

SOMMAIRE

1. Nous voulons élargir l'horizon du danger, l'habitude de l'énergie et de la lumière.
2. Les éléments essentiels de notre progrès sont le courage, l'austérité et la discipline.

Le Futurisme

Le Futurisme, le mouvement le plus moderne et le plus révolutionnaire de notre époque, se propose de détruire l'art du passé et de créer un art nouveau, capable de exprimer la vitesse et la puissance de la civilisation moderne.



3 Page showing Futurist manifesto published in Le Figaro, February 1909

Futurism

Early Futurist performance was more manifesto than practice, more propaganda than actual production. Its history begins on 20 February 1909 in Paris with the publication of the first Futurist manifesto in the large-circulation daily, Le Figaro.

A Travers Paris

The Roi des Bulgares a charged M. Stancou, ministre de Bulgarie à Paris, de déposer son nom avec une candidature au conseil de régence.

Les Courses

Aujourd'hui, à 3 heures, Courses à Vincennes. — Gagnant: le Figaro.

Le Futurisme

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'Ubu Roi' and 'Roi Bombance'

Marinetti had lived in Paris from 1893 to 1896. At the cafés, salons, literary banquets and dance-halls frequented by eccentric artists, writers and poets, the seventeen-year-old Marinetti was soon drawn into the circle around the literary magazine La Plume.

4 F.T. Marinetti

signs indicating the scene, as in puppet shows. The principal character would adopt 'a special tone of voice' and the costumes would have as 'little colour and historical accuracy as possible'. These, Jarry added, would be modern, 'since satire is modern', and sordid, 'because they make the action more wretched and repugnant ...'.

All literary Paris was primed for opening night. Before the curtain went up a crude table was brought out, covered with a piece of 'sordid' sacking. Jarry himself appeared white-faced, sipping from a glass, and for ten minutes prepared the audience for what they should expect. 'The action which is about to begin', he announced, 'takes place in Poland, that is to say: nowhere.' And the curtain rose on the one set – executed by Jarry himself, aided by Pierre Bonnard, Vuillard, Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Sérusier – painted to represent, in the words of an English observer, 'indoors and out of doors, even the torrid, temperate and arctic zones at once'. Then pear-shaped Ubu (the actor Firmin Gémier) announced the opening line, a single word: 'Merdre'. Pandemonium broke out. Even with an added 'r', 'shit' was strictly taboo in the public domain; whenever Ubu persisted in using the word, response was violent. As Père Ubu, the exponent of Jarry's pataphysics, 'the science of imaginary solutions', slaughtered his way to the throne of Poland, fist fights broke out in the orchestra, and demonstrators clapped and whistled their divided support and antagonism. With only two performances of *Ubu Roi*, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre had become famous.



5 Drawing by Alfred Jarry for poster of *Ubu Roi*, 1896

So it was not surprising that Marinetti, in April 1909, two months after publication of the Futurist manifesto in *Le Figaro*, should present his own play *Roi Bombance* at the same theatre. Not entirely without reference to Marinetti's predecessor-in-provocation, Jarry, *Roi Bombance* was a satire of revolution and democracy. It made a parable of the digestive system, and the poet-hero l'Idiot, who alone recognised the warfare between the 'eaters and eaten', despairingly committed suicide. *Roi Bombance* caused no less of a scandal than Jarry's pataphysician. Crowds stormed the theatre to see how the self-proclaimed Futurist author put into practice the ideals of his manifesto. In fact the style of presentation was not that revolutionary; the play had already been published some years earlier, in 1905. Although it contained many ideas echoed in the manifesto, it only hinted at the kind of performances for which Futurism would become notorious.

### First Futurist Evening

On his return to Italy, Marinetti went into action with the production of his play *Poupées électriques* at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin. Prefaced, Jarry-style, by an energetic introduction, mostly based on the same 1909 manifesto, it firmly established Marinetti as a curiosity in the Italian art world and the 'declamation' as a new form of theatre that was to become a trademark of the young Futurists in the following years. But Italy was in the throes of political turmoil and Marinetti recognised the possibilities of utilizing the public unrest and of marrying Futurist ideas for reform in the arts with the current stirrings of nationalism and colonialism. In Rome, Milan, Naples and Florence, artists were campaigning in favour of an intervention against Austria. So Marinetti and his companions headed for Trieste, the pivotal border city in the Austro-Italian conflict, and presented the first Futurist Evening (*serata*) in that city on 12 January 1910 at the Teatro Rosetti. Marinetti raged against the cult of tradition and commercialization of art, singing the praises of patriotic militarism and war, while the heavily-built Armando Mazza introduced the provincial audience to the Futurist manifesto. The Austrian police, or 'walking pissoirs' as they were abusively called, took note of the proceedings and the Futurists' reputation as troublemakers was made. An official complaint by the Austrian consulate was delivered to the Italian government, and subsequent Futurist Evenings were closely watched by large battalions of police.

### Futurist painters become performers

Undaunted, Marinetti gathered together painters from in and around Milan to join the cause of Futurism; they organized another Evening at Turin's



Teatro Chiarella on 8 March 1910. One month later, the painters Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini and Giacomo Balla, with the ever present Marinetti, published the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting*. Having already used Cubism and Orphism to modernize the appearance of their paintings, the young Futurists translated some of the original manifesto ideas of 'speed and love of danger' into a blueprint for Futurist painting. On 30 April 1911, one year after publication of their joint manifesto, the first group showing of paintings under the Futurist umbrella opened in Milan with works by Carrà, Boccioni and Russolo among others. These illustrated how a theoretical manifesto could actually be applied to painting.

'The gesture for us will no longer be a *fixed moment* of universal dynamism: it will be decisively the *dynamic sensation* made eternal', they had declared. With equally ill-defined insistence on 'activity' and 'change' and an art 'which finds its components in its surroundings', the Futurist painters turned to performance as the most direct means of forcing an audience to take note of their ideas. Boccioni for example had written 'that painting was no longer an exterior scene, the setting of a theatrical spectacle'. Similarly, Soffici had written 'that the spectator [must] live at the centre of the painted action'. So it was this prescription for Futurist painting that also justified the painters' activities as performers.

Performance was the surest means of disrupting a complacent public. It gave artists licence to be both 'creators' in developing a new form of artists' theatre, and 'art objects' in that they made no separation between their art as



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ROMA  
Grande Stagione Lirica Carnevale-Quaresima 1912-913

**Domenica 9 Marzo 1913**  
alle ore 21 prec.

== GRANDE SERATA ==  
**FUTURISTA**

PROGRAMMA

1. **INNO ALLA VITA**  
Sinfonia futurista del maestro **Ballila Pratella**  
organizzato dall'Orchestra del Costanzi e diretta dall'Autore

2. **La Poesia nuova** di **Paolo Buzzi**.  
**La Fontana malata** di **Aldo Palazzeschi**.  
**L'orologio ed il suicida** di **A. Palazzeschi**.  
**Sciopero generale** di **Luciano Folgore**  
**Sidi Mesari** di **F. T. Marinetti**.

Questo poema futurista entrò nella decimata del Pesto

**F. T. MARINETTI**

3. **Il pittore e scultore futurista**  
**UMBERTO BOCCIONI**  
parlerà della "Pittura e Scultura futurista".

**CONSIGLIO AI ROMANI**  
di **F. T. MARINETTI**.

PREZZI:  
**1 Lira - INGRESSO - Lire 1**  
Palchi: I e II Ordine L. 25 - III Ordine L. 10  
Pulzone L. 6 - Sedile L. 3 - Anziano L. 2 (tutto oltre l'ingresso)  
Galleria. Posti suoi L. 1,50 - Galleria. Posti suoi suoi L. 1  
(escluso l'ingresso)

Il Teatro si apre alle ore 8 - La Galleria si apre alle 6  
Il manifesto del teatro è stampato dalla ore 10 alle 12 per un giorno di rappresentazione  
a dalle ore 10 alle ore 8 sono in vendita di stampa - Teatrino 10-25  
Per informazioni sul programma e vendita dei biglietti presso l'ufficio stampa - Calle 10-15  
Dopo gli uffici dell'Amministrazione Teatrale, Viale Umberto I, 114 - Tel. 21-12

6 Opposite: Umberto Boccioni, caricature of a Futurist Evening, 1911

7 Umberto Boccioni, caricature of Armando Mazza, 1912

8 Poster for a Futurist Evening, Teatro Costanzi, Rome, 1913

9 Valentine de Saint-Point in *Poem of Atmosphere*, danced at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées on 20 December 1913. She was one of the few women Futurist performers. She was also the only Futurist to perform in New York, at the Metropolitan Opera House, in 1917



10 Luigi Russolo, Carlo Carrà, F.T. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini, in Paris, 1912

poets, as painters or as performers. Subsequent manifestos made these intentions very clear: they instructed painters to 'go out into the street, launch assaults from theatres and introduce the fisticuff into the artistic battle'. And true to form, this is what they did. Audience response was no less hectic – missiles of potatoes, oranges, and whatever else the enthusiastic public could lay their hands on from nearby markets, flew at the performers. Carrà, on one such occasion, retaliated with: 'Throw an idea instead of potatoes, idiots!'

Arrests, convictions, a day or two in jail and free publicity in the next days followed many Evenings. But this was precisely the effect they aimed for: Marinetti even wrote a manifesto on the 'Pleasure of Being Booed' as part of his *War, the Only Hygiene* (1911–15). Futurists must teach all authors and performers to despise the audience, he insisted. Applause merely indicated 'something mediocre, dull, regurgitated or too well digested'. Booing assured the actor that the audience was alive, not simply blinded by 'intellectual intoxication'. He suggested various tricks designed to infuriate the audience: double booking the auditorium, coating the seats with glue. And he encouraged his friends to do whatever came to mind on stage.

So at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan in 1914, the Futurists tore to shreds and then set alight an Austrian flag, before taking the scuffle out onto the streets where more Austrian flags were burnt for 'the fat families lapping their ice cream'.

### Manifestos on performance

Manifestos by Pratella on Futurist music had appeared in 1910 and 1911 and one on Futurist playwrights (by thirteen poets, five painters and one musician) in January 1911. The manifestos encouraged the artists to present more elaborate performances and in turn experiments in performance led to more detailed manifestos. For example, months of improvised Evenings with their wide range of performance tactics had led to the *Variety Theatre Manifesto*, when it became appropriate to formulate an official theory of Futurist theatre. Published in October 1913 and a month later in the London *Daily Mail*, it made no mention of the earlier Evenings, but it did explain the intentions behind many of those eventful occasions. By 1913 also, the magazine *Lacerba*, based in Florence and formerly produced by rivals of the Futurists, had become, after much debate, the official organ of the Futurists.

Marinetti admired variety theatre for one reason above all others: because it 'is lucky in having no tradition, no masters, no dogma'. In fact variety theatre did have its traditions and its masters, but it was precisely its *variety* – its mixture of film and acrobatics, song and dance, clowning and 'the whole gamut of stupidity, imbecility, doltishness, and absurdity, insensibly pushing the intelligence to the very border of madness' – that made it an ideal model for Futurist performances.

There were other factors that warranted its celebration. In the first place variety theatre had no story-line (which Marinetti found to be utterly gratuitous). The authors, actors and technicians of variety theatre had only one reason for existing, he said. That was 'incessantly to invent new elements of astonishment'. In addition, variety theatre coerced the audience into collaboration, liberating them from their passive roles as 'stupid voyeurs'. And because the audience 'cooperates in this way with the actors' fantasy, the action develops simultaneously on the stage, in the boxes and in the orchestra'. Moreover, it explained 'quickly and incisively', to adults and children alike, the 'most abstruse problems and most complicated political events'.

Naturally, another aspect of this cabaret form which appealed to Marinetti was the fact that it was 'anti-academic, primitive and naive, hence the more significant for the unexpectedness of its discoveries and the simplicity of its means'. Consequently, in the flow of Marinetti's logic, variety theatre 'destroys the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious, and the Sublime in Art with a capital A'. And finally, as an added bonus, he offered variety theatre 'to every country (like Italy) that has no single capital city [as] a brilliant résumé of Paris, considered the one magnetic centre of luxury and ultra-refined pleasure'.

One performer was to embody the ultimate destruction of the Solemn and the Sublime and offer a performance of pleasure. Valentine de Saint-

Point, the author of the *Manifesto of Lust* (1913), performed on 20 December 1913 at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées in Paris, a curious dance – poems of love, poems of war, poems of atmosphere – in front of large cloth sheets onto which coloured lights were projected. Mathematical equations were projected onto other walls, while a background of music by Satie and Debussy accompanied her elaborate dance. She was later to perform in 1917 at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

### Instructions on how to perform

A more carefully designed and elaborate version of earlier Evenings, illustrating some of the new ideas set out in the *Variety Theatre Manifesto*, was *Piedigrotta*, written by Francesco Cangiullo as a 'words-in-freedom' (*parole in libertà*) drama, and performed by Marinetti, Balla and Cangiullo at the Sprovieri Gallery, Rome, on 29 March and 5 April 1914. For this, the gallery, lit by red lights, was hung with paintings by Carrà, Balla, Boccioni, Russolo and Severini. The company – 'a dwarf troupe bristling with fantastic hats of tissue paper' (actually Sprovieri, Balla, Depero, Radiante and Sironi) assisted Marinetti and Balla. They 'declaimed the "words-in-freedom" by the free working Futurist Cangiullo' while the author himself played the piano. Each was responsible for various 'home-made' noise instruments – large sea shells, a fiddle bow (actually a saw with attached rattles of tin) and a small terracotta box covered with skin. Into this box a reed was fitted which vibrated when 'stroked by a wet hand'. According to Marinetti's typical 'non-sense' prose it represented a 'violent irony with which a young and sane race corrects and combats all the nostalgic poisons of Moonshine'.

Typically this performance led to another manifesto, that of *Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation*. Basically it instructed potential performers how to perform, or 'declaim' as Marinetti put it. The purpose of this 'declaiming' technique, he emphasized, was to 'liberate intellectual circles from the old, static, pacifist and nostalgic declamation'. A new dynamic and warlike declamation was desired for these ends. Marinetti proclaimed for himself the 'indisputable world primacy as a declaimer of free verse and words-in-freedom'. This he said equipped him to notice the deficiencies of declamation as it had been understood up until then. The Futurist declaimer, he insisted, should declaim as much with his legs as with his arms. The declaimer's hands should, in addition, wield different noise-making instruments.

The first example of a Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation had been *Piedigrotta*. The second took place at the Doré Gallery in London towards the end of April 1914, shortly after Marinetti's return from a tour of Moscow and St Petersburg. According to the *Times* review the room was 'hung with many specimens of the ultra-modern school of art' and 'Mademoiselle fliclic



11 Russolo and his assistant Piatti with *intonarumori*, or noise instruments, 1913

12 Marinetti speaking in a Futurist Evening with Cangiullo

13 Title-page of Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tumb*, 1914





14 Marinetti, *Tavola Parolibera*, 1919

chapchap' – a ballet dancer with cigar holders for legs and cigarettes for neck – was in attendance. Dynamically and synoptically, Marinetti declaimed several passages from his performance *Zang tumb tumb* (on the siege of Adrianople): 'On the table in front of me I had a telephone, some boards, and matching hammers that permitted me to imitate the Turkish general's orders and the sounds of artillery and machine-gun fire', he wrote. Blackboards had been set up in three parts of the hall, to which in succession he 'either ran or walked, to sketch rapidly an analogy with chalk. My listeners, as they turned to follow me in all my evolutions, participated, their entire bodies inflamed with emotion, in the violent effects of the battle described by my words-in-freedom.' In an adjoining room, the painter Nevinson banged two enormous drums when instructed to do so by Marinetti over the telephone.

### Noise music

*Zang tumb tumb*, Marinetti's 'onomatopoetic artillery' as he called it, was originally written in a letter from the Bulgarian trenches to the painter Russolo in 1912. Inspired by Marinetti's description of the 'orchestra of the great battle' – 'every five seconds siege cannons disembowel space by a chord

– TAM TUUUMB mutiny of five hundred echoes to gore it, mince it, scatter it to infinity' – Russolo began an investigation of the art of noise.

Following a concert by Balilla Pratella in Rome in March 1913, at the crowded Teatro Costanzi, Russolo wrote his manifesto *The Art of Noises*. Pratella's music had confirmed for Russolo the idea that machine sounds were a viable form of music. Addressing himself to Pratella, Russolo explained that while listening to the orchestral execution of that composer's 'forcible Futurist Music', he had conceived of a new art, the Art of Noises, which was a logical consequence to Pratella's innovations. Russolo argued for a more precise definition of noise: in antiquity there was only silence, he explained, but, with the invention of the machine in the nineteenth century, 'Noise was born'. Now, he said, noise had come to reign 'supreme over the sensibility of men'. In addition, the evolution of music paralleled the 'multiplication of machines', providing a competition of noises, 'not only in the noisy atmosphere of the large cities, but also in the country that until yesterday was normally silent', so that 'pure sound, in its exiguity and monotony, no longer arouses emotion'.

Russolo's Art of Noises aimed to combine the noise of trams, explosions of motors, trains and shouting crowds. Special instruments were built which at the turn of a handle would produce such effects. Rectangular wooden boxes, about three feet tall with funnel-shaped amplifiers, contained various motors making up a 'family of noises': the Futurist orchestra. According to Russolo, at least thirty thousand diverse noises were possible.

Performances of noise music were given first at Marinetti's luxurious mansion, Villa Rosa in Milan, on 11 August 1913, and the following June in London at the Coliseum. The concert was reviewed by the *London Times*: 'Weird funnel shaped instruments . . . resembled the sounds heard in the rigging of a channel-steamer during a bad crossing, and it was perhaps unwise of the players – or should we call them the "noisicians"? – to proceed with their second piece . . . after the pathetic cries of "no more" which greeted them from all the excited quarters of the auditorium.'

### Mechanical movements

Noise music was incorporated into performances, mostly as background music. But just as the *Art of Noises* manifesto had suggested means to mechanize music, that of *Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation* outlined rules for body actions based on the staccato movements of machines. 'Gesticulate geometrically', the manifesto had advised, 'in a draughtsmanlike topological manner, synthetically creating in mid-air, cubes, cones, spirals and ellipses.'

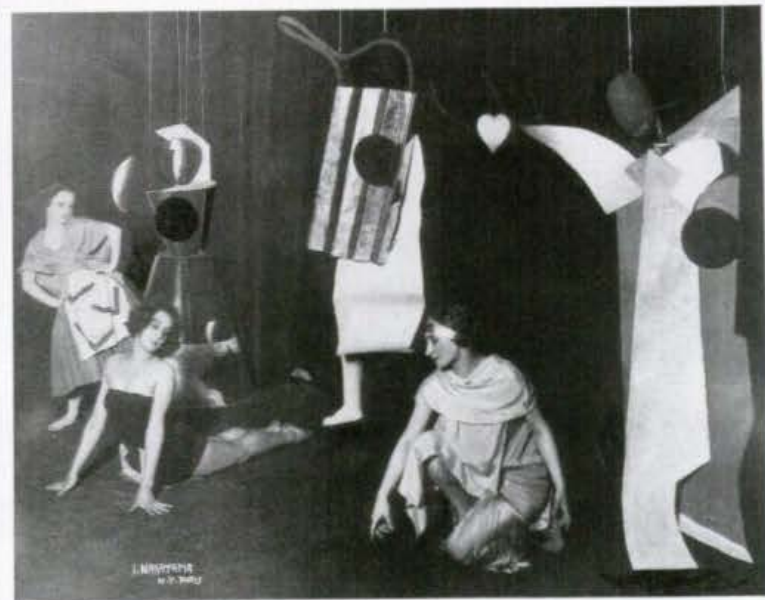
Giacomo Balla's *Macchina tipografica* ('Printing Press') of 1914 realised these instructions in a private performance given for Diaghilev. Twelve

people, each part of a machine, performed in front of a backdrop painted with the single word 'Tipografica'. Standing one behind the other, six performers, arms extended, simulated a piston, while six created a 'wheel' driven by the pistons. The performances were rehearsed to ensure mechanical accuracy. One participant, the architect Virgilio Marchi, described how Balla had arranged the performers in geometrical patterns, directing each person to 'represent the soul of the individual pieces of a rotary printing press'. Each performer was allocated an onomatopoeic sound to accompany his or her specific movement. 'I was told to repeat with violence the syllable "STA"', Marchi wrote.

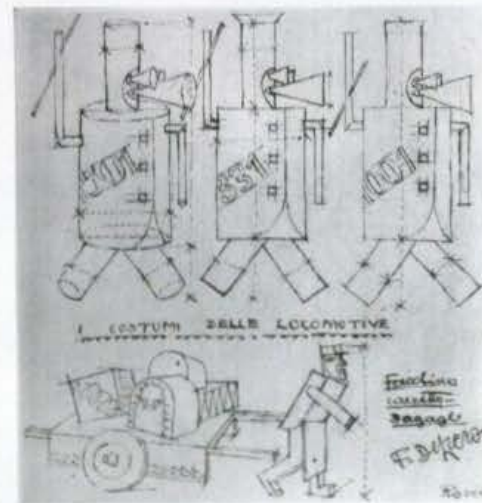
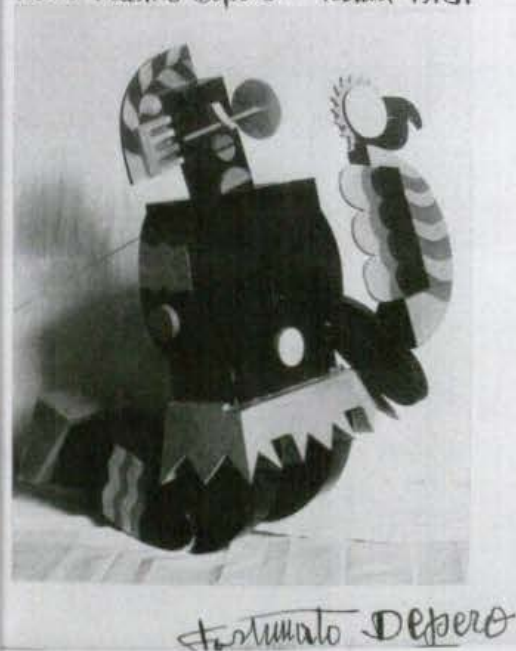
This mechanization of the performer echoed similar ideas by the English theatre director and theoretician Edward Gordon Craig, whose influential magazine *The Mask* (which had reprinted the *Variety Theatre Manifesto* in 1914) was published in Florence. Enrico Prampolini, in his manifestos on *Futurist Scenography* and *Futurist Scenic Atmosphere* (both 1915), called, as Craig had in 1908, for the abolition of the performer. Craig had suggested that the performer be replaced by an *Übermarionette*, but he never actually realised this theory in production. Prampolini, in a disguised attack on Craig, talked of eliminating 'today's supermarionette recommended by recent performers'. Nevertheless the Futurists actually built and 'performed' with those inhuman creatures.

Gilbert Clavel and Fortunato Depero, for instance, presented in 1918 a programme of five short performances at the marionette theatre, Teatro dei Piccoli, at the Palazzo Odescalchi, in Rome. *Plastic Dances* was conceived for less than life-size marionettes. One figure, Depero's 'Great Savage', was taller than a man; its special feature was a small stage which dropped from the belly of the Savage, revealing tiny 'savages' dancing their own marionette routine. One of the sequences included a 'rain of cigarettes' and another a 'Dance of Shadows' - 'dynamic constructed shadows - games of light'. Performed eighteen times, *Plastic Dances* was a great success in the Futurist repertory.

17 Enrico Prampolini and Franco Casavola, *The Merchant of Hearts*, 1927



«Un grande selvaggio dal teatro nel ventre»  
Teatro Plastico Depero - Roma - 1918.



18 'The Great Savage', one of F. Depero's puppets for his and Clavel's *Plastic Dances*, 1918

19 Depero, costumes for *Macchina del 3000*, a mechanical ballet with music by Casavola, 1924

15 Opposite: Mechanical character from G. Balla's Futurist composition *Macchina tipografica*, 1914

16 Opposite: Balla, drawing of movement of actors for *Macchina tipografica*, 1914

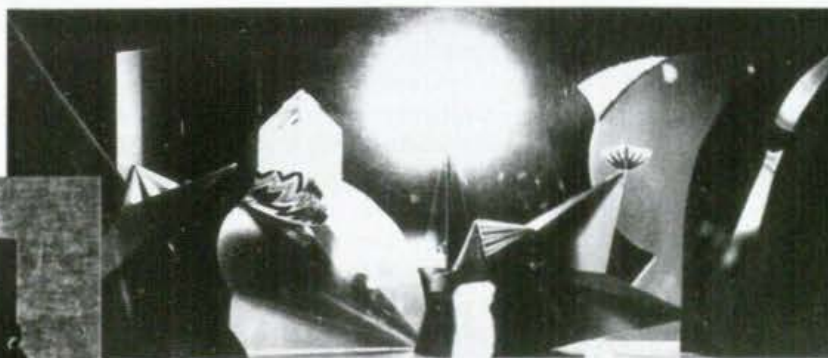
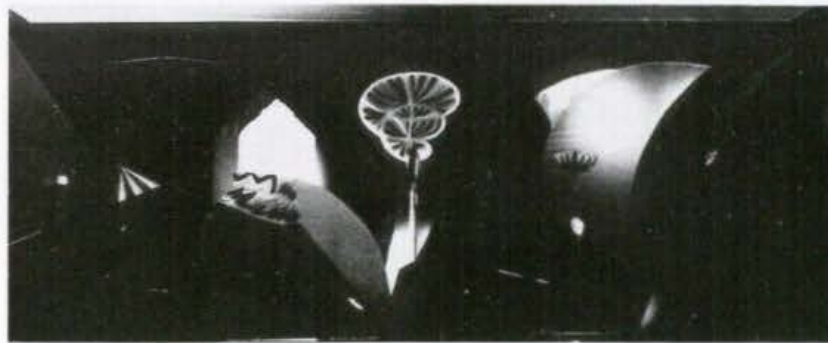
- 17 *The Merchant of Hearts* by Prampolini and Casavola, presented in 1927, combined marionettes and human figures. Life-size puppets were suspended from the ceiling. More abstract in design, and less mobile than the traditional marionette, these figurines 'performed' together with the live actors.

### Futurist ballets

- An essential motive behind these mechanical puppets and moving décor was the Futurists' commitment to integrate figures and scenery in one continuous environment. For instance, Ivo Pannaggi had in 1919 designed mechanical costumes for the *Balli Meccanichi*, blending figurines into the painted Futurist setting, while Balla, in a performance of 1917 based on Stravinsky's *Fireworks*, had experimented with the 'choreography' of the setting itself. Presented as part of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes programme at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, the only 'performers' in *Fireworks* were the moving sets and lights. The set itself was a blown-up three-dimensional version of one of Balla's paintings and Balla himself conducted the 'light ballet' at a keyboard of light controls. Not only the stage, but also the auditorium, was alternately illuminated and darkened in this actor-less performance. In total, the performance lasted just five minutes, by which time, according to Balla's notes, the audience had witnessed no less than forty-nine different settings.

For those 'ballets' by live performers, Marinetti outlined further instructions on 'how to move' in his manifesto on *Futurist Dance* of 1917. There he untypically acknowledged the admirable qualities of certain contemporary dancers, for example Nijinsky, 'with whom the pure geometry of the dance, free of mimicry and without sexual stimulation, appears for the first time', Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller. But, he warned, one must go beyond 'muscular possibilities' and aim in the dance for 'that ideal multiplied body of the motor that we have so long dreamed of'. How this was to be done, Marinetti explained in great detail. He proposed a Dance of the Shrapnel including such instructions as 'with the feet mark the boom-boom of the projectile coming from the cannon's mouth'. And for the Dance of the Aviatrix, he recommended that the danseuse 'simulate with jerks and weavings of her body the successive efforts of a plane trying to take off'!

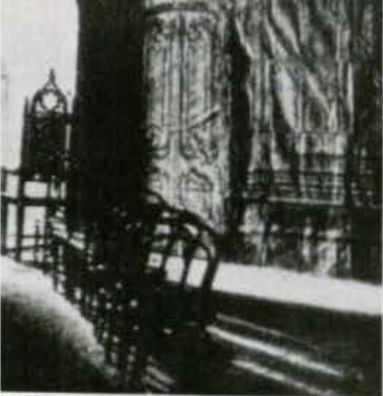
But whatever the nature of the 'metallicity of the Futurist dance', the figures remained only one component of the overall performance. Obsessively, the numerous manifestos on scenography, pantomime, dance or theatre, insisted on merging actor and scenography in a specially designed space. Sound, scene and gesture, Prampolini had written in his manifesto of *Futurist Pantomime*, 'must create a psychological synchronism in the soul of the spectator'. This synchronism, he explained, answered to the laws of simultaneity that already regulated 'the world-wide Futurist sensibility'.



20 Balla's 1915 design for Stravinsky's *Fireworks*, 1917

21 Pannaggi, costume for a ballet by M. Michailov, c. 1919. The costumes 'deformed the entire figure bringing about machine-like movements'





22 Exit of chairs from Marinetti's *They're Coming*, 1915



23 Marinetti's *Feet*, 1915, a *sintesi* that consisted of only the feet of performers and objects

### Synthetic theatre

Such 'synchronism' had been outlined in detail in the manifesto of *Futurist Synthetic Theatre* of 1915. This notion was easily explained: '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 variety theatre had recommended representing in a single evening all the Greek, French and Italian tragedies condensed and comically mixed up. It had also suggested reducing the whole of Shakespeare into a single act. Similarly, the Futurist Synthesis (*sintesi*) deliberately consisted of brief, 'one idea' performances. For instance, the single idea in Bruno Corra's and Emilio Settimelli's *Negative Act* was precisely that – negative. A man enters the stage: he is 'busy, preoccupied . . . and walks furiously'. Taking off his overcoat he notices the audience. 'I have absolutely nothing to tell you. . . . Bring down the curtain!', he shouts.

The manifesto condemned 'passéist theatre' for its attempts to present space and time realistically: 'it stuffs many city squares, landscapes, streets, into the sausage of a single room', it complained. Rather, Futurist Synthetic theatre would mechanically, 'by force of brevity, . . . achieve an entirely new theatre perfectly in tune with our swift and laconic Futurist sensibility'. So settings were reduced to a bare minimum. For example, Marinetti's Synthesis <sup>23</sup> *Feet* consisted of the feet of the performers only. 'A curtain edged in black should be raised to about the height of a man's stomach', the script explained. 'The public sees only legs in action. The actors must try to give the greatest expression to the attitudes and movements of their lower extremities.' Seven unrelated scenes revolved around the 'feet' of objects, including two armchairs, a couch, a table and a pedal-operated sewing machine. The brief sequence ended with a foot kicking the shin of another disembodied figure.

<sup>22</sup> In *They're Coming*, Marinetti's Synthesis of 1915, the props themselves became the main 'characters'. In a luxurious room lit by a large chandelier, a majordomo simply announced: 'They're coming.' At this point two servants hurriedly arranged eight chairs in a horseshoe beside the armchair. The

majordomo ran through the room, crying 'Briccatirakamekame', and exited. He repeated this curious action a second time. Then the servants rearranged the furniture, turned off the lights of the chandelier, and the set remained faintly lit 'by moonlight coming through the French window'. Then the servants, 'wedged into a corner, wait trembling with evident agony, while the chairs leave the room'.

The Futurists refused to explain the meaning of these Syntheses. It was 'stupid to pander to the primitivism of the crowd', they wrote, 'which in the last analysis wants to see the bad guy lose and the good guy win'. There was no reason, the manifesto went on, that the public should always completely understand the whys and wherefores of every scenic action. Despite this refusal to give 'content' or 'meaning' to the Syntheses, many of them revolved around recognisable gags on artistic life. They were timed very much like brief variety theatre sequences, with introductory scene, punchline and quick exit.

Boccioni's *Genius and Culture* was a short story of a despairing artist, clumsily committing suicide while the ever-present critic, who 'for twenty years had profoundly studied this marvellous phenomenon (the artist)', watched over his quick death. At that point he exclaimed, 'Good, now I'll write a monograph.' Then, hovering over the artist's body 'like a raven near the dead', he began writing, thinking out loud: 'Toward 1915, a marvellous artist blossomed . . . like all great ones, he was 1.68 metres tall, and his width . . .' And the curtain fell.

### Simultaneity

A section of the Synthetic theatre manifesto was devoted to explaining the idea of simultaneity. Simultaneity 'is born of improvisation, lightning-like intuition, from suggestive and revealing actuality', it explained. They believed that a work was valuable only 'to the extent that it was improvised

(hours, minutes, seconds), not extensively prepared (months, years, centuries). This was the only way to capture the confused 'fragments of inter-connected events' encountered in everyday life, which to them were far superior to any attempts at realistic theatre.

Marinetti's play *Simultaneity* was the first to give form to this section of the manifesto. Published in 1915, it consisted of two different spaces, with performers in both, occupying the stage at the same time. For most of the play, the various actions took place in separate worlds, quite unaware of each other. At one point, however, the 'life of the beautiful cocotte' penetrated that of the bourgeois family in the adjacent scene. The following year, this concept was elaborated by Marinetti in *Communicating Vases*. There the action took place in three locations simultaneously. As in the earlier play, the action broke through the partitions, and scenes followed in quick succession in and out of the adjacent sets.

The logic of simultaneity led also to scripts written in two columns, as with Mario Dessy's 'Waiting', printed in his book *Your Husband Doesn't Work? . . . Change Him!* Each column described the scene of a young man pacing nervously back and forth, keeping a close eye on their various clocks. Both were awaiting the arrival of their lovers. Both were disappointed.

Some Syntheses could be described as 'play-as-image'. For instance in *There is no Dog*, the only 'image' was the brief walk of a dog across the stage. Others described sensations, as in Balla's *Disconcerted States of Mind*. In this work four people differently dressed recited together various sequences of numbers, followed by vowels and consonants; then simultaneously performed the actions of raising a hat, looking at a watch, blowing a nose, and reading a newspaper ('always seriously'); and finally enunciated together, very expressively, the words 'sadness', 'quickness', 'pleasure', 'denial'. Dessy's *Madness* attempted to instil that very sensation in the audience. 'The protagonist goes mad, the public becomes uneasy, and other characters go mad.' As the script explained, 'little by little everyone is disturbed, obsessed by the idea of madness that overcomes them all. Suddenly the (planted) spectators get up screaming . . . fleeing . . . confusion . . . MADNESS.'

Yet another Synthesis dealt with colours. In Depero's work, actually called *Colours*, the 'characters' were four cardboard objects – Gray (plastic, ovoid), Red (triangular, dynamic), White (long-lined, sharp-pointed) and Black (multiglobed) – and were moved by invisible strings in an empty blue cubic space. Off stage, performers provided sound effects or 'parolibero' such as 'bulubu bulu bulu bulu bulu' which supposedly corresponded to the various colours.

*Light*, by Cangiullo, began with a stage and auditorium completely in darkness, for 'three BLACK minutes'. The script warned that 'the obsession for lights must be provoked by various actors scattered in the auditorium, so

that it becomes wild, crazy, until the entire space is illuminated in an EXAGGERATED WAY!'

### Later Futurist activities

By the mid-twenties the Futurists had fully established performance as an art medium in its own right. In Moscow and Petrograd, Paris, Zurich, New York and London, artists used it as a means to break through the boundaries of the various art genres, applying, to a greater or lesser extent, the provocative and alogical tactics suggested by the various Futurist manifestos. Although in its formative years Futurism had seemed to consist mostly of theoretical treatises, ten years later the total number of performances in these various centres was considerable.

In Paris, the publication of the Surrealist manifesto in 1924 introduced an entirely new sensibility. Meanwhile the Futurists were writing fewer and fewer manifestos of their own. One late one, *The Theatre of Surprise*, written in October 1921 by Marinetti and Cangiullo, did not go far beyond the earlier seminal writings; rather it attempted to place the Futurist activities in historical perspective, giving credit to their earlier work, which they felt had not yet been acclaimed. 'If today a young Italian theatre exists with a serio-comic-grotesque mixture, unreal persons in real environments, simultaneity and interpenetration of time and space', it declared, 'it owes itself to our synthetic theatre.'

Nevertheless their activities did not decrease. In fact companies of Futurist performers toured throughout Italian cities, venturing to Paris on several occasions. The Theatre of Surprise company was headed by the actor-manager Rodolfo DeAngelis. In addition to DeAngelis, Marinetti and Cangiullo, it included four actresses, three actors, a small child, two dancers, an acrobat and a dog. Making their debut at the Teatro Mercadante in Naples on 30 September 1921, they then toured Rome and Palermo, Florence, Genoa, Turin and Milan. And in 1924 DeAngelis organized the New Futurist Theatre with a repertory of about forty works. With their limited budgets the companies were forced to bring even more of their genius for improvisation into play, and resort to even more forceful measures to 'provoke absolutely improvised words and acts' from the spectators. Just as in earlier performances actors had been planted in the auditorium, so on these tours Cangiullo scattered instruments of the orchestra throughout the house – a trombone was played from a box, a double bass from an orchestra seat, a violin from the pit.

Neither did they leave any field of art untouched. In 1916 they had produced a Futurist film, *Vita futurista*, which investigated new cinematic techniques: toning the print to indicate, for example, 'States of Mind';

distorting images by use of mirrors; love scenes between Balla and a chair; split-screen techniques; and a brief scene with Marinetti demonstrating the Futurist walk. In other words it was a direct application of many of the qualities of the Synthesis to film, with similarly disjointed imagery.

There was even a manifesto of *Futurist Aerial Theatre*, written in April 1919 by the aviator Fedele Azari. He scattered this text from the sky on his 'first flight of expressive dialogue' in the middle of an aerial ballet, producing at the same time flying *intonarumori* [noise intoners] – controlling the volume and sound of the aeroplane's engine – with the device invented by Luigi Russolo. Prized by the flyer as the best means to reach the largest number of spectators in the shortest period of time, the aerial ballet was scripted for performance by Mario Scaparro in February 1920. Entitled *A Birth*, Scaparro's play depicted two aeroplanes making love behind a cloud, and giving birth to four human performers: completely equipped aviators who would jump out of the plane to end the performance.

So Futurism attacked all possible outlets of art, applying its genius to the technological innovations of the time. It spanned the years between the First and Second World Wars, with its last significant contribution taking place around 1933. Already, by that time, the radio had proved itself to be a formidable instrument of propaganda in the changing political climate in Europe; its usefulness was recognised by Marinetti for his own ends. *The Futurist Radiophonic Theatre* manifesto was published by Marinetti and Pino Masnata in October 1933. Radio became the 'new art that begins where theatre, cinematography, and narration stop'. Using noise music, silent intervals and even 'interference between stations', radio 'performances' focused on the 'delimitation and geometric construction of silence'. Marinetti wrote five radio Syntheses, including *Silences Speak Among Themselves* (with atmospheric sounds broken by between eight and forty seconds of 'pure silence') and *A Landscape Hears*, in which the sound of fire crackling alternated with that of lapping water.

Futurist theories and presentations covered almost every area of performance. This was Marinetti's dream, for he had called for an art that 'must be an alcohol, not a balm' and it was precisely this drunkenness that characterized the rising circles of art groups who were turning to performance as a means of spreading their radical art propositions. 'Thanks to us', Marinetti wrote, 'the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labour, nor a life of idleness either, but a *work of art*.' This was a premise that was to underlie many subsequent performances.

## Russian Futurism and Constructivism

Two factors marked the beginnings of performance in Russia: on the one hand the artists' reaction against the old order – both the Tzarist régime and the imported painting styles of Impressionism and early Cubism; on the other, the fact that Italian Futurism – suspiciously foreign but more acceptable since it echoed this call to abandon old art forms – was reinterpreted in the Russian context, providing a general weapon against art of the past. The year 1909 – in which Marinetti's first Futurist manifesto was published in Russia as well as Paris – may be regarded as the significant year in this respect.

Such attacks on previously held art values were now expressed in the quasi-Futurist manifesto of 1912 by the young poets and painters Burlyuk, Mayakovsky, Livshits and Khlebnikov, entitled *A Slap in the Face to Public Taste*. In the same year, the 'Donkey's Tail' exhibition was also organized as a protest against 'Paris and Munich decadence', asserting the younger artists' commitment to developing an essentially Russian art following in the footsteps of the Russian avant garde of the 1890s. For while Russian artists had previously looked to western Europe, the new generation promised to reverse that process, to make their impact on European art from an entirely new Russian vantage-point.

Groups of writers and artists sprang up throughout the major cultural centres of St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and Odessa. They began to arrange exhibitions and public debates, confronting audiences with their provocative declarations. The meetings soon gathered momentum and an enthusiastic following. Artists such as David Burlyuk lectured on Raphael's Sistine Madonna with photographs of curly-haired boys, attempting to upset respectful attitudes towards art history with his unconventional juxtaposition of a serious painting and random photographs of local youths. Mayakovsky made speeches and read his Futurist poetry, proposing an art of the future.