A SLAP IN THE FACE OF PUBLIC TASTE:
THE RUSSIAN FUTURISTS’ AESTHETICS OF REVOLUTION

BY

EMILY K LIPIRA

THESIS

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Advisers:

Professor Mark D. Steinberg
Associate Professor David Cooper
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical context in which Russian Futurism formed in 1910 in order to comprehend better this significant movement’s motivations, ideologies, aesthetics, and effects on subsequent literature, art, and politics, particularly those of Russia. It identifies the primary problems of the late Russian Empire and how various groups sought to provide solutions to these troubles to help Russia become modern. While scholars often focus on the Bolsheviks’ proposal of a two-fold socio-political revolution because this view prevailed in and after 1917, other organizations promoted their own interpretations of how to address Russia’s numerous troubles that offer insight into the era and the diversity of opinions that existed during this turbulent period. This project focuses on the most well-known group of Russian Futurists, Hylaea (sometimes also called the Cubo-Futurists), because its members developed unconventional aesthetics of revolution to spread their plan to the Russian public from the time of its founding in 1910 until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. The Hylaean Futurists’ proposal expanded upon and differed from the Bolsheviks’ vision of revolution because it called for a three-tiered revolution that would encompass aesthetics in addition to politics and society. By deliberately infusing their iconoclastic aesthetics of revolution into their writings, books, and performances, the Hylaeans slapped ambivalent and complacent Russians awake to the shameful conditions that existed in the empire’s antiquated political, social, and artistic systems. This thesis includes a number of detailed case studies of the Hylaean Futurists’ pre-war publications, rhetoric, illustrations, and performances in order to understand more comprehensively their inspiration, aesthetics, techniques, interpretation of revolution, and relationship with the socialists before the momentous revolutions of 1917.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the seven years that preceded the momentous 1917 revolutions in Russia, avant-garde writers and artists known as the Futurists worked to spread their controversial message of destruction and rebirth through their publications and performances. As their name implies, the Futurists focused their work on the urgent need to untether Russia from its antiquated cultural, social, and political traditions in order to reach a viable future, free of the major problems that faced the empire in the early twentieth century, namely the adoration of earlier cultural figures and conventional aesthetics, crippling social inequality, and the anachronistic autocracy that kept Russia oriented to the past. Many members of Russian Futurism’s most renowned group, Hylaea (which is sometimes called Cubo-Futurism and included members such as Vladimir Maiakovskii, David Burliuk, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Aleksei Kruchenykh), had socialist backgrounds that helped influence them to endorse the Bolsheviks’ call for a two-tiered political and social revolution. While many of these Futurists later supported the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist regime in the early 1920s, their conception of what sort of revolution Russia needed differed from the Bolsheviks and their relationship to the Bolshevik administration was more complicated than people usually consider it to be. The Russian Empire’s numerous problems in its final decade and the Hylaean Futurists’ radical, left-wing political ideas shaped the group’s work and ideology, although often resulting with a more extensive interpretation of revolution and different methods than those of the socialists. This thesis analyzes the historical motivations for and the ways in which the Hylaean Futurists developed unconventional revolutionary aesthetics, linked with a message of revolution, which served as tools for shocking the Russian public and press into paying attention to their extreme message of starting a
multifaceted revolution that included one more sphere than the socialists’ socio-political revolutionary vision: aesthetics. The Futurists’ aesthetics of revolution included utilizing unconventional techniques in their writings, books, and performances, using offensive rhetoric and imagery, insulting and interacting with the audience during presentations, and discussing the need for Russians to reject impractical traditions. This analysis examines how this iconoclastic group deliberately added tumult to the turbulent time before the 1917 revolutions, especially from the group’s founding in 1910 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, by rejecting traditional values and by taking their art beyond passive thick journals directly into the public sphere, which included a tour across Russia in 1913. During these chaotic years at the end of the Russian Empire, the Hylaean Futurists’ message and aesthetics resonated with public anxieties and their rebellious style effectively generated dialogue, both positive and negative, about the group’s call for a three-tiered (socio-political-aesthetic) revolution, thereby contributing to the revolutionary attitudes that triumphed in 1917.

This thesis employs a historical approach to understand the Hylaean Futurists’ motivations, philosophies, aesthetics, methods, and objectives in the years before the Great War. While numerous scholars have analyzed Russian Futurism over the past century, many of them fail to consider in any real depth the complex historical context that gave rise to such an iconoclastic and impactful movement. Many publications primarily take a literary approach and explore the Futurists’ poetry, focusing mostly on form and seeking to explain its utilization of rhyme, rhythm, and neologisms. This methodology is understandable since Futurism existed partly as a poetry movement, but it often fails to analyze the complexity of the movement, the historical factors that influenced the Futurists’ work and ideology, their use of other creative mediums such as performance and painting, and how they acted in their society in response to
these circumstances. A minority of scholars have employed a historical approach, observable in Vladimir Markov’s *Russian Futurism: A History* (1968), which contains extremely useful material but has not been matched or updated in the near-half century since its publication, Mark D. Steinberg’s *Petersburg Fin de Siècle* (2011), which considers Russian Futurism as one indication of the process of the Russian Empire’s decay, and Nina Gurianova’s *The Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in the Early Russian Avant-Garde* (2012), which focuses on a variety of radical Russian artistic groups and their desire to destroy and to deconstruct “the aesthetic clichés of ‘the ideal’ and ‘beauty.’”¹

This thesis examines how the Hylaean Futurists’ avant-garde work and aesthetics both reflected the prevailing mood in the struggling Russian Empire during this critical period and also helped to spread ideas of revolution to the general public, thus contributing to the revolutionary mindset that prevailed in 1917. Steinberg has noted some of the existing gaps in the study of Russian Futurism and of the 1917 revolutions, explaining that, “the story of 1917 in Russia still needs to be told with greater attention to the vital complexities of language, culture, and meaning.”² This thesis addresses this particular gap in the scholarship in order to understand better the events and general atmosphere that existed in Russia leading up to the 1917 revolutions. Through the use of unconventional aesthetics of revolution, the Hyleans put into words, images, performances, and actions what they thought was necessary for Russia to thrive and did it in a way that “slapped” awake the complacent members of Russia’s middle- and

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upper-classes who had been unconcerned, almost as if they were asleep, with the problems consuming Russia. The Hylaeans used their shocking works to inform their audience about the critical need to replace Russia’s timeworn political, social, and artistic systems, all of which the upper class and bourgeoisie dominated at that time, to create a viable modern framework, even if that meant that this change occurred through a revolution. Upper- and middle-class Russians and the press regarded the Futurists as nothing more than rebels and hooligans for using insubordinate tactics similar to those of socialists and street criminals to gain attention. Unlike socialists and hooligans, however, the Futurists purposefully crafted and used their aesthetics of revolution in their works as a political tool to proclaim an ideological message that boldly stated the problems plaguing pre-revolutionary Russia and that presented their art as a new way to understand life in the newly-modern world.

This thesis also shows the ways in which the Hylaean Futurists differed from the Bolsheviks both in their vision of what kind of revolution Russia needed and in their methods for cultivating a revolutionary spirit among the Russian public. Even though many Hylaeans had participated in socialist activities before 1917 and publicly endorsed the young Bolshevik government, they had a much more complicated relationship with Bolshevism and the early Soviet state than many scholars acknowledge. The Hylaeans did not endorse every Bolshevik policy and belief, maintained their own vision of Russia’s future even after the revolution, and eventually became frustrated by how the Bolsheviks implemented the revolution, particularly by the end of the 1920s when art once again became oppressed by the state. Using a historical approach, this thesis analyzes the circumstances of pre-revolutionary Russia that encouraged the Hylaean Futurists’ radicalism and aesthetics of revolution that politicized their art in a way that no other cultural group did in pre-revolutionary Russia. With the assistance of images, it
examines the use of the Futurists’ aesthetics in some of their most shocking books, illustrations, and performances before the Great War in order to understand their motivations and primary objective: to shock the public in order to inspire revolutionary attitudes that would destroy the outdated artistic, social, and political systems of the late Russian Empire.
CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL SETTING AND ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN FUTURISM

While the Russian Futurists were not a traditionally political movement, the turbulent political atmosphere of the Romanov Dynasty’s last years certainly shaped the circumstances in which this avant-garde group developed. In his analysis of Russian culture in 1916, Louis Friedland remarked that the state of Russian politics always influenced the direction of art and literature, and that recently Russian artists’ and writers’ “inspiring motive was antagonism toward the official institutions.” This sentiment of hostility toward the Russian autocracy escalated around the turn of the century in most social groups, with cultural figures such as the Futurists articulating this common sense of frustration and anger felt by many Russians who lived in the last decades of the empire. This public mood of animosity toward the empire’s ineffective and non-democratic political system grew in part because the rapid industrialization of the 1890s engendered a major demographic shift as hundreds of thousands of peasants moved to cities to work in the new factories. This shift created a sizable, literate working class who were becoming politically conscious, more aware of the great social inequality that existed in the empire’s antiquated autocratic system, and beginning to organize strikes and illegal trade unions around the turn of the century.

On 9 January 1905 (22 January on the western Gregorian calendar), a day that came to be known as “Bloody Sunday,” tensions between the frustrated masses and the imperial authorities erupted when Father Georgii Gapon led an unarmed group of striking workers and their families.

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4 For a discussion of Russian industrialization, demographic changes, and development of the working class see “The Economic Social Development of Russia from the ‘Great Reforms’ until the Revolutions of 1917,” in *A History of Russia* (8th edition), Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 421-438.
who wanted to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II at the Winter Palace in the imperial capital, St. Petersburg. Instead of the tsar making the appropriate changes to help ease their hardships and listening to the peoples’ pleas for better working conditions and universal suffrage, the Imperial Guard fired upon the crowd, killing and wounding hundreds of innocent people and starting the Revolution of 1905 (figure 2.1). Protests, violence, student and worker strikes, and mutinies such as the notorious one on the Potemkin battleship continued throughout the next two years, even after the tsar reluctantly issued the October Manifesto on 30 October 1905 in an attempt to answer some of the peoples’ demands. The October Manifesto, which only satisfied some of the Liberals’ requests, promised basic civil liberties to the people and permitted the creation of a national assembly, the Duma. Instead of creating the type of representative body for which many people called, however, Tsar Nicholas II limited the Duma’s power and later his government staged a coup, altering it to weighted representation that discriminated against the lower classes. A strong defender of the three-hundred-year-old Romanov monarchy, Nicholas denied the peoples’ requests for democracy and true social reforms, and wrote in October 1905 his belief that, “It is dangerous to change the way that power is formulated.” It soon became clear that the tsar’s limited concessions during the 1905 Revolution neither satisfied the increasing demands of the people nor solved the empire’s complicated problems that had grown as a result of Russia’s modernization.

Russian Futurism and numerous left-wing political parties gained popularity with the Russian public in the years preceding the 1917 revolutions because it was obvious that the tsar and the other entrenched powers in politics and the arts refused to allow significant changes to

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5 Riasanovsky and Steinberg, A History of Russia, 402-404.
occur. In discussing modernity’s effects on the late Russian Empire, historian Yanni Kotsonis explained that, “A study of Russian autocracy might recognize 1905 as the first serious challenge and 1917 as a terminus.” Many of the Futurists cited the 1905 Revolution, the inadequate government response, and the subsequent unrest across Russia as the origins of their radicalism and desire to help Russia become more modern. Although the tsar refused to grant the major reforms in 1905 that would quell the socialists’ and the lower classes’ demands, the government promulgated a few important concessions, such as the rights to form political parties and trade unions, to criticize the government modestly, and to allow relative freedom of the press.

The Hylaean Futurists later took full advantage of these new, albeit still limited, rights of expression and hoped to spread their ideas among the Russian public to initiate a successful and triple-faceted socio-political-artistic revolution after the 1905 Revolution failed to enact adequate change. Reflecting a few years after the 1917 revolutions, Prince D.S. Mirskii, a historian and staunch supporter of the Romanov autocracy as a member of the Russian nobility, viewed this softening of state censorship in 1905 as facilitating the creation of an “anti-political individualism” expressed in the Futurists’ publications and performances, thus contributing to the autocracy’s demise. Modern political theories and philosophies about the individual’s value in society had spread and influenced many Russians, including the Futurists, who desired a representative form of government that did not value an individual based upon the social class into which he was born, as had been the system in the Russian Empire for centuries. As

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Steinberg noted, “Modern revolutions are exceptionally loquacious events. Physical action, including force and violence, is certainly essential to struggles for power. But words give these actions shape and substance. Words inspire, encouraging large numbers of people to think that it is important and worth the effort (even vital) to take part in meetings, participate in strikes or demonstrations, choose among new claimants to political leadership, draft various appeals, and even write personally to leading public figures.”¹⁰ Through their unconventional poetry, impassioned speeches and manifestos, and shocking performances, the Hylaean Futurists articulated the enormous difficulties that plagued the late Russian Empire, as well as their solution to these problems: to disregard antiquated political, social, and artistic norms in order to create a modern, sustainable infrastructure in Russia.

Many political parties used Russia’s myriad of social problems both as a foundation and as a motivator for their ideologies, especially the socialist parties that gradually gained in popularity between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. The Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP), with Vladimir Lenin leading the Bolsheviks and Iulii Martov leading the Mensheviks, gained supporters for its primary focus on the destruction of the “tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic” that would offer a constitution that guaranteed civil rights in a socialist society.¹¹ The socialists’ commitment to a dual revolution, which meant a social revolution in addition to a political revolution, influenced how many Russians thought and attracted many followers, including RSDWP members who later became Hylaean Futurists,

¹⁰ Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution*, 1.
such as Vladimir Maiakovskii and Vasilii Kamenskii. After many years of enthusiastically working with the socialists, Maiakovskii and his friends realized that the Bolsheviks’ vision of a dual socio-political revolution did not go far enough to address all of Russia’s troubles. By leaving the Party and focusing on creating their own vision of Russia’s future, the Hylaeans formulated an alternative vision of revolution that differed both in scope and methods from the Bolsheviks’ interpretation of revolution. The Futurists added a third sphere to the socialists’ socio-political revolution, proposing a triple-tiered socio-political-artistic revolution that would be farther reaching than the plan of the Bolsheviks.

Because of the Hylaean Futurists’ deliberate use of radical and impolite methods, many educated and urban Russians considered the group to be an indication of Russian society’s sharp decline. The Bolshevik writer Aleksandr Serafimovich explained that Russian Futurism began in 1910 as a symptom of the decaying empire, writing that the movement represented “a child of the rotten bourgeois regime.” Critics, the press, and members of the bourgeoisie often associated the Futurists with another growing social problem of the early twentieth century, hooliganism (khuliganstvo), which had increased as a result of Russia’s demographic shift around 1900. Russia’s upper classes considered “culture” and “civilization” to be goals that society could achieve through education, moral development, and refinement. People labeled as “hooligans,” usually young, lower-class males, defied these traditional cultural standards by committing rebellious and sometimes violent actions that “violated the norms of ‘civilized’

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public life.”\textsuperscript{15} The boulevard press in St. Petersburg around 1900 began reporting an escalation of hooliganism, highlighting fights, blocked public streets, unruliness, public intoxication, obscenities shouted on public streets, theft of carriage wheels, stabbings, rape, arson, and other offensive crimes.\textsuperscript{16} These types of behaviors indicate a rising dissatisfaction with the empire’s obsolete social structure and definitions of culture. While hooligans committed these acts without deeply considering their implications, the Hylaeans consciously incorporated elements of hooligan behavior into their works to show their extreme frustration with Russia’s hierarchical society and conventional conceptions of culture and beauty.

From the time of the 1905 Revolution until the outbreak of the March Revolution in 1917, a heightened feeling of distrust toward the stagnant autocracy manifested in a variety of ways among the empire’s different social classes. Instead of being satisfied with the few rights the tsar had afforded to them, many people voiced their discontent, joined political parties, created lists of demands in political manifestos, or committed destructive acts against the system. After 1905, hooliganism increased so much that the Ministry of Internal Affairs set up a special committee, the Lykoshin Commission, to investigate the steep rise in these urban crimes. It reported that between 1905 and 1914, criminal activity increased by one-hundred fifty percent.\textsuperscript{17} The bourgeoisie became even more worried about the ostensibly anarchistic activities of hooligans and other iconoclastic rebels, such as the Hylaeans, and they considered these types of defiant groups to signify “antonyms of ‘civilization.’”\textsuperscript{18} Like the hooligans, the Hylaean Futurists expressed the public’s feeling of a looming apocalypse, an idea that had captivated Russia since

\textsuperscript{15} Steinberg, \textit{Petersburg}, 171.
\textsuperscript{17} Weissman, “Rural Crime in Tsarist Russia,” 229-232.
\textsuperscript{18} Steinberg, \textit{Petersburg}, 171.
the turn of the century, which grew rapidly in imperial society after the failures of 1905. The combination of continued frustration and new rights led to the conditions that motivated the Futurists to form in 1910 and to call for the modernization of Russia’s archaic artistic, social, and political institutions.

The Russian Futurists originated and operated during the final years of the Russian Empire because these writers and artists felt an overwhelming need to express the public’s anxiety and to articulate the flaws of the empire’s artistic, social, and political systems in the hopes of shocking some of their audience into sharing their desire for a multifaceted revolution. All of the social, economic, cultural, and political problems still facing Russia after 1905 provided the Futurists with numerous topics against which they could rebel and an audience who could understand, and sometimes even relate to, their message. Writing about the empire’s condition in 1913, which happened to be the most active year for the pre-revolutionary Futurists, one scholar remarked, “The political world here is more discontent[ed] than ever…there is a deeper hostility to the administrative machine than in the days of the [1905] revolt.” Tsar Nicholas II only aggravated the disillusioned members of Russian society more in 1913, filling the year with expensive parties to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty’s founding (figure 2.2), dressing in anachronistic seventeenth-century clothing, and focusing on antiquated familial governing traditions that did not address Russia’s problems as it entered the twentieth century as a modernizing country. The Romanov anniversary festivities dragged on for months and displayed the tsar’s unwillingness to move forward in any respect. He publicly connected the empire to its historical origins, a time when the autocrat made all the decisions without a representative legislature, and to Christianity, including the highest Orthodox

19 Lincoln, Between Heaven and Hell, 230.
hierarchs at events to signify the union and “sacred mission of the empire under crown and cross.” (figure 2.3)\textsuperscript{21} The 1913 tercentenary illustrated clearly for the Russian public and Futurists that the imperial leadership hoped to keep Russia oriented to the past instead of making progress to join the modern world politically, culturally, and socially. The October Manifesto and the Duma’s failures to curtail the power of the irrational tsar created more tension that could finally be discussed, and many Russians, including the Hylaean Futurists, had lost faith in the empire’s capability to reform and saw Russia’s only hope as a successful, multifaceted revolution.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Wayne Dowler, \textit{Russia in 1913} (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 6.
\textsuperscript{22} Weissman, “Rural Crime in Tsarist Russia,” 228.
FIGURES FOR CHAPTER 2

Figure 2.1 A poster depicting the Bloody Sunday massacre of 9 January 1905, a symbol of the failures of 1905. Designed by artist Mikhail I. Avilov, 1930.

Figure 2.2 A photograph that shows the extravagant and expensive displays used during the Romanov tercentenary, 1913.
Figure 2.3  Tsar Nicholas II with his family and an Orthodox hierarch during one of the processions of the Romanov tercentenary, 1913.
CHAPTER 3
THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN FUTURISM (HYLAEA)

Many people inaccurately think that Russian Futurism originated as a derivative of Italian Futurism, which appeared the year before the Russian groups began publishing in 1910. In February of 1909, Filippo Marinetti published his “Manifesto of Futurism,” in which he proclaimed the beauty of speed and urbanism. Some similarities existed between Russian and Italian Futurism, such as the public using the same designation for both movements and several general beliefs about modernity, urbanism, and progress, but Russian Futurists viewed their movement as a separate, Russian-based phenomenon that addressed topics and issues relevant to Russia. Many contemporary critics of Russian Futurism also considered it to be “one of the most purely domestic developments” of Russian art and literature that grew as a result of the empire’s failures to address the events of 1905. Russian Futurism was not, however, a unified movement with a single leader, but this early avant-garde movement represented a “revolutionary attitude to life and art” that had numerous groups claiming it as their own. Although the Hylaeans (also called the Cubo-Futurists), Ego-Futurists, Mezzanine of Poetry, Centrifuge, Company 41°, and other groups categorized themselves as Futurists in Russia and fought for supremacy in the movement, the Hylaeans alone focused on interacting directly with the public and infused unconventional aesthetics of revolution into their works. Only the Hylaean Futurists’ writings and performances were infused with a political message and resonated with the radical spirit of

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24 Mirskii, Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881-1925, 266.
the decade leading up to the 1917 revolutions because their art called attention to Russia’s urgent need for a three-tiered socio-political-artistic revolution.26

David Burliuk (figure 3.1) is considered to be the “father of Russian Futurism” because he helped establish and led Hylaea, the group of avant-garde poets and artists who became more famous than their Futurist contemporaries in Russia because of their revolution-inspired ideology, aesthetics, and activities, all of which the Russian press and public discussed vigorously. In 1910, Burliuk brought together his brothers, Nikolai and Vladimir, and some of his artistic friends, Benedict Livshits, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Vasilii Kamenskii (Vladimir Maiakovskii joined the group later in the autumn of 1911), at his family’s estate in Kherson in Ukraine (figure 3.2). Hylaea (Гилея) was the ancient Greek name for the region and the newly-formed group adopted it for their name.27 Khlebnikov, known for his experimentation with the Russian language, began to call the group’s members будетляне (budetlyane), which means “people of the future,” and by 1913 they had also received the name of Cubo-Futurists due to their cubist style of painting.28 The members of Hylaea felt somewhat uncomfortable with the name футуристы (futuristi), or “futurists,” in part because of its connections to Italian Futurism and also because Igor Severyanin’s Ego-Futurist group in St. Petersburg had adopted the designation for themselves.29 The Hylaeans wanted to be sure to distance themselves from the Ego-Futurists’ “bourgeois” aesthetics, which they considered to be out of touch with Russian reality at such a turbulent time. Instead, the members of Hylaea hoped to articulate both the Russian public’s frustration and the reasons behind the general mood of anxiety that had been growing in the Russian Empire for the past few decades. They said that Severyanin and his

26 Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 311.
27 Ibid., 12.
29 Ibid., 90.
group’s publications were too refined and high-class, calling it “salon poetry” rather than the “factory poetry” that the Hylaeans used.\(^\text{30}\) From the group’s very beginning in 1910, Burliuk and his friends hoped to use their writings, art, and performances to dismantle Russia’s outdated hierarchical social structure and deliberately chose not “to approach life or the crowd from some heavenly height, as did the Ego-Futurists.”\(^\text{31}\) Contrary to most groups of their time and earlier in Russian art and literature, Hylaea loathed the empire’s numerous social constrictions and the conventional aesthetics revered by the Academy because they failed to reflect modern reality in Russia.

The distressing historical circumstances of the era in addition to a fortuitous collection of passionate individuals enabled Hylaea to be such an outspoken, influential group in prerevolutionary Russia. Burliuk and the other Hylaeans had strong socialist sympathies and formulated the ideology of their group to be an artistic interpretation and extension of left-wing political movements, which resulted in their decision to employ nontraditional aesthetics of revolution. They based their radical philosophy on a complete rejection of Russia’s past, including the people, movements, and values typically revered by Russians, in order to construct a progressive modern society that would also have a fresh conception of aesthetics that better addressed real life. Although Burliuk’s painting and poetry paled in comparison to the other Hylaeans, he developed innovative ideas and had an enthusiastic personality that helped to push the other members beyond the accepted norms of Russian society, poetry, and art. The other Hylaeans called him “Stormy David (бурлящий Давид)” or “Storming Burliuk,” partly due to his fervor and also because his surname shares the same root as the Russian verb бурлить

(burlit’) that means “to storm” or “to seethe.” He wrote in 1913 that his group aspired to deconstruct the recognized canon by using disharmony and dissymmetry, thereby creating their own “canon of displaced construction [italics in original].” Burliuk helped to provide the theoretical groundwork upon which the Hylaeans operated in their pre-war years.

In September of 1911, Hylaea added a member to their group who helped fulfill and popularize the movement’s aesthetics in new and exciting ways, Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii. At the time, David Burliuk attended Moscow’s Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture and met the passionate eighteen-year-old painter who possessed a forceful personality and strong socialist leanings. When another of Hylaea’s early members, Alexei Kruchenyk, met the young Maiakovskii, he noticed the controversial artist because he wore unconventional clothing in addition to a scowl (figure 3.3), stating “he used to go about in the same black velvet shirt, looking like an anarchist-nihilist, with dark shoulder-length locks.” Maiakovskii soon joined Hylaea and began writing the fiery, revolution-inspired urban poetry for which he became famous. In his memoirs, a performative text first written in 1922 (and later updated and republished in 1928) after the 1917 revolutions and during Soviet rule, which probably caused his perspective of the past to be written in a more pro-Bolshevik manner, Maiakovskii noted that, “Burliuk had the blazing anger of an artist who was ahead of his generation; I had the pathos of a socialist who knew that the destruction of the past was

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34 Markov, Russian Futurism: A History, 32.
unavoidable. Futurism was born.”36 The combination of Burliuk and Maiakovskii’s fierce personalities led to the full development of the group’s aesthetics of revolution that sought to slap the public awake to Russia’s problems by using new styles and alarming methods.

Most of Hylaea’s members had personal experiences in socialist political parties, illegal political activities, and conspiring to start a revolution to overthrow the Russian autocracy. They joined this radical, nonconformist artistic movement after their previous involvement with socialism, which caused the rhetoric and ideas of revolutionary Russian socialism to be visible in some of Hylaea’s work. Several Hylaeans had participated in the 1905 Revolution or had become politically active soon after in the hopes of creating a successful revolution, which in many cases led to arrests, jail time, and intensification of their hatred of the empire’s status quo. Kamenskii, who had been a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in Perm, actively took part in the 1905 Revolution and authorities arrested and imprisoned him when it failed. Khlebnikov, a university student in 1905, also spent time in jail for joining in anti-government protests.37 The 1905 Revolution also had a major influence on Kruchenykh, then only nineteen years old, who joined the Bolshevik Party and worked in Odessa to move illegal literature and printing equipment until police arrested him in 1906. After his release from jail, he continued to propagandize for the Bolsheviks by drawing and circulating lithograph portraits of famous revolutionaries such as Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, and Bebel. After 1905, Kruchenykh sought an outlet in art and poetry for his “violently contradictory yearnings” against Russian traditions in art and politics, also using his art as a way to participate in what he viewed as Russia’s “class struggle.”38 After experiencing jail time and observing the failures to effect sustainable change in

38 Ibid., 30, 28.
1905, the members of Hylaea left the Party and its vision of a dual socio-political revolution in search of a more-encompassing conception of revolution. As an alternate route to achieving viable changes, they turned to art, poetry, and performance to articulate their own revolutionary plan that separated from the Bolsheviks’ ideas and dissemination techniques.

As a teenager and young man, Maiakovskii also perceived that the Russian Empire was in the midst of a bitter class conflict and found socialism to be the best solution in the fight to destroy Russia’s hierarchical and outdated regime (figure 3.4). Socialism and experiences with the imperial authorities, which occurred many times in his youth due to political arrests, directly influenced Maiakovskii’s beliefs, writings, and performance style. Born and raised until age thirteen in Baghdati, Georgia, then part of the Russian Empire, Maiakovskii came from a family “of no clear estate connections.” His father, however, was ethnically Russian and worked as a local forester, a government position that awarded the family a stable income and a moderate amount of respect, although he died prematurely in 1906 after a scratch from a rusty pin gave him blood poisoning. Without its sole provider, the family frantically sold all their possessions and moved to Moscow in search of a decent life.

Before he even moved to Russia’s major cosmopolitan center, Maiakovskii had been exposed to left-wing revolutionary ideology in 1905, the year of great political turmoil and a failed revolution, when his sister gave him a long paper that included anti-tsarist poetry. Later in his 1922 memoirs, written during and presumably influenced by Soviet rule, he cited this publication and its radical poetic lines, such as “Come to your senses, comrade (Опомнись, Опомнись).”

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товарищ),” as his first experience with poetry being used as an ideological and inspirational force for change, writing that to him, “It was a revolution. It was through verse. Poetry and revolution somehow were united in my head (Это была революция. Это было стихами. Стихи и революция как-то объединились в голове).”\(^{41}\) After this experience, Maiakovskii began to read socialist publications and to become friends with others who desired a drastically new political and social reality in the Russian Empire, remembering that as early as 1905 in Georgia he joined a Marxist group (“Меня ввели в марксистский кружок”).\(^{42}\) Within a year of moving to Moscow in 1906, Maiakovskii had officially joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (the Bolshevik faction) and was even elected to its Moscow committee at only fourteen years old.\(^{43}\) He became extremely active in socialist revolutionary activities and concerned the Okhrana, the imperial secret police, to such a degree that plain-clothes operatives followed him and noted his activities, using the codename “the tall one.”\(^{44}\) Police arrested him numerous times for illegal activities with the Bolsheviks, such as operating an illegal printing press, distributing socialist propaganda, carrying a revolver without a license, and helping to free socialist inmates from prison. The imperial authorities imprisoned Maiakovskii three times between 1908 and 1909, with his last sentence lasting eleven months in Butyrka Prison (figure 3.5).\(^{45}\)

Maiakovskii's time in prison helped to solidify his revolutionary point of view and his strong feelings toward the tsarist regime. Even during his imprisonment, he remained obstinate,
rude, and subversive to the imperial authorities. Although he was only sixteen years old, he
called the sentries “bastards” and attempted to convince the other political prisoners to defy the
police officers’ orders.\textsuperscript{46} He used these eleven months in a single jail cell to continue forming his
political and literary views, rereading the popular publications of the day as well as some classic
works of Shakespeare and Tolstoi. He recalled that he read the Symbolists, especially Konstantin
Balmont and Andrei Bely, but that the Symbolists’ work was ethereal and therefore foreign to
Russia’s current reality. As someone living in the Russian Empire outside of the privileged social
classes and as a member of the younger generation, Maiakovskii asserted that the Symbolists’
themes and images did not relate to his life (“Но было чуждо. Темы, образы не моей
жизни.”).\textsuperscript{47} Numerous times Maiakovskii referred to the aesthetics of these classical and
Symbolist authors as “aesthetics of junk (эстетика старья)” because they failed to address or to
resolve Russia’s problems, instead only offering “old art” for the “old life.”\textsuperscript{48} In prison
Maiakovskii experimented with his own poetic style, unsuccessfully incorporating elements of
existing poetic movements, but the prison guards threw away his poetry notebook when he left
Butyrka Prison in January of 1910.

After serving his sentence, Maiakovskii, as many of the other members of Hylaea had
done after imprisonment, resolved to channel his revolutionary energies into more productive
and creative work, choosing to leave the Party in order create his own interpretation of the
revolution that the empire needed. He decided to attend the Moscow School of Painting,
Sculpture, and Architecture because he wanted to create socialist art (“Хочу делать

\textsuperscript{46} Brown, \textit{Mayakovskiy, a Poet in the Revolution}, 34, 37.
\textsuperscript{47} Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам), 17. See also Iskrzhitskaia, "Vladimir Vladimirovich
Maiakovskii," 20.
\textsuperscript{48} Iskrzhitskaia, "Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii," 21.
He remained committed to the idea of a social revolution in addition to a political upheaval, acknowledging that “the revolution will be ‘social,’ the revolution will be harsh, bloody” (“révolution будет «социальная» [Maiakovskii’s own quotation marks], что révolution будет тяжёлая, кровавая.”) Both his emphasizing use of quotation marks around “social” and his choice of “социальная (sotsial’nai),” which is closer etymologically to the Western word “social” than the Russian “общественная (obshchestvennaia),” a word that can mean “public” or “community” in addition to “social,” accentuate his focus on the destructions of Russia’s traditional social hierarchy, which confined people to particular estates (сословия) and had been eradicated much earlier in the west. Jane Sharp describes Maiakovskii’s journey from a socialist “party activist to art student to professional speaker and public poet” as an example of the “interdependency of the two discourses (political/cultural)” in Russia during that time. Maiakovskii never lost his strong socialist sentiments and revolutionary vocabulary, which he utilized a few years later as a Futurist in his passionately iconoclastic poetry and performances.

The Hylaean Futurists’ unorthodox, left-wing beliefs and practices that many critics associated with revolutionaries and hooligans did not originate solely from the members’ own ideas, but they also developed from the members’ personal experiences and the historical circumstances that surrounded them in Russia. The destructive and often political rhetoric utilized in their poetry and performances sounded similar to the type of speech used in socialist and other left-wing politics, although the Futurists often added more violent language than the socialists used at that time in order to achieve a shocking effect for their audiences. Their poetry,

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49 Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 18.
50 R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik, Vladimir Maiakovskii: “Misteriia” ili “buff” (Berlin: Skify, 1922), 32.
51 Sharp, Russian Modernism Between East and West, 18.
manifestos, and live speeches often contained references to using force, weapons, and explosives in order to achieve a revolution, whether it be in art, society, politics, or all three areas. When the group began publishing in April of 1910, Kamenskii described the release of their first book, Sadok sudei, as an explosive that would interfere in peoples’ normal lives and demand their attention, writing, “our literary faction decided to throw a bomb into the sleepy, cheerless streets of everyday.”\textsuperscript{52} The Hylaeans often combined this violent rhetoric with insults about the bourgeoisie’s values and about past aesthetics, for example Maiakovskii’s phrase used in his essay, “An Open Letter to the Workers (Открытое письмо рабочим),” “Only the explosion of the Revolution of the Spirit to cleanse us from rags of old art!” (“Только взрыв Революции Духа очистит нас от ветоши старого искусства!”)\textsuperscript{53} Maiakovskii often called himself and the other Hylaeans rebels, terrorists, and other similar aggressive appellations, viewing the Futurists as fighting a battle against antiquity and the bourgeoisie. He wrote that by 1913, the group’s most vigorous year, some publishers stopped accepting their work because of their common use of threats and vicious rhetoric that might alarm customers too much. Maiakovskii explained that these bourgeois publishers and others in the middle class regarded the Hylaeans as harmful and a threat to society, writing, “Publishers would not take us. The capitalist nose sensed dynamiters (terrorists) in us. (Издатели не брали нас. Капиталистический нос чуял в нас динамитчиков.).”\textsuperscript{54} While the Futurists never actually used weapons or forceful methods to achieve their objectives, they filled their writings and speeches with this type of violent rhetoric to express their passion and sincerity about eradicating the values of an outdated time.

\textsuperscript{52} Vasilii Kamenskii, \textit{Put entusiaza}ta (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1931), 113.
\textsuperscript{54} Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 22.
Although Maiakovskii and David Burliuk became acquainted because they were both students at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in 1911, their connection to the formal, academic art world did not last long. Even as students, they both openly criticized the academy for being close-minded and restrictive to experimental forms of art. The Hylaean Futurists candidly shared their opinions that old aesthetics no longer applied to the modern world and that their group’s new aesthetics addressed the problems and the people of Russia in the twentieth century. They quickly met other like-minded revolutionary students who also desired to overthrow the established aesthetic norms to create progressive, modern art. They formed a “revolt of leftist students (бунт «левых» учеников)” with these non-Futurist rebellious students, some of whom were currently practicing Cubism and later became famous Russian artists, such as Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova,\(^{55}\) Maiakovskii explained that this group’s members recognized their defiant ideological stance against irrelevant aesthetics as a dynamic movement such as those in socialist politics at that time, writing that he had an “identification of the aesthetic rebellion in art with a revolutionary rebellion (отождествление эстетического бунта в искусстве с бунтом революционным).”\(^{56}\) Their critique of the academy and traditional aesthetics drew the attention of the school’s director, who ordered Maiakovskii and Burliuk to cease their criticism and agitation or they would be expelled. Maiakovskii explained that they refused to quit and that the school’s council of artists consequently expelled them from the school (“Директор училища. Предложил прекратить критику и агитацию. Отказались. Совет «художников» изнал нас из училища.”)\(^{57}\) The Futurists’ bitter experiences with the art

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\(^{55}\) Iskrzhitskaia, "Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii," 21.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 21.
school and the formal art academy added to their frustration with Russia’s stagnant aesthetic norms and compartmentalized, exclusionary social structure.

The Hylaean Futurists as a literary and artistic group shared commonalities with Russian socialists, especially with the Bolsheviks, in some of their objectives, tactics, and rhetoric, although fundamental distinctions also existed between the two movements. The Hylaeans’ personal experiences with socialism, political demonstrations, and arrests for illegal political activities played a major role in the formation of their ideas and tactics, which they intended to be revolutionary, shocking to the public, and anti-autocratic. The Futurists wanted to contribute their talents to be the vanguard of a revolution that would completely destroy the old systems of art, politics, and social stratification in order to establish their vision of an ideal world, which they considered would possess few restrictions on the individual in all aspects of life.58 As former socialists, they were familiar with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s assertion that a society’s upper classes controlled the accepted political, social, and artistic norms for all levels of society because the privileged few controlled the wealth and material capital. Marx and Engels explained that, “the ideas of the ruling class are…the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”59 Maiakovskii believed that similarly to the Bolsheviks, Hylaea’s brand of Futurism intended to open the public’s eyes to the Russian Empire’s unjust social system in order to break the imbalanced social hierarchy. He wrote that he wanted his speeches and poetry to speak for “the tongueless street,” which he described as all those who had been silenced by social oppression in Russia.60

58 Gurianova, The Aesthetics of Anarchy, 2-3; Milner, A Slap in the Face! Futurists in Russia, 7; Jangfeldt, Majakovskij and Futurism 1917-1921, 36.
60 Maiakovskii, “How to Make Verse,” 53.
In Russian, the word for “tongue” (язык) is also the word for “language,” and Maiakovskii and the other Futurists hoped to articulate the public mood of the time in their poetry, speeches, and manifestos, making clear the anger and anxiety felt by many Russians who did not possess the literary and creative skills necessary to express these complex feelings. They sought to remove archaic restrictions from life in order for Russia to become truly modern, but this left-wing objective for the “democratization of culture” was perceived as “either a threat or a promise, depending on one’s politics.”

Another similar characteristic of Hylaea to the Bolsheviks was that both groups, “despised the crowd and proclaimed themselves to be its truest expression and leader.” In his polemic of 1902, What is to be Done?, with which the Futurists were familiar, Lenin endorsed the idea of a vanguard party to lead the proletariat. Lenin did not trust the workers independently and spontaneously to form the political consciousness necessary to lead a revolution; the Futurists also believed the Russian public needed help to be exposed to avant-garde ideas about art, society, and politics. The target audience for the message of revolution represented one of the major distinctions that existed between the Bolsheviks and the Futurists. Lenin and his Party focused their efforts on awakening the working class’s political consciousness and regarded the bourgeoisie as already conscious but simply unwilling to make any changes that might threaten their privileged place in politics and society. The Futurists, however, often spoke to and interacted with members of the bourgeoisie in order to startle them

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out of their complacency, hoping that it would cause them to abandon their flawed ways and privileges to support more-inclusive spheres in art, society, and politics.

The Hylaeans expressed the anxiety and anger of the period that also manifested in other forms, although the Futurists best articulated the predominant mood in the late Russian Empire because they literally wrote their opinions, unlike some of the other disruptive groups of the time. The Russian press and upper classes noticed the Hylaeans’ rebellious message and aesthetics, often calling them “hooligans” because both groups sought destruction of the status quo, to criticize traditional authorities, to promote a different collection of values, and to prove the weakness of the anachronistic system with a display of their own strength. Both the Futurists and hooligans in Russia despised the unequal social system that favored the upper class and the bourgeoisie, the wealthy middle class often referred to as “мешане” (*meshchane*), which also means “Philistines.” Not only was the Futurists’ hatred of the bourgeoisie similar to that of the hooligans, but their rhetoric also mimicked the violence of the hooligans. Believing that the bourgeoisie had caused the commercialization of culture that cheapened true art, Burliuk urged the members of his group to remember, “The main thing is to plunge the knife into the bourgeois, deep as you can!”65 Because poetry served as one of the Futurists’ primary mediums of expressing their opinions, the group’s members often discussed the power that could be contained in a poem’s features and rhetoric. To them, poetic power was not gentle and did not gradually expand its grasp on the readers, but it struck quickly, violently, and thoroughly. Khlebnikov explained this violent rhetorical strategy used in the group’s poetry in a letter on August 31st, 1913, written to his friend and collaborator on numerous poetic works, Aleksei Kruchenykh, clarifying that, “the elements of poetry are elemental forces. They are an angry sun

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64 Steinberg, *Petersburg*, 33; Neuberger, “Culture Besieged,” 185.
that strikes with a sword or a flyswatter at the waves of human beings.”

Maiakovskii commonly used violent and rebellious rhetoric in his poetry and performances, such as his view of the Futurists’ primary target, “Our constant and main hatred comes crashing down on the sentimental-critical philistine.” (“Наша постоянная и главная ненависть обрушивается на романсово-критическую обывательщину.”) While hooligans literally stabbed the bourgeoisie on the streets in late Imperial Russia, the Futurists wielded their own blades to attack the legitimacy of the bourgeoisie as the standard in Russian art and culture.

The Hylaeans used public ridicule and shocking behaviors as a sign of their rejection of traditional, “civilized” cultural norms. They developed complex motivations for their unorthodox stance, vehemently expressing their hatred of the past and of the bourgeoisie because they harbored “hostility toward the values of traditional cultural authority of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia.” The Hylaeans deliberately violated the traditional standards of “civilized” art by using “the coarse, the crude, the primitive, the childlike, the blasphemous, and the erotic” as a way to “shock the philistine.” They infused their poetry, illustrations, speeches, and performances with rhetoric and images that were violent, disgusting, anti-religious, and ridiculous to show the frivolousness of traditional values, which they perceived as failing to address modern Russia’s needs. These methods contradicted the literary and artistic devices of preceding groups, especially those of the Symbolists who had been popular in the years directly before the Futurists’ rise to fame and who used academically-sanctioned aesthetics to create

69 Ibid., 194.
traditionally beautiful works of art and poetry. The artist Iurii Annenkov explained that the Hylaeans constantly attempted to reject “academic” art and the style of Symbolism, and instead they, “strove to free artistic creation from the prejudices of ‘bourgeois’ art.” Simply repudiating traditional rules proved to be insufficient for the Futurists, who went on the offensive to insult and to destroy conventional aesthetics. The Hylaeans made their acts of defiance visible to the public as an example of alternative aesthetics and principles, in the hopes that people would question the status quo and join the fight to destroy it. Through their revolutionary art, the Futurists hoped to attract like-minded supporters and to disturb those who had been apathetic to Russia’s problems before encountering their works.

Because the Hylaeans rejected traditional art and anything associated with the tsarist regime of Imperial Russia, many in the press and upper classes considered the group to be evidence of moral decay in the empire due to modernity’s influences. Modern beliefs and philosophies such as socialism, nihilism, and atheism had entered the empire from abroad and influenced many to abandon Orthodoxy and other traditional Russian values. Conservative Russians considered the Futurists to be exemplifying a new mindset that had taken hold of both the educated and the lower social classes, which was a modern mentality that they believed actually represented "a psychological condition of moral insanity" or "moral nihilism" in Russia. Because of the Futurists’ blatant exhibition to the public of their unconventional beliefs through their art, many Russians regarded them to be a harbinger of their society’s decline. The press often quoted lines from Dmitrii Merezhkovskii’s journal essay from 1908, “Misticheskie

72 Weissman, “Rural Crime in Tsarist Russia,” 228.
khuligany (Mysterious Hooligans),” in which he blamed “amoral egoism” for the type of hooliganism that had come to dominate the current literary, artistic, and intellectual spheres. Journalists of this time, both in religious journals such as Tserkovnyi vestnik (“Church Herald”) and in secular popular magazines such as Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh (“New Magazine for Everyone”), often addressed issues about contemporary Russian society and artists’ interactions with it, especially when cultural figures caused problems, created public disturbances, or questioned norms. Therefore, journalists frequently discussed the Russian Futurists’ obscene performances, books, and art, and how this radical group affected Russia beyond the traditional art world, which served as yet another signifier of their threat to Russia’s civilized values.

Newspapers, journals, and magazines frequently published damning reviews of the Futurists’ work and scathing remarks about the group, printing statements that claimed Futurism was, “Above all, a ‘symptom’ of the ‘deep crisis’ now being experienced by ‘modern man.’ In a word, ‘futurism is hooliganism,’ but cloaked in art and ideology.”

Evgenii Sosuntsov, a writer for Tserkovnyi vestnik (“Church Herald”), discussed the negative influence of the Futurists in his 1914 article, “Sovremennyi antinomizm (Modern Antinomism),” which regarded the Futurists as antinomians, that is, people who reject socially accepted morality, explaining that, “like hooliganism, they are a signifier (pokazatel’) of the sick condition of our civil society (obshchestvennost’).” In 1914 in his evaluation of Russian literature’s development since Chekhov, J. D’Auvergne described the Futurists as a negative sign for the empire because they

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73 D. Merezhkovskii, “Misticheskie khuligany,” Svobodnye mysli, 28 January 1908, 2, as cited in Steinberg, Petersburg, 177.
74 S. Isakov, “Mysli ob iskusstve (k voprosu o ‘futurizme’),” Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh 1914, no. 1 (January): 54; “Futurizm, ego ideologiya i sushchnost’,” Tserkovnyi vestnik 1914, no. 27 (3 July): 823, as cited in Steinberg, Petersburg, 177.
75 Evgenii Sosuntsov, “Sovremennyi antinomizm,” Tserkovnyi vestnik 1914, no. 21 (22 May): 626-27, as cited in Steinberg, Petersburg, 177.
were so “decadent and demoralizing,” especially in contrast with literary groups preceding them that had endorsed traditional Russian values such as loyalty to the tsar, religious devotion, and respect for the hierarchical social structure.\(^76\)

Critics noticed the Hylaeans’ iconoclastic ideology and unconventional methods of presenting it in publications and on stage. In 1913, famed poet Aleksandr Blok commented on the Futurists’ performative technique, writing, “I am afraid there are more bad manners (\(khamstvo\)) here than anything else.”\(^77\) His reaction that made note of their violation of traditional decorum proved that the Futurists had successfully crafted their method of presenting their work to the public in an offensive yet noticeable way. Maiakovskii described how the press and critics treated them once they started to become popular, especially in early 1913 after the group had published its famous manifesto, “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste.” He mentioned that the group drew consistent attention in the press, although it was largely negative reviews of their work and performances. In particular, journalists attacked Maiakovskii for his extremely outspoken performance style and abrasive personality. He explained that, “the newspapers began to fill with Futurism. The tone was not very pleasant. For example, they simply called me a ‘son of a bitch.’ (Газеты стали заполняться футуризмом. Тон был не очень вежливый. Так, например, меня просто называли «сукиным сыном».)”\(^78\) Maiakovskii attracted such hostile criticism because he most visibly displayed the group’s revolutionary aesthetics in both his provocative performances and his radical poetry.


\(^{77}\) Aleksandr Blok, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955), II: 452.

\(^{78}\) Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 21.
If anything, this type of harsh criticism from the press and polite society proved to the Hylaean Futurists that their work had been noted and had drawn attention to the flaws of Russian society and traditionalists, the group’s main goals the entire time. Its members had successfully used the method of insulting to attract attention and for a deeper, more political purpose: to publicly mock those who supported the values of the entrenched regime. The Hylaens despised their critics, who usually represented the formal views of their two primary enemies: the Academy and the bourgeoisie. Maiakovskii demonstrated how the Futurists felt about critics when he equated them with bulls (noting, “poor bulls!- I compared them to the critics”) and that Futurism represented the red cloak of a Spanish toreador, which the young poets used to taunt and infuriate.\(^79\) In 1914, Alexander Zakrzhevskii, a critic in Kiev, wrote a book that attempted to analyze the nature of Futurism, *Rytsari bezumiia (futuristy)* [The Knights of Madness (Futurists)]. As indicated in the title of the book, Zakrzhevskii did not understand the artistic and social messages of the Futurists’ work and described their outrageous actions and poetry as “rebellion for rebellion’s sake,” writing that some of the Futurists’ more controversial work acted as, “a mine laid under the whole of Russian literature.”\(^80\) In 1914, just four years after their founding, the Hylaens had amassed so much negative criticism that David Burliuk thought it humorous to include in *The First Journal of Russian Futurists* a collection of passages from critiques and negative newspaper articles entitled, “The Pillory of Russian Critique” (“Позорный столб русской критики”).\(^81\) Critics of the Futurists considered the fact that their


edifying statements did not correct the group’s erroneous ways to be yet another indication that the Hylaeans lacked morals. Not only did they fail to amend their ways, but the Futurists laughed about it and continued to mock those who had provided the criticism.
FIGURES FOR CHAPTER 3

Figure 3.1
David Burliuk with a top hat, cravat, and monocle.

Figure 3.2
The members of Hylaea, 1913. From right to left: Aleksei Kruchenykh, David Burliuk, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Nikolai Burliuk, Benedict Livshits.
Figure 3.3 Vladimir Maiakovskii wearing his typical unusual clothing, age 17, 1910.

Figure 3.4 Vladimir Maiakovskii, the young socialist, circa 1912.
Figure 3.5  Police mug shots of Vladimir Maiakovskii, Moscow, 1908.
CHAPTER 4

THE REVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS OF THE RUSSIAN FUTURISTS’ BOOKS

As an avant-garde group composed largely of poets and writers, the Hylaean Futurists naturally used their books and other publications as a means to attract public attention to their rebellious call for a three-tiered socio-political-artistic revolution. The Futurists thoughtfully imbued their books with their unorthodox aesthetics of revolution by deliberately selecting unusual types of typography, paper, book covers, artwork, and rhetoric to support their primary goals of shocking the philistine, spreading their left-wing outlook to the Russian public, and inspiring their readers to join them in creating a revolution against all conventions of the past. What may appear to present-day readers, and certainly appeared to Russian readers in the early twentieth century, as a chaotic mixture of words, fonts, textures, papers, lines, and illustrations, all interwoven with violent rhetoric and a message of revolution, the Futurists’ books actually contain layers of calculated aesthetic choices that the Futurists purposefully selected in order to convey their “canon of displaced construction” to the reader. By examining some of the Hylaean Futurists’ major publications, Tango s korovami (Tango with Cows), Sadok sudei (A Trap For Judges), Igra v adu (Game in Hell), and Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu (A Slap in the Face of Public Taste), how and why the iconoclastic group incorporated their aesthetics into their books becomes clear.

The Futurists, both Russian and Italian, experimented with using new and unusual structures, formatting, and themes in their books and other publications, often focusing on the visual aspects of the printed word as part of the reading experience. They began a “typographical revolution” with their exploratory use of fonts, margins, and page design, based on their belief

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82 Gurianova, The Aesthetics of Anarchy, 27; David Burliuk, “Cubism,” 76.
that the word should be unfettered from not only grammar but from the conventional uses of type
settings and book design as well.\textsuperscript{83} In particular, Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh,
who both experimented with neologisms and \textit{zaum} (transrational) poetry, devoted much attention
to the properties and effects of words and letters. As part of their exploration into the theoretical
aspects of words, they analyzed the value and uses of typography, insisting that a change in font
altered the entire message of the work because the reader perceived it differently. In their essay
from 1913, “The Letter as Such,” they assert that, “a word written in one particular handwriting
or set in a particular typeface is totally distinct from the same word in different lettering.”\textsuperscript{84} They
support their argument by personifying “the word” and claim that if it could speak, it would
designate how it should be presented. In true Futurist fashion, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh
wrote their theoretical explanation using humorous imagery and offensive, crude language, seen
in their personification of the word: “You certainly wouldn’t dress up all your lady friends in
standard-issue overalls! Damn right you wouldn’t, they’d spit in your face if you did.”\textsuperscript{85} This
metaphor serves as a segue in this essay to their next point about the importance of typography,
which is that a writer should prefer handwriting or hiring an artist to handwrite their works for
publication over using a mechanized, typed font. They explain that a writer’s mood at a
particular time influences their handwriting, so the author’s handwriting can convey the mood to
the reader even without the meaning of the words themselves. The Futurists did not miss their
opportunity to insult writers of previous movements in Russian literature, especially the
Symbolists who had enjoyed popularity in the years directly preceding the Futurists’ rise to

\textsuperscript{84} Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, “The Letter as Such,” in \textit{Collected Works of
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
fame, remarking that, “It’s strange that neither [Konstantin] Balmont nor [Aleksandr] Blok has ever thought of giving his offspring to an artist instead of a typesetter.” Quite a few of the Hylaean Futurists’ publications contained handwritten text, such as Igra v adu (Game in Hell) by Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, while many other books, such as Tango s korovami (Tango with Cows), employed unorthodox type-settings and mixed numerous font styles within one work.

Tango with Cows, published in 1914 and written by Vasilii Kamenskii, offers one of the most vivid examples of the Hylaeans’ use of their aesthetics in book design. The book’s unusual typography, inconsistent and scattered layout, almost pentagonal shape, abstract illustrations drawn by David and Vladimir Burliuk, and choice of brightly-colored floral wallpaper for the inner pages demonstrate how this avant-garde group regarded and utilized typography and book design in unconventional ways (figure 4.1 and figure 4.2). Linguists and literary scholars have recognized that the “visual side” of writing, including typography, represents an independent system in language to express meaning, and that the Futurists’ experimental publications offer clear examples of how typography and book design serve as semantic features of language in its visual form. Kamenskii’s first poem in the book takes advantage of the visual side of writing, positioning the text in a pyramid shape with the font decreasing in size as it reaches the apex (figure 4.3). The word spacing of this poem and others in the book often breaks one word into several parts, and the individual letters of many words appear higher or lower and larger or smaller than the letters surrounding them. Another strange visual and semantic innovation used in this poem is that Kamenskii instructed the reader to read the lines from the bottom to the top (“Читать снизу вверх”), yet again inverting and pushing against traditional modes of reading.

86 Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, “The Letter as Such,” 258.
In this and the other poems, Kamenskii’s rhetoric articulates ideas denoting modernity and components of modern life, such as “tango,” “airplanes,” “mechanic,” “telephone,” “noise,” “automobiles,” “cacophony,” “pilot-aviator,” “cinema,” “radio,” etc. The Hylaean Futurists designed each of their books according to their aesthetics to convey a particular message to the reader, with the typography itself possessing “semiotic potentialities” and containing a fine “layer of meaning” that was planned to enhance the text’s idea. While many readers and critics disregarded the Futurists’ innovative and unconventional uses of typography and book design as strange and incomprehensible, the Futurists meant for the readers to absorb the subtle layer of meaning in their abnormal aesthetic choices that had developed a semantic depth in the visual aspect of their writing. Their tumultuous mixing of type settings, font sizes, orientation of words on the page, illustrations, and rhetoric expressed both the Futurists’ verbalization of Russian modernity and the common feelings of chaos associated with it, as well as their revolutionary message to the reader to abandon the traditional beliefs and aesthetics of the past that continued to hinder Russia’s progress.

In April of 1910, the members of Hylaea released their first publication as a group, the almanac *Sadok sudei* (Садок судей), which is best translated as “a trap for judges,” a name which Khlebnikov concocted. They had been working together and appearing at art shows for a few months by this point and considered themselves ready to venture into book production and publication. Kamenskii explained that their successful appearances at exhibitions did not satisfy their creative impulses and remained stuck within the walls of bourgeois academic art, one of the group’s primary targets. Instead, they wanted to explore a new medium and to expand their

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influence further in order to reach the public directly, which could be done through book production and publication. Using the Hylaeans’ typical method of choosing violent rhetoric, Kamenskii wrote that, “now, having pooled our strength and organized ourselves into a strong, focused, and intimate group, our literary faction decided to throw a bomb into the sleepy, cheerless streets of everyday.”89 Not surprisingly, the Hylaeans had difficulty finding a publisher willing to produce their “bomb,” finally having it printed by the only press that was willing, a German newspaper in St. Petersburg, _Petersburger Zeitung_.90 Russian publishers considered the book to be too controversial and possibly harmful to Russian civilization because it differed so much from typical publications of the early twentieth century, refusing to print this and other books designed and written by the Hylaeans.

_Sadok sudei_ broke early twentieth-century printing conventions of thick book covers and pristine inner pages because the Futurists chose various patterns of wallpaper for both the book cover and inside pages, a trend they repeated in later books such as _Tango with Cows_. They selected a wallpaper with red and cream circles for _Sadok sudei’s_ cover, placing the book’s title toward the left instead of squarely in the middle as previous, more-geometrically precise authors and publishers had done (figure 4.4). The book’s text appears on the plain reverse side of a different pattern of wallpaper, leaving the striped patterned wallpaper with upward-facing green triangles to adorn the page opposite the text (figure 4.5). Hylaea’s first publication did not include any sort of manifesto or declaration that many of their later works contained, but David Burliuk and the others still regarded it as “the dawn of a new era” and a “time bomb.”91

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89 Kamenskii, _Put entusiazta_, 113.
91 Ohana, _The Futurist Syndrome_, 91.
Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, who contributed poems to the almanac, explained that the Futurists desired to make the reader, and of course the critics, uncomfortable, therefore Sadok sudei was “written so that it reads pinching, less comfortable than blacked boots or a truck in a living room.”

Hylaea’s first book, with its creative and unconventional choices of materials, clearly displayed the group’s aesthetics and represented a glimpse of things to come from the Futurists.

The Hylaean Futurists produced another notable book, *Game in Hell (Igra v adu)*, that both displays the group’s left-wing ideology and aesthetics in its illustrations and rhetoric and that signals a complete departure from earlier traditional aesthetics of book publishing, illustration, and poetry. Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov wrote the text and Natalia Goncharova drew sixteen illustrations, including the cover illustration, for the book’s first edition, which they published in the summer of 1912 in Moscow. Instead of having the poems appear in the book neatly written with a typewriter as nearly all publications did at that time in Russia, Kruchenykh handwrote the book’s text himself with a black lithographic pencil, complaining that the pencil’s brittleness made it awkward and slow to write. His sloppy, uneven handwriting contributes to the book’s revolutionary aesthetics because it shows a break from the neatly-typed text and Neo-Romantic typography of previous artistic and poetic publications, which will be examined later.

Goncharova’s cover illustration for *Game in Hell*’s first edition also marks a clear departure from traditional book covers in both its primitivist style and its subject matter. Her black-pencil drawing depicts the scowling face of the devil, complete with horns and a pointed goatee, with cards of different suits floating around his head (figure 4.6). Goncharova’s portrayal

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of Satan on the cover heightened the physicality of the themes discussed in the book’s poetry, which ridiculed Christianity and other conservative, right-wing beliefs, thereby intensifying the reader’s overall perception of this Futurist work. Her thick, jagged, and crude lines defy traditional aesthetics of organic shapes and of “art for beauty’s sake,” which was consistent with her emphasis on primitivism at that time. Kruchenykh described Goncharova’s illustration as an, “ironic, lubok-style mockery of the archaic devil.”94 The subject matter itself, Satan surrounded by playing cards, symbols of the uncivilized and often-ruinous vice of gambling, still posed offensive and iconoclastic images in the Russian Empire in 1912. Even after imperial censorship decreased after 1905, many Russians found certain types of “uncivilized” or anti-religious topics and rhetoric to be insulting and improper, even though Western audiences interpreted the same things to be “rather mild,” for example to insult someone by calling them a “devil’s head” (cherteva golova).95 The Hylaeans purposefully chose to portray the devil and cards on the book’s cover to offend those who still held Christian beliefs, which many middle- and upper-class Russians still possessed, often partly in an attempt to sustain Russia’s Orthodox “civilization.” The Futurists hoped that this mocking of ancient superstitions in conjunction with the use of primitivist illustrations would help readers to understand their call to reject the past and its primitive beliefs.

The second publication of *Game in Hell* in 1914 in St. Petersburg used different artists to illustrate the text, but the Futurists’ radical aesthetics and the mocking tone of disrespect for the past and its beliefs remained clear. Kazimir Malevich and Olga Rozanova drew the new edition’s illustrations, many of which exhibit color-blocked geometric shapes that later became known as

one of Malevich’s signature techniques. This technique can be found in his cover illustration, which shows a two-dimensional, masculine figure (possibly Satan again) with a white torso and black arms (figure 4.7). The figure is framed by an uneven black square, another later trademark of Malevich. Thick black lines separate all of the figure’s shapes and there is no shading to give a sense of perspective, which communicates to the viewer that the artist rejects conventional artistic techniques and aesthetics. One of the inside illustrations by Rozanova clearly depicts the devil, once again done in a primitivist style (figure 4.8). Instead of a close-up view of his face as in Goncharova’s drawing, Rozanova’s illustration contains the devil’s dark silhouette as it hangs on the end of a rope. This unsettling image of the devil, his death by hanging, and the unconventional techniques used throughout Game in Hell in both its art and poetry combine to make it one of the best examples of the Futurists’ aesthetics of revolution in their publications.

The Hylaean Futurists’ most well-known and shocking publication, A Slap in the Face of Public Taste (Пощечина общественному вкусу), appeared in December of 1912 and included multiple deliberate examples of the group’s aesthetics, which undoubtedly contributed to the work’s notoriety. The book contained the belligerent manifesto of the same name, “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,” that explicitly explained Hylaea’s radical and destructive beliefs, objectives, and demands. To write the polemical essay, the group’s members gathered in Burliuk’s apartment in Moscow, arguing and contributing phrases and ideas meant to summarize their movement and incite conversation among the public. Maiakovskii recalled that Burliuk devised the famous title of the essay and that they developed their final version after composing poetic verses, writing, “After a few nights, poetry gave birth to this joint manifesto (После нескольких ночей лирики родили совместный манифест).” 96 Kruchenykh recognized the

96 Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 21.
momentousness of their radical essay, remembering that after they finished composing “Slap,” he “hurried off to have dinner and ate two steaks- so worn out was I by my collaboration with the giants.”97 Before the book’s official publication, which passed the censor and came out in January of 1913, they printed a leaflet version of the essay, a tactic often used by political groups of the time with their manifestos. Khlebnikov felt so excited about their controversial manifesto and how it would affect the public that he took the leaflets and “stuck it up in a vegetarian canteen in Newspaper Alley among the various Tolstoian announcements, smiling craftily as he laid them on the empty tables, like menus.”98 Soon after this early release, six-hundred copies of *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* were printed on gray and brown wrapping paper with a cover made from coarse, ragged burlap (figure 4.9).99 While the simple block typography on the cover with the title in all capital letters does not seem revolutionary to present-day viewers, this stylistic choice of font marked a clear departure from previous publications of Russian artistic groups. The Futurists’ untraditional aesthetic choices for *Slap* not only appeared unorthodox to the eyes of the uninitiated reader, but they also sent a message to the upper class and the bourgeoisie that the Futurists had rejected the conventional norms for group publications, which traditionally had lavish covers and beautiful artwork as seen from groups such as The Golden Fleece (*Zolotoe Runo*) and The World of Art (*Mir Iskusstva*).100

The Neo-Romantic artists in The World of Art group complained about the anti-aesthetic character of the modern, industrialized world and sought to reaffirm the aesthetic qualities of previous artistic movements, the very thing that the Hylaeans detested. The group published its

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97 Kruchenykh, *Our Arrival*, 43.
100 Milner, *A Slap in the Face! Futurists in Russia*, 14.
self-titled thick journal, *The World of Art*, from 1899 until 1904, which provides an illustrative example to contrast Russia’s conventional, academy-associated creative publications with the revolutionary, independent books of the Futurists (figure 4.10). The Futurists took pride in the fact that their publications marked a clear separation from the “ideologically tendentious ‘thick journals’” that had dominated Russian intellectual and artistic printing during the nineteenth century. While *Slap* could fit into the hands of its reader, each edition of *The World of Art* measured more than a foot long (32.6 by 24.4 centimeters) and had to be placed on a table for viewing. Opposite of *Slap*’s burlap binding and block letter typography, *The World of Art* was bound in rich brown leather with a classical, golden script. Each edition displayed a different artwork on the cover, usually one that employed Neo-Romantic aesthetics of beauty, harmony, nature, and organic designs. These elements can be seen in the cover illustration of the 1899 first edition of *World of Art*, which was a color lithograph entitled “Лебедь белый (White Swan),” done by Maria Yakunchikova of a solitary swan approaching a lake, surrounded by trees (figure 4.11). A sidebar of leaves with a connecting zigzag pattern of dark berries helps to reinforce the natural and organic elements of the illustration. The Futurists decided not to include a cover illustration for *Slap*, instead allowing the rugged burlap and capital letters to be the primary areas of focus.

The Futurists’ famous manifesto, “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,” found in *Slap*, strongly reinforced the group’s call for a multifaceted revolution with its violent language and message of destruction and restructuring. Their forceful rhetoric and proclamations reflected the public mood that had been growing in recent years in Russia, which was an impatient attitude that could no longer tolerate the confines and strict rules of the Romanov Empire’s traditional

The Futurists’ strong rejection of conventions from Russia’s past in order to establish a completely new system was the primary message of the “Slap” manifesto. In the essay, the Futurists declared that their group alone was “the face of our time” that could express Russia’s internal problems and that possessed the ability to express, to analyze, and to criticize contemporary life in the Russian Empire. They intended this opening statement to show that only the Hylaeans understood the plethora of difficulties that afflicted Russia in the modern age after the failures of the 1905 Revolution, which also served as an insult to other Russian artistic and literary groups at that time. They called for cultural norms and Russian writers revered by the bourgeoisie, namely Pushkin, Dostoevskii, and Tolstoi, to be “thrown overboard from the Ship of Modernity.” Maiakovskii later elucidated upon this revolutionary and commonly-quoted statement about throwing the past overboard in order for Russia to have a fresh start without the crumbling foundations of the past, writing "For the building of a new culture, cleared space is essential."

The Hylaean Futurists’ use of violent rhetoric and a threatening message in “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” did not go unnoticed by its readers and the press. As indicated in the manifesto’s very title, the Futurists sought to alert the public suddenly and forcefully to the problems of modern Russia, giving their readers a metaphorical “slap in the face” instead of a gentler type of warning, such as a “wakeup call” or a “call for attention.” Additionally, the gesture of slapping someone in the face could also be a challenge to a duel in Imperial Russia, which expressed and symbolized the Hylaeans’ confrontational spirit. Both in their writings and

104 Ibid.
in public appearances, the Futurists loved to challenge the Russian public regarding their disparate ideological perspectives, often causing their performances and interactions with the press to seem like a duel or a battle for supremacy of their outlook. Using more metaphors of physical violence and direct contact with the public, Burliuk explained that with this manifesto, his group wanted “to rage and rave, to preach, to pound with a fist on the reader’s forehead.”

The group’s unconventional aesthetics, mainly seen in this text as insubordinate opinions of revolution and aggressive language, successfully caught the attention of Russian readers and journalists, who viewed this essay to be proof that the Futurists were rebellious like socialists or hooligans because they had no respect for the foundations of Russian civilization and culture. Immediately after “Slap’s” publication, everyone in Russia seemed to be discussing and debating the Hylaean Futurists and their radical ideas. The newspaper Russkie vedomosti accurately summarized the situation when one of its journalists wrote, “In the minds of Muscovites, Futurism is indelibly linked to the concept of scandal. That, in any way, is how the Moscow Futurists themselves have taught the public to think.”

The Futurists’ incorporation of forceful rhetoric and a defiant message in this polemical essay effectively attracted the public’s attention, as its authors had hoped it would do.

While the meaning of “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” noticeably exposed the Futurists’ radical and confrontational perspective, the structure of the essay, although more subtly, also suggested the group’s revolutionary and political outlook. The Futurists deliberately wrote “Slap” in the style of a political manifesto, almost ubiquitous in late tsarist Russia. They knew that many of their readers would recognize the two-part structure of a political manifesto and consequently understand the essay to be an explanation of a group’s platform and demands.

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106 Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 96.
The first section of the manifesto explains the problems that the group, whether a political party or an avant-garde artistic movement, has identified as its major conflicts and also its basic beliefs. The manifesto’s second section contains a list of rights that the group is demanding and the bottom is signed by the authors of the manifesto, in this case signed by Burliuk, Maiakovskii, Kruchenykh, and Khlebnikov. The reading public understood that this essay was a play on the political manifestos that radical left-wing parties had been circulating, which reinforced the readers’ perception of the Hylaeans as a harbinger of revolution and as attempting to spread their subversive ideas to the masses.

FIGURES FOR CHAPTER 4

Figure 4.1  Cover of *Tango With Cows* by Vasilii Kamenskii, 1914. Printed on wallpaper. Getty Research Institute.

Figure 4.2  Inside pages of *Tango With Cows* by Vasilii Kamenskii, 1914. Printed on wallpaper.
Figure 4.3 Poem by Vasilii Kamenskii in *Tango With Cows*, 1914. The typography and word spacing are deliberately inconsistent, and the text appears in a pyramid shape, with instructions at the very bottom “to read from the bottom to the top (Читать снизу вверх).”
Figure 4.4  Wallpaper cover of *Sadok sudei*, 1910. Getty Research Institute.

Figure 4.5  *Sadok sudei*’s interior pages of wallpaper, 1910. Vasilii Kamenskii’s poem “Жить чудесно” (“To live wonderfully”) can be seen here. Getty Research Institute.
Figure 4.6 Natalia Goncharova. *Game in Hell* cover, first edition, 1912.

Figure 4.7 Kazimir Malevich. *Game in Hell* cover, second edition, 1914.

Figure 4.8 Olga Rozanova. *Game in Hell* interior illustration, 1914.
Figure 4.9  Original
cover of *A Slap in the
Face of Public Taste*,
1912.

Figure 4.10  Elaborate
leather covers
of *The World
of Art*, 1899-
1904.
Figure 4.11 Maria Yakunchikova, “White Swan,” color lithograph, cover of 1899 volume of *World of Art*. 
CHAPTER 5

THE FUTURISTS’ 1913-1914 PUBLICITY TOUR: PERFORMANCE AS A NEW MEDIUM

*A Slap In the Face of Public Taste* and its popular manifesto of the same name, published in January of 1913, brought the Hylaean Futurists the attention of Russia’s public and press that they had intended its provocative design, message, and rhetoric to gather. Russians “snapped up” the Hylaean’s books in early 1913 and David Burliuk decided to use this wave of success to continue promoting the group’s art and idea of a three-tiered (socio-political-artistic) revolution across the Russian Empire, which led to 1913 being the “annus mirabilis” and most active year for the prerevolutionary Futurists.109 Their burst of activity and touring the empire occurred at the same time that Tsar Nicholas II was traveling across Russia to celebrate the Romanov tercentenary and to promote the autocracy as a foundational necessity of Russia even in the twentieth century, an idea that completely contradicted the revolutionary vision of the Hylaean Futurists. Burliuk arranged numerous public appearances for his group in 1913, including a tour of seventeen cities throughout the empire, which continued until the Great War broke out in the summer of 1914. The Hylaean utilized performance as a new medium of their creative expression, appearing in public debates about art and literature at universities, in theaters and in cabarets to recite poetry and to perform, on stage in two Futurist plays, and even on the streets to deliver their ideas directly to the public. As they had done in their earlier poems and books, the Hylaean Futurists deliberately infused their unconventional aesthetics of revolution into their performances by utilizing unusual visuals in the costumes and props, provocative left-wing themes of destruction and revolution, offensive and violent rhetoric, and the nontraditional practice of interacting with the audience during a performance.

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Kruchenykh explained that these public performances represented more than simple self-promotion by Hylaea, although they later became renowned for self-advertisement, because the group sought to impart its ideas of upheaval straight to the audience, as opposed to the traditional method of authors only communicating with their readers through the pages of their books.\textsuperscript{110} He elucidated that interacting with readers only in print, “seemed too distant and complicated. The belligerent nature of our utterances needed a direct link with all that was young and fresh, all that had not been stifled by the bureaucratic fustiness of the capital at that time. We took it all out onto the stages of public halls.”\textsuperscript{111} Once they began their public appearances and performances, the popularity that the Futurists had gained with the publication of \textit{A Slap In the Face of Public Taste} only intensified, as did the reports from their critics that the Futurists believed and acted like socialist revolutionaries and posed a threat to civilized society.

This new direct link with the public through personal interactions from the stage and on the streets in 1913 to 1914 changed the categorical, spatial, temporal, and interpersonal dynamics of the Futurists’ art. It expanded their use of aesthetics of revolution from their writings and publications to other artistic forms, particularly to those of a performative nature such as poetry readings, self-advertisement, public lectures, and plays. The group accomplished this continuation of its aesthetics in performance by intending to awaken the public to Russia’s problems with a metaphorical “slap,” utilizing violent and offensive rhetoric in their speeches and poems, announcing the need to destroy the past’s antiquated beliefs and values, and presenting odd visual stimuli in their selections of unorthodox wardrobe, props, and scenery. Incorporating these methods through the medium of performance added new dimensions to the Futurists’ work because they now shared the same space and time as their audience, often the

\textsuperscript{111} Kruchenykh, \textit{Our Arrival}, 53.
very people that they had assaulted in their writings. In these live performances, the Futurists could personally interact with their audience, which removed the passive constraints of delivery and temporality that had been present when a person simply read their works in a book that they had written weeks or months earlier. Using performance as a medium infused the Futurists’ art with new possibilities to attract attention and to spread their message.

The performative aspect and public interaction of the Futurists’ art in 1913 and 1914 gave vitality and strength to the movement, which grew in notoriety across Russia as the publicity tour continued. The Hylaeans’ strong personalities, especially members like David Burliuk, Maiakovskii, and Kruchenykh, seemed to intensify when given the opportunity to see the public’s reactions in person. Maiakovskii loved to interact with the audiences during shows and in his autobiography fondly remembered the year of Hylaea’s tour as “a gay year (веселый год).”¹¹² Burliuk recalled this phenomenon as feeling like he had had too much to drink, explaining, “The Futurist who, in the public eye, gets intoxicated with the articulated sounds of his native language.”¹¹³ While on stage, the Futurists often engaged the members of the audience, especially those who had heckled or shouted insults at the performers. Kruchenykh explained that the Futurists sought a “definite audience reaction” and that they intended to “remain in the mind of the listeners.”¹¹⁴ He described the dynamic atmosphere that they deliberately built up during these Futurist evenings, saying, “passions ran high and the spectator himself was prepared for a brawl!”¹¹⁵ Through their new medium of performance and the possibilities that it offered to broaden their art, the Futurists spoke and acted in controversial

¹¹² Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 22.
¹¹³ Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 97.
¹¹⁴ Kruchenykh, Our Arrival, 57.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 59.
ways to shock and to “slap” the bourgeois members of the audience who were now literally within their reach.

Students and members of the intelligentsia composed part of the audience at the Futurists’ pre-war performances, but they were not the primary target of the Futurists’ animosity. The bourgeoisie also attended these “Futurist evenings,” some purely for the entertainment and others to investigate the “‘barbarian’ destroyers of a dying civilization.” In their writings and shows, the Hylaeans often employed the pejorative term “pharmacists,” one of the Futurists’ many nicknames for members of the bourgeoisie, perhaps because it represented a common middle-class profession or perhaps because the Hylaeans hoped to sell a more effective cure for the Russian Empire’s ailments to the Russian public than the answers offered by the “civilized” bourgeoisie in the last decade of the empire. The Futurists used the attendance of the “pharmacists” at their shows to provoke them by insulting their privileged lifestyle and beliefs. The Futurists found the bourgeoisie’s presence at their readings to be humorous because the “pharmacists and their wives agreed to get themselves ‘slapped in the face.’” The Hylaeans used this intersection of avant-garde art and bourgeois leisure to point out the flaws of Russian society and conventional beliefs, partially in an attempt to spread their progressive beliefs to receptive members of their audience.

Before the Hylaeans officially began their tour around Russia in November 1913, they attended public conferences on art and literature, organized lectures and poetry readings, and paraded the city streets to advertise their upcoming events in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Sometimes they even appeared with other groups to debate the nature of aesthetics, culture, and the problems of the modern world, such as the first joint appearance of Russian Futurists on 13

116 Kruchenykh, Our Arrival, 62; Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 15.
117 Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 15-16.
October 1913 in Moscow’s hall of the Society of Art Lovers. To advertise this event, they held five publicity strolls with painted faces and produced posters made of toilet paper that declared it to be “the first recital of speech creators (речи-творцы) in Russia” (figure 5.1). After gaining experience performing for a few months, David Burliuk, Maiakovskii, and Kamenskii left Moscow to begin the Futurists’ tour, presenting in seventeen cities (although the Futurists themselves sometimes claim up to twenty-nine cities) around the Russian Empire, which included places in Ukraine and Georgia. The Hylaeans’ primary objective for the tour was to spread their art and its message throughout Russia, which meant that it constituted “provocations of the public and a rejection of norms.” The police always monitored the Futurists’ performances in case they discussed extremely controversial topics or incited the audience to the point of disorder, both of which occurred a number of times during the tour. In Nikolaev on 24 January 1914, the local authorities told the Futurists that they could not discuss politics or classic literature because it might create a social disturbance. The group had to flee from the theater in Kiev on 28 January 1914 so as not to be arrested after Maiakovskii slighted the city’s governor. Igor Severianin of the Ego-Futurists, a rival Futurist group, even briefly joined the Hylaeans on tour in January of 1914 in order to renew interest in the Futurists’ tour, but he left after only two performances because they disagreed about money. Despite multiple confrontations with local police and occasional quarrels among the performers, the Futurists’ tour of 1913-1914 achieved its goal of further distributing the group’s work and gaining

118 Markov, Russian Futurism: A History, 133.
120 Markov, Russian Futurism: A History, 137.
121 Ibid. Also see Ohana, The Futurist Syndrome, 101.
122 Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 24. See also Markov, Russian Futurism: A History, 94.
notoriety in the press and among the Russian public for their outrageous performance techniques and revolution-inspired ideology.

This unsuccessful pairing of Igor Severianin with the Hylaeans on their tour across Russia raised more interest from the Russian public and the art world because it caused a fascinating and “permanent verbal cross fire” between the Ego-Futurists and Hylaea that continued for years.¹²³ Severianin openly commented and wrote about the Hylaeans’ anti-bourgeois, anti-establishment poetry and methods used during performances, later blaming Burliuk’s radical Futurist group for helping to contribute to the 1917 Russian Revolution in his 1921 poem, “Poeza dopolneniia (Verse of Amplification).” He wrote that the Hylaeans’ pre-revolutionary work represented “verses of destruction (Пое́за истребленъя)” that incited public disorder, causing the “mob to begin howling, like a bitch (завыла чернь, как сукa).”¹²⁴ In this poem, Severianin also implicated them in raising the social awareness and irritation that contributed to the disestablishment of the Romanov Empire in 1917, as well as to the rise of the rejection of traditional aesthetics in Russia, saying, “Now, when the lackey with pleasure, Wipes Rafael with his spit, Aren’t you, O Cubo-Futurists, guilty of this? (Теперь, когда холопу любо, Мазнуть Рафаэля слюной, Не вы ль, о футуристы -- кубо, Происходящего виной?).”¹²⁵ He viewed their work, rhetoric of rebellion, and left-wing ideological stance that had called for such an extensive revolution to be extremely ruinous for Russia’s artistic and social development, claiming that art no longer contained elements of conventional aesthetics and that the public no longer respected Russia’s traditions. Severianin even mockingly incorporated the Hylaeans’ own wording from “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” when he accused them of all of these

¹²³ Lawton, Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 24.
¹²⁴ Igor Severianin, “Poeza dopolneniia,” in Polnoe sobranie stikhov (Moskva: Direkt-Media, 2015), 1,748.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
transgressions, writing, “Didn’t your vile verses, And ‘modern steamship,’ Nurture the stinking roses, And corrupt all of the people? (Не ваши ль гнусные стихозы, И ‘современья пароход,’ Зловонные взрастили розы, И развратили весь народ?)”

Severianin’s personal experience on tour with the Hylaeans in 1914 and his familiarity with their work caused him to believe that they carried responsibility for the Russian public beginning to abandon traditional aesthetics of beauty and order and growing increasingly agitated with the Russian Empire, which contributed to the 1917 Revolutions.

A telling sign that the Futurists’ performances were going to be inflammatory to conservative and bourgeois Russians occurred during their first two public debates on 23 and 24 March 1913 at the St. Petersburg Trinity Theater. At the first night’s debate, “On Contemporary Painting,” the Hylaeans caused the crowd to become so agitated that the police ordered the meeting to be closed after the audience emitted a loud roar. At the second debate, “On Contemporary Literature,” Maiakovskii read his poetry in a booming voice, followed by a lecture by David Burliuk. Just as the Hylaeans had done in their newly-famous publication three months earlier, Burliuk decided to “slap” the public from the very start to set the tone of his performance and to awaken the complacent middle-class audience members from their comfortable lives in order to see the Futurists’ objectives. To achieve this metaphorical slap, he opened with a line meant to offend the audience’s love of previous Russian cultural icons and their traditional Christian views of binary gender roles, shouting, “Lev Tolstoy was a gossipy old woman!” Burliuk’s tactic of obnoxiously antagonizing the public by affronting the cultural, social, and religious conventions of Imperial Russia continued the Futurists’ method used in their

126 Severianin, “Poeza dopolneniia,” 1,748-1,749.
127 Kruchenykh, Our Arrival, 53.
128 Ibid., 53-54.
publications and book designs. Burliuk’s audience immediately reacted to such a disrespectful statement with cries, hisses, and shouts about how terribly the speaker had treated them. With such a provocative opening line at one of the Futurists’ first shows, Burliuk demonstrated that all of the “Futurist evenings” would be exciting and would encourage audience participation. News of the Futurists’ antics on stage spread quickly throughout Russia, which earned them the reputation of “troublemakers” and encouraged people to buy tickets to see what the iconoclastic group really said and did during their performances.129

In an attempt to preserve order at these notoriously raucous shows, policemen waited behind the scenes at every one of the Futurists’ performances in 1913-1914. Occasionally the tension of the interactions between the Futurists and the audience became so high that the police ordered them to stop and the Futurists could not finish the performance. Kruchenykh described one such concert, saying, “Bedlam broke out in the audience and I ran up on the stage and started tearing the posters and programs fastened to the rostrum. Konchalovskii was shouting, the president’s bell was ringing, calling for order, but no one heard it. The hall was seething, like the sea in autumn.”130 The police also had to intervene a few times during the publicity walks around Moscow when disorder broke out between the poets and the spectators, such as the time in October 1913 when a person from the crowd threatened to beat the Futurists.131 The public responded exactly how the Hylaeans wanted them to react to these controversial statements and insulting performances, through which the Futurists intended to show their complete disregard for polite society and the cultural and religious conventions of Russia’s past. The Futurists used their unorthodox methods in their performances to deliver another form of a smarting “slap” to

131 Brown, *Mayakovsky, a Poet in the Revolution*, 44.
the Russian public, who were awakened from their comfortable, traditional mindsets to realize that numerous cultural, social, and political problems were disturbing the Russian Empire at its very core.

The Hylaeans employed visual stimuli such as face painting and unusual costumes as a means to attract public attention during performances and self-advertisement walks during their 1913-1914 tour. They intended not only to draw interest with their unorthodox appearances, but also to utilize the clothing and face paint as visual signs of their denunciation of established aesthetic and social norms. The face painting carried “dramatic shock effect” that signified the Futurists’ separation from and rejection of “bourgeois philistinism” and “the weight and pomposity of artistic tradition.”132 The Hylaeans borrowed the idea to paint their faces from some of their artist friends who identified as Futurists at that time, namely Mikhail Larionov, Ilia Zdanevich, and Natalia Goncharova, who had done it a few months earlier (figures 5.2 and 5.3). Larionov and Zdanevich had published an essay entitled “Почему мы раскрашиваемся: Манифест футуристов” (“Why We Paint Ourselves: A Manifesto of the Futurists”) in the 1913 Christmas issue of Argus magazine that explained their actions as a way “for art to invade life.”133 Similarly to the Hylaeans, they also used a left-wing, political interpretation of art in this manifesto, declaring that most Russian people could not afford or relate to bourgeois art. They argued against traditional, socially-stratified art and advocated for simple, inexpensive creative acts such as face painting, which was, “one of the new valuables of the people…The old ones were incoherent and squashed flat by money (Раскраска - новые драгоценности народа..."

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Both Larionov’s group and Burliuk’s group of Futurists considered face painting to be an effective device to communicate their ideology with the masses. Larionov and Zdanevich wrote that painting themselves enabled them to “join contemplation with action and fling ourselves into the crowd (Мы же связываем созерцание с действием и кидаемся в толпу).” The Hylaeans occasionally collaborated and exchanged ideas with Larionov’s group because the two factions of Futurism held many of the same beliefs about replacing old aesthetics, creating art for all social classes, and interacting with the public to share their art.

Burliuk and his friends began to paint their faces for performances because they agreed that, although not completely original to their group, the act carried aesthetic, social, and performative power that could aid their public appearances during their publicity tour of 1913-1914. They also used this technique in various cities for their “publicity stunts,” which usually occurred a day or two before an evening performance in order to advertise for the show. They dressed in gaudy suits and top hats and painted their faces with symbols and shapes, reciting their poetry and engaging the public on the streets (figures 5.4 and 5.5). Even Benedict Livshits, the shyest member of Hylaea, joined the group on their strolls and wore a bright handkerchief and bizarre tie. Khlebnikov described this technique’s success to shock society and to gather publicity for their shows, writing, “To the astonishment of the public, the Cubo-Futurists

frequently paraded the streets with bright pictures and lettering painted on their faces; the newspapers faithfully reported each shocking sight.”

The Hylaean Futurists also used the clothing that they wore during performances as a visual sign of the group’s leftist ideology and revolutionary objectives. In the early twentieth century, Russia’s upper classes and bourgeoisie valued fashion as a way to express their social identity and economic status. The Futurists mocked this shallow concern with fashion and “proper” attire both by speaking openly against it in performances and by wearing outfits that disregarded popular fashion. In addition to a striped vest and top hat, David Burliuk liked to wear a wooden ladle in his coat pocket instead of a fashionable pocket square and to paint his face with various symbols for appearing in public in 1913-1914 (figure 5.6). Sometimes he even wore a pendant earring, an item normally worn by a woman, which violated gender norms in addition to aesthetic norms at that time in Russia and certainly helped to shock the public (figure 5.7). Burliuk also appeared on stage in a frock coat that had multicolored rags around the collar and in a yellow vest with silver buttons, while Kamenskii often recited his work while wearing a cocoa-colored suit with golden brocade trim.

Out of the Hylaeans, Maiakovskii best displayed the revolutionary performative aesthetics of the Futurists because of his vigorous delivery, fiery rhetoric, emphatic use of gestures and movement, outrageous outfits, noticeable height, and overall commanding stage presence (figure 5.8). He quickly rose to notoriety among the Russian public and press for his outrageous performances during these “Futurist evenings” on the tour in 1913 and 1914.

137 Khlebnikov, Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov, 21.
139 Milner, A Slap in the Face! Futurists in Russia, 22.
Although some of Hylaea’s members were older, such as David Burliuk, and others had more experience and education, such as Kamenskii, Maiakovskii stood out as a “bright figure” because he “impressed the public with his originality (импонирующих публике своею незаурядностью).”¹⁴¹ His booming bass voice, crooked smirk, piercing dark eyes, energetic use of gestures, and enthusiasm for exchanging insults with the audience all contributed to his forceful presence on the stage. The press even made note of Maiakovskii’s performative comportment, noting his authoritative conduct and unusual appearance. In early 1913, the day after the Futurists’ “Second Debate About Contemporary Art,” a journalist at the “Moscow Gazette” described his memorable performance, explaining, “There was someone named Maiakovskii, an enormously tall man with a voice like a trombone (Некто Маяковский, громадного роста мужчина, с голосом, как тромбон).”¹⁴² Maiakovskii used his unusual physical features, such as his height and strong voice, to create a vivid stage persona that the Russian public and press not only noticed during the debates and poetry readings, but that they also remembered and discussed later.

In his autobiography, Maiakovskii devoted an entire section to his “Yellow blouse (Жёлтая кофта),” in which he explains the origins of his famous stage outfit and some of the other bizarre items he chose to wear on stage for added dramatic effect, such as gaudy ascots and a red tuxedo (figures 5.9 and 5.10).¹⁴³ Because he was an impecunious poet, he owned only two dress shirts “of the most heinous kind (Были две блузы — гнуснейшего вида).”¹⁴⁴ He reasoned that since a man’s tie is the most noticeable aspect of his outfit, to increase the size and

¹⁴² Mikhailov, Maiakovskii: Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 78.
¹⁴⁴ Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 21.
frequency of the tie would also increase the interest and “furor” of the spectators (“Значит, самое заметное и красивое в человеке — галстук. Очевидно — увеличишь галстук, увеличится и фурор.”)¹⁴⁵ He decided to create his own “tie shirt and shirt tie (сделал галстуковую рубашку и рубашковый галстук),” borrowing some yellow ribbon from his sister to serve as the “tie” element on the originally-dark shirt.¹⁴⁶ Maiakovskii wrote that this unique shirt’s impression was extremely intense and that it successfully attracted attention from the public while he was performing.

In a few instances, Maiakovskii’s famous striped shirt and other unorthodox sartorial choices became part of the performance itself, extending beyond simple visual signs of rebellion and leading into full discussions of the Futurists’ revolutionary ideology. At presentations, heckling from the audience caused Maiakovskii to interrupt his speech to discuss his choice of clothing, one time using it to expound the nature of beauty according to a Futurist and another time to talk about class divisions based on clothing. For example, one night while delivering a speech about Futurist beauty, different people from the crowd yelled at him, showing the diversity of the audience’s opinions of and reactions to Maiakovskii:

“Don’t teach! Enough! (- Не учите! Довольно!)”
“Bravo! Continue! (- Браво! Продолжайте!)”
“And why are you wearing a yellow blouse? (- И почему вы одеты в желтую кофту?)”¹⁴⁷

As usual, he used the audience’s heckling to his advantage to promote the group’s views and to mock the spectators further, responding that he wore it, “In order not to be like you (Чтобы не походить на вас),” which raised loud applause from the entire theater.¹⁴⁸ Maiakovskii continued his answer on a more serious note, explicating that the Futurists’ fight against vulgarity and

¹⁴⁵ Maiakovskii, “I myself (Я сам),” 21.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
¹⁴⁷ Mikhailov, Maiakovskii: Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 91.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
petty-bourgeois patterns and instead search for true, modern beauty. He explained to the crowd that modern society had developed “a division of class interests, cliquishness, and the compartmentalization of art (о разделе классовых интересов в современном обществе, о замкнутости, камерности искусства),” all of which favored only the social elite who fought against progress and new aesthetics in the fear that it might uproot their control.\(^{149}\) While he most likely would have touched on these socialist-inspired arguments about beauty, art, and modern society in his speech, Maiakovskii used the heckler’s question about his strange clothing as a practical example for the audience to understand the Futurists’ beliefs.

During one of the Futurists’ public lectures on 17 February 1913, Maiakovskii’s dramatic outfit even drew the attention of the local authorities. He showed up for the night’s lecture, entitled “Fact and Fiction about Woman,” wearing his usual yellow-and-black-striped shirt and carrying a whip. The police ordered him to leave and change his clothes, so Maiakovskii returned a little later wearing a bright orange jacket instead (there is no reference as to whether or not he returned with the whip).\(^{150}\)

Additionally, Maiakovskii’s speeches, word choices, and style of poetry related to several groups in Russian society and he was well received by many audience members because they understood and related to his words. His verses were considered to be meant for the streets, unlike the lofty and out-of-touch poetry of the Symbolists or the bizarre transrational (zaum) style used by some of the other Futurists. Maiakovskii chose not to use transrational language as Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh did, and, although the right-wing literary historian Prince Mirskii meant it as an insult to Maiakovskii’s writing style, his “subjects could interest the most

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uncultured” members of society. During the tour’s publicity walks and evening performances in 1913 and 1914, Maiakovskii deliberately selected words and examples that the public could understand regardless of their social class or education. In order to explain the Futurists’ aesthetics and the complicated problems of “new art” to the audience, he related these issues to the changes in life itself in the twentieth century. He recalled that on city streets and squares across Russia on the tour, he used “simple words like mooing” to express himself to the crowd (“на улицах и площадях он «словами простыми как мычание» открыть свою душу”). Like his fellow Futurist performers, Maiakovskii took great pleasure in insulting the crowd and getting the audience worked into a frenzy over his iconoclastic rhetoric, mannerisms, and outfits. He was known for trying to push the audience far enough to “whistle” at him, which at that time in Russia was the equivalent of booing, and he even said that he felt “a lust for whistles.”

During 1913, the Futurists decided to expand their public performances even further and produced two plays at the Luna Park Theater in St. Petersburg, *Vladimir Maiakovskii: A Tragedy* and *Victory Over the Sun*. The group’s signature iconoclastic aesthetics of revolution can be found in numerous aspects of these two productions because the scenery, props, acting, and message all defied conventional methods of theater and art. For *A Tragedy*, Maiakovskii both wrote and acted as the protagonist in his odd drama, which contained only two acts and barely lasted an hour due to the author’s rush to complete the script. Many of the play’s supporting characters and props were figures that had been cut out of cardboard, including a ten-foot tall woman, “dry” black cats, and enormous tear drops that Maiakovskii picked up and carried around from time to time during the performance. He reportedly smoked between his lines and

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152 Iskrzhitskaia, ”Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii,” 22.
wore a yellow blouse, one of his bright and unorthodox sartorial choices that he preferred to wear while on the stage. During the premiere of *A Tragedy* in December of 1913, Maiakovskii displayed his usual attitude of disgust with the bourgeois audience members, proclaiming “unnerving” and insulting phrases at the audience such as, “You are rats.” The audience began to heckle him mid-performance, yelling, “Maiakovskii is a fool, idiot, madman!” to which he broke character and responded by yelling back at the audience from the stage, “You’re the fools!” In part because of his play with its strange plot, scenery, outfits, and interaction with the public, Maiakovskii earned the reputation from Russia’s press and bourgeoisie in 1913 of being a derogatory, caustic, and delinquent artist who threatened Russia’s civilization.

Although none of the scenery or props from *Vladimir Maiakovskii: A Tragedy* exist today because the 1924 flood of Leningrad destroyed them, sketches and advertisements have been preserved. One sketch for the play’s backdrop, drawn by Iosif Shkolnik and Pavel Filonov in black pencil, shows a hazy cityscape of geometric buildings and roads (figure 5.1). Drawn in the modern Cubo-futurist style, the image conveys feelings of motion and speed through its slanting objects and hazy lines, which works well to express the modern city’s chaos and confusion that the Hylaeans often discussed as symptoms of the empire’s inability to deal with modernity because of its antiquated cultural, social, and political structures. Another backdrop sketch of Shkolnik and Filonov displays a similar urban landscape of colorful, uneven buildings, many of which stick out at strange angles as to suggest the confusion of the modern, industrialized city (figure 5.2).

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155 Ibid., 62.
Another sketch for the production design of *A Tragedy* shows the extremely odd prop items that the Futurists cut out of cardboard, which was an unusual and “low class” material to use in theater at that time. These unconventional props included a blatantly geometrically-drawn black cat, a large eye, and an assortment of black and white shapes, all of which served to agitate the viewers and to inspire them to think about the play’s themes of rebellion (figure 5.13). One of the posters that advertised the “First in the world productions of Futurist theater” for both *A Tragedy* and *Victory Over the Sun* maintains the group’s aesthetics with its rejection of orderly, typed print in exchange for hand-written, jagged letters that are not uniform in size and do not follow conventional rules of capitalization (figure 5.14). This poster also contains an illustration by Rozanova that mirrors the chaotic aesthetics of the typography. It shows a swirling, confused square of uneven shapes and lines that mix into each other without forming a clear object. Kruchenykh described Rozanova’s unconventional and noticeable image, remarking that it contained “prismatically refracted colors – white, black, green, and red, like a twirling fan could not help attracting attention.”157 From the typography and illustration of Rozanova’s poster, the Russian public could ascertain the revolutionary type of theater and message that the Futurists produced in 1913 in both *A Tragedy* and *Victory Over the Sun*.

When the publication of *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* drew a great deal of attention from the Russian public and press in the beginning of 1913, the Hylaean Futurists decided to extend their creativity into the realm of performance to sustain their newfound popularity and to spread their message of a multifaceted revolution to a broader audience. As they had done in their books to “slap” the reader and to assert their ideology, the Futurists infused their performances with the group’s revolutionary aesthetics, which utilized unorthodox visuals in the

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157 Kruchenykh, *Our Arrival*, 60.
clothing and props, provocative socialist themes, violent rhetoric, and the unconventional technique of interacting with the audience during a show. Over the course of 1913 and 1914 until the start of the Great War, the Hylaean Futurists gathered a great deal of the public’s attention as they had strategically planned and earned the reputation from Russia’s press and bourgeoisie of being derogatory, caustic, and revolutionary artists. The assessment from the “philistines” that the Futurists behaved outrageously by using offensive and rebellious methods in their performances was exactly the reaction that the Hylaeans had hoped to provoke with their publicity tour of 1913-1914.
Figure 5.1 Poster advertising the Futurists’ “first recital of speech creators (речи-творцы) in Russia,” 13 October 1913.

Figure 5.2 Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, and Ilia Zdanevich with painted faces in Argus, December 1913.
Figure 5.3
Natalia Goncharova displaying her painted face and holding her cat in *Argus*, December 1913.

Figure 5.4
Vasilii Kamenskii’s painted face, 1913.
Figure 5.5  David Burliuk with two variations of symbols painted on his face, circa 1913.

Figure 5.6  David Burliuk wearing a striped vest, top hat, and ladle in his pocket, with a painted face, 1913.
Figure 5.7
David Burliuk wearing his pendant earring.

Figure 5.8
Maiakovskii preparing for a performance. His height and emphatic use of gesture can be seen.
Figure 5.9 Maiakovskii (center) wearing his yellow-and-black-striped shirt, sitting with other Hylaea members, circa 1913.

Figure 5.10 Maiakovskii wearing an unusual ascot at a performance, 1913.
Figure 5.11  Iosif Shkolnik and Pavel Filonov. Backdrop sketch in black pencil for Vladimir Maiakovskii: A Tragedy, 1913.

Figure 5.12  Iosif Shkolnik and Pavel Filonov. Backdrop sketch for Vladimir Maiakovskii: A Tragedy, 1913.
Figure 5.13
Sketch for unorthodox props to be cut out of cardboard for *Vladimir Maiakovskii: A Tragedy*, 1913.

Figure 5.14
Poster advertisement for “Futurist theater” of *A Tragedy* and *Victory Over the Sun*. Olga Rozanova, 1913.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Extreme political, social, and cultural unrest permeated the decade before the momentous 1917 revolutions in the Russian Empire, which caused public anxiety and for a variety of organizations to propose solutions to the problems that afflicted the empire as it struggled to deal with the realities of the modern world. As the eventual victors in this debate about Russia’s future, the Bolsheviks represent the most well-known group that offered an answer, which came in the form of a two-fold socio-political revolution to transform the antiquated social and political systems that still operated in Russia in the twentieth century, despite a limited revolution in 1905 that ultimately created more problems than it solved. Other groups interpreted Russia’s predicament differently and came to conclusions that disagreed with those of the Bolsheviks, although these visions and their consequences are often overlooked in the study of pre-revolutionary Russia.

This thesis examines an influential yet often neglected proposal for how to bring Russia fully into the twentieth century’s modern reality. As part of the larger movement of Russian Futurism, Hylaea formed in 1910 to articulate the general unrest present in the empire and to spread its answer to Russia’s troubles: a three-tiered revolution in politics, society, and aesthetics. Some scholars have glossed over the Hylaean Futurists’ extensive and radical proposition because they primarily focus on the group’s literary or artistic achievements, but this methodology fails to acknowledge both the political and social ideology that shaped the group’s work and the historical context that influenced the Russian Futurists to form and to operate in the ways that they did. Other scholars have simply categorized the Futurists as devoted and unwavering supporters of the Bolsheviks’ vision of revolution, which ignores the complex
relationship of the Futurists with the socialists that existed and often fluctuated during the years preceding and following the 1917 revolutions. This thesis examines the fact that although Hylaea’s members had socialist connections in their pasts, hailed the upheavals of 1917, and tried to work with the Bolshevik regime in the 1920s, their vision of revolution extended further than that of the socialists and often diverged from the state’s wishes, especially after Lenin’s death in 1924. The Futurists recognized the need to reject conventional aesthetics in order to have art that could be free to express Russia’s modern reality, and while their work carried a political message, they did not want bureaucratic institutions of the government or of the art academy to restrict their freedom of expression in their writings, art, and performances.

This thesis also explores how the Hylaean Futurists’ methods for distributing their call for revolution differed from the Bolsheviks’ propagation techniques before 1917 because they developed unconventional revolutionary aesthetics that also carried a message of revolution in order to slap the public awake to notice their call for a multifaceted revolution in art, society, and politics. The Hylaeans’ aesthetics of revolution included employing unusual methods in their writings, books, and performances, incorporating distasteful imagery and rhetoric, affronting and interacting with the crowd during performances, and openly discussing Russia’s need for extreme change. This radical group purposefully amplified disorder in the unstable time before the 1917 revolutions, particularly from the group’s formation in 1910 until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, by renouncing conventional aesthetics and by taking its work straight into the public sphere during its tour across the empire in 1913 to 1914. During this volatile time toward the empire’s end, the Hylaean Futurists’ message and iconoclastic aesthetics resonated with public concerns and generated both favorable and hostile conversation about the group’s vision.
of a three-tiered (socio-political-aesthetic) revolution, which contributed to the revolutionary mindset that prevailed in 1917.

Understanding the complexity of Russian Futurism, how it infused aesthetics with a political message, and the movement’s effects on later cultural movements in Russia, perhaps even in other countries, proves to be fruitful for analyzing both Russian history and present-day issues in Russian art, politics, and society. Even though many Hylaean Futurists had participated in socialist activities before 1917 and publicly endorsed the young Bolshevik government, they had a much more complicated relationship with Bolshevism and the Soviet state than many scholars acknowledge. The Hylaeans did not blindly support the party, had their own ideas of how Russia’s future should look, and became dissatisfied with how the Bolsheviks carried out the revolution, especially by the late 1920s when the government and ruling elite tried to seize control of the artistic sphere yet again, as had been the case during the empire. This deep frustration with the young Soviet Union and with the new restraints placed on aesthetics by the state is partially responsible for the dissolution of Russian Futurism and for Maiakovskii’s suicide in 1930, which marked a definite and pessimistic conclusion of Futurism in Russia. Both the influence and ideas of Russian Futurism did not perish with Maiakovskii, but they endured and continue to affect readers, viewers, artists, cultural groups, and even the Russian government’s relationship with performance artists and other outspoken critics of the current system. By better comprehending the motivations, ideology, and consequences of Russian Futurism, people can more accurately discuss and interpret contemporary cultural figures and artists who draw attention by using their art to protest Russia’s current system. Despite a century passing since the Futurists’ revolutionary art and performances, the movement’s influence can be found in present-day artists and protesters, such as the politically-driven performance artist Piotr
Pavlenskii, who set fire to the headquarters of Russia’s security service (FSB) and is currently in jail, and the Russian feminist punk rock group Pussy Riot, who have been imprisoned for their numerous artistic displays of their criticism of stagnant Russian beliefs and politics. Protesters, artists, and critics such as these illustrate that Russian Futurism carries a lasting effect on not only art and literature, but on politics and society as well, thereby designating the movement as worthy of further, more in-depth study.
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