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Sounds of February, Smells of October: The Russian Revolution as Sensory Experience

Jan Plamper

“Hastily leaving the house, we hurried to the Troizky Bridge. Here we found a large but orderly crowd listening to the firing and greedily drinking in every bit of news. Nobody knew anything positively. Cavalry police kept the crowds in check and allowed nobody to cross the Neva. Boom! Rat-a-tat, tat-tat-tat-tat. ‘Who’s firing? On whom?’”<sup>1</sup> This was the question that Pitirim Sorokin, the Russian émigré founder of Harvard’s sociology department, posed in his Petrograd diary on February 23, 1917, the first day of what would become known as the February Revolution. Sorokin was one of many diarists who described the foreboding sense of turmoil announced by the sound of gunfire. Seeming to come from many directions at once, the live rounds were unlike the choreographed, rhythmic cannon shots that Petersburg’s

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<sup>1</sup> Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After* (1950; repr. Ed., New York, 1970), 5–6. Dates are consistently given in, or have been converted to, Old Style.

inhabitants heard outside the Peter and Paul Fortress each day at noon or over the Field of Mars and other places on high holidays.<sup>2</sup>

Modern revolutions bring momentous changes, squeezed into short, compact periods, that affect the social sphere, the polity and its institutions, the economy, religion, and relations between genders and generations.<sup>3</sup> But revolutions are also—and, temporally speaking, first and foremost—stimuli that interact with the human senses in new ways. The Russian Revolution, the quintessential twentieth-century modern revolution, became known to the city-dwellers of Petrograd not through newspaper headlines, and not even through rumors passed by word of mouth, but through the sounds, sights, and smells of discharging rifles, and later through the crack of bursting street lamps and shattered shop windows.<sup>4</sup>

This article considers the sensory dimensions of Russia's revolutionary period. These are key to any account that foregrounds the experience of historical actors themselves rather than, say, geopolitical rivalries, high power politics, quantifiable social aggregates (classes, groups), or abstract socioeconomic forces. In existing accounts of the Russian Revolution the senses have surfaced as embellishment, as spice in the narrative, not as objects of inquiry in their own right. Thus the Bolshevik politician-cum-historian Leon Trotsky cast his polemics in a metaphorical sensory idiom, writing that the Socialist Revolutionaries were irredeemably right-wing, yet even they sometimes “paused in fright before the reeking mixture of land greed and political ‘blackhundredism’ which exuded from some of the deputies.”<sup>5</sup> Thus for the anti-Bolshevik historian-cum-political advisor Richard Pipes, “with a wild scream, Rasputin fell to the floor. The instant they heard the shot, the conspirators rushed down”; or,

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<sup>2</sup> E. E. Keller, *Prazdnichnaia kul'tura Peterburga: Ocherki istorii* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 126–149, 154–199.

<sup>3</sup> On similar definitions of revolution, see the introduction to Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (Belmont, Calif., 2008); and Reinhart Koselleck, “Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1984), 5: 653–654.

<sup>4</sup> On rumors in the Revolution, see Boris Kolonitskii, “*Tragicheskaia erotika*”: *Obrazy imperatorskoi sem'i v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow, 2010); Igor' Narskii et al., eds., *Slukhi v Rossii-XX vekov: Neofitsial'naiia kommunikatsiia i 'krytye povoroty' rossiiskoi istorii* (Chelyabinsk, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (New York, 1932), 433.

“the sight and sound of approaching troops, the mob in front of Taurida fled pell-mell in all directions.”<sup>6</sup> The senses, in short, were denied a history, sensory imaginaries of the present were uncritically telescoped to the past. Here, the point of departure is instead that taking the “sensory turn” adds a key element to our understanding of a phenomenon that, as Eric Hobsbawm argued, outstripped the French Revolution in its repercussions.<sup>7</sup>

Experience is a central historical category waiting to be reclaimed for a holistic concept of social reality that overcomes false dichotomies of prediscursive vs. discursive, unmediated vs. mediated, embodied vs. cultural, raw/visceral vs. culturally/socially constructed, and ultimately nature vs. culture. The moment for such a reclaiming is propitious.<sup>8</sup> For a long time in modern history-writing an unquestioned concept of experience easily mapped onto a very robust notion of the real world. During the linguistic or cultural turn that tie was severed. “There was,” in Martin Jay’s words, “a widespread inclination during the last decades of the twentieth century, especially among those who characterized themselves as poststructuralist analysts of discourse and apparatuses of power, to challenge

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1990), 264, 433.

<sup>7</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York, 1994), 55. On the sensory turn in history see the “AHR Forum: The Senses in History,” esp. Martin Jay, “In the Realm of the Senses: An Introduction,” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 307-15; David Howes, ed., *Senses and Sensation: Critical and Primary Sources*, vol. 2 (London, 2018), 2-6; Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, 2008); Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge, 2004); Constance Classen, ed., *A Cultural History of the Senses*, 6 vols. (London, 2014); and the nine books in the (discontinued) University of Illinois Press series “Studies in Sensory History,” ed. Mark M. Smith, but also David Howes, Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses In Society* (New York, 2014) and David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (London, 2004). For a model case study, see Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York, 2012). The sensory turn has just begun to reach Russian history and Slavic Studies more generally, see e.g. Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks, eds., *Russian History through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present* (London, 2016); Mariia Pirogovskaia, *Miazmy, simptomny, uliki: Zapakhi mezhdru meditsinoi i moral'iu v russkoi kul'ture vtoroi poloviny XIX veka* (St. Petersburg, 2018); Karl Schlögel, *Der Duft der Imperien: Chanel No 5 und Rotes Moskau* (Munich, 2020); Emma Widdis, *Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917-1940* (Bloomington, Ind., 2017); Christoph Neidhart, *Russia's Carnival: The Smells, Sights, and Sounds of Transition* (New York, 2003). The only writing on the sensory history of the Russian Revolution I am aware of is Vladimir Lapin, *Peterburg: Zapakhi i zvuki* (St. Petersburg, 2007), chap. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Or, in Joan Scott’s more somber concluding words after a powerful critique of “experience,” “Given the ubiquity of the term, it seems to me more useful to work with it, to analyze its operations and to redefine its meaning.” Joan Wallach Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-797, here 797.

‘experience’ (or even more so ‘lived experience’) as a simplistic ground of immediacy that fails to register the always already mediated nature of cultural relations and the instability of the subject who is supposedly the bearer of experiences.”<sup>9</sup> Then, in the early 2000s, during the turn from the linguistic turn, historians recovered the category, now understood as the non-discursive extreme of a polarity with “discourse” at the other end. “The world,” wrote French Revolutionary historian Lynn Hunt in 2009, “is not just discursively constructed. It is also built through embodiment, gesture, facial expression, and feelings, that is, through nonlinguistic modes of communication that have their own logics.”<sup>10</sup> Or, as intellectual historian Harold Mah commented, historians resuscitated “an idea of experience as a pretheorized, prediscursive, direct encounter with others, with society, or with the past.”<sup>11</sup> In recent years there has been another shift. We have seen growing dissatisfaction with the very dichotomy underpinning experience and some historians have been recovering a pre-eighteenth-century, pre-nature-vs.-culture age, a time when nature was “still understood as a pliable set of potentialities, not as a reality inexorably, unalterably fixed.”<sup>12</sup> Concomitantly, a number of philosophical and neuroscientific fields have seen a renaissance of Spinoza’s monism, his belief in feeling and soul as elements of a single divine substance rather than separate entities, and the rise of embodied or situated cognition, behavioral ecological understandings of emotion, “cogmotion,” neuroplasticity, social neuroscience, functional

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley, 2005), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Lynn Hunt, “The Experience of Revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 32, no. 4 (2009): 671–78, here 674. Or, “New studies of emotion and over the embodiment of the self indicate a way out of this reduction of experience to discursive and social constructions”; “to leave space for universals, however small it may be, means the radical rejection of social and cultural constructivism,” Lynn Hunt, “Kulturgeschichte ohne Paradigmen?,” *Historische Anthropologie* 16 (2008): 323–40, here 337, 338. Also see “Roundtable: History Meets Biology,” esp. Lynn Hunt, “The Self and Its History,” *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 5 (2014): 1576–86.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Mah, “The Predicament of Experience,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 5, no. 1 (2008): 97–119, here 99. For Frank Ankersmit the French and Industrial Revolutions amount to pasts so disruptive that they resist cognitive processing—much like trauma. See his *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Lorraine Daston, Gianna Pomata, “The Faces of Nature: Visibility and Authority,” in Daston, Pomata, eds., *The Faces of Nature in Enlightenment Europe* (Berlin, 2003), 1–16, here 14.

integration (rather than specificity) of the brain, and culturalized brains, all of which amount to a holistic notion of experience that transcends the dichotomy.<sup>13</sup> Such an integrated category of experience includes a sensory dimension, in which the senses are no longer considered temporally or functionally separate, the classical schema being one of sensory perception→emotion→cognition. Rather, the senses emerge as part of an integrated, multimodal, simultaneous sensory-emotional-cognitive process—ultimately a neologism will be required that leaves behind the sensory, emotional and cognitive as distinct dimensions and blends them into a single term. It is time to apply such a capacious, holistic concept of experience to world-historical events like the French or Russian Revolutions and to see what can be gained from rereading the sources through a sensory lens.<sup>14</sup>

There was a concurrence between holistic thinking about experience and the Russian Revolution that is at the very least suggestive. Before and during the Revolution artists and scientists, ranging from avant-gardists to reflexological psychologists, were engaged in radically reconfiguring sensory perception, feeling, and thought. The painter David Burliuk,

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<sup>13</sup> On embodied and situated cognition see Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, 2009), Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (New York, 2009). On behavioral ecological understandings of emotion see Alan J. Fridlund, *Human Facial Expression: An Evolutionary View* (San Diego, CA, 1994), Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (Chicago, 2017), chap. 5. “Cogmotion” is derived from Douglas Barnett and Hilary Horn Ratner, “Introduction: The Organization and Integration of Cognition and Emotion in Development,” *Journal of Developmental Child Psychology* 67, no. 3 (1997): 303–16, and used in William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York, 2001), 15. On neuroplasticity, social neuroscience, and functional integration see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (New York, 2015), 243–49.

<sup>14</sup> For histories of the emotions and senses in eighteenth-century and revolutionary France see Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, esp. part II; Sophie Wahnich, *Les Émotions, la Révolution Française et le Présent: Exercices Pratiques de Conscience Historique* (Paris, 2009); Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015); Sophia Rosenfeld, “The Social Life of the Senses: A New Approach to Eighteenth-century Politics and Public Life,” in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Enlightenment*, ed. Anne C. Vila (London, 2014), 21–39; Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 2001); Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris* (New York, 2014); Emma Spary, “Making a Science of Taste: The Revolution, the Learned Life, and the Invention of Gastronomy,” in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650–1850*, ed. Maxine Berg, Helen Clifford (Manchester, 1999), 170–182; Jean-Alexandre Perras, “La Réaction parfumée: Les ‘petits musqués’ de la Révolution,” *Littérature*, no. 185 (2017): 24–38; Richard Clay, “Smells, Bells and Touch: Iconoclasm in Paris during the French Revolution,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 521–533; Carolyn Purnell, *The Sensational Past: How the Enlightenment Changed the Way We Use Our Senses* (New York, 2017).

for example, a proponent of Cubo-Futurism, one of the many movements collectively known as the Russian avant-garde, in 1912 demanded that viewers move up closely to a painting and inhale “the aromas of color.” Unlike Rembrandt, whom he quoted as having kept viewers from getting too close to a painting because “it stinks,” because, in other words, olfactory impression might overpower the visuality Rembrandt and his contemporaries revered as the queen of the five senses, Burliuk suggested we feel the brushstrokes, that with all our senses combined we explore the painting’s surface, its “wonderful, secret, little countries, where mountains, ravines, abysses ... are combined.”<sup>15</sup> He and others called this surface and its texture *faktura*, a keyword of the Russian avant-garde that surmised an overturning of the Western hierarchy of the senses (vision on top, smell and tactility at the bottom), a valorization of materiality and the material more generally, and ultimately synesthesia: “the resonance of the colors, the sound of the materials,” as Vladimir Markov wrote in 1914.<sup>16</sup> Russian artists, then, already groped toward a holistic concept of social reality beyond the binary of “raw” experience and discursive mediation and thus, in a way, foreshadowed by a century recent moves in the historical discipline.<sup>17</sup>

The February Revolution proper is considered to have started with strikes, food shortages, and women standing in lines waiting for bread during an exceptionally harsh winter.<sup>18</sup> On the eve of the Revolution, the sound of rising anger carried through the air, with one diarist observing that “today the demonstration became larger and noisier.”<sup>19</sup> The key

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Maria Gough, “Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde,” *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (1999): 32-59, here 37.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30 (Autumn, 1984): 82-119, here 86. For introductions to *faktura* see esp. Gough, “Faktura,” and Oge Khanzen-Leve [Aage Hansen-Löve], *Russkii Formalizm: Metodologicheskaia rekonstruktsiia razvitiia na osnovie printsipa ostraneniia* (Moscow, 2001; orig. 1978), 85-88.

<sup>17</sup> For serious moves in this direction, see for instance Michael Fried, Ruth Leys, and Robert Pippin in <http://nonsite.org/issues/issue-5-agency-and-experience>.

<sup>18</sup> See Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, 1980), 198-202, 217-218.

<sup>19</sup> Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 3.

sign of the February Revolution, however, became gunshots. Time and again gunshots were described as shocking sensory experiences that interrupted everything else: “I was on Nevsky on a bright and sunny day in the midst of armed workers and soldiers, who filled the entire street,” wrote the historian Pavel Vinogradov. “These [workers and soldiers] for the most part were in a state of cheerful excitement, discussing the news, trying to join just about any demonstration, no matter how small, on the street corners, catching flyers that were thrown from the cars that passed by. All of a sudden there was the rattling sound of machine-gun fire from a building close by—and the situation changed immediately. A couple of pedestrians fell onto the pavement to avoid the bullets, others quickly disappeared into nearby roads, a few minutes later an armored car appeared that opened fire on the enemy building.”<sup>20</sup> Soon the absence of shots was registered as a sign of change, a multivalent sign, to be sure, one that could signal more fighting ahead or its cessation, maybe even the end of the revolution itself.<sup>21</sup>

Petrograders quickly became very good at distinguishing blank shots from shots with live ammunition.<sup>22</sup> They also relied on their eyes and ears to detect whether guns were being fired at targets or discharged up into the air.<sup>23</sup> Amid the chaos, these sensory impressions provided some orientation until news trickled in.<sup>24</sup> The result was new sensescapes in the

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<sup>20</sup> Pavel Vinogradov, *Izbrannye trudy* (Moscow, 2010), 427 (February 25–26, 1917).

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Louis de Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia: 1917–1918* (London, 1969), 15 (February 28, 1917). For some, silence only indicated the absence of shooting: “Complete silence: not a single shot” (Mikhail Prishvin, *Dnevnik. 1914–1917* [St. Petersburg, 2007], 375 [March 2, 1917]).

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Aleksandr Chikoliniin Semion Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism: Untold Stories of the February 1917 Revolution* (New York, 2013), 73 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>23</sup> Among many examples is the French diplomat Anet: “There was firing in Liteiny, along which a great number of soldiers were passing. I went out. What a spectacle greeted me! The whole of the Regiment Preobrazhensky, the first regiment of the Guard, was marching past in disorder, without its officers. The soldiers were firing in the air. It was an incessant fusillade. The crowd cheered them, waving their handkerchiefs.” Claude Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution: Notes of an Eyewitness, from 12th March–30th May* (London, 1917), 17 (February 27, 1917). See also Zinaida Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8 (Moscow, 2003), 213 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, the British *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton and his exasperation regarding the absence of information in Robert Wilton, *Russia’s Agony* (London, 1918), 107. This continued well into the October Revolution: “Right now, in the middle of the night as I am writing, there are ominous muffled thumps—gunshots...I run into the dining-room that faces the courtyard and see the lit-up windows of the house security guards... I return. After having put out the light, I lift the curtains and look out onto the street: white, deserted,



citizenry's existing mental topography, that is, a cognitive-emotional-sensory experience of one's situatedness in the urban environment determined largely by sound.<sup>25</sup>

But gunshots were also a source of spatial disorientation, for "it was unclear who was shooting from where, over there you could see soldiers, here the frightened crowd ran away in different directions."<sup>26</sup> In revolutionary times, the entire sensorium remained on special alert. People listened, looked, smelled, touched, and tasted more attentively in an effort to detect the slightest changes that might signal the next sensory pandemonium. Some gunfire was associated with other sensory impressions, including "the smell of blood."<sup>27</sup> Panic was not uncommon: "It's worth mentioning the shameful panic that occurred on the second day, the 28th. In the afternoon, a rooftop machine-gun accidentally opened fire toward the main entrance of the Duma. A great panic occurred."<sup>28</sup> Recording panic was deemed embarrassing, but descriptions of fear in response to gunfire were considered even more shameful, and hence occurred only rarely.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless the sensory experience of bullets was terrifying

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white-bluish (there seems to be moonlight behind the clouds) and sometimes dark figures are scurrying along the wall" (Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 346 [November 30, 1917]).

<sup>25</sup> In one case, this occurred when "the firing sounds [were] particularly heavy on the other side of the Neva, in the Vyborg district." Quoted in De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 14 (February 27, 1917). The anthropologist David Howes defines sensescapes as being predicated on "the idea that the experience of the environment, and of the other persons and things which inhabit that environment, is produced by the particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study." Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 372 (March 1, 1917).

<sup>27</sup> Matvei Skobolev quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 171 (February 25, 1917).

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandr Kerensky quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 228. Nikolai Sukhanov wrote of "a rather shameful panic" that occurred in the hall of the Soviet after shots had resounded (Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* [New York, 1955], 93 [February 28, 1917]). Engendering panic certainly was the goal of some of the shooting: "I regained Liteinyi. There also there were firing, but it was at random. 'Provocation,' said the people. ... We were assured that agents of the secret police were in possession of rifles and machine-guns, that they had ascended to the tops of the houses, and were firing into the crowd and upon the soldiers from the roofs, with the object of creating panic" (Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 39 [February 28, 1917]). The panic-inducing power of gunfire, especially sniper shots, was a recurring issue during the October Revolution: "We were not able to finish the argument because as we turned the corner of Gogol street and St. Isaacs Square sniping began from roof tops. A man walking in front of the German Embassy suddenly dropped down dead, shot by the bullet of an unknown enemy. Cronstadt sailors, on guard at the Astoria Hotel, come rushing down the street, shouting 'Provocatsia!' People were always being killed in those first days by snipers just to start riots" (Louise Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia: An Observer's Account of Russia Before and During the Proletarian Dictatorship* [New York, 1918], 230).

<sup>29</sup> Consider this exception: "Then a bullet came through the window, quickly followed by another, then more. This terrified those in the room. Most dashed out into the corridor looking for an exit, yet finding none." Mikhail Tereshchenko quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 257 (February 27, 1917). For another exception, see this pro-Bolshevik Officer: "On all sides rifle and machine-gun fire could be heard. Individual

enough to leave formerly enthusiastic revolutionaries yearning for law and order, an example of how interconnected the sensory, emotional, and cognitive were.<sup>30</sup>

And yet the gunfire, much like any other sensory phenomenon experienced on a regular basis, quickly became an ordinary everyday occurrence. A few days into the February Revolution, one eyewitness noted that “one or two shots were heard in the courtyard” and calls it “a fairly usual and now no longer alarming occurrence.”<sup>31</sup> By October of 1917, in Moscow “the people of the town were themselves surprisingly calm. Even during the bombardment, railways, postal services, and many other public services functioned as usual, and it was not uncommon to see bread queues standing on one side of a square whilst the other side of the same square was subjected to rifle fire. The theatres functioned as usual, and I first saw Tchekov’s *Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Art Theatre during the days of the bombardment. Incidentally I had to take cover from machine gun fire on my way home after the performance.”<sup>32</sup> By January 1918 “one has got used to hearing random shots, caused by tovarishes dropping their guns when they slip on the icy ground” and “a squad of women sweeping snow off the street went stoically on with their work without taking any notice of the shooting.”<sup>33</sup> The writer Mikhail Prishvin aligned the shots of the machine-gun with the everyday sound of his German clock: “A long, long day is coming to a close, the clock is still playing its German song, and from afar, and lightly, the sounds of machine-gun shots travel

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pedestrians crept along in a frightened manner close to the walls of the houses, and on meeting anyone enquired fearfully as to the possibility of passing through such and such a street without risk.” A. F. Il’in-Zhenevskii, *From the February revolution to the October revolution, 1917* (London, 1931), 15 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>30</sup> Consider the case of a cook in the employ of a French diplomat: “My cook was, until lately, a strong revolutionary, and used to declare that, after the War, she would go down into the street and lead the students to the houses of the generals to hang them. But, on the famous Monday on which they fought so fiercely at the corner of my house, Nastia wished to go into the streets in the afternoon. Hardly had she reached the corner of the house, when bullets began to whistle all about her. She recoiled, terrified. The door was already shut, but, almost dead with fear, she waited for five minutes in the corner of the side door, from which she was able to get back to my apartment. Going into her kitchen, she burst into resounding sobs; her cries filled the apartment. Since that time she is on the side of order and discipline. Already, I perceived the same rapid change of fate among many people occupying a more exalted social station than my worthy cook.” Quoted in Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 83 (March 8, 1917).

<sup>31</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 93 (February 28, 1917).

<sup>32</sup> Allan Monkhouse, *Moscow, 1911–1933: Memoirs* (London, 1933), 67.

<sup>33</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 201 (January 22, 1918), 196 (January 18, 1918).

to the apartment.”<sup>34</sup> The routinization of gunfire was partly due to the fact that Bolshevik rituals lent them regularity and rhythm by concentrating them at particular sites.<sup>35</sup> <FIG. 1 NEAR HERE>

The smells, sights, and sounds of the burning institutions of state power—prisons, police stations, courts, judicial archives—were the other key sensory impressions offered up by the February Revolution. “Far off, across the river, towards the left, columns of smoke were floating over the city, and the flames of an enormous conflagration could be seen. This was the quite blameless District Court, destroyed and set on fire by the excited crowd to keep the neighboring Detention Prison company. Archives, countless documents belonging to civil suits, and notarial deeds were burning there. Looking at all this I kept being reminded of the scenes of the Moscow uprising,” wrote Nikolai Sukhanov, in a Proustian recollection of the 1905 Revolution that was visual as well as olfactory.<sup>36</sup> Many observers were palpably edging toward a language that might capture the simultaneity, and collapsing into a single whole, of sense-based, emotional and ideologically framed, “rational” historical experience: “On the Liteiny blazed a very fierce fire, the magnificent building of the Okroujny Soud (the High Court) being in flames,” began one. “We could see,” he continued, “that other Government buildings were also burning, among them police stations, and that no efforts were being made to extinguish the fires. On the faces of many spectators of this destruction were expressions of intense satisfaction. Their countenances, in the red blaze, looked demoniac as they

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<sup>34</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 370 (February 28, 1917).

<sup>35</sup> The British Ambassador noted his surprise that during the Bolshevik mass burial ceremony of the heroes of the February Revolution on April 5, 1917, held at the Field of Mars, “there was a general sense of order despite the lack of any policy authority. [...] During the burying of each [and every one of the 200 coffins] in the earth the fortress fired a salute.” Quoted in George Buchanan, *Meine Mission in Rußland* (Berlin, 1926), 191.

<sup>36</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 42–43 (February 27, 1917). See also Maurice Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges: Tagebücher und Betrachtungen* (Munich, 1939), 384–85 (February 27, 1917); George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, vol. 2 (London, 1923), 61; Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 212 (February 27, 1917); Il’in-Zhenevskii, *From the February revolution to the October revolution, 1917*, 16 (February 27, 1917); Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 369, 371, 399; Nikolai Nekrasov in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 146, 148 (February 27, 1917); Matvei Skobelev in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 181 (February 28, 1917); Praskov’ia Mel’gunova-Stepanova, *Dnevnik 1914–1920* (Moscow, 2014), 64 (February 28, 1917); and Lapin, *Peterburg*, 250.

shouted, laughed, and danced. Here and there were heaped wooden carvings of the Russian double eagle, and these emblems of Empire, torn from shops and from Government buildings were being thrown on the fires, to the cheers of the crowd.”<sup>37</sup> Descriptions in which multiple sensory experiences merged into one, and real fire, real blood, and metaphorical vomit coalesced into the conflagration of the February Revolution, were quite common: “They had burned the Palace of Justice, close by my house, the windows of which were vomiting flames. The firing continued, but it was dying away. Puddles of blood at the corner of the street reddened the snow. Twelve police stations were on fire.”<sup>38</sup> The tactile sense must have been activated as well. One diplomat speaks of “half-blackened pages” that “blow away and scatter on the snow.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the particularly noxious smells emanating from the burning of Rasputin’s corpse were seen to symbolize the ancien régime’s toxicity.<sup>40</sup> The end of the smells, sounds, and sights of burning institutions of state power signaled the end the February Revolution and the return to a kind of order.<sup>41</sup> The smoke in the air now came from factories, not from bonfires of police files.<sup>42</sup>

The February Revolution was followed by a blossoming of democratic senses. Shouts of “Hurray!” erupted everywhere accompanied by “the unforgettable delirium of speechifying...to groups at street corners, of ascending the doorsteps of houses and climbing

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<sup>37</sup> Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 23 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>39</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 16 (February 28, 1917).

<sup>40</sup> See Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 429; Douglas Smith, *Rasputin: Faith, Power, and the Twilight of the Romanovs* (New York, 2016), 654.

<sup>41</sup> “By Tuesday night the city was entirely in the hands of the Revolutionaries and, nominally at least, under the control of the Duma. Moscow had joined the movement. The police and the representatives of the Old Regime had been dispossessed with little difficulty and practically no bloodshed. All the railways were working. Fires had been extinguished. Everybody was glad to get some respite and to enjoy the new-found ‘freedom.’” Wilton, *Russia’s Agony*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> “Puffs of smoke are emanating from the smokestacks of the factories—is it possible that people are going to work again? Yesterday there was no smoke” (Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 376 [March 3, 1917]). But the fires had brutally altered the city’s environment. Prishvin described “[t]he ruins of the burnt Litovskii Castle” from which a “cut cable lay across Kriukov Canal [Street], the cable ends of which extended like a spider’s legs and kept people from walking on the sidewalk (*Dnevnik*, 383 [March 13, 1917]).

lamp-posts.”<sup>43</sup> In this mostly pre-microphone era, the physical volume of one’s voice mattered; particularly memorable speakers elicited sensory-saturated descriptions from onlookers.<sup>44</sup> About this new climate of expression Maxim Gorky wrote: “The torrent of a liberated people roared in the street; the bee-like buzzing of hundreds of voices was heard through the window panes. The city was like a hive in the spring when the bees awaken; it seemed to me that I smelled the fresh, sharp odor of new words and that I felt how the honey and wax of new ideas was being created everywhere.”<sup>45</sup>

Amid the public speeches and the din of the crowds was the sound of music. The imperial anthem “God Save the Tsar!”, still played by some pro-Monarchist regiments in February, gave way to the Marseillaise as the revolutionary process unfolded. Bands everywhere played the French anthem while people enthusiastically sang and whistled along. In April, a person who attended a burial ceremony for the Revolution’s heroes on the Field of Mars reported that there were “no priests, no icons, no prayer, no cross,” only “a single song: the workers’ Marseillaise.”<sup>46</sup> Another witness described “processions of worker-soldiers accompanied by [the songs] ‘Socialist Republic,’ ‘Stand up, Rise’ (‘God Save the Tsar!’ no longer exists).” Later that month the same observer expressed fear of being overheard while quietly singing a new anthem composed by a friend to the words of “God Save the Tsar!”: “I

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<sup>43</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 178 (April 21, 1917). For “Hurrays,” see for instance Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 393 (March 31, 1917). Former underground newspapers were now sold in the open, advertised by the shouts of peddlers (on the first issue of *Pravda*, see Il’in-Zhenevskii, *From the February Revolution to the October Revolution, 1917*, 24–25).

<sup>44</sup> The American Ambassador described Rodzianko as follows: “He was an eloquent speaker and had a great voice that could reach thousands of auditors in the open air, and it was a familiar saying among Russians that Rodzianko’s voice ‘on a still day could be heard a verst’—which is about two-thirds of a mile.” David Rowland Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy, 1916–1918* (New York, 1970), 83. On the importance of voice in public speech, see Stephen Lovell, *How Russia Learned to Talk: A History of Public Speaking in the Stenographic Age, 1860-1930* (New York, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Maxim Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts: Essays on Revolution Culture and the Bolsheviks 1917–1918* (London, 1970), 31. Sorokin observed that “everywhere are seen couples embracing and kissing as they walk along or sit on the roofs of houses. Some dance madly in the streets. From time to time firing is heard. Laughter and weeping of women breaks into the general chorus of ‘Freedom now! No pharaoh has the right to touch us. Long Live the Revolution!’” (*Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 33).

<sup>46</sup> Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 449 (March 23, 1917).

feel like someone will overhear me... What if someone really hears me?”<sup>47</sup> Over the course of the year, Bolshevization replaced the Marseillaise with the Internationale.<sup>48</sup> One could argue that this was necessary to eliminate ambiguity. The political stance of the Internationale was unimpeachable; the Marseillaise meant different things to different people—liberation to leftists, bourgeois order to centrists.<sup>49</sup>

Like any modern revolution, the February Revolution was accompanied by the destruction of the emblems of the bygone autocracy. “On Nevsky the double-headed eagles were smashed everywhere” and people throughout the city detected the smell of fires in

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<sup>47</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 380 (March 5, 1917).

<sup>48</sup> On the Marseillaise, see Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 64–65, in particular this passage: “Petrograd. The bands played the Marseillaise, which was on its way to replace Boje Tsaria Krani, and to become the Russian national hymn.” See also Monkhouse, *Moscow, 1911–1933: Memoirs*, 61; De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 16, 61; Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 64; Mel’gunova-Stepanova, *Dnevnik 1914–1920*, 150; Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 378, 379, 453, 465; Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 218–219, 272, 295; Albert Rhys Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1921), 26; Wilton, *Russia’s Agony*, 123. On the Internationale, see Olga Tchernoff, *New Horizons: Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1936), 146. The move from the “God Save the Tsar!” to the Marseillaise to the Internationale seems to have taken place all over the Russian Empire. In Georgia after the February Revolution the “massed bands then struck up the Marseillaise. Every head was bared. The mountain tribesman took off his shaggy fur cap, the long hair of the Russian student fluttered in the breeze, and the troops, who a few days before had sung ‘God save the Tsar’, now presented arms to the great revolutionary hymn. Three times it was played amid frantic cheering” (M. Philips Price, *War & Revolution in Asiatic Russia* [London, 1918], 284). In Western Siberia in 1918 during a funeral for fallen Bolsheviks the “band played the ‘Marseillaise,’ which, after the revolution, was only considered in the light of the first song of liberty and not at all as the French National Anthem, and this was followed by the usual ‘International’” (Sophie Buxhoeveden, *Left Behind: Fourteen Months in Siberia During the Revolution, December 1917–February 1919* [New York, 1929], 108). In Azerbaidzhan by 1918 the Marseillaise had been entirely replaced by the Internationale, for “one day they staged a real auto-da-fé in front our house. They threw wax effigies of the blood-suckers and their international helpers, Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyds George into a huge bonfire and solemnly burnt them while intoning the International” (Essad, *Öl und Blut im Orient: Meine Kindheit in Baku und meine haarsträubende Flucht durch den Kaukasus* [Freiburg i.Br., 2008], 220). For an extended discussion of the songs of 1917 see Boris Kolonitskii, *Simvol’ vlasti i bor’ba za vlast’: K izucheniiu politicheskoi kul’ tury rossiiskoi revoliutsii 1917 goda*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg, 2012), 260–75.

<sup>49</sup> The Menshevik Sukhanov saw the Marseillaise as endowed with conservative, bourgeois meanings (Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 222). A conservative republican French diplomat attended a military parade organized by Provisional Government in front of the Winter Palace and heard the Marseillaise, “every word of which sounds bitterly ironic in the present circumstances: ‘Allons, enfants de la Patrie. . . le jour de gloire est arrivé!’” (De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 25 [March 19, 1917]). Another French diplomat was shocked at how the Russians had reinterpreted “his” defiantly happy Republican Marseillaise: “I went to the Finland Station . . . watching this mob of singers, for they were singing. . . . It took me some minutes to recognize the air which the crowd was untiringly repeating, a mournful air, without expression, which dragged itself along monotonously and without rhythm. And, all the same, I was unable to deceive myself; it was the Marseillaise! What was it that the Russian people, what was it that the babas, had made of our wild chant of revolutionary war? . . . They had transformed it here into a sombre and plaintive litany. [...] At the end of a quarter of an hour of this melancholy melopoeia, I felt my nerves giving way, and I fled” (Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 141–42 [April 8, 1917]). To be sure, meaning-making also depended on context. For instance, at the Elets’k Duma elections on August 10, 1917, Prishvin described “the sound of church bells mixed with the music of the ‘Marseillaise’” (*Dnevnik*, 490 [August 10, 1917]).

which tsarist coats of arms burned.<sup>50</sup> For symbols firmly linked with the old regime, iconoclasm was the only option. Those whose meaning was more malleable could be salvaged, however, usually by overlaying the old sign with a new one. In the Duma, wrote one observer, “the portrait of the Emperor [Nicholas II] has been removed, but they have left a bust of Alexander [II, presumably] and given it a red cravat.”<sup>51</sup> The color red had profound resonances on cognitive, emotional, and sensory levels, none of which were easily separable but rather blended into each other in everyday experience. Red appeared more and more frequently in public—on ribbons attached to clothing and to rifles and bayonets, as carnation flowers, and in flags from Bukhara in Turkestan (present-day Uzbekistan) to Ukraine’s Kharkov and the Russian capital of Petrograd, where “even at the Credit Lyonnais or the Bank of Siberia, the red flag was flying.”<sup>52</sup> Red flags came to signify political acquiescence as they sprang up in urban areas from Petrograd to Baku: “Cyril Vladimirovitch displayed the red flag on his palace. He was the first of the Grand Dukes to submit to the Duma.”<sup>53</sup> Later “an immense red flag” floated “above the Winter Palace.”<sup>54</sup> Tsarist spaces were prime targets

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<sup>50</sup> On the burning of tsarist coats of arms, see Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 388 (March 26, 1917); Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 56 (March 2, 1917). On broken double-headed eagles, see Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 227 (March 3, 1917); Wladimir Nabokow, *Petrograd 1917: Der kurze Sommer der Revolution* (Berlin, 1992), 31 (“In front of the entrance to Anitchov Palace they are burning eagles which have been detached from the signs of the purveyors to the tsarist court,” March 3, 1917); and B. V. Nikol’skii, *Dnevnik, 1896–1918*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 2015), 280 (March 3, 1917).

<sup>51</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 22 (March 7, 1917). Later he wrote how “coming along the quay, I noticed that they have removed the sword from the statue of Suvorov in front of the British Embassy, and that they have replaced it with a red flag” (ibid., 49 [April 18, 1917]).

<sup>52</sup> Emile Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1918), 25. See also Kharkov: S. G. Pushkarev, *Vospominaniia Istorika: 1905–1945* (Moscow, 1999), 48. Bukhara: “The bazaars of Bukhara were filled with crowds of Young Bukhariots, who marched with red flags to the Emir’s palace demanding ‘Freedom and a Constitution’” (Price, *War & Revolution in Asiatic Russia*, 294). Anet speaks of “a great crowd in Nevsky; and almost everyone wore a red ribbon. The soldiers carried a red knot on their rifles; the detachments, a red banner. Everywhere the Imperial Eagles fixed on the ensigns of the Court tradesmen were torn down and burned” (*Through the Russian Revolution*, 64 [March 4, 1917]). See also Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 230 (carnations, March 4, 1917); Il’in-Zhenevskii, *From the February Revolution to the October Revolution, 1917*, 18 (“As I went along the Bolshoy Prospect on the Petrograd side, I could not help noticing the changed scene. The streets had an entirely different appearance from that of the previous day. Rebellion was in full evidence. . . . Everybody was wearing red badges and ribbons,” February 28, 1917); and Fedor Stepun, *Das Antlitz Russlands und das Gesicht der Revolution, aus meinem Leben, 1884–1922* (Munich, 1961), 268, 273.

<sup>53</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 83 (March 8, 1917).

<sup>54</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 21 (March 3, 1917).

for sensory conversion. The tsar's box at operas and theaters was a frequent target.<sup>55</sup> In places where conversion did not take place voluntarily, it became compulsory, as in the case of foreign diplomatic buildings: "Soldiers came to demonstrate outside the [French] Embassy, demanding that the red flag be hoisted."<sup>56</sup>

Few of these changes were easy. In the process, various sensory conflicts arose, first between the Duma's Provisional Government and the Soviets and later between the warring parties, all of which carried designated colors (Reds, Whites, and, for the peasant insurgents, Green). Meaning-making was open-ended and could have unintended results, as when a French diplomat saw a hint of Bolshevik collaboration with the Germans in a pro-Soviet Red demonstration: "The prodigious quantity of red flags, standards, banners and streamers. . . . Seen from above, these processions were a fantastic sight: the scarlet line of all these emblems waving above the peoples' heads was superimposed, as with stage scenery, and gave the impression of a single splash of color, all red above the black mass of the demonstrators. . . . Together with the white of the snow, it made up the colors of Germany. . . . Could it be a symbol?"<sup>57</sup> Sometimes Bolshevik-Christian syncretisms formed that the Marxists were loath to see, as when troops at a spring 1917 demonstration in Petrograd marched with "the old regiment's flag with its icons, that had now been framed by red flags."<sup>58</sup>

So much for political parties. As for social types, the bourgeois was identifiable by sensory markers, "a hat on a lady, glasses or a pair of pince-nez on the nose of a man were considered signs of the *burzhuis*."<sup>59</sup> Body parts could become signs as well. A socialist

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<sup>55</sup> See Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 60; Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 453–54 (March 25, 1917).

<sup>56</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 61–62 (May 12, 1917).

<sup>58</sup> Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 395 (February 28, 1917). For similar cases of sensory syncretism, see de Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 262 (May 1, 1917).

<sup>59</sup> Pushkarev, *Vospominaniia Istorika: 1905–1945*, 58. In fact, *burzhui* was a multivalent category. Prishvin captured this multivalence succinctly: "Who is a *burzhui* after all? (In the village they call the bourgeoisie unspecified groups of people who act in the name of selfish motives.)..." (*Dnevnik*, 508 [September 14, 1917]).



revolutionary “noticed the speaker’s hands. He had the thin nervous fingers that belong to an intellectual, no sign of hard toil about those hands. Indeed, what right had he to speak in the name of the proletariat?”<sup>60</sup> As the previous system of the senses was reexamined, sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and senses of touch took on new values. The smell of cigars now became firmly *burzhui* and negative.<sup>61</sup> Lower-class people intentionally used sensory signs associated with their background to mark the new times. Immediately after the February Revolution a soldier reported from the front that “it now often happens that when seeing an officer a soldier will spread his legs, start smoking and put his hands in his pockets. ‘What are you standing like that, how about saluting?’ ‘We have freedom now,’ is the constant answer.”<sup>62</sup>

Petrograd’s Tauride Palace became the site of a struggle between the two post-February centers of power, the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. Originally built in the 1780s by Prince Grigorii Potemkin, one of Catherine II’s lovers and her favorite royal, the palace now united prerevolutionary elites with worker and peasant representatives in a single space. No sense more than smell encapsulated the clashes that ensued. The Menshevik Sukhanov “had several occasions to pass through the meeting-hall. At first it looked as it had done the night before: deputies were sitting on chairs and benches, at the table and along the walls [...]. A few hours later the chairs had completely vanished from the hall, so that they should not take up space, and people, pouring with sweat, were standing tightly squeezed together.”<sup>63</sup> Sukhanov, who had spent years in prison and exile, commented on the perspiration matter-of-factly. Members of

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On this also see the *locus classicus* on *burzhui*, Boris I. Kolonitskii, “Antibourgeois Propaganda and Anti-‘Burzhui’ Consciousness in 1917,” *The Russian Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 183–96.

<sup>60</sup> Tchernoff, *New Horizons*, 79.

<sup>61</sup> On conservative politician Ivan Goremykin’s cigar-smoking, see Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 225 (March 2, 1917).

<sup>62</sup> A. E. Snesarev, *Pis'ma s fronta. 1914–1917* (Moscow, 2012), 584 (letter dated March 17, 1917).

<sup>63</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 91 (February 28, 1917).

the upper classes who passed through the meeting hall immediately noted the extremely unpleasant smell. And not just that: “One’s feet slipped on the dirty floor, which was spat all over with sunflower seeds and cigarette butts.”<sup>64</sup> Sunflower seeds, still associated today with the lower-class in Russia, became a key marker of the record number of workers and peasants who poured into the cities. Entire sidewalks became blanketed with the seed shells they spit out. Pedestrians felt like they were walking on a cushioned carpet.<sup>65</sup>

In the spring of 1917 observers were astonished by the mingling of high and low at the Tauride Palace: “I caught sight of the crowd of the cabinet, marine fusiliers, with fixed bayonets, and, in the midst of them, the sharp profile of the Grand Duke. I recalled to mind the last occasion on which I had seen him, at the Château de Chambly, surrounded by women in low evening gowns, with diamonds and pearls. The strong odor of the hall, the mud on the floors, the noisy crowd, the disorder, the revolutionary soldiers with fixed bayonets, formed a singular contrast to that gay and elegant scene.”<sup>66</sup> In a throwback to nineteenth-century miasma theory and its fusion of cognition with the sensate, the smell of sweat was believed to cause muddled thinking.<sup>67</sup> This resulted in what many saw as unreasonable demands, such as a call for women’s suffrage: “In this atmosphere of exaltation, amid the warm odor proceeding from the perspiring people, brains became over-taxed and intoxicated by the prevailing enthusiasm. [...] A charming, pretty and elegant woman insisted upon entering the

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<sup>64</sup> Stepun, *Das Antlitz Russlands und das Gesicht der Revolution*, 276.

<sup>65</sup> Consider Gippius: “I have often seen Petersburg in the summertime. But I have never seen it in such a gray, unwashed, and run-down state. Throngs of idle soldiers are knocking about, spitting sunflower seed shells.” Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 277, vol. 8, (August 13, 1917). See also *ibid.*, 284 (August 21, 1917); Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 33; Iurii Got’e, *Time of Troubles: The Diary of Iurii Vladimirovich Got’e: Moscow, July 8, 1917 to July 23, 1922*, ed. Terence Emmons (Princeton, N.J., 1988), 55 (August 7, 1917); Lapin, *Peterburg*. George Grosz recorded getting his “first whiff of the way Russia smells” in a local soviet housed in a barrack: “a mixture of stale beer, chewed sunflower seeds and wet boots.” George Grosz, *An Autobiography*, trans. Nora Hodges (Berkeley, 1997), 170.

<sup>66</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 45 (March 1, 1917). Vladimir D. Nabokov, the Kadet politician and father of the writer, noted that “the resplendent halls [of the Tauride Palace] had been invaded by masses of dishevelled, carelessly dressed people” (Nabokov, *Petrograd 1917*, 128).

<sup>67</sup> See Pirogovskaia, *Miazmy, simptomny, uliki*; Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1986; orig. 1982).

Great Hall of Session, where the Soldier Delegates were sitting, to deliver a speech to them on Women's Rights, and to demand the vote for women for the Constituent Assembly."<sup>68</sup>

Smells and sights at the Tauride Palace bore ethnic markers as well: "The floor is filthy, covered with bits of paper, cigarette ends, and litter of all kinds. Unshaved students with long mops of hair, wearing green caps, and typists with short hair and pince-nez glasses, typical Russian nihilists, move about among the soldiers. A lot of Jews."<sup>69</sup> Bespectacled Jewish nihilists constituted the ultimate Other in the eyes of ethnically Russian and denominationally Orthodox upper-class. But the old elites also expressed more generic disgust about the lower classes.<sup>70</sup>

Worse than arousing repulsion, the lower classes produced fear, especially in large crowds. Their unplanned, spontaneous behavior was likened to a force of nature—to the elements (*stikhiia*) and to elementalism (*stikhiinost'*)—and associated with the menace of roaring sounds and avalanche-like movement.<sup>71</sup> The public spaces these crowds inhabited were experienced by many as topsy-turvy, a world of carnivalesque and even apocalyptic inversion: "The streets are littered with papers, dust, dung, and sunflower seeds [...]. Windows of many houses, bullet-shattered, are stopped with paper. In fire-swept rooms marks of bullets can plainly be traced on the walls. In the parks trees and shrubs have

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<sup>68</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 71 (March 4, 1917).

<sup>69</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 22 (March 7, 1917).

<sup>70</sup> Mikhail Tereshchenko wrote: "I remained standing by the central window of the general's office, opposite Zakhar'evskaia Street, and suddenly I saw soldiers marching along in ranks under the red flag. The front ranks walked in disorder and appeared to be shouting. I could not hear what they yelled, but I was shocked by the sight of them—their wide-open mouths and their strained, changed faces. They had the look of drunken men. For me, coming from a professional military family on my mother's side and raised in the spirit of military discipline, this was a deeply disturbing, unusually difficult thing to witness. My first impression was that these people in the front ranks had lost their military bearing and did not understand where they were headed. I had to strain every nerve, call upon all of my past, to understand them and suppress within myself a sense of disgust." Mikhail Tereshchenko quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 257 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>71</sup> Like many others, Got'e associated the elements with passions and darkness: "Yes, we are going through a storm of dark passions; the past has laid bare before us its very depths and shows us how repulsively deformed man is; a blizzard of greed, hatred, and vengeance rages about us; a wild beast, enraged by long captivity and worn out by centuries of torment, has opened wide its vengeful jaws and in triumph roars out its rancor and malice" (*Time of Troubles*, 80). See also Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 220, 231 (March 1, 1917; March 5, 1917); Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 116; Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 390 (March 30, 1917); Tchernoff, *New Horizons*, 83; Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 21.

ruthlessly been damaged, and every blank wall is patched over with placards, notices. And political proclamations.”<sup>72</sup> Class divisions ceased on public transportation, bringing people of different social backgrounds into direct contact, sometimes quite literally: “A simple woman in the streetcar went up to a pompous noblewoman and touched her veil with her finger. ‘That’s what they mean by freedom!’, said the noblewoman.”<sup>73</sup> Deserted or demobilized soldiers “treated themselves to ‘joyrides’ in the tram-cars....The soldiers, besides, took possession of the cars as though they belonged to them, and the common people and the middle-classes had to go on foot.”<sup>74</sup> Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, lady-in-waiting to Empress Alexandra Fedorovna, recorded her experiences during a trip to rejoin the imperial family in Tobol’sk in December of 1917: “The last month during which the ‘Trans-Siberian de luxe’ was run, and even now nothing in the train’s appearance conveyed the idea of luxury. All the coverings of the seats had been ripped off by our predecessors for their private use. In order to prevent the horsehair from appearing, dirty canvas covering had replaced the plush. Many of the windows were broken, all the brass bolts were missing, the water in the dressing-room did not run, and the whole carriage had evidently seen much ill-treatment. [...]

Between Vyatka and Perm we locked our door at night against the invasion of newcomers, for the last contingent seemed especially militant. Eventually they hammered loudly on the doors of all the shut compartments, demanding an entrance and threatening ‘death to the bourgoui’!”<sup>75</sup> Her journey continued in a horse carriage, where “the smell of goats emanating from the felt rugs, combined with the terrible je jolting as we bumped along the frozen ruts, reminded us of experiences on the high seas.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 513 (October 10, 1917)

<sup>74</sup> Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 107 (March 20, 1917). See also Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 114 (Petrograd, “The entire garrison of the city spends its time riding over the city in the tram cars, refusing to pay their fares and generally behaving in a disorderly manner”); and Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 369.

<sup>75</sup> Buxhoeveden, *Left Behind*, 5, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, *Left Behind*, 17.

For others, sensory shock came only after 1918, when they were forced to leave the cities by train to survive in the countryside during the Civil War. The Moscow historian Iurii Got'e, who referred to the lower classes as "gorillas," recorded how in June 1918 he "had to crawl into the car through the window—that was the first time for me. . . . I even managed to sleep a little at night, although two circumstances hindered sleep: the conversations of the gorillas about politics, and various noises, some accompanied by a foul odor and some not. It should be noted that the gorillas, being truly Russian people, are very fearful of drafts and therefore assiduously shut all the windows."<sup>77</sup> The dehumanizing of the lower classes was also reflected in other derogatory terms such as "pigs."<sup>78</sup> The poet Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Zinaida Gippius' husband, wrote of the "stinking, spit-covered, and smoke-filled waiting room, the invisible presence of typhoid lice, spies of the Cheka, of Bolshevik vulgarity and peasant-soldierly stupidity" and of "tiny, grey, countless, indistinguishable, insect-like creatures. Not human beings, but vermin."<sup>79</sup>

The commingling of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary worlds elicited a strong sense of what Ernst Bloch called the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*). Consider the moment when revolutionaries arrested the proper and perfumed Grand-Duke Michael, the tsar's brother: "The very scene of Mikhail's abdication was unforgettable: the splendid noble's apartment on Millionnaia [Street], Hussars standing guard, elegant furniture in the living room and boudoirs. Into this setting poured in an unspeakably strange company of people—dirty and unwashed, with creased faces, eyes red and bloodshot from sleepless nights, uncombed hair and wrinkled collars. These were

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<sup>77</sup> Got'e, *Time of Troubles*, 160 (June 24, 1918).

<sup>78</sup> "Entering the Tauride Palace proved difficult, but I managed to squeeze myself in among a crowd of people entering from Tavricheskaia Street. Once inside, I witnessed a scene of total chaos. A great many soldiers were wandering about, and the Catherine Hall had been reduced to a pigsty. Many deputies were deeply troubled by what had become of the building. 'You could not force pigs into this place,' Tuliakov complained." Mikhail Tereshchenko quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 262 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>79</sup> Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *Das Reich des Antichrist: Russland und der Bolschewismus* (Munich, 1921), 160–61, 235.

representatives of the Provisional Government and the Temporary Committee of the Duma—the only organs of power in the country. On the other side was a person who could be considered emperor.”<sup>80</sup>

As more time passed, the old regime became a distant memory: “I went last night...to a charity concert,” recounted the French diplomat de Robien. “It was very old regime: the eagles were still there, and there was a portrait of Peter the Great at the end of the room. ...The officers had almost all put back their shoulder-knots, as there was no danger of showing them in this place and one could hide them under an overcoat when going outside. The women were in low-cut dresses . . . one could have believed it was before the revolution, and this entr’acte amused me.”<sup>81</sup>

Like all modern revolutions, the Russian Revolution was accompanied by different experiences of time itself, accelerated revolutionary action coupled with a decelerated everyday life.<sup>82</sup> This acutely felt divergence of times was often expressed in a sensory idiom.<sup>83</sup> For instance, when telephones stopped working or people stopped calling, people

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<sup>80</sup> Nikolai Nekrasov quoted in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 150 (February 27, 1917).

<sup>81</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 42–43 (April 12, 1917).

<sup>82</sup> Contemporaries were aware of this: “Yes, the Imperial Theater is packed during the play ‘Mascerade,’ people came by foot (no public transportation worked), they are full of admiration for Iur’ev and Meyerhold’s production—even a proscenium ticket cost 18,000. And on Nevsky machine guns are crackling. At that very time (I know for sure from an eye-witness) a stray bullet hit a student who was in the process of buying a ticket from a nobleman. A historical picture! [...] They are shooting onto Nevsky from their windows while the ‘public’ is rushing to the theater” (Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 211–12 [February 26, 1917]). Likewise, a writer was flabbergasted at a painter friend who kept painting, oblivious to the shooting and commotion outside: “[Painter Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin] is painting watercolor beauties, he is completely unaware and was very surprised. I then tried visiting [the writer] Remizov but only made it to the 8th Line [on Vasily Island]—first machine guns fired, then guns here and there, then there are shots, you hear them, some people run, others laugh, it’s just like in war near the front, only in the city it’s much more terrifying at night-time” (Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 370 [February 27, 1917]). On revolution and time more generally, see Koselleck, “Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 5: 714–725, 749–766; Matthew Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution: The Republican Calendar, 1789–Year XIV* (Rochester, N.Y., 2011); Malte Rolf, “Constructing a Soviet Time: Bolshevik Festivals and Their Rivals during the First Five-Year Plan. A Study of the Central Black Earth Region,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 3 (2000): 447–73.

<sup>83</sup> In diary entries from 1917, Prishvin’s German clock measured the slow regularity of everyday time against the sounds of the revolution—gunshots, shattered windows, screams. His clock symbolized tsarist officialdom and an orderly bureaucracy: “The old clock (in my apartment) is playing its simple German song and its words in sleep seem like the words of the simplest of ministerial paper forms: ‘Member of the Council of Minister, showing complete reverence to His Highness’ and so on. ...The clock is playing its simple German song and

strained their ears while awaiting news. And during the February Revolution, multisensory experiences like movie showings were frequently interrupted.<sup>84</sup> Regular, chronological time was often represented as nature, in one case as a calf in the countryside that slowly chews its cud.<sup>85</sup> Silence became marked as the halting of revolutionary time.<sup>86</sup> But these “normal” silences also had to be distinguished from revolutionary silences that were pregnant with meaning—or, as Gippius put it, silences pregnant with ““history”” in quotation marks.<sup>87</sup> By late 1918 there was “deathlike silence in the streets. No one is shooting (at anyone), no one is stripping anyone of their fur coats (everyone has been stripped). ... There are no more horses in town (they have all been eaten).”<sup>88</sup> Emma Goldman, who returned in 1919 to the city of her childhood she was forced to leave at age sixteen, noted that “my parents had moved to St. Petersburg when I was thirteen. ...St. Petersburg was to me an evil thing. But the gaiety of the city, its vivacity and brilliancy, soon dispelled my childish fancies and made the city appear like a fairy dream. ...I found Petrograd of 1920 quite a different place. It was almost in ruins as if a hurricane had swept over it. The houses looked like broken old tombs upon neglected and forgotten cemeteries. The streets were dirty and deserted; all life had gone from them. The population of Petrograd before the war was almost two million; in 1920 it had dwindled to five hundred thousand. The people walked about like living corpses; the shortage of food and fuel was slowly sapping the city; grim death was hung at its heart. Emaciated and frost-

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once in a while the entrance door bangs on the entire house like a cannon: ‘Are they shelling us? Is it starting?’” (*Dnevnik*, 365 [February 25, 1917; see also 398, April 4, 1917]).

<sup>84</sup> Prishvin described the interruption of a movie: “The movie theater where we were last night turned off its outside lights so that the strikers could not stop the movie, but they stopped it nonetheless” (*Dnevnik*, 368 [February 27, 1917]).

<sup>85</sup> “Time is so dizzyingly fast that it seems to be flying some place, but then I behold a calf that as always chews slowly, consistently, and if it were to somehow enter into a connection with time, if it were to grab a hold of rapid human time, it would turn into a huge bull within an hour. But this miracle doesn’t happen and nature continues to do its job, not conforming to the desires of human beings. Nature needs to be reckoned with” (Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 448 [June 18, 1917]).

<sup>86</sup> “This morning there was silence. Not even any leaflets. A crowd of workers [passes] by our windows, with Cossacks at the head, carrying a huge red banner on two poles: ‘Long Live the Socialist Republic.’ Singing. Then everything falls silent again” (Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 227 [March 3, 1917]). See also *ibid.*, 224 (March 2, 1917).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 315 (October 21, 1917), 437 (July 6, 1918).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 454 (December 2, 1918).

bitten: men, women, and children were being whipped by the common lash, the search for a piece of bread or a stick of wood. It was a heart-rending sight by day, an oppressive weight at night. Especially dreadful were the nights of the first month in Petrograd. The utter stillness of the large city was paralysing. It fairly haunted me, this awful oppressive silence broken only by occasional shots.”<sup>89</sup><FIG. 2 NEAR HERE>

Throughout the revolution the sound of streetcars was associated with temporality. When there was silence, revolutionary action was in full swing; when the clanking and rattling of the iron wheels in iron railways was audible, normal life had returned, a pattern memoirists remembered from the 1905 Revolution.<sup>90</sup> As Sukhanov, then a Petrograd municipal official, put it in early March of 1917: “The restoration of normal street traffic in the form of the trams ought to be a clear symbol of the conclusively victorious revolution and of the beginning of a peaceful life in free Petersburg....The appearance of the trams in the streets of the revolutionary capital...would also have been a symbol of the restoration of order.”<sup>91</sup> In a similar aural vein, the sound of telephone service or the announcement of newspaper sales in the streets marked revolutionary vs. everyday time.<sup>92</sup> Visually, the functioning or absence of electricity—and light—worked much in the same way.<sup>93</sup> Once the

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<sup>89</sup> Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York, 1970), 8–9.

<sup>90</sup> “On Nevsky Prospekt, as in 1905, the streetcars have stopped working. Somewhere around Iamskaia Street a horse-drawn streetcar is running. Nobody ever noticed while the streetcars were working, but now everyone looks in surprise: a horsecar!” (Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 366 [February 25, 1917]). On silence, see Anet, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 65 (Petrograd, “It was announced that the trams would begin to run again on Tuesday. In the course of ten days, I had travelled on average sixteen miles on foot in the snow,” March 4, 1917); Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, vol. 2, 206 (Petrograd: October 26, 1917); Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 205 (February 23, 1917), 207 (“On Nevsky Prospekt workers are stopping the streetcars, taking away the keys of the drivers,” February 24, 1917), 208 (February 25, 1917), 359 (January 4, 1918), 448 (October 25, 1918); Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 399 (April 4, 1917); Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 16 (Petrograd: “Factories were at a standstill. No trams were running,” February 25, 1917); Tchernoff, *New Horizons*, 85 (Moscow: “There were no newspapers, the trams did not run, bread was practically unobtainable,” October 28, 1917). On the return of streetcar noise, see De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 233 (Petrograd, February 11, 1918); Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 382 (March 11, 1917).

<sup>91</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 170 (March 3, 1917).

<sup>92</sup> On the telephone, see Nikol’skii, *Dnevnik, 1896–1918*, vol. 2, 364 (April 18, 1917).

<sup>93</sup> Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 318–19 (Petrograd, October 25, 1917), 321 (Petrograd, October 26, 1917), 331 (“Shocking news from Moscow. ...The city is completely dark, the telephones don’t work,” November 3, 1917), 357 (Petrograd, January 1–2, 1918), 359 (Petrograd, January 4, 1918), 367 (Petrograd, January 7, 1918); and Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 386 (Petrograd, February 27, 1917); Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 12 (Petrograd).



Bolsheviks were firmly in power, they changed time-keeping to standard time and synchronized it with electricity. A memoirist noted on May 18, 1918, “Electricity now gets turned off at 12 midnight. That is, at 10pm since the Bolsheviks have turned the clock two hours ahead (!). Fun times.”<sup>94</sup>

Temporality was also on the minds of Russian scientists, visual artists, and other cultural producers, who in the years leading up to and during the Revolution started some of the century’s wildest experimentation with the sensorium. Avant-garde artists rejected mimetic representation of reality with its attendant temporality—three-dimensional reality anteceding two-dimensional representation—and elevated the material surface of, say, a painting to a dimension in its own right. In stressing the texture of paint, its *faktura*, they were certain to be engaged in the production of artwork that was lifted out of chronological time and pointed into the future. That future became synesthetically palpable when beholding a work of art. At the same time scientists from Ivan Sechenov to Vladimir Bekhterev were forging a biopsychology that rejected the primacy of ideas, soul, or mind, and instead viewed human beings as fundamentally embodied, as being governed by sensory reflexes that were inseparable from feelings and thoughts. While these artistic and scientific fields were in fact more diverse and while the causal connections between art/science and revolution—what came first, which fed off which?—are perforce unknowable, let us take note that there was a confluence of living through the revolution of temporality, the senses, the emotions, and cognition, and reflection on these very issues in various fields of cultural and knowledge production.

If the enemy (monarchists) and the goal (topple tsarism) were clear to the revolutionaries during the February Revolution, the Bolshevik-led protests against the

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<sup>94</sup> Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 425 (May 18, 1918). Nikol’skii too noted that “electricity now gets turned off at 12 midnight sharp” (*Dnevnik, 1896–1918*, vol. 2, 457 [August 28, 1918]).

Provisional Government known as the July Days of summer 1917 were characterized by chaos and confusion. All first-person sources recorded a much greater presence of armed Bolsheviks on automobiles, more, and more chaotic, shooting, more crowds, more panic, and more blood. Sensory indicators proliferated in descriptions of the July Days, compensating for the lack of ideological or historical orientation. The pro-Bolshevik American journalist Albert Williams wrote: “In the early morning of July 18th I am suddenly wakened by piercing cries from the Nevsky... With the clattering of horses’ hoofs are mingled shouts, desperate pleas for mercy, curses—one terrible blood-curdling scream. Then, the thud of a falling body, the groans of a many dying, and silence. An officer coming in explains that some workingmen had been caught pasting up Bolshevik posters along the Nevsky, a squad of Cossacks had ridden them down, lashing out with whips and sabres, cleaving one man open, and leaving him dead on the pavement.”<sup>95</sup> The American Ambassador noted that a “truck loaded with Kronstadt sailors appeared on the scene with a machine gun on the rear, which they turned upon the Cossacks and opened fire. Horses and drivers fell together and, although there was a driving rain a half hour afterward when I visited the scene, the street was literally and actually running with blood. Bodies were scattered for four blocks along the street from the bridge to the Kirochnaya.”<sup>96</sup> By contrast, the monarchist law professor and poet Boris Nikol’skii drily wrote in his study during the White Nights of Petrograd: “I am correcting my translation of Catullus to the music of machine gun crackling.”<sup>97</sup> <FIG. 3 NEAR HERE>

The Bolshevik headquarters at Smolny, which became increasingly important throughout the revolutionary year, the July Days marking one highpoint, was associated with

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<sup>95</sup> Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Nikol’skii, *Dnevnik, 1896-1918*, vol. 2, 303 (July 7, 1917). On July 4, 1917, Sukhanov wrote, “It was obvious that *the disorders had begun again*. Clusters of people were collecting everywhere and arguing violently. Half the shops were shut. The trams had not been running since 8 o’clock that morning. A tremendous excitement was felt—tinged with anger” (*The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 439 [original emphasis]).

a whole gamut of sensory perceptions. Sound-wise, “in all the former classrooms typewriters ticked incessantly.”<sup>98</sup> The general noise-level was so high that one Bolshevik journalist in Helsingfors locked himself up in the toilet to write his articles.<sup>99</sup> Outside of Petrograd’s Smolny the Reds more than any other group were associated with armored cars, and the sights, sounds, and smells linked with these (and opposed to those of horses) left deep—hopeful to some, menacing to others—impressions signifying power and modernity.<sup>100</sup> Leading Bolsheviks—in fact, all leading figures of the Revolution—were associated with concrete sensory markers, such as particular voices and looks. Oratorical personae were key. Thus the waning popularity of Kerensky and the rise of Lenin had much to do with sensory aspects. Everyone remarked on Kerensky’s theatricality and emotionality.<sup>101</sup> Kerensky’s female-coded “hysteria” stood in contrast to Lenin’s male-coded calmness:<sup>102</sup> “Lenin was in general a very good orator—not an orator of the consummate, rounded phrase, or of the luminous image, or of absorbing pathos, or of the pointed witticism, but an orator of enormous impact and power, breaking down complicated systems into the simplest and most generally accessible elements, and hammering, hammering, hammering them into the heads of his audience until he took them captive.”<sup>103</sup> By contrast, Kerensky’s theatricality was initially impressive but soon wore off. Prishvin, who, away in the countryside, didn’t hear

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<sup>98</sup> Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 48.

<sup>99</sup> Il’in-Zhenevskii, *From the February revolution to the October revolution, 1917*, 36.

<sup>100</sup> On Bolsheviks and cars, see Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 215 (February 27, 1917), 235 (March 7, 1917), 248 (March 19, 1917); Matvei Skobelev in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 180 (February 28, 1917); Mikhail Tereshchenko in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 258 (June 7, 1917); Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 42 (February 27, 1917); Paléologue, *Am Zarenhof während des Weltkrieges*, 387 (February 28, 1917); and Nabokov, *Petrograd 1917*, 136, 139.

<sup>101</sup> Here’s Sukhanov’s account: “He began to speak in a ‘failing’ voice, a mystical half-whisper. White as snow, so agitated that he was shaking all over, he forced out short, broken phrases, interrupted by long pauses. His speech, especially at first, was disconnected and completely unexpected—particularly after the tranquil conversation behind the curtain. God knows which it had more of—real frenzy or theatrical pathos!” (*The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 141 [March 2, 1917]). For the “thickest” description see Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 61–62. See also Boris Kolonitskii’s many articles and his “*Tovarishch Kerenskii*”: *antimonarkhicheskaia revoliutsiia i formirovanie kul’ta “vozhdia naroda” (mart-iun’ 1917 goda)* (Moscow, 2017).

<sup>102</sup> Gippius is just one example: “Kerensky...takes everything in an almost effeminate way” (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 270 [August 9, 1917]).

<sup>103</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 280.

Kerensky speak until much later, recalled that “Kerensky’s speech made a huge impression.” But when he shared his view with journalists they look at him “like a provincial person: they had listened to Kerensky a hundred times and his speeches no longer impressed them.”<sup>104</sup> Shifting from grammar and semantics to pragmatics, from grammatical form and meaning to their contexts, especially the sensory aspects of speech that are usually subsumed under the branch of paralinguistics, helps explain Lenin’s rising popularity after his return to Russia in April 1917.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the contrast between Kerensky and Lenin came to be dramatized as a contrast between semantics and paralinguistics. Kerensky’s hyperbole—his emotionally charged intonation, rhythm, tone, and stress—wore off over time and created a sense of disjuncture between content and the mere embellishment of packaging. As a result, Lenin’s lackluster speech came to be seen as a healthy, down-to-earth obsession with content and content only.

From a sensory perspective, the October Revolution was anti-climactic—more of the same: the gunfire, shattered glass, street-fighting, troop transports, blackouts, interrupted telephone service. In fact, it was so much like the February Revolution and the July Days that Bolsheviks would take massive efforts beginning in the 1920s to ensure it was remembered as the era’s defining moment.<sup>106</sup> It could even be argued that a sensory approach offers an additional causal explanation of why the Bolsheviks invested so heavily in overwriting the memory of February as the main break: it took special effort to erase the sensory impressions of February that were deeply embedded in Russia’s collective memory, to break the strong link between memory and the senses.

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<sup>104</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 509.

<sup>105</sup> See the work of phonetician John Laver, e.g. *The Gift of Speech: Readings in the Analysis of Speech and Voice* (Edinburgh, 1996), or of general linguist Gennadii Kolshanskii, *Paralingvistika* (Moscow, 2010).

<sup>106</sup> On this, see Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, 2004).

With repetition came habituation. Diary entries from October show how accustomed people had become to armed conflict: “I went out twice—once in the morning to buy newspapers and walk to Mertvyi Pereulok for milk; and then I accompanied Ninka to the orphanage. At that time occasional shots could be heard on Prechistenka and in the side streets; there was no feeling of fear, but rather an impulse to go and see something that looked like fighting.”<sup>107</sup> Three days later, the same diarist recorded: “There’s little shooting in the course of the day until 7 p.m.—approximately two or three times an hour. The fire at Nikitskie Gates has subsided. Tenants of the building have picked up shrapnel canisters and bullets in the courtyard. A whole day without telephone service.”<sup>108</sup> The shock palpable in anti-Bolsheviks’ sensory descriptions of the February Revolution was replaced by matter-of-fact accounts: “*10pm (electricity has just been turned on.)* There was strong shooting from heavy artillery that we could hear even here. We got a call and were told that apparently cruisers from Kronstadt bombarded the Winter Palace. It looks like the palace has already been stormed. [...] *Later.* The rumor about the storming of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks turned out to be false. The fighting continues. From our balcony we can see glittering flashes in the sky, like frequent lightning bolts. There are muffled shots. Are they bombarding from the Palace, the Neva, and the ‘Aurora’?”<sup>109</sup> Two days later, it turned out that “the bombardment was from heavy artillery, not the ‘Aurora,’ which everyone says shot with blank cartridges as a kind of signal, because if they had not been blank, the Palace would have turned into ruins.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Got’e, *Time of Troubles*, 72 (October 28, 1917). For additional laconic descriptions of the sensory impact of the October Revolution, see De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 130–32 (Petrograd, October 25–26, 1917); Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, vol. 2, 206–07 (Petrograd, October 26, 2017); Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 98, 101; Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 99; Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, 190 (Moscow, November 11, 1917); Tchernoff, *New Horizons*, 87–89 (October 29, 1917), 94–95 (October 31, 1917).

<sup>108</sup> Got’e, *Time of Troubles*, 73 (October 31, 1917).

<sup>109</sup> Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 319–20 (October 25, 1917).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 323 (October 27, 1917).

Following the October Revolution, the golden riches of the aristocratic, tsarist world turned up at city markets, bringing with them a veritable sensory explosion: “Alexander Market—has another name in Petrograd. It is known as the ‘Thieves’ Market,’ because obviously most of the things that are for sale there are stolen goods. It is one of the most interesting places I ever visited. More antique treasures can be bought there than anywhere else except in old markets in Constantinople. The range of loot is amazing. There are old Bokharas, ikons of wood, brass and iron, amber, carved silver chains, old enamel, cameos, tapestries, brocades, peasant embroideries, jewel-studded silver bracelets, heavy silver earrings and silver rings set with agates, old lusters, Bristol glasses, Chinese porcelains, furs and great trays of precious and semi-precious stones.”<sup>111</sup> After half a year or so, some peasants in their stolen new clothes looked more *burzhui* than the tsar family’s entourage, who had been wearing the same pair of clothes since the February Revolution. And yet even in this inverted sartorial world, sensory memories kept resurfacing with unintended force, as when the Empress’s Lady-in-Waiting in Tyumen “went for our dinner to a local restaurant much in vogue among the soldiers. Here for a very high price we got a plate of cabbage soup and a piece of beef. [...] The place, of course, was full of soldiers and their ladies, and the smell of foul tobacco and leather boots mingled with sour cabbage filled the unaired rooms, and we generally tried to sit on the veranda.”<sup>112</sup>

The years of war and revolution had devastated the urban centers bringing far-reaching consequences to the senses. “In Petrograd,” wrote the poet Merezhkovskii, “all factories have long closed and there is no smoke from the stacks. The sky above the dying city is cheerful, pale green, like above mountaintops. The snow in the streets is so virginally white as in a free field. All stores are closed; you see few pedestrians; no real traffic, only

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<sup>111</sup> Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 160.

<sup>112</sup> Buxhoeveden, *Left Behind*, 97.

once in a while a car with the commissars or a truck with Red Guards. There's a horse's corpse with bare ribs in the middle of the street; dogs are tearing bloody pieces of meat from it."<sup>113</sup> Many noted the unemptied latrines, the burst and unrepaired water pipes, and the sights and stench of excrement that resulted: "The toilets are locked and they threaten to shoot you if you use them. The sick go to the attic, healthy people out in the courtyard. In the courtyards there are piles of frozen feces. [...] Everything will melt in the spring."<sup>114</sup>

The sensory revolution changed the languages heard and foods smelled in cities. German was forbidden—Louise Bryant, John Reed's wife, upon arriving in her Hotel Angleterre room, noticed a large sign above her bed stating that guests who spoke German would be subject to a fine of fifteen hundred rubles.<sup>115</sup> The sounds of Finnish disappeared as well, and soon the smells of German bakeries and German gingerbread vanished, too.<sup>116</sup> This sensory revolution extended to the private interiors of houses and apartments. Aristocratic families were forced into a single room; peasant families might move into the piano room—the smell of cabbage soup started emanating from there. Aristocratic ladies (now forced to use the servants' back staircase) retaliated by wearing more perfume than usual and parading their mink fur coats in the apartment.<sup>117</sup> <FIG. 4 NEAR HERE> <FIG. 5 NEAR HERE>

The February Revolution saw much public drunkenness.<sup>118</sup> But it was after October that the situation became critical, reaching a pinnacle during the December "wine pogroms." The widespread looting of tsarist wine cellars, liquor stores, beer breweries, and vodka

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<sup>113</sup> Merezhkovskii, *Das Reich des Antichrist*, 236.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>115</sup> Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 36.

<sup>116</sup> See Lapin, *Peterburg*, 190–93.

<sup>117</sup> On this, see *ibid.*, 253.

<sup>118</sup> See Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 219 (February 28, 1917); Aleksandr Chikolini in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 74 (February 27, 1917); Wilton, *Russia's Agony*, 126–27. On the wine pogroms see Iuliia Khmelevskaia, Igor' Narskii, "'Upoenie' buntom v russkoi revoliutsii (na primere razgromov vinnykh skladov v Rossii v 1917 godu)," in *Rossiiskaia imperiia chuvstv: Podkhody k kul'turnoi istorii emotsii*, ed. Ian [Jan] Plamper, Schamma Schahadat, Marc Elie (Moscow, 2010), 259–81.

factories were often accompanied by the sounds of shots from wild shooting.<sup>119</sup> “Every night for almost two weeks,” Gorky wrote, “crowds of people have been robbing wine cellars, getting drunk, banging each other over the head with bottles, cutting their hands with fragments of glass, and wallowing like pigs in filth and blood.”<sup>120</sup> Among the upper classes the drunken soldiers elicited disgust and marked a chaotic reversal of the social order. Social distinctions connected with the palate also entered here, as when a French diplomat wrote that “it is sickening to see such good stuff thrown away: there were bottles of Tokay there of the time of Catherine the Great, and it has all been gulped down by these Vodka swiggers.”<sup>121</sup> The wine pogroms were described in ethnic terms and inebriated Russians likened to animals: “Wine produces different effects on different races. On the Russian soldiers it does only one thing—it brings out his most bestial tendencies....They were like animals, they become wild beasts after drinking.”<sup>122</sup> Aurally and visually, “broken bottles littered the square, cries, shrieks, groans, obscenities, filled the clean morning.”<sup>123</sup> Visually and olfactorily, “the snow outside the ransacked shops is a purplish color and smells of stale dregs” and “some parts of the central streets reek of pubs.”<sup>124</sup> The daughter of the British Ambassador was shocked to see “scenes of indescribable horror and disgust” with “the crowds in some instances scooping up the dirty, wine-stained snow, drinking it out of their hands, fighting with each other over the remains.”<sup>125</sup> After several measures were unsuccessful, often because the troops assigned to guard wine cellars, liquor stores, and vodka factories ended up getting inebriated themselves, the Bolshevik city government decided to pour alcohol into the canals of “the Venice of the North”: “Beginning with the Winter Palace the [Kronstadt] sailors went

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<sup>119</sup> On gunfire during the wine pogroms, see Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, vol. 2, 240 (December 18, 1917).

<sup>120</sup> Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 101.

<sup>121</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 164 (November 26, 1917).

<sup>122</sup> Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 158.

<sup>123</sup> Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After*, 103.

<sup>124</sup> De Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 166 (November 30, 1917); Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 346 (December 1, 1917).

<sup>125</sup> Meriel Buchanan, *Petrograd: The City of Trouble 1914-1918* (London, 1918), 231-32.



systematically all over the city and finished the ‘booze’ problem. They poured the wine on the streets or threw it into the canals. Cellars were flooded with it and pumped out with the aid of fire engines. The snow was rose stained and the city reeked with stale alcohol.”<sup>126</sup>

<FIG. 6 NEAR HERE>

After the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace on March 3, 1918, factory sirens went off “strangely, darkly, in night-like fashion.” One urban diarist speculated that this had been done to “generate a positive relationship toward the new ‘peace’” among the workers.<sup>127</sup> As the revolution spread from the cities to the provinces, domestic servants in the manor houses started whispering or falling quiet whenever their gentry masters turned up: “At the Kastchenkos’ estate of Vesjolaya in Ukraine life seemed the same as always, at least outwardly. But then things began to change in small ways. ‘The change was indefinable, hard to pin down, yet grimly unmistakable,’ Marie Kastchenko remembered. “The two old coachmen ‘kissed our hands with the usual cordiality, but seemed uneasy and looked around, as though they were afraid somebody was watching them.’ In the house things began to disappear—a scarf, a blouse, a bottle of eau de Cologne; the servants began to whisper in groups and would ‘then lapse into sullen silence if any of us appeared.’”<sup>128</sup>

And yet life in the province also represented a sensory throwback to earlier times. Baroness Buxhoeveden recalled: “When I went about in the town I was surprised to see placards with orders of the Governor appointed by Kerensky still posted up at the street corners....and that the station [Vologda] was decorated with red banners and festoons of fir branches framing red cloth placards bearing the usual inscriptions in large letters: ‘Long live the International,’ ‘Long live the brotherhood of nations’.” Some urbanites left the cities in search of silence, quoting the founding fathers of the Russian Left. In the words of the

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<sup>126</sup> Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 159.

<sup>127</sup> Gippius, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 394 (February 11, 1918), 395 (February 12, 1918).

<sup>128</sup> Douglas Smith, *Former People: The Last Days of the Russian Aristocracy* (New York, 2012), 95–96.

American journalist Albert Rhys Williams: “‘Go out among the forests and the people,’ said Bakunin. ‘In the capitals the orators thunder and rage/But in the village is the silence of centuries.’ We craved a taste of this silence. Three months we had heard the roar of Revolution. ... So we started out for the Volga basin bound for the little village of Spasskoye (Salvation).”<sup>129</sup> A year later, in April 1918, Williams traveled to Siberia and remarked on “the feeling the Russians call *prostor*, a sense of space and vastness.” Typically, in spatially inflected observations such as this the boundaries between the cognitive, the emotional, and the sensory were fluid, too: “Under its spell things once mighty and imperative, become trivial and unimportant. Even the Revolution relaxes its grip upon us. May it not after all be a ferment confined to railway men and the industrial workers of the cities? Back there the Revolution was an insistent fact, assailing us in eye and ear with banners and battle cries, parades and assemblages. Out here on the Siberian steppes we see no evidence of it.”<sup>130</sup>

The single most important sensory sign of the revolution in the villages were the church bells. In the cities the continued ringing, or renewed ringing, of church bells was seen as a sign of normalcy.<sup>131</sup> For a liberal like Fedor Stepun, “the light ringing of the small, picturesque church bells” of Shumliany in Galicia marked a key difference to “dirty, foggy, senseless Petrograd, where my wife and myself had ended up in the apartment of a marine officer who had ‘accidentally’ been killed during the first days of the revolution.”<sup>132</sup> By Stalin’s 1928 Great Break at the latest, churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques were being destroyed, bells melted, minarets closed, and muezzins sent to the Gulag. A few years later most outward markers of religion had disappeared.<sup>133</sup> <FIG. 7 NEAR HERE>

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<sup>129</sup> Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 41.

<sup>130</sup> Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 197.

<sup>131</sup> See Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 380 (March 5, 1917); Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 262 (on the eve of Easter Sunday, April 1–2, 1917); Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, 260; Buxhoeveden, *Left Behind*, 65. The classic sensory study of church bells is Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York, 1998).

<sup>132</sup> Stepun, *Das Antlitz Russlands und das Gesicht der Revolution*, 291.

<sup>133</sup> See Lapin, *Peterburg*, 105–15; Richard L. Hernandez, “Sacred Sound and Sacred Substance: Church Bells and the Auditory Culture of Russian Villages during the Bolshevik *Velikii Perelom*,” *The American Historical*

To be sure, not everything was new and not every break was as discontinuous as linear *ab ovo, ex nihilo* narratives of the Russian sensory Revolution suggest. The sounds of bullets and machine-guns were familiar not just to those who could remember the 1905 Revolution. The sensory impressions of the Great War served as an immediate reference point, as when Prishvin wrote: “At that moment very close to us (on the 16<sup>th</sup> Street [of Petrograd’s Vasily Island]) I could hear the same sounds of the death machines that I heard during the War. Only now they were much more terrifying because there I knew I would encounter the [machine guns], whereas here I was on my way to tea-time with the painter.”<sup>134</sup> And yet a sensory history of the Russian Revolution brings to the fore aspects of the revolutionary experience overlooked in accounts that focus on politics, ideology, class, and even symbolic practices. Indeed, it could be argued that, in revolution, the sensory, prosodic, in a word, paralinguistic qualities of speech matter more because semantics are in such disarray. Equally, a sensory approach offers an additional explanation—beyond ideology (Lenin’s concept of the party as vanguard, dramatized in his “April Theses”), power aggrandizement (*vis-à-vis* the other socialist parties), and so on—of why the Bolsheviks were obsessed about overwriting the memories of February and replacing them with those of Red October, for them, the true

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*Review* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1475-1504; Karl Schlögel, *Das sowjetische Jahrhundert: Archäologie einer untergegangenen Welt* (Munich, 2017), 728-38.

<sup>134</sup> Prishvin, *Dnevnik*, 400 (April 4, 1917). Gippius described “a strange occurrence”: “An airplane dropped a bomb on the corner of Gorstkina and Fontanka. Some people were injured (this is not a rumor, but a fact). From which airplane? They are telling us that it was a German plane. I don’t believe it, it doesn’t make sense. If it wasn’t from a German one—could it have been one of our own?” (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, 404 [February 17, 1918]). De Robien wrote, “In any case, air attacks are to be feared. . . but they have thought of every way of guarding against them: the few gas lamps which still remain intact have been painted blue” (*The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia*, 123 [October 2, 1917]). The sensory qualities of food were on the minds of many who had served in the tsarist army, which, famously, was said to have crumbled during the First World War because of lentils, a nutritionally sound foodstuff whose bland flavor left the soldiers disappointed. After all, there is more to food than carbohydrates and filling stomachs. It was not just the “the stomach that made the revolution,” as one Colonel put it, but the palate and, by extension, sensory perception itself. See Lev Tugan-Baranovskii in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 131. For more on lentils, see Aleksandr Chikolini in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 73 (February 27, 1917). On food and the senses more generally, see Laurie S. Stoff, “The Sounds, Odors, and Textures of Russian Wartime Nursing,” in *Russian History Through The Senses*, 117-40, here 130–33.

revolutionary rupture. They could but notice how large February loomed in recorded memory of 1917, and how much of that memory was couched in sensory language: breaking the strong ties between memory and the senses required extra work.

Upper-class, first-person sources have figured more prominently in this article than those by workers or peasants. Apart from varying levels of literacy (there are simply fewer written sources by workers or peasants), the reason why upper-class ego-documents are suffused with sensory descriptions and others not is that they tend to be more backward-looking or nostalgic. Their memories of a bygone, positively connoted past are often cast in sensory terms. By contrast, lower-class memoirs, especially those written by leftist authors, are future-oriented and focus on ideology. In Marxism more generally, the senses occupy an ambiguous role that has yet to be explored in sustained fashion.<sup>135</sup> To be sure, in his 1844 *Manuscripts* Marx predicted that the end of private property would entail “the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes.”<sup>136</sup> Capitalism alienated human beings and their bodies from things, “people are unable to feel the world,” and so it follows that “socialist revolution must, and would, create *socialist senses*,” as Emma Widdis has summed up.<sup>137</sup> Socialism would bring about fully sensed, holistic selves. And yet in most of (Russian) Marxism, the senses, emotion, and cognition were seen as separate, and the senses as secondary in the forging of the socialist New Person. The emphasis was on the mind; sensory revolution was epiphenomenal to intellectual-cognitive remaking, but epiphenomenal in important ways. Thus in 1923 Trotsky noted that “the workers’ state already has its festivals, processions, reviews, and parades, symbolic spectacles—the new theatrical ceremonies of state,” only these had yet to infiltrate the private sphere, “the shut cages of family life.” That

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<sup>135</sup> The key exploration to date is David Howes, “HYPERESTHESIA, or, The Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford, 2004), 281-303.

<sup>136</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow, 1961), 107 (original emphasis).

<sup>137</sup> Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, 1 (original emphasis).

sphere was an object of Bolshevik mere theorizing and this was wrong, for “theoretical arguments act on the mind only. Spectacular ceremony acts on the senses and imagination.”<sup>138</sup> Senses might serve as an important tool on the road to the New Person, or an index of how far along an individual had gotten on that road. The New Person per se was defined as a being that had subordinated senses and emotions to will and mind: “Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.”<sup>139</sup> Trotsky was beholden to a long tradition of Cartesian division between cognition on the one hand and the emotions and senses on the other. The key challenge of a future history of the senses will be to overcome this dualism and adopt an integrated sensory-emotional-cognitive processural model of experience while allowing room for the fact that historical actors thought in dualisms and that this dualistic thinking had feedback loop effects on how they experienced the world. Put differently, we may inhabit a moment in which dualistic sense-making of social reality reigns supreme and dualism may profoundly shape how we live reality, yet in truth social reality is anything but dualistic. Or, the challenge for the history of experience is to think with Spinoza but allow for the fact that in a certain place during a certain time humans experienced the world through a Cartesian lens.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Leon Trotsky, “Ot staroi sem’i—k novoi [The Family and Ceremony],” *Pravda*, no. 155 (July 14, 1923).

<sup>139</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach (Chicago, 2005; orig. 1923), 207.

<sup>140</sup> On Spinoza’s holistic concept of experience see e.g. Ursula Renz, *The Explainability of Experience: Realism and Subjectivity in Spinoza’s Theory of the Human Mind* (New York, 2018). Broadly speaking, the image of holistic Spinoza and dualistic Descartes as regards experience and its cognitive, emotional, and sensory qualities continues to hold. For an exception see Deborah Brown, “The Rationality of Cartesian Passions,” in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (Dordrecht, 2002), 259–78. For a critique of facile, caricature-like versions of Spinoza vs. Descartes, as in neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994) and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, FL, 2003), see Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 17-21, 214-19, 225-27.

Back to the avant-garde. Some contemporaries of the Russian Revolution actually made headway in Spinozist thinking amidst Cartesianism. The Formalist literary theorist Viktor Shklovskii advocated the “estrangement” (*ostranenie*) of the material world by means of artistic devices, so that this world could be perceived afresh sensorily. Art would free the senses, it would create a new immediacy, it would “make the stone stony.”<sup>141</sup> Futurist poets like Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh advocated “the release of the word from its denotative meaning,” which would foster the “discovery of its material qualities: the *faktura* of language itself.”<sup>142</sup> The Symbolist poet Alexander Blok demanded that artists “listen to the revolution with the whole body, with the whole heart, with the whole consciousness.”<sup>143</sup> And in the 1920s Constructivists began creating the new, socialist world through art, the senses now serving both as an object of transformation and an instrument to measure how far the process of socialist construction had come along.<sup>144</sup> Whatever the differences between these individuals, groups, and moments, they shared a commitment to reconfiguring sensing, feeling, and thinking, a colossal undertaking that was at first coeval with the Russian revolutionary project and then, after 1917, aligned with revolutionary Russia.

As this Russia became the Soviet Union, *faktura* underwent changes. In *faktura*’s early iterations of the 1910s agency had been distributed democratically between artist, viewer, and artwork: all three were thought to participate more or less equally in cultural production, the artist and the viewer as fully embodied subjects, the artwork as a fully material thing with agentic properties, too. Throughout the 1920s Constructivists tilted this balance of co-creation toward a primacy of the artwork’s materiality—a “materiological determination”—whereby the artwork overrode artists and viewers: “*faktura*, once

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<sup>141</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Device [1913],” in *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Berlina (London, 2016), 80.

<sup>142</sup> Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, 29.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Corney, *Telling October*, 31.

<sup>144</sup> See Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, 2005); Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

constituted as the very locus of artistic subjectivity, was reconfigured as the site of its explicit erasure.”<sup>145</sup> If in the 1910s meaning-making was considered to involve an artist who “works” (*obrabotat*) a material surface that activates the viewer on sensory, emotional, and cognitive levels, in the 1920s the artwork’s very materiality was deemed to work artists and viewers.

*Faktura* was, then, most democratic and holistic—most revolutionary—at the time of the Revolution. In 1912 the Cubo-Futurist Burliuk described a painting from Claude Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral* series at Moscow’s Shchukin Art Gallery as follows: “Right under the glass grew moss, carefully colored in light orange, lilac-tinged, yellowish tones, and it both appeared and was really true that the paint’s flow marks had roots, that they pointed upward from the canvas and that they smelled sweetly.”<sup>146</sup> In 1917 Burliuk painted *Revolution*, its canvas overlain with bullet-ridden metal plates and cartridges—and to be beheld by body-minds through a “sensocognitive” operation of tactile vision and visual tactility, of thought feeling and felt thought, and so on. The radical democratizing spirit of *faktura* lay in its overcoming of dichotomies, of senses high (vision) and low (touch, smell), sensory perception vs. cognition, emotion vs. cognition, artist vs. artwork, artwork vs. viewer, viewer vs. artist. *Faktura*, in other words, promised a holistic utopia, one as pressing for the revolutionary era as the quest for a holistic analytical lens beyond the binary opposition of experience vs. discourse is for historians today.<FIG. 8 NEAR HERE>

<BIO>

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<sup>145</sup> Gough, “Faktura”: 55, 34.

<sup>146</sup> David Burliuk, “Faktura,” in David Burliuk et al., *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu: Stikhi, proza, stat’i* (Moscow, 1912), 116.

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<ABSTRACT>

Temporally speaking, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was not a news item, not even a rumor, but first and foremost novel sensory impressions—gunshots with live ammunition from unusual places, the smell of burnt police files. This article explores the sensory history of the revolution through ego-documents like diaries and memoirs. It tracks in detail how people of various backgrounds in Petrograd and Moscow lived the olfactory class struggles after February and the taste excesses of the post-October “wine pogroms,” how they expressed a new experience of time in a sensory idiom, and how they ultimately became habituated to the new sounds and sights. Historiography is at a propitious moment to move beyond a dichotomy of discourse vs. “raw” experience: conjoining the histories of experience, the senses, and the emotions, the article probes what is to be gained from interpreting a world-historical event with a concept of experience as an integrated, multimodal, simultaneous sensory-emotional-cognitive process. Avant-garde artists, contemporaries of the Russian Revolution, foreshadowed such a holistic concept of experience by a century.

Sensory history, history of emotions, experience, 1917 Russian Revolution, February and October Revolutions