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Words in Revolution

Russian Futurist Manifestoes 1912-1928

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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-canon's 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

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.

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

¹The manifesto "Trumpet of the Martians" (Truba Marsian) was printed as a scroll in Kharkov in 1916. It was published by the group Lyroon (*Lirriia*), headed by Nikolai Aseev and Grigori Petnikov. Lyroon grew out of Centrifuge and showed an orientation toward Khlebnikov's poetry and theory.