthetic function represents our perceptions in a more complex way, in order to deautomatize and renew them: "The aim of art is to give the feeling of things as seeing and not as knowing; the device of art is the device of the 'making strange' of things and the device of form made difficult, magnifying the complexity and the duration of perception, since the perceptual process in art is an autonomous value."⁴¹ In verbal art in particular, it is words that are deautomatized, or "made strange," by their inclusion in a particular structured context that disturbs our normal perception of their meanings. From this followed Shklovsky's conviction that the principal task of literary science was, therefore, to elucidate the means by which this process of "making strange" operated in verbal art.

41. Viktor Shklovskii, "Art as Device," in *Poetics*, p. 105.

The adoption of Shklovsky's view by other Formalists led to an intensive study of art's devices for "making strange." This was the principal theme of Yakubinsky's studies of verse language, in which he sought to demonstrate the use of euphonic devices in poetry to slow down the tempo of speech and render it more difficult: "The accumulation of liquids retards the tempo of speech, destroys its automatism, calls attention to the sounds . . . consequently we would justifiably anticipate that in poetic language dissimulation does not take place and the accumulation of liquids is entirely permissible. So it is. Furthermore, the accumulation of liquids in poetic linguistic thinking is not only permissible, but can receive the well-known positive value."⁴² Eichenbaum declared that "art lives on that which removes itself from the everyday." Whereas usual word use involves no attention to the acoustic resemblance between words, poetry creates deliberate structures and devices based on sound; thus art exploits what is random and unnoticed in everyday life. "Dance is constructed out of movements which do not take part in the ordinary process of walking. If art does make use of the everyday, it uses it as material—in order to give it an unexpected interpretation or place it in a new context, in an explicitly deformed state."⁴³

The terms "making strange," "making difficult," "renewing perception," "deformation," "frustrating expectations" were, of course, all exceedingly applicable to the Cubo-Futurist experiments in poetry. In *The Word as Such*, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh had described the new poetry as "more uncomfortable than blacked boots or a truck in the living room" (certainly an image designed as an affront to banal conceptions) and had said that it should have "a splintery texture, very rough" (i.e., difficult and strange). Language would be "roughened" up by the accumulations of like sounds and of nouns without the normal syntactic connections, as in Mayakovsky's lines

. . . lokhmoťiami gub moikh v piatnakh chuzhikh
pozolot
dymom volos nad pozharami glaz iz olova . . .

. . . gilded with rags of my lips in another's stains
with the smoke of my hair over the fire of eyes of
tin . . .⁴⁴

42. Iakubinskii, "Accumulation of Identical Liquids."

43. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problems of Cinema Stylistics," in *The Poetics of Cinema* (Moscow, 1927). Citation is from the English translation by Herbert Eagle in *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, ed. H. Eagle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), p. 57.

44. From the poem "From Fatigue," *The Croaked Moon* (1913).

Kruchenykh related such decomposition and rearrangement of verbal elements to the similar perspectival experiments of the Cubist painters—all in the name of renewing perception of the world:

Contemporary painters discovered the secret (1) that movement generates relief (a new dimension) and that, in turn, relief generates movement;

and (2) that irregular perspective generates a new 4th dimension (the essence of Cubism).

Similarly, contemporary bards discovered: that irregular structuring of a sentence (in terms of logic and word formation) generates *movement and a new perception of the world* and, conversely, that movement and psychological variation generate strange “nonsensical” combinations of words and letters.

Therefore, we loosened up grammar and syntax; we recognized that in order to depict our dizzy contemporary life and the even more impetuous future, we must combine words in a new way, and the more disorder we introduce into the sentence structure the better.⁴⁵

(it is interesting to note that Kruchenykh made this observation in 1913, the year before Shklovsky first raised the issue of art as renewal of perception in *The Resurrection of the Word*). Kruchenykh follows this with a virtual catalog of devices that can be used to make the word “strange” in verse:

1. grammatical irregularity—unexpected twist
 - a. lack of agreement in case, number, tense, and gender between subject and predicate, adjective and noun: lake ran past white flying
 - b. elimination of the subject or other parts of speech, elimination of pronouns, prepositions, etc.
 - c. arbitrary word-novelty (pure neologism): he doesn’t give a “shoot” (*A Trap for Judges*, 1), dyr bul shchyl etc.
 - d. unexpected phonetic combination: euy, rlmktzhg . . . (*Let’s Grumble*).⁴⁶

The goal of his study, he asserts, is “to underscore the great significance for art of all strident elements, discordant sounds (dissonances) and purely primitive roughness.”

Crafty devices are employed that “confuse novices with their unexpected ups and downs” but with purposes “serious and solemn. . . . A new content *becomes manifest only* when new expressive devices are achieved, a new form. Once there is a new form, a new content

45. See “New Ways of the Word.”

46. *Ibid.*

follows; form thus conditions content."⁴⁷ The propositions that "content" is inextricable from form, that new content is an inevitable concomitant of new form, and that novelty in art does not depend on new themes were to become central tenets for Shklovsky and for the Formalist movement as a whole.

The Process of Literary Evolution

The claim that the function of art was to renew perceptions had clear implications for a theory of literary evolution. For if the function of art is to deautomatize perceptions, there must be a state in which those perceptions *are* automatized. On the one hand, that automatized state is the unnoticed world of everyday facts; on the other, it is the background field of banal art forms against which the truly innovative art work appears. As Shklovsky wrote in his article "The Connection of Devices of Plot Formation with General Devices of Style" (1919), "A work of art is perceived against the background of, and by association with, other works of art. The form of a work of art is determined by its relationship with other forms existing prior to it. . . . A new form arises not in order to express new content but in order to replace an old form which has already lost its artistic quality."⁴⁸ Thus, old, petrified art forms are replaced by new ones capable of producing fresh perceptions. When these new forms have been in use so long that they too become automatized, then new devices must arise again for art to function.

Shklovsky's theory was in complete harmony with the way the Cubo-Futurists saw themselves during the 1912–15 period. The very first lines of their first manifesto "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (1912) called upon readers to abandon the old "classical" literature, which was no longer meaningful, in favor of what was new and unexpected: "To the readers of our New First Unexpected. *We* alone are the *face* of *our* Time. Through us the horn of time blows in the art of the word. The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity." The calls for renewing the language with invented and newly derived words to produce a keener and more vivid impression, for replacing traditional metrical

47. *Ibid.*

48. Viktor Shklovskii, "The Connection of Devices of Plot Formation with General Devices of Style," in *Poetics*, p. 120.

forms with “free rhythms,” for discarding clichéd rules of grammar and syntax—all were made with a view toward making the artistic language palpable once more. As Kruchenykh argued in “New Ways of the Word,” “Russian readers have grown used to emasculated words, and they see in them algebraic symbols that mechanically solve the problems of petty thinking, meanwhile everything alive, superconscious in the word, everything which connects it to its well-springs, its sources of existence, goes unnoticed.” For the Cubo-Futurists the language of the Symbolists as well as that of the Realists was a “smooth” art that could not adequately reflect the turmoil of the contemporary era. As Mayakovsky declared in “A Drop of Tar” (1915):

1. Destroy the all-cansons freezer which turns inspiration into ice.
2. Destroy the old language, powerless to keep up with life’s leaps and bounds.
3. Throw the old masters overboard from the ship of modernity.⁴⁹

The above citations demonstrate quite clearly that the Cubo-Futurists saw “evolution” as a radical change. They wanted to disavow every aspect of the old poetry: its thematics, its vocabulary, its style, its devices. For example, Kruchenykh attacked alliteration and vowel assonance as worn-out devices because they were so prevalent in Symbolist practice. He called for dissonance instead, and for transrational language: “Poetry has ended up in a blind alley, and its only honorable way out is not to use epithets and words that have outlived their time—but to switch to transrational language.”⁵⁰ Whereas it may have been true that Kruchenykh’s own radical experiments fell in the category of a *pure* transrational language, this was not true of the poetry of Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, or Livshits. To treat these poets as examples of *evolution* in poetic styles and forms would require a more subtle model.

Indeed, by the 1920s the Formalist standpoint on literary evolution had itself “evolved” away from the more radical assertions of Kruchenykh and Shklovsky in the early period. Although the necessity of overcoming dead forms continued to be viewed as the driving force behind evolution, the process of change came to be seen as rapid *or* gradual depending on the specifics under consideration. More important, Tynianov argued that change was not merely, or even primarily, a replacement of old forms by new and different ones, but rather a shift in the *structural functions* of elements. In his essay “On Literary

49. In this collection.

50. See “*Secret Vices of the Academicians*,” in this collection.

Evolution" (1927), Tynianov pointed out that the function of a structural element within a specific work might be related both to the other elements in the work, and to the function of "similar elements in other works in other systems." At the end of the article, Tynianov makes a statement that could well be considered a program for the further study of the functional relationships of elements, both within a system and among systems: "If we agree that evolution is the change in interrelationships between elements of a system—between functions and formal elements—then evolution may be seen as the 'mutations' of systems. These changes vary from epoch to epoch, occurring sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly. They do not entail the sudden and complete renovation or the replacement of formal elements, but rather the *new function of these formal elements*."⁵¹

In spite of this important difference between the Cubo-Futurist view and the complex conception of evolution in "late" Formalism, the *example* of Futurism, its sharply polemical position vis-à-vis the worn out forms of past literature, had a marked effect on Formalist studies of other literary periods. Russia's important writers and poets were studied with an emphasis on their restructuring of the canonical aesthetic systems of their time. Thus, Eichenbaum studied Akhmatova's poetry as a liberation from the poetic diction of the Symbolists; Tynianov, in his *Dostoevsky and Gogol*,⁵² analyzed parody as a phenomenon characteristic of the period when old norms became clichéd; studies by Eichenbaum, Tynianov, and Shklovsky stressed the ways Pushkin restructured the neoclassical norms he inherited.⁵³ Characteristically, when, in 1928, Tynianov published his collected essays dealing with this problem, he titled the volume *Archaists and Innovators*. Thus, it might be argued that the strident Cubo-Futurist position, albeit modified by much subtler levels of analysis and understanding, had a substantial impact on the way literary history was construed by the Formalists in the 1920s.

There was also a return benefit, as it were, as certain Futurists moved into the period of *Lef* and *New Lef*. The former Cubo-Futurists

51. Iurii Tynianov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Archaists and Innovators* (Leningrad, 1929). Citation is from the English translation by Carol Luplow in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, pp. 76–77.

52. Iurii Tynianov, *Dostoevsky and Gogol: Toward a Theory of Parody* (Petrograd, 1921). Reprinted in *Archaists and Innovators*.

53. For example, Iurii Tynianov's "The Archaists and Pushkin," in *Archaists and Innovators*; Boris Tomashevskii's *Pushkin* (Moscow, 1925); Viktor Shklovskii's "Eugene Onegin: Pushkin and Sterne," in *Notes on Pushkin's Poetics* (Berlin, 1923); and Boris Eikhenbaum's "Pushkin's Path toward Prose," in his *Literature*.

who embraced the Revolution could regard the “explosion” of 1912–15 as merely a *stage* in the evolution of art, not the *epitome* of aesthetic endeavor—as the manifestoes of that early period would have had it. Thus, in the first issue of *Lef* (1923), Mayakovsky and Brik could place emphasis on the social tasks of literature while at the same time evoking its experimental and evolving nature:

We work on the organization of language sounds, on the polyphony of the rhythm, on the simplification of verbal constructions, on the accuracy of verbal expressiveness, on the manufacture of new thematic devices.

All this work for us is not an aesthetic end in itself, but a workshop for the best expression of the facts of the contemporary era.

We are not priest-creators, but master-executors of the social demand.

Our practice printed in *Lef* is not “absolute artistic revelations,” but examples of work in progress.⁵⁴

Faced with the problem of reconciling the aesthetics of Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, and Burliuk in the early 1920s (each poet having clearly gone in a distinct direction), Tretyakov (also in the first issue of *Lef*) insisted that Futurism never had a single doctrine and that its essence was never to rest on the clichés of the moment but to be constantly experimental, constantly evolving:

Futurism would not be what it is if it finally settled on some given aesthetic clichés, and ceased to be the revolutionary ferment that without respite impels us toward creativity, toward the search for ever newer forms. Schools may branch out of Futurism, and they do. One can talk about the Mayakovsky school, the Khlebnikov school, the Pasternak school. But, here, one has to be cautious, because the abnormal calm that the popular dead-end concept of “school” carries in itself would be harmful to Futurism.⁵⁵

For Tretyakov, Futurism represented an engine of permanent evolution. He stated that Futurism did not aim at the establishment of an artistic dogma but rather sought maximum creativity, maximum flexibility, and the “rejection of all possible canons and concepts of absolute values.” (Of course Tretyakov did go on to add that the ultimate aim of Futurism was the creation of a new “world-sense” and a new “human being”—thus adding an explicit revolutionary social purpose that of course would be hard to justify on the basis of the 1912–15

54. See “Our Linguistic Work,” in this collection.

55. See “From Where to Where,” in this collection.

works themselves.) Whereas the early Cubo-Futurists had been ready "to throw Pushkin from the ship of modernity," Tretyakov now paralleled the evolutionary role of the Futurists to that of Pushkin: "A live contemporary Pushkin lives with us a hundred years later in the verbal and conceptual explosions of the Futurists, who today are carrying forward the work that he performed on the language the day before yesterday."⁵⁶

In fact, Futurism was moving into a new area, the area of "applied arts" (the agitational jingle, the poster caption, the newspaper feuilleton, the march song), adjusting its aesthetics to suit the task at hand. The movement as represented in *Lef* maintained, however, its rejection of the conventions of old "realist" fictional art and retained its emphasis on material, only now as the material directly related to purposeful life: Constructivism's "assemblage of materials according to a compositional method justified by its practical end"; "not narratives about people, but living words in living interaction among people"; "a study of the methods for working up material into a useful object."⁵⁷

The legitimacy of Futurism's rejection of old art forms remained a central tenet, now evoked against those tendencies in the Proletkult and other workers' art groups that, in theory or in practice, retained essential features of the "dead" art the Futurists claimed to have definitively replaced. The manifesto "Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?" (1923) read, in part:

With all our might, *we will fight against the transferring of the working methods of the dead into today's art. We will fight against speculations in false clarity, in our affinity with the venerable masters; fight against offering in books dusty classical truths disguised as new and renewing. . . .*

against those who through ignorance, resulting from their strictly political specialization, pass out the traditions inherited from their great-grandmothers as the will of the people, . . .

against those who replace the inevitable dictatorship of taste with an institutional slogan of general elementary clarity,

against those who leave a loophole in art for idealistic outpourings about eternity and the soul.⁵⁸

The accompanying manifesto "What Does Lef Fight For?" commented about the conservative artistic practices of the Proletkult even more

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. In this collection.

pointedly: "*The Futurists*, from the very beginning, while still in the Kshesinsky palace, tried to reach an agreement with the groups of the proletarian writers (the future Proletkult), but these writers thought (judging by all evidence) that the revolutionary spirit was completely exhausted by agitational content alone, and they remained true reactionaries in the area of form, incapable of joining forces in any way.⁵⁹

In 1927–28, *New Lef* also framed its artistic positions in the context of the principles of literary evolution. While affirming the accomplishments of *Lef*, the manifesto "Reader!" (1927) stated, "These achievements have not turned the Leftists into academics. *Lef* must move forward, using its achievements only as experiments."⁶⁰ In "We Are the Futurists," Brik wrote that *Lef* had respect for "the past as the past," but continued in its "uncompromising hatred for that very same past when it attempts to become the present."⁶¹ Mayakovsky's article "Broadening the Verbal Basis" also began with an attack on critics upholding old structures and conservative artistic traditions. The article went on to discuss the legitimacy of new genres and methods that had emerged on the "left front" of the arts: the slogan, the agitational speech, the declamatory style.⁶²

In *New Lef*'s first issue of 1928, Tretyakov, in the article "Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!" declared that "militant passéism . . . is the first and principal enemy." He decried the belief that new themes could be effectively communicated through old worn-out forms:

We say that ideology does not lie in the material which art makes use of. Ideology lies in the devices through which that material is worked up; ideology lies in form. Only expediently formed material can become a thing with direct social function. Changing a theme is trivial. Peasant women will not become women cadres merely by so labeling them. . . .

This is how the most perfunctory response to the present day is made. Under the helmet of Yegorya the Victorious, the icon painters overlay the face of a Red Army man, or under women in peasant dress they write, instead of "lasses"—"Komsomolkas." Composers insert communal words into the melodies of a café chanteuse; writers describe the Civil War and the rising of the factories in muffled Chekhovian tones or in the manner of the Dostoevskian hysterical-criminal novel.⁶³

In place of these worn-out genres, Tretyakov championed the "uninvented literature of fact": memoirs, sketches, reportage, travel notes, feuilletons.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

Tretyakov's article "What's New" (1928) attempted to review the entire history of Futurism from the evolutionary perspective of the Formalists, that is, as a movement undergoing successive changes in the dominant organizing principle of its art, not rejecting its earlier stages but reconceiving their position within the functional system as a whole. Thus, in its earliest stage, according to Tretyakov, Futurism was dominated by principles originating in "Futurist painting" (presumably its Impressionism and its Cubism); later the primary considerations were those emerging from the verbal arts; in the early 1920s, the example of Meyerhold's theatrical practices led to a shift toward functionality and the involvement of the audience; the then current stage, the mid-1920s, was dominated by the move toward documentary, led by the example of the debates on cinematic art. Tretyakov also remarked on the tendency for the canonical, established systems to absorb revolutionary developments—in their own terms:

The first Futurist poems were evaluated not as poems, but as clowning, intended to subvert poetry as a whole.

The Futurist painting was not a painting, but an insult in colors, an insult intended for the whole of fine arts from ancient times until the present day.

October in the Theater was a negation of the theater as such.

Such is the first stage.

During the second stage, the inclusion of the hateful product into its sector of the arts takes place. The acceptance of transrational poems as poems; Cubist compositions as paintings; Constructivist staging as spectacle.⁶⁴

In the contemporary stage, the old dominant principles have assumed a subsidiary position, with the "maximum . . . transferred over to the line of the assertion of documentary literature. . . . The problem of the fixation of fact; raising the interest of the activists in reality; the assertion of the primacy of realness over fiction, the publicist over the belletrist—this is what in *Lef* is now most burning and immediate. . . . The fight for fact against fiction divides today's Futurists from the passéists."⁶⁵ The progression of Tretyakov's argument owed a great deal to the more sophisticated studies of literary evolution by the Formalists earlier in the decade. Those Formalist insights enabled him to present the new tasks the former Futurists had taken upon themselves in the mid-1920s as nonetheless an integral part of the evolving Futurist movement as a whole.

64. From "What's New," *New Lef*, no. 9 (1928): 1–5. This excerpt is not included in the present collection.

65. "What's New," in this collection.

Thus the interaction between Futurism and Formalism on the question of literary evolution might be characterized as symbiotic. The Cubo-Futurists' "revolutionary" view of literary change as a radical deautomatization of no-longer-perceptible artistic canons fueled the Formalist theory (particularly Shklovsky's) and provided an approach to literary history. Later, the Formalist studies of the 1920s led to a far more sophisticated picture of literary evolution, which in turn was used by the Futurists of *Lef* and *New Lef* in justifying the changes taking place in *their* Futurism's dominant emphases.

On the basis of the interaction between Cubo-Futurism (and its successor movements) and Formalism over the 1914–28 period on the issues of poetic language, the nature of art as renewal of perception, and the process of literary evolution, a dichotomy such as "Futurist practice/Formalist theory" is far too simple. At various stages in the elaboration of these issues, the Futurists themselves made key theoretical observations or staked out strong programmatic positions. And conversely, as Formalist theory and critical practice developed, that body of experience informed the Futurists' theoretical conception of their own evolution. The interplay between theory and practice was a two-way street.

Notes

Cubo-Futurism

Slap in the Face of Public Taste

1. These two paragraphs are a caustic attack on the Symbolist movement in general, a frequent target of the Futurists, and on two of its representatives in particular: Konstantin Bal'mont (1867–1943), a poet who enjoyed enormous popularity in Russia during the first decade of this century, was subsequently forgotten, and died as an émigré in Paris; Valerii Briusov (1873–1924), poet and scholar, leader of the Symbolist movement, editor of the *Scales* and literary editor of *Russian Thought*, who after the Revolution joined the Communist party and worked at Narkompros.

2. Leonid Andreev (1871–1919), a writer of short stories and a playwright, started in a realistic vein following Chekhov and Gorkii; later he displayed an interest in metaphysics and a leaning toward Symbolism. He is at his best in a few stories written in a realistic manner; his Symbolist works are pretentious and unconvincing. The use of the plural here implies that, in the Futurists' eyes, Andreev is just one of the numerous epigones.

3. Several disparate poets and prose writers are randomly assembled here, which stresses the radical position of the signatories of this manifesto, who reject indiscriminately all the literature written before them. The use of the plural, as in the previous paragraphs, is demeaning. Maksim Gorkii (pseud. of Aleksei Peshkov, 1868–1936), Aleksandr Kuprin (1870–1938), and Ivan Bunin (1870–1953) are writers of realist orientation, although there are substantial differences in their philosophical outlook, realistic style, and literary value. Bunin was the first Russian writer to win a Nobel Prize, in 1933. Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921) is possibly the best, and certainly the most popular, Symbolist poet. His early poetry reflects his fascination with Vladimir Solov'ev's idealistic philosophy and the idea of the "eternal feminine"; his later poems reveal a concern for patriotic and nationalistic themes. Blok accepted the Revolution as an apocalyptic phenomenon and made an

unsuccessful attempt to join the new order. Fedor Sologub (pseud. of Fedor Teternikov, 1863–1927) belongs to the first phase of Russian Symbolism, better known as Decadence. He was a refined poet but gained long-lasting fame from his novel *Petty Demon* (1907). Aleksei Remizov (1877–1957), a brilliant and very prolific prose writer, is a highly original stylist in the tradition of Gogol' and Dostoevskii. Arkadii Averchenko (1881–1925), a popular humorous writer, wrote short stories in a satirical vein. Sasha Chernyi (pseud. of Aleksandr Glikberg, 1880–1932), poet-satirist and author of short stories, is also known for his children's prose and poetry. Mikhail Kuzmin (1875–1936) was the first post-Symbolist poet to oppose clarity of style and earthly aestheticism to vagueness and mysticism, both in a theoretical statement and in his creative output. The names Sologub and Kuzmin are incorrectly spelled in the original ("Sollogub" and "Kuz'min"), possibly to reinforce the sarcasm of the statement. The spelling "Sollogub" implies aristocratic origins, whereas "Kuz'min" implies plebian ones.

4. The correct name is Aleksei Kruchenykh, but the poet at times and quite inconsistently used the name Aleksandr.

From *A Trap for Judges*, 2

1. In the first issue of *A Trap for Judges* (1910) there was hardly anything that could be labeled "avant-garde." This statement has to be considered in the light of the ongoing polemic between the Cubo-Futurists and other rival groups.

2. Metz & Co. was an advertising agency in St. Petersburg. This is a sarcastic allusion to the leader of the Ego-Futurists, Ivan Ignat'ev, who had commercial connections and at the time was promoting verbal experimentation within his group and had started a polemical exchange with the Cubo-Futurists.

3. Article 5 refers primarily to Kruchenykh's lithographed publications. The text was handwritten and reproduced by lithography. Kruchenykh produced hundreds of such booklets, some of them in collaboration with Khlebnikov.

[The Word as Such]

1. This date is a deliberate falsification; *A Trap for Judges*, 1 was issued at the beginning of 1910. At the time this manifesto was written (1913) the Cubo-Futurists were eager to establish themselves as independent from Italian Futurism, which made its first appearance in 1909.

2. This almanac was published in St. Petersburg in February 1910. The editor was Nikolai Kul'bin (1868–1917), who notwithstanding his rank of State Councillor and his position as a professor at the Military Academy was an enthusiastic patron of many avant-garde ventures. The only true Futurist piece in this almanac is Khlebnikov's famous poem "Incantation by Laughter." When the almanac was published Futurism had yet to appear in Russia.

3. S. Miasoedov, a mathematician by profession, contributed the excellent short story "On the Road" to *A Trap for Judges*, 1. Afterward, he seems to have abandoned all literary activities, for his name no longer appears in subsequent publications.

4. An appropriate example of this technique is Khlebnikov's "Incantation by Laughter," in which every word derives from the same root.

5. The authors of this manifesto supposedly refer to *I Poeti Futuristi* (Milan: Poesia, 1912).

6. Reference to "The Tale about the Priest and His Workman Balda" by A. Pushkin, in which Balda wins a contest with a little devil. The contestants were required to lift a horse. While the little devil tries to lift the horse over his head and fails, Balda jumps on the horse and cleverly "lifts" it by riding off.

7. In Russian, *pishchateli* (squeakers), a graphic and phonetic distortion of the word *pisateli* (writers).

From *The Word as Such*

1. Elena Guro (pseud. of Elena Von Notenberg, 1877–1913), a painter, poet, and author of short stories, was associated with the Cubo-Futurists, contributed prose and poetry to some of their almanacs, whose publication she subsidized. Guro was the wife of the artist and composer Mikhail Matiushin (1861–1934). Vladimir Burliuk was a painter and unlike his brothers never wrote any poetry or prose. Olga Rozanova (1886–1918), an artist and Kruchenykh's wife, illustrated many of Kruchenykh's lithographed books.

2. This is an excerpt from Khlebnikov's poem, "Malusha's Granddaughter."

3. In Russian, the word used by Guro is *shuiat* instead of the correct one, *shumiat*, "they whisper."

4. The poem "Finland" was published in the almanac *The Three* (1913).

5. *Explodity*, one of the many lithographed books by Kruchenykh, appeared in 1913.

6. From the poem "From Fatigue," which appeared in the almanac *The Croaked Moon* (1913).

7. This poem appeared in *The Croaked Moon*.

8. Excerpt from Kruchenykh's poem "Russia," which first appeared in the *Union of Youth*, no. 3 (1913), subsequently in the book *Piglets* (St. Petersburg, 1913, 1914).

9. A transcription of the Russian original (with *r*'s italicized by the translator) is necessary to clarify this example:

ia zhrets ia razlenilsia
k chemu vse stroit' iz zemli
v pokoi negi udalilsia
lezhu i greius' bliz svin'i
na teploi gline
ispa' svininy
i zapakh psiny
lezhu dobreiu na arshiny.
Kakoi-to vestnik postuchalsia . . .

10. From the poem "The Angel" by Mikhail Lermontov.

11. Kruchenykh's transrational poem, which appeared first in his booklet *Po-made* (1913). Later, it became the most quoted, and misquoted, example of transrational language.

12. The English word *speech* is in the original, although in Cyrillic.

13. This poem is based on Rimbaud's "Fêtes de la faim" and appeared in *The Croaked Moon*.

14. The allusion to "the beautiful lady" is a barb at Symbolism, in particular at the poet Aleksandr Blok, who wrote a cycle of poems dedicated to that mystical figure.

15. The phrases in italics are allusions to Dostoevskii's and Lermontov's works, according to Vladimir Markov, ed., *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov* (Manifestoes and programs of Russian Futurists) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1967), p. 58.

16. Kruchenykh sarcastically refers to the dandyism of the Ego-Futurists and the members of the Mezzanine of Poetry.

17. This poem has not been located in other publications. Presumably it appeared here for the first time.

18. In the original, "6 budushchelskikh knig." The word *budushchel* comes from Khlebnikov's poem "War-Death," and it is a neologism built on the Slavic root (as opposed to the Western one) meaning "future." The Cubo-Futurists occasionally called themselves "*budetliane*," a term also invented by Khlebnikov, which is a calque of the Western word *Futurists* instead of a direct borrowing. The Slavic root indicates not only verbal experimentation, but a slavophile orientation as well. In translation we have preserved this distinction by rendering the term *futuristy* by "Futurists" and *budetliane* by "Futurians." We have preserved as well the distinction between derivative terms related to these two categories. The six books the authors refer to are *Slap in the Face of Public Taste; A Trap for Judges, 2; Union of Youth, 3; The Three; The Missal of the Three; and The Crooked Moon*. The "evening of the Futurians" took place on October 13, 1913, at the Association of the Lovers of the Arts in Moscow.

The Letter as Such

1. In Russian, *rechar'*. We have rendered this neologism, as well as *rechetvoretz*, by "wordwright" because they both derive from the same root and convey the same meaning.

2. After the death of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, his older son Sviatopolk seized power and ordered the murder of his younger brothers, Boris and Gleb, in 1015. Boris and Gleb, later sanctified by the Orthodox Church, became the subject of a famous icon and of stories found in medieval chronicles.

3. All these books were issued by Kruchenykh in 1912-13. Mikhail Larionov (1881-1964), together with his wife, Natalia Goncharova (1881-1926), was one of the most prominent exponents of the avant-garde. He worked out the theory of "rayonism" in painting and was the driving force in the organization of the Jack of Diamonds and the Donkey's Tail (see "What Does Lef Fight For?," nn. 3 and 4). About Nikolai Kul'bin, see [The Word as Such], n. 2. About Olga Rozanova, see *The Word as Such*, n. 1.

4. The literal expression in Russian is "Kiss the tip of your fingers!" It refers to a typical gesture expressing appreciation and delight.

5. About Bal'mont, see "Slap in the Face of Public Taste," n. 1. About Blok, *ibid.*, n. 3.

From *Explodity*

1. See below, "Declaration of the Word as Such."

2. This quotation comes from an article by D. G. Konovalov, "Religious Ecstasy in the Russian Mystical Sects," *Theological Bulletin*, April 1908.

3. By changing the words' gender to the masculine, Kruchenykh applied this rule in the opera libretto *Victory over the Sun* (1913).

4. The words that follow, obviously, do not belong to any specific language, except for the last one, *shish*, which is a Russian word that refers to a typical abusive gesture. In the original, however, Kruchenykh drew the letters to look like Hebrew.

Declaration of the Word as Such

1. Kruchenykh called the free language "zaum'" or "zaumnyi iazyk," literally, "transreason" or "transrational language." We have maintained this distinction in translation. The example that follows is taken from a poem by Kruchenykh, which appeared in the *Union of Youth*, no. 3 (1913). The words in this quotation do not belong to Russian or to any other language.

2. *Euy*, a transrational word, is also the name of Kruchenykh's own publishing house.

3. These are the vowels from the beginning of the prayer "Our Father," according to Markov, *Manifesty*.

4. Kruchenykh refers to the essay by N. Kul'bin, "Free Art as Life's Foundation," *Studio of the Impressionists* (1910).

New Ways of the Word

1. Quotation from "Slap in the Face of Public Taste," included in this collection.

2. The *byliny* are epic songs celebrating the deeds of Slavic knights (the *bogatyri*) and folk heroes. They came into being at the time Russian communities were making the transition from tribal to feudal organization (A.D. 700–900). There are two main cycles of *byliny*, which reflect the political structure and social life of the two major powers in the country, Kiev and Novgorod. The Kiev cycle is similar in many ways to the ballads of the King Arthur cycle. *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, the greatest work of the Middle Ages, was composed toward the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century by an anonymous author. This epic poem celebrates the struggle of Prince Igor against Asian invaders, the Polovtsy, and mourns his defeat. It stands out, against the background of religious and scholarly works or primitive folk compositions, as a unique poetic achievement. Although it is the only specimen that survived, it testifies to the fact that poetry had reached a high level of aesthetic refinement by that time.

3. Vasilii Tred'iakovskii (1703–69), scholar, poet, writer, and translator from French and Latin is credited, together with Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–65), with the reform of the Russian prosodic system from syllabic to syllabotonic. He was also one of the first to experiment with a new literary language less dependent on Old Church Slavonic and closer to the French model.

4. *Tertium Organum* (St. Petersburg, 1912), a book of mystical philosophy by Petr Uspenskii (1878–1947).

5. The word *smekhir* comes from Khlebnikov's poem "The Black Lover" (Chernyi liubir'), which appeared in *The Croaked Moon*. Both *smekhir* and *liubir'* are neologisms and are associated by phonetic analogy in the way suggested here by Kruchenykh. *Mechar* seems to be Kruchenykh's own creation.

6. See "From *A Trap for Judges*, 2," n. 2.

7. Mikhail Lermontov (1814–41), romantic poet and writer. Kruchenykh delib-

erately misspells the word *l'azur* by adding an apostrophe. He supposedly intends to make fun of aristocratic, Frenchified pronunciation.

8. In Russian, *truparnia*, a neologism from Khlebnikov's play in verse "Marquise Dezes'."

9. Quotation from Khlebnikov's poem "Malusha's Granddaughter"; see "From *The Word as Such*," in this collection.

10. Kruchenykh makes a pun: the word *nemtsy* (Germans) derives from the word *nemye* (mute).

11. Afanasii Fet (pseud. of Afanasii Shenshin, 1820–92), was a poet and a translator of Shakespeare and Schopenhauer; the quotation is from his poem "Like Midge at Dawn" (1844). Fedor Tiutchev (1803–73) was a poet and a career diplomat; the quotation is from his poem "Silentium!" (1830). Both Fet and Tiutchev anticipated the modernist trend in their mystical leanings as well as their formal accomplishments. Because of their originality they were not appreciated until the turn of the century, when they were "discovered" by the Symbolists.

12. This was the definition of faith deriving from St. Paul, in the prerevolutionary official textbook on religion, according to Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 416. See also "Declaration of Transrational Language," in this collection.

13. See "From *Explodity*," n. 2.

14. *The Small Light* was a popular illustrated journal. *Russian Thought* was a journal of general cultural information; the Symbolist poet Brusov became the editor of the literature section in 1909.

15. From the first book of Elena Guro, *The Organ Grinder* (1909).

16. The Russian reads "probegal ozero belyi letuchie."

17. This sentence is taken from the short story by Miasoedov, "On the Road"; in the original: "a emu vse tirko" (see "[*The Word as Such*]," n. 3).

18. A. Kruchenykh, *Let's Grumble* (1913).

19. The almanac *The Donkey's Tail and the Target* was issued in Moscow in 1913 by the group of artists that gathered around Mikhail Larionov. The almanac included an article by S. Khudakov (possibly a pseudonym) that presents a new group of poets and examples from their avant-garde works.

20. Two stanzas from Khlebnikov's long poem "War-Death." Kruchenykh quotes these two stanzas plus another one back-to-back, although they are not consecutive in the original. The translation is by Paul Schmidt (copyright by the Dia Art Foundation).

21. A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov, *Worldbackwards* (1912).

22. This expression is taken from a Russian proverb: "U semi nianek ditia bez glaz," literally, "Where there are seven nannies the child is blind." The English equivalent is "Too many cooks spoil the broth."

23. Aleksandr Red'ko, a critic from the populist magazine *Russian Wealth*, in which he devoted two long articles to Futurism: "At the Foot of the African Idol," no. 6–7 (1913), and "Among Aspirations to the Unknown and the Inscrutable," no. 3 (1914). His position was generally unfavorable to modernist trends, but he recognized the Futurists' honesty and consistency in their approach to art. Aleksandr Benua (1870–1960), a painter, art historian, and art critic, founded in 1898 the group the World of Art together with Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929). Subsequently, he designed the decor and costumes for numerous Diaghilev productions.

24. *The Cornfield* was a popular illustrated journal.

25. In poems by Khlebnikov one can find examples of words written in reverse. Significant also is the title of the book he wrote together with Kruchenykh, *World-backwards*.

26. This is a reference to an article by A. Ballier, "The Everyday Apollon and the Exotic Apollon," *Union of Youth*, no. 3.

27. Kruchenykh here parodies Marinetti, who made extensive use of onomatopoeia in his poetry.

28. Evgenii Chirikov (1864–1937), a minor writer, author of sentimental novels and plays.

The Liberation of the Word

1. Livshits refers to the Cubo-Futurists by their original name, Hylaea, because he was opposed to the change. The "anonymous statements" are from the almanac *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, published without the group's denomination.

2. V. Briusov, in his article "New Currents in Russian Poetry: The Futurists," *Russian Thought*, no. 3 (1913), maintains there is nothing new in the statements of the Futurists and traces some of their ideas back to Symbolism.

3. S. M. Propper was the publisher of the daily *Stock Exchange Gazette*, which often carried denigratory articles on Futurism.

4. For the first quotation, see "Slap in the Face of Public Taste"; for the second quotation, see "From *A Trap for Judges*, 2."

Poetic Principles

1. From the poem "Bobeobi Sang the Lips," in *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (Moscow, 1912).

2. It became common practice at the time to print the author's signature on book covers.

3. Another name for Hylaea.

4. Dürer painted "Melancholy" in 1514 and added the inscription "Symbolism of all the diseases of our conscience."

5. In French in the original.

6. It seems that the quotation marks are used here only for emphasis.

7. N. F. Fedorov (1828–1903), a Russian philosopher and librarian.

8. The author refers to the Greek myth of Theseus.

9. In French in the original.

10. Catherine II ruled 1762–96.

11. From the poem in prose "The Song of the Peacer."

12. Burliuk makes a pun by using the Russian word *strausy* (ostrich) and the German word *Strauch* (bush).

13. *Pismozniki* were collections of letters meant to provide models for correspondence; *Apollon* was a Symbolist journal; and *The Cornfield* was a popular illustrated journal.

Go to Hell!

1. In Russia the tango was the latest fad, and many tended to associate it with Futurism. The Italian Futurists, however, had a different view of it: Marinetti wrote

the manifesto "Abbasso il tango e il Parsifal" (1914), in which he characterized the tango as a bourgeois and decadent phenomenon.

2. Kornei Chukovskii (1882–1969), a well-known critic, translator, and author of children's literature, translated the works of Walt Whitman and declared him the first and true Futurist. This statement is to be found in the essay "Ego-Futurists and Cubo-Futurists," *Sweetbrier*, 22 (1914). After the Revolution it appeared as a single volume by the title *Futurists* (Petrograd, 1922).

3. The authors have changed the name of Briusov from "Valerii," which sounds noble because of its ancient Roman connotation, to the prosaic and domestic "Vasilii." The mention of the "cork" is a reference to the cork business run by Briusov's family. This sentence has been translated literally in the text, but its meaning is "Knock it off, Vasia, you won't be able to plug us up with that."

4. The image of an old man stroking black cats is recurrent in Maiakovskii's poetry. It represents the past, an old and impractical way of producing electricity that was practiced in ancient Egypt.

5. Petersburg Herald was the publishing house of the Ego-Futurists.

6. The representatives of Acmeism (also called Adamism), Nikolai Gumilev (1886–1921) and Sergei Gorodetskii (1884–1967) issued two manifestoes, respectively, "Symbolism's Heritage and Acmeism" and "Some Currents in Contemporary Russian Poetry," *Apollon*, no. 1 (1913). In these declarations they maintained that the poet must look at the world with new eyes, like Adam, and convey through his poetry a virile sense of life. The authors of the present manifesto stretch the point by adding the names of Sergei Makovskii (1877–1958), editor of the journal *Apollon*, and the poet Vladimir Piast (pseud. of Vladimir Pestovskii, 1886–1941).

We, Too, Want Meat!

1. Aleksandr Iablonovskii (1870–1934) was a feuilleton writer for liberal journals, such as *Russian Wealth*; his volume of sketches about life in Russia at the turn of the century, *Scenes from My Country* (1912–13), was very popular.

2. The word *kritika* in Russian is of the feminine gender; the word *Mademoiselle* is in French in the original.

3. From the poem "Letter from a Country House" by I. Severianin.

4. From a transrational poem by Kruchenykh (1913).

5. The name Vavila suggests a man of plebeian origins, a peasant. Conversely, the name Eugene (meaning "well-born" in Greek) was traditionally used in Russian literature to denote a nobleman.

6. Aleksei Apukhtin (1840–93), famous for his pessimistic poems of sorrow, bitter nostalgia, and degradation; several were put to music by Chaikovskii, one of his best friends.

7. The last three paragraphs are from "Slap in the Face of Public Taste."

From Secret Vices of the Academicians

1. This excerpt as well as the following one are from the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*, by A. Pushkin, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Dutton, 1963). Pushkin was one of Kruchenykh's favorite targets and the subject of his book *500 New Witticisms and Puns of Pushkin* (Moscow, 1924).

2. The sounds Kruchenykh uses as examples, here and a few lines below, are mostly grammatical endings. We have rendered them with English equivalents where possible, without maintaining a strict correspondence to the Russian.

3. This is an ironic reference to the tendency of contemporary critics and scholars to look for a mysterious deep meaning in Pushkin's works and life.

4. From the poem "The Angel" by Mikhail Lermontov.

5. Vladimir Solov'ev (1853–1900), philosopher and poet; the Symbolists considered him their forefather because of his theory of the Eternal Feminine as the expression of Holy Wisdom. His influence is particularly evident in the early poetry of A. Blok.

6. A. Kruchenykh, *Pomade* (1913).

7. These verses are by Kruchenykh himself.

From Now On I Refuse to Speak Ill Even of the Work of Fools

1. Electric fans were a recurrent motif in the paintings of Ivan Kliun (1872–1943).

2. A. I. Kuidzhii (1842–1910) and K. Ia. Kryzhitskii (1858–1911) were conservative landscape painters. *Vershiny* (The Heights) and *Lukomore* (The Seashore) were art journals for the general public.

3. *The Archer* (Petrograd, 1915) was an almanac in which the works of the Futurists were printed for the first time next to the works of such well-established authors as Blok, Kuzmin, and Remizov.

4. *Lasierung*, from German, is a technique by which transparent or semitransparent strokes of paint are applied to a dry, oil-painted surface to enrich the color.

5. The Swiss painter, Alexandre Calame (1810–64).

6. An allusion to Tolstoy's pacifist philosophy. Quotation marks in this text are not necessarily used for citation, rather for emphasis or allusions.

7. From A. Pushkin's poem "The Poet and the Crowd" (1828).

A Drop of Tar

1. Petr Kogan (1872–1932), Marxist critic and author of the book *Essay on the History of Contemporary Russian Literature* (1908–12), was the president of the Academy of Literary Science. Iulii Aikhenval'd (1872–1928) was a literary critic who used an impressionistic method of criticism.

2. Possibly an ironic allusion to the idea of the "divine intuition" central to Symbolist poetry and theory.

3. Il'ia Repin (1844–1930) and N. Samokish (1860–1944) were realist painters. Samokish specialized in battle scenes and painted many canvases on the theme of the heroic deeds of the Red Army during the Civil War (1918–20).

4. The city of St. Petersburg changed its name to Petrograd in 1914. The word *burg*, of German origin, was replaced by the Slavic word *grad* after the declaration of war with Germany.

5. The emphasis on the word *SEIZED* (*VZIAL*) refers to the title of the homonymous almanac where this manifesto appeared.

The Trumpet of the Martians

1. The author suggests a linguistic pun. The remark "Consonantal error" indicates that the word *bosy* (barefoot) should actually read "*bogi*" (gods).

2. Except for Khlebnikov all the signatories were associated with the groups Centrifuge and Lyroon. Maria Siniakova-Urechina (1898–1984?) was close to those groups both because her sister Oksana was married to Aseev and because she illustrated some of their books. Bozhidar (pseud. of Bogdan Gordeev, 1894–1914), a poet and theoretician, had been dead for two years when this manifesto was signed. Grigorii Petrukov (1894–1971) and Nikolai Aseev (1889–1963) were two prominent poets.

3. In Russian, *zachelovek*, analogous to *zaum* ("transreason").

4. The madman Balashov slashed Repin's painting "Ivan the Terrible Kills His Son," in 1913.

5. Karl Gauss (1777–1855), German mathematician and astronomer.

6. Nikolai Lobachevskii (1793–1856), Russian mathematician, one of the founders of non-Euclidean geometry, served as rector of Kazan University (1827–46).

7. Joseph Montgolfier (1740–1810), French inventor, devised a balloon, filled with hot air, designed to rise and float in the atmosphere and capable of carrying passengers.

8. This is the cry of the Martians in the novel *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells.

Ego-Futurism

The Tables

1. Mirra Likhvitskaia (1869–1905) and Constantin M. Fofanov (1862–1911), minor pre-Symbolist poets, greatly influenced Severianin and were considered by him to be forerunners of Ego-Futurism. Fofanov's son, also named Constantin, became a friend of Severianin's and, under the pen name Olimpov, the cofounder of Ego-Futurism.

Egopoetry in Poetry

1. Graal-Arelskii uses the Latin word "*credo*" in the original, rather than any Russian equivalent. The use of "exotic" foreign words is particularly typical for the Ego-Futurists. Other foreign words appearing in the originals of the manifestoes are indicated below.

2. "*Cogito ergo sum*" is in Latin in the original.

The First Year of Futurism

1. A traditional verse form popularized by Igor Severianin and some of his followers. It is a display of ignorance on the part of the provincial reviewer to think that the word "triolet" is an invention of the Futurists.

2. In French in the original.

3. The days following the proclamation of governmental reforms by Nicholas II in 1905.

4. The editor of the magazine *Satirikon*.

5. Ellis was the pseudonym of E. E. Kobylinskii, a minor Symbolist poet and critic.

6. The "Ego" press was organized by the Ego-group in the fall of 1911. One year later it acquired the name Petersburg Herald, after the Ego-Futurist newspaper by the same name ceased to be published (see n. 10, below). Severianin was the acknowledged leader of the Ego-Futurists until he left the group toward the end of 1912. His *Prolog Ego-Futurism* presented the movement's basic principles, in verse form. It was a manifesto *ante litteram* because it appeared before Ego-Futurism was established as a group and before "The Tables" were issued. Later it was reprinted in Severianin's collection *Thunder-Seething Goblet* (Moscow: Grif, 1913).

7. I. V. Ignat'ev was the pseudonym under which Kazanskii became better known. Thus, Kazanskii is, in effect, here congratulating himself for the role he played in founding the new movement. His work as a publisher, promoter, and organizer was in fact a key element in the group's success.

8. Gavriil Derzhavin (1743–1816) is recognized as the greatest poet of Russia's eighteenth-century baroque. Kazanskii quotes Severianin's lines from *Prolog Ego-Futurism* to the effect that now Pushkin, like Derzhavin, is only an old-fashioned relic, no longer vital for the contemporary reader.

9. The Academy of Ego-Poetry was an invention of Severianin and his cohorts; it actually existed only "on paper." See "Tables" in this volume.

10. The *Petersburg Herald*, founded by Kazanskii in February 1912, consisted mostly of essays and reviews written by Kazanskii himself, both under his own name and under a variety of pseudonyms, including, of course, the name Ignat'ev. Although the newspaper did not last long, its publishing house (of the same name) was active until Kazanskii's suicide in 1914 and published many of the Ego-Futurists' small books of verse and its miscellanies.

11. The words are from a popular soldier's song.

12. The Blacks were reactionaries.

13. Decadence was an early stage of Russian Symbolism; Mystical Anarchism, a later stage, whose leading figure was Viacheslav Ivanov.

14. Suvorov was a renowned Russian general who scored major victories over the Turks and the Poles in the late eighteenth century.

15. In French in the original.

16. "Poesas" was an exotic term coined by Olimpov and much used by all the Ego-Futurists in referring to their poems.

17. In French in the original. "Crème-de-Violettes" is a refined image very typical for Severianin; he later used it as the title for one of his books of poetry.

18. A. I. Kuprin (1870–1938) was one of the best known prose writers of the time, so his reply to an invitation certainly enhanced the prestige of the planned gathering.

19. Ivan S. Lukash (1892–1940) wrote poetry in the style of Whitman under the pseudonym Ivan Oredezsh.

20. In French in the original.

21. *Dream Princess* was the Russian title of Edmond Rostand's popular play *La Princesse Loïtaine*.

22. Valerii Briusov was one of the most influential of the Symbolist poets and critics. His contribution of two poems to *The Orange Urn* was, for the Ego-Futurists, evidence of their acceptance by the literary elite.

23. The poet Leonid Afanasev was a very occasional contributor to the Ego-Futurist miscellanies. Fedor Sologub was another well-known Symbolist poet and

prosaist who, like Briusov, participated in a few Ego-Futurist miscellanies. *Apollon* was a journal of art and literature that published some work by the early Futurists but later became more closely associated with Acmeism.

24. Pavel Shirokov (1893–1963) was a central member of the Ego-Futurist group, an imitator of Severianin's style in poetry, and a close friend of Kazanskii.

25. N. Minskii (1855–1937) was a decadent poet and essayist who first became popular in the 1880s. Hence, the remarks referred to here are meant to imply a lack of originality on the part of the Ego-Futurists.

26. This sentiment is Ivan Karamazov's in Dostoevskii's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Of course, Dostoevskii himself disagreed with his character's position!

27. The Guild of Poets was the poetic group associated with Acmeism.

Ego-Futurism

1. Ignat'ev alludes here to two 1913 articles critical of Ego-Futurism, Vladimir Kranikhfeld's "Literary Comments" in *Contemporary World*, no. 4 (1913) and Aleksandr Red'ko's "At the Foot of the African Idol," in *Russian Wealth*, no. 5–6 (1913).

2. Both Briusov and Sologub, much more prestigious figures than the minor critics mentioned above, had reacted favorably to Ego-Futurism and had contributed to Ego-Futurist miscellanies. Sologub wrote an especially enthusiastic preface to Severianin's book of poetry *Thunder-Seething Goblet* in 1913.

3. A line from Friedrich Schiller's play *The Fiesco Conspiracy in Genoa*, which was well known in Russian translation.

4. The whole text of "The Tables" follows. We have omitted it in translation because it is included in this collection as a separate manifesto.

5. The line is from Severianin's "Extra Poeza" in *Thunder-Seething Goblet* (1913).

6. The use of religious terminology for its concepts and its adherents was very characteristic of Ego-Futurism.

7. The citation is from Severianin's poem "Ordinary People," in *Thunder-Seething Goblet*.

8. See n. 2 to "Go to Hell!"

9. In referring to the "prose of the Ego-Severianinists," Ignat'ev is alluding to Lukash's free verse.

10. Dmitrii Kriuchkov, an Ego-Futurist poet who also wrote critical articles under the pseudonym Kelelnik, was represented in several of the Ego-Futurist miscellanies, and he also published two collections of his own in 1913 and 1914.

11. From Severianin's "Ordinary People."

12. From Severianin's *Prolog Ego-Futurism*.

13. In the original this stream-of-consciousness piece was printed in different types, including Gothic.

14. These lines by Gnedov, published in *A Candi[ed] Ra[t]* (1913), consist almost entirely of neologisms, with paradoxical and impossible grammatical and syntactic combinations.

15. Georgii Chulkov was a Symbolist who was particularly critical of Futurism. Ignat'ev gives no evidence for the offhand comparisons he makes here.

16. Shershenevich, soon to be the leading figure of the Mezzanine of Poetry, not only contributed to the Ego-Futurist almanac *The Always* in 1913, but also in that same year published one of his own poetry volumes, *Romantic Face Powder*, with Ignat'ev's Petersburg Herald imprint.

17. The article on new rhyme appeared in *The Alwayser* anonymously but was written by Ignat'ev. Not surprisingly, he goes on to summarize its findings in some detail here.

18. The miscellanies were published in the following order. In 1912: *The Orange Urn, Glass Chains, Eagles over the Abyss*; in 1913: *Gifts to Adonis, A Candi Ra, Strike! but Hear Me, The Alwayser*. The title *A Candi Ra* (Zasakhare kry) was suggestive of "A Candied Rat" (*Zasakharennaiia krysa*).

19. In what follows, Ignat'ev in fact cites and paraphrases significant portions of his preface to *Death to Art* (1913).

20. Here and in the preceding paragraph, the citations are lines and stanzas from poems by Kriuchkov and by Ignat'ev.

21. Ignat'ev refers to his own poem "The Third Entry."

22. In French. Quote from Gogol's *Inspector General*.

23. Riurik Ivnev (1893–1981) was the pseudonym of Mikhail Kovalev, who published in many of the Futurist miscellanies; a volume of his poetry, *Self-immolation*, appeared under Ignat'ev's Petersburg Herald imprint in 1913. He was later associated with the Mezzanine of Poetry and, after the Revolution, with Imaginism.

Mezzanine of Poetry

Overture

1. This adjective is of the feminine gender in Russian. Supposedly the author is addressing *kritika*, a collective feminine noun for "the critics."

2. Here the author uses a neologism, "poverkhoskol'zie."

3. In French in the original.

Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo-Futurists

1. This is an approximate quotation from Kruchenykh's "Declaration of the Word as Such"; the same statement with slight variations can be found in *Pomade* (1913).

2. See "Slap in the Face of Public Taste," in this collection.

From "Moment Philosophique"

1. The title is in French in the original.

2. From a fable by Ivan Krylov (1769–1844).

3. A friend of the author, mentioned in a passage omitted in translation.

4. This is one of the two pseudonyms used by Lev Vasilevich Zak (1892–?). Under the pseudonym of Khrisanf he wrote poetry and fiction; as a critic he used the name M. M. Rossiinskii, and he signed his paintings with his real name.

5. French spelling in the original.

Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyansky

1. Shershenevich makes a pun that is lost in translation; he juxtaposes the words *bezobraznost'* ("imagelessness") and *bezobraznosti'* ("disfigurement").

2. Andrei Belyi wrote a series of poems in prose, which he called "Symphonies" (1902–08).
3. Benedikt Livshits, a member of the Cubo-Futurist group. As a rule he was not among the radicals, though Shershenevich's statement is correct. Livshits practiced the destruction of grammar in his prose work "People in a Landscape," which appeared in the almanac *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912). It is worthy of note that Shershenevich himself came to such a radical solution a few years later, in his book $2 \times 2 = 5$ (Moscow: Imazhinisty, 1920).
4. Shershenevich refers to two excerpts from his unpublished novel *Prelude by a Suicide* and to Khrisan's short story "Princess Cuttlefish," which were printed in the Mezzanine almanac *Crematorium of Common Sense* (1913), together with this "Letter."
5. Shershenevich uses the verb *rukovodit'* (literally, "to lead by the hand").

Foreword to *Automobile Gait*

1. This is the Russianized term for the German *töff-töff* (automobile).
2. In Russian this is a rhyme, *vperiod-narod*, and represents a worn-out cliché of the radical and liberal political trends in poetry.
3. An allusion to Symbolism, and in particular to Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), whose apartment, The Tower, was one of the fashionable literary salons.
4. Shershenevich uses the term *piitika*, a word belonging to the eighteenth-century high-style vocabulary. Here, it is a sarcastic allusion to old-fashioned forms.
5. Shershenevich's numbering is not quite correct. In fact, he issued several collections of verses prior to *Automobile Gait*, in the following order: *Patches of Earth Free of Snow* (Moscow, 1911), *Carmina* (Moscow: Kushnerev, 1913), *Romantic Face Powder* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Herald, 1913), and *Extravagant Scent Bottles* (Moscow: Mezzanine of Poetry, 1913).

From *Green Street*

1. In his epic poem "Poltava" (1828) Pushkin glorifies Peter the Great and his military victory over the king of Sweden, Charles XII.
2. Shershenevich's imagery is often reminiscent of Marinetti's. In "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), Marinetti compares Futurism to a roaring car that runs "through streets as rough and deep as the bed of torrents . . . hurling watchdogs against doorsteps, curling them under its burning tires like collars under a flatiron" (see also Shershenevich's Foreword to *Automobile Gait*). English translations of Marinetti's manifestoes are to be found in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, R. W. Flint and A. Coppotelli, eds. and trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972).
3. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto" (1912). Shershenevich translated most of Marinetti's manifestoes and published them in *Manifesty i programmy ital'ianskogo futurizma* (Manifestoes of Italian Futurism) (Moscow: Russkoe Tovarishchestvo, 1914).
4. From the poem "To the Poet" (1907), in the collection *All Melodies* (1909).
5. Here Shershenevich seems to paraphrase Marinetti, who wrote: "Since every

kind of order is necessarily a product of the cautious intelligence, one must orchestrate images according to a maximum of disorder" ("Technical Manifesto").

6. See the allusion to Kornei Chukovskii in "Go to Hell," n. 2.
7. In Latin in the original.
8. This word belongs to Marinetti's vocabulary and is the antonym of Futurism.
9. In French in the original.
10. Chukhloma is a small town in the heart of Russia, north of the city of Gorkii. Its name is often used to refer to a God-forsaken place.

Two Final Words

1. The word used by Shershenevich is "Nedotykomka," which is the name of a devil figure in the novel *Petty Demon* (1907) by Fedor Sologub. Here it is used as a contemptuous term for narrow-minded, spiteful conservatives.

2. Shershenevich uses the English word in Cyrillic transliteration.

3. We have not been able to locate the source of this quotation. It probably comes from Shershenevich's own poetry.

4. This is an allusion to Italian Futurism. In the introduction to his book *Futurism without a Mask* (1913), Shershenevich stated that new and bold ideas suddenly came to Russia from Italy: "Shouts come closer and closer; drumbeat; grenades; scout planes darting about; an army in the uniforms of clowns and jesters, turning somersaults and shouting absurd *boutades*, is rushing from Italy. . . . In response, but in a personal way, almost their own, completely different, the environs echo the Italians."

Centrifuge

Charter

1. The Cubo-Futurists' *First Journal of Russian Futurists* in 1914 printed an article titled "Mocking Ignat'ev's Work." On page 130 one also finds an attack on Bobrov, who had published poems and an article critical of the Cubo-Futurists in the Ego-Futurist miscellany *Shattered Skulls* (1913).

2. This refers to Severianin's "Poem of Annihilation," in which he proposes that the Burliuk brothers be sent to the penal colony on Sakhalin, i.e., to "the farthest reaches of the land."

3. On page 141, in a review of Bobrov's poetry, there is an epigram about Bobrov, supposedly based on something which Briusov said about him. Hence, the "Charter's" reference to "spreading slanderous gossip."

4. On page 131, David Burliuk, general editor of *First Journal*, condemns the practice of hiding behind pseudonyms. Nonetheless, two of the reviews on pp. 141-42 are signed with pseudonyms: "Egyx," apparently a pseudonym for Iurii Egert, a friend of Shershenevich; and "Georgii Gaer," a pseudonym for Shershenevich himself.

5. On page 130, in a section devoted to examples of the journalistic abuse directed against the Cubo-Futurists, *First Journal* reprinted the polemical review of the Hylaea group that Bobrov had published in *Shattered Skulls*. A paragraph critical of Kruchenykh was, however, omitted.

6. Il'ia Zdanevich (1894–1975) was a Futurist poet who was a close associate of the artists Larionov and Goncharova and later a founder of Company 41° in Tiflis. Although a signer of the Centrifuge charter, Zdanevich did not actually contribute to any of the Centrifuge publications.

Foreword to *The Lyric Theme*

1. In French in the original: "to conceal one's disappointment."
2. In French in the original: "gossip."
3. In French in the original: "the ancient lyrical inspiration."

The Wassermann Test

1. In French in the original: "live and let live."
2. In French in the original: "sacred fire."
3. In German in the original.
4. In Latin in the original.
5. This is an ironic reference to the Mezzanine of Poetry and to Shershenevich's cooperative union with the Cubo-Futurists.
6. Konstantin Bol'shakov (1895–1940) was allied first with the Mezzanine of Poetry and later with the Cubo-Futurists. Pasternak's designation of Bol'shakov as a "true Futurist," along with Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii, may have been an attempt to woo him. And, indeed, Bol'shakov began actively participating in Centrifuge publications in 1916.
7. Pasternak has in mind the urbanist poetry Shershenevich published in *The First Journal of Russian Futurists*.
8. In French in the original.
9. These examples are taken from the poems "Dedication" and "The Immortal" in Bol'shakov's 1913 collection *Heart in a Glove*.
10. Pasternak here refers to Shershenevich's review of Bol'shakov's book (see text) in *First Journal*.
11. "The Apennine boot" that has left its traces on "the rugs of Moscow's corridors" is a clear reference to Marinetti's visit to Moscow in 1914. Even before that visit, though, Shershenevich had become an adherent of Marinetti's views.

Two Words about Form and Content

1. This formula belongs to V. Shershenevich of the Mezzanine of Poetry.
2. Augustus Deglaus (1862–1922) was a Latvian novelist; Stanislaw Przyby-szewski (1868–1927), a Polish modernist writer. "All the Manns" refers to Thomas Mann and to his older brother Heinrich.

Company 41° and Beyond

From *Kruchenykh the Grandiosaire*

1. In the original, "*kruchenyi kanat*," which generates a pun in connection with the name Kruchenykh.

2. This word is pure transreason; it does not exist in any language.
3. Reference to the book "*Worldbackwards*" (Moscow, 1912), by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov.
4. Vladimir Dal' (1801–72) was the compiler of the most valuable *Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* (1863–66) and of a collection of Russian proverbs. Ivan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929), a Russian-Polish linguist, is one of the most illustrious representatives of the science of comparative linguistics. He taught at St. Petersburg University from 1900 to 1918, where he was surrounded by a group of numerous disciples. Some of the followers of the Baudouin "school" such as L. Iakubinskii and E. Polivanov worked closely with the poetic avant-garde and eventually joined the Formalist circle of Opoiiaz (see "Whom Does Lef Warn," n. 3). B. de C. edited and updated two editions of Dal's *Dictionary* (the 3d, 1903–9, and the 4th, 1912–14). He wrote three interesting articles on Futurism: "Ahead at Full Speed," *Messenger of Knowledge*, no. 5 (1914); "Word and 'Word,'" *Comments*, no. 7 (1914); and "Toward a Theory of the 'Word as Such' and the 'Letter as Such,'" *ibid.*, no. 8 (1914). In the first article he praises Russian Futurism and maintains its independence from the Italians; in the other two he expresses a rather negative view of transreason.
5. Iakov Karlovich Grot (1812–93), linguist, literary historian, and academic, edited many Russian classics, providing the readers for the first time with explanatory notes. This editorial method, which later became a common feature, was known as the Grot method. In 1891 he began to publish the multivolume edition of *The Dictionary of the Russian Language* (1891). In this text, Terent'ev refers to Grot's work *The Russian Orthography* (St. Petersburg, 1885).
6. Tiflis, 1919.
7. "Ka" is a root that carries the meaning of "feces."
8. In Russian, "*kakistina*"; see n. 7.

Declaration of Transrational Language

1. This whole paragraph, article 1, is taken literally from "Declaration of the Word as Such," in this collection. The example is from one of Kruchenykh's poems, first published in *Union of Youth*, no. 3, and later in *Exploidy*.
2. Ylayali is a mythical figure from the novel *Hunger* (1890) by the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun (1859–1952). Avoska and Neboska are figures belonging to Russian folklore, and their approximate meaning is What-about and How-about.
3. Oile is a mythical planet from a cycle of poems by F. Sologub, with the title "The Star Mair." This cycle was written mainly in 1898, with the last poem added in 1901. Oile is also the fantastic setting of the last part of Sologub's trilogy, *The Created Legend* (1908–12). Bleiana is another mythical country, from the short story "On the Road" by S. Miasoedov (see "[The Word as Such]," n. 3). Udras (rather than Vudras) and Baryba are two creatures from the collection of poems *Brightness* by Sergei Gorodetskii. They appear in the poems "They Celebrate Larila" (1905) and "They Look for Baryba" (1907). Svidrigailov is a character from Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment*. Chichikov is the hero of Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*. Pravdin (True-man) is a character from the comedy "The Young Hopeful" (1782) by D. Fonvizin (1745–92). Glupyshkin (Simpleton) is the Russian name for the character of Cretinetti from French silent movie comedies.
4. See "New Ways of the Word," n. 12.

5. Kuboa, a word invented by the hero of Hamsun's novel *Hunger*. Kho-bo-ro is a transrational line from Kruchenykh's book *Learn Art* (1917).

From *Shiftology of Russian Verse*

1. This whole paragraph is an allusion to Symbolist poetry, which was prone to investigation into the mysteries of the universe.

2. Demian Bednyi (pseud. of Efim Pridvorov, 1883–1945) was extremely popular between 1917 and 1930 for his satirical fables patterned on the works of the eighteenth-century celebrated fabulist I. Krylov and for facile propaganda songs and couplets. Western capitalists and political leaders were the target of his crude and direct witticism, which found an enthusiastic response among the masses. Vladislav Khodasevich (1886–1939), poet and critic, moved from an early Symbolist poetic style toward classical forms but retained a tragic sense of life. After emigration, in the early 1920s, he worked mostly as a critic, devoting his attention to the problems of Russian émigré literature. Here, Kruchenykh twists his family name into Khudosevich, in order to produce a phonetic analogy with the word *khudoï* ("bad").

Left Front of the Arts (Lef)

What Does Lef Fight For?

1. 1905, the year of the first abortive revolution.

2. Georgii Chulkov (1879–1939), writer and critic, belonged to the Symbolist movement, worked for journals such as *New Way* and *Problems of Life*, and wrote the essay "About Mystical Anarchism," historical novels, poems, memoirs, and short stories. Zinaida Gippius (1867–1945), one of the best Decadent poets, also wrote numerous short stories, two novels, one play, a diary, and extensive literary criticism under the pseudonym of Anton Krainii. She was married to the writer Dimitrii Merezhkovskii. Vasilii Rozanov (1859–1919), a prose writer and philosopher who displayed bold and paradoxical ideas in a highly original style, is best known for a critical analysis of Dostoevskii's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor." Here, *Lef* alludes to an idea central to Rozanov's writings: that spiritual values and religious feelings have their roots in sexuality.

3. Vasilii Kandinskii (1866–1944) operated between the German and the Russian avant-garde. The Jack of Diamonds was an avant-garde group of painters that dominated Russian artistic life for several years. Its first exhibition, in Moscow in December 1910, included M. Larionov, N. Goncharova, David and Nikolai Burliuk, A. Ekster, V. Kandinskii, A. Lentulov, P. Konchalovskii, I. Mashkov, R. Falk, and V. Tatlin.

4. The Donkey's Tail, born when Larionov and Goncharova severed their ties with the Jack of Diamonds in December 1911, first exhibited in Moscow in March 1912 with works by M. Larionov, N. Goncharova, K. Malevich, V. Tatlin, D. Fonvizen, A. Morgunov, and others. In 1913 the group issued a miscellany, *The Donkey's Tail and the Target*.

5. Marinetti, in Russia in January 1914 to give a series of lectures, met with a

cold and at times hostile reception from the Russian Futurists. His assumption that he was on a cultural mission to bring support and advice to the "provincial" Futurists clashed with the Russians' fierce nationalism. The 1913 date is incorrect. On Marinetti's trip, see B. Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, trans. John E. Bowlit (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1977); V. Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); Anna Lawton, *Vadim Shershenevich: From Futurism to Imaginism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1981); and Introduction to this collection.

6. *War and the World* (1915–16). This statement is not completely correct. The Futurists printed a number of articles and poems that glorified the war, if only as an aesthetic category; see in particular Maiakovskii's articles "A Civilian Shrapnel" (three by this title), "Now, to the Americas," "We, Too, Want Meat" (in this collection), "Russia. Art. We," "War and Language," and "Futurians" in V. Maiakovskii, *Complete Works* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1955), I: 301–32. As for Gorodetskii and Gumilev, mentioned a few lines above, see n. 6 to "Go to Hell."

7. V. Maiakovskii, "A Cloud in Trousers" (Petersburg, 1915).

8. A book of addresses of the Moscow inhabitants, the equivalent of our telephone book.

9. Osip Brik (1883–1945) developed the idea of "productivist art"—that artistic labor must penetrate factories and contribute to the artistic transformation of the country—when he was an IZO officer; IZO therefore established free workshops (*svomas*) to train the new generation in art applied to industry. Boris Arvatov (1896–1940), with Maiakovskii, Brik, and others, was a founder of Lef and a brilliant critic and theoretician who tried to reconcile Marxism and Futurism by pointing out the social relevance of the Futurists' linguistic work; see his article "Language Creation," in this collection. Constructivism became particularly prominent in the visual arts. The Literary Center was headed by the theoretician and literary critic Kornelii Zelinskii (1896–1970) and the poet Il'ia Sel'vinskii (1899–1968). The Constructivists, romantics at heart and Marxists in politics, maintained that art must be functional and aimed at a synthesis of poetry and science by stressing the relevance of contemporary themes and using the vocabulary of science and technology. Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956), a photography artist, was also a painter, graphic artist, and author of travel sketches. Anton Mikhailovich Lavinskii (1863–1968), Constructivist artist and member of Lef, contributed to the development of Soviet design in the 1920s, especially in architecture, where he introduced experimental ideas such as "kinetic constructions." He also contributed to the production of propaganda and commercial posters. He first worked with Maiakovskii for ROSTA (see n. 13), then, with Rodchenko, used photomontage in the posters for the films *Battleship Potemkin* by Eisenstein, and *The Sixth Part of the World* by Vertov. He designed scenes and costumes for Maiakovskii's epic satire *Mystery-Bouffe*. His contribution to Lef was journal illustrations.

10. "Proletkult" is an abbreviation for Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organizations. The group, headed by Aleksandr Bogdanov (pseud. of A. Malinovskii, 1872–1928), remained independent from the Soviet government until 1919, when it was subordinated to Narkompros. Its aim was to develop a proletarian culture; it established studios and workshops all over the country to train young men and women of proletarian origin in literature and the arts.

11. Divisions of the Figurative Arts, Theater, and Music.
12. Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), sculptor, painter, and designer—both industrial and theatrical—and the creator of the famous model for the Monument to the Third International (1919), he also developed a bizarre project for a man-propelled glider called “Letatlin” (“Fly-Tatlin”) (1929–32). *Mystery-Bouffe* was staged by Vsevolod Meierkhol’d in 1918 at the Petrograd Conservatory, with sets and costumes designed by Kazimir Malevich. The play was eventually revised, in 1921. Vasilii Kamenskii’s *Stenka Razin* (1916), a lyric novel about the famous seventeenth-century Cossak rebel, is a collage of prose, poetry, and songs that relies more on the folk interpretation of events than on historical facts.
13. In 1919 Maiakovskii began to work for the State Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), producing hundreds of posters and cartoons with easy captions in verses, designed for mass propaganda and education.
14. Committee of the Futurist Communists.
15. Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.
16. Chuzhak, Aseev, Pal’mov, Tre’tiakov were all members of the Futurist group Creation, organized by David Burluk in Vladivostok in 1918, which published a magazine of the same name. In 1922, when Burluk left for the USA, they moved to Moscow and joined Maiakovskii and Lef. Nikolai Chuzhak (pseud. of Nikolai Nasimovich, 1876–1937), the most dogmatic theoretician of Lef and an editor of the magazine, also published a collection of theoretical essays by various Lefists, *Literature of Fact* (Moscow, 1929). Nikolai Aseev (1898–1963) was a poet and a member of Centrifuge before joining the Vladivostok Futurists. Sergei Tre’tiakov (1892–1939), a poet, playwright, and scriptwriter, and a member of the Mezzanine of Poetry in his early years, is most famous for the play *Roar, China!* (Moscow, 1926). No specific information on Pal’mov is available.
17. Republic of the Far East.
18. Abbreviation for Narodny Komitet Prosveshcheniia (People’s Commissariat of Education).
19. Andrei Belyi (pseud. of Boris Bugaev, 1880–1934), one of the most prominent Russian Symbolists, was a poet, prose writer, and theoretician of talent. The word *belyi* in Russian means “white,” making a pun through the juxtaposition of “pink” and “white.”
20. N. Osinskii (pseud. of Valerian Obolenskii, 1887–1938), a leading politician and economist, worked as an editor and journalist for *Pravda*. Anna Akhmatova (pseud. of Anna Gorenko, 1889–1966), an important poet and a prominent figure among the Acmeists, was married to N. Gumilev (see n. 6 to “Go to Hell”). Nikolai Bukharin (1888–1938) was a politician and leading theorist of the Bolshevik Party. Nat Pinkerton, the famous detective character of pulp novels, was very popular in Russia.
21. The group the Serapion Brothers, formed in Petrograd in 1921, believed in artistic freedom, political independence, stylistic diversity, and experimentation with language and form. It included many prominent prose writers, such as Evgenii Zamiatin (1884–1937), Vsevolod Ivanov (1895–1963), Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895–1958), Konstantin Fedin (1892–1977), Veniamin Kaverin (1902–), and Boris Pil’niak (pseud. of Boris Vogau, 1894–1938).
22. The Russian expression is *smena vekh*, which literally means “change of landmarks.” There was a specific group of writers by that name.

23. These are acronyms: Inkhuk, Institute for Artistic Culture; Vkhutemas, Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops; Gitis, State Institute of Theatrical Art; Opoi-az, Association for the Study of Poetic Language.

Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?

1. See "Slap in the Face of Public Taste."
2. *Ibid.*
3. This refers to the café of the Imaginists, the Stable of Pegasus, that offered evenings of poetry reading and discussion until 1924, when it was closed by the government.
4. This sentence in Russian results in a pun: "*domkov*" (little houses), and "*domkomov*" (committees managing apartment buildings).

Whom Does Lef Warn?

1. On Constructivism see n. 9 to "What Does Lef Fight For?"
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Opoi-az*, the Association for the Study of Poetic Language, was born in Petrograd in 1916 and included such linguists as L. Iakubinskii and E. D. Polivanov and such literary theoreticians as V. Shklovskii, B. Eikhenbaum, and O. Brik. Together with the Moscow Linguistic Circle, whose best known exponent is Roman Iakobson, *Opoi-az* constitutes the core of the movement that goes under the name of Russian Formalism.

Our Linguistic Work

1. An allusion to Symbolist statements.

From Where to Where?

1. Quotation from the poem "From Street to Street" (1913); *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918), a parody of a medieval mystery play; "III International" (1912).
2. Imaginism was born in Moscow in 1919, its leader the former Futurist Vadim Shershenevich. Among its members were S. Esenin, A. Mariengof, R. Ivnev, A. Kusikov, and I. Gruzinov. The Severianinists were not a group; here Tret'iakov refers to the epigones of Ego-Futurism. The Nichevoki was a group; originally from Rostov-on-the-Don, they published their first manifesto in the collection of poetry *To You* (Moscow, 1920). Their most prominent figure was the poet Riurik Rok. Vladimir Friche (1870–1929), a literature and art critic, was the editor of the journals *Literature and Marxism* (1928–29), and *Press and Revolution* (1929).
3. Semion Nadson (1862–1887) was the idol of a frustrated generation of young idealists. His sentimental verses full of pathos, melancholy, and foreboding had a populist slant fashionable in those years. His tragic fate and untimely death contributed to his popularity.
4. *A Cloud in Trousers* (1915), *War and the World* (1915–16), *Man* (1916–17). *Ladomir* (1912) was a manuscript book.
5. The "*chastushka*" is a two-line or four-line folk verse, usually humorous and topical, sung in a lively manner.

6. A monument to Pushkin stands in Pushkin Square, formerly Tverskoi Boulevard.

7. Not a literary quotation, this is probably a reference to the common popular suggestion that one "should do something useful."

8. This appears to be a sarcastic reference to some laxative advertisement ("slabit' legko i nezhdno").

9. Allusion to the Imaginists; see "Whom Does Lef Wrangle With?" n. 3.

10. The word *poshlost'* denotes a life devoid of spiritual values, a state of self-satisfied mediocrity, pettiness, and bigotry. The etymology of the word suggested by Treťiakov is "*poshlo est'*," literally "the vulgar is."

11. Russian Communist party.

12. Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

13. Aleksei Gastev (1882–1941), poet and activist, one of the founders of the Scientific Organization of Labor (NOT), started his activities as a working-class poet in 1904, and his first collection of poems, *Shock Worker Poetry*, appeared in 1918.

Language Creation

1. "Bobeobi Sang the Mouth" was first published in *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912).

2. Longfellow's poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) was written as a conscious imitation of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*. A Russian edition of the *Kalevala* appeared ten years after the publication of this article (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia, 1933), illustrated by the Filonov school. Ivan Bunin (1870–1953) translated *The Song of Hiawatha* into Russian in 1897. Here, Arvatov quotes Longfellow's text in Russian translation, which differs slightly from the original:

Shli Choktosy i Komanchi,
Shli Shomony i Omogi,
Shli Gurony i Mendeny
Delavary i Mochoki.

3. A line from "Bobeobi Sang the Mouth."

4. From the poem "Now the Giaours Celebrate Istanbul," written in 1830.

5. Shklovskii published two versions of this article, one in *Poetics*, no. 1 (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 1–15; the other, in the new orthography, in *Poetics*, no. 3 (Petrograd, 1919), pp. 13–26. See translation by G. Janecek and P. Mayer, "On Poetry and Trans-Sense Language," *October* 34 (Fall 1985): 3–24.

6. This is very likely a reference to Ivan M. Miatlev, a contemporary of Pushkin and one of Kruchenykh's favorite poets. Kruchenykh printed some examples of Miatlev's "French" transreason in one of his booklets; see Marzio Marzaduri, "Futurismo Menscevicio" in L. Magarotto, M. Marzaduri, and G. Pagani Cesa, eds., *L'avanguardia a Tiflis* (Venice: University of Venice, 1982), p. 141.

7. "About the Poetic Combination of Glossemes" appeared in *Poetics*, no. 3 (Petrograd, 1919), pp. 7–12. Lev Iakubinskii (1892–1945) was a linguist and literary scholar primarily interested in comparative-historical linguistics and the history of the Russian literary language. He was a member of Opoiiaz (see n. 3 to "Whom Does Lef Warn?").

8. Approximately: "Road, two-horned, cottage cheese, touch-me-not, / Hoof, tried, pawed. . . ." From M. Gorkii's *Childhood*, chap. 10.

9. Ylayali is a mythical figure from Hamsun's novel *Hunger*. About Rozanov, see "What Does Lef Fight For?" n. 2. Mikhail Volkov (1886–1946), a "proletarian" writer of peasant stock, headed the literary section of the Moscow Proletkult from 1920 to 1922. His novels and short stories treat village themes from the critical point of view of a Marxist proletarian. "Zakovyka" is a colloquial word that means "hindrance" or "hünt." It is impossible to determine the meaning of "drysk" and "miakushka" out of context, but "miakushka" carries a resemblance to *miakish*, the "soft part of the bread," and *makushka*, "crown of the head."

10. Among these translational words, "rakh-chakh-chakh" seems to be an onomatopoeia; "tiutelki-potiutelki" and "tiutiunechki" belong to the language used by adults to address small children; it was not possible to identify "enbentere" and "shmarovoz"; the last two examples belong to popular songs of the 1920s, performed in worker's clubs and music halls. One of them sounded as follows:

Shel tramvai deviatyi nomer,
na ploshchadke kto-to pomer,
tianut tianut mertvetsa
lamtsy-dritsa . . . tsa-tsa

Tram number nine arrived,
on the platform someone died,
they're dragging away the corpse
lamtsy-dritsa . . . tsa-tsa

11. The Western word *union*, transliterated and pronounced the French way, with a stress on the last syllable, has no meaning in Russian.

12. Reference to the tall belltower in the Kremlin.

13. Chichikov is the main character in Gogol's *Dead Souls*; Svidrigailov is one of the main characters in Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment*.

14. These rhymes carry no rational meaning but evoke associations with numbers, as in a count. Quoted from E. A. Pokrovsky, *Children's Games, Principally Russian* (Moscow, 1887), p. 57. See translation of Shklovskii's article, n. 5 above.

15. The "transrational" speech of religious sectarians had already been noted by Kruchenykh; see "From *Exploidy*." See also translation of Shklovskii's article, n. 5 above.

16. This is an example of phonetic associations that evoke a feeling or sensation (namely, an undefined feeling of "brocade, mob, to growl, blood," all at once) rather than conveying a precise meaning (from the book *Let's Grumble*, 1913). This technique is further explained in the example that follows, from another of Kruchenykh's poems.

17. In Russian: "To lesu viden smuglyi muzh" and "I v otvet na pros'bu k gonkam."

18. An acronym for Chrezvychainaia Komissiiia, the secret police.

19. Roman Iakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia* (Prague: Politika, 1921).

20. Petr Dmitrievich Boborykin (1836–1921) was a writer and the editor of the journal *Library for Reading* in the 1860s; later a contributor to the journal *Messenger of Europe*. The term "Boborykin intelligentsia" here has a sarcastic slant. A prolific writer, Boborykin turned out one realistic novel after another, all focused on social problems to meet the expectations of the liberal, "progressive" intelligentsia. "Sovdep" is an acronym for Sovet Deputatov (Soviet of the Representatives of the Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Soldiers).

21. *The Croaked Moon* (Moscow, 1913), a miscellany of the Hylaea group. A. Kruchenykh, *The Starving One* (Moscow: TsIT, 1922).

22. From the poem "Incantation by Laughter" (1910). In Russian:

O rassmeites' smekhachi,
O zasmeites' smekhachi,
Chto smeitsia smekhami, chto smeianstvuiut smeial'no . . .

23. From *Zangezi* (1922). Khlebnikov called this work a "supertale" (*sverkh-povest'*) or "transtale" (*zapovest'*). It is a composite piece of prose, poetry, and dialogue. In Russian:

Idi, mogatyr!
Shagai, mogatyr! mozhar, mozhar!
Mogun ia mogeiu!
Moglets, ia mogu! mogei, ia mogeiu!
Mogatsvo mogachei, etc.

24. We have been unable to locate this poem. In Russian:

Iverni, vyverni
Umnyi igren'!
Kucheri tucheri
Mucheri nogeri
Togeri tucheri, vecheri ocheri . . .

25. From an untitled poem written between 1906 and 1916. V. Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Collected Works) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1968), 2:271. In Russian:

Tebe poem, Rodun,
Sebe poem, Byvun,
Tebe poem: Radun . . .

26. From the long poem *The Starving One* (1922). In Russian:

Golodnia . . . Golodniak . . .
Glod . . . Gludukh . . . Golodiitsa . . .—
Glyd—ryk
Myr sdykh . . .

27. Both excerpts are from the poem "Winter," printed in *Calendar* (1926). In Russian:

Stuzha . . . v'iuzha . . .
V'iuga . . . stuga . . .
Gudit zemlia, zudit zemlia . . .

28. All these words are derived from the verb *letet'* (to fly) and mean "flyer," "flying," "pilot."

29. Eugen Steinach (1861–1944), a physiologist renowned for his study of the sexual organs, researched the correlation between sexual hormones and internal secretion. He was professor of physiology in Prague (1895) and Vienna (1912). Sergei Kravkov (1891–1951), physiologist and psychologist, studied the function of sight in the human being and its interaction with the other sensory organs.

Lef to Battle!

1. This is a pun on the proverb "Kto v les, kto po drova," which describes a situation of disharmony, chaos, disagreement. In the text the word "les" (woods) is replaced by "Lef."

2. Anatolii V. Lunacharskii (1873–1933), the Commissar for Education from 1918 to 1929, was an enlightened intellectual who supported experimentation in the arts and in the education system.

Lef's Tribune

1. The author refers to the trilogy *The Created Legend* (1908–12), by Fedor Sologub. Written in a Symbolist-Decadent vein, this work presents a dual reality: dull, vulgar everyday life versus the aesthetic realm of harmony, beauty, and refined sadistic pleasures.

2. Quotation from *The Word as Such* (Moscow, 1913) by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, in this collection.

3. About Marinetti's relationship with the Russian Futurists, see "What Does Lef Fight For?" n. 5.

4. Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

5. See "Lef to Battle!" n. 2.

6. On Nikolai Chuzhak, see "What Does Lef Fight For?" n. 16.

7. Members of Proletkult and other "proletarian" associations, such as Cosmos. See "What Does Lef Fight For?" n. 10.

8. Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826), writer, journalist, and publisher, introduced the trend of Sentimentalism into Russian prose and distinguished himself as a reformer of the literary language. Nikolai Nekrasov (1821–77), writer, poet, and publisher, was one of the main exponents of the civic poetry trend that championed philanthropic and liberal causes. He played an important role as organizer and sustainer of the Natural School, a literary current that favored sentimental themes of urban realism, new to Russian literature.

9. See "What Does Lef Fight For?" n. 13.

10. Russian Communist party.

Lef and MAPP

1. Acronym for Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers. This was the Moscow chapter of RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, which counted among its members the critic Lev Averbakh and writers such as Fedor Gladkov (1883–1958), Aleksandr Fadeev (1901–56), and Iurii Libedinskii (1899–1959). RAPP claimed to be the only legitimate representative of proletarian literature and waged a vicious war against its "bourgeois" literary adversaries. It was eventually dissolved in 1932, together with all other literary organizations, by a decision of the Central Committee of the Communist party.

2. The Russian term is *mnimo-poputnisheskaia literatura* and refers to the so-called fellow travelers (*poputchiki*), writers who went along with the Revolution but did not eagerly support the Soviet government and did not cooperate with its policies on the arts.

We Are the Futurists

1. This leaflet was written by Khlebnikov and Livshits before Marinetti's first lecture in St. Petersburg on February 1, 1914. The Belgian poet Verhaeren and the French movie star Max Linder had been previous visitors to the capital. The leaflet's last two lines are a reference to an incident in Gogol's *Dead Souls* where smugglers hide lace under a false layer of sheep's fleece.
2. In Russian folklore, Kashchey the Immortal (*Kashchei bessmertnyi*) is a feared wizard who can only be slain when his soul, encased in a special casket or an egg, is captured and crushed.
3. Ivan Puni, an avant-garde artist, belonged to IZO and contributed to *Art of the Commune*.

The Black Sea Futurists

1. The Cruiser "Diamond" (*Almaz*) has not been traced; presumably it took part in military actions around Odessa.
2. Kirsanov turns the acronyms of the various executive committees for the western, southern, and northern regions and the Rumanian front, the Black Sea fleet, and the Odessa military district into a trans-sense poem in the Cubo-Futurist style. "Nikolka" ("Little Nicky") is intended as a demeaning reference to the portrait of Tsar Nicholas II.
3. The Southern branch of ROSTA, the Russian Telegraphic Agency, which supervised the production of agitational posters and cartoons, enlisting many artists in this effort. Maiakovskii produced hundred of drawings, jingles, and slogans for ROSTA.
4. Iurii Olesha (1899–1960) and Valentin Kataev (1897–1985) were fellow travelers (see n. 127 to "Introduction").
5. The Russian is *epatirovat*, a verb derived from the French expression *épater les bourgeois*.
6. Pushkin, lisped.
7. Politprosvet (Politiko-prosvetitel'nyi komitet) was an agency of Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Education. It was charged with organizing and carrying out the political education of adults.
8. Alexander Tairov's Kamerny Theater in Moscow developed (in opposition to the psychological realism of the Moscow Art Theater) along the lines of spectacle, overt theatricality, and fantasy.
9. YugoLef was the southern branch of Lef. Kirsanov's remarks provide a good sketch of the brief history of this group.
10. Agitprop was the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the Communist party's Central Committee.

Broadening the Verbal Basis

1. Founded in 1924, the *Star* was Leningrad's first Marxist thick journal. Its early issues published works by Blok and Belyi, revealing its attitude toward continuing the literary tradition of which Maiakovskii is critical.
2. Aleksandr Voronskii (1884–) was the editor-in-chief of *Red Virgin Soil*, found-

ed in 1921 as the first Soviet "thick" journal (thus reviving a very popular nineteenth-century format, including criticism, politics, and belles lettres). Its contributors, led by its editors, fostered a distinctly tolerant current in Marxist literary theory. During the early and mid-1920s it published the work of fellow travelers like the Serapion Brothers as well as that of communist writers. Viacheslav Polonskii (1886–1932) was a literary critic whose views lay clearly to the right of *Lef* and *New Lef*. He thus opposed "leftist" groups intolerant of diversity and claiming literary hegemony for themselves. A. Lezhnev (1893–) was one of *Red Virgin Soil's* most important contributors of literary criticism. Generally speaking, he vigorously opposed Formalism and advocated representational art.

3. Maiakovskii attacked *Poet and Tsar* in *New Lef*, n. 2 (1927) and *Kino* (Lenin-grad), November 7, 1927, as an example of the "monstrosities" produced by Sovkino (the state-controlled studios).

4. V. I. Kachalov was a well-known actor.

Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!

1. "Komsomolkas" were female members of the Komsomol (the Young Communist Youth League).

2. A classic of early Soviet drama, *Liubov' Ivanovaia* (1925), by Konstantin Trener (1876–1945).

3. "Pickfordization" is an ironic reference (via Mary Pickford) to the adoption of bourgeois art forms and lifestyle, whereas "Fordization" refers to Western industrial technology and assembly-line production. "Sov-Douglasses" and "Sov-Marys" are ironic references to Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, very popular with Soviet audiences in the 1920s. Shershenevich wrote the script for the film *The Kiss of Mary Pickford* (Potselui Meri Pikford), 1927. Thus, Tret'iakov criticizes those Soviet directors who were attempting to imitate the popular American films being imported into the Soviet Union.

4. "AKs" is intended as a derogatory reference to the painters of the Academy, "AKhRRs" to those of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, who mass-produced monumental portraits on socialist themes, using a very photographic style.

5. See "Broadening the Verbal Basis," n. 2.

6. The *kamarinskaya* is a lively Russian folk dance; the term refers also to the music that goes with it.

What's New

1. The group "October" was associated with the journal of the same name, founded in 1924. Its ideas were close to those of the earlier Proletkult: that the proletarians had to build their own literature, rejecting "fellow travelers" as well as bourgeois literature.

2. Sergei Esenin (1895–1925) was the most famous poet among the Imaginists; his verses convey a nostalgic attachment to the idyllic countryside and a fatal attraction to Bohemian city life.

3. Zharov was a proletarian writer and a member of the executive board of RAPP.

4. In the long narrative poem *Semen Proskakov* (1928), Aseev told the story of a Bolshevik partisan during the Civil War, incorporating into his verse text newspaper articles, memoirs, and other archival material.

5. The travel notes *The Made-up Beauty* (1928) described Aseev's trip to Italy; it was his first major prose work.

6. Dimitrii Talnikov was a leading critic who wrote for *Red Virgin Soil* (see "Broadening the Verbal Basis, n. 2). He argued against a narrow interpretation of proletarian literature and for gradually involving artists in the task of socialist construction rather than alienating them.

7. Yuri Sobolev was a literary critic who also wrote for *Red Virgin Soil*.

More Left than Lef

1. In 1928, Maiakovskii, Brik, Aseev, and Rodchenko severed their ties with *New Lef*, leaving Tret'iakov and Chuzhak in charge. This explains the bitter tone of this article. Later that year, Maiakovskii tried to organize REF (the Revolutionary Front of the Arts) but failed. He then entered RAPP (see "Lef and MAPP"), n. 1.

2. These lines are from the fifth scene of Nikolai Nekrasov's *Bear Hunt: Scenes from a Lyrical Comedy* (1867).

3. These lines are from Maiakovskii's poem "About Trash."

4. *Komsomolskaia Pravda* was the literary organ of the Komsomol (Young Communist Youth League). It took the position that proletarian writers had nothing to learn from the preceding literature of the bourgeois period, either modernist or realist.

5. Iuda Grossman-Roshchin, in his critical articles, was an ideological watchdog against various sorts of deviations from Marxism. He represented the position of the proletarian writers.

6. *On Literary Guard* (*Na literaturnom postu*, or *Nalitpost*), founded in 1926, was the literary journal that reflected the views of the proletarian writers (RAPP).

7. "Pisarevshchina" is a derogatory reference (indicated in Russian by the suffix *-shchina*) to Dimitrii Pisarev, the nineteenth-century Russian "civic" critic who was a proponent of positivism and populism. Roshchin clearly wishes to characterize Pisarev's attitude as intolerant and radical.

8. See "Broadening the Verbal Basis," n. 2.

9. VAPP, the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (*Vsei Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei*), founded in 1920, came to represent the forces of literary realism and "contemporary thematics" in the literary disputes of the 1920s, advancing realism as the literary method appropriate to dialectical materialism. The association was reorganized and its name changed simply to RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) in 1928.

10. Nikolai Aduv was one of the contributors to *Business*.

11. Fedor Raskol'nikov was a literary critic and a member of the editorial board of *Nalitpost*.

12. A. I. Sviderskii—not traced; presumably, a very minor writer of the time.

13. See "Broadening the Verbal Basis," n. 2.

14. Chuzhak chooses to ignore here the considerable work of Dziga Vertov and his Kino-eye group in developing a cinema verité based on documentary footage.

Selected Bibliography

A complete bibliography of the miscellanies, collective volumes, and individual works of the Russian Futurists in the prerevolutionary years is to be found in Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (see page 336).

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