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LAUGHING REVOLUTIONS:  
THE POPULAR CULTURE OF MODERN AESTHETIC MANIFESTOS

by

Stephen Everett Leet

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

The University of Memphis

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## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to my wife, Amber.

Her tenacity, humor, and obstinacy echo in its every page.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to my committee chair, Carey James Mickalites, for first introducing me to the works of the Futurists at a young and impressionable age. He has been a fountain of encouragement and thoroughly corrupting influence throughout my graduate studies. This work would not have been possible without him.

I would also like to thank Gene Plunka who, over the course of my studies, served as a role model for erudition and intellectual curiosity. He is my spirit animal.

## Abstract

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During the first quarter of the twentieth century, a veritable manifesto-craze in the arts swept across Europe and the Americas. Inaugurated by F.T. Marinetti's "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), this phenomenon saw the publication of thousands of manifesto texts and parodic manifestos announcing new aesthetic theories and movements in the form of bombastic and often incredulous rhetoric. This dissertation intervenes in the extant body of literary criticism on the subject of this phenomenon. It argues that, contrary to current analytic trends, these manifestos were irreducible to their generic antecedents in the realm of politics. Rather than seeking legitimacy for their artistic programs in the same way political manifestos seek legitimacy for and subscription to their political programs, the authors of these texts sought legitimacy through a paradoxical process of *delegitimizing* themselves, by appropriating a confluence of comedic framing, rhetoric, and performance specific to burgeoning forms of entertainment unique to early twentieth-century popular culture.

Assessing the modern aesthetic manifesto with this internal cultural logic in mind, the project interrogates the genesis, popularization, and decline of the genre at its origin-point in *Belle Époque* Paris. In what unfolds as a narrative of cultural actors, events, and reflexive relations, the project attends to the manifesto's popular reception in and appropriation of the theater, the press, cultural memory, and the visual arts, respectively. The genre's participation in each of these popular forms, I argue, expose a calculated invocation of the affective, innervating anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious on the part of manifesto authors in order to gain public attention, effectively inculcating in the manifesto a new modality of popular entertainment.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Modern Manifestos and the Seriously Non-Serious**

Mikhail Bakhtin remarked in his essay, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” that where there is a style there is genre (66). Elegant as this formulation may be, its usefulness when surveying the aesthetic manifestos of the modernist period is complicated by the confounding proliferation of distinct stylistic inventions that permeate the period’s equally bewildering production of manifesto texts.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the modernist aesthetic manifesto poses a difficult and decidedly literary question: how does one come to reconcile two texts as stylistically remote as, for example, Tristan Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto” (1918) and Wyndham Lewis’s “Bless England” (1914) under a single generic rubric at all? Claude Abastado, one of the progenitors of the form’s interrogation, addressed this very point in his investigations by maintaining simply that “the manifesto does not exist as an absolute”; which is to say, the manifesto genre does not exist in any codified form, either critically or theoretically (qtd. in Somigli 23). Thus, the mere invocation of this genre opens a space for the introduction of several questions regarding the nature of generic classification as well as literary history’s predilection for nominal and, by extension, normative categorizations.

Luca Somigli has argued the modernist aesthetic manifesto is a “gesture of opposition to political power” that “aims at establishing the intellectual class as a legitimate interlocutor of political power in the court of public opinion” (53). Adopting a similar, yet altogether political tact, Janet Lyon has averred that the manifesto serves as “a touchstone in the history of political

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “aesthetic manifestos” to refer to texts whose subject matter is art, art criticism, or aesthetics, and which, generally (though not necessarily), self-reflectively carry the moniker “manifesto.” For the purposes of this project, I also qualify the beginning of the modernist period at 1881 owing to concomitant relaxations in European (especially French) censorship laws that radically changed artistic production, the press, and engendered successive waves of “little magazines.” This demarcation is in keeping with historically event-driven analyses of the period such as Richard Shattuck’s seminal *The Banquet Years*.

conflict in the modernist period” that “serves as a rebuke to modernity’s narratives of progress” (30). While the fundamental thesis undergirding these analyses has merit, it fallaciously appraises the manifesto genre from within the closed system of the field of cultural production while ignoring the reflexive relationship these texts participate in as both symptoms and indexes of the popular culture of modernity itself. Put simply, these analyses privilege a reading of these texts that limits them to mere indexes of the artistic schools they portend to announce, delimit, or defend, often relegating them to mere anterior traces of the altogether more important “work of art.” Moreover, their methodology foregrounds a stylistic affinity to a rich history of political manifesto antecedents that elides one important attribute: unlike truly political manifestos, whether couched in the bombast of Marinetti’s “Manifesto Against Past-Loving Venice,” the shock and abject *sérieux* of Artaud’s “All Writing is Pigshit,” or the irrelevance of Kurt Schwitters’s “Cow Manifesto” (which proceeds from the claim that it is “very unnatural to milk different cows into a single pail” [390]), modernist aesthetic manifestos make us laugh.

While this elision can be said to be a blind spot in these analyses given the decidedly comic tone that colors so much of modernity’s artistic production (e.g., Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Chaplin’s films, Gaudi’s architecture), it is symptomatic of a text-centric genealogical method that posits “X son of Y” in an attempt to circumnavigate a deterministic “cause and effect” analysis. Read in this way, aesthetic manifestos are *a priori* contextualized as seeking legitimacy for their artistic programs in the same way that political manifestos seek legitimacy for and subscription to their political programs. Though such analyses are useful for interrogating the manifesto’s rhetorical stratagems, they often fall victim to a series of false generic assumption identified by Aviva Freedman: “1. that a text is ‘in’ a genre, i.e., that it is primarily, or solely, describable in terms of the rules of one genre; 2. that genre is ‘in’ a text, i.e., that the features of a

text will correspond to the rules of the genre” (73). Conceding, at least tacitly, to Freadman’s generic fallacies, Lyon’s *Manifestos: Provocations of the Modern* argues for examining the genre through Wittgenstein’s allegory of “family resemblances,” wherein representative texts are related by similarities without having any singular feature shared by all (13). However, as genre scholars such as John Frow have pointed out, using likeness as the basis for classification “raises the problem of where the line of *dissimilarity* is to be drawn” (59).

Troublingly, readings extending from each of these methodologies have symptomatically engendered an *ex post facto* application of the manifesto genre to a range of texts that defy both taxonomy and historicity. One example of such generic “slippage” can be found in Mary Ann Caws’s seminal manifesto anthology, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Eschewing any formal or theoretical rubric, Caws asserts, “the manifesto can always be redefined; it makes its own definition each time” (xxviii). Accordingly, she claims that “a case can be made for the poem-manifesto, the painting-manifesto, the aphorism-manifesto, the essay-manifesto” (xxix). This virtually infinite plasticity of taxonomy, at least on the surface, justifies her inclusion of poems such as Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira Le Hasard* and Whitman’s *Song of Myself* alongside Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto” and Eugene Jolas’s “Revolution of the Word” while excluding any trace of André Breton’s manifestos of Surrealism.<sup>2</sup> Though radically inclusive, Caws’s application of the term “manifesto” questions the relevance of any such generic category or distinction at all. At best, it lends the taxonomy the mark of a value judgment, the articulation of a subjective textual hierarchy grounded in the reader’s affective

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<sup>2</sup> In a 2002 interview for the journal, *Exquisite Corpse*, Caws laments the exclusion of the Surrealist manifestos and the “Cannibal Manifesto” of Oswald de Andrade due to page-count constraints. I argue, however, that the inclusion of certain material *instead* of these texts amounts to a value-judgment—a position bolstered by Caws’s statement that Breton’s manifestos have “some incredibly BORING moments. I want no boring here.”

response to a text's perceived historical importance, merely a veiled sign of canonicity. At worst it concedes to Potter Stewart's now clichéd definition of pornography: "I know it when I see it."

Evident in each of these examples is a heady resistance to any generic definition of the manifesto, often caricatured by a self-conscious attempt to avoid what Lyon laments as the "unfortunate effect of taking the revolution out of the manifesto" (202). Much of this care to preserve the manifesto's revolutionary aspect—often at the expense of the genre and, worse, the distinct cultural context of the text itself—can be attributed to perceived affiliations between the literary avant-garde and political vanguard, affiliations in which, as Bourdieu claims, "convergences were flaunted (e.g., Mallarmé referring to a book as an '*attendat*'—an act of terrorist violence) but distances prudently maintained" (44). Francis Haskell has likewise argued that such affiliations "were amorphous at best, always misleading, and have had an enduring life" (Jensen 37). This is not, however, to say that avant-gardist production was devoid of political affiliation. As Haskell has shown, critics after the French Revolution applied political terminology to non-political aesthetics in response to the widespread politicization of everyday life. Thus, the reader's understanding or reception of any given cultural product was dependent upon and enriched by their ability to interpret and decode the allegorical traces of political codes and conventions of their particular historical milieu.<sup>3</sup> Perceived affiliations between the political and the aesthetic were thus the result of a series of structural homologies within the field of cultural production, wherein cultural producers, occupying an economically dominated but culturally dominant position, profess an alliance with the economically *and* culturally

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<sup>3</sup> For the inversion of this paradigm, in which the language of non-political aesthetics is appropriated by political discourse, see Michael Orwicz's *Art Criticism and Its Institutions in Nineteenth-century France*.

dominated.<sup>4</sup> Such affiliations were, however, only partial alliances, deployed, as Robert Jensen has argued, to allow aesthetic producers to claim a position outside the marketplace—a fiction which “served rather than denied the commodification of art” (10). These “market fictions,” as Rainey has similarly argued, amounted to “new strategies of authorial self-construction” emblematic of a unique, historically delimited economic circuit resulting from the “momentary equivocation” between artistic autonomy and the marketplace in which art invited and solicited its own commodification (3). In short, aesthetic producers within the modernist period found that alienation sells; moreover, alienation was a role that could be cultivated, publicized, and professionalized.<sup>5</sup>

The aim in making these distinctions is not to initiate a wholesale meta-critical correction to the important and much needed discursive expansion of manifesto studies already accomplished by these critics. Instead, these observations aim to intervene in the extant body of manifesto scholarship by foregrounding what Hans Robert Jauss has identified as genre’s “Horizons of Expectation,” a body of historically determined epistemology that forms the background comprehension of a text’s reception as well as its authorship. In Jauss’s formulation, this epistemology derives from a series of intertextual relationships: “A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself in a vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions” (23). Theorized in this way, the manifesto is not a generic category of

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<sup>4</sup> On the homologies of structure between the literary and political spheres of cultural production and their relation to genre formation, see Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 44-52; A cogent example of these partial homologies is Surrealism’s failed attempt to strike a lasting alliance with the Communist party owing to the party’s claim that Surrealism’s attitude was essentially bourgeois and its aesthetics pornographic.

<sup>5</sup> For a theoretical analysis of such “position taking,” see Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*; for anecdotal evidence of alienation’s “legitimate imposture,” see *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 72-73, and Robert Jensen’s *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*.

“belonging” that can be defined by resemblances or formal homologies, but only historically delimited and described; for, as Frow observes, “genres have little transhistorical essence, only historically changing use values” (76, 167). Thus, the manifesto, like any text, enters into an interactive relationship with the codes and conventions of its particular cultural milieu such that the latter establishes a guide for interpretation and classification while the former acts upon that milieu to confirm and/or change its prejudices.

This reflexive methodology is of particular use when we consider that the two inaugural aesthetic manifestos of the modernist period, Moréas’s “Symbolist Manifesto” (1886) and Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909), did not originally carry the moniker “manifesto,” but had that taxonomy interpolated upon them by their respective editors when they appeared in the pages of *Le Figaro*. The application of the manifesto taxonomy to these texts is thus a cogent example of the horizon of expectation at work. Had the manifesto label not been applied, these texts would be considered what they were originally written to be, namely, works of literary criticism. The addition of the taxonomy, however, recodes the audience’s reception by transposing knowledge of one genre (political manifestos) onto another (literary criticism), effectively challenging the reader’s expectations and creating a newly familiar expectation.<sup>6</sup>

This methodological distinction gives greater purchase to a historically delimited analysis of the aesthetic manifestos of the modernist period by also highlighting the horizon of expectation at work in the critical works surveyed here. In each case, aesthetic manifestos are read through political manifestos, and vice-versa, by anachronistically applying incompatible cultural codes to disparate texts in an attempt to *impose* generic stability on historically delimited forms, resulting in occlusions and limitations by foregrounding formal and rhetorical homologies

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<sup>6</sup> According to Jauss, texts that conform to the reader’s generic expectations are experienced as “light reading,” unchallenging and therefore confirming the prejudices and pretenses of the cultural milieu from which they arise.

at the expense of what was, as historically evinced, a reformulation of the genre by way of generic appropriation and transposition. Indeed, the manifesto genre as we know it today, both critically and in the vernacular, was *created* by the modern aesthetic manifesto's reshaping of the genre's horizon of expectation such that critical interrogations of the texts are unknowingly in the frustrated position of taming dissimilar historical contexts and codes by applying normalizing systems of logic. These processes, as in the case of Lyon, attempt to "preserve" the politics of revolution sometimes at work in the manifesto, but wind up sacrificing any investigation into the genre's production of novelty through its disruptive appropriations of and confluences with other styles and genres.

By contrast, divorcing aesthetic manifestos from their political antecedents, at least generically, allows for a deeper engagement with the purported strategies of legitimization that manifesto critics unanimously highlight. Reading the legitimizing strategies inherent in aesthetic manifestos through political texts too often accepts as truth the fictionalized roles of marketplace alienation that the authors of aesthetic manifestos cultivated and, indeed, professionalized. Such readings, as Jensen claims, yield to an often-mythical utopian politics that imagines social reality rather than describes them (10). Too, they occlude powerful economic and social relationships within the marketplace of cultural production that made marginality the eruptive epicenter of modernity and the handmaiden of spectacle-culture.<sup>7</sup> Overdetermined by popular culture, these marketplace impostures are irreducible to binaries such as "bourgeois" and "anti-bourgeois" that

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<sup>7</sup> For a contemporary theory regarding the cultivation of eccentricity in urban society and its relation to macroeconomics, see Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903).

have become common currency in contemporary, post-Frankfurt School Marxist criticism.<sup>8</sup>

A salient example of such a reading is Lyon's interpretation of Tzara's "Dada Manifesto" (1918). Often read as an acerbic critique of the genre ("To put out a manifesto you must want: ABC / to fulminate against 1,2,3"), Tzara's text becomes, in Lyon's hands, a "pedagogical vehicle" that suggests political struggle "is merely one more facet of the parliamentary politics of the bourgeois public sphere" (42). While the word "bourgeois" does appear in the text six times, Lyon's conflation of the discourse of political manifesto's with Tzara's exhortations results in an idealized reading that neglects Dada's assertion that *everyone* was bourgeois—and, in particular, the politically inclined. This important aspect is legible in nearly all of the extant Dada manifestos from Hugo Ball's claim, "We will always be 'anti'. / We are not naive enough to believe in progress. / We want to ruin the appetite for any type of beauty, culture, poetry, all intellect, taste, socialism, altruism and synonymism. / We will rip into all 'ism' parties and 'beliefs'" ("Literary Manifesto" [1916]), to Walter Serner's exclamation, "World views are word mixtures" ("Last Loosening Manifesto" 160).

Lyon's subsequent extension of the manifesto's purported "anti-bourgeois struggle" to the Dada movement writ-large is further complicated by the proximity of the movement's adherents to Catholicism, a typically bourgeois institution that inspired Hugo Ball to create Dada with the purpose to introduce "a secret language and leave behind documents full of paradox, not edification" (Ball *Diary* 6/18/1916). Moreover, Lyon's reading ignores the Dada manifestos' participation in what had become, by 1915, the genre's parodic phase, in which manifesto

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Maza's *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie* offers an historical account of these terms' evolution and their inherent instability. Jerrold Siegel's *Bohemian Paris* similarly argues that the term "bourgeois" arose from bohemia's impulse to describe what it was not—a distinction born of value judgments and personal prejudices rather than strictly political or economic formulations. See also Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* for a humorous depiction of the "bourgeois-bohemian," an ostensibly radical social affectation that actually reaffirms the middle-class culture it professes to oppose.



authors vied for public attention by positioning their own movement as an “art-against-art.” Given this context, manifestos such as Tzara are not earnest political texts in which universal political subjecthood is at stake, but responses to the genre’s shifting horizons of expectation.

Thus, by recoding our methodology to consider the cultural milieu in which these aesthetic manifestos were produced, their correspondence with the pretensions of popular culture, and their intrinsically comic framing, an altogether different strategy of legitimization becomes apparent, one that demarcates the shift from the political to the aesthetic while allowing for what is surely an overlap between the two. Following this logic, this project wagers that the authors of modern aesthetic manifestos attempt to gain legitimacy, paradoxically, through a process of *delegitimizing* themselves, by appropriating a confluence of comedic framing, rhetoric, and performance specific to modernity’s most vibrant forms of popular entertainment, namely, comic theater, cabarets, *parade*, the circus, and, indeed, the theatricalized popular press itself. This project further contends that these diverse generic appropriations reshaped the genre, creating for the first time an “art of the manifesto” comprised of cultural codes specific to that historical milieu.

Foregrounding the inherent comic theatricality of the manifesto, both historically and theoretically, capitalizes on the existing body of manifesto scholarship regarding the performative aspects of the genre while also attending to its legitimizing paradoxes. Relying heavily on J.L. Austin’s delineation of perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts, manifesto critics have identified the liminal position that the genre occupies between “authorized” and “unauthorized” contexts. In Austin’s formulation, a series of authorizing contexts must preexist in order to allow a speech act to be considered “serious.” In the absence of these contexts, a speech act risks being received as “non-serious,” fictive, or merely theatrical. While manifesto

critics have attempted to ameliorate this hierarchical distinction by way of Derrida's re-readings of Austin, showing that the non-serious is subject to an "iterable mark" that is a sufficiently authorizing context, this project aims to show that that "mark" was the manifesto taxonomy itself—a mark whose generic transposition upon aesthetic criticism resulted in a comedic effect, a *blague*, that embraced the anxious indeterminacy of the gap between the serious and non-serious.<sup>9</sup>

The import of this anxious indeterminacy on the popular reception of manifesto texts is empirically observable in the critical discourse of the period: audiences and critics alike scorned these texts for their impudence, indicting them as hoaxes while, at the same time, expressing consternation over the possibility that their pronouncements extended from a genuine desire to, for example, "demolish museums and libraries" (Marinetti, "Founding" 1). To be sure, the anxious indeterminacy arising from the inability to objectively discern the sincerity of these manifestos was the crux of their appeal; it turned otherwise inert tracts of artistic criticism into affective documents. Indeed, authors of these texts could be said to have been "performing" this anxious indeterminacy in both a generic and theatrical sense given that the publication of these texts was complemented by readings in theaters, cabarets, and music halls, often with the aim of eliciting scandal or the derision of the audience. This performative, theatrical trajectory can further be seen in these manifestos' deployment of textual conventions emblematic of the theater (e.g., dialogue and scenic description)—an often ignored attribute that, troublingly, has been redacted from these texts in contemporary anthologies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida's challenging of Austin's definitions of performativity is analyzed at length in Chapter One of Janet Lyon's *Manifestos: Provocations of the Modern*.

<sup>10</sup> Moreas's "Symbolist Manifesto" is universally anthologized in English without its second half, an "Interlude" written in the form of a play.

Taking up the challenge posed by these methodological and historical conundrums, this project takes a four-part approach toward reconciling the modern aesthetic manifesto with the historically delimited milieu of its first appearance in *Belle Époque* Paris—the city Walter Benjamin perspicuously dubbed “Capital of the Nineteenth Century.” By narrowing the critical gaze to this particular time and place allows for a more comprehensive study into the genre’s origins, reception, and adaptation to the pretenses of popular culture. Put another way, rather than explore canonical aesthetic manifestos as individual phenomenon, the project interrogates the evolution of the genre at its point of origin. Each of these parts attempts to reappraise the manifesto through a different facet of popular culture, assessing the genre from the standpoint of a different horizon of expectation. Thus, the manifesto’s reciprocal relationships with the theater, the press, cultural memory, and painting, respectively, define the contours of the project. By its conclusion, it aims to intervene in the current body of scholarship to reveal a genre as much engaged with the pretenses of popular culture—and as equally innovative in its generic and stylistic innovations—as the modernist novel and modernist poetry.

The historical scope of the project is, by necessity, narrowly defined, therefore occasioning the unfortunate exclusion of canonical manifestos published after the First World War. These exclusions have not, however, been made in disregard for the impact the War had on shaping the genre, but rather in affirmation of that fact. Indeed, this project illustrates that pre-war aesthetic manifestos are distinct from latter generic exemplars because they were shaped out of a wholly distinct popular milieu that foregrounded quotidian forms of cultural entertainment. Post-war manifestos, by contrast, were constitutive of a coterie aesthetic experience, symptomatic of the proliferation of “little magazines” more than a truly popular phenomenon as exemplified by the publication of the Surrealists’s manifestos as limited edition “objets d’art.”

Rather than a comprehensive study of the genre, this project is an origin of story of, not only the aesthetic manifesto, but also the themes that the genre's successive rebirths after the war would formulate themselves in contrast to.

To that end, chapter one attempts to reconstruct the generic origins of the manifesto by interrogating the particular forms and cultural codes within late nineteenth-century French culture that contributed to the genre's formation, revealing that the aesthetic manifesto was imbued with cultural memory specific to its French origins. In what unfolds as a narrative of cultural actors, events, and formal innovations stretching from the fall of the Paris Commune (1871) to the publication of "Marinetti's Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), I demonstrate how a delinquent society of artists cultivated *blague* as a new *l'esprit Galois*. After a series of demoralizing tragedies including the French defeat at the hands of Prussia and the subsequent bloody suppression of the Commune, comedy offered, in these artists' estimation, the most liberating path toward reclaiming a lost national identity. Highlighted in this narrative will be Coquelin Cadet's invention of *le Monologue Fumiste* as a form of solo, comedic theater that hybridized the external form of the serious with inner content of the ridiculous. As I will argue, this form became a model for the modern aesthetic manifesto both on and off the stage. A reflexive popular innovation in itself, Cadet's *le Monologue* parodied Jean-Martin Charcot's infamous performative lectures at Paris's Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, making it an aesthetic innovation constitutive of the battle against scientific positivism waged between the early avant-garde and naturalism.<sup>11</sup> This chain of cultural contexts, though seemingly tangential to the manifesto genre, were the foundation of the manifesto's horizon of expectation, providing the cultural codes through which audiences and authors subconsciously engaged with these texts.

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<sup>11</sup> Charcot's performances of hysteria and degeneration were of lasting interest to avant-garde artists, in particular the Surrealists who claimed he and patients were the greatest theatrical innovations of the modern era.

In chapter two, I tackle the often-neglected theatricality of the manifesto both theoretically and empirically by interrogating Marinetti and the Futurists' foregrounding of theatrical forms in the dissemination of their manifestos. Aiming to purge the manifesto of textual inertia, the Futurists transformed their texts into theatrical performances, effectively constructing situational aesthetic experiences that expressed the manifesto's energy and turned otherwise staid written words into innervating sensations. These pioneering theatricalizations represented a new modality of reception for both the manifesto and theater alike, cultivating surplus antagonisms and anxieties by exploiting the indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious. Constitutive of this innovation was Marinetti's development of the Futurist *serata*, which turned manifesto performances into popular events predicated on a rich history of theatrical *succès de scandales* that formed the basis of Marinetti's unique aesthetic enculturation—the implications and foundations of which are analyzed at length.

Chapter two also links the manifesto's theatrical expression to the cultural memory of French aesthetics by building on the work of Robert Darnton and Bernadette Fort to show that aesthetic criticism's appropriation of other generic and stylistic forms had its roots in similarly theatrical late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century dissident art criticism. Censored by the official Salons and Academy, critics who, like the Futurists, took an oppositional or otherwise negative opinion of institutionally consecrated art found recourse in the circulation of anonymous pamphlets—effectively going “underground”—or published Salon reviews in the form of satiric verse, farce, parade, vaudevilles, popular songs, burlesque scenes, and fantastic narratives (Fort 372). These appropriations allowed acidic criticism to be displaced from overt value-judgments and, instead, inscribed in generically familiar, comedic signifiers within the reader's cultural register, most often deriving from the popular theater.

Focusing on the theatricalization of the popular press at the turn of the twentieth-century, chapter three foregrounds the complicity of the press in the interpolation of the manifesto taxonomy onto insolent aesthetic criticism. Using F.T. Marinetti and Jean Moréas as exemplars, I show that the transposition of the genre onto aesthetic criticism met with heightened attention within popular culture, leading to Marinetti's cultivation of an "art of the manifesto" which he described, in truly Futurist terms, as "Violence and Precision." Marinetti's embracement and recoding of the genre, however, did not occur in a textual vacuum, but was a reactionary appropriation arising from a reflexive relationship between the press and the Parisian theatrical *revue*, a variety show in which scandalous persons and events appearing in newspapers were satirized onstage. These spectacles gained greater public attention when a reactive, theatrically sensitive press in turn mocked the *revue* in its daily papers. Taking a cue from this feedback loop, the manifesto became a theatrical form in its own right whose goal was to elicit a negative affective response from the audience. This "Pleasure of being booed" (as one of Marinetti's manifestos describes it) sought to capitalize on the press's preoccupation with *succès de scandales*, for which Hugo's *Hernani* and Jarry's *Ubu Roi* served as models. Marinetti's affinity with Jarry's *oeuvre* is of particular import here, as it makes legible the comedic underpinnings of Marinetti's entire Futurist enterprise, giving greater purchase for regarding Futurist antics as comedic performances.

Scandal and comedy aside, the manifesto, as Somigli has argued, became a useful discursive tool through which disparate avant-garde groups could articulate their difference from other "schools." Chapter four, however, complicates this reductive reading by demonstrating that the manifesto's proximity to the pretensions of popular culture introduced limitations to its effectiveness as a serious rhetorical vehicle. By 1912, the proliferation of manifestos delineating

aesthetic schools (new and old) had become so wide-spread and subject to ridicule in the press and onstage that manifesto authors took to creating faux manifestos and announcing sham artistic schools. These parodic manifestos were often indistinguishable from the real thing. Thus, manifestos hailing eccentric aesthetic programs such as Colorithermometrisme and excentrocentroconcepticorationaloorphism became common occurrences that foregrounded the practice of *blague* at the heart of manifesto production.

These hoaxes, however, were culpable in the manifesto's popular decline. Critics and audiences, desensitized to their novelty, received each new manifesto, axiomatically, as an exercise in *blague*, effectively diminishing the anxious anxiety between the serious and non-serious by tipping the receptive scale too far in one direction. The implications of this newfound skepticism were profound, particularly in the visual arts where any alliance between literary texts and visual works was perceived to be the hallmark of a hoax. The chapter concludes with a postmortem analysis of the manifesto genre's popular decline by arguing that the continued success of Marinetti and others was attributable to their Symbolist roots.

At the project's conclusion, I hope to demonstrate the irreducibility of the modern aesthetic manifesto to any stable generic rubric that does not concede to a historically delimited popular context. Moreover, by highlighting the modern aesthetic manifesto's dependency on its theatrical history and its comic underpinnings, my objective is to reinvigorate readings of the genre by providing a body of knowledge that challenges the view that the serious and non-serious are mutually exclusive. Our contemporary readings of modernist such texts as Eliot's *The Wasteland* and Joyce's *Ulysses* have been shaped by rich scholarship in these texts' cannibalizing of forms and traditions, footnoted or supplemented by annotated volumes without which crucial misreadings would occur. My aim is to contribute the same contextualizing

scholarship to what is, in my opinion, one of modernity's most fascinating, engaging, and neglected forms.



## CHAPTER ONE

### **Laughing Revolutions:**

#### **Modern Manifestos and the Culture of *Blague***

The enduring legacy of the Futurist Manifesto was cemented not by the artistic school it founded but by the critical discourse it engendered. The proliferation of aesthetic -isms or *cénacles* distinguished by questions of technique and theory had already been a defining characteristic of the Parisian art-scene since the advent and popularization of Symbolism decades before. Application of the manifesto taxonomy, however, gave these disparate movements a new textual apparatus for distinguishing themselves from one another. The traditional, essayistic form of aesthetic criticism was reinvigorated in the guise of a modern, popularized form befitting the announcement of a new school—a novelty announcing novelty.

The popularity of the manifesto, though fostering public engagement with the arts anew, was not overwhelmingly welcomed by critics, even those who claimed to champion the modern arts. Contemporaries such as Cubism advocate and co-founder of Salle 41, Roger Allard, decried manifesto-mania as a “special vocabulary” “to disguise ignorance” and dismissed it as a “farce” (qtd. in Weiss 60). Such indictments seem peculiarly conservative in light of cultural history’s canonization of manifestos that revolutionized twentieth-century art and made legible the groundbreaking concepts pioneered by the Futurists, Surrealists, Expressionists, Cubists, and Dadaists, to name only a few. But these often cited -isms and their attendant manifestos represent only a small sampling of the thousands of aesthetic manifestos published between 1909 and the 1930s. Vulvism, electromagnetism, subjectivism, impulsism, pluralism, scientism, magnificism, paroxysm, sincerism, intensism, druidism, philopresentism, orphism, synchronism, and Neo-Mallarmism all made their mark, however small, on the artistic scene, representing only a

fraction of the now-forgotten *cénacles* cataloged by critic Florian-Parmentier in *La Littérature et l'époque* (1914). As the names of many of these -isms imply, aesthetic reverence and relevance were eschewed in favor of bewilderment and bemusement. Public mockery and negative criticism, once the perils of aesthetic criticism, became expedient means for capturing the public's attention, a means of making one's mark by negation rather than acclaim.

While scholars such as Milton Cohen and Luca Somigli have asserted that this new mode of publicity-seeking can be explained as either capitulation or adaptation to modern commercial logic, the anonymity, parody, and deliberately engineered obsolescence of the vast majority of these -isms indicate that a goal quite distinct from commercial success was at stake. Indeed, there was not much to be gained commercially by publishing a text anonymously, nor performing it for free in a cabaret as a bit of ephemera. Most often, it was the press and the public, not the author, who gained most from these antics: journalists were supplied with scandal-worthy stories; the public with new diversions. "Art for art's sake," it seems, had given way to "Art for entertainment's sake." Moreover, when artists did realize fame or infamy from this new climate of publicity, it was with the ironic acknowledgment that their notoriety was predicated on a joke. As Wyndham Lewis observed:

The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, and no Politics: so the painter could really become a 'star.'...Anybody could become one who did anything funny. And Vorticism was replete with humour, of course: it was acclaimed the best joke ever. Pictures, I mean oil paintings, were 'news.' Exhibitions were reviewed in column after column. And no illustrated paper worth its salt but carried a photograph of some picture of mine or of my 'school'...or one of myself smiling insinuatingly from its pages. To the photograph

would be attached some scrap of usually misleading gossip; or there would be an article from my pen, explaining why life had to change, and how. (35-36)

Describing the pre-war period of the modern era as devoid of modern modes of diversion (cinema and radio), Lewis underscores the relevance of modern art, not as art in the reverent sense, but as one of the first modern entertainments during a period in which anyone could be famous “who did anything funny.” Lewis’s remarks also illustrate the importance of humor and entertainment in both the reception and creation of modern art, importantly, during a distinct milieu shaped by the popular application of the manifesto genre within the sphere of aesthetics.

If the manifesto was, as Allard claimed, a “special vocabulary,” its vernacular was indeed the cultural history of comic entertainment. As just one salient example, critics were quick to dismiss the Futurist Manifesto as a secret joke. Excoriating Marinetti’s text in Portugal’s leading newspaper, *Jornal de Noticias*, just after the manifesto’s *Le Figaro* publication, the poet Xavier de Carvalho made the perspicuous observation that its appearance coincided with the celebration of Carnival: “It seems to us that the new poetic school, Futurism, is nothing more than a carnival *blague*. It is enough that it has been published in an article by *Le Figaro* on the eve of Fat Sunday” (102). Contemporary responses to the Futurist Manifesto like Carvalho’s affirm the disruptive comingling of the profane and reverent attendant in the manifesto that aligns it with the history of carnivalesque literature, both in terms of the text’s temperament and the timeliness of its publication.

For literary historians and theorists alike, correlations such as these bear a compelling resemblance to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque codified in his seminal work, *Rabelais and His World* (1941). According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque literature subverts prevailing social hierarchies through humor and chaos, temporarily suspending the prohibitions

and restrictions of the dominant order. Indeed, it is a tempting lens through which to assert revolutionary social uprising through purportedly revolutionary aesthetic texts. But Bakhtin's theory also reminds us, in his differentiation between Mardi Gras and Carnival, that there exists a sharp distinction between the generative social effects of the latter and the pure spectacle of the former. Early twentieth-century manifestos and -isms, whether sincere, parodic, irreverent, or mysterious, established a distinct culture of entertainment that did little to overturn social norms. Instead, they served as pure amusement and spectacle for both their readers and their authors. And while there are striking correspondences observable between the artistic milieu of manifesto authors and Rabelais's topsy-turvy world of carnival, these were often deliberate appropriations of a lost past, nostalgically described as "jolly relativity" rather than an attempt to revolutionize society or overturn hierarchies. This chapter assesses those appropriations as fundamental precursors and underlying cultural codes recognizable, explicitly or implicitly, to manifesto authors and their readers. In short, the chapter approaches these texts as objects imbued with an often ignored wealth of cultural memory. Bringing these historically determined cultural codes together will take us from the fall of the Paris Commune to Charcot's scientific séances of hysteria at the Salpêtrière in an attempt to decipher the historical causes for the twentieth century's manifesto-craze and its attendant explosion of -isms. Rather than take recourse in Bakhtin's carnivalesque to argue on behalf of the manifesto's revolutionary aspect, the chapter asserts that the artistic milieu in which these texts were authored constituted what sociologist Jesse R. Pitts has erstwhile described as a "delinquent community."

Originally created as an organizational theory explaining French society, Pitts's concept of "delinquent community" described French group life and peer-group relations as predominately oppositional and spontaneous. These two qualities render those groups incapable

of cohesive, collective action, even though they form in defiance of a prevailing social order. In “Continuity and Change in Bourgeois France” (1963), Pitts employed the metaphor of a primary school classroom to illustrate his concept, alluding to the sense of schoolboy humor and anarchy reminiscent of early twentieth-century manifestos and their authors’ antics: The teacher, keeper of order, discipline, and hierarchy, turns his back to write on a chalkboard. The air behind him becomes a volley of spitballs and chaos until the teacher turns around, and with a disapproving look, restores order. Deceptively simple, Pitts’s analogy reveals the way in which defiance of social order occasions the ephemeral construction of informal peer groups through “entertainment or cheating,” deviating from authorized behavior in a manner amounting to gratification and the “fulfillment of forbidden pleasure” (255).<sup>1</sup> The negative solidarity engendered by this collective activity, though, also prevents any attempt at leadership within the group, limiting the activities of the group to a hodge-podge of self-gratifying, creative acts of insolence. As Pitts summarizes, “They are characterized by jealous equalitarianism among the members...conspiracy of silence against superior authority, incapacity to take any initiative outside of the interpretations and accommodations with the directives of superior authority, in an effort to create for each member a zone of autonomy, of caprice, of creativity” (256). “Delinquent communities,” though realized in what, on the surface, appears to be collective action, result in the compulsory practice of creative autonomy. No participant is allowed to lead. No participant is permitted to succeed.

The implications of and evidence for these proscriptions play out across the most enduring early twentieth century aesthetic movements from Decadentism to Surrealism: Moréas

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<sup>1</sup> John Kim Munholland has likewise applied Pitts’s concept of “delinquent community” to his reading of the unique culture of Montmartre in “Republican Order and Republican Tolerance: Montmartre as a Delinquent Community.” Munholland’s analysis, however, applies the term pejoratively to describe republican views of the district’s transgressive ethos rather than as a sociological descriptor of its denizens.

breaks with the Decadents to champion Symbolism, only to be ejected from the movement; Marinetti's Futurism engenders splinter groups, each decrying the success of their leader as vulgar Marinetti-ism; Tzara is expelled from Dada, which in turn gives way to Surrealism; Surrealism excommunicates its most successful adherents, and others quit the movement until Breton is the proverbial last man standing.

These proscriptions and envies also bear out across inter-delinquent community dynamics, as an enlightening anecdote in Francis Steegmuller's biography of Jean Cocteau makes clear. According to Steegmuller, when Cocteau's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* had its gala preview on June 18, 1921, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, a Salon Dada had already been in progress for a few weeks on the top floor of the theater. On the night of the seventeenth, the evening just prior to the premiere, the theater was also rented to F.T. Marinetti and his Italian Futurist coterie for a "*concert bruitise*." Whether angered over a perceived encroachment by a rival -ism or simply making good on Dada's notoriety as an anarchist movement, Tristan Tzara and his compatriots invaded the Futurists' show and began a demonstration. The management of theater, already annoyed by weeks of Dadaist antics, responded by locking the Dadaists out of their own exhibition. Unable to complain to the authorities lest they, as self-proclaimed anarchists, be perceived as ridiculous or hypocritical, the Dadaists exercised their frustrations over the events by descending upon Cocteau's play the following evening, sitting and standing up at various times in the performance, and shouting, "Vive Dada!" such that critics in the audience were unable to hear well enough to write proper reviews (Steegmuller 273).

On their own, such anecdotes make for a colorful representation of the chaotic milieu of early modern art. Reading the -isms and texts of the manifesto-craze as byproducts of a "delinquent community," though, affords the opportunity to reassess these movements and their

works as symptoms of a particular historical moment in which what constituted entertainment was defined by the performance of deviant, humorous behavior or, more succinctly, deviant individuality. The emphasis placed in this model on autonomy, individuality, or genius, however, should not be confused with the resurgence of any semblance of Romanticism, though such parallels were not altogether lost on members of this delinquent community. For example, Aldo Palazzeschi's often ignored Futurist manifesto, "Il controdolore," takes up the charge of distinguishing Futurism from Romanticism by asserting the primacy and function of comedy in both art and life.<sup>2</sup> For Palazzeschi, laughter is the manifestation of a free spirit, and freedom is the affirmation of individuality. True individuality only exists in one's capacity to create laughter—a philosophy his manifesto raises to the level of a religion (Tamburri 26).

Consequently, Romantic suffering is rendered invalid, parodied as a form of conventional social behavior exemplified by grief, age, and loss, all of which are curable according to twelve points cataloged in the manifesto. "Draw a whole new comedy from a mixture of earthquakes, shipwrecks, fires, etc.," he declares, asserting that disaster can and should be recoded into humorous entertainment. Laugh at a man who falls down, for your own good health; but, he tells us proscriptively, "do not laugh at seeing someone laughing"; that is plagiarism. Instead, laugh when you see someone crying and "create epitaphs based on bickering, puns and double meanings" (Palazzeschi 4). Written during the year he lived in Paris as a Futurist in the company of Apollinaire, Picasso, and Max Jacob, Palazzeschi's manifesto indexes the privileged role comedy played in the network of avant-garde delinquent communities by reimagining laughter,

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<sup>2</sup> Palazzeschi was one of the first literary exponents of Marinetti's Futurism. Marinetti paid for the publication of Palazzeschi's first novel, *Il codice di Perelà* [The Man of Smoke], and served as a mentor to the young writer. He broke with Marinetti in 1911, however, by joining a splinter Futurist group in Italy that disparagingly termed Marinetti's faction "Marinetti-ism."

not as a response to stimuli, but as a replacement for normative social behavior predicated on the juxtaposition of the serious and non-serious.

Though Palazzeschi's Italian-language manifesto never uses the French term *blague*, his Futurist prescriptions for better living through comedy can be read as a nuanced attempt at defining *blague* as well as putting it into practice. As Jeffery Weiss has shown, by the time the Futurist manifesto appeared in *Le Figaro*, *blague* was a working cliché whose meaning subtly evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. Originally a term for the tobacco pouch, *blague* became a vernacular word describing the national spirit of France, particularly in Paris, under the Second Empire. Its direct meaning could imply any type of joke or prank, but chiefly connoted an ironic posture of playful charlatanism. In their novel *Manette Salomon* (1865), the Goncourt brothers took great pains to explain the word's subtle meaning as "the modern version of universal doubt" brought on by a reconciliation with the failures of the Revolutions of 1792 and 1848 to bring about the economic and social reforms those uprisings had pledged. Indeed, the Second Empire, under Napoleon III, had been particularly disappointing for artists. Censorship laws affecting all aspects of artistic production, relaxed under the Second Republic, were re-instituted with Draconian force, consolidating aesthetic authority into the hand of officially sanctioned institutions such as the Salon and the Academy. That Napoleon III had taken power on heels of the 1848 uprisings, in part because of a series of progressive political policies on behalf of the working poor, codified in his "Campaign Manifesto," was further cause for disappointment. It engendered a fervent mistrust at expressions of public virtue, as well as a disdain for the manifesto genre as little more than a document containing promises to future hypocrisy.



The dramatic critic Francisque Sarcey confirms that the spirit of *blague* “sharpened and aggravated” during the Second Empire, ushering in a modern zeitgeist of relativism and irony:

*Blague* is a certain taste which is peculiar to Parisians, and still more to Parisians of our generation, to disparage, to mock, to render ludicrous everything that *hommes*, and above all *prud’hommes*, are in the habit of respecting and caring for; but this raillery is characterized by the fact that he who takes it up does so more in play, for a love of paradox, than in conviction: he mocks himself with his own banter, *il blague*. (qtd. in Weiss 120)

Sarcey’s definition exposes *blague* as a system of critical artifice, disdain joined with the “pleasure of puncturing inflated balloons” (qtd. in Weiss 120). The reforms and reversals of Second Empire edicts undertaken during the Third Republic, though, did little to modify *blague*’s nihilistic tendencies. It deepened them. In 1901, the American Francis Buckley Smith observed that *blague* represented a unique form of Parisian discourse, a playful buoyancy that masked sadness:

The French do not bring their misery with them to the table. To dine is to enjoy oneself to the utmost; in fact, the French people cover their disappointments, sadness, annoyances, great or petty troubles, under the masque of ‘*blague*,’ and have such an innate dislike of sympathy or ridicule that they avoid it by turning everything into ‘*blague*.’ This veneer is misleading, for at heart the French are sad. (qtd. in Weiss 121)

Precisely what so saddened the French, Smith never says. But the distinctions between the *blagueur* philosophy of the Second Empire and that of the Third Republic indicate that a shift had occurred in not only the national spirit which *blague* represented but also the function and uses of comedy.

## I. LAUGHTER MASSACRED: THE PARIS COMMUNE

The nihilistic joke that *blague* came to represent in the Third Republic was itself an exigency of what poet Ernest Raynaud called “the disaster of 1870,” a phrase connoting a tumultuous nine months that saw the capture and exile of Napoleon III, the end of the Second Empire and beginning of the Third Republic, a five-month seize of Paris by the Prussian army, and, finally, the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune. Initially, this series of events was met by cheering crowds, ebullient for the return of a republican government after a generation of imperial rule. Indeed, Republican unity was welcomed as the only way to save France, not just from its political divisions, but from the Prussian armies on the march toward Paris.

When Prussia finally laid siege to Paris on 19 September 1870, the city’s optimistic denizens treated the event in characteristically *blague* manner. Families rode the train around Paris’s walls, laughing at the Prussian cannons, and audaciously held picnics on the ramparts—until newspapers reported that Prussian shells could actually kill them. Citizens also submitted amusing suggestions to the Scientific Committee of National Defense on how to thwart the Prussian blockade which included the construction of a musical *mitrailleuse* (a rapid-fire, multi-barreled gun) that would play the symphonies of Wagner and Schubert to the natural effect of luring in and mowing down Prussian troops with ease. Another suggestion envisioned sending a contingent of Paris’s thousands of prostitutes to visit Prussian soldiers in the night armed with poison needles in order to “exchange pricks.” One proposal even advocated setting free the beasts of the zoo, “so that the enemy would be poisoned, asphyxiated, or devoured” by a menagerie of snakes, bears, and great cats (Merriman 14). The presence of an army on their doorstep seemed less a matter of consequence than an opportunity for amusement.

By October, however, the siege had become more serious for those confined within Paris's walls. The Seine froze. Food was in short supply. People began to die. Edmond de Goncourt's diary reflects the conditions, stating, "People are talking only of what they eat, what they can eat, and what there is to eat...Hunger begins and famine is on the horizon" (qtd. in Merriman 14). Despite such conditions, Parisians continued to meet these tribulations with the spirit of a *blagueur*. Robert Lowery Sibbet, an American physician on holiday in Paris who was trapped by the siege, detailed the "jolly relativism" with which Parisians' confronted these stark conditions in his book, *The Siege of Paris* (1892), much of it describing how the people were forced to seek alternative forms of food. Horse, rat, dog, and cat meats were common at marketplace stalls—and they were not cheap. Still, Sibbet's recollections highlight the humorous perspective Parisians adopted relative to their newfound Epicureanism, particularly when he quotes, at length, a doggerel verse, unattributed, which appeared in the Parisian press. The closing stanza reads:

The rats, in their turn, the last and the best,  
Of the savory dishes were eaten with zest ;  
Ten thousand a day — it was seriously funny —  
The rich ate most of them for they had the money.  
Kind patrons and friends you smile at this food.  
But never 'till hungry can you tell what is good.  
Remember, I pray you, of these kinds of meat,  
We were eating to live not living to eat (439)

The ironic tone of the poem is unmistakable. It depicts the boisterous consumption of rats as “seriously funny,” while pleading for sympathy and absolution, as if to say, “This was hilarious! It was horrible!”

Those fortunate enough to dine in restaurants during the siege, such as the Goncourt brothers, Zola, and Daudet, were often treated to no better fare. To that end, Christmas dinner at Chez Voisin, held at midnight, offered a very different kind of holiday feast. Days before the holiday, Paris’s zoo, *Le Jardin d’Acclimatation*, announced it could no longer feed its animals, and reluctantly offered them for sale as livestock. The zoo’s inventory sold out at once, though no one purchased the monkeys or the hippopotamus. Parisians may have been starving, but eating monkeys seemed cannibalistic, and there was much debate over whether a hippopotamus was even edible. A menagerie of other beasts, however, made their way onto Voisin’s festive and sophisticatedly composed menu (see fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

Though elegantly type-faced, the menu features no direct indication of the Christmas holiday that occasioned it other than its respective date. Rather, emblazoned on the line typically declaring the festive occasion, the words “99<sup>th</sup> DAY OF THE SIEGE” appears, indicating this was not simply a holiday celebration but an act of culinary defiance wrapped in traditionalist grace. Indeed, the text of the menu features all the trappings emblematic of *haute* French gastronomy. Each course is described and delineated by its method of preparation or its complementary ingredients. Too, the wine selection features exemplary vintages, boasting a forty-year-old port and a thirty-year-old Rothschild. Closer inspection of the bill of fare, however, reveals a confluence of comedy and horror: the *hors-d’oeuvre* course consists of “stuffed donkey head” with butter, radishes, and sardines; the soup offering is “elephant broth”;

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<sup>3</sup> More on Voisin’s legacy and its indebtedness to the 1870 Christmas feast can be found in John Baxter’s *Eating Eternity: Food, Art and Literature in France* (2017).

starters include “kangaroo stew” and “side of bear.” Both cryptic and telling, in place of the main course, the title “Rots” appears without a circumflex over the “o,” creating a subtle, ludic play on the French homographs for the English equivalents of ration, rat, and burp. Though distinct, these three possible meanings together adequately summarize the dishes that follow the heading, indicating what the dishes are (rations), their abhorrent origins (rats), and the patron’s possible reaction (burp or vomit). Despite its play on words, though, the main course offering was entirely serious. “Casserole of Wolf,” “Kangaroo stew,” “Antelope Terrine,” and “Cat flanked by Rat” were each served in the regimented manner expected of a refined French restaurant such as Voisin’s, providing a sense of continuity, order, and tradition to its customers while giving them occasion to laugh off the barbarianism the siege had reduced them to. It also gave them occasion to recast that barbarianism into highly prized exoticism. Indeed, on New Year’s Eve, while the siege was still in full swing, Edmond de Goncourt’s diary describes entreating himself at Voisin’s to the restaurant’s now “famous elephant consommé” leftover from the Christmas feast. Defiance, properly aestheticized, had turned savagery into refinement.

Chez Voisin’s Christmas menu would become one of Paris’s most durable legends of the siege. In it, the limitlessness of *blague* and its place as a coping mechanism in the French cultural spirit stands in full relief. As a textual object, though, it bears noting that the menu and the aesthetic manifesto share conspicuous generic homologies. Both announce a particularized offering, in effect, advertising a programmatic set of ideas intended to set its originator apart from others in his or her field. More importantly, these offerings visually unfold in a paratactic composition intended to elicit a visceral response in the reader. These similarities were not lost on the Futurists whose primary literary exponent was manifestos. Indeed the movement placed these homologies on full display in Marinetti’s *La Cucina Futurista* (1932), a collection of

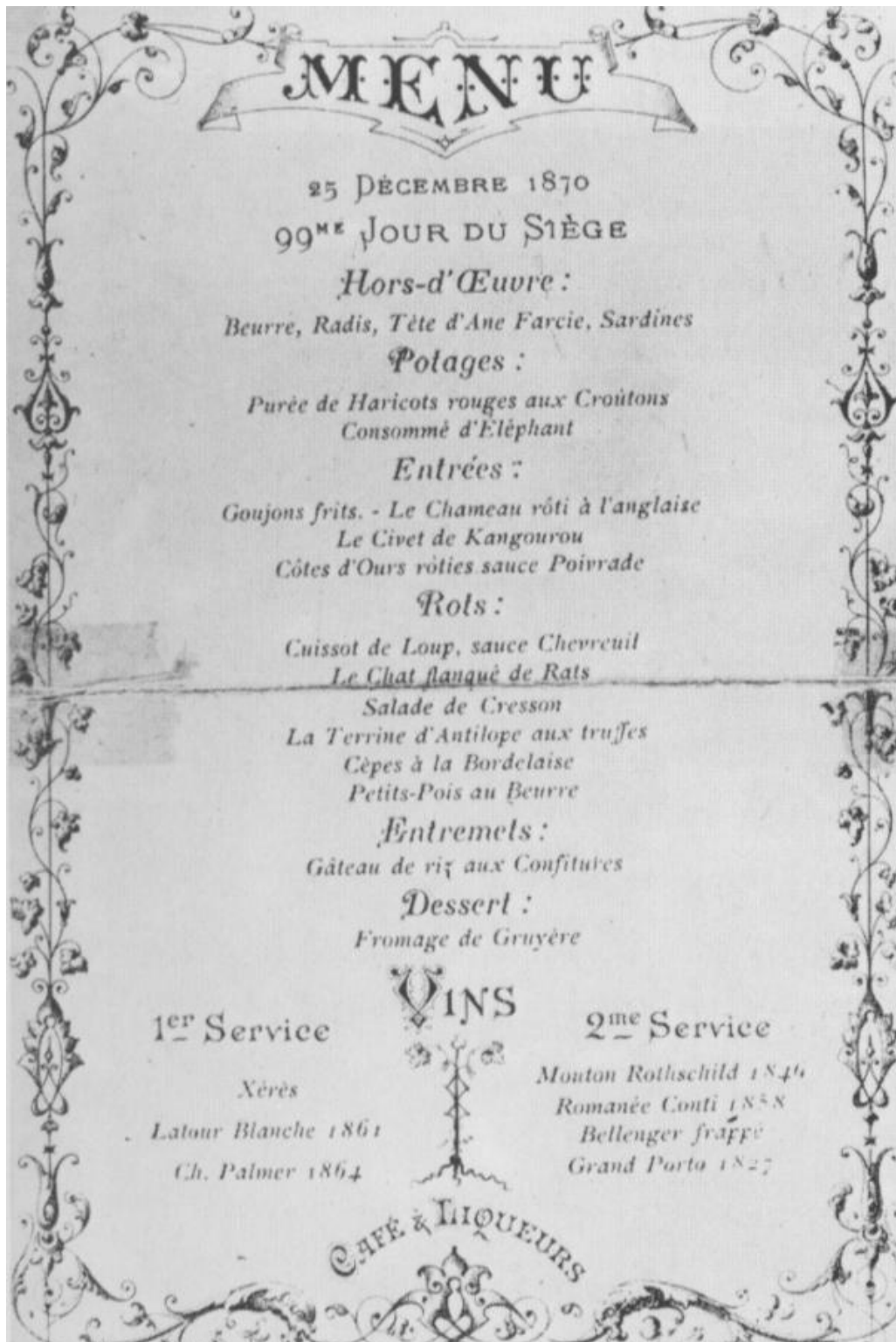


Fig. 1. Alexandre Étienne Choron, Christmas menu for Café Voisin (1870).

Futurist recipes, menus, and essays ostensibly intended to revitalize Italian cuisine by divorcing it from its nostalgic obsession with “*pastasciutta*.”

In a gesture reminiscent of Voisin’s dinner, Marinetti introduced Futurist cooking and the menu/manifesto to the world at a banquet on 15 November 1930 at Penna d’Oca in Milan, declaring, “*Pastasciutta*, however grateful to the palate, is an obsolete food; it is heavy, brutalizing, and gross; its nutritive qualities are deceptive; it induces skepticism, sloth, and pessimism” (*Cookbook* 54). In short, Italy’s social ills, according to Marinetti, were the result of pasta. It was an outrageous claim, but it struck a nerve. The following morning, Marinetti’s banquet was transformed into a press spectacle: a letter of protest from the housewives of L’Aquila was published in support of spaghetti, and the mayor of Naples penned a rebuttal stating that “the angels in Paradise eat nothing but *vermicelli al Pomodoro*” (*Cookbook* 18). In predictably Futurist fashion, coverage of the banquet was accompanied by a manifesto, “The Manifesto of Futurist Cooking” (1930), which outlined the requirements for “the perfect meal”: the “abolition of speech-making and politics” from the table; an interdiction against forks and knives; the use of perfume, color, and form to achieve synesthesia; and the employment of scientific instrument (“ozonizers,” “electrolyzers,” and “centrifugal autoclaves”) to extract from a known ingredient “a new product with new properties” (32). Though Marinetti’s propositions appear, on the surface, entirely sincere, the resultant dishes he imagined were bizarre and humorous, indicative of the spirit of *blague* that undergirded the entire Futurist project. Dishes such as “aerofood,” “immoral trout,” and “zoological soup” were each described along typical Futurist themes such as speed, scientific positivism, iconoclasm, and airplanes. The resemblance to this last dish (zoological soup) and Voisin’s “famous elephant consommé” notwithstanding, it is important to note that the *Futurist Cookbook* and the “99<sup>th</sup> DAY OF THE SIEGE” were both

born out of a moment of negative solidarity engendered by an act of collective iconoclasm, whether against tradition or in defiant support of tradition, surrounding a cultural event as seemingly quotidian as a meal. More importantly, public reception of both these events met with reactions colored by an anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious, drawing attention to the modern aesthetic manifesto's alliance, both formally and culturally, with *blague* as critical artifice, disdain joined with—to quote Sarcey again—the “pleasure of puncturing inflated balloons.”

Unlike Marinetti's short-lived crusade against *pastasciutta*, the Prussian siege that engendered Voisin's banquet would last for another month. At its conclusion, Parisians had much to celebrate. Rats came off the menu, and a third, modern French Republic was declared. Authoritarian censorship laws enacted under the Napoleon III were summarily abolished, and those found guilty of press offenses under the previous regime were amnestied. France, the provisional government claimed, would once again be a liberal democracy. Not everyone, though, was convinced those reforms would hold. Promises had been made before; promises had been broken. As such, during the first month of siege, whispers of “commune” had already been circulating in the cafés and streets of Paris. Working class displacement from the city's center to peripheral arrondissements such as Montmartre and Belleville brought on by a decade of Haussmannization had given class distinctions in the city topographical legibility. Distrust and resentment were further heightened by Paris's peculiar statutory means of representation and participation in the government. Despite being the capital of France, Paris had been denied a freely elected mayorship, giving it less democratic autonomy than much smaller and less affluent French cities where mayoral elections were allowed to proceed. Instead, the administration of Paris was determined by appointment in Versailles, effectively handing over the daily lives of



the city's denizens to the whims of political patronage. When the newly elected government installed themselves at Versailles rather than Paris, these grievances became a powder keg—and, more importantly, a power vacuum.

Tensions in the capital escalated quickly and became palpable. An exodus of wealthy denizens from the capital to Versailles, either escaping what had become an impending conflict in the city or seeking to grow their capital interests by moving closer to the seat of government, further complicated matters as money poured out of Paris. In the first month following the armistice, Versailles's population exploded from twenty-thousand to over two-hundred thousand, crippling its infrastructure and putting additional strain on the nascent government. Paris had become poorer than before the siege, but wealthy Versailles was in no better state, crippled as it was by an untenable population explosion. The Parisian press, which had spent the greater part of the siege castigating the former regime, turned its ire on the new government, laying at its feet the sorry state of the nation and accusing it of cowardice and capitulation to Prussia both in the war and the subsequent armistice.

The appearance of a caricature on 11 March in the journal *La Caricature Politique*, though, proved a tipping point and made clear the backlash the new government faced (see fig. 2). In it, Marianne, the symbolic embodiment of France, is draped in a cloth of Republican red. Her left arm shields her eyes as her right arm is sawn off by grotesque government henchmen, her blood spilling into a Prussian helmet at the dawn of the "*Republique Sociale*."<sup>4</sup> A biting critique of the new government's ceding of Alsace-Lorraine in the Prussian armistice as well as

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<sup>4</sup> The caricature's author, Georges Pilotell, would later become special commissar of the Commune and director of its School of Beaux-Arts. After the Commune's fall, he declared himself an avowed anarchist and called his fellow Communards "narrow-minded sectarians with base desires, the mediocre ambitious men ready to content themselves with a bone thrown to them to nibble on: leaders, politicians, traitors" (Abidor 100). For him, the lesson of the Commune was that the only path to freedom was anarchy.

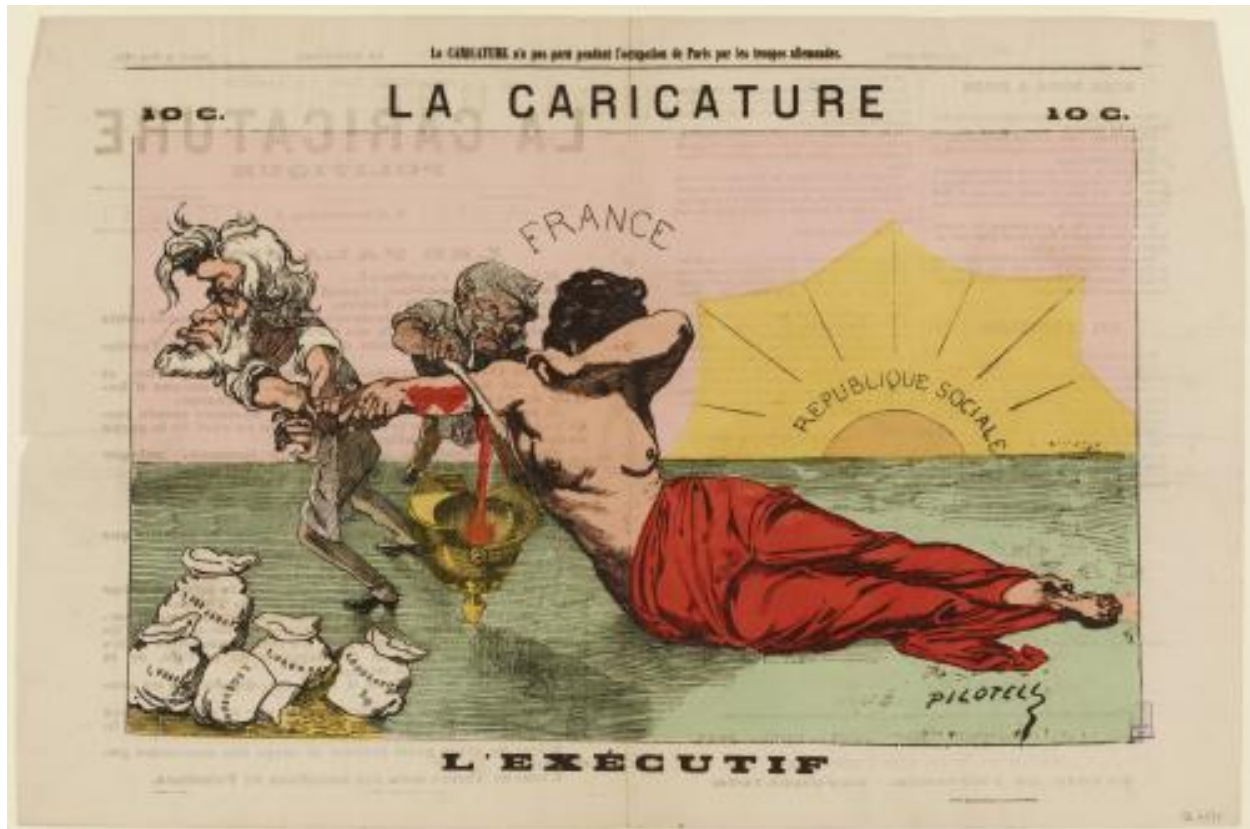


Fig. 2. “*L’Executif*.” Pilotell (Georges Labadie). *La Caricature Politique*, March 11, 1871 the broken promise of a new age of Republicanism, the caricature’s printing resulted in the suppression of *La Caricature* and five other journals by the decree of General Vinoy, the military governor of Paris who had been installed by Versailles under the siege but conveniently not recalled after the conflict’s end. Denouncing such journals as seditious, Vinoy’s decree announced that “the publication of all journals and written periodicals treating matters dealing with politics or social economy is forbidden” (qtd. in Goldstein 199). The Third Republic, it seemed, was duplicating the Second Empire’s tyranny all over again.

A week after censorship was once again declared in Paris, government forces attempted to secure cannons leftover from the Prussian siege in the radical, working-class arrondissements of Montmartre and Belleville. Though successful at Belleville, the government’s excursion into Montmartre was met with resistance from crowds of residents and citizen-conscripts to the city’s

National Guard who refused to capitulate to threats of force. After being ordered to open fire on the crowd, many of the soldiers broke rank with the army and joined the citizens. The remaining troops, facing an overwhelming throng of bodies and lacking reinforcements, were disarmed and taken prisoner. By that evening, the Commune of Paris was officially declared.

Proclaiming its aspirations in the form of a manifesto, “The Manifesto of the Paris Commune,” the elected Central Committee described its mode of governance as one of political unity, which it succinctly defined as “voluntary association of all local initiatives, the spontaneous and free concourse of all individual energies in view of a common goal: the well-being, the freedom and the security of all” (“Declaration”). It further declared the rights of its citizens in terms starkly contrarian to the age of censorship experienced under the Second Empire, by ensuring the following:

The absolute guarantee of individual freedom and freedom of conscience. The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas, the free defense of their interests, with guarantees given for these manifestations by the Commune, which alone is charged with overseeing and assuring the free and fair exercise of the right to gather and publicize. (“Declaration”)

Like Napoleon III’s “Campaign Manifesto” before it, though, the Commune’s declared emancipatory principles were swiftly abandoned in favor of authoritarian rule when sweeping and unilateral powers of censorship, arrest, and execution were granted to a newly formed Committee for Public Safety. In response, dissenting Commune representatives issued their own manifesto to the press on 16 May 1871, declaring that “by a special and clear vote, the Paris Commune has abdicated its power into the hands of a dictatorship to which it has given the name of Public Safety” (Abidor 27). Incensed by the public dissemination of a “minority opinion,” the

Commune's Central Committee, in turn, convened the following day to take up the subject of the dissenters' manifesto. The meeting, transcribed and published in the newspaper *Journal Officiel* in a form that reads like a theatrical script, illustrates the committee's internecine fighting and excessive parliamentarianism, but also the raucous energy against which the voices of dissent were subsumed under motions to unseat the manifesto's signatories, calls to force them to renounce its contents, tangential votes on education policy, and unanswered questions about committee voting procedures. Though none of those motions were taken up, the meeting concluded with the redoubling of the Committee for Public Safety's authority, the creation of special secret committees, and the voluntary withdrawal of numerous signatures from the dissenting manifesto. For perhaps the first time, the written word, codified in an allegedly muscular genre like the manifesto, proved impotent against the affective, innervating tumult of a political meeting—every bit of it published for posterity in the Parisian press in the convention of dramaturgy.

As the meeting and its precursory manifestos show, the utopian aspirations of the Commune were quickly eclipsed by its inability to fulfill its stated aspirations. Commenters writing during and after the Commune's six-week existence overwhelmingly attributed these failures to the fact that it had been disproportionately steered from the beginning by radical factions rooted in the questionable activities and socially transgressive milieu of café life—a delinquent community that had risen to a position of governance. One such observer, philosopher Elme-Marie Caro, remarked that the Commune differed from prior revolutions in that it consisted of “a crowd of names belonging originally to the civilized world, to letters, sciences, and the schools”—a sentiment shared by Leconte de Lisle who called the Commune a “league of all the *déclassés*, the incapable, the envious...bad poets, bad painters, journalists *manqués*,

novelists from the lower depths.” (qtd. in Siegel 182). In his estimation, the Commune was overrun with individualist artists whose temperaments and goals were ill-suited to politics. These artists, characterized by their envy of others’ success, had transplanted their moral disorder and indiscipline into the world of politics, nurturing and exploiting “lower-class hatreds.” Caro’s arguments were later echoed by Jules Forni, who likewise concluded that, in the hands of these Communard artists (“the great men of cheap bars”), “the workers will once again become the sacrificial victims of the Bohemian” (qtd. in Siegel 184).

Furtherance of the arts and their emancipation from government regulation were, undoubtedly, one of the most essential and under-acknowledged guiding principles of the Commune. Indeed, the enormous influence of the artistic community on the Commune is made evident in a number of confluences that permeate the Commune’s short reign. For example, concomitant with the declaration of the Commune on 18 March, the painter Gustave Courbet announced a convocation of artists to demand artistic freedom from constraints imposed by the state. Its first meeting, held on 7 April, was attended by four hundred artists who elected a committee of forty-seven members across disciplines and conferred its presidency on Courbet. The new Federation’s organization and mandate were codified in “The Manifesto of the Federation of Paris Artists” (1871), a manifesto that visually represents the paratactic precision of the genre, but is primarily concerned with the establishment of a new bureaucratic institution. It is, in short, more closely aligned with a constitutional document. Its preamble, however, unequivocally declares the group’s guiding principle as “the free expansion of art, free from all governmental supervision and from all privileges.” To accomplish this goal, the federation took responsibility for the protection and creation of museums, galleries, exhibitions, libraries, and monuments, but asserted that the newly installed Commune should pay for the training of gifted

artists. The federation's legitimacy as a Communal institution was ensured nine days later when Courbet was elected as mayor of the sixth arrondissement in the Commune's by-elections convened to replace previously elected members who had not professed unreserved allegiance to the Commune's mandate or had resigned in protest of its growing authoritarianism.

Given that the sixth arrondissement included the prestigious left bank educational and artistic institutions such as the *École des Beaux-Arts de Paris* and the *Académie française*, the Commune appointed Courbet to the Commission on Education and issued him the title Delegate of Fine Arts.<sup>5</sup> The federation, now a full-fledged arm of the Commune, quickly abolished the Academy of Beaux-Arts, considered a purveyor of "official" taste. It also fired directors of the Louvre it believed sympathetic to the Versailles government and mandated that all employees sign a document pledging allegiance to the Commune.

Although its ostensible mission was to ensure that artists alone would administer the arts, the federation and the Commune's alliance complicated the very notions of artistic freedom it portended to champion. Nowhere was this more evident than in the theater and the press, which were censored by the Commune as severely as under previous regimes. Just as General Vinoy had censored journals the week before the Commune's declaration, the Commune's Central Committee banned *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois* in its first actions. At least thirty-seven additional newspapers were closed by the Commune in subsequent weeks, often by force. The theater, for its part, fared no better. Subsidies to the theaters were summarily abolished, though they were ensured for other branches of the arts, indicating that the Commune viewed the theater as a

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<sup>5</sup> After the fall of the Commune, Courbet stood trial in a military tribunal for his role in its leadership. In his defense, he argued that his participation was predicated on protecting the arts from the insurrection rather than allegiance to the Commune's principles. His lawyer argued, "you could not do anything without being a member of the Commune. That is why Courbet told himself, pulled as he was by the need to protect our artistic riches, 'Because you have to be a member of the Commune to protect our museums, I'll be a member of the Commune'" (qtd. in Sanchez 110). The argument saved Courbet from execution, but he was still sentenced to two years imprisonment and fined five-hundred francs.

subversive form just as the Second Empire had before it. Suddenly, theaters in the most theatrical city in the world could scarcely sell a ticket, often not generating enough income to cover expenses. As John Merriman details, when Catulle Mendès attended a performance at the Folies-Bergères during the Commune's first week, the theater was nearly empty. Actors raced through their lines, seeming bored and, in turn, bored the audience. Boulevard cafes that depended on theater crowds closed (120). Ironically, the theatrical culture that had flourished under Second Empire censors collapsed under the auspices of the allegedly artistically emancipated Commune.

British author and illustrator John Leighton, moored in Paris during the Commune, attested to the effects and underlying cause of the Commune's destructive impact on the dramatic arts by noting that the theater and those that bothered to attend it shared a reciprocal malaise:

Some few persons go to the theatres; the playbills, however, are not seductive. If you go in, you will find the house nearly empty; the actors gabble their parts with as little action as possible. You see they are bored, and they bore us. Sometimes when some actor, naturally comic, says or does something funny, the audience laughs, and then suddenly leaves off and looks more serious than before. Laughter seems out of place. One does not know how to bear it; so one walks up and down the corridors, then instead of returning to the play, wanders out again on to the Boulevard. (127)

Leighton's description of the theater under the Commune is rife with ennui. The escapism and excitement typically offered by a night at the theater are effaced by an omniscient seriousness as if entertainment or joy is an unbearable vice. His experience of theater, where comedy ends in awkward silence, where laughter is now "out of place," is, however, symptomatic of a deeper and more tragic loss that Leighton explains in his most biting criticism of the Commune:

That, Commune de Paris, is what you have made of Paris! The Prussians came, Paris awaited them quietly with a smile; the shells fell on its houses, it ate black bread, it waited hours in the cold to obtain an ounce of horse-flesh or thirty pounds of green wood; it fought, but was vanquished; it was told to surrender, and "it was given up," as they say at the Hôtel de Ville; and yet through all, Paris had not ceased to smile. And this, they say, constitutes its greatness; it was the last protestation against unmerited misfortunes; it was the remembrance of having once been proud and happy, and the hope of becoming so again; it was, in a word, Paris declaring it was Paris still. Well, what neither defeats, nor famine, nor capitulation could do, thou hast done! And accursed be thou, O Commune; for, as Macbeth murdered sleep, thou hast murdered our smiles! (127)

According to Leighton, the Commune had murdered the Parisian spirit of laughter, smiles, and *blague* that had marshaled its citizenry through the famine and fear, that had engendered Voisin's menu and allowed doggerel verse to serve as an acceptable commentary on the siege. Paris could no longer smile "proud and happy" or declare that "it was Paris still" because, circularly, Paris could no longer smile. The underlying argument in Leighton's observation is that laughter and comedy are an inseparable component of the Parisian cultural identity. Without it, Parisians do not know who they are.

The role that artists played in the Commune makes Leighton's observation altogether more tragic. Their desire, however admirable, to place control of the arts in the hands of artists resulted in the very conditions they were attempting to ameliorate: the bureaucratization of aesthetic taste, draconian censorship, the use of art as government propaganda, and worse, the death of laughter. Indeed, the Commune and its conceits, at least metaphorically, echo Plato's warning that the Poet is best left outside the Republic's gates. When Versailles troops finally



suppressed the Commune after a week of gunfire, shelling, and executions, nearly twenty-five thousand Parisians had been killed. If the Commune killed laughter, its bloody conclusion ensured that if laughter returned to Paris, it would be forever altered. One of Leighton's most tragic and telling anecdotes of the Commune, just before its fall, affectively sums up the sense of cultural loss it had wrought. In it, a crowd of people "collects 'round a little barefooted girl, who is singing on the corner of a street" (79). Though simple, the imagery is ambivalent in its pathos, invoking both a sense of loss and inspiration. More importantly, it hints that the Parisian spirit, when revived, would find its footing in comradeship and performance. Missing in the anecdote, however, is the fact that when Paris laughed again, it would be the impudent, mystifying, mad laughter of a *fumiste*.

## II. THE NEW LAUGHTER: PERFORMING SCIENCE, PRACTICING FUMISTERIE

Though historicized as a brave, if horribly faulted, attempt to construct a socialist state, the Commune's cultural origins run deeper than mere questions of political economy. Indeed, within the "Manifesto of the Paris Commune," its Central Committee authors describe the Versailles government as criminals and derive the revolution's legitimacy from scientific positivism: "The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, begins a new era of experimental, positive, scientific politics" ("Manifesto" 1). The fusion of these two concepts—criminality as social ill and science as its cure—had decidedly aesthetic as well as discursive cultural origins. But just as the Commune juxtaposed these two concepts to argue for its own legitimacy, post-Commune France deployed the same concepts to diagnose the Commune's failure.

In the decades prior to the Commune, print culture had grown fascinated with the criminal underworld of Paris with sensationalist writers like Eugene Sue fetishizing, romanticizing, and

reviling the “criminal mysteries of Paris” and “multiplying representations of the ‘dangerous classes’ in literature” (Pick 21). Popular culture, however, was not alone in its fetishization of criminality. The evolving discipline of nineteenth-century human sciences, at first dedicated to solving mysterious bodily and mental disorders such as cretinism, began to expand their scope during this time to the exploration of social disorders. As Daniel Pick has shown, this expansion was tightly bound to the pathologizing language of “*dégénérescence*,” an indeterminate word that, by virtue of its plasticity, was increasingly seen by medical professionals as a self-reproducing force, the cause of crime and disease, and a biological answer for the question of degeneracy and disharmony in society.

In the wake of France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the divisive suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, the language of *dégénérescence* brought about a sweeping re-historicization of the Revolution of 1789 such that French history was effectively rewritten and “the problems of history were displaced into the problem of inheritance” (Pick 59). For example, the historian Hippolyte Taine adopted *dégénérescence* to reflexively explain 1870 and 1871 as genealogical inheritances of a 1789 Revolution that had itself been the outcome of the psychological effect of the visual and linguistic pathology of revolution. In short, Taine re-codified revolution as a genetic disorder. More ominously, the influential French psychiatrist Benedict Morel gained widespread acceptance of his theory that political engagement caused lesions on the brain—lesions that could, he warned, be passed down to subsequent generations and irreversibly destroy the nation. Indeed, History had become morbid. Reinforcing this emphasis on heredity in the popular imagination, the press began running sensationalized articles warning of a decline in birth rates that, according to reports, threatened the strength of the nation’s military and presaged a future defeat even more demoralizing than the one experienced

in the Franco-Prussian conflict. Impotence and sterility were posited as degenerative diseases, the unwelcomed inheritances of political conflict and the “shock” of modernity.

The idea of *dégénérescence*, however, was not limited solely to the sphere of science. Naturalism, Realism, and Decadence, the first literary “schools” of modernism, were born out of these very discursive anxieties. What is most interesting about these literary movements, however, is not their adoption of this scientific discourse, but scientific discourse’s reaction to this adoption. Medical minds such as Max Nordau in Germany and Toulouse in France published prolix studies of these schools’ authors, arguing that their obsession with *dégénérescence* and heredity were themselves evidence of degeneracy. Toulouse’s study of Zola emphasized the author’s cranial features and determined that Zola’s scientific fetishism was a result of heredity (Pick 77). For Nordau’s part, pathological literature was a symptom of a modern crisis, a “mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria” (40). In keeping with this analysis, Nordau claimed Zola’s degeneracy was evinced by a “perversion of the olfactory sense which makes the worst odours, especially those of all human excretions appear to him particularly agreeable and sensually stimulating” (502).

It is worth noting that in both Nordau and Toulouse’s examinations of Zola, the author’s obsession with degeneracy is deemed pathological, but their own preoccupation is exempted. Like the bourgeois-bohemian dichotomy, *dégénérescence* was an exercise in classifying and explaining imagined and real social differences born out of the revolutionary conflicts of the nineteenth-century, an attempt to identify and delimit the quintessential “other” that threatened the realization of a unified French nation and a cohesive, harmonious, natural social order. Unlike previous discursive structures exemplified by sensationalist mysteries and crime stories, promoters of *dégénérescence* did not rely upon popular narrative forms but attacked them,

effectively creating a new, melodramatic narrative of the body in which an ominous villain lay hidden within the human subject across generations.

Just as France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the fall of the Paris Commune created the fertile ground out of which theories of *dégénérescence* grew, so too did it engender, within the arts, a new, comic universalism. In 1873, the great hit of the Paris Salon (the official salon of newly reconstituted Académie des Beaux-Arts) was Édouard Manet's painting, *Le Bon Bock* (The Good Pint) (See fig. 3). As Phillip Dennis Cate has pointed out, the painting was received equally well by conservative and leftist critics alike, perhaps for its seemingly apolitical subject which depicted both serenity and *joie de vivre* in the wake of national crises (2). The model for Manet's portrait was Emile Bellot, a printmaker and frequent patron of Montmartre social cafés. In 1875, Bellot organized a luncheon to commemorate the painting (and perhaps himself as model), during which Etienne Carjat recited an original poem written in its honor. The poem's first stanza captures the serenity of the painting's subject and indicates both an imagined and desired fraternity with its figure: "It's him indeed, the merriest of my old comrades, / A combat drinker, swigger of brimming glasses, / Big bodied companion whose huge palate / Was able to hold booze like the late Rabelais" (qtd. in Cate 3). Carjat's comparison of this "comrade" to Rabelais was the poem's most important gesture. It linked a desire for tranquility in the present to a boisterous comedic figure in the sixteenth-century, a time before the Revolution, the Commune, and the Prussian defeat. Rather than evoking this past to invoke a feeling of nostalgia, however, the poem concludes firmly in the present, positing an original Gallic spirit in the mode of Rabelais that would heal the wounds of disillusionment: "He saw the Commune and its somber battles, / For the past three years he has been reading the / sermons of Versailles, / And everyday, fall, winter, spring, summer, / He drinks, eats, and digests serenely!" (qtd. in Cate, 3).

For over forty years, Bon Bock dinners continued to be held monthly. They were attended by early, pre-Futurist avant-gardists who went on to found groups such as the Incoherents and the Hydropaths. Moreover, the Bon Bock coterie documented their monthly events by publishing a Bon Bock *livre d'or* comprised of poems, music, drawing, and jokes authored by its members—a practice that would be duplicated by future avant-gardist groups. The publication's preface articulated a universalist mandate for the arts that, again, envisioned Rabelaisian wit as the soul of the French people:



Fig. 3. Édouard Manet, *Le Bon Bock*.

Literature and the Fine Arts, Music and Poetry, hand in hand, forming a magnificent crown at our meetings. No arguments, no jealousies, no animosities. All equal, all united, we assemble around that Republican banner that bears as its device: FRATERNITY! So I can say without arrogance that if Gaiety and Intelligence and Congeniality were banished from the rest of the earth, they would be found at the Bon Bock. Wherefore, beloved

brothers, I pray our immortal grand master, Rabelais, to maintain you in good bodily health and joyous frame of mind. (qtd. in Cate 4)

The preface's insistence upon fraternity and the absence of "arguments" and "animosities" resonates with pre-revolutionary notions of community. And while class harmonies are not explicitly envisioned in the preface, they are not dismissed either. National cohesion is to be found in Republicanism and Rabelaisian wit; the latter standing as a remedy to notions of *dégénérescence* that will "maintain you in good bodily health and joyous frame of mind."

Though the preface's "bodily health" appears, on the surface, to be axiomatic, its appeal to Rabelais, the "grand master," alters the term's meaning. As Mikhail Bakhtin has shown in his study of Rabelais's works, the Rabelaisian body is grotesque. It is comprised not of mere human form but of mouth, nostril, anus, and genitals. In Bakhtin's words, "all these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome" (317). As the preface illustrates, the early avant-garde turned to the Rabelaisian body in order to reject the closed logical systems of biological science and the polity to assert a new universal promise grounded in the body's fecundity. Such ideas share Bakhtin's notion of renewal, which he describes by stating, "Eating, drinking, defecation, and other elimination, as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body" (316).

While these early avant-gardist works are replete with grotesque imagery, perhaps the most infamous revolve around depictions and invocations of the word "shit." Indeed, one could assert that the early avant-garde is defined by or at least bookended on one side by the riotous opening night of Hugo's 1830 melodrama, *Hernani*, during which bohemians and bourgeoisie

heckled and jeered one another, and the riot that ensued after the first spoken word of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in 1896, "shit." Jarry's iconoclastic use of the word in the well-mannered context of the theater, though, was not the first. It was preceded by usages as wide-ranging as Jehan Rictus's performative poem "Soliloques du pauvre," the anonymous contribution to the Quat'z Arts' "wall publication" *Merde, v'là l'I vert*, and Henry Somm's shadow-puppet-plays *Le Berline de l'emigre* and *L'Elephant* (the latter was a short skit that featured a shadow-puppet elephant defecating and was performed in Paris over four thousand times) (Cate 57). "Shit," both as an early avant-gardist textual manifestation and an adjective to describe their works was so pervasive that a physiology published in 1886 depicted Jules Levy, the leader of the Incoherents, painting a picture using a chamber-pot as a palette.<sup>6</sup> For proponents of *dégénérescence* and social morality, those to whom, lacking a proper Rabelaisian wit, human excretions did not "appear particularly agreeable and sensually stimulating," these bawdy, flagrant breaches in decorum were either proof of school-boy aesthetics or evidence of a degenerate mind. But for artists harboring a nihilistic worldview brought about by successive social and political disappointments exemplified by the Commune and its bloody end, these attributions were not critiques, they were the point.

In the years between 1871 and 1878, censorship had been particularly severe. Café-concerts were especially affected. All political allusions were strictly forbidden by law, including programs that expressed sympathy for trade unions or the poor. In 1876 alone, ten percent of these establishments were shuttered for presenting unauthorized programs or performances that ran afoul of political proscriptions (Goldstein, *The Frightful Stage* 105). Those establishments

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<sup>6</sup> Popular pamphlets known as "physiologies" were all the rage in nineteenth-century Paris, with circulation numbers rivaling many of the city's newspapers. They contained biting, humorous descriptions and caricatures of Parisian social types and cultural practices. An exponent of realism's fascination with heterogonous social typologies, the physiology was directly responsible for the cultivation and popularization of the figure of the *flâneur*.

that survived government enforcement of censorship, many of which had been hotbeds of pre-Commune radicalism, responded by hiding their controversial subject matter in allusions, wordplay, and parody often incoherent to outsiders of the café's official social group. Curiously, these subversive practices had the effect of enhancing public interest in their performances, primarily because their methods relied upon bawdy comedic stratagems that successfully outmoded the traditional, staid comedic fare on offer at the official theaters. It was in this ironic mix of censorship, commerce, and comedy that the modern cabaret and its aesthetic exponent, *fumisme*, was born.

The figure most directly responsible for the creation of the cabaret and *fumisme* was, unmistakably, Emile Goudeau. Originally conceived as a way to introduce aspiring artists to consumers, Goudeau founded the Hydropathes cabaret and theater in 1878, around which the Society of Hydropathes formally coalesced.<sup>7</sup> The group's unique mode of presentation was a perplexing blend of formality and chaos. Meetings were presided over by Goudeau himself, acting as president, installed behind a large desk in full view to the cabaret's audience. When the hall was sufficiently full, pages went row to row collecting the names of volunteers who wished to perform. The president and vice-president, as the audience watched on, then constructed the evening's program from the list of entrants, as Goudeau later recalled, so that "music and verse, happy numbers with sad ones" would be harmonized into a pleasing artistic pattern (185). When the president's gavel was heard, the audience would go silent and "there emerged one after another poets, monologists, actors or singers, pianists and violists" who delivered their

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<sup>7</sup> The true origin of Goudeau's choice of the name "Hydropathes" is as confounding as the name itself—often giving way to a duplicity of meaning. According to Mary Gluck and Jerrold Siegel, it is a parodic reformulation of the title belonging to a popular waltz; contemporaries saw it as a nod to the legendary, early nineteenth-century café group, the Water Drinkers. Equally as relevant is the assertion made by Rae Beth Gordon that the name is linked to a hydrotherapy treatment used to treat hysteria. Taken together, however, these origins sum up the group's purpose and identity more succinctly than any one individually: café culture, revelry, and madness.



performances in an unconventionally unpolished or formal manner (Goudeau 185). As Jules Levy described them, “they were without emphasis, without attempts at quackery, and with a naïve candor full of charm” (9). The effect was, Levy concluded, “the peculiar savor of the author producing himself in public through the expression of his thought” (9). The Hydropathes’ unusual blend of committee-like officiation and quasi-spontaneous performance proved wildly popular. Goudeau’s cabaret was forced to expand three times in as many years to accommodate its growing audience, which at times became rowdy, necessitating the ejection of unruly participants. Indeed, they prefigured F.T. Marinetti’s tumultuous *serata* in both form and function so closely that the Hydropathes’ performances can arguably be called the direct progenitors of Futurism’s antics and the events around which the delinquent communities comprising twentieth-century aesthetic *cénacles* reconstituted themselves.

Like the *serata*, the Hydropathe séances gained an infamous reputation for intellectual creativity and artistic import among Paris’s consecrated and aspiring artists alike. Indeed, Guy de Maupassant, Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, Alphonse Allais, Huysmans, Edmond de Goncourt, Robert de Montesquiou, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Jules Laforgue counted themselves among its members. But the Hydropathes also drew the attention of censors and, worse, the police who, perhaps fearing café culture’s ties to the Commune and *dégénérescence*, were concerned that some of its performances might have political meaning. On one occasion, a local noise complaint concerning the cabaret’s activities gave the police cause to interrogate Goudeau, during which they demanded he produce a valid permit required for political gatherings. Despite claiming no such permit was required because the Hydropathes was a theatrical club, Goudeau was forced to submit a written statement to the Chief of Police confirming the group’s apolitical nature. Though Goudeau produced the requested statement, the police were not satisfied. The cabaret,

while not political, had an air of questionable morality about it, causing them to request he further amend his statement with a clause explicitly excluding women from its séances. In protest, Goudeau argued that this would exclude actresses from the performances whose attendance was a critical part of their professional training. Among these, Goudeau singled out Sarah Bernhardt, a formally inducted Hydropathe member and, more importantly, the Chief of Police's favorite actress (as well as the most celebrated in Paris). The Chief's sympathies were made clear when the issue was resolved in a ridiculous compromise befitting the aura of the cabaret: the Chief of Police decreed that Sarah Bernhardt and all actresses were, in fact, not women at all but great artistes. The exclusion of women, therefore, remained in the Hydropathes' official rules, but women continued to be allowed—because they were not women (Gluck 127).

The inversion of logic achieved by the Hydropathes in their performances and, more momentously, in the world around them attest to the liminal nature of the performative space they created: one in which a vaudeville show adopts the formal guise of parliamentary proceeding, and women, by police decree, are not women at all. Goudeau's group, though, took this aura of *blaguer* further, transposing the hijinks of their liminal cabaret into the codified aesthetic theory, "*Fumisme*," which served as the foundation for avant-garde aesthetics long into the twentieth century. Originally a term denoting a chimney sweep, Goudeau described *fumisme* as a compensatory release of "imperturbable *bouffonneries*" by a generation fraught with pessimism and post-war spiritual malaise. *Fumisme* was, according to him, "a kind of disdain for everything, an inner spite against creatures and things that translated itself on the outside by innumerable acts of aggression, farces, and practical jokes" (Goudeau 100). The disdainful farce Goudeau describes was further explicated by Georges Fragerolle in the manifesto of *fumisme*, published in *L'Hydropathe*, the official publishing organ of the cabaret by the same name. In it,

Frageroles distinguishes between *fumisme* and wit (*esprit*), privileging the former against the latter as both a mode of artistic creation and proof of a greater intellectual capacity:

How much more brilliant and more complicated at once is the *fumiste*, who, beneath a naïve, quasi-prudhommesque envelope hides this core of skepticism which is the very stuff of wit. To make someone feel...that he is an imbecile, that's the nature of wit. To agree with him and make him reveal the very quintessence of his imbecility, that's the nature of *fumisme*. Wit asks to be paid on the spot with bravos or discreet smiles; *fumisme* carries its own reward: it makes art for art's sake. In order to pass for a man of wit, it is sometimes necessary to be an ass in a lion's skin; in order to be a good *fumiste*, it is often indispensable to be a lion in the skin of an ass. In the first case, the effect is direct; in the second, it is once, twice, sometimes ten times removed. (2)

Frageroles's *fumisme* is boundless *blague*. It no longer masks, as Francis Buckley Smith or Sarcey had argued before the Prussian siege, inner sadness or self-mockery. *Fumisme* is *blague* turned outward, mocking its victim "by encouraging him to be himself" (Weiss 143). Importantly, Fragerolle asserts that *fumisme* is an indirect method; it reveals the inner contradictions and hypocrisies of its victim such that the effect is that the victim is left confounded, mired in the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious.

Among Goudeau and Fragerolle's writings on *fumisme*, repeated appeals to Rabelais as the theory's progenitor appear. Both were life-long members of the Bon Bock society, confirming their conviction that the popularity of *fumisme* constituted the modern embodiment of Rabelaisian *joie de vivre* which, in turn, symbolized a return to the soul of the French people. Indeed, their convictions were prescient. Though the Hydropathes cabaret closed in 1881, after only three years in operation, its business model was replicated by a litany of cabarets that

sprung up in its absence, each adopting *fumisme* as its primary aesthetic mode. The most famous of these, *Le Chat Noir*, would come to epitomize the topsy-turvy world of Parisian cabarets as well as what Parisians referenced when they employed the term, “modern.”

From the beginning, *Le Chat Noir* was envisioned as an entirely *fumiste* enterprise.<sup>8</sup> Like the *Hydropathes*, it also published a newspaper sharing the same name as the cabaret. It published caricatures, stories, poems by notable members alongside columns in support of new aesthetic trends, and lists of recently published books available for sale at the cabaret. The journal’s primary purpose, though, was to serve as an advertisement for the cabaret and introduce prospective patrons to the spirit of *fumistrie*. Its inaugural issue carried a perfunctory announcement for the cabaret which economically communicates the aesthetics of its space and milieu:

## **LE CHAT NOIR**

*Cabaret Louis XIII*

FONDE EN 1114, PAR UN FUMISTE

84, Boulevard Rochechouart, 84

The first descriptor of the cabaret invokes the Renaissance style of Louis XIII synonymous with the architecture of the Palais du Luxembourg and the Sorbonne. Though invoking an ornate, classical space through the announcement, Diana Schiau-Botea has argued that *Le Chat Noir* was a Foucauldian “heterotopia” of decorative references to disparate times and places that created

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<sup>8</sup> *Le Chat Noir* was a joint venture between Rodolphe Salis and Goudeau. Originally, Salis provided the capital investment and Goudeau lent his experience running the *Hydropathes*. Salis eventually took on an active role in the cabaret, serving as master of ceremonies and often performing his own material. After Salis became more involved, Goudeau’s energies focused primarily on the editorship of the cabaret’s newspaper.

the image of the cabaret as the center of the universe (42).<sup>9</sup> To emphasize the cabaret's universality, employees posted foreign newspapers on the walls of the cabaret each evening, editing and excising the pages to form a *fumiste*, universal newspaper dispatch office that, in the words of Marcel Baillot "was more popular than that of *Le Figaro*" (qtd. in Schiau-Botea 45).<sup>10</sup>

The liminality of time and place that comprised Le Chat Noir's interior is further signaled by the third line of its announcement, which affixes its founding to the year 1114, "by a *fumiste*." Indeed a fabrication, the line is itself a *fumiste* joke alluding to the seventh chapter of Rabelais's first book, *Pantagruel*. The reference, though, is multiple times removed, in keeping with Fragerolle's treatise on *fumisme*. While the clause, "by a *fumiste*," gestures to Rabelais, intimating his position as the progenitor of the movement, the 1114 founding is more opaque. Most likely, the year refers to the founding of the Abbey of Saint-Victor, under whose banner the university system of Paris was originally created. Though demolished during the French Revolution, the Abbey's original site had come to house the Faculty of Sciences for the University of Paris. But the Abbey's most important attribute had been its great library which grew over the course of multiple centuries, synonymous with all institutions of higher learning in pre-Revolutionary France. The library's fame far exceeded its material existence owing to its appearance in the seventh chapter of Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, in which the titular character, after an educational journey into the sciences, enters Paris for the first time. The chapter concludes with a prolix catalog of books Pantagruel sees in the abbey library, including ribald and satiric titles such as "The Gym Shoe of Humility," "The Codpiece of the Law," "The Art of Farting,"

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<sup>9</sup> According to Foucault, heterotopia is a utopia realized in otherness, where all arrangements found in society, time, and space are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned ("Of Other Spaces" 352).

<sup>10</sup> *Le Chat Noir*'s performative newspaper dispatch was re-envisioned by the *Cabaret des Quart'z'Arts* as a regular journal, *Le Mur* (the wall), complete with an editorial staff which accepted submissions by artists and rewrote stories published in the traditional press to make them bawdy or nonsensical. An in-depth analysis of *Le Mur* can be found in Olga Anna Dull, "From Rabelais to the Avant-Garde: Wordplays and Parody in the Wall-Journal *Le Mur*," in Cate and Shaw (eds), *The Spirit of Montmartre*, pp. 199-241.

“Craparetus,” and “The Mustard Pot of Penitence” (153-57). The list, however, is not all jokes. In the prologue to his second novel, *Gargantua*, Rabelais urges his readers to look for a more serious meaning inside the titles:

For so much as you, my good disciples, and some other jolly fools of ease and leisure, reading the pleasant titles of some books of our invention, as Gargantua, Pantagruel, Whippot, the Dignity of Codpieces, of Pease and Bacon with a Commentary, etcetera, are too ready to judge that there is nothing in them but jests, mockeries, lascivious discourse, and recreative lies; because the outside (which is the title) is usually, without any farther inquiry, entertained with scoffing and derision. But truly it is very unbecoming to make so slight account of the works of men, seeing yourselves avouch that it is not the habit makes the monk, many being monasterially accoutred, who inwardly are nothing less than monachal, and that there are of those that wear Spanish capes, who have but little of the valour of Spaniards in them. Therefore is it, that you must open the book, and seriously consider the matter treated in it. Then shall you find that it containeth things of far higher value than the box did promise; that is to say, that the subject thereof is not so foolish as by the title at first sight it would appear to be. (3)

Rabelais’s revisiting of the catalog in *Gargantua* affirms the importance the list plays in his oeuvre, both to his contemporary readers and those of the nineteenth century. His insistence that the outward “jests, mockeries, lascivious discourse, and recreative lies” of the titles, though entertaining, mask a “higher value,” compellingly anticipates the stated goals of *fumiste* aesthetics. But Rabelais’s statement, by virtue of not spelling out what that “value” or hidden meaning is, also elicits the question as to whether his argument is itself a prank, an impish invitation to look for deeper meaning where there is none. Indeed, such provocations were at the

very heart of *Le Chat Noir* and *fumisme*'s intended effect. Too, the allusiveness of meaning attendant in simple gestures such as the cabaret's "founded in" announcement and its veiled references illustrate *fumisme*'s propensity toward a group epistemology which was legible only to initiates. Put another way, *fumisme* was not simply a comedic aesthetic; it was a coterie that one belonged to, replete with its own codes, symbols, and allusions.<sup>11</sup>

For *Le Chat Noir* initiates, cabaret performances and *fumiste* antics shared a common object of scorn made legible in their shared, sub-cultural codes and performances, namely, science. Certainly, the obtuse reference to Rabelais's ridiculous library, inhabited in the era of the cabaret by the Faculty of Sciences for the University of Paris, contributed to a fictive, foundational narrative grounded in the satirizing of institutionalized learning. When their assaults were more explicit, they often took Naturalism, the dominant aesthetic school of the day, to task for its inflated theoretical stances, scientific pretensions, and seriousness. Jules Lemaître, in his preface to *Les gaietés du Chat-Noir*, praised the cabaret for its "awakening of idealism" effected through its success in being "the first to discredit morose naturalism by pushing it to the limits" (2). As with all *fumiste* works, however, the ridiculing or discrediting of science was often not a direct effort. Indeed, cabaret performances at *Le Chat Noir* and other cabarets did not denounce science outright but misappropriate the medical discourse surrounding hysteria, *dégénérescence*, and neurasthenia which had been popularized in newspapers and magazines.

As Rae Beth Gordon has pointed out, cabaret and café-concert performances duplicated the "movements, gestures, tics, grimaces, fantasies, hallucinations, and speech anomalies found

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<sup>11</sup> The signboard of the *Lapin Agile* is a cogent example of cabaret culture's "language of belonging." The image of an anthropomorphized rabbit leaping from a frying pan while holding a bottle of wine, the sign was painted by André Gill and provides a play on words from which the cabaret's name derives: *Lapin à Gill* (Gill's rabbit) and *Lapin Agile* (The Agile Rabbit). Depicting a rabbit in a hot pan wearing a red bandana and work cap was a sly means of expressing Communard sympathies while subverting the wrath of censors.

in nineteenth-century hysteria” (xvii). While many of those presentations, by virtue of their ephemerality, are lost to history, the popularity of performances by Maurice Rollinat, a *Hydropathe* and *Le Chat Noir* participant, shed light on what a successful cabaret performance entailed. Rollinat’s performances were decidedly macabre. He sang poetry of his own making as well as morbid excerpts from Baudelaire’s oeuvre.<sup>12</sup> His subjects concerned death, pain, and evil, and his manner was described as “a heart-breaking and diabolical neuroticism” invoking “the terror of death” (qtd. in Siegel 233). Goudeau went further, noting that Rollinat’s performative movements manifested convulsions throughout and displayed evidence of hallucinations (185). Rollinat’s success, however, was not strictly attributable to the vision of the poet working himself up into a state of madness. Critics were especially enamored by the effect he had on an audience, as Albert Wolff recounted in a review appearing in *Le Figaro*:

They are frozen in terror. Truly, the extraordinary has leapt into the room. A nightmare of horror and beauty weighs on every breast. Faces are pale, the features tense, . . . the eyes are hallucinated by the spectacle of this head that appears like the Saint John of human madness. The song has ended. . . Suddenly, . . . a frenetic ovation burst forth. . . Now he has their fibers and nerves under his fingers. He plays on them at will. . . caresses them, enervates them, pinches them, exasperates them, makes them mad, and the audience no longer has any control over itself. (qtd. in Gordon 100)

Wolff’s review of Rollinat’s performance illustrates the thrill nineteenth-century audiences felt not only in witnessing madness onstage but also participating in the madness themselves.

Audiences’ desire to participate in the performance by giving themselves over to greater and

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<sup>12</sup> The convulsions and hallucinations Maurice Rollinat performed during his acts at *Le Chat Noir*, though lauded, were probably actual symptoms of an acute mental illness. He died in 1903 at the age of fifty-seven in an insane asylum.



more intense feelings orchestrated by the performer, to be enervated and exasperated to the point of madness, calls attention to changing tastes in the sphere of popular arts. For some, it was proof of *dégénérescence*, that society had finally gone off the rails and that witnesses to the *fin de siècle* were really living in the last age of humankind.

For the *fumistes*, however, it was the application of poetics to a mode of theater that had already been playing out across the Seine for years. The twice-weekly medical lectures of Jean-Martin Charcot at the Hôpital Universitaire Pitié-Salpêtrière were one of the most cataloged theatrical series in the Parisian press, all the more interesting for the fact that they were, ostensibly, serious scientific presentations. Their popularity, though, indexes the prestige that the burgeoning science of psychopathology held during the late nineteenth century. The wounds inflicted by the Commune and recurring, yet unfulfilled, political revolutions had created a crisis of faith in social institutions. The mental sciences, though, offered modern answers to these failings as well as to questions philosophers and theologians had left unsolved or disproven by historical events. Charcot's unique contribution to this climate was to categorize, define, and demystify a host of behavioral anomalies under the umbrella of hysteria. But the public's fascination with his Salpêtrière lectures was not wholly explained by the prominent place they afforded to scientific inquiry alone.

As Jonathan Marshall has argued, Charcot's renown could be attributed to the aesthetic style of his lectures as much as their content. Charcot's lectures occurred each week on Tuesday and Friday. While the Friday lessons were part of the Sorbonne's Faculty of Medicine courses, his Tuesday lessons were open to the non-medical public and were popular enough to be included in the official travel guide to Paris alongside Le Chat Noir and the Folies-Bergères (Gluck 136). Popular interest in the Tuesday lectures was heightened by the regular attendance

of high-profile spectators across the artistic, political, and intellectual spectrum: Jules Clarétie (administrator of the *Comédie Française*); the professor of artistic anatomy at the *École des beaux-arts*, Mathias Duval; Republican politician Léon Gambetta; writers and dramaturges such as Léon and Alphonse Daudet, Émile Zola, Paul Arène, Guy de Maupassant, and Edmond de Goncourt; and other intellectuals such as Hippolyte Taine and Henri Bergson. Though officially a medical lesson, Charcot's Tuesday lectures functioned as spectacle, effectively sensationalizing hysteria by placing the symptoms of the hospital's patients on display. Each session began with a banal oration given by Charcot, which a contemporary described in *Les annales politiques et littéraires*:

His voice is somewhat dull; the speech is clear, precise, not meticulously arranged, sometimes hesitant. But the master delays little in choosing words, he speaks simply, the elevation always comes from the subject. With a few very short phrases, he poses the problem to be resolved, the question to be studied, and immediately introduced the living examples...one listens only to his voice, monotonous like that of a puppeteer of wax figures. (qtd. in Marshall 16)

Charcot's simple manner of speech, though "monotonous," was regularly commented upon in the press, where it was compared to leading theatrical actors and revered for the dramaturgical distinction it drew between Charcot and the mumbling, fitful patients whose symptoms he would conjure on demand. Likening Charcot to "a puppeteer of wax figures" reinforced this narrative, recasting the Salpêtrière from hospital to stage, his patients into puppets. As Mary Gluck has pointed out, the spectacle presented by these patients manifesting their symptoms in a theatricalized setting allowed the audience to perceive attacks of hysteria as revelations of the hidden passions and universal truths of inner life. The Commune and its bloody fall had created a

fissure between the individual and society. The vision of the hysteric reestablished those bonds, publicly performing inner life such that one's body became the public manifestation of one's symptoms. Madness had been at once elevated to an aesthetic and a societal cure, enabling delinquent communities to perform their "disdain for everything" and "innumerable acts of aggression, farces, and practical jokes" in a mode that was culturally legible to popular audiences. Hysteria's import to modern aesthetics would be affirmed further, forty years later, when the Surrealists Louis Aragon and Andre Breton baptized hysteria the "the most important poetic discovery of the late nineteenth century." "Hysteria," they claimed, "is not a pathological phenomenon and can, in all regards, be considered a supreme mode of expression" (Gluck 20-22).

To be sure, the links between Charcot's lectures on hysteria and the evolution of *fumisme* are deeply intertwined. Sarah Bernhardt, Goudeau, and Salis were all frequent attendees to the Tuesday lessons at the Salpêtrière. Indeed, the lectures were considered, like the Hydropathes cabaret, an obligatory component to theatrical training. A number of Charcot's hysterical patients even went on to make a living as successful cabaret and theatrical performers, as was the case of Jane Avril, one of the most popular Moulin Rouge dancers of the period. It was, however, the actor Coquelin Cadet who most explicitly infused the lecture-style of Charcot with *fumisme*. A Hydropathe and attendee to Charcot's performances, Coquelin Cadet (Ernest Alexandre Honoré Coquelin) was a Comédie-Française actor and the inventor of a form of one-man-show he intermittently referred to as the "Modern Monologue" and the "*Fumiste* Monologue." Considered the progenitor of stand-up comedy and, indeed, the monologuesque performance of manifestos that would permeate twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics, Cadet's monologues took the form of a mock-serious lecture delivered by a single individual dressed in a black suit

and white tie, so as to convey the “appearance of a *conférencier*” (10). The monologist’s delivery, too, was prescribed to approximate the casual conversation of a good friend. The cumulative effect of these details was to create a sense of seriousness against which the monologue’s speech would juxtapose, creating a composed, outward appearance that would clash with content wherein Cadet mandated, “the unlikely and the unexpected calmly frolic with a serious idea, where the real and the impossible merge in a cold fantasy” (12). Cadet’s equally famous brother, Coquelin aîné, however, warned that this description of the monologue should not be mistaken for the performance of hysteria by advising the monologist to “come on stage with the physiognomy of one who is a bit overwhelmed, the body slightly automatic;...be concentrated, obsessed, very anxious and worried, but not hallucinated: you are a theatrical subject, not a medical subject. You belong to the stage, not to Doctor Charcot” (qtd. in Gordon 86). These two descriptions suggest that the intent of the monologue was to embody, in a singular performer, Charcot’s serious, scientific oration and his patients’ performance of symptoms.

For Cadet, these contrasting elements were a distinctly modern form of theater: “a kind of one-person vaudeville, mixed with fantasy and satire, with a little enormity (extravagant exaggeration), as in Rabelaisian farce, but with a modern twist, which, precisely in what it contains of madness, corresponds to the state of our nerves” (qtd. in Gordon 87). Expressing the modern was thus expressing madness, the “absolute incarnation” of which was Cadet’s most performed monologue, “Obsession.” In it, the monologist takes the stage and announces, “Oh! I’m really sick.” He has been to the theater and heard a tune whose rhythm he is unable to get out of his mind. He washes his clothes to it. He walks to it. He rings his concierge’s bell to it. During his speech, the monologist’s words begin to take the form of hysterical verbal tics in which the

last syllable of a word is repeated: he takes the train, “trin, trin, trin;” he arrives at the “Gare Saint-Lazare, zar, zar, zar.” Despairing to the point of suicide, he throws himself into the Seine but is rescued. Upon regaining consciousness, he “expels the water, but not the air! Lère, lère, lère” (qtd. in Gordon 87). While “Obsession” illustrates Cadet’s use of pathological symptoms to elicit laughs, yet another of his monologues illustrates the degree to which those performances satirized the pathologization of everything and everyone. Entitled “Hydrotherapy,” the monologue refers to the Hydropathes and, at the same time, the standard water-cure for hysteria used at the Salpêtrière. It contains the following speech, delivered by the monologist in the fictive role of Dr. Beni-Barde:

All those suffering from nerves, fatigue jadedness, all those with poor circulation, who see life black, the neurasthenics smitten by passing agitation, who feel uneasy, only need...hail a carriage...and tell the driver the address of Dr. Beni-Barde. There they will discover joy, a return of faith, happiness, amusement, strength, enthusiasm, a lively eye, a straight and vigorous body, a laughing soul, oblivion to worries, the renewal of good will, the courage to put up with one’s mother-in-law. (qtd. in Gluck 136)

According to Mary Gluck, “Hydrotherapy” goes beyond the misappropriation of hysterical symptoms assumed by many analyses of cabaret performances, showing instead an inversion of roles in which the cabaret becomes a place of therapy and the Salpêtrière a place of entertainment. In this context, the words above the door at Le Chat Noir, under which Parisian denizens passed on their way to enjoy a night of *fumiste* curative, are worth repeating. For they divulge a modern *joie de vivre* in madness: “Above all be modern.”

These latent cultural codes constituted the cultural memory that undergirded not only the creation of early twentieth century aesthetic manifestos but also the lens that shaped

contemporary audiences' reception of those texts. The genre's status as chief vehicle for the political exhortations of the Commune had twinned it in the French popular imagination, not with emancipative political revolution but with misery, bloodshed, and failure. Too, the genre's resurgence within the sphere of aesthetics in excessive, often violent language intimated the return of those "bad poets, bad painters, journalists *manqués*, novelists from the lower depths" that had constituted the Commune's ranks. The historically determined anxiety that these manifestos invoked in the audience, however, was equally informed by the culture of *blague* and *fumisterie* that served as the foundation of modern popular entertainment. Moreover, the affective thrill inculcated by the indeterminacy between these two poles—the grave and amusing, the serious and non-serious, madness and *joie de vivre*—bespeaks a particularized generic phenomenon that extended the manifesto from an organ of political discourse to a form of comic entertainment, born out of cabaret culture's penchant for inversion and performance, that is often neglected or misunderstood in our contemporary readings. Read as *blague* and *fumisterie*, however, these manifestos can be seen as the textual and performative representation of a delinquent community misappropriating or otherwise invoking cultural codes for the "pleasure of puncturing inflated balloons." As the next chapters illustrate, however, this subtle, culturally nuanced style of comedy, though responsible for the widespread popularity of the genre, would eventually be its undoing.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Proclamation and Performance:

#### Modern Manifestos and the Making of an Affective Audience

On the balmy afternoon of July 8, 1910, throngs of Venetians returned from their weekly respite on the fashionable beaches of the Lido as they had customarily done for over fifty years.<sup>1</sup> As they disembarked ferries at the Piazza San Marco and crowded into the square, their traditional day of repose was upended by an assault of anti-traditionalist Modernism taking the form of pure performance as F.T. Marinetti and a coterie of his Futurist compatriots ascended the clock tower of the piazza and rained down upon the crowd 800,000 broadsheets containing a manifesto, translated into three languages, entitled *Contro Venezia passatista (Against Past-Loving Venice)*.<sup>2</sup> Over the resulting chaos, Marinetti then delivered, via megaphone, an “improvisational” speech in which he called for the liberation of Venice from “the tyranny of sentimentalism” and denounced the city as an “enormous sewer” filled with “liquefied shit” perfumed by the “divine scent of latrines” (“Speech” 168). The Venetians were not amused. A violent melee between the unwitting audience and the Futurists ensued. According to R.W. Flint, “the Futurists were hissed, *passéists* were knocked around. The Futurist painters Boccioni, Russolo, and Carà punctuated this speech with resounding slaps. The fists of Armando Mazza, a Futurist poet who was also an athlete, left an unforgettable impression” (55-6).

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of Europe’s first sea-bathing facility in 1857 at the Lido made it a popular destination for both Venetians and international literati of the modernist period including Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and Thomas Mann, whose novella, *Death in Venice*, takes place on its beaches.

<sup>2</sup> Varying accounts by Marinetti describing the performance offer different claims as to the number of leaflets dropped on the audience: 200,000 is cited in his letter to *Comœdia* on June 17, 1910; the dubious number 800,000 is asserted in Marinetti’s own 1914 anthology, *I manifesti del futurism* and, following R.W. Flint’s translation of that volume, became the historically accepted number, if only because its exaggerated number contributes to the legend of Marinetti’s exaggerated persona.

Nine days after the incident, the Parisian journal *Comœdia* published a reprint of the now internationally notorious leaflet under the title, “Premier Manifeste futuriste aux Vénitiens.”<sup>3</sup> In place of a simple typographic reproduction of the text, however, the *Comœdia* printing prominently featured three panels of drawings by futurist sympathizer André Warnod that together served as a pictorial representation of the manifesto’s content (see fig. 4).<sup>4</sup>

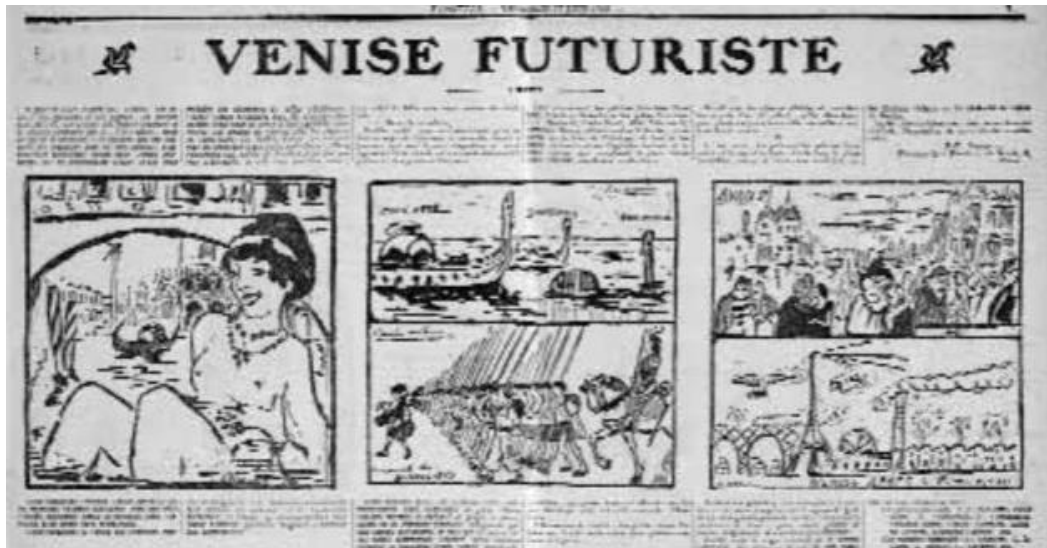


Fig. 4. André Warnod, Illustration for “Venise Futuriste” (1910). From *Comœdia*

In the first and most prominent panel, Venice, the “jeweled bathtub for cosmopolitan courtesans” full of “little one-eyed businesses,” is depicted as a lavish and venal whore seductively pinching her breasts, prostituting herself to tourists drawn to Venice’s “market for counterfeiting antiquarians” (Marinetti, “Venice” 167). The succeeding panels illustrate the manifesto’s call to action and its appeal for the liberation of Venice from gondolier-gravediggers “bent on

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<sup>3</sup> An account of the Venice performance and a copy of the leaflet also appeared in the *New York Times* on July 24, 1910 under the headline, “Futurists’ Desire to Destroy Venice.” The text was described by the *Times* editors as a “curious manifesto” by a “strange cult.”

<sup>4</sup> Though he never identified as a Futurist or participated in the movement’s antics, the Parisian painter and writer André Warnod published several laudatory essays on its exploits and polemics between 1910 and 1914. A chronicler of bohemian Montmartre and Montparnasse, Warnod’s interest in Futurism stemmed from its mobilized, concerted, and, in his estimation, effectual assault on traditionalism—a sentiment he shared and deemed necessary for the revitalization of the arts.



rhythmically scooping out graves in a flooded cemetery” by “invincible warriors and artists of genius” to erect an “imposing geometry of metal bridges and factories plumed with smoke” (“Venice” 165-168). The final panel depicts Venice “*après la Futurisme*,” envisioned as a newly industrialized city of dirigibles and smoke-stacks poised to compete with modern Paris for dominance over Europe through the erection of its own Eiffel Tower, transmitting radio frequencies across the Adriatic.

Beyond their graphic representation of Marinetti’s combative manifesto, however, Warnod’s panels are more closely allied with the Futurist event at the Piazza San Marco than may at first be evident, for in both the Venice event and *Comœdia*’s publication, the textuality of the manifesto is sublated through the deliberate foregrounding of decidedly theatrical forms of representation: the Futurists’ antagonistic performance dominates and frames the Venice event while the manifesto serves merely as its literary supplement; Warnod’s illustrations, printed on the same pages as the manifesto, dwarf the text by four-fold, catapulting the manifesto’s contents beyond the strictly verbal and solidly into the realm of the visually lurid. Taken together, these events betray a calculated effort on the Futurists’ part to construct a situational, aesthetic experience expressive of what had conventionally been an unrepresentable form—the manifesto. Moreover, in both of these distinct representations of the same manifesto, the text—the underlying *raison d’être* of the performance—transcends its materiality and is made ephemeral, disposed to surprise. The introduction of these attributes frees the text from its typographic prison, characterizing what the futurist painter Umberto Boccioni would later describe as “an emotive architectural environment which creates sensations and completely involves the observer” (“Technical” 205).

As Marjorie Perloff has argued, the constitution of such an “emotive architecture” hinges on the successful deployment of numerous theatrical strategies, the most crucial being the successful portrayal of the author as *improvvisatore* which, in turn, generates an “unforeseen discourse” that “disrupts readerly expectations and the consequent ability to recognize what is taking place” (102). Marinetti’s speech to the Venetians thus reconstitutes its attendant manifesto by belying its inert textual form and giving it the appearance of a composition coexistent with its reception. Unified formal structure and coherence are eschewed and with them any recourse on the part of the audience to the phenomenological experience of a printed text. In its place, the “sensations and revelations of the moment” are heightened in order to, as Marinetti put it, “orchestrate the audience’s sensibilities like a symphony” (“Brevity” 205). Similarly, Warnod’s panels refashion the manifesto’s reception by reimagining its content across multiple coarsely drawn caricatures, reminiscent of hastily composed school-boy smut, which unfold dialectically rather than through a singular, static image. In each of these cases, strict fidelity to the manifesto’s textuality is eschewed in favor of the Futurists’ reverence for “the absolute value of novelty” and, moreover, its disorienting effect on the audience (“Brevity” 205). Indeed, the manifesto, in the minds of the Futurists, was most efficacious when it was rendered endlessly mutable, endlessly new.

Modernist studies have long promoted the notion that predilection for the “new” was fundamental to the experience of modernity. Aesthetic programs expressive of the era were thus imbued with an often-conflicted anxiety over and aspiration for both permanence and immediate obsolescence. In this respect, the manifesto stands as modernism’s genre *par excellence*. Its unwillingness to yield to the present and its insistence on the immediate realization of an idealized future gives its authorship the quality of “both word and deed, both threat and incipient

action” (Lyon 14). But, as Claude Abastado has asserted, “the manifesto’s situation is inherently insecure” and prone to diffusion (10). To act upon a manifesto’s demands is to neutralize the text, removing it from the present, the proto-future, and relegating it to a mere historiographical trace of the future it portends to demand. Put another way, the manifesto is always-already outmoded upon its dissemination—the text is no longer “now,” its action has already begun. It is, perhaps, with this contradiction in mind that Marinetti and the Futurists made the manifesto their primary means of aesthetic expression but augmented it by reconceptualizing the genre as a theatrical form. Indeed, Marinetti in later manifestos laid claim to these texts succinctly as “theater.”<sup>5</sup> This innovative, though tacit, generic shift from the purely polemical to the aesthetic accounts for what Perloff has argued is the manifesto’s ability “in the eyes of a mass audience, to all but take the place of the promised work of art” (86). Rather than mediate, explain, or announce a group’s aesthetic program and its works, these manifestos, when inculcated with a protean capacity for theatrical or situational surprise, become works of art in their own right.

Whether these works constitute “serious” art, however, is another matter. As purely performative speech acts, manifestos have been an object of consternation since J.L. Austin’s dismissal of the genre as “non-serious.” The crux of Austin’s categorization lies in the manifesto’s lack of authorizing context for the speech act itself—a distinction that has a wholly theatrical valence. For example, in Austin’s theory, when a priest announces that two people are married, they are officially wed. But when an actor playing the part of a priest announces the same words, no one is actually, either symbolically or literally, married. Thus, Austin singled out

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<sup>5</sup> In the manifesto “A Futurist Theatre of Essential Brevity” (1915), Marinetti asserts, “Most of our works have been in the theater.” Though critics such as Berghaus and Doug Thompson have claimed this is an overstatement given the dearth of Futurist plays written by that date, Marinetti’s claim is accurate if one includes the movement’s publication and performance of manifestos.

the theater as a site void of normal, or “serious,” speech acts.<sup>6</sup> Such insistence upon a dichotomy between the serious and non-serious, however, places manifestos like the *Contro Venezia passatista* (and perhaps theater itself) in a dubious artistic position that borders on pretention. As Michael Fried puts it:

Art degenerates as it approaches the conditions of the theatre. Theatre is the common denominator that binds a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities to one another, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts. Here as elsewhere, the question of value or level is central... What lies between the arts is theatre. (164)

Fried’s assertion that art “degenerates” as it assumes the quality of theatricality seems to be grounded in the art object’s ability to stand apart from the observer (and other artistic practices), containing its own enclosed, self-sufficient unity.<sup>7</sup> Contra Fried, Perloff and Howard Fox have noted that the appropriation of theatricality in art, such as in the Futurists’ manifestos, anticipates nearly all artistic innovations from modernism to post-modernism, and that it is High Modernism’s emphasis on coherence and internal unity that is anomalous across the periods (Perloff 110).

Implied in these divergent critiques is the precariousness of a situationally aestheticized work’s reception vis-à-vis the observer, not just for the critic but also for the spectator, which

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<sup>6</sup> Derrida’s essay “Declarations of Independence” laid the groundwork for a theoretical dismissal of Austin’s appraisal of the manifesto, asserting that the genre creates the authorizing context through the use of the anterior future (“We will have...”) as well as explicitly newly creating authorizing social groups. Reliance upon rhetorical conventions, however, is complicated in the case of avant-garde aesthetic manifestos given their wholesale embrace of theatrical conventions in the recitation and/or performance of these texts.

<sup>7</sup> While Fried does not expressly quantify value’s exclusive attribution to the individual arts or theatre’s lowly place among them, his dismissal of the theatrical is, perhaps, related to the historical and ontological privileging of absorption over theatricality that he traced throughout eighteenth century painting and criticism in his monograph, *Absorption and Theatricality* (1976).

extends beyond the question of value. Indeed, for a work of art lacking in coherence and imbued with theatricality, the chief question becomes: is it serious? To be sure, this was the very question Marinetti's unwitting Venetian audience must have uttered in 1910, as well as the readers of the event's attendant manifesto and Warnod's illustrations. As Martin Puchner has argued though, the manifesto genre is wholly dependent upon the gaps that theatricality opens up (serious/non-serious, authorized/non-authorized), for without theatricality "there would be no pose, no presumption, no projection, no futurity; without theatricality there would be no manifesto" (26). But while manifesto critics cite the performance of manifestos by avant-garde groups such as the futurists and, later, the Dadaists as illustrative of a resignation to the theatrical paradoxes inherent in the genre, I contend that these performances are indicative of a deliberate appropriation of theatrical stratagems that effectively "outmode the outmodedness" of the manifesto, exploiting and heightening the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious already attendant in the manifesto's text. Thus, to perform a manifesto is to purge it of its textual inertia and place it within the affective register, transforming it from a rhetorical composition that one might read in solitude into an experiential, viscerally dramatic script that creates the symbiotic, reciprocal roles of audience and presenter or, more succinctly, the provoked and the provocateur. It is my contention that the explosive proliferation of manifesto texts during the modernist period is irreducible to the texts themselves. Instead, it was the surplus antagonisms and anxieties—serious vs. non-serious, inertia vs. pandemonium—engendered by theatricalizing these texts that made the genre the calling card of modernist aesthetics and, perhaps more importantly, ratified chaos, tumult, and insurrection as new modalities of reception.

Indeed, by cultivating antagonisms between audience and auteur, aesthetic groups such as the Futurists capitalized on contemporary popular culture's thirst for the scandalous and, more importantly, the value placed by the marketplace on the eccentric posture of the "alienated" artist whose authenticity and aesthetic worth was demonstrated through his or her denial of commercialism. As Robert Jensen has shown, this seemingly paradoxical rejection of the marketplace for the purpose of gaining market-share was a prominent feature of modernism's nascent roots in Paris, engendered by the procurement habits of Francophile international collectors and consumers (particularly from America and Germany) who began paying high prices for the works of artists rejected by or in stylistic opposition to the French Salon system and its institutions. The consequential collapse of the salon system during the *fin de siècle* decentralized artistic consumption and aesthetic criticism, causing commercial galleries to flourish and giving rise to an endlessly flexible series of dichotomous aesthetic positions expressed in dramatically polarized clichés still rehearsed today: high versus low; bourgeois versus bohemian; healthy art versus degenerate; tradition versus fashion.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, the appropriation of the manifesto genre in aesthetic criticism and promotion was constitutive of this pivotal historical shift and its attendant rhetorical climate. And while proclamations calling for the destruction of "museums, libraries, and academies" repeated across nearly all of the Futurist manifestos could be said to be important indexes of the historical determinacy of the marketplace, the ephemeral nature of events such as that in Venice are equally important as

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<sup>8</sup> Sara Maza's *The Myth of French Bourgeoisie* (2003) and Jerrold Seigel's *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (1999) illustrate that bourgeois/bohemian dichotomy was an ever-shifting social construct that came to designate different practices and people at different times, and not always pejoratively. As one popular 1840's Parisian pamphlet, *Bourgeois Physiology*, put it, "My bourgeois is not yours, nor your neighbors" (Seigel 6). Despite history's reliance upon these terms to explain social dynamics, archival evidence shows they were not objective social categories. See also Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* for a humorous depiction of the "bourgeois-bohemian," an ostensibly radical social affectation that actually reaffirms the middle-class culture it professes to oppose.

evidence of concerted attempts to manufacture artistic authenticity by staging an aesthetic product—an event—that was irreducible to a commodity because it was both ephemeral and impossible to reproduce.

Like Justus Nieland, however, I am uneasy by the methodological frameworks arising out of the new modernist studies' preoccupation with the period's "material network of publicity" and its telos: the often-banal conclusion that groups such as the Futurists' "dissident self-fashioning" were the by-product of a promotional logic gleaned from commercial institutions (6). To be sure, the aesthetic manifesto is the product of a historical moment shaped by the marketplace, but studies which emphasize this commercial dimension (e.g. Milton Cohen's *Movement, Manifesto, Melee*, Luca Somigli's *Legitimizing the Artist*, and, at times, Marjorie Perloff's *Futurist Moment*) tend to eschew the manifesto's reciprocal determinism within the sphere of popular culture, or to solidly account for the unrelenting proliferation of the genre in the artistic sphere for over thirty years in its varied and increasingly heterogeneous forms, even as the marketplace for aesthetic goods consolidated around institutions such as the Academy and once-marginal avant-garde artists increasingly converged with their academic counterparts as professional elites in their own right.

These shortcomings in mind, this chapter attempts to reconcile the manifesto as both a promotional device and an affective, *innervating* agent by attending to the pivotal part played by the theatrical performance of manifestos toward the development and popularization of the genre

in the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Instead of the emphasis placed on the genre's formal devices that typifies recent manifesto scholarship, the chapter inverts textual primacy and envisions performance as *the* event that, still in its generic infancy at the dawn of the twentieth century, gives the manifesto referential density.<sup>10</sup> These performances reflect in surprising ways the underlying material conditions in which aesthetic criticism, out of necessity, evolved and appropriated the manifesto genre toward its own objectives. Moreover, they illustrate the genre's unique ability, when imbued with strategies gleaned from theatrical tradition, to capitalize on the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious—a decidedly theatrical affect/effect whose implications will be rehearsed over the course of the chapter. In this context, events such as the Futurists' antagonistic performance to the Venetians and Warnod's panels are inseparable from the manifesto they appear to complement because they are attendant characteristics of the same, *singular* genre, briefly lived, terminally effective, and developed by F.T. Marinetti under the rubric he termed "*serata*."

## I. THE EVOLUTION OF THE FUTURIST *SERATA*

Over a decade before the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909) erupted upon the international scene, Marinetti was a recovering law student and aspiring Symbolist poet. By March 1898 he had published his first poem, "L'Echanson" ("The Cup-Bearer"), in the Milanese

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<sup>9</sup> I borrow the word "innervation" from Walter Benjamin's term describing the mimetic reception of the external world. For Benjamin, innervating effects were empowering and active responses held in contrast against "defensive mimetic adaptations" that protect the organism but paralyzes its imaginative faculties and, by extension, its capacity for active response. As with many of Benjamin's theories, his concept of innervation was modified after the experiences of the First World War, and again during the rise of Fascism. This reading derives from his early works, specifically the second, non-canonical version of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

<sup>10</sup> This argument capitalizes on David Kurnick's claim in *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (2011) that the modern novel's assimilation of "theatrical failure" causes the reader to "imagine a theatrical event that would give the text referential density" (26). The performance of a manifesto not only gave the text referential density in the mind of the audience, but also served as an index for an event when those manifestos were reprinted in the popular press. Thus, manifestos became news items because they "occurred."



journal *Anthologie Revue* and taken on the unpaid role of the periodical's general secretary. The position put him in regular correspondence with a number of well-established literati, most notably, the French Symbolist Gustave Kahn, who awarded Marinetti first prize in a national poetry competition organized with Catulle Mendès.<sup>11</sup> At the awards ceremony held in Paris, Marinetti was entreated to a public recitation of his prize-winning poem by the most acclaimed and popular actress of the day, Sarah Bernhardt, in her own theater—an affective experience that he would later describe as “glorious” (“Portrait” 7).

Both the award and the Bernhardt event proved to be a tonic for Marinetti's career. Over the ensuing months, aided by his mentor Kahn, Marinetti was introduced to the French cultural elite and built a network of influential connections that enabled him to contribute regularly as both a critic and collaborator to prominent journals such as *Anthologie Revue*, *La Plume*, *La Revue blanche*, *La Revue d'art dramatique*, *Vers et prose*, *L'Hermitage*, *La Rénovation Esthétique*, *La Renaissance Latine*, *La Rassegna Latina*, *Esperia*, *Fortunio*, *Iride* and *La Vogue*. Though his literary output during the period remained solidly within the Symbolist school, Marinetti's published critical essays were largely theatre reviews that intervened in contemporary artistic debates waged over Realism versus the “poetic drama of ideas.”<sup>12</sup> A vociferous proponent of the latter, Marinetti criticized Italian and French audience's appetite for *pièces-bien-faites* and their propensity to attend the theatre “only to laugh, digest[...] and look for an erotic frisson in one of these scenes with an amorous *pas-de-deux*” (qtd. in Berghaus 17).

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<sup>11</sup> Though Kahn and Mendès's poetry competition was ostensibly reserved for French nationals, Marinetti's literary output had been composed exclusively in the French language and his baccalaureate degree had been earned at the Sorbonne in Paris—distinctions that allowed his Italian citizenship and residence to be excused.

<sup>12</sup> Marinetti's reproaches of Realism concentrated specifically on exponents of the Italian *verismo* movement. Like its inspiration, Naturalism, *verismo* was based on positivism. The movement's adherents, however, digressed from Naturalism by rejecting the social usefulness of science. Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga were the movement's primary figures and co-authored the preface to Capuana's novel *Giacinta* (1879), considered—as Zola's preface to *Térèse Raquin* is to Naturalism—the manifesto of *verismo*.

Decrying popular drama for the absence of the “modern spirit” that “animates the soul of our century,” Marinetti threw his favor and support behind Enrico Annibale Butti whose dramas he admired for their capacity to unleash “a storm of controversy, of boos and frenetic applause” (qtd. in Berghaus 17). Though credited with introducing Italy to the Naturalism of Ibsen, Butti’s plays were considered by contemporaries “middle of the road Naturalism” that, in one contemporary critic’s words, illustrated “the struggles of conscience between faith and science” (qtd. in. Fay 138). What Marinetti admired in Butti, however, was not his aesthetic affiliations or his strict adherence to a singular ideology, but his interminable idealism which he promoted in his dramas in the form of “audacious theses” highlighted through the use of experimental and provocative formal innovations that, on occasion, saw audiences erupt into fisticuffs over perceived effronteries toward traditionalist values and the unwelcomed exposure of socio-economic inequities. In Marinetti’s estimation, Butti’s brand of theatre was a potential curative for a “lugubrious *fin-de-siècle*” fallen into social and aesthetic complacency, for whom art was stubbornly relegated to either elitist academicism or frivolous entertainment (qtd. in Berghaus 99).

Precisely what the animating “modern spirit” meant for a pre-Futurism-Marinetti is unclear from his essays, but given his shifting aesthetic and ideological allegiances (Symbolist, Naturalist, Decadent) during the time, one can surmise that provocation and, above all, the innervated response of an audience was a primary component.<sup>13</sup> As Marinetti learned from Butti, the key to creating this effect in the audience was the cultivation of a specific mood and a supplementary narrative disorientation, a technique whose program and effects share a logic with

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<sup>13</sup> Marinetti’s early allegiance to Symbolist aesthetics remained an albatross around his neck in the press as he was often referred a former adherent to that school. In 1911, he issued the manifesto, “We Renounce Our Symbolist Masters, the Last of All Lovers of the Moonlight,” to powerfully distance himself and Futurism from its perceived influences.

Justus Nieland's assertion that mood and disorientation are progenitors of innervated responses: "moods [...] are particularly given to cognitive and epistemological disorientation, to forms of agential receptivity. [...] moody disorientation abets a re-orientation of productive agency toward the material world" (168-9). Read in this context, the riotous responses of Butti's audiences were not merely backlashes against his "audacious theses," but keenly orchestrated agential responses that exploit a short-circuiting between mood and disorientation; or, put another way, the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious which upends situational reason by introducing contingency into a social environment normally experienced as a series of self-evident truths. In such situations, socially patterned behaviors give way to unpatterned responses that themselves elicit a further reply—a veritable feedback loop of innervating energy that, unable to cohere in the realm of logic and reason, is unleashed upon the material world in the form of mayhem.

By 1909, Marinetti had intuited and put into practice this very stratagem with the staging of his own play, *Poupées électriques*. Premiering on January 15, 1909 at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin, Marinetti changed the French title to the Italian, *La donna é mobile* (The Woman is Fickle)—explicitly borrowing the title of a popular aria from *Rigoletto*—to deceive theater-goers into the belief they were attending a light amusement, thereby ensuring the theatre would be filled by the very patrons he despised: those looking for "an erotic frisson in one of these scenes with an amorous *pas-de-deux*."<sup>14</sup> In place of a romantic comedy, however, the audience was entreated to a play about a marriage plagued by mechanical humans, the creations of the husband

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<sup>14</sup> The play's script was translated into Italian by Marinetti's secretary, Decio Cinti, and further edited by Marinetti for the performance.

and duplicates of the couple themselves.<sup>15</sup> Aggravated by the mechanical avatars' presence, the wife destroys them and disposes of their remains only to have them return in the final act. It was intellectual. It was strange. It was distasteful. It was modern. The audience hated it. Exacerbating their ire further, Marinetti had organized a clique for the performance to ensure a disorienting mood was established, not just onstage, but within the audience with ill-timed jeers and applause. As Marinetti would reflect in a letter some months later, "The poet and painter friends I had in the theatre insulted the audience and the journalists, resulting in fights."<sup>16</sup> By the close of the second act, the audience had become so visually and vocally incensed that Marinetti jumped onto the stage and shouted, "I thank the organizers of this chorus of boos which deeply honours me" (qtd. in Daly 81). Curiously, he then began reciting an aesthetic declaration that would, a month later, be published in *Le Figaro* as the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," but nobody seemed to pay much attention, pandemonium had erupted in the audience.<sup>17</sup> The following day, a reviewer from *Il Lavoro* declared, "Not all nuts are in the nuthouse" while another from *Gazzetta del Popolo* wrote, "What we saw last night was not a performance, but a battle, pandemonium, chaos" (qtd. in Gaborik 129). Despite critical reception of the play as a failure, however, Marinetti's staging was, in his eyes, a resounding success. The performance was not intended to elicit applause but provoke the audience out of their complacency and create a scandal—one

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<sup>15</sup> *Poupées électriques* has the distinction of presenting humanoid automatons onstage ten years before Karl Capek's *R.U.R.* As a letter by Capek to Marinetti housed at Yale's Beinecke Library illustrates, *Poupées* was an influence on Capek's work.

<sup>16</sup> Filippo T. Marinetti Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Connecticut, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>17</sup> Marinetti claims to have recited the manifesto at this performance in his self-compiled anthology, *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (1968), but there is no corroborating record of the declamation as reviewers focused almost exclusively on the crowd's pandemonium. Since the text, at the time, was essentially an essay and not yet called a "manifesto," it is conceivable that its recitation would have garnered scant attention. The implications of applying the manifesto taxonomy to the text will be covered in detail in chapter two.

that, as Marinetti would later triumphantly boast in *Poesia*, was reported in “468 commentary articles and criticisms” (“*La donna*” 9).

Two events of great import soon followed: *Le Figaro*’s publication of the Futurist’s first manifesto and the premiere of Marinetti’s second play, *Le Roi Bombance*, on April 3, 1909. Both were first-rate scandals in their own right. The manifesto’s bombastic impudence garnered international attention, reported on by journals as remote as the *New York Times* and the *Tasmanian News*, to name but two. For its part, *Le Roi Bombance* generated the same level of audience response and scandal that *La donna* had months earlier. It also garnered as much press focused on the audience’s response. Marinetti boasted these reviews in his journal, *Poesia*, by publishing a selection of the more caustic criticisms which claimed, “The spectacle took place in the hall as well as on stage,” and declared Marinetti “the most booed author of the century” (“*La Critique*” 46). While each of these events and their coverage in the press had the effect of elevating Marinetti and, by extension, Futurism’s public exposure, the means represented little more than repeats of theatrical *succès de scandales* that had become commonplace to contemporary theatre-goers since the tumultuous 1830 premiere of Victor Hugo’s *Hernani*.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, reactions of both audiences and critics continued to center on Marinetti’s breaching of theatrical convention, the obscenity of the play’s content (*Le Roi* prominently featured a farting priest), or the poor performance of the actors (another of Marinetti’s intentional tactics). In short, Marinetti’s radical, theoretical concept of theatre as a site for “Art as Action” was occluded by the traditional structure of theatrical presentation, specifically, performance and narrative. And though Marinetti’s theatrical scandals served as excellent sources of publicity,

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<sup>18</sup> Establishing a model for Marinetti and other successors, Hugo had assembled a clique of Romanticist followers for the performance who disrupted the performance and insulted those who jeered the play. As a result of the spectacle, Hugo was offered 5,000 francs for publishing rights to the play before the final curtain, and participating claquers such as Théophile Gautier became household names.

they yoked Futurism, like its manifesto, almost exclusively to print. To ameliorate this textual inertia, Marinetti “introduced the fist into the artistic battle,” enabling the “brutal entry of life into art” by putting the manifesto onstage as a new form of bellicose theatre under the rubric “Futurist *serata*” (“Subject” 143). As Futurist compatriot and *serate* participant Carlo Carrà explained, “Having issued our appeal to youth with a manifesto, we realized this was still too indirect a way to rouse public opinion. We felt the need to enter into a more immediate contact with the people: thus were born the famous Futurist *serate*” (qtd. in Berghaus, *Theatre* 110).

The inaugural *serata* took place on January 12, 1910 in Trieste at the Rossetti Theater. It was followed by 147 performances across Europe over the course of five years, making it the chief artistic production, along with the manifesto, of the Futurist movement (Gaborik 141). At first, the evenings were comprised of the declaiming of manifestos, poetry recitations, and polemic speeches—the latter two of which resembled manifestos in their own right. In this respect, the *serate* paralleled their more hushed, dignified predecessor, the Symbolist *soirée*, which Marinetti had participated in as both an author and reciter during his youthful adherence to the movement. For the *serate*, however, he formulated a new type of recitation that outmoded the Symbolists by introducing synaesthesia—a central Symbolist and Decadent concept curiously missing in those movements’ *soirées*—to the reading of texts, later codified in Marinetti’s 1914 manifesto “Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation”: noisemakers and flashing lights complemented the readers’ orations; paintings were carted across the stage; megaphones were employed intermittently; the readers’ hands and legs gestured in geometrical patterns; and texts were enunciated in varying cadences from monotone to impassioned. Words were made sensory. According to Michael Webster, shifting the manifesto from the purely textual to the oratory and combining it with synaesthetic techniques lubricated the audience’s affective responsiveness:

In this context ‘stirring the audience up’ by direct address, pathetic exhortations, and emotional and humorous exaggeration is not at all uncommon. Such a practice has the immediate character of an event, is descriptive and propagandistic rather than narrative and leads naturally to the theatricality baiting of the *serate futuriste* (69).

Orality is thus distinguished from the abstractive tendency of the strictly textual owing to its confrontational, “baiting” position. It is a form of action rather than a mere countersign of thought. Unlike the logocentrism of the Symbolists who strived for *le mot juste* that would create “correspondences” between the real and ideal or spiritual world, Futurist declamation sought to eliminate lexical mediation between sign and signifier and move “language from the *arbitrary* in the direction of the *motivated* (Saussure), or from *symbolic* to the *iconic* (Pierce)” (White 26).<sup>19</sup> If, as Lyon has asserted, manifesto texts “aim to invoke even as they address charged audiences,” transforming the text from print into oral literature exponentially magnified its affective potential, not only invoking but *provoking* an audience.

Within the context of the theater, however, manifesto declamations at the *serate* went further, eradicating the interpretive dependence upon the actor and placing the author in the role of performer. The declaimer now served as “an object the audience could react *against*,” enabling intellectual discord to become affective dissent by providing a material, embodied presence toward which hostility could be immediately directed (Berghaus, *Theatre* 102). Reaction against a declaimed manifesto no longer required rationality; it could be opposed

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<sup>19</sup> According to Ferdinand de Saussure the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary and can, therefore, be motivated by social convention. The linguistic sign, therefore, links not a thing and its sound, but a concept and an acoustic image. By contrast, C.S. Pierce held that as sign’s meaning may be formed by a further sign, an interpretant, into an actual effect, for example, a state of agitation.

cathartically. This new dynamic turned every *serata* into a virtual battlefield with both sides—audience and stage—hurling insults as well as missiles at one another.

The early history of Futurism is riddled with accounts of melees like these occurring at the *serata*, as well as visual representations. Drawings such as Gerardo Dottori's, *Futurist Serata in Perugia* (1914) depict full-fledged assaults by the audience toward the stage and performers who use canvases and stage props as protection, leaving only a defiant Marinetti to weather the storm (see fig. 5). Foregrounded in this depiction is the kinetic nature of the melee, which Dottori captures through the projectile lines that crosshatch the canvas and the audience, shown as a flailing *mélange* of bodies that fills the composition's central space. The Futurist painter

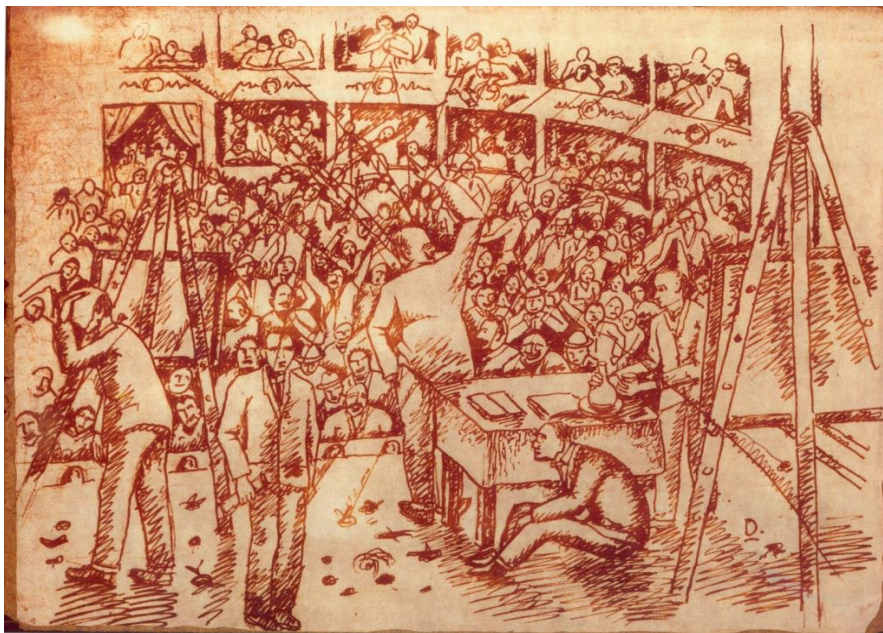


Fig. 5. Gerardo Dottori, “Futurist Serata in Perugia” (1914).

Umberto Boccioni similarly recorded a visual representation of the *serata*, this time depicting the Futurists' performative energies as swirling, hypnotically arched lines reminiscent of mesmerism, the bodies of conquered *passéists* stacked behind them (see fig. 6). Notable in these two images, however, is the differing, inverted treatments of the *serata*'s modes of spectatorship,





Fig. 6. Umberto Boccioni, “Caricature of the Futurist Serata Held in Treviso” (1911).

indicating that the audience, as well as the Futurists, took the place of the performer.

Verbal accounts of the events are similarly kinetic, and often emphasize the violence of the events. Futurist poet Francesco Cangiullo, who chronicled many of the evenings in his memoir, *Le serate futuriste: romanzo storico vissuto*, described one such event in Florence:

The showers of potatoes, oranges and bunches of fennel became infernal. Suddenly he [Marinetti] cried, “Damn!” slapping his hand to his eye. We ran to help him; many in the public who had seen the missiles land protested indignantly against the bestial cowardice, and, with what we shouted from the stage, the place became a ghetto market where things were said that cannot be repeated, much less written... I hear Carrà roaring, “Throw an idea instead of a potato, idiots!” (qtd in Kirby 14).

Cangiullo’s remembrances illustrate the great risk for bodily harm that the Futurists elicited at these events. It also emphasizes how important it was that the manifesto authors declaim these texts themselves. Indeed, it was imperative that the performer be a skilled wordsmith and a master of provocative repartee to keep the audience inflamed and, at the same time, not be bested

by its insults. Declaimers had to give better than they took. Moreover, it was necessary that the manifestos recited were treated as dynamic texts, open to interpolation, excision, and improvisation by its author.

The symbiotic relationship between the declaimer and the audience at the *serate*, both performers in their own respects, resembled a perverse catechism, not of question and answer, but of demand and response. Given that the inaugural, as well as the majority, of the *serate* occurred in major Italian, overwhelmingly Catholic, cities, the significance of the catechism's format on the events and the declamation of manifestos cannot be overemphasized. Formally, the catechism relies on the bold assertion and performance of authority in which the catechist, assuming the role of scholar and teacher, delivers instruction "accommodated to the capacity and intelligence of the hearers" (Catholic Church 32). This is an especially fitting description of the *serata*, which often initiated with a torrent of insults launched upon the audience, decrying their stupidity and cowardice. Furthermore, as Berghaus has argued, Marinetti's rhetoric was often modeled on that of prophets and messiahs in the Catholic tradition (*Theatre* 431n.6). While Marinetti conceived of the *serate*, like the catechism, as a didactic performance of adherence to the Futurist movement, it is important to note that the deliberate provocation of the audience had as its aim a supplementary inversion of the catechism in which the audience, the "ignorati," were cast as priests expounding *passéist* truths while the Futurist declaimers responded with "the insolent and cruel truths" (Marinetti, "Battles" 153).

Such paradoxical affinities between the catechism and the manifesto genre are not merely theoretical but grounded in the evolution of the manifesto genre itself. Though its publication bore little influence on Marinetti, Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* is today considered the genre's urtext and most influential example of the genre. Its original draft, *Principles of*

*Communism*, however, was composed, not as a manifesto but in strict catechistic form, comprised of twenty-five “articles of faith.” Drafted at the behest of the Congress of the League of the Just, the founding conference of the Communist League, the catechist form unsettled Engels which he expressed to Marx in a letter dated November 23, 1847: “Think over the Confession of Faith a bit. I believe we had better drop the catechism form and call the thing: Communist Manifesto. As more or less history has got to be related in it, the form it has been in hitherto is quite unsuitable. I am bringing what I have done here with me; it is in simple narrative form, but miserably worded, in fearful hast” (158). For Engels, the catechism was an ineffective form for the conveyance of historical and scientific evidence. The manifesto’s plasticity and its mixture of both sweeping narrative and parataxis to elucidate grievances made it a more convenient form for detailing the faults of capitalist economy. It would be a mistake, however, to read Engels’s emphasis on history as an impulse toward mere historiography. Indeed, the Communist Manifesto has as its goal a re-envisioning of history *as* revolution, as its first sentence declares: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (89). Perhaps more importantly, the text aims to become an intervention in the very history it details and to contribute to a revolutionary unfolding of that history actively.

According to Maurice Blanchot, though, the effectiveness of such an intervention requires that the manifesto adopt an affective voice that exceeds mere historiography or measured logic: “It is brief and direct, more than just brief and direct, since it short-circuits all speech. It no longer carries any meaning, but becomes an urgent and violent appeal, a decision for rupture. It does not strictly speaking say anything; it is only the urgency of what it announces, bound to an impatient and always excessive demand since excess is its only measure” (116). While the Communist Manifesto is indeed an “impatient” text laden with an “excessive demand”

that culminates in the final cry, “Workers of the world unite!”, the manifesto form in Marinetti’s hands is purged of its historical theorizing and reduced to an organ of pure, impatient, action-speech. The *serate* was thus the material realization of the manifesto’s “excessive” voice, as Marinetti succinctly describes: “The Futurist *serate* mean precisely the violent incursion of life into art. Artists alive at last, and no longer up in their ivory towers, despising aestheticism, asking to participate, like workmen or soldiers, in the progress of the world” (“Subject” 143-144).<sup>20</sup>

Whereas Engels jettisoned the catechistic form, the articles of the faithful, in favor of a manifesto geared toward theoretical persuasion and apprehension, the *serata*’s manifesto declamations reversed these didactic aims to engender an atmosphere of dissent, a veritable catechism of the unfaithful that relied, paradoxically, on misunderstanding to achieve an innervated, intuitive comprehension of Futurism’s program of “excessive” iconoclasm. This paradox was pivotal to Futurism’s assault on traditionalist institutions and “professionals” (academia, critics, etc.) who were viewed as promulgators of false truths and impediments to the democratization and revitalization of the arts. Marinetti explained the need to break with the logic and theory promoted by those entities (and the manifesto à la Engels and Marx) in favor of a higher-order mode of comprehension in an interview for the first issue of the Neopolitan magazine *La diana*:

We fight ferociously against the critics, useless intermediaries or dangerous exploiters that they are, and not against the public whom we wish to improve, to raise to a comprehension of

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<sup>20</sup> Marinetti’s delineations of the *serata*’s underlying concepts are couched in socialist terminology. His writings on the subject of socialist, however, are almost completely devoid of Marxist traces, pledging affinity instead to George Sorel’s anti-theoretical socialism that defended and extolled violence as the prime initiator of social revolutions. In Sorel’s view, The Communist Manifesto was deeply flawed in its emphasis on history and theory which smacked of utopian idealism rather than actionable revolution.

life that is more elevated and profound, more powerful and succinct, more original and forthright. The public have often misunderstood us. That is only natural, considering the superficial nonsense of the common clichés and professional idiocies that pass for ideas among them. We are not pessimistic, however. The public will understand us, but it will take time and, especially, boundless energy. The mobs that have hissed us, shown their contempt and showered us with vegetables, have also—much against their wills—admired our artists’ courageous, selfless, heroic struggle. (“Subject” 145)

At first blush, Marinetti’s appraisal of the audience’s reception as admiration seems to conflict with the mountain of anecdotes detailing the violence that took place at the *serate*. Such tales involve every conceivable act of mayhem from shouting to bloodletting. Indeed, at one such incident in Florence, a spectator came up to the stage during one of Marinetti’s orations and offered him a pistol, suggesting, “Go on, commit suicide.” To this, Marinetti replied, “If I deserve a bullet of lead, you deserve a bullet of shit!” (qtd. in Berghaus 109). The audience erupted in laughter. Examples like this one illustrate that, despite the violent nature of the *serata*, there was, behind the ire and fomenting, an ironic accord between the Futurists and the audience grounded in comprehension but performed by way of discord—a comprehension that was, in Marinetti’s terms, “more elevated and profound, more powerful and succinct, more original and forthright.” He would later detail an illustrative example of this “comprehension” at work as a veritable surplus-effect of the audience’s vacillation between sincere rage and feigned irascibility at a *serate* which occurred in Naples at the Mercandante Theatre:

All of a sudden, among the parabolas of potatoes and rotten fruit, I managed to catch an orange that had been thrown at me. I peeled it as calm as could be and proceeded to eat it slowly, segment by segment.

Then a miracle occurred. A strange good humor took hold of those dear Neopolitans, and gradually, as my bitterest enemies gave themselves up to applause, the fortunes of the evening turned in our favor.

Naturally, I lost no time in thanking the bellowing herd (whose admiration was suddenly stopped in its tracks) by heaping further insulting truths upon them; with the result that they waited for us outside the theater entrance, to cheer us and lead us in a triumphant procession all over the city. (“Futurism’s First Battles” 155)

Marinetti’s narrative demonstrates not only the degree to which his repartee and quick wit lorded over the audience’s affective responses but also bears witness to a series of tacit cues that the audience looked to as pivot-points for their own performance: Marinetti peels a hurled orange, the audience cheers; Marinetti insults them, their admiration turns to ire; the evening ends, the crowd cheers the Futurists through the streets of the city. Each of these oscillations turns on the axis of the serious and non-serious, the grave and the comedic. In this newly theatricalized, disorienting context, the successful declaiming of a manifesto relied upon an ironically antagonistic audience eager or willing to discharge cathetic energies. Indeed, one has to imagine that if the Futurists had performed their manifestos to a pensive, polite audience, the text would cease to be a manifesto, instead resembling a staid lecture rather than a revolutionary event—even if that revolution is itself just a performance.

The fact that the audience so readily played the part of the angry crowd, however, eventually contributed to the *serata*’s abandonment by the Futurists. By late 1913, Marinetti concluded that the audience’s responses had grown far too rote. Surprise and tumult had given way to scripted participation. Though the press that each event received contributed greatly to the promotion of the Futurists’ message, newspaper articles and reviews became little more than audience

instructions. They no longer reacted to what appeared on stage, but to the event itself.

Complicating the matter further was the fact that the *serate* had grown ever more dangerous. The infamy of the events ensured many of its attendees came to engage more in simple rabble-rousing than the evening's program. With turnouts often exceeding 5,000 people at singular events in large cities, the evenings increasingly turned into full-scale riots in the streets, causing tensions with police security and local municipalities who began imposing hefty fees on Marinetti's crew before allowing a *serata* to take place. Innervating the audience is one thing; a mischief-seeking crowd is something altogether different. The *serata*, it seems, finally succumbed to the burden of its own logical, if unforeseen, outcome.

Though the frequency and scale of the *serata* waned after 1913, the Futurist's emphasis on theatre as a cornerstone of their movement did not abate. Extravagantly promoted events announced via parades through the city and the tossing of Futurist pamphlets into the streets was replaced with smaller scale "gallery evenings" that placed emphasis on the presentation of paintings and sculpture. Though the inflammatory declaiming of manifestos remained an important ingredient in the evening's program, the goal of sparking violent melee was eschewed in favor of more measured verbal ripostes. In short, higher ticket prices, smaller venues, and less ostentatious advertising ensured that the audience was less plebian and better mannered. Despite the shift in practice to less raucous events, Marinetti's post-1913 musings on the theater remained unrepentantly mischievous—perhaps more mischievous than during the height of the *serate*—as exemplified in the "suggestions" attending his "Manifesto of the Variety Theatre" (1913):

Some random suggestions: spread a powerful glue on some of the seats, so that the male or female spectator will stay glued down and make everyone laugh (the damaged frock coat or

toilette will naturally be paid for at the door). – Sell the same ticket to ten people: traffic jam, bickering and wrangling. – Offer free tickets to gentlemen or ladies who are notoriously unbalanced, irritable or eccentric and likely to provoke uproars with obscene gestures, pinching women or other freakishness. Sprinkle the seats with dust to make people itch and sneeze etc. (54)

Though seemingly cruel, Marinetti's "suggestions" are indicative of an important component to the Futurist program which would form the aesthetic foundation of avant-garde movements that followed: to "make everyone laugh." Importantly, Marinetti's suggestions also emphasize compensation to those whose property might be seriously damaged by these non-serious hijinks. Though subtle, his injunction implies that the theatrical context that he was advocating was not simply chaos, but the constitution of an equitable, bidirectional performative energy between the stage and stalls that conformed neither to quotidian reality nor the cultural norms attending a night at the theater. Rather the theater Marinetti envisioned was one colored by a disorienting mood inculcated by the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious for which the manifesto served as both a text and sub-text.

## II. BLUEPRINT FOR THE AVANT-GARDE

The legacy of Marinetti's *serata* as a promotional tool and theatrical revolution did not, however, end with the Futurists' abandonment of its program. The *serata* had indelibly increased the imaginable modalities of reception *vis-à-vis* the work of art and its audience. Moreover, it had made legible the degree to which classical modalities of reception (i.e., contemplation and reverence) enshrined the success of an institutionally consecrated few by ensuring the exclusion of the innovative, the new, and more importantly, the popular. Thus, just as Marinetti's Italian group began staging less chaotic events, the Russian Hyleans took to the streets of Moscow, on



October 9, 1913, to announce a theatrical lecture.<sup>21</sup> Parading through the streets in painted faces, they handed out manifestos and announcements printed on toilet paper while reciting their own poems. Tickets to the event sold out within one hour. Replicating Marinetti's *serata*, the event's audience was entreated to insults and the reading of inflammatory manifestos. Giving a sense of the evening's ambiance by way of anecdote, Aleksei Kruchenykh, one of the Hylean ringleaders, spilled hot tea on the front row during his oration. Unlike its Western counterparts, the Moscow audience responded to these ill-mannered gestures with applause and laughter instead of fisticuffs—despite the physical combat envisioned by the group's inaugural manifesto, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (1912). The result was that "evenings of poetry recitation and manifesto declamation became fashionable season events to which the respectable public flocked with a confessed feeling of condescending curiosity," spawning similar events in Russian theaters and music halls, as well as the establishment of the first cabaret dedicated exclusively to Futurist aesthetics, *The Stray Dog* (Lawton 15). The presentation of iconoclastic ideals in a theatrical context emphasizing surprise and infidelity to a set script gave Russian audiences, like those in Western Europe, the illusion they were participating in a collective act of transgression and lawlessness. Though for Russian audiences such events were often naughtiness-by-proxy, the affective response in the attendees was pure mesmerism.

While the Hyleans were perhaps the first and certainly the most geographically distant adopters of the *serata*'s framework, they were certainly not the last. And while successive avant-garde groups did their best to deny Marinetti's influence on their respective movements, their co-option of his synthesizing of the manifesto and theatrical performance made for undeniable

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<sup>21</sup> The first of the purported Russian Futurist groups, the Hyleans were later renamed the Cubo-Futurists by the press—a name the group ambivalently embraced because it afforded them greater press by virtue of its association with Marinetti's international fame. Despite appropriating many of Italian Futurism's antics, the group constantly asserted their independence from Marinetti, labeling him "The Stranger" whenever they spoke of him.

parallels drawn by the contemporary press and history alike. Indeed, the most celebrated and studied locus of avant-garde performance, the Dada evenings at Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire, were themselves inheritors of Marinetti's innovation. But long before Hugo Ball donned his cardboard shaman's suit for the recitation of sound poems or declaimed his *First Dadaist Manifesto* (ironically his farewell-text to the movement) from the cabaret's stage, he, along with Richard Huelsenbeck, staged a series of confrontational performances in Berlin under the banner of Expressionism. Each of these was dedicated to the reading of poetry and declaiming of manifestos that succinctly described not only what would become Dada, but also the affective, innervating goal of their immediate performances: "We want to provoke, perturb, bewilder, tease, tickle to death, confuse, without any context. Be reckless, negators. We want to propagate metabolism, break-neck somersaults, vampirism and all forms of mimicry" (qtd. in Green 15). The allusions to a body in a state of agitation coupled with a confounded mind are unmistakable, and these were indeed not lost on the audience who responded obediently by laughing, cat-calling, and brawling at the event. As one newspaper observed, "Basically it was a protest against Germany in favour of Marinetti" (qtd. in Green 15).

Such parallels would increasingly be difficult to make, however, as Dada's antics eclipsed even Marinetti's imaginings. The purging of theory from the manifesto accomplished by Marinetti, aesthetically besting Marx and Engels in seizing the genre from intellectual idealism, was taken one step further by the Dadaists who purged logic and, often, syntax from their manifestos. Indeed, Tzara's "Dada Manifesto" (1918) which laid out a program of supreme contradiction and "Idon'tgiveadamnism," achieved a level of unprecedented paradoxical illogical-logic by blending relativism and nihilism. Remarkably, the text manages to offer a biting critique of the manifesto by reducing the genre, as it had been previously practiced, to a

simple logical formula: “To proclaim a manifesto you have to want: A.B.C., thunder against 1, 2, 3” (297). Put another way, the text takes a position about its own form, while ridiculing and decrying the futility of position-taking altogether.

Tzara’s text was by no means a rejection of the manifesto but rather a crucial step in its evolution from an ephemeral performance genre to a self-referential, self-canonizing one, the meta-manifesto, which challenges the autonomy of the manifesto from the works or movement it portends to announce. The manifesto is thus explicitly folded into the work of art itself such that the artwork contains a discourse on its own creation. Tzara’s *Seven Dada Manifestos* (1920) stands as the most important transition from manifestos composed for impermanence to manifestos written for faithful printing and anthologizing. Much of the impetus behind this textual durability extended from Dada’s emphasis on self-anthologizing the movement’s works, as evinced in collections such as *Dada Almanac* (1924). But it was also constitutive of Dada’s privileging of the genre such that the movement elevated the manifesto to a status on par with the poem and the play.<sup>22</sup>

As Martin Puchner has observed, three of the texts in *Seven Dada Manifestos* are extracted from Tzara’s play *First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, performed at Zurich’s Waag-Saal theater in 1919. For its part, the play is typical of Dadaist theatre, redolent with nonsense dialogue and absent a discernable narrative. Near the end of the play, however, the text shifts with the appearance of a character named, self-referentially, Tristan Tzara whose speech resembles a declaimed meta-manifesto “for and against unity” (qtd. in Puchner 154). This exchange between the play and the manifesto, the manifesto-within-a-play and the play-within-a-

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<sup>22</sup> “The Manifesto of Mr. AA, the Antiphilosopher,” the fourth text in *Seven Dada Manifestos*, is a poem written in the form of a manifesto. It too was declaimed from the stage as part of a public reading at an event staged by the People’s University in Paris on February 18, 1920.

manifesto is demonstrative of a privileging of the genre that has the capacity to make *correspondances* (to invoke an apt Symbolist term) between the manifesto of the work and its very manifestation. It is also indicative of an inversion of Marinetti's *serata* in which the manifesto served as a rough script for mutable theatricality: now the theatrical script served as a text for an immutable manifesto.

Attendant in these twinned histories of the art manifesto and theater is an overwhelming sense of reciprocity, a sense that the two forms, while autonomous in their own respects, are reciprocally attracted. While much of this can be attributed to the manifesto's performative aspects, particularly its status as a speech-act, this attraction is equally a byproduct of the two genre's histories. Marinetti once asserted that "EVERYTHING OF ANY VALUE IS THEATRICAL" ("Synthetic" 199). His claim, however, is as rooted in the material culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as it is in any semblance of modernist aesthetic valuation. The rapid growth of literacy, industrialization, and communication that accompanied the dawn of the twentieth century gave large segments of the Western population an increasing awareness of their social and economic conditions as well as a sense that a positive change in those conditions was possible. The theater's status as the only form and arena of mass entertainment made it the veritable center of public life where new and often subversive ideas could, in the words of Bavarian reformer Wilhelm Riehl, "storm and rage." As one Russian dramatic critic claimed in 1899, "for us plays and theaters are the same thing as, for example, parliamentary events and political speeches" (qtd. in Swift 153). The fear that the theater was a dangerous forum uniquely positioned for the expression of political discontent was not lost on European rulers desperate to maintain authority in an epoch which had experienced a deluge of popular uprisings resulting in violent regime changes. Indeed, many pointed to the performance

of the opera *La Muette de Portici* as inciting the 1830 Belgian revolution. It was also widely held that plays had served as dress rehearsals for the 1848 revolutions that swept the continent (Goldstein 7). Thus, stringent censorship in the theater and prior censorship laws governing what could and could not be staged existed in every continental nation-state throughout the nineteenth century, lasting decades longer than similar laws governing the press and literature owing to the view that the theater's affective potential wielded greater influence on the public than the written word. Though many of the censorship laws governing the European theater were relaxed by the time Marinetti's *serata* burst upon the scene, the quotidian and governmental consensus had long established that the theater was the proverbial center of modern public life—and its discontents.<sup>23</sup>

If the manifesto was the textual voice of revolution, certainly the theater was its most effective arena. Marinetti's combining of the two in the *serata* was thus a watershed transition that synthesized two anxiety-inducing forms. But the economic conditions of its historical moment also made for an unprecedentedly egalitarian audience. The promotional tours that preceded these events—parades, acrobatics, marching bands, leaflets—gave the impression of a circus or *petite spectacle*, considered by many of the day “lowbrow” theatrical forms that attracted audiences across the entire class spectrum. Once these promotional antics concluded and the main event—the *serata*—occurred, however, the theaters would be filled by audiences ranging from two to five thousand spectators, more than any single-night performance garnered at traditional playhouses. Since ticket prices were generally higher for shows at the boulevard

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<sup>23</sup> The relaxation of prior censorship laws governing performance in European countries was generally the result of logistical issues. For example, in France over 9,000 plays were submitted for the censor's approval across 160 official theaters in the year 1900 alone. In addition to these, the censor prefects had the burden of monitoring café chansons and cabarets. In nascent Italy, which had only been unified in 1889, the lack of centralized control over standards, both political and moral, resulted in a resignation in enforcement. Still, nation-states across the continent relaxed these laws in close proximity to one another: Germany in 1918; Austria in 1906; and France in 1906. Prior censorship of the theater in Great Britain, however, persisted until 1968, lending support to the theory that the dearth of manifestos produced in Great Britain was the result of the genre's forestalled theatricalization in that country.

theaters, the lower and middling classes were relegated to cheaper venues such as *café chansons* and the circus, or free open-air performances offered by *petite spectacles*. The *serata* leveled these implicit social divisions by offering tickets as cheap as one Lire. Thus, people who rarely went to the “official” theaters and certainly never to the traditional playhouses that staged the *serata* were put in company with the *gente perbene* who occupied the five to ten Lire seats in the boxes. As a critic writing in *Corriere della sera* described the Milan *serata* of 1910, “people who have never been seen before and who evidently only come to the theatre when a *serata* is on” (qtd. in Berghaus 98). Such audience compositions contributed to the *serata*’s havoc by ensuring that the stalls were full of incompatible class sensibilities and social mores. The gap between the serious and non-serious, the refined classes and the plebian rabble, was as present in the audience composition as much as on the stage.

The social juxtapositions in the audience ensured that a dynamism would evince from the Futurists’ assault on culturally revered institutions of art, the primary frame for the inflammatory rhetoric of the manifestos they would declaim. Marinetti’s assertion that the *serate* were constitutive of a “ferocious” fight “against the critics” which he derided as “useless intermediaries or dangerous exploiters” is telling, as it both deflates the role of the critic and gestures to a system of artistic and cultural institutions set apart from and “above” the public. According to Marinetti, these “ivory tower” institutions only made themselves accessible or visible to the general public through critic-proxies and were the traffickers of *passéist* sensibilities, “professionals” whose primary allegiance was to their institutionally codified status. Protecting the hegemony of the institution legitimized their own cultural supremacy. Against these dogmatists, the Futurists vowed to fight on behalf of a public “whom we wish to improve, to raise to a comprehension of life that is more elevated and profound, more powerful and

succinct, more original and forthright” (Marinetti, “Subject” 145). The fact that the *serata* audience was populated with denizens from both sides of this cultural and class-stratified spectrum made for a swirling nexus of affective energies. Manifesto declaimers were subjected to outrage as well as defense from the audience, whose members reacted against one another’s respective responses with the result that the theater, more than ever, resembled the “modern public arena” that government and institutional figures had feared.

### III. MANIFESTO, MARKETPLACE, AND MATERIALITY

The assault on cultural elitism and its symbols—museums and libraries—that the Futurists branded as *passéist* was, despite its effectiveness in reinvigorating artistic discourse in the public sphere, part of a much longer and pervasive battle that at times resonated not only with same themes but also within the same generic forms: the manifesto and the theater. Making legible the cohesion extent between the manifesto’s form and content, its voice and its message thus requires rereading these battles as the cultural preconditions for the Futurists’ arrival upon a scene at a time when modern aesthetics was already problematically tied to the market.

Thematically, the Futurists were constitutive of a broader discussion with the contemporary arts concerning the public’s tepid response to modern aesthetics and its influence on the marketplace for aesthetic works. Though the legacy of the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists loomed large and those movement’s exponent figures enjoyed widespread fame (or infamy), the collectors of their works were generally wealthy Americans. Weakened by a growing litany of competing organizations, the official French Salon still held a great deal of power as a taste-making institution. Despite art history’s canonization of its attendant movements, however, modernist painting never gained traction with Salon juries. The heterogeneity of artistic movements also contributed to an overall diffidence toward actual works of art. Indeed, it was

difficult for the public to discern what constituted “good” art worthy of investment. Making a living as an artist in such a climate was difficult. Thus, many turned to the decorative arts in an attempt to capitalize on their craft. This, too, turned out to be a dead end as evinced by the collapse of international art nouveau between 1900 and 1904 (Jensen 269-271).

Thus, by 1905 the conditions of the marketplace had set the stage for the emergence of the avant-garde and a reshaping of the public’s aesthetic sensibilities. Impressionism was old hat; Fauvism was on the rise. The public’s taste, however, was still mired in traditionalism. Writing in 1906, Camille Mauclair became a leading critic on the state of the marketplace, attributing contemporary conditions to the general public’s lack of aesthetic appreciation: “They love bad taste, false gilt, weepy engravings...all that can excite their imaginative vanity” (Mauclair 251).<sup>24</sup> In his estimation, the appreciation of art by lower classes was wholly mimetic; they gravitated to aesthetic goods that allowed them to fantasize that they were members of a higher caste. The blame for this condition rested on the shoulders of “pseudo-educators” and “preachers of social art” who tried to elevate the public by exposing them to curated masterpieces. The curative curriculum put in place by these “preachers” was simple: intellectuals would educate the masses about what was good by letting them see what was good. This stratagem, however, had proven itself to be tautological, reinforcing the very mimetic appreciation that it aimed to ameliorate. According to Mauclair, changing aesthetic appreciation first necessitated admitting the error of intellectual and aesthetic gatekeepers such as the Salon: “They portray the people as starved for masterpieces, waiting impatiently for the opening of museums and libraries whose gates are unjustly closed to them. It isn’t true: they aren’t hungry, and our preachers of social art

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<sup>24</sup> Camille Mauclair was a novelist and poet chiefly associated with the Symbolist movement. He served as an art critic for *Mercure de France* and *Revue bleue*, dogmatically attacking aesthetic movements that came after Impressionism and Symbolism. Though his works on the theater are few, he was a cofounder along with Lugné-Poe of the Théâtre de l’Œuvre.



are trying to break down open doors...Everything being done right now for the artistic education of the people is only bragging, boosterism, or blundering.” (250). In place of this system of intellectual and institutional “bragging,” Mauclair advocated the renouncement of taste-making and education in favor of encouraging the public to make its own art. Once ordinary people create their own art, he claimed, they will learn to appreciate the works of others.

Though considered a conservative critic, Mauclair’s analysis seems to anticipate the co-creative performances of the avant-garde inaugurated by the Futurist *serata* and offers a theoretical explanation for the success of those events. It also gives purchase to the view that the *serata* paved the way for the avant-garde by giving audiences an appreciation, however perverse, of the works that followed. More importantly, the homology between Mauclair’s indictment of intellectual and artistic institutions and the content of Marinetti’s manifestos—Mauclair’s claim that museums did little to improve aesthetic sensibilities, and Marinetti’s call to burn the museums down—are indicative of a perspicuous harmonizing between the *serata*’s anti-institutional message and its innervating theatrical form. Whether Mauclair’s ideas were a direct influence on the creation of the *serata* is a matter of conjecture, but the fact that he and Marinetti were personally and professionally acquainted lends credibility to this assertion. Indeed, Marinetti dedicated his 1908 poem, “La ville charnelle,” to Mauclair during the same time he was drafting the Futurist manifesto and planning a “Futurist refashioning of the universe.”<sup>25</sup> Regardless, Mauclair’s writings make legible within the Futurist manifestos and their theatrical antics an attempt to ameliorate specific conditions within the marketplace of aesthetic goods by

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<sup>25</sup> Marinetti and Mauclair publicly duelled in the press over Futurism owing to Marinetti’s view that his old friend’s dogmatic adherence to Symbolist aesthetics was evidence of his *passéism*. Mauclair’s nationalistic claims that French art was superior to Italian art was a further, deep point of contention. Marinetti offered a detailed account of his objections to Mauclair in an article published in *Comoedia* on January 14, 1930.

changing the public's aesthetic sensibilities using a new methodology that relied on ludic, non-serious theater to realize a didactic, serious aim.

#### IV. A TRANSHISTORICAL GENRE(S)

Placing the aesthetic manifesto within this new contextual nexus, though, calls into question literary history's designation of the genre as an announcement of "rupture" rather than one step in the evolution of aesthetic criticism. To be sure, the charged rhetoric and formal efficacy of the manifesto—its parataxis and trenchant brevity—have shaped literary history such that scholars have projected, anachronistically, the title "manifesto" onto texts that did not originally bear that moniker. One example of such generic "slippage" can be found in the anthology, *The Romantic Manifesto*, edited by Larry Peer, which includes texts as wide-ranging as Madame de Staël's *De Allemagne* (1810), Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1802), and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) as exemplary manifesto texts. Peer's brief introduction argues the case for these texts' inclusion under that generic category by invoking Welleck and Warren's definition of genre as "a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter and structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience)" (qtd. in Peer 2). Tellingly, Peer elsewhere describes the manifesto as "essay-like writing," an indication that the genre has been reflexively shaped, recodified, by encounters with aesthetic manifestos such that the term may be applied to any text of artistic criticism provided that it is essayistic (outer form) and exhortative (inner form). A similar plasticity toward defining the manifesto genre was asserted by Claude Abastado, the progenitor of the genre's study, who delineated five applications of the term:

- 1) The term is applied *stricto sensu* to texts, often brief, published in a pamphlet, whether in a newspaper or a journal, on behalf of a political, philosophical, literary, or artistic movement.
- 2) By extension, all texts which violently stake a position and institute between the emitter and the allocutioner an openly injunctive relationship.
- 3) By comparison—and anachronistically—all programmatic and polemical texts, whatever their form.
- 4) Public reception may designate as manifestoes works which originally did not entail that intention.
- 5) Finally, we designate as manifestoes certain spectacular, often violent, acts of individuals or groups which intend to “make their voice heard” through these means. (3-5)

As Abastado progresses from *stricto sensu* manifestos in his first definition to the last, his application of the term broadens from textual modes to the relationship between issuer and audience and, finally, to the reception of the audience alone. As both Peer and Abastado’s analyses illustrate, the manifesto is first and foremost an intuitive genre. Intuition, however, does not exist in a vacuum, nor do purportedly new forms. Reading the genre backwards onto texts such as the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” implies extant homologies that allow for a forward application or, better, a viable claim that the aesthetic manifesto is but a series of conventions grafted upon literary and aesthetic criticism. Read in this way, the greatest claim aesthetic manifestos such as the Futurists’ may stake was finally making aesthetic criticism popular by making it affective, by making it theatrical. For all their novelty, though, the Futurist manifestos and the *serata* were popular because their audiences were able to understand, implicitly or explicitly, the cultural codes of which these texts and events were inescapably a part. As critics

as far removed as Foucault and T.S. Eliot would say, the new always participates in the discourse of tradition. Theorized in this way, the manifesto is not a generic category of “belonging” that can be defined by resemblances or formal homologies, but only historically delimited and described; for, as John Frow observes, “genres have little transhistorical essence, only historically changing use values” (76, 167).

Reevaluating aesthetic manifestos along the lines of use value allows for the elimination of the distinction between the genre of a text and the modalities of its dissemination, often revealing a richer expanse of culture codes obscured by strict generic study. In the case of the *serata* and the Futurist manifestos, emphasis on use value exposes the transposition of manifestos onto the oral literature of the theater to create a tonic for an artistic marketplace under the influence of self-interested institutions and professionals. It also demonstrates that the appropriation of theatrical conventions by aesthetic criticism has a long and storied past, always with the aim of undermining aesthetic and intellectual elites and asserting the public or lower classes’ right to aesthetic judgement. Indeed the history of the manifesto-as-criticism contains diverse examples: Jean Moréas’s “Symbolist Manifesto” (1896) invokes the theater in the form of a theatrical interlude complete with ribald dialogue to assert the stupidity of contemporary critics; for Jules Romain’s “Unanimist Manifesto” (1905), the theater is proof of the public’s collective consciousness and shared emotional energy.

If, as Lyon and Puchner have argued, the performativity of the manifesto provides the authoritative context for an unauthorized voice, its use value is the seizing of aesthetic supremacy from the hands of a privileged few. This reading belies the reductive assertion often put forth by literary and art histories that the manifesto and its theatricalization were little more than highly effective promotional tools. Indeed, the purported “rupture” that the proliferation of

manifestos in the early twentieth century signaled was not simply aesthetic “newness,” but the final triumph of unprofessional artists over an institutionalized system of culture that had existed in European states for centuries. Robert Darnton, whose work on revolutionary-era France bears witness to the pervasiveness of this system, succinctly summarizes it as being one chiefly defined by privilege:

Privileged guilds [...] monopolized the production and distribution of the printed word. Privileged journals exploited royally granted monopolies. The privileged Comédie Française, Académie Royale de Musique, and Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture legally monopolized the stage, opera, and the plastic arts. The Académie Française restricted literary immortality to forty privileged individuals, while privileged bodies like the Académie des Sciences and the Société Royale de Médecine dominated the world of science. And above all these the corps rose the supremely cultural elite who kept *le monde* all to themselves. (21)

Such was the “tradition” that constituted the cultural codes that Marinetti and his audiences throughout Europe recognized. These were the *passéists*, the ones that “kept *le monde* all to themselves,” the ones who feared the “storm and rage” of the theater and censored it.

The fact that Marinetti was able to use the theater as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of Futurist manifestos may have been a happy accident made possible by a relaxation in censorship laws governing the theater across the continent at the dawn of the century, but it certainly was not the first attempt to wrestle aesthetic criticism from the privileged by employing the theatrical. As Bernadette Fort has elaborately detailed, the venerable state-sponsored Salons of the eighteenth-century experienced a similar moment of rupture. The happy alliance between institutions of art and government censors effectively forestalled dissenting

opinions in criticism that did not conform to the dogmatic tastes of the Salon and the Académie, despite the fact that those institutions claimed to derive their consecration from the public, for the public's aesthetic edification. To subvert the censors, dissenting critics adopted a repertoire of songs, jests, plays, and entertainments from the popular theater to recast their critiques as light entertainments unworthy of serious concern. These authors insisted upon the frivolity of their texts through titles such as "Cousin Jacques Kicked Out of the Salon: An Inconsequential Folly" and numerous prefaces that described their efforts as "a bit of pure banter, which can have no other value but that of the moment" (Fort 374). Despite such declarations, these tracts signified a consequential break with the rhetoric and ideology of institutionalized criticism that treated art as a serious, dignified undertaking belonging to a select, cultured elite. Indeed, the popularity of these "inconsequential" texts posed a grave threat to the legitimacy and solemnity of the Salon and its institutions. Short plays within these texts depicted folk from the lower classes attending public exhibitions and commented on revered paintings in vulgar fashion, recasting the Salon's aesthetic snobbery as a lack of common sense. For example, Daudé de Jossen's "Lettre de M. Raphael le jeune" (1771) depicts one character admonishing the celebrated Salon painter Nicholas Jollain: "Your Diana is poorly drawn...her tit falls below her elbow all the way to her waist" (qtd. in Fort 386). Re-descriptions of paintings as portrayals of biblical figures with flatulence, diarrhea, and ill shaped buttocks were a commonplace theme that deflated artistic rhetoric and put criticism in the language of the street. Like the aesthetic manifesto would over a century later, these dissident critiques served as scripts, preparing audiences for their own reception of artworks to come. Thus, Salon exhibitions became affairs where one could hear laughter cracking out over the serious, reverent silence, asserting the judgement of the popular over the taste of their betters.

Though separated by an epoch of great social and economic change, the explosive number of manifestos authored in the twentieth-century echoes the explosion of dissident criticism in the eighteenth century. While both deploy theatrical conventions toward the same aims—innervating the audience and opposing institutionalized culture—they do so most notably by straddling the serious and non-serious such that a blurring of the distinction between the two occurs, and the seriousness of the serious evaporates entirely. Linking these two phenomena highlights the efficacy of theatrical appropriation in criticism, but it also makes legible the demarcation point between criticism and the manifesto missing from generic studies; namely, textual inertia. Or rather, the manifesto's deliverance of criticism from it. Performing aesthetic criticism as oral literature, making it theatrical, is perhaps the manifesto's watershed moment, for it is the moment in which aesthetic criticism ceased to be pompous judgement, aligned itself with the chaotic indeterminacy of the streets, and stormed and raged in the voice of the dangerous public. While manifesto writers still relied upon newspapers and journals to reach an international audience, the next chapter will illustrate that the genre's success in the press stemmed from the popular invocation in the public's mind, not of aesthetic ideas, but events that could capture the public's imagination. Put simply, the manifesto, when not performed on stage, performed or indexed an event that occurred in the theater of everyday life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Spectacle and Scandal:

#### Manifestos, Taxonomy, and the Theatrical Press

When French playwright Henri-René Lenormand compiled a ten-volume anthology of his own works in 1942, he excluded an early play he judged unworthy of his oeuvre: *Les Possédés* (1909). Despite his dismissal of this early play, its public dress rehearsal at the Théâtre des Arts in Paris on April 13, 1909, was touted by contemporary newspapers as an important theatrical event. The popular daily *Le Figaro*, in its influential “Courrier des Théâtres” column, even took the unique measure of announcing the play alongside a letter from the young author explaining the play’s theme, which the newspaper’s editor described as both “curious” and “interesting”:<sup>1</sup>

The possessed are the intellectuals of genius for whom the accomplishment of their work is the only goal in life. Whether they are physicists engaged in researching the laws of the evolution of matter or the musicians who promote new forms of art, the possessed are damned by creative instinct. Victimized by the unappeasable passion for creating which obliterates all human feeling in them, they do not shrink from anything to satisfy their dreams, and if the social laws come against them, they do not hesitate to break everything, by becoming criminals (5).

The dress rehearsal for *Les Possédés* would go on to achieve international notoriety, but the premier was far less momentous. And while the rehearsal’s infamy had everything to do with the theme of unbridled artistic passion that, in the face of social laws “breaks everything” and turns

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<sup>1</sup> Lenormand’s play was the first piece in a double bill that included a dramatization of Joseph Conrad’s short story “To-morrow,” dramatized by Pierre Henri Raymond-Duval. Conrad later attempted his own adaptation of the story, which was never staged. Ten years after Raymond-Duval’s effort, Conrad remarked in his Preface to *Typhoon*, “Of that story I will only say that It struck many people by its adaptability to the stage, and that I was induced to dramatise it under the title of *One Day More*; up to the present my only effort in that direction.”



“criminal,” the worldwide attention the performance received had nothing to do with the play. Rather, it was upstaged by what the “*Courier des Théâtres*” column described the following morning as a “lively incident” during the intermission which captured the theater-going public’s attention: “M. Marinetti, author of *Le Roi Bombance*, seeing in the vestibule M. Charles-Henry Hirsch, rushed upon him and slapped him twice. M. Charles-Henry Hirsch replied as best he could. Cane strokes were exchanged” (5). Lenormand’s letter, it seems, had anticipated the drama of the evening’s intermission more succinctly than the theme of his own play.

The cause of Marinetti’s criminal assault on Hirsch was fundamentally a matter of critical discord. Marinetti had taken great offense at a review of the disastrous first (and only) performance of *Le Roi Bombance* which Hirsch had published in the newspaper *Le Journal* only a few days before. In it, Hirsch charged Marinetti with indecency and claimed the play was little more than a bad knock-off of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, he attributed the depiction of vulgar images, themes, and dialog in *Le Roi Bombance* to Marinetti’s Italian blood—an unwise and unfair conclusion considering Marinetti’s fervent Italian nationalism and, paradoxically, the fact that most of the play’s vulgarity had been borrowed from Jarry and was therefore of French extraction. Irrespective of the attack’s justification, Hirsch responded to Marinetti’s slaps in a manner befitting a dramatic critic who was also a critic of sports. He challenged Marinetti to a duel.

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<sup>2</sup> In his notes on Marinetti’s critical works, Gunter Berghaus asserts that Marinetti’s anger at Hirsch was exacerbated by the latter’s complicity in a rumor that Marinetti had engaged in an affair with Jane Catulle-Mendès, a fellow poet and wife of Catulle Mendès, one of Marinetti’s early Symbolist mentors. The rumor was especially scandalous since Catulle Mendès had died only two months before. Hirsch’s tacit charge of plagiarism was also important given Marinetti’s revulsion of it. Indeed, as Andrew Hewitt has shown, Marinetti’s final break with Mussolini and Fascism stemmed from the latter’s insistence on creating a new Roman Empire which Marinetti decried—in decidedly literary terms—as historical and cultural plagiarism. See Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-garde*, pp. 100.

Occurring on April 16, 1909, at the Parc des Princes in Paris, nearly every popular newspaper in Europe and the Americas carried lengthy reports of the Marinetti-Hirsch duel. Remarkably, a photograph of the duel also appeared in sporting magazines, indicating the degree to which the event permeated entertainment industries as seemingly distinct as the theater and sport (see fig. 7). Bout-by-bout accounts of the twelve sword-wielding encounters appeared in dailies as remote as the New Zealand *Evening Post*, which dubbed the men “fighting cocks,” detailed the pricking of Marinetti’s wrist in the first bout, and Hirsch’s receipt of a three-quarter inch gash in the tenth that, owing to its incessant bloodletting, ended the fight in the twelfth reprise. What had begun as Hirsch’s attempt, however antiquated, to demand honorable satisfaction from Marinetti’s offense, ended in the press reporting Hirsch’s “manifest inferiority” and praising Marinetti’s “philosophy of energy and the violent life” idealized in his Futurist



Fig. 7. “Le duel Hirsch-Marineti.” Published in *Le Vie au grand air*, 24 April 1909.

Manifesto, now fully realized in a bona fide swordfight against a critic (“Furious Fight with Swords” 11).

Critics and historians often cite the Marinetti-Hirsch duel as an anecdote representative of the aggressive rhetoric that colors Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto, relegating the event to an amusing footnote attesting to the infamy Marinetti earned from the explosive publication of his manifesto. But this well-worn narrative has, I claim, read the cultural and historical correspondences between the manifesto and the duel backwards. Viewed chronologically, the manifesto’s appearance in the pages of *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909, two months before the duel certainly serves as a convenient starting point for the Futurist narrative. But a survey of articles concerning Marinetti and the manifesto in the international popular press of 1909 tells a different story. Indeed, the appearance of the manifesto, though in one of Paris’s most widely circulated journals, *Le Figaro*, garnered scant international attention. Between February and April, only one reference to either the manifesto or Marinetti appears in newspapers across the Americas, the United Kingdom, and Australia, oddly enough, in rural Warwickshire’s *Learnington Spa Courier*. Similarly, the French popular press paid scant attention to the manifesto’s publication. An altogether different picture emerges, however, in the wake of the Hirsch-Marinetti duel. As Marinetti later boasted, for fifteen days the press talked of nothing but him. Hundreds of articles appear across the international press detailing the Parc des Princes altercation, often featuring a description of the manifesto either digressively or as a diagnostic tool through which the reader might understand the duel’s violent origins. Coverage of the event, however, was not limited to single articles. Larger periodicals discussed the event for months. For example, six weeks after its first report, London’s *Daily News* reflected on the duel, this time in the paper’s topical “Table Talk” column:

A few weeks ago, there appeared in our newspapers a brief account of a duel fought somewhere on the Continent between Signor F.P. [sic] Marinetti and somebody else. We do not remember who the antagonist was, nor which of the combatants it was who was hurt in the elbow severely enough to satisfy honour... When we read of this duel, we suspected—as we do still—that it had to do with Futurism. (4)

The anonymous author of the article goes on to introduce and explain the Futurist philosophy in laudatory fashion as “practical,” “good stuff,” and “fine writing.” But the column’s lead-in, more importantly, demonstrates that it was interest in the duel that occasioned interest in the manifesto. The column’s dismissive rehash of the swordfight as occurring “somewhere” between Marinetti and “somebody else” likewise signals not only the journal’s self-consciousness in relating old news, but also illustrates that the relevance of the manifesto was heavily dependent on invocation of the duel.

This more nuanced reading of the Futurist narrative, while foregrounding the popular press’s hand in promoting the manifesto, belies the manifesto’s initial import, indicating that the text was considered trivial until indexed by a spectacular event. Recuperating such details from the archive affords an opportunity to reconsider the context as well as the generic origin of modern aesthetic manifestos. This chapter attempts to reassemble those ephemeral, often overlooked or underappreciated details that disrupt the origin-story of aesthetic manifestos promoted by literary history, revealing instead a distinct genre created and shaped by the Parisian popular press. At stake in this reading is a reassessment of the explosive popularization of aesthetic manifestos at the dawn of the twentieth century that overcomes vexing issues inherent in genealogical studies of the genre. In my view, such studies rely too heavily on the application of anachronistically incompatible cultural codes to disparate texts in an attempt to *impose*

generic stability on what were historically delimited forms. In this respect, comparing Marinetti's "Manifesto Against Past-Loving Venice" (1910) to the Leveller's manifestos of 1647 in order to make claims about the genre's conventions or impulses are as abortive as, for example, reading Joyce's *Ulysses* against Richardson's *Pamela*.<sup>3</sup> Historical conflations such as these result in occlusions and limitations by foregrounding formal and rhetorical homologies at the expense of what was, as the chapter will illustrate, a reformulation of the genre by the simple act of appropriating and applying the title "manifesto" to aesthetic criticism published in the popular, theatrical press. More importantly, placing emphasis on the historical milieu in which these texts were published reveals a fundamental double meaning behind the press's particular use of the title "manifesto," specifically, as a term announcing a scandalous text and, at the same time, a spectacular event. Indeed, generic categories are built on much more than the application of a single word. And, as the Parc de Princes duel shows, in the case of modern aesthetic manifestos, it was the event that manifested the text.

#### I. THE MANIFEST EVENT

In December 1908, Marinetti was working on the final edits of the text that would eventually become "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism." At the time, he had not yet struck on the broader title "Futurismo," but called it instead, alternately, "Dinamismo" and "Elettricismo." Its publication in the pages of *Le Figaro* had already been scheduled for early the next month, but its appearance would be delayed by an unforeseen event. On January 2, an earthquake in Sicily wrecked the island, killing over two thousand people and monopolizing the pages of the international press. According to Günter Berghaus, "Marinetti realized that this was hardly an opportune moment for startling the world with a literary manifesto, so he delayed publication

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<sup>3</sup> Such ahistorical comparisons are the crux of Lyon's methodology in *Manifestos: Provocation of the Modern*.

until he could be sure he would get front-page coverage for his incendiary appeal to lay waste to cultural traditions and institutions” (8). The fact that Marinetti was able to defer the manifesto’s appearance in *Le Figaro* suggests that he possessed an editorial voice in *Le Figaro*’s publication of the text rarely afforded to its contributors, calling into question the pretext under which the newspaper consented to publish it in the first place. While the manifesto’s incendiary rhetoric and cultural iconoclasm may have made for a fascinating read to the newspaper’s subscribers, these traits hardly justified its placement in the top-left corner of the front page, the spot typically reserved for the most important news of the day. In this respect, it was not a coincidence that Marinetti and his family were longtime, close friends of Mohammad el-Rachi Pasha, the majority stakeholder in *Le Figaro*. For, it was he who provided the poet with this unique curatorial arrangement through a remarkable act of patronage, if not sheer nepotism.

Though the degree of participation between Marinetti and the editors of *Le Figaro* (at the behest of el-Rachi Pasha) in cultivating the manifesto for its publication is unknown, modifications made in the text between its initially scheduled run and its February 20 appearance reveal that the manifesto continued to be a work in progress. The text appeared across Italian cities—Naples, Verona, Trieste, and Mantua—in various journals and newspapers beginning February 5 in Bologna’s *Gazzetta Della’Emilia*. In each subsequent iteration, however, the text is different, indicating that these publications were trial runs in preparation for the *Le Figaro* printing, which would subsequently be treated as the immutable, official version.

The sixth version, appearing in Naples’s *Tavola Rotonda* on February 14, is significant in that it represents the first edition featuring the introductory narrative detailing the “birth” of the Futurist movement, and it is the only version which mirrors the full text that would later appear in *Le Figaro*. The sudden injection of the introductory narrative to the series of editions, though,

is suspicious. For, as Berghaus claims, Marinetti composed it in haste after arriving at Paris's Grande Hotel, just before submitting the final proofs of the manifesto to *Le Figaro's* editor.

While critics such as Perloff and Somigli often cite the introductory narrative as an inventive frame that would make the manifesto's revolutionary proposals palpable to readers, the curatorial role *Le Figaro's* editors played in the text's publication may have served as the primary motivator for its composition. Giving greater purchase to this is the fact that six months before printing the manifesto, *Le Figaro* ran a front-page column extolling a book of poems recently published by Marinetti, *La Ville Charnelle*, which the newspaper's editor described thusly:

Among the books that we have carefully brought to the country and the sea, *la Ville Charnelle* of the poet Marinetti is the first choice. In it, artists will find delightfully nostalgic oriental songs, and the sportsmen will read with thrilling pleasure the most eloquent pages that have been written about the violent intoxication of the automobile. The success of this book is launched at fourth speed, and the poet Marinetti, very predictably, has beautifully dedicated, as we have already said, *la Ville Charnelle* to his gravediggers! ("Review" 1)

Choosing to focus on two themes among the litany of tropes that permeate the collection of thirty-eight poems, the review's author cites Marinetti's nostalgic orientalism and automobilism as the qualities most appealing and worthy of praise. The appearance of the review hints that el-Rachid Pasha's patronage may already have been at work in *Le Figaro's* pages before 1909, leveraging the paper's prominence to boost Marinetti's literary career. It also spotlights a theme—*automobilisme*—that conveniently shared the title of a new *Le Figaro* column on the subject, which would consistently appear alongside its theatrical section. Moreover, the review's highlighting of these particular tropes is suspiciously prescient, anticipating the two tropes that comprise the manifesto's introductory narrative. Consider, for example, the narrative's opening:

We had stayed up all night, my friends and I, under hanging mosque lamps with domes of filigreed brass, domes starred like our spirits, shrinking like them with the prisoned radiance of electric hearts. For hours we had trampled our atavistic ennui into rich oriental rugs, arguing up to the last confines of logic and blackening many reams of paper with our frenzied scribbling. (“Founding” 13)

From the narrative’s first line, the reader is transported to a realm of nostalgic orientalism peppered with exotic objects that, in turn, become receptacles for the casting off of “millennial gloom” and “the last confines of logic.” In the passages that follow, Romanticism’s “ideal mistress” is supplanted by Death, newly domesticated by the energy, speed, and danger of an automobile that, with the poet at the wheel, rolls “over into a ditch” with its “wheels in the air.” The poet’s emergence from the “muddy,” “maternal ditch,” having conquered death and experienced the thrill of modern speed, occasions the manifesto’s declaration of intentions. A Futurist aesthetic is born.<sup>4</sup>

The narrative itself is, however, one part truth, one part fantasy. The automobile accident Marinetti describes had indeed occurred on October 15, 1908, but not after a night of inspired revelry. According to newspaper accounts, he crashed at about noon with his mechanic in the passenger seat.<sup>5</sup> Still, his choice to rework the episode into a narrative frame for the manifesto so

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural readings of Marinetti’s “Preface” can be found in Enda Duffy’s *The Speed Handbook* and Cinzia Sartini Blum’s *The Other Modernism*. For Duffy, the preface is endemic of modernism’s concomitant rise in pleasure-inducing speed technologies that compensated for the oppressive speeds of Taylorist efficiency and the modern metropolis. Blum’s analysis argues that the preface is the foundational document for the injection of hyper-masculinity into modernist aesthetics.

<sup>5</sup> Marinetti’s wreck was published in *Corriere della Sera* and is quoted in Jeffery Schnapp’s “Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)”: “This morning, a bit before noon, F. T. Marinetti was heading down Via Domodossola in his car. The vehicle’s owner was at the wheel accompanied by a 23-year-old mechanic, Ettore Angelini. Although the details of the incident remain sketchy, it appears that an evasive maneuver was required by the sudden appearance of a bicyclist, and resulted in the vehicle being flipped into a ditch. Marinetti and mechanic were immediately rescued by two race car drivers from the Isotta and Fraschini factory, Trucco and Giovanzani, each in



close to publication intimates a desire, whether his own or at the suggestion of *Le Figaro*'s editors, to associate the manifesto with a spectacular event. The publication of the manifesto had already been upstaged once by such an event in the Sicilian earthquake, so, at the very least, the narrative is illustrative of an attempt to acclimatize the text to the contextual particularities of the popular press. The interpolation of the narrative to the manifesto's different editions also marks the first time the word "manifesto" appears in the text's title. All Italian versions prior to *Le Figaro*'s printing carry the simple heading, "Il Futurismo." And while the same title originally accompanied the *Le Figaro* text, the manifesto label was applied as a subheading just before publication by Gaston Calmette, *Le Figaro*'s editor from 1894 to 1914, who prefaced the manifesto with an editorial passage which merits quoting in full:

M. Marinetti, the young Italian and French poet, whose remarkable and fiery talent has been made known throughout the Latin countries by his notorious demonstrations and who has a galaxy of enthusiastic disciples, has just founded the school of "Futurism," whose theories surpass in daring all previous and contemporary schools. The Figaro, which has already provided a nostrum for a number of these schools, and by no means minor ones, today offers its readers the Manifesto of the "Futurists." Is it necessary to say that we assign to the author himself full responsibility for his singularly audacious ideas and his frequently unwarranted extravagance in the face of things that are eminently respectable and happily, everywhere respected? But we thought it interesting to reserve for our readers the first publication of this manifesto whatever their judgement of it will be (qtd. in Perloff 13).

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his car. Marinetti was transported to his apartment by the former and seems to have received little more than a scare. The mechanic was taken by Giovanzani to the Institute on Via Paolo Sarpi, where he was treated for minor wounds."

Though Marinetti originally titled his text with a term that simply designated a new “ism,” the adoption of the manifesto taxonomy signals a new sense of textual self-awareness rooted in spectacle revealed in the preface. In it, Calmette sensationalizes Marinetti, describing him as “notorious” and his ideas as “singularly audacious.”<sup>6</sup> Too, Calmette’s statement that *Le Figaro* “has already provided a nostrum for a number of these schools” is telling. For him, the publishing of Marinetti’s text is not an action but an investment through which *Le Figaro* stakes claim on a history of sensational ideas qualified as “by no means minor ones.” Finally, the editor’s choice to add a closing disclaimer framed as a question reveals a cagey duplicity of voice. “Is it necessary,” he asks, that Marinetti’s “singular audacious ideas” which fly “in the face of things” “everywhere respected” be taken only as his own? This rhetorical question ostensibly distances *Le Figaro* from statements in the text such as, “We will glorify war—the world’s only freedom” and “We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice” while, at the same time, opening the possibility of assent (“Founding” 14). Rather than simply giving an “interesting” text over to his readers to form their own judgement, as he claims, the editor of *Le Figaro* was knowingly courting visceral reader reaction to the disavowal of “things that are eminently respectable” precisely by not renouncing these ideas in the form of an unequivocal statement. In other words, Calmette’s preface courts the anxious indeterminacy existing between the serious and non-serious, effectively fabricating news out of an “interesting” text.

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<sup>6</sup> Gaston Calmette’s tenure as editor of *Le Figaro* is the story of spectacle itself. His first year was distinguished by the beginning of the Dreyfus Affair, and *Le Figaro*’s publications in support of Alfred Dreyfus through the printing of columns, Dreyfusard fiction, and evidence supplied by the defense’s lawyers. His editorship ended in similarly spectacular fashion when he was murdered in the newspaper’s office, shot by Henriette Caillaux, the minister of finance’s wife, about whom Calmette had published a series of scandalous columns and letters. Caillaux’s trial would captivate the Paris press as her defense argued that, because she was a woman, she was prone to hysteria, and therefore not responsible for her own actions. She was acquitted by a jury of men on July 28, 1914.

Despite literary history's treatment of the "Futurist Manifesto" as the text that inaugurated the widespread popularization of the genre, it is important to understand that Calmette's application of the title had less to do with genre and everything to do with sensationalizing the realization of an opinionated idea through an actual event. This distinction is made clear when one considers the works of Anatole Baju, editor and founder of the *Le Décadent*, who is credited by manifesto scholars including Puchner and Somigli as the first literary critic to make the leap from prose criticism to the conventions of the aesthetic manifesto. Curiously, Baju's texts never carried the title "manifesto," though the term often appears in his journal's pages.<sup>7</sup> In its noun-form the following connotative use of the term appears in the journal, gesturing to "protests": "*l'heure a sonné, des manifestes parmi l'odeur de poudre et les bruits d'armes de cette fin de siècle tourmentée*" ["the hour has come, protests among the smell of gunpowder and the sounds of weapons at this end of a tormented world."] (Raymond 10). As a verb, one finds the next statement, meaning simply "to make known": "*Nous avons à différentes reprises manifesté ici-même des sentiments suffisamment antiboulangistes*" ["We have, on different occasions, made known here sentiments sufficiently antiboulangist"] (Baju 13). Read against Baju's texts, Calmette's application of the term to Marinetti's text may have been occasioned by its juxtaposition of aesthetic opinions and the reporting of those opinions' founding event—not the formal invocation of genre.

Such distinctions serve as a reminder that nominal categorizations of genre often impose a correlative reading that reductively positions a text as one in a closed series of literary forms, highlighting essential characteristics at the expense of the text's contingent, historical codification. To be sure, certain homologies do exist between the Futurist manifesto and its

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<sup>7</sup> Anatole Baju's so-called "Decadent Manifesto" (1886) was actually an editorial in *Le Décadent* titled "Aux Lecteurs!".

generic antecedents in the sphere of politics. But these formal similarities were perhaps less prevalent to contemporary readers than other cultural codes that comprised the Futurist manifesto's particular popular milieu. As Hans Robert Jauss tells us, "A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself in a vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a particular kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions" (23). Genre is, therefore, a changing order, historically determined, and yet altered by reciprocal relations existing between the text and the cultural context under which it appears. Reassessing the Futurist manifesto as the product of a historical moment rather than as one text belonging to the manifesto genre affords the opportunity to uncover the cultural codes that its contemporary readers would have recognized, either implicitly or explicitly. It also opens a window onto those historical traces that better explain the unmatched popularity and proliferation of aesthetic manifestos in the modernist period. This is not, however, to imply that Calmette's interpolation of the term "manifesto" to Marinetti's text was entirely arbitrary. The precedent for applying the term to literary criticism already existed in *Le Figaro's* own archive.

## II. THE MANIFEST WORD

When considering the genre in strictly nominal terms, however, it is difficult not to invoke the word "manifesto" without calling to mind the most notorious, most recognizable text that bears that moniker: Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*. Though originally published in 1848, before the modernist period as we have come to know it, this text's circulation history bears far *less* impact on the emergence of the modern aesthetic manifesto than critics may claim. Indeed, there exist few observable similarities between it and aesthetic manifestos apart from the appearance of "manifesto" in its title. Despite this dearth of similarities, Martin Puchner has proposed a circumstantial argument for its impact on aesthetic manifestos by tracing the

translation and circulation of Marx and Engels's text, ultimately showing that its first publication in French, in Paris, occurred in 1880 (65). The confluence of this date, location, and language is significant, for it coincides with what has come to be known as the first aesthetic manifesto of the modernist period, Moréas's "Symbolist Manifesto," published in the Parisian journal *Le Figaro* in 1886.

Though literary history has persistently categorized Moréas's text as a manifesto, the word "manifesto" did not appear in its original title. It was interpolated onto the text by Auguste Marcade, the editor of *Le Figaro*, who prefaced its publication in that circular "with a short note under the heading 'a literary manifesto'" (Somigli 25). While we can only speculate at Marcade's intentions with this editorial intervention, two possibilities appear viable. On the one hand, Marcade was perhaps attempting to sensationalize Moréas's text by associating it with the *Communist Manifesto*, if only in form and not content, thereby capitalizing on the notoriety of a text that had enjoyed a great deal of recent popular attention as evinced by its republication in Paris in 1884, 1885, and, notably, 1886 (Puchner 65). Second, it is possible that Marcade recognized the parallels between Moréas's impulse to distance his "ism," Symbolism, from a rival "ism," Naturalism, just as Marx and Engels distanced their political program, Communism, from "utopian socialism" (Puchner 70). Whether either or both of these inferences is the case, Marcade's *ex post facto* application of genre to Moréas's text would impact artistic and intellectual history in an unforeseen way, creating a template through which aesthetic manifestos could exercise their own anxiety of influence (borrowing Harold Bloom's terminology) by decrying or extolling this or that "ism." Marcade's interpolation of genre would also draw attention to an important material attribute of the aesthetic manifesto as not only a self-aware

textual object but a self-aware *intertextual* object in modernity's proliferating, yet nascent, media culture, a culture engendered by the relaxation of laws governing the circulation of texts.

Five years prior to Moréas's manifesto, the enactment of the Press Law of 1881 eliminated what had been over fifty years of strict publication censorship in France. During those five decades, publishers were required to submit all texts and illustrations to the Bureau of Printing and Bookstores within the Police Ministry for review. In the event a text was approved by authorities, publishers were further required to post a monetary bond insuring the text against the "spreading of dangerous ideas among the lowest classes of society" (qtd. in Goldstein 4). *Le Figaro's* publication of Moréas's manifesto was thus constitutive of a print culture mostly freed of its prior subversive anxieties, in which political and aesthetic "dangerous ideas" were increasingly commonplace, banal, and commodified.

One medium not freed from censorship by the Press Law of 1881, however, was the theater, owing to the stage's capacity to transform words into action. As Minister of Justice Jean-Charles Persil argued at the time, "Let an author be content to print his play, he will encounter no obstacle... But when opinions are converted into acts by the presentation of a play... one addresses people gathered together, one speaks to their eyes. That is more than the expression of an opinion, that is a deed, an action, a behavior" (qtd. in Goldstein 2). Though Moréas's manifesto is, today, regularly anthologized, it has almost exclusively been reprinted in truncated form. Indeed, what is universally missing in these reprints is the second half of the manifesto, which Moréas authored in the form of a play. Unfolding over two scenes, the "Symbolist Manifesto's" theatrical "interlude" envisions a dialogue between "A Detractor of the Symbolist School" and (an imaginary) M. Theodore de Banville in which the former, in hysteric, exclamatory lines, expresses panic over Symbolism's eschewal of classical poetic forms.

Moréas's Banville, for his part, effectively "grows...monstrous donkey ears on the head" of the detractor through erudite dialogue plucked from (the real) Banville's *Le Traité de poésie française* (1881) and concludes the final scene by "heaving a lamentable sigh" at the Detractor's insipid stupidity (150). While there are obvious comic overtones in the "interlude's" dialogue, Moréas's adoption of theatrical convention in the manifesto is indicative of an intertextual appropriation of iconoclasm: by injecting a censored form—the theater—into the text, Moréas associates Symbolism's "ideas" with the potentially subversive "actions" of the theater. If, as Lyon has asserted, the manifesto genre "gives the appearance of being at once both word and deed, both threat and incipient action" (14), then Moréas's "Symbolist Manifesto" is, indeed, the first modernist aesthetic manifesto, not because of its announcement of an "ism," but because it is the textual coalescence of "word and deed" through popular forms and events preoccupied with anxieties over the theater and theatricality.

Like Marinetti's manifesto, Moréas's was prefaced by an editorial note that explained *Le Figaro's* choice to publish it:

For two years, the Parisian press has been very occupied with a school of poets and writers called "Decadents." The storyteller of *Thé chez Miranda* (in collaboration with Paul Adam, author of *Soi*), the poet of *Syrtes* and of *Cantilénes*, M. Jean Moréas, one of many seen among these revolutionaries in letters, has formulated, on our request, for the readers of the Supplement, the fundamental principles of this new art. (150)

Rather than distancing the paper from the text's "singularly audacious ideas" as Calmette ostensibly would, Marcade stakes claim on the text's creation, asserting that it was "formulated on our request." His preface also affixes Moréas's text to an ongoing event which played out in the pages of the popular press, specifically, the battle of aesthetic opinions within the school of

Decadentism (primarily centered around Baju) that resulted in the founding of a splinter-group, Symbolism. Importantly, none of the columns Marcade's preface gestures to carried the manifesto label, nor did the dissenting columns it engendered. The absence of the manifesto label from response-texts such as René Ghil's manifesto-like "Notre École," though, was deliberate. Anatole France remarked on the appearance of the word in Moréas's text on 26 September in *Le Temps*, stating, "A newspaper, which usually receives the manifestos of princes, has just published the profession of faith of the Symbolists" ("Examen" 25). Though veiled by its historicity, this statement, the first sentence in France's response, was an underhanded jab at both *Le Figaro* and the invocation of the word "manifesto." Louis Villate and Baju, however, were much more explicit in their responses, claiming that *Le Figaro* was "the great reflector of bourgeoisie opinion" and not to be given credit in literature and the arts ("La critique" 9). Disdain for *Le Figaro* stemmed not only from its status as a popular newspaper but also from its prior support for the deposed Prince Napoleon III who had imposed strict censorship in the Second Republic and exiled revered literary icons such as Victor Hugo.<sup>8</sup> *Le Figaro* had also published the Prince's own "Manifesto," the very same "manifestos of princes" France gestured to in his response. Indeed, Marcade's application of the term "manifesto" was bold, not in its invocation of genre, but as a slap in the face of aesthetes who criticized the popular arts that *Le Figaro* promoted. It indelibly marked Symbolism as the first popular avant-garde, announced in the popular press, at the behest of the popular press. Moreover, it also yoked the title "manifesto" to

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<sup>8</sup> Victor Hugo details the shameful reign of Napoleon III as well as the prince's manifesto in *Napoleon Le Petit* (1852). In chapter VII, he describes the prince's apotheosis: "February arrived; he hailed the Republic, took his seat as a representative of the people in the Constituent Assembly, mounted the tribune on the 21st of September, 1848, and said: "All my life shall be devoted to strengthening the Republic;" published a manifesto which may be summed up in two lines: liberty, progress, democracy, amnesty, abolition of the decrees of proscription and banishment; was elected President by 5,500,000 votes, solemnly swore allegiance to the Constitution on the 20th of December, 1848, and on the 2nd of December, 1851, shattered that Constitution. In the interval, he had destroyed the Roman republic, and had restored in 1849 that Papacy which in 1831 he had essayed to overthrow. He had, besides, taken nobody knows how great a share in the obscure affair of the lottery of the gold ingots" (79).



an event that aesthetic criticism wanted to distance itself from, explaining why the title was not applied to works of aesthetic criticism for another twenty years, no matter what their form. And, when it did, it was, again, in the pages of *Le Figaro*.

### III. THE THEATRICAL PRESS

The attempts to foreground and highlight the sensational aspects of Marinetti and Moréas's respective texts were not isolated incidents. Nor were the efforts to affix these manifestos to spectacular events, whether through Marinetti's car crash narrative or Moréas's dramatic interlude. They were constitutive of *Le Figaro*'s and similar publications' participation in the culture of Parisian modernity, whose vibrant center was the burgeoning theatricality of the boulevards. More than sixty percent of these newspapers' content centered on the performances, personalities, gossip, and social events surrounding the theater. Too, theaters increasingly became the location of newspaper offices as successful publications moved from humble parcels of real-estate to high-priced boulevard addresses, often incorporating seemingly incongruous attractions such as bazaars, aquariums, and art galleries to their spaces. Indeed, if one were to identify the most important, pervasive cultural code apparent, implicitly or explicitly, to readers of these manifestos in the popular press, it would be the theatricality of urban experience. As historian Vanessa Schwartz points out, the boulevards of Paris were considered not only the center of Paris, or even of France, but the center of the universe because of the infinite variety of things and people that could be found there. In a newspaper article dated 1892, a journalist boasted of this very condition: "On the boulevard, one can say everything, hear everything and imagine everything" (21). This ethos of freedom and variety, however, should not be misread as something essentially French, for the boulevards were the center of Paris because of their

association with the theaters and the way in which their theatricality spilled into the streets, cultivating in the boulevards a virtual “theater of modern life” (Schwartz 20).

Enumerating, if only partially, the number of theaters that proliferated the boulevards of Paris (not to mention the excess of *cafes-concerts*), Schwartz shows that the concomitant growth in boulevard cafes—set literally *on* the streets around these institutions—offered the cafe patron a “constantly renewing spectacle of an ever-changing crowd,” as well as seats that were often cheaper and more comfortable than those in the theaters themselves (22). Moreover, at the boulevard cafes, theatricality became reflexive; one was not only a spectator but a participant in the spectacle, the viewer and the viewed. Compounding the possibilities of perceiving and being perceived in this theatrical spectacle was the fact that, at the cafes, patrons could also read about—and thereby passively engage with—the spectacle of the boulevard in the newspapers. The popular press was not, however, merely a voyeuristic enterprise, transposing the life of the boulevards into print, for they “functioned as a major source for legitimating the experience of the city as a spectacle and of looking as a pastime” (Schwartz 26). In short, newspapers sensationalized the theatricality of the boulevards, promoting the quotidian, the artistic, and the social to the level of spectacle.

That the editors of *Le Figaro* would attempt to promote Marinetti’s text as spectacle should, then, come as no surprise. The newspaper’s very *raison d’être* had become the framing, representation, and sensationalization of the facts of everyday life as a modern Parisian spectacle. Thus, it is telling that the proliferation of boulevard theaters and boulevard cafes occurred within what has been called the “golden age of the press.” Like these institutions, the newspaper enjoyed a 250 percent increase in circulation during the years 1880 and 1914 (Schwartz 27). In the year 1882, 3,800 periodicals were printed in France alone. By 1892, that

number had grown to over 6,000 (Schwartz 29). Much of this growth can be attributed to the publication model pioneered by Moïse Millaud in 1863, whose *Le Petite Journal* was the first newspaper that could be purchased by issue for one sou at kiosks and street corners. By declaring itself a non-political newspaper, *Le Petite* avoided the hefty five centimes per issue fee levied against opinion papers during the Second Empire. In place of political opinion pieces, *Le Petite*'s pages featured current events, large and small, which Millaud instructed his journalists to report from the vantage of the streets, providing readers with a veritable guide to urban spectatorship:

You should spend your time in buses, in trains, in theatres, in the street. Find out what the average man is thinking. Then let yourself be guided by this. At the same time keep up with all the latest discoveries, all the latest inventions. Publish all the knowledge that gets buried away in the serious heavies. Your job is to report what most men are thinking and to speak of everything as if you know far more about it than anybody else. (qtd. in Schwartz 32)

This stratagem proved incredibly successful. By 1886, *Le Petite Journal*'s circulation exceeded one million, outpacing all other Parisian newspapers by four to one. Naturally, Millaud's competitors responded by adopting his new journalistic philosophy in its entirety, as well as his pricing model. As competitors adapted to the new paradigm, the impulse to sensationalize the facts of everyday life became a vital component to all facets of reportage. Like Marinetti's manifesto and the city itself, newspapers "celebrated speed, spontaneity, the unpredictable and the ephemeral" (Schwartz 28). Thus, *Le Figaro*'s equivocating disclaimer to Marinetti's text can be said to be a tacit attempt to promote and codify its ideas into a manifesto of modernity, of the city, of the Parisian boulevards, and, moreover, of the press.

With the adoption of this new journalistic model came a flurry of innovative formal experiments, unique to the press, that sought to render quotidian events as spectacular through sensational narrative. Chief among them were the *feuilleton* and *fait divers*. The serial publication of fiction, or *feuilleton*, in the daily press became itself a popular event. Newspapers plastered the streets with posters and handbills announcing new installments. Eugene Sue's publication of *Le juif errant* in *Le Constitutionnel* alone boosted subscription to that journal from 3,600 to 20,000 in a matter of weeks (Schwartz 14). More importantly, the addition of fiction to the reporting of current events blurred the distinction between reality and fantasy. *Feuilleton* narratives often drew from stories that appeared above the bold line of demarcation separating actual events and fictional ones. Unsurprisingly, public enthusiasm for these narratives impacted traditional non-narrative, non-fiction articles, resulting in a deliberate fusion of the two under the heading *fait divers*. As *Le Grand Larousse universal* defined it, *fait divers* served as a catch-all column presenting unclassifiable information as a form of cultural excess, provoking in readers "paradoxical responses of revulsion, fascination, and compassion" (Walz 117):

Under this rubric, the newspaper artfully group and regularly publish stories of all kinds that circulate around the world: small scandals, carriage accidents, horrible crimes, lovers' suicides, roofers falling from the fifth floor, armed robbery, showers of locusts or toads, storms, fires, floods, comical tales, mysterious kidnappings, executions, cases of hydrophobia, cannibalism. (qtd. in Schwartz 16)

In short, the *fait divers* were extraordinary events reported from the streets, stories shockingly unbelievable, yet true. To be sure, it was this anxious indeterminacy between truth and fiction, serious and non-serious, that captivated newspaper subscribers, cultivating in its readership an

imagined community in which the spectacular events of stage and page were equally plausible in everyday life.

Though *fait divers* often appeared in the paper with no attributable author, treated as ephemerally as the events they detailed, those attributed to Félix Fénéon attest to the innovative reportage practiced in them.<sup>9</sup> For his part, Fénéon composed up to twenty *fait divers* per day during his tenure at *Le Matin* (1,220 in total); stories he took from the wire services, the paper's readers, and village newspapers, which he distilled and condensed into three-line narratives imbued with an ironized poetry of violence: "There was a gas explosion at the home of Larrieux, in / Bordeaux. He was injured. His mother-in-law's hair / caught on fire. The ceiling caved in" (24). Fénéon's particular talent for turning the commonplace into a tragicomedy testified to readers that anyone and everyone's life could (and perhaps would) become the subject of *fait divers*: "A dishwasher from Nancy, Vital Frerotte, who had / just come back from Lourdes cured forever of tuberculosis, / died Sunday by mistake" (107). His most important contribution, however, may have been as the inspiration—though uncredited—for the Futurists' condensed, energetic manifestos and poetry. As Apollinaire remarked in 1914, reflecting on Fénéon's legacy, "M. Felix Fénéon has never been very prodigal with his prose, and his conversation is rather laconic. Nevertheless, this writer so bare-bones that so to speak invented, in his immortal three-line stories in *Le Matin*, the words in freedom adopted by the Futurists, has been silent for too long" (151). Apollinaire's stint as a Futurist, during which he published his own manifesto, "L'antitradition futuriste" (1913), gives greater purchase to Fénéon and the *fait divers's* influence on the economy and shock that would color aesthetic manifestos post-Marinetti. But it is the

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<sup>9</sup> Fénéon's career was not defined exclusively by his contribution to *fait divers*. He was a revered member of Parisian literary circles, having edited *Revue blanche*, published an untold number of reviews and essays on the arts (many were anonymous), translations of Poe, Jane Austen, and the first French translation of James Joyce. After *Revue blanche* folded in 1906, he briefly wrote anonymous copy for *Le Figaro*.

inclusion of narrative—Marinetti’s car crash and Moréas’s interlude—that brings the affinities between these manifestos and the generic experiments practiced by the Parisian press into sharp relief, manufacturing news out of the formal synthesis of aesthetic criticism and spectacular events under a new rubric, “manifesto.” Read in this way, the kinship between aesthetic manifestos and their political antecedents is less categorical than literary history has claimed. Instead, the aesthetic manifesto appears as a popular genre, one in a string of formal experiments initiated by the press to render aesthetic criticism more spectacular and align it with the boulevards.

#### IV. PRACTICING BOULEVARD *REVUE*

If the modernist aesthetic manifesto was created, as we have seen, by a reflexive relationship between the artist and the newspaper, the latter recasting a series of “audacious ideas” into a spectacle, from what position of legitimacy does the manifesto speak? If the manifesto is bound to institutions of popular culture outside of an autonomous field of artistic production, does the resultant text possess an authentic voice? These questions call to attention what a number of critics identify as a fundamental theoretical problem that the manifesto poses. Drawing on J.L. Austin’s rejection of the manifesto as a viable speech act, these critics contend that the manifesto rests somewhere within the gap between performative acts and theatrical speech acts. In order to be a legitimate speech act (a performative act), according to Austin, an authorized or authorizing context must exist. This authority, however, is always under the threat of falling to the level of theatricality, of being seen as unauthorized, illegitimate, or preposterous. For her part, Lyon, in *Manifestos: Provocation of the Modern*, claims that the anxiety created by the tension between these two poles (the performative and theatrical, the authorized and unauthorized) accounts for the manifesto genre’s “aim to *invoke* even as they

*address* charged audiences” (28). Put another way, manifestos rhetorically imply assent, interpellating the reader as a participant in the text’s program in order to derive its authorizing context from the speech act itself.

While this future-anterior claim to authority can certainly be seen across modernist aesthetic manifestos as surely as their political antecedents, these texts, which were often performed in theaters, music-halls, and cabarets, could be said to have given up on any desire for legitimate authority and, instead, embraced the freedom and mischievous atmosphere of the popular theater (Puchner 25). If we can contend that artists, by adopting the conventions of the manifesto could rhetorically create an authorizing context for their programs, why would they expend this borrowed legitimacy by thrusting their texts into a theatrical and thereby delegitimized sphere? This question is particularly germane to F.T. Marinetti’s manifestos; for even though his texts were published in some of the most widely circulated newspapers of the day (*Le Figaro* in particular), he and his coterie of Futurists maintained a continual program of performing their manifestos in theaters and *serata* throughout Europe. These activities are indicative of a unique cultural alliance between the textual experimentations practiced by the press and those of the popular theater. Indeed, the Futurists’ two-pronged publicity front composed of newspapers and the theater mirrors a popular Parisian theatrical form of the period in which the spectacle of the city, the press, and the confusion of the modernist moment coalesce, namely, the music-hall *revue*.

Dating to the eighteenth century, the Parisian music-hall *revue*, as a form, peaked during the Second Empire and then fell into popular disfavor. After 1900, however, the form was revived with greater extravagance such that, by 1910, that revival had “erupted into a virtual mania” (Weiss 13). The publication of Marinetti’s purported first manifesto of Futurism in *Le*

*Figaro* concomitant with the explosion of this form is telling, for “to practice *revue* was to cultivate an esthetic of the newspaper” (Weiss 18). Unfolding in a sequence of disjointed scenes, the *revue* was a jumbling and splicing of current events extracted almost exclusively from popular newspapers. The fads of modern Paris—economic life, politics, sports, gossip, machinery, science, and even the theater itself—were favorite topics drawn from the pages of periodicals for satiric treatment, which operated to reveal the daily press as a manipulative artifice disguised as objective reportage (Weiss 33). The allusion to these newspapers within the form was not, though, tacit. Characters and emcees conventionally appeared in costumes made of authentic and imitation printed pages, prominently displaying the typeface and title of popular circulars such that there could be no question as to the object of ridicule. As a satirical device, the *revue* was not, however, limited to the confines of the theater. By 1910, newspapers had adopted the very vehicle of their own ridicule and took to publishing mock *revue* programs complete with wordplay, jokes, and comic song titles that satirized their own content while, by virtue of their very composition, effectively satirized the music-hall *revue* itself. The bi-directional relationship between these institutions in the form of the *revue* is significant to our understanding of Marinetti’s insistence upon theatricality in manifestos, for it makes legible the lack of authoritative and authorizing context within the popular sphere of modernity. Moreover, it highlights a “modernist strain of comical insolence toward the ‘facts’” of daily life within a popular, mediated public sphere (Weiss 39).

At least one challenge for any investigation of Futurism remains the fact that Marinetti did not often gesture in his more than fifty manifestos to the artists, forms, or philosophies that inspired his ideas. Much of this elision can be attributed to the anxiety of influence that undergirds his artistic program, illustrated in his call to “set fire to the library shelves” (*Founding*



15). One notable exception is his repeated reference to the variety theater as the “only theatrical entertainment worthy of a true Futurist spirit” (“Variety” 185). Indeed, Marinetti extolled the virtues of this brand of theater in multiple manifestos dedicated expressly to the form, the most explicit of which is “The Variety Theater” (1913).<sup>10</sup> In this text (referred to by the author in subsequent works as a manifesto, though it did not originally announce itself as such), Marinetti lauds the “music-hall, cafe-concert, or hippodrome” as a medium of “pure action” that “sheds much light on the most important rules of life.” Of these purported rules, one is noteworthy: “the inevitability of lies and contradictions” (“Variety” 188). Read against the satire of the *revue*, greater purchase is given toward the theater as a site of “comical insolence,” a purging of the “lies and contradictions” of modernity. Within the variety theater, Marinetti tells us, “all laughter, all smiles, all guffaws, all contortions” will “shake humankind a hundred years from now, of their poetry, their pictures, their philosophy” and drag “the most sluggish souls out of their torpor,” forcing them to “run and leap” (“Variety” 187). Further, it is “a synthesis of everything that humankind has hitherto instinctively refined to lift its spirits” (“Variety” 188).

This synthesis, a hallmark of the Parisian *revue*, was for Marinetti “a melting pot” that enabled the audience to laugh in the face of “material and moral anguish” to purge the anxieties of modernity (“Variety” 187). This amelioration was not, however, effected through the use of traditional comic device but initiated by what can arguably be read as an inoculation, a curing of the disease by administering more of what makes the patient sick. If we understand modernity as a quickening in the pace of social, scientific, and technological progress, a relentless repetition of newness and immediate obsolescence, then Marinetti’s variety theater, which “feeds on the

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<sup>10</sup> Marinetti’s “The Variety Theatre” (1913), though one of his most anthologized manifestos, was originally published in nine different versions, with none claiming to be the definitive text. As Victoria Kirby has shown, each version of the manifesto was the product of the editor who published it, and not always in cooperation with Marinetti. For a comparison of versions, see Michael Kirby and Victoria Nes Kirby, *Futurist Performance*.

rapidly passing events of the moment” (186), “piling up events that are raced through in an instant” (187), “repeating endlessly, with the mechanical monotony of everyday routine” (188), can indeed be said to mirror and magnify the modernist condition. His reverence for these attributes are not, though, merely theoretical; they are material, grounded historically in a shift in the format of the Parisian *revue*.

The second part of the “Variety” manifesto sets out to “eradicate all logic from shows in the Variety Theater” by calling for the prevention of “any set of traditions from becoming established” (190). Explicitly using the case of the *revue*, Marinetti claims, “we have to fight against and eliminate Parisian-style *revues*, which are as stupid and tedious as Greek tragedy.” “The Variety Theater,” he avers, “must not be what it unfortunately almost always continues to be today—a more or less humorous sort of newspaper” (190). As archivist Jeffrey Weiss has pointed out, Marinetti’s invective is not addressed, as it seems on the surface, to the form of the *revue* but to developments that occurred within it. Beginning in 1912 there was an attempt to unjumble the scenes of the *revue* in order to make them conform to a singular, unbroken narrative. This alteration in form was not commented on by Marinetti alone, but was heavily debated in the entertainment press of the day. Incoherence, it seems, was just as much a popular aesthetic as it was an avant-garde aesthetic.

And even though Marinetti inveighs against the *revue* after 1912, he elsewhere in the manifesto praises a specific *revue* performance at the *Folies-Bergère* in 1911. While Marinetti only describes this particular *revue*’s scenario, Weiss has identified the performance as the *Revue de l’Année*, one in a series of *revues* that synthesized that year’s headlines and happening in a jumble of contemporaneity, dance, slapstick, and satire. By delineating between the pre-and post-1912 *revue*, Marinetti not only comes down on the side of contemporaneity but stakes his claims

against narrative and for the dismantling and recombination of modernity's own narrative of progress. And while the Futurist program is often seen as a positivistic program extolling the progressive potentials of science and technology in statements such as, "We believe that this wonderful world has been further enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed" (Marinetti, *Founding* 13), this monolithic reading may be said to be only a topographical appraisal, masking a program of comic materiality that accedes to modernist anxiety and offers a laughing cure.

#### V. ENCODED COMEDY: ALFRED JARRY AND MANIFEST EXCESS

Regrettably, the ephemeral nature of the *revue* means that few traces remain of the scenarios that made up its individual performances. While one can only imagine whether the Hirsch-Marinetti duel was parodied as part of its headline-inspired skits, the duel's events and reporting in the press would have served as tempting sources of comedic reinterpretation, particularly during the height of the form's popularity in 1909. Though Hirsch bore the brunt of ridicule in the press for his "manifest inferiority," his claim that Marinetti had set out to imitate poorly Alfred Jarry's career and oeuvre had some resonance to both their contemporaries and modern scholars. And while Marinetti may not have found humor in Hirsch's claim, the subject of comedy and Marinetti's nearly plagiaristic use of it may have rested at the heart of the matter.

In his memoirs, Marinetti describes his first introduction to Jarry at the offices of the *Revue Blanche*, a French art and literary magazine published from 1889 to 1903 (edited, importantly, by Fénéon). "I had the pleasure of meeting an unquestionable literary genius of the underworld," he states, going on to recount Jarry as "thin with an emaciated face, strings instead of buttons holding his baggy jacket together, certainly not his own, that made his large flapping pants swing back and forth, and this was a gratuitous way of life in a very prosperous Paris, a flagrant banner of voluntary poverty" (qtd. in Brotchie 325). That Marinetti would describe Jarry's beggarly

appearance as “voluntary poverty” in terms reminiscent of a revolutionary insignia, a “flagrant banner,” is noteworthy, for it implies a deliberate, material projection of the Baudelairian artist and comic actor that had become synonymous with the bohemian avant-garde. In Baudelaire’s view, the artist of modernity becomes a self-tormentor when confronted with his own state of alienation, having no other recourse to react against his feelings than to adopt a grotesque caricature of himself in self-mockery. Conscious of society’s evaluation of him as a charlatan, he thus “voluntarily and ostentatiously assumes the role of comic actor” (Poggioli 110). According to Bourdieu, such Baudelaire-inspired self-fashionings were illustrative of a double bind brought on by reflexive transformations in the economy, society, and aesthetic fields during the late nineteenth century; namely, that artistic legitimacy could only be achieved across each of these spheres (economy, art, society) by conforming to one of two alternatives: “either degradation, the famous 'bohemian life', made up of material and moral misery, sterility and resentment; or a submission to the tastes of the dominants, just as degrading, through journalism, the serial or the boulevard theatre” (64).

If political manifestos, as Lyon has averred, are a means by which its authors and programmatic adherents project a “negative identity, a group for whom emancipation does not yet exist, a group pulled into provisional identity because it has been denied a viable rights-bearing identity” (36), then it follows that Marinetti, the author of the first modernist aesthetic manifesto, was indeed performing the negative identity of the alienated artist and, moreover, the comic actor, the aesthetic clown. Marinetti’s cultivated social persona was thus a constitutive part of legitimizing the manifesto genre in the artistic sphere, confirming Andrew Goldstone’s observation that “the appearance of autonomous aesthetic form actually depends on a social performance by the artist” (131).

Though Jarry made an immediate impact on Marinetti, the extent of the two men's subsequent relationship is not fully known. Still, it is certain that they developed a friendship of mutual respect strong enough to occasion documented comradely correspondences and the exchange of manuscripts. Indeed, most of the Parisian artistic community was acquainted with Jarry. As Alastair Brotchie's biography details, letters between artists of the time frequently made reference to this "underworld" artist, a man in grimy clothes who carried about him an air of mad genius. Jarry's notoriety, though, was not limited to his outward appearance; his fame was engendered by the staging of his play, *Ubu Roi* (1896), an absurdist drama that not only changed the nature of the modern theater but influenced nearly every avant-garde artistic program that followed (i.e., Surrealism, Futurism, Dadaism)—if not because of the anti-logic that permeates its dialogue then because of the riot that it incited at its premiere over the play's first line of dialogue, which included the French equivalent of the word "shit."<sup>11</sup> For his part, Marinetti's appraisal of Jarry as an "unquestionable literary genius" was conditioned by this notoriety, which seems to have spilled over into his own artistic works, bringing into question the originality of Marinetti's Futurist program as described in his manifestos. Further, the influence of Jarry's artistic oeuvre and Baudelarian comic identity on Marinetti allows for a perceptive rereading of Futurism as an "ism" rooted, not in modern positivism, but in modernism as a decidedly comic enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious imitative gesture in Marinetti's oeuvre is his 1905 play, *Le Roi Bombance*, a drama Jarry's biographer, Brotchie, has called "hopelessly derivative" of *Ubu Roi*

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<sup>11</sup> Jarry augmented the word, "merde," in the play by interpolating a trailing "R" ("Merdre"). As a result, Jarry was able to claim the audience's ire was misplaced because the word in question was no word at all. At the same time, the sound of the word in the play was extended, emphasized, and given a more guttural resonance.

<sup>12</sup> A comprehensive, analytic reading of Marinetti's Futurism against Jarry's Pataphysics can be found in Christian Bok's *Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (2002). Bok asserts that Futurism is an attempt to transform Jarry's philosophy of exceptions into an applied science.

(341). Though imitative, Marinetti's play was, perhaps, not an attempt to copy *Ubu Roi* so much as it was an attempt to copy its effect; for when the play was staged, the audience interrupted it with whistles and jeers. Tellingly, part of this audience response was elicited by Marinetti himself, who participated in the heckling and then co-opted the audience's response as the centerpiece of his "Manifesto of Futurist Playwrights: The Pleasures of Being Booed" (1910). Whichever was being imitated, the play or the response (or both), Jarry's artistic reception was precisely what Marinetti sought to emulate and project.

Indeed, the vehicle of this projection, too, may be said to have been gleaned from Jarry's notorious theories on excess and, to an even a greater extent, his modernist fascination with machines. We have already seen that Marinetti promoted a cure by excess in the theater as a proxy for modernity at large. And while it could be said that this line of thought was, proverbially, "in the air" at the time, it is worth noting that Jarry, in his novel "The Supermale" and among his friends, advocated "cure by excess" for most any ailment—chief among them, alcohol. By "alcoholizing the alcoholics," Jarry insisted, perfect sobriety could be achieved. And though Jarry knew perfectly well, as an alcoholic and avid absinthe consumer himself, that such excesses would lead to death, the seriousness of his pronouncements on the subject was a key to his humor (Brotchie 251). At least theoretically, Jarry's alcoholic excess bears a resemblance to Marinetti's pronouncement, "We wish to glorify war," and his lauding of "infinite, omnipresent speed" (*Founding* 14). Both programs of excess, they signal imminent death when read seriously. Read through the proposition that "excess is a cure" was a joke circulated within Marinetti's social milieu, however, indicates that the deadpan, serious delivery of this initial Futurist pronouncement was a constitutive part of an overarching attempt at comic affect. Here, the influence of Jarry's early *Ubu Roi* performances is revealing; for it provides a

link between Marinetti's Futurist annunciations, his theatricality, and a specific philosophy of the comic.

Years before *Ubu Roi* incited a riot at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Jarry was a student at the Lycée Henri IV, a demanding and prestigious secondary school located in Paris. While a student there, Jarry began conceiving and performing what would become *Ubu* amongst his friends while attending the lectures of his philosophy professor, Henri Bergson. Jarry would later recall that Bergson, "in our presence—we adolescents just awakening to the serious—improvised his theory of humor" (qtd. in Brotchie 177). Occurring sometime around 1892, Bergson's "improvisations" to his class would, by 1900, become a fully formed philosophical treatise on comedy published under the title, "Le Rire" ("Laughter"). Bergson's examples of the comic, derived chiefly from stage humor, along with his delineations of the techniques and social function of comedy could not have been lost on Jarry, who is alleged to have drafted the first manuscript of *Ubu* in his school exercise book alongside lecture notes on fossils (Brotchie 175).

Beyond informing Jarry's stage innovations, Bergson's theory of the social function of laughter also seems to have influenced Jarry in that he cultivated, in *Ubu*, a wholly contrarian theory. For Bergson, "laughter is a corrective" (74), a means by which society "avenges itself for the liberties taken with it" (187). In Jarry's hand, however, laughter is not directed at eccentric individuals on the fringe of society but the individuals who make up society itself. Thus, Jarry's *Ubu* (and oeuvre in general) does not avenge society but is the artist's revenge upon it (Brotchie 177). Applied to Marinetti's manifestos, this inversion of Bergson, or rather the Baudelarian projection of that inversion, modifies our reading of his revolutionary language such that they signal more than a simple assault on tradition, indicating, instead, a complex comic utterance that stakes claim on the power of laughter for the artist, the ostentatious social outcast. Perhaps more

importantly, Marinetti's manifesto explicitly inverts Bergson's assertion that laughter "represses any separatist tendency" by converting "rigidity to plasticity" (174). In the place of a society of plasticity, Marinetti's manifesto proclaims a replacement, a society formed through a separatist "ism," dedicated to "broad-breasted locomotives, champing on their wheels like enormous steel horses, bridled with pipes; and the lissome flight of the airplane" (*Founding* 14). Thus, Marinetti, via Jarry and Bergson, cultivates a Baudelarian comic actor identity that, in making himself the object of ridicule, elicits his revenge on society by embracing corrective laughter and redeploying it in service of his "ism." In short, the more the modern reader laughed at the inflated rhetoric of Marinetti's manifestos, the closer they came to reifying the text as spectacle in the sphere of popular culture, effectively celebrating asocial rigidity through their laughter rather than correcting it.

While Jarry and Marinetti both took liberty with Bergson's social theory of laughter, their application of his techniques of humor is uniform. According to Bergson, it is the distinct quality of "something mechanical encrusted upon the living" that makes us laugh (92). And of the stage devices listed to illustrate his concept, puppets figure prominently, no doubt inspiring Jarry and, by appropriation, Marinetti to experiment with these uncanny figures. The mechanized human is not, however, limited to the stage in each of these artists' oeuvres. Indeed, each made the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" a central theme of his works, and, in Jarry's case, of his identity.

Predating Marinetti's fetishization of the automobile by more than a decade, Jarry's particular object of affection was the bicycle. Defining it as the "combination of inexorable mathematics and human action," the bicycle was, for Jarry, a new notion of modern beauty and, above all, a means by which one could race a train—a favorite past time that he transposed into



his novel, *The Supermale* (Brotchie 250). Loosely structured around a race between a locomotive and a five-man bicycle over ten thousand miles, *The Supermale* details one of these team members dying in the course of the race. Instead of this death threatening the outcome of the race, though, the dead man continues to pedal owing to the “perpetual motion food” that the team ingests. While it might be remarked that, in keeping with Jarry’s excesses, this “food” is an alcohol base, this scenario is illustrative not only of Bergson’s mechanical human but also of a comic outmoding of his theories in which the synthesis between the mechanical and human results in a complete disavowal of the body. More than fiction, Jarry adopted this very synthesis and disavowal in references to himself. Once asked about a bicycle accident in which he was badly injured, he simply replied, “Nothing damaged, apart from the left pedal,” by which he meant his injured leg (Brotchie 252).

A similar adoption of Jarry’s man-mechanical hybridization can be found across almost all facets of Marinetti’s oeuvre. But nowhere is this adoption and projection more pronounced than in the narrative prefacing the first manifesto of Futurism, in which Marinetti’s automobile wreck is caused by his doomed attempt to avoid a cyclist described as “stupid,” “ridiculous,” and “a nuisance” (“Founding” 12-13). Bearing in mind Jarry’s vision of a synthesis between the human and the bicycle, Marinetti’s fusion of man and the automobile, occasioned by the “nuisance” of a man on a bicycle, can be read as an attempt to outmode Jarry’s Bergsonian comic synthesis by fusing the human with a more autonomous, more powerful, more willful machine, the automobile. Moreover, the conclusion of Marinetti’s narrative, in which he emerges from the wreck armed with a new Futurist vision, his “face covered in repair-shop grime—a fine mixture of metallic flakes, profuse sweat, and pale-blue soot,” relishing in

“strength-giving sludge,” realizes Bergson’s “mechanical encrusted upon the human” quite literally (“Founding” 13).

Ironically, it was Marinetti’s manifestos that shifted the generic horizon of expectation, allowing us to retrospectively apprise Jarry’s critical works on the theater as manifestos, despite the fact that none of his essays carried the word “manifesto” in their title. While critics including Shattuck and Puchner have passingly referred to Jarry’s “Twelve Theatrical Topics,” “Theatrical Questions” (1897), and “Of the Futility of the ‘Theatrical’ in the Theatre” (1896) as manifestos in their own right, none of these works are represented in manifesto anthologies or scholarly studies of the genre. Still, Jarry’s essays read like preliminary injunctions for the Futurist manifesto, despite the fact they were published over a decade before Marinetti’s text. For example, “Twelve Theatrical Topics” is composed of twelve numbered paragraphs, echoing the parataxis used in the pre-*Figaro* versions of the Futurist manifesto. “Tradition” and “history” are decried as “mummified” and “boring nuisances” that art must overcome, echoing the assault on *passéism* attendant throughout the Futurist oeuvre. Too, the future of the theater is portrayed as wholly dependent on “active” engagement of the audience in the creation of the play, further anticipating the central innovation of Futurist *serata*. But perhaps the most striking homology lies in Jarry’s and Marinetti’s respective conclusions. Consider Marinetti’s: “The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen!” (“Founding” 13). These sentences are a cogent summarization of the Futurist program, but their desire for youthful, future artists who will rebel against those of the present was already fantasized by Jarry: “And another lot of young people will appear, and consider us completely out of date, and they will write ballads to express their loathing of us, and that is just the way

things should always be” (“Theatrical Questions” 85). These similarities of both content and structure in mind, the genealogy of the Futurist manifesto is not synonymous with or reducible to the genealogy of the manifesto genre. It is, instead, the product of a network of historically determined cultural codes and reflexive relationships which coalesced around a singular text to *invent* the first aesthetic manifesto.

Whether contextualized against popular forms such as the *faits divers*, the *revue*, or particularities such as Jarry’s adoption of Bergson’s theories of the comic, aesthetic manifestos are a decidedly popular, deceptively comic enterprise, expressing an insolence against the “facts” of modernity, prescribing a comedic cure by excess, and projecting an aesthetic performance of artistic marginality. And while it may be said that Marinetti adopted Bergson’s comic technique of the “mechanical encrusted upon the living,” or a “person behaving like a thing,” it may also be said that the authors of modernity’s aesthetic manifestos derive much of their comic tenor from the self-awareness that their texts are *behaving* like a manifesto, political programs encrusted upon art that elicit the laughter of their respective popular culture.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Manifesto is Dead, Long Live the Manifesto**

Though the production and consumption of aesthetic manifestos between 1909 and 1912 continued to meet with critical scorn, its hostile reception did little to allay its popularity—it nourished it. By 1914, however, the manifesto’s popular appeal had waned significantly. The Futurist *serata* was a thing of the past. The music-hall *revue* had given way to Boulevard theatre. The cabaret now performed the can-can. Though the manifesto still had life as the chief textual organ of the Salon, this too was finally abating. While a portion of this decline can be attributed to the press’s new preoccupation with geopolitical tensions in the lead-up to the First World War, this chapter contends that the genre’s popular appeal largely fell victim to the very culture of *blague* that had made it a sensation in the first place. Indeed, the genre’s dependency on the affective, anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious to generate public attention had carried with it, from the start, the risk of being summarily considered a wholesale prank or, worse, threateningly or banally genuine. But straddling the axis between these two poles proved a delicate balancing act of mystification and legitimization that *blaguers* and *fumistes*, in particular, were increasingly disobliged to maintain, resulting in popular fatigue and affective entropy. Put simply, the manifesto had become a joke told too many times.

Writing in 1913, Camille Mauclair diagnosed these circumstances as the by-product of “overproduction,” a condition in which the marketplace for aesthetic goods was plagued by bad theories justifying the “worst follies” that resulted in works “terribly disproportionate to the value of the artistic results” (355). Against such odds, Mauclair lamented, the critic could not save art, but the eventual “fatigue and boredom of the public” would (369). Other critics, though, were not so pacifistic in expressing their frustrations. Writing for *Les Hommes du Jour*, Henri

Guilbeaux asserted, “In contemporary art, *blague* is erected as a principle... We have been too benevolent in our recent acceptance of *fumistes*; it is now necessary to hunt them down and prevent them from accomplishing their nefarious mission” (9). Indeed, Guilbeaux’s call to arms echoes the widespread paranoia that permeated the arts—and painting in particular—during the manifesto craze. Any work that audaciously or flagrantly defied respect for aesthetic convention could be championed as “Modern,” especially when its absence of craft was theorized and justified by an affect-inducing accompanying text. Léon-Paul Fargue described this unsettling allegiance between the manifesto and painting in 1912 by declaring that the arts had become “victims of pictorial and literary theory.” “It would be easy to explain Cubism and Futurism,” he claimed, “with ten philosophical or scientific systems. But then we are no longer speaking of painting” (1090). Similarly, Fernand Roches assailed the Cubists and Futurists on the grounds that “they do not paint, they describe, giving themselves over to scientific analyses” (qtd. Weiss 75).

To be sure, critics had cause for alarm. At the Salon des Indépendants of March 1910, the previously unknown Genovese artist, Joachim-Raphael Boronali, displayed a groundbreaking painting entitled *Et le soleil se coucha sur l'Adriatique* (Sunset over the Adriatic) to great critical acclaim (see fig. 8).<sup>1</sup> Though lacking in classical technique, it featured vibrant, shifting swaths of color that purported to outmode Impressionism’s reliance on light and color to depict subjective representational states by fusing Impressionist intellectualism with Fauvist audacity. The first work from the new school of Excessivism, the painting’s appearance was supplemented by the

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<sup>1</sup> The Salon des Indépendants was the exhibition arm of the Société des Artistes Indépendants. Founded by Redon, Signac, and Seurat as a response to Impressionism’s rejection from the official Salon, and juryless by design, it gave space to every new movement in painting. Its initial exhibition, though, met with internal troubles when its board, wanting to go fishing, raided the treasury to buy fishing rods. After other members demanded an audit, the treasurer had to defend himself by producing a revolver (Shattuck 19).

publication of the “Manifesto of Excessivism” in the Parisian press, copies of which were handed out at the salon’s exhibition. In a tone reminiscent of Marinetti’s bombast, the manifesto declared, “The excess in everything is a force, the only force. The sun is never too ardent, the sky too green, the sea far too red, the darkness too black, as are the heroes too daring, the flowers too fragrant. Let’s ravage, ravage the absurd museums!” With bold, synesthetic bravado, the text aligned color to life, directly reflecting the painter’s palette and impasto: “High palettes! High brushes and high tones! Live the scarlet, the purple, the coruscate gems, all these swirling and superimposing tones are the true reflection of the sublime solar prism!” (“Le Matin” 4).



Fig. 8. *Et le soleil se coucha sur l'Adriatique*. Joachim-Raphael Boronali.

The press and critics championed the painting as a modern masterpiece. A collector purchased it at the exhibition for 400 francs—an eighty-fold price over the average for salon exhibited works. There was, however, one problem.

The masterpiece had been painted by a donkey.

Three days after the exhibition’s close, Roland Dorgelès revealed to the daily newspaper *Le Matin* that the entire enterprise had been a hoax perpetrated by himself, André Warnod, and Jules Deraquit in confederacy with the Lapin Agile cabaret (see fig. 9). The prank had begun

with the simple idea of having the cabaret proprietor's pet donkey, Lolo, paint a picture. After assembling at the Lapin Agile for a celebratory feast, the perpetrators (along with a notary to validate the hoax) placed a canvas under Lolo's tail, to which Dorgelès attached a succession of brushes dipped in different colors. Lolo was then fed carrots to make him happily flick his tail, resulting in a painting indistinguishable, in the group's estimation, from nascent Futurist theories.<sup>2</sup> To ensure comparison to that movement, the fictitious painter's name was created as an anagram of Aliboron (a name evocative of both La Fontaine's fabled donkey and also the master charlatan of Rabelais's *Pantagruel*), deliberately scrambled so as to resemble an Italianate name. Dorgelès' motive, however, was not limited to a parodic assault on Futurism. In his words, it was to "show the silly, incapable, and vain people cluttering much of the Salon des Indépendants that the work of a donkey, brushed with great strokes of the tail, is not misplaced among their works" ("Un Ane" 4).



Fig. 9. "L'Artiste." Published in *Le Matin*, 28 March 1910.

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<sup>2</sup> Though Futurism had been announced the year before Dorgelès's stunt, there were no Futurist paintings as such in 1910. Thus, Dorgelès's attempt to imitate a Futurist work relied solely on Marinetti's manifestos to glean his interpretation of what a Futurist painting would look like.

Successfully making an ass out of the entire Parisian art-establishment was not without its consequences. The Salon des Indépendants, revered for its juryless system to which any work could be submitted, instituted a new measure stating, “Any *oeuvre mystificatrice*, obscene or injurious will be refused” (“Echoes et Nouvelles” 2). The General Rule of 1910, as it was commonly referred to, became a standard measure for artistic exhibitions, contests, and publications in pre-war Paris, literary and visual alike. Echoing Guilbeaux’s call to ferret out *fumistes* and prevent them from “accomplishing their nefarious mission,” the paranoid General Rule likely caused more genuine works to be rejected than hoaxes.<sup>3</sup> One infamous example was the Salon’s rejection of Marcel Duchamp’s iconic *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* in 1912. Ironically, the juryless-jury that imposed the rejection was comprised of notable cubists Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Fernand Léger, and Henri Le Fauconnier. The committee, it seems, was unable to see past the silliness of the title emblazoned on the front of the canvas. They declared the painting “too Futurist,” but in that appraisal, they tacitly confirmed the unease that Duchamp’s work was, if not a complete hoax, then at least an article of bad faith.

Duchamp’s rejection makes legible the degree to which the alliance between visual works and text were considered a hallmark of buffoonery.<sup>4</sup> Reactionary impulses such as these were reinforced by the publication of manifestos announcing sham –isms that, though garnering public curiosity, never materialized into actual works. The appearance of the “Manifesto of Plurism” in the review *Occident* is a case in point. Ostensibly a new school devoted to abolishing theoretical specialization, Plurism envisioned works condensing the innovations of all extant schools into

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<sup>3</sup> Newspapers and journals alike swiftly adopted the General Rule of 1910 as a standard for contest submissions in the literary arts as well as the visual ones to shield themselves from ridicule. Examples include *Comoedia*, 11 April 1910, pp. 4; *Le Radical*, 8 April 1910, pp.4; *L’Humanité*, 7 April 1910, pp. 2.

<sup>4</sup> The Duchamp and Lolo incidents anticipate the production and reception of Dadaist works. They are also a cogent reminder that the consensus reading that Dada was affirmed or exacerbated by WWI is more complicated, constitutive of an internal, cultural logic of outmoding that existed before the war.



singular works at the same time. To make clear its aim, the manifesto included a hypothetical example:

Suppose a plurist wants to express his concept of Abundance. In a corner of his canvas, he would paint the total or partial figure of a woman, who would symbolize Abundance. Then he would model (in plaster, aluminum, or terra-cotta) a sumptuous bowl of fruit or flowers, which he will attach to another corner of the canvas. The two remaining corners will be occupied respectively by a poetic text and row of musical measures—the poetic text and the melodic theme both suggesting Abundance. (qtd. in Weiss 83).

Later revealed as a joke authored by *Occident's* editor, Adrien Mithouard, the manifesto attracted enough popular attention to cause the review to publish a note on the “Progress of Plurism” in its November issue, claiming that all negative responses to it were proof of its excellence and pointed out, mendaciously, that the movement was already immensely popular in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Though the note proclaimed that Pluralism would reveal itself at the 1913 Salon des Indépendants, no such work was presented, causing one Salon reviewer to lament later that Pluralism remained hearsay after all (Weiss 84).

The fact that the “Manifesto of Plurism” could sustain public anticipation of its debut at the following year’s Salon indicates an important dimension of a truly successful *blague* at work, namely, that the ruse never be revealed. Its effectiveness becomes more complicated to assess, however, when the *blague* parodies itself. A cogent example of this phenomenon appeared in the journal *Les Hommes du Jour* in 1913, during the lamentably Plurism-free Salon des Indépendants, under the title, “The Evolution of Art.” Structured like Marinetti’s 1909 infamous *Le Figaro* publication, this text featured an explanatory preamble followed by a bellicose

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<sup>5</sup> Florian-Parmentier’s 1914 catalog of –isms, *La Littérature et l’époque*, describes Plurism as a “spirited satire” and reveals Mithouard as its author.

manifesto declaring a “war on form!” and “form is the enemy” (“*Vers*” 77). This “war,” the author claims, will result in the creation of an “inevitable formula” that will decompose objects, light, and color:

the audacious attempts of bold innovators, upon whom a verve as ferocious as it is stupidly simple, have long exercised themselves, will, at last, lead us to the coveted formula; the single and multiple formula which will contain in it all the visible and sentimental universe; the free and tyrannical formula which will prevail over the spirit, will direct the hands, inspire the hearts; the formula definitive as well as transitory and having, at bottom, the merit of subtle indication and precision at the same time. (“*Vers*” 77)

Crediting Cubism and Orphism as the last in the line of “bold innovators” who understood the necessity for the absolute suppression of form by occupying themselves with color alone,” the ultimate school, Amorphism, will finally, inevitably, break the final frontier in art by attending to the “thing in itself.” Amorphist works will then reveal “the relationship of the reflection to its source, which is luminous energy,” and the viewer, in turn, will “reconstitute the form, which is at once absent and necessarily alive.” To illustrate Amorphism’s “formula,” the manifesto also included two reproductions of “the brilliant work” by Amorphist painter Popaul Picador entitled *Woman in the Bath* and *The Sea*. The images, however, are not quite what one would expect (see fig. 10). Each picture is illustrated as an empty frame labeled only with the artist’s name. “You see nothing at first glance,” the manifesto explains, because the subjects “are not visible to the naked eye.” But, “with habit, you will see that the water will come to your mouth” (“*Vers*” 77).

## VERS L'AMORPHISME

L'HEURE est grave, très grave. Nous sommes à un tournant de l'histoire de l'Art. Les recherches patientes, les tentatives passionnées, les essais audacieux de novateurs hardis sur lesquels une verve aussi féroce que stupidement facile s'est trop longtemps exercée, vont enfin aboutir à la formule tant convoitée; la formule une et multiple qui renfermera en elle tout l'univers visible et sentimental; la formule libre et tyrannique qui s'imposera aux esprits, dirigera les mains, inspirera les cœurs; la formule définitive encore que transitoire et n'ayant, au fond, qu'une valeur d'indication subtile et précise à la fois.

Expliquons nous.

Il y a des années qu'on bataille et qu'on marche vers un but éclatant. Les précurseurs, les Claude Monet, les Renoir, les Cézanne promptement surpassés, par la petite troupe néoimpressionniste et la vaillante phalange pointilliste où brillent d'un pur éclat les Signac et les Seurat ont indiqué largement la route à suivre. A leur suite, se sont rués les fauves, Gauguin en tête. Vinrent ensuite les Matisse. Disons-le tout de suite. *Ces peintres savaient encore peindre; quelquesuns même dessinaient.* On peut juger par là du retard inouï de leurs conceptions d'une esthétique surannée. Toutefois, ils faisaient de louables efforts pour parvenir à l'Art véritable, lequel consiste à négliger purement et simplement la forme pour ne s'occuper que de la chose en soi et à ne point voir l'univers en tant qu'apparence fatalement provisoire. De toute évidence, après avoir rendu un juste hommage à ces purs artistes, il fallait les abandonner à mi-côte et se lancer vertigineusement sur le clair chemin de l'amorphisme.

C'est alors que le cubisme fit son apparition, bientôt suivi par le conisme. Pourquoi avoir reproché à ces peintres leurs préoccupations géométriques? Il leur était difficile de concevoir les objets sous une forme moins rudimentaire et ils demeuraient, dans une certaine mesure, victimes des préoccupations et des préjugés de leur époque. A première vue, l'objet doit être ramené à l'état de simple notion de dimensions. Il ne vaut que par ses dimensions et ses rapports avec l'ambiance lumineuse rapports qui varient avec les positions de l'objet et l'intensité de la lumière qui le baigne. Remarquons que, dans cette conception déjà téméraire et dans cette vision étrangement lucide de l'interprétation de la beauté disséminée et parsemée dans le flot universel, aucune place n'était réservée à l'âme des choses. Mais passons. Les cubistes ont apporté leur pierre, si l'on peut dire. Ils ont donné leur effort. Nous n'avons pas à leur réclamer davantage.

Le cubisme, d'ailleurs, comme tous les grands Arts, s'est replié sur lui-même et subdivisé en plusieurs courants. D'abord scientifique, puis physique, il est devenu, instinctif et enfin — c'est là la forme supérieure — orphique. L'orphisme, jusqu'à ce jour — si nous négligeons le futurisme, essai impétueux, mais manquant de science véritable — est le dernier mot de l'art contemporain. C'est l'aboutissant logique de toutes les tentatives d'hier. C'est le premier pas fait vers la formule inévitable, vers l'amorphisme.

Déjà, les Rouault, les Matisse, les Derain, les Picasso, les Van Dongen, les Jean Puy, les Picaba, les Georges Bracque, les Metzinger, les Gleizes, les Duchamp (dont on ne peut oublier l'irrésistible *Nu descendant un escalier* (1912), ni le *Jeune Homme* (1912), semblent avoir compris et admis la nécessité de supprimer absolument la forme et de s'en tenir uniquement à la couleur. Il y a mieux à faire, cependant. Il y a à décomposer la couleur qui peut évoquer jusqu'à un certain point la forme et à la désassocier, pour laisser à l'œil le soin de synthétiser et reconstruire.

Ainsi, peu à peu, l'amorphisme s'impose. Certes, on poussera des cris de putois, en présence des œuvres prochaines des jeunes pionniers de l'Art. Mais nous sommes quelques critiques indépendants, ennemis du bluff, et sans rapport aucun avec les marchands de tableaux, pour défendre l'Art nouveau, l'Art de demain, l'Art de toujours. Pour aujourd'hui, contentons-nous de publier ici le manifeste, trop court, mais combien suggestif, de l'école amorphiste. Les esprits non prévenus et les véritables intelligences jugeront.

### MANIFESTE DE L'ECOLE AMORPHISTE

*Guerre à la Forme!*

*La Forme, voilà l'ennemi!*

*Tel est notre programme.*

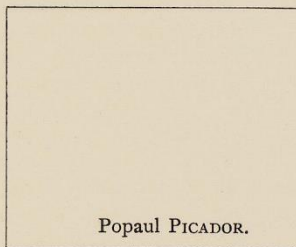
*C'est de Picasso qu'on a dit qu'il étudiait un objet comme un chirurgien dissèque un cadavre.*

*De ces cadavres gênants que sont les objets, nous ne voulons plus.*

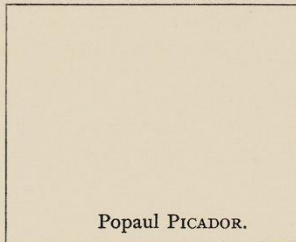
*La lumière nous suffit. La lumière absorbe les objets. Les objets ne valent que par la lumière où ils baignent. La matière n'est qu'un reflet et un aspect de l'énergie universelle. Des rapports de ce reflet à sa cause, qui est l'énergie lumineuse, naissent ce qu'on appelle improprement les objets, et s'établit ce non-sens: la forme.*

*C'est à nous d'indiquer ces rapports. C'est à l'observateur, au regardeur, de reconstituer la forme, à la fois, absente et nécessairement vivante.*

*Exemple: Prenons l'œuvre géniale de Popaul Picador: Femme au bain:*



*Cherchez la femme, dira-t-on. Quelle erreur! Par l'opposition des teintes et la diffusion de la lumière, la femme n'est-elle pas visible à l'œil nu, et quels barbares pourraient réclamer sérieusement que le peintre s'exerce inutilement à esquisser un visage, des seins et des jambes? Prenons maintenant La Mer, du même artiste.*



*Vous ne voyez rien au premier regard. Insistez. Avec l'habitude, vous verrez que l'eau vous viendra à la bouche.*

*Tel est l'amorphisme.*

*Nous nous dressons contre la Forme, la Forme dont on nous a rebattu les yeux et les oreilles, la Forme devant laquelle s'agenouillent les Bridois de la peinture.*

*From "Les Hommes du Jour"*

Fig. 10. "Vers L'Amorphisme." *Camera Work*, 1913.

In short, Amorphist works will elicit both a Pavlovian and hallucinatory response precisely by showing the viewer nothing at all.

Absurdity aside, the author's assertion that the "water" will reveal itself, that the viewer will "reconstitute the form," implies that the title itself is the work, not the image. It is this distinction that gives clues about the satiric target of the manifesto, revealing a much deeper objective than *blague* alone. Though scholars such as Johnathan Green assess the Amorphist manifesto as a legitimate "new theory of expression," these critics overlook the existence of a complementary text published alongside a reprinting of the manifesto in a special issue of Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* in the same year, dedicated to the work of Francis Picabia. While the manifesto's inclusion in the special issue reveals the identity of the anonymous text's author, it is this essay, authored by Picabia's wife, Gabrièle Buffet, which indirectly clarifies the manifesto's target by stating:

The mistake on the part of the public is in desiring to find that a particular subject has aroused this emotion (as was the case in old-fashioned painting) and in frantically trying to find some objective point of contact between the title of a picture and the picture itself. This point of contact doesn't exist...the title, which has no more importance as far as understanding the picture is concerned than have the names of musical compositions such as the "Heroic Symphony," and of "Spring," etc., we should not look for anything more in it than the abstract suggestion of the impression that has impelled the artist to express himself by this special balance of form and color, without trying to give some objective or literary interpretation to the meaning or sensation expressed by this equilibrium. (12)

Using Buffet's essay as a Rosetta stone for the Amorphist manifesto makes clear the manifesto's intent, namely, to parody the "objective point of contact" sought by the public between the title

of a work and the work itself or, more generally, the misplaced desire to interpret a non-literary work using a literary text existing outside the work.<sup>6</sup> But while the Amorphist manifesto's underlying statement seems cogent and bold, as *blague* the statement is entirely and purposely derivative, a comparative, inverted reference to the heyday of Parisian *fumisterie*.

Consider the following: embedded in the Amorphist manifesto's text is a single italicized statement, derisively summing up the progression of modern -isms by stating, "*These painters still knew how to paint; some of them even drew*" ("Vers" 77). The emphasis, easily unnoticed, is pointed, slyly referencing the announcement for the 1883 Salon des Incohérents, which declared that the exhibition would be a showing of "drawings by people who do not know how to draw." An entirely satiric undertaking, the 1883 exhibition featured mockingly comic inversions of works recently presented at the official Salon. The exhibition was an immense success, attended by over twenty-thousand visitors including an exhausting roster of the most celebrated popular figures of the age including Sarah Bernhardt, Manet, Pissarro, Renoir, and Richard Wagner.<sup>7</sup> Among the works presented though, it was Alphonse Allais's series of monochromatic paintings that captured the most attention in the *fin de siècle* press for their comic ingenuity. Each of Allais's canvases were painted entirely in a single color, framed in gold, and featured a title prominently affixed to the bottom: red carried the title, *Tomato Harvest by Apoplectic Cardinals at the Edge of the Red Sea*; white, *First Communion of Young Anemic Girls in the Snow*; black, *Negros Fighting in a Tunnel at Night*. Hoaxes in an exhibition of hoaxes, Allais's paintings were indeed a hilarious commentary on the pretentious nature of artistic titles. But the veiled reference

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<sup>6</sup> The recognizable French culinary term for appetizer, *hors-d'oeuvre*, derives from this artistic phenomenon. Literally translating to "outside of the work," the existence of the term is a reminder that the arts in France are keenly aware that a constellation of ancillary works may exist around a primary oeuvre.

<sup>7</sup> The Salon des Incohérents was conceived by Jules Lévy as the successor to the Hydropathes group. In addition to their annual Salon, the Incohérents held costume balls from 1885 to 1889, for which an invitation was the envy of Parisian social life.

to these precursory works in the Amorphist manifesto went a step further, inculcating a multi-dimensional critique of modern art by asserting the superiority of *blague* over aesthetic solemnity. Indeed, by referencing Allais and the Salon des Incohérents, the manifesto establishes a paradigm in which *not* knowing how to paint is preferable. Notably, this is accomplished by way of a hidden discourse recognizable only to those in the artistic community well versed in the cultural history of *fumisterie*. Thus, on the one hand, the manifesto is clearly a satiric send-up of aesthetic philistinism. On the other hand, it is a statement that only the *blagueur* can know the difference between authentic artistic expression and its imposture.

While Amorphism's satiric target, aesthetic titles, can be said to purloin Allais's monochromes in both statement and example, it is the choice of the manifesto as the vehicle of the critique that stands out as an innovative outmoding. By using the manifesto form, Picabia extends his critique of the non-existent "objective point of contact" from titles to the manifesto itself, in effect creating what is arguably the first proto-Dada meta-manifesto.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the Amorphist hoax stands as a satiric dismissal of the manifesto genre, placing it alongside titles as a philistine impediment to the creation and reception of pure aesthetic experience, a superfluous literary text incompatible with the cultivation of subjective aesthetic states in the visual arts.

As archivist Jeffrey Weiss has claimed, the tone and figures of speech used in the Amorphist manifesto suggest that Picabia modeled the text after a manifesto-like essay, "Du Sujet dans la Peinture moderne," written by Apollinaire and published in his Jarry-inspired

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<sup>8</sup> Picabia would go on to be one of Dada's most prominent innovators before publicly breaking with the group and joining Breton's Surrealism. Publication of the Amorphist manifesto occurred during his affiliation with the Puteaux group, whose members included Apollinaire, Gleizes, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, and Leger. Tellingly, the final four names comprised the Cubist hanging committee that had denied Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* entry to the Salon of 1912.

journal *Les Soirées de Paris* (87).<sup>9</sup> Though lacking in comedic color, Apollinaire's essay likened the move toward abstraction in painting to the written word by asserting that the latter elicits a distinct and equally legitimate mode of joy derived purely from aesthetics without deference to human reason (4). A timely claim, Apollinaire and Picabia's gestures both index a moment in which the manifesto (and the written word in general) was considered a suspicious companion to art, a piece of affective propaganda rationalizing works that could not stand on their own merit. More importantly, if the Lolo incident had taught the public and critics anything, it was that the manifesto was the harbinger of the hoax. It was not to be trusted.

The foreclosure of the manifesto as a vehicle of popular expression in the arts, however, was ironically fortuitous, exorcizing from the manifesto its status as an object of entertainment in the spectacular press. Moreover, it marked the end of a brief alliance between the textual and visual arts that the aesthetic manifesto had come to represent, once again foregrounding the competitiveness existing between these two artistic modalities. Here, a manifesto by Marinetti once again reinvigorated the field. The appearance in 1913 of his "Imagination without strings: Words-in-Freedom," argued for literature what had already taken place in the visual arts, specifically, the eradication of verisimilitude and objectification. Instead of clarity of communication and fidelity to grammar, intuition and dynamism would replace syntax and logical structure in language, freeing words from their prison, allowing the author to "avoid rhetoric and banalities telegraphically expressed." In addition, the manifesto envisioned a

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<sup>9</sup> Picabia's regular contribution of essays and poems to *Les Soirées de Paris*, along with his personal friendship with Apollinaire have given rise to theories that the Amorphist manifesto was a joint project between the two men.

“typographic revolution” to counter the “bestial, nauseating idea of the book” that Mallarmé had predicted would forever reconcile the visual and literary arts: <sup>10</sup>

I oppose the decorative, precious aesthetic of Mallarmé ... I do not want to suggest an idea or a sensation with passéist airs and graces. Instead, I want to grasp them brutally and hurl them in the reader’s face. Moreover, I combat Mallarmé’s static ideal with this typographical revolution that allows me to impress on the words (already free, dynamic, and torpedo-like) every velocity of the stars, the clouds, aeroplanes, trains, waves, explosives, globules of seafoam, molecules, and atoms. (4)

For Marinetti, Mallarmé’s desire to synthesize the verbal and visual arts through typography was, in effect, decorative. It constrained and diminished the energy of the word by seeking “harmony of the page.” Futurist typography, by contrast, would “redouble the expressive force of words” by using “three or four colors of ink, or even twenty different typefaces if necessary” (“L’immaginazione” 4).

Ironically, it was Apollinaire and not Marinetti who conceived the first manifesto of this purported typographic revolution. The appearance of his “Futurist Anti-Tradition. Manifesto = Synthesis” in June 1913 was met with equal parts curiosity and misplaced schadenfreude by the Parisian press. Most of the commentary accompanying the manifesto’s reprinting focused on the text’s typographic creativity—a reasonable response from newspaper publishers in the business of printing. The remaining commentary, however, championed Apollinaire’s manifesto as the celebratory, long-awaited, “end of Futurism” (“*Le fin*” 3). Marinetti had been, after years of

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<sup>10</sup> A comprehensive study of Mallarmé’s quest to harmonize the verbal and visual arts into the ideal material form of a book can be found in Anna Sigridur Arnar’s monograph, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist’s Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture*, U of Chicago P., 2011.



bluster and bombast, out-Futuristed by a Frenchman.<sup>11</sup> Determining it a comedic text “not to be read by people who are easily tricked,” editors could not help but point out that, while giving “*Merde*” to classical artists from Molière to Walt Whitman, Apollinaire bestowed “Roses” to his own friends alone who, “like him adore hoaxes” (*Répertoire* 45)<sup>12</sup>.

It came as no surprise that critics decried Apollinaire’s manifesto as a prank. By 1913, it was an obligatory assessment of any manifesto in the press. The great legacy of the text, however, is its place as a pioneering work in visual literature, and the final enfolding of aesthetic expression *into* the manifesto’s formal contours.<sup>13</sup> No longer did the manifesto express energy, violence, affect, fervor, and iconoclastic ideas through language; it expressed them through the visual representation of the words themselves, in themselves, for themselves. If the manifesto could no longer express aesthetic ideas without tainting the works or ideas it purported to champion, it would go on to *be* the material embodiment of the aesthetic idea itself.

#### POSTMORTEM

Though the manifesto lost the immense popular appeal it held immediately after 1909, the relentless production of them by Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists well into the 1930s is a testimony to the success of not just *blague*, but *blague* practiced with an air of absolute seriousness. One can only imagine the various entertaining outcomes of the Lolo incident and the manifesto of Excessivism had Dorgelès resisted the temptation to reveal the hoax, allowing

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<sup>11</sup> Journals that joyfully announced a Frenchman had outmoded Marinetti were mistaken. Apollinaire was actually an Italian by birth, and only became a French citizen at the start of World War I when he applied for citizenship in order to fight on the side of France, over a year after the publication of “Futurist Anti-Tradition. Manifesto = Synthesis.”

<sup>12</sup> Whitman’s transcontinental popularity was a fascination to Apollinaire, who published mock accounts of Whitman’s funeral in *Mercure de France*. The narrative features a watermelon-fueled, orgiastic barbeque attended by Whitman’s former lovers of both sexes.

<sup>13</sup> Canonical descendants of Apollinaire’s “Futurist Anti-Tradition. Manifesto = Synthesis” include Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, Wyndham Lewis’s “BLAST” manifesto, and virtually every extant manifesto of Dada.

instead the possibility, the rumor of it being a hoax to fester under the skins of Salon critics forever. In this respect, the continued international success of Marinetti and his manifestos is illustrative as a foil. Indeed, Marinetti never faltered in his insistence that his bombastic, often ridiculous pronouncements were anything but serious. Cries of hucksterism fueled his production, redoubling his playful incursions into every sphere of art from theater and painting to cutlery and headwear while he increasingly abandoned any pretense to sincerity of style. In this respect, his advice to the composer Francisco Pratella is perhaps the most perspicuous confession on record:

To conquer Paris and appear in the eyes of all as an absolute innovator ... I advise you with all my heart to set to work to be the most daring, most advanced, most unexpected, and most eccentric emanation of all that has represented music to date. I advise you to make a real nuisance of yourself and not to stop until all around you have declared you to be mad, incomprehensible, grotesque and so forth. (qtd. in Weiss 95)

Though Marinetti's statement falls short of explicitly suggesting a strategy of *blague* to achieve success, his insistence that one be a "nuisance," "incomprehensible," "eccentric," and "be declared mad" clearly advocates provoking responses in the public symptomatic of the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious, eliciting ad-hominem attacks because there exists no definitive proof, no admission of the hoax.

A similar claim can be made of Apollinaire whose *oeuvre* exemplifies an often-indistinguishable blend of the picaresque and *sérieux*. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Apollinaire's advocacy of modern painting, which Roger Shattuck has claimed distinguished Apollinaire from artists too invested in the seriousness of their works: "The enjoyment of a good hoax—insofar as it was a hoax—prevented most painters from capitulating totally to the

theoretical side” (284). In Shattuck’s view, Apollinaire understood well that “a good hoax can be as salutary as it is entertaining” (284). Put another way, for Apollinaire and Marinetti alike, a hoax that is objectively indistinguishable from a bonafide work of art *is* a work of art—and a far more entertaining one to boot. Legitimizing a work by capitulating to theoretical justifications, intentions, or designs only affirms the importance of academics, pedants, salons, and critics—the interest groups that the Symbolists and their progeny –isms had waged a culture-war against in order to liberate the arts from institutional hegemony. By extension, such capitulations also threatened to render art, whether predicated on a hoax or not, impotent, foreclosing aesthetic valuation from the sphere of the popular reception.

While Marinetti and Apollinaire were known to share an amicable relationship of mutual respect, they also shared an aesthetic enculturation rooted in Symbolism. Indeed, this fact, on closer inspection, is an attribute that differentiates manifesto authors that embraced the unrevealed hoax as an aesthetic enterprise, and those who either insisted on aesthetic solemnity or were quick to reveal their *blagues*.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, Alfred Jarry, a prolific, if subversive, Symbolist was an important role model in this respect, and one that figures explicitly in the poems and essays of Apollinaire, and tacitly in Marinetti’s Futurist fantasies. An even more compelling connection, however, lies in the network of affiliations extending from the short-lived utopian arts community, L’Abbaye de Créteil.

Lasting from 1906 to early 1908, the Abbaye was conceived by a group of young Symbolist poets as a means to detach themselves from the corrupting influences of modern

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<sup>14</sup> Dorgelès, for example, was not a Symbolist sympathizer. He loathed abstract art and believed the merit of any work could only be judged sincerely relative to its ability to faithfully reproduce the objective world (Siegel 347).

Parisian life.<sup>15</sup> Their ambition, though, was not simply to create a hermetic cloister, but to answer the same question an aging generation of Symbolists had long confronted, specifically, “how to create a truly modern art based on the conditions of modern life” (Robbins 114). Bound up in their objective, however, was the desire to break with the answers their Symbolist forebears and financial backers proposed as solutions: aestheticism, symbolism, and allegory. To that end, they carved out their own path by publishing the impassioned, though banally titled, “Manifesto of the League of Independent Artists” (1905), declaring, “To the inertia of conventionality we oppose our combativeness. . . . We proclaim our desire to benefit from effective solidarity!” (qtd. in Robbins 113). Their announcement of communal living for and *as* art was a captivating concept, for up to three hundred curious Parisians per week visited the Abbaye during weekly, often raucous “friend banquets.” Included among the curious was a pre-Futurism F.T. Marinetti who would have been exposed, perhaps for the first time, to proto-Cubist composition, poetry lauding the energy of crowds, and a collective of artists determined to find, together, a path beyond Symbolism. Marinetti would later take this final concept to a characteristically Futurist extreme in his anti-Symbolist manifesto, “We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters, Last Lovers of the Moonlight” (1911). In a similar vein, Sherry Buckberrough has claimed that the tropes of Futurism were directly traceable to the aesthetic preoccupations of Abbaye members whose works were obsessed with the concepts of modern speed, technology, and simultaneity (53).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The founding members of L’Abbaye de Créteil were Georges Duhamel, René Arcos, Henri-Martin Barzun, Alexandre Mercereau, Charles Vildrac, and Albert Gleizes.

<sup>16</sup> Henri Barzun, one of the founding members of the Abbaye de Créteil, also founded the Simultaneists. His musings on simultaneity in the arts was of great interest to Marinetti, the concept appearing frequently in Futurist manifestos. The Simultaneists issued a number of manifestos of their own (“Manifesto of Poetic Simultaneism,” “technical manifesto of the new literary art: ‘Voix, Rhythms, et Chants Simultanes Experiment,” and “The Revolution of Modern Polyrythms”). Apollinaire counted among Simultaneism’s members and signed two of the group’s manifestos.

Tropes notwithstanding, Marinetti would also have passed through the entrance of the Abbaye, under a sign bearing a fragment from Rabelais's *Gargantuan and Pantagruel* announcing the fictive Abbaye de Thélème, the model and allegorical namesake for the Abbaye de Créteil:

Here come in! All of you, and most welcome be!

Herein you will have refuge and bastille

Against hostile error that much prevails

Through its false style poisoning the world;

Come in, and let's found here the true faith (qtd. in Robbins 113)

Indeed, the inscription must have resonated with Marinetti when he set out to create Futurism, a movement fixated on the destruction of the "false style poisoning the world," and committed to confronting the "hostile errors" of civilization with the establishment of a new Futurist "faith."<sup>17</sup>

Marinetti was not, however, the only manifesto author inspired by the Abbaye. Poet and novelist Jules Romains was also a lay member of the communal experiment. And when the Abbaye undertook printing as a means of financial support, it was Romains's nascent Unanimist movement and his manifesto, "Les Sentiments unanimisme et la poésie," they honored by publishing as an *oeuvre* representative of the Abbaye group's ethos. Like Marinetti's Futurist religion, Romains's conceived Unanimism as an aestheticized faith. According to F.S. Flint, this new, universal religion considered all individual life in relation to a hierarchy of crowds:

The god-couple, wherein each member becomes something different, and fuses into one

being; the god-group, a changeable god, liable to fierce hatreds that may overthrow kings,

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<sup>17</sup> Marinetti's most significant non-manifesto literary work, *Mafarka the Futurist*, is a fantastical narrative about the creation of a new, aestheticized, Futurist religion. His publication of the novel would cause him to be charged and found guilty of obscenity in Italy.

or as peaceful and powerful as the diurnal dinner party; the god-family, the god-street, the god-village, almost static gods; and greatest god and chiefest god of all, the god-town, an omnipotent god, drawing and controlling all men. (Flint 113)

A powerful, poetic paean to the energy of crowds, Romain's treatise also reads like an exercise in exaggeration. This is not to say Romain was insincere in his aesthetics. Indeed, in works associated with the Abbaye de Créteil, one notes that it is often difficult to distinguish between burlesque and sincerity. This is especially true of Romain, whose first novel of Unanimism, *Les Copains* (1913), was a romping comedic tale about a group of friends who perpetrate a series of elaborate hoaxes on two towns, in effect, pitting two group energies against one another. Contrary to Unanimism's hierarchy, the god-group of *Les Copains* (the "changeable god, liable to fierce hatreds that may overthrow kings") triumphs over the god-town (the "greatest god and chiefest god of all") through acts of charlatanism. If Romain codified Unanimism as a religious aesthetic, *Les Copains* makes clear that all pious hierarchies are superficial and impotent against a well-played prank.

The Abbaye member's choice to found their utopian experiment on Rabelais's comedic monasticism is a sufficient indicator of their desire to imbue their serious endeavor with an air of unserious wit and *joie de vivre*. It also linked their community to the rich history of *fin de siècle* cabarets and *café concerts* in which sympathizers of the Paris Commune had sought intellectual and aesthetic refuge a generation before, giving their group an identity at once iconoclastic and, at the same time, imbued with cultural memory.

Rabelais was not, however, their only model. The Abbaye was, from the start, conceived as the realization of Charles Fourier's *phalanstère*, a self-contained, utopian community of members engaging in mutually beneficial work. Fourier was a natural choice for a precursor on

which to found a communal utopia. Indeed, Marx credited him in the “Communist Manifesto” as a “founder” of “Socialist and Communist” thought, and the Bolsheviks inscribed his name on the wall of the Kremlin when they triumphed over Russia (15). But as David Harvey has shown, much of Fourier’s writings and theories have been painstakingly expurgated in an attempt to conceal the outrageous and ridiculous ideas they contain. Arguments concerning the copulation of planets, “methodological mindlessness,” the “sexual and gastronomic delights of Harmony,” and the evolution of genitalia are seemingly incommensurate with the founding of a serious theory of political economy (Harvey 89).

While true Fourier’s ambitious text, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (1822), offers an exhaustive analysis of the social problem and its roots in class struggle, French readers regarded the work as an elaborate prank. Reviewers were too captivated by prognostications foretelling that the sea will one day taste of lemonade to see any merit in the text outside the audacity of its “secret science,” or its digressions concerning the sad decline of provincial theatre. To be sure, Fourier’s contemporaries received him as a crank, albeit a brilliant one. This in mind, it is difficult to regard the Abbaye’s Fourierism as merely a political gesture. Instead, it is Fourier’s legacy that Abbaye members were drawing on, one that saw buffoonery apotheosized into secular scripture. Fourier’s comic underpinnings would not have been lost on members of the Abbaye, who could, and perhaps did, look to their Symbolist forefather, Gautier, for guidance:

The only one of you who has any common sense is a madman, a great genius, a fool, a divine poet far superior to Lamartine, Hugo and Byron. I mean Charles Fourier the Phalansterian ... He is the only one who has been logical and daring enough to push his arguments to the limit. He does not hesitate to say that it will not be long before men have tails fifteen feet long with an eye at the end ... He promises to create new pleasure

and develop the organs and senses. He will make women more beautiful and more voluptuous, men more robust and vigorous. The Phalanstery is indeed an advance on the Abbey of Thélème. (27)

Appearing in Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), this passage gives greater purchase to Fourier's legacy as a comic genius, a "fool."<sup>18</sup> It also explicitly aligns Rabelais's Abbey of Thélème with Fourier's *phalanstère* as utopias founded on outrageous ideas, not political economy.

Such, too, was the Abbaye de Créteil: a utopian point-of-origin where the history of the avant-garde, the manifesto, post-Symbolism, and pre-Futurism aligned for a brief moment to set the stage for modern aesthetic expression. Distinct among those who visited its *phalanstère*, however, was an understanding that pranks, hoaxes, hucksterism, buffoonery, and mystification are not incommensurate with art. Practiced as a collective effort, they are constitutive of a "changeable god, liable to fierce hatreds that may overthrow kings." The public's continued fascination with Marinetti, Apollinaire's picaresque appeal, and Dada's self-loathing meta-manifestos are all testament to the powerful hold the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious can maintain over the pretenses of popular culture. The textual manifestation of this very indeterminacy, modern aesthetic manifestos, were much more than revolutionary tracts, as their genre origins imply. They were the secular scriptures of tomorrow—but only if the pretense of their seriousness was maintained.

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<sup>18</sup> Gautier's reference to men with fifteen-foot tails was an attempt to side-step obscenity laws. Here, "tail" is a euphemism for penis, further illustrating the outrageous and often obscene content of Fourier's text. Tellingly, one also finds in Marinetti's *Mafarka the Futurist* (1909) an extended passage detailing the protagonist's several meter long prehensile penis.



## CODA

### **The Manifesto as *Parade***

Given the manifesto's often-ignored theatrical history, it should come as no surprise that the most salient contemporary commentary on the modern aesthetic manifesto's performative dimension came from a work of theater. First performed on 18 May 1917, Jean Cocteau's *Parade* should have been, by all accounts, a smashing success: Cocteau wrote the scenario; Satie composed the score; Picasso designed the sets and costumes; Léonide Massine of the Ballet Russes choreographed the movements; Apollinaire authored the playbill.<sup>1</sup> The play, however, was a miserable failure, and one Cocteau would lament over for the remainder of his life. Years after *Parade*'s disastrous debut, Cocteau attempted to explain the hostile reception it received from the public and the press by recasting the performance as an allegory for modern art in his seminal preface to *Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (1922):

Every living work includes its own *parade*. Only this *parade* is seen by those who do not enter. Or, the surface of a new work offends, puzzles, irritates the spectator too much for him to enter. He is turned away in spirit by the face, by the unfamiliar expression, which distracts him like the grimace of a clown at the door. This is the phenomenon which fools critics who are least slave to routine. (66)

Here, Cocteau provides a distinction between “living,” or genuine, works of art and those ancillary gestures of modern artistic production embodied by aesthetic manifestos. In his view, the public, offended, puzzled, or irritated by the ballyhoo presented in these supplementary works, rarely experience the true *oeuvre* as it should be experienced. The inner significance of

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<sup>1</sup> Apollinaire coined the neologism “surrealism” in the playbill as a descriptive word for *Parade*'s scenario.

the work is thus occluded by the “surface,” the manifesto, beyond which the spectator cannot bring him or herself to traverse.

The original scenario for *Parade* was intended to dramatize this very phenomenon by drawing on a theatrical form of the past that had renewed significance in the present. Attempting to stress this analogy, Cocteau took the title of his *Parade* from a distinct, ancestral form of French performance of the same name. Roughly defined as a sideshow performance that occurred outside performance tents at a carnival, a *parade*'s purpose was to entice passers-by inside for the main event, the *spectacle intérieur*, by seizing their attention with witty dialogue, loud music, physical comedy, and other small-scale performances. *Parades*, despite the seemingly negative connotation Cocteau tacitly ascribes to them, were considered a prized component of French cultural history in the early twentieth century, harkening to the interminable French spirit and a brand of comic genius that elevated charlatanism to the level of a national treasure. The contemporary relevance of these performances is illustrated by the 1911 festival of Saint-Cloud, which featured a contest in which *bonimenteurs* (hawkers or, more literally, good liars) performed modern *parades*. *Parade* hucksters were also lauded in poetry, painting, and prose during the pre-war years, often depicting the nostalgic life of *saltimbanques* who lived with a paucity of resources and surplus of wit.<sup>2</sup> This cultural reference and its thematic import, however, was lost on Cocteau's audience, which booed and jeered from a belief that a prank was being played on them. And thematically, one was.

Taking less than twenty minutes to perform, the scenario for *Parade* was incredibly simple. Cocteau's text reads as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis, Picasso, Daumier, and Henri-Martin Barzun are examples of those who produced works featuring *saltimbanque* characters, each of them bearing the title, “*Les Saltimbanques*.”

The scenery represents houses in Paris on a Sunday. *Théâtre forain*. Three music-hall numbers serve as the *Parade*.

Chinese Prestidigitator

Acrobats

Little American Girl

Three managers organize the publicity. They communicate in their terrible language that the crowd is taking the *parade* for the *spectacle intérieur*, and coarsely try to make them understand. No one enters.

After the final number of the *parade*, the exhausted managers collapse atop one another.

The Chinese, the acrobats and the little girl come out of the empty theater. Seeing the managers' supreme effort and their failure, they try in turn to explain that the show takes place inside. (qtd in Weiss 169)

In the scenario, the barkers use "terrible language" to coax the audience beyond the threshold of art, into the *spectacle intérieur*. Still, the audience continues to mistake the *parade* for the *spectacle intérieur*. Importantly, the cast of *Parade* did not include any semblance of a fictive audience onstage. Instead, the audience of the scenario is the audience of spectators attending the play, directly implicating them in the plot, directly addressing them as the public incapable of crossing the rubicon of aesthetic understanding and discernment, incapable of separating genuine art from its *parade*.

For as much as critics and the public decried or lauded the modern aesthetic manifesto in all its varied forms, its appeal was, as we have seen, predicated on the anxious indeterminacy between the serious and non-serious, on the unflagging persistence that the ruse was a reality. This notion, however, only accounts for the manifesto's popular reception. Cocteau's *Parade*, by

contrast, brings our understanding to one final conclusion, namely, that the *production* of modern art was also changed forever by the aesthetic manifesto by inflicting upon the arts the anxious indeterminacy between *parade* and the *spectacle intérieur*.

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