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

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# 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?<sup>1</sup>

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

All those Maxim Gorkys, Kuprins, Bloks, Sologubs, Remizovs, Averchenkos, Chornys, Kuzmins, Bunins, etc.<sup>3</sup> 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" (Poshchechina 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,<sup>4</sup> V. MAYAKOVSKY,  
VICTOR KHLEBNIKOV

## [The Word as Such]

In 1908 *A Trap for Judges, 1* was in preparation.<sup>1</sup> Part of the works (of the Cubo-Futurists) ended up in that miscellany, part in *The Studio of the Impressionists*.<sup>2</sup> In both collections, V. Khlebnikov, the Burliuks, S. Miasoedov,<sup>3</sup> 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*,<sup>4</sup> 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),<sup>5</sup> or later.

That's understandable: the Italians relied on tendentiousness. Like Pushkin's little devil,<sup>6</sup> 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-writhers.<sup>7</sup>

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).<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup>This 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*)<sup>2</sup>

Or from E. Guro:

Finland  
 . . . Lulla, lolla, lalla-lu,  
 Liza, lolla, lulla-li.  
 Whisser, whisser<sup>3</sup> the pine trees,  
 ti-i-i, ti-i-u-u . . .<sup>4</sup>

(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*)<sup>5</sup>

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)<sup>6</sup>

"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. Burliuk)<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>**

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

Г, Г  
Г  
Г  
Г  
Г, Г

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.<sup>9</sup>

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 . . .<sup>10</sup>**

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 ez<sup>11</sup>

(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!<sup>12</sup>  
 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. Burliuk)<sup>13</sup>

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,<sup>14</sup> 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 tail<sup>15</sup>

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-foppists<sup>16</sup> (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:

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*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!<sup>17</sup>

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 books<sup>18</sup> 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 wordwright<sup>1</sup> 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),<sup>2</sup> your word is stillborn.

Ah, accursed Sviatopolsks!

*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

<sup>1</sup>'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, *Explodity* by N. Kulbin et al., *Duck's Nest* by O. Rozanova.<sup>3</sup> Here, one can at last say: "Every letter is . . . A-1!"<sup>4</sup>

It's strange, neither Balmont nor Blok<sup>5</sup>—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

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup>—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 E<sup>3</sup>

(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-

<sup>1</sup>"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).<sup>4</sup> (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