

- §6 Light frankly non-natural, disposed so as to illuminate scene and actors.
 §7 Masks.
 §8 Expression to be dependent on the masks and the conventional movements, both of which are dependent on the skill of the actor.

Now we find that without having to eliminate any one of the eight factors, we have been able to harmonise their conflicting purposes by altering some of them. . . .

I would propose, therefore, that we familiarise ourselves and our assistants with these seemingly new suggestions until we realise their *value*; and that where, by the addition and application of one or more of these suggestions we can increase the value of the whole Art of the Theatre, we should not be held up by an over-sensitive lack of confidence in our power to apply them, or by lack of faith in the power of the spectators to accept them.

This is one method of advancing our institution to a position which may influence the distinguished traducers of our work to reconsider their verdict that the Art of the Theatre is an *inferior* art.

Gordon Craig (1872–1966), English actor, designer, director and modern theatre pioneer, also offers in this article an alternative ‘rearrangement’ whereby theatre could become consistently ‘organic’ or natural – with idiomatic speech colloquially delivered, natural movements, the setting a facsimile of nature, perhaps with real objects, etc. But his preference for the more provocative option of the ‘inorganic’ is clear, and this is in line with the most notorious of all his proposals, that actors be replaced by marionettes. But Craig, initially an actor himself, backed off from this proposal afterwards – as befitted the son of a renowned actress (Ellen Terry), and an admirer of Henry Irving, his first employer. From 1897 he worked as designer and director, for Beerbohm Tree, Otto Brahm (of the Berlin *Freie Buhne*), Max Reinhardt, Eleonora Duse, and Stanislavski. At the same time he furthered his fertile ideas on theatre through his magazine *The Mask* (1908–29), and his numerous articles and books. His volume *The Art of the Theatre* (1905) and the extended *On the Art of Theatre* (1911) where the marionette is extolled, were landmarks, rapidly translated into all the major European languages.

F. T. MARINETTI,
 E. SETTIMELLI AND B. CORRA

FROM The Futurist Synthetic Theatre
 (1915)

Our Futurist theatre will be

Synthetic. That is, very brief. To compress into a few minutes, into a few words and gestures, innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts, and symbols.

The writers who wanted to renew the theatre (Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Andreyev, Claudel, Shaw) never thought of arriving at a true synthesis, of freeing themselves from a technique that involves prolixity, meticulous analysis, drawn-out preparation. Before the works of these authors, the audience is in the indignant attitude of a circle of bystanders who swallow their anguish and pity as they watch the slow agony of a horse that has collapsed on the pavement. The sigh of applause that finally breaks out frees the audience’s stomach from all the indigestible time it has swallowed. Each act is as painful as having to wait patiently in an antichamber for the minister (*coup de théâtre*: kiss, pistol shot, verbal revelation, etc.) to receive you. All this passéist or semi-Futurist theatre, instead of synthesising fact and idea in the smallest number of words and gestures, savagely destroys the variety of place (source of dynamism and amazement), stuffs many city squares, landscapes, streets, into the sausage of a single room. For this reason this theatre is entirely static.

We are convinced that mechanically, by force of brevity, we can achieve an entirely new theatre perfectly in tune with our swift and laconic Futurist sensibility. Our acts can also be moments [*atti – attimi*] only a few seconds long. With this essential and synthetic brevity the theatre can bear and even overcome competition from the *cinema*.

Atechnical. . . . With our synthetist movement in the theatre, we want to destroy the Technique that from the Greeks until now, instead of simplifying itself, has become more and more dogmatic, stupid, logical, meticulous, pedantic, strangling. THEREFORE:

- 1 *It's stupid to write one hundred pages where one would do, only because the audience through habit and infantile instinct wants to see character in a play result from a series of events, wants to fool itself into thinking that the character really exists in order to admire the beauties of Art, meanwhile refusing to acknowledge any art if the author limits himself to sketching out a few of the character's traits.*
- 2 *It's stupid not to rebel against the prejudice of theatricality when life itself (which consists of actions vastly more awkward, uniform, and predictable than those that unfold in the world of art) is for the most part antitheatrical and even in this offers innumerable possibilities for the stage. EVERYTHING OF ANY VALUE IS THEATRICAL.*
- 3 *It's stupid to pander to the primitivism of the crowd, which, in the last analysis, wants to see the bad guy lose and the good guy win.*
- 4 *It's stupid to worry about verisimilitude (absurd because talent and worth have little to do with it).*
- 5 *It's stupid to want to explain with logical minuteness everything taking place on the stage, when even in life one never grasps an event entirely in all its causes and consequences, because reality throbs around us, bombards us with squalls of fragments of interconnected events, mortised and tenoned together, confused, mixed up, chaotic. E.g., it's stupid to act out a contest between two persons always in an orderly, clear, and logical way, since in daily life we nearly always encounter mere flashes of argument made momentary by our modern experience, in a tram, a café, a railway station, which remain cinematic in our minds like fragmentary dynamic symphonies of gestures, words, lights, and sounds.*
- 6 *It's stupid to submit to obligatory crescendi, prepared effects, and postponed climaxes.*
- 7 *It's stupid to allow one's talent to be burdened with the weight of a technique that anyone (even imbeciles) can acquire by study, practice, and patience.*
- 8 *IT'S STUPID TO RENOUNCE THE DYNAMIC LEAP IN THE VOID OF TOTAL CREATION, BEYOND THE RANGE OF TERRITORY PREVIOUSLY EXPLORED.*

Dynamic, simultaneous. That is, born of improvisation, lightninglike intuition, from suggestive and revealing actuality. We believe that a thing is valuable to the extent that it is improvised (hours, minutes, seconds), not extensively prepared (months, years, centuries). We feel an unconquerable repugnance for desk work, a priori, that fails to respect the ambience of the theatre itself. THE GREATER NUMBER OF OUR WORKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN THE THEATRE. The theatrical ambience is our inexhaustible reservoir of inspirations: the magnetic circular sensation invading our tired brains during morning rehearsal in an empty gilded theatre; an actor's intonation that suggests the possibility of constructing a cluster of paradoxical thoughts on top of it; a movement of scenery that

hints at a symphony of lights; an actress's fleshiness that fills our minds with genially full-bodied notions. . . .

Autonomous, alogical, unreal. The Futurist theatrical synthesis will not be subject to logic, will pay no attention to photography; it will be *autonomous*, will resemble nothing but itself, although it will take elements from reality and combine them as its whim dictates. Above all, just as the painter and composer discover, scattered through the outside world, a narrower but more intense life, made up of colours, forms, sounds, and noises, the same is true for the man gifted with theatrical sensibility, for whom a specialized reality exists that violently assaults his nerves: it consists of what is called THE THEATRICAL WORLD.

THE FUTURIST THEATRE IS BORN OF THE TWO MOST VITAL CURRENTS in the Futurist sensibility, defined in the two manifestos 'The Variety Theatre' and 'Weights, Measures, and Prices of Artistic Genius', which are: (1) our frenzied passion for real, swift, elegant, complicated, cynical, muscular, fugitive, Futurist life; (2) our very modern cerebral definition of art according to which no logic, no tradition, no aesthetic, no technique, no opportunity can be imposed on the artist's natural talent; he must be preoccupied only with creating synthetic expressions of cerebral energy that have THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF NOVELTY.

The *Futurist theatre* will be able to excite its audience, that is, make it forget the monotony of daily life, by sweeping it through a labyrinth of sensations imprinted on the most exacerbated originality and combined in unpredictable ways.

Every night the *Futurist theatre* will be a gymnasium to train our race's spirit to the swift, dangerous enthusiasms made necessary by this Futurist year.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1 TOTALLY ABOLISH THE TECHNIQUE THAT IS KILLING THE PASSÉIST THEATRE.
- 2 DRAMATIZE ALL THE DISCOVERIES (no matter how unlikely, weird, and antitheatrical) THAT OUR TALENT IS DISCOVERING IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS, IN ILL-DEFINED FORCES, IN PURE ABSTRACTION, IN THE PURELY CEREBRAL, THE PURELY FANTASTIC, IN RECORD-SETTING AND BODY-MADNESS. (E.g., *Vengono*, F. T. Marinetti's first drama of objects,¹ a new vein of theatrical sensibility discovered by Futurism.)
- 3 SYMPHONIZE THE AUDIENCE'S SENSIBILITY BY EXPLORING IT, STIRRING UP ITS LAZIEST LAYERS WITH EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE; ELIMINATE THE PRECONCEPTION OF THE FOOTLIGHTS BY THROWING NETS OF SENSATION BETWEEN STAGE AND AUDIENCE; THE STAGE ACTION WILL INVADE THE ORCHESTRA SEATS, THE AUDIENCE.
- 4 FRATERNIZE WARMLY WITH THE ACTORS WHO ARE AMONG THE FEW THINKERS WHO FLEE FROM EVERY DEFORMING CULTURAL ENTERPRISE.

- 5 ABOLISH THE FARCE, THE VAUDEVILLE, THE SKETCH, THE COMEDY, THE SERIOUS DRAMA, AND THE TRAGEDY, AND CREATE IN THEIR PLACE THE MANY FORMS OF FUTURIST THEATRE, SUCH AS: LINES WRITTEN IN FREE WORDS, SIMULTANEITY, COMPENETRATION, THE SHORT, ACTED-OUT POEM, THE DRAMATISED SENSATION, COMIC DIALOGUE, THE NEGATIVE ACT, THE REECHOING LINE, 'EXTRALOGICAL' DISCUSSION, SYNTHETIC DEFORMATION, THE SCIENTIFIC OUTBURST THAT CLEARS THE AIR.
- 6 THROUGH UNBROKEN CONTACT, CREATE BETWEEN US AND THE CROWD A CURRENT OF CONFIDENCE RATHER THAN RESPECTFULNESS, IN ORDER TO INSTILL IN OUR AUDIENCES THE DYNAMIC VIVACITY OF A NEW FUTURIST THEATRICALITY.

These are the *first* words on the theatre. Our first eleven theatrical syntheses (by Marinetti, Settimelli, Bruno Corra, R. Chiti, Balilla Pratella) were victoriously imposed on crowded theatres in Ancona, Bologna, Padua, Naples, Venice, Verona, Florence, and Rome, by Ettore Berti, Zoncada, and Petrolini. In Milan we shall soon have the great metal building, enlivened by all the electromechanical inventions that alone will permit us to realize our most free conceptions on the stage.

Translated by R. W. Flint

NOTE

- 1 *They are Coming*. The objects are principally a table and a number of chairs, arranged and rearranged by two servants at the sometimes nonsensical orders of a major-domo for guests who fail to arrive; and which finally make their own exit. A translation of the two-page text, which foreshadows the drama of objects practised by Beckett and Ionesco and particularly Ionesco's *The Chairs*, is in *Futurist Performance* by Michael Kirby (New York, Dutton, 1971).

Filippo Tomasso Marinetti (1876–1944), Italian poet, playwright and promoter of the Futurist cause, produced manifestos from 1909 to 1921. The influence of Jarry has been argued (by R. W. Flint in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1972). His first play, *Il re baldoria*, was written in 1905 and staged in France in 1909. A collection of his plays was published in 1920 (*Elettricità sessuale*). From 1914, he was a friend of Mussolini and fascist enthusiast. It is hard to argue any inherent connection between futurism and fascism, however, since the Russian futurists embraced the soviet revolution with equal enthusiasm. Bruno Corra, author of *Per l'arte nuova della nuova Italia* (1918), and Emilio Settimelli both wrote futurist sketches, and both signed the Manifesto of Futurist Cinema (1916). Corra and his brother pioneered the technique of painting directly on film in 1910. Settimelli appeared in one of the lost futurist films, *Vita Futurista*, and wrote *Marinetti, Man and Artist* (1921).

ENRICO PRAMPOLINI

FROM Futurist Scenography (1915)

To us, scenography is a monstrous thing. Today's scenographers, sterile whitewashers, still prowl around the dusty and stinking corners of classical architecture. We must rebel and assert ourselves and say to our poet and musician friends: this action demands this stage rather than that one.

Let us be artists too, and no longer merely executors. Let us create the stage, give life to the text with all the evocative power of our art. It is natural that we need plays suited to our sensibility, which imply a more intense and synthetic conception in the scenic development of subjects.

Let's renovate the stage. The absolutely new character that our innovation will give the theatre is *the abolition of the painted stage*. The stage will no longer be a coloured backdrop but a *colourless electromechanical architecture, powerfully vitalised by chromatic emanations from a luminous source*, produced by electric reflectors with multicoloured panes of glass, arranged, coordinated analogically with the psyche of each scenic action.

With the luminous irradiations of these beams, of these planes of coloured lights, the dynamic combinations will give marvellous results of mutual permeation, of intersection of lights and shadows. From these will arise vacant abandonments, exultant, luminous corporalities.

These assemblages, these unreal shocks, this exuberance of sensations combined with dynamic stage architecture that will move, unleashing metallic arms, knocking over plastic planes, amidst an essentially new modern noise, will augment the vital intensity of the scenic action.

On a stage illuminated in such a way, the actors will gain unexpected dynamic effects that are neglected or very seldom employed in today's theatres, mostly because of the ancient prejudice that one must imitate, represent reality.

And with what purpose?

Perhaps scenographers believe it is absolutely necessary to represent this reality? Idiots! Don't you understand that your efforts, your useless realistic preoccupations have no effect other than that of diminishing the intensity and emotional content, which can be attained precisely through the interpretive equivalents of these realities, i.e., abstractions?