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 Dostoevski. 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. Metzl & 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.
Notes

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 Buriuk 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
   ispar’ 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 *Pomade* (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 budushchel’skich 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, rech’lir’. We have rendered this neologism, as well as rechetvorets, 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.


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 bogatyry) 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.


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.


7. Mikhail Lermontov (1814–41), romantic poet and writer. Kruchenykh delib-
1. The English equivalent is “Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

2. 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 Diagilev (1872–1929). Subsequently, he designed the decor and costumes for numerous Diagilev productions.

24. The Cornfield was a popular illustrated journal.

25. 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.”
Notes

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.


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.


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. Pismovniki 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 Chukovsky (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 Maiakovsky'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 (1866–1921) 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 (1877–1919), editor of the journal Apollon, and the poet Vladimir Piest (pseud. of Vladimir Pestovskii, 1886–1941).

**We, Too, Want Meat!**

1. Aleksandr lablonovskii (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).
Notes

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.


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 Akhenval'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 wordburg, of German origin, was replaced by the Slavic wordgrad 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 wordbosi(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 Petrikov (1894–1971) and Nikolai Aseev (1889–1963) were two prominent poets.

3. In Russian, *zachelocek*, 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 Lokhvitskaia (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.