ABSTRACT

KELSEY WALSH
Beautiful Ideas Worth Dying For: Interventionism and Nationalism in Italian Futurist Theater
Under the Direction of DR. STEVEN SOPER

Futurism offers an invaluable perspective on the rise of interventionism and nationalism in Italy and the role of theater to popularly inspire and achieve these political ends. In the early years of the movement, the Futurists used theater for explicitly interventionist propaganda in order to break the recently reunified Italy of their provincialist sentiments and forcibly move the country into a new era of industrial, economic and social progress. The movement was marked by reverence for war, contempt for the passéism of the old Italy, veneration of youth, and love of spectacle. The Futurists were masters of advertisement and used this skill to attract people to their first *serate,* which sought to break the apathy of viewers and drive people to political action. The plays and manifestos performed and declaimed at these early *serate* were blatantly anti-neutral and succeeded in changing the concept of Italian theater, if not immediately the minds of attendees. Futurist theater, as discussed in history, is often depicted as revolutionary, yet when their political views are considered, they fall short of such acclaim and have been labeled reactionary. The dichotomy between these two appraisals of Futurist ideology allowed for a politically motivated theater that was still able to elicit shocking reactions from their spectators because they could, at some level, agree with many of their political beliefs. Futurist theater formed an outlet for nationalist and interventionist politics and a means of involving the people of Italy in a truly nationalist fight for their own identity.

INDEX WORDS: Futurism, Theater, Performance, Italy, Interventionism, Nationalism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, World War I, *Serate*

BEAUTIFUL IDEAS WORTH DYING FOR: INTERVENTIONISM AND NATIONALISM IN ITALIAN FUTURIST THEATER

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909; it was a document that established the group's precedent of publicity, antagonism, and a deep longing for action in the face of what they viewed as cultural, political, economic, and social stagnation.[1] From Futurism's inception, there was an atmosphere of spectacle that its members used to spread awareness for the movement and the political goals it hoped to achieve. While the political aims were not fully articulated in Futurism's early years, Marinetti had loosely outlined the basic tenets they would uphold in his founding manifesto: "we will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman."[2] Violence, youth, speed, industry, danger, and action were heralded as the paths to a new Italy that would heal the world of the "smelly gangrene" of the past.[3] Marinetti's primary focus was the development of an Italy that upheld the historically powerful name it had at one time earned, but he also hoped that it would serve as an example for the rest of the world to follow in pursuit of industry, war, and progress.

Futurism has regularly been studied as both a fleeting moment in Italian history and as a significant marker in avant-garde European art, but the political implications of Futurist

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[1] F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909," in *Futurist* Manifestos*,* ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. R.W. Flint (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), 24.
[2] Ibid., 22.
[3] Ibid.

performance are often ignored. Histories of Italy, such as Denis Mack Smith's *Modern Italy*, offer a brief reflection on the first Futurist Manifesto and the artistic developments created out of this movement, mention the "reactionary" beliefs of the political group, and then focus all further attention to Futurism on F.T. Marinetti's personal exploits or Benito Mussolini's brief stint as a Futurist.[4] Mack Smith establishes Futurism as a group of "malcontents with a grudge to settle" who joined the Fascists when they could no longer believe their own group was working effectively toward a solution to the problems they perceived in Italy.[5] Marinetti and other prominent Futurists' later involvement with Fascism comprise the only historical context in which Futurism will be mentioned. Christopher Duggan's *Force of Destiny* discusses Futurism primarily as a feeder group for Fascism: their nationalist beliefs and reverence for war had attracted them to Mussolini's political campaign, but when he began consolidating power, "the most powerful bond uniting them was not what they hoped to build but what they hated"—the existing government and their passéist policies.[6] This discussion of Futurism diagnoses it either as a solely artistic movement, or as a group which was merely a minor precursor to Fascism. These and other histories of Italy do not study the theater or performance of Futurism in great detail, nor do they attempt to investigate the atmosphere in which Futurist spectacle was received by the Italian people. Emilio Gentile's book, *La Grande Italia,* discusses the development of nationalism in Italy in the twentieth century as it leads into to Fascism. This and his other book, *The Struggle for Modernity*, provide a context for the nationalist themes of Futurism in Italy's wider political history. Gentile's books also offer commentary on the other contemporary

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[4] Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 241.
[5] Ibid., 312.
[6] Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 416.

modernist movements and their part in the development of a national culture in Italy. *The Struggle for Modernity* extensively describes the politicization of Fascist theater and the spectacular approach to Fascist political action that was reminiscent of Futurism's use of spectacle in advertising their cause. *Avant-Garde Florence*, by Walter Adamson, presents the politics of the artistic movement of Futurism, but the narrative focuses primarily on the journal *Lacerba* and the differences between its ideology and that of its modernist contemporary, *La Voce*. In these books, an in depth analysis of the theater as a primary venue for Futurist political programs is rare.

Alternatively, there are studies of Futurist theater and art that approach the subject from a purely aesthetic position. The artistic movement that Futurism inspired, and indeed quintessentially represented, was ground-breaking, avant-garde, and thoroughly modern. According to Günter Berghaus, the Futurists "declared war on the cultural establishment"—their political ideals subjugated to the greater work in the artistic and cultural sphere.[7] Berghaus' book chronicles the Futurist *serate* and many other performances and their audiences' receptions of the material promoted. His research recognizes that there were often political ideals behind such Futurist events, but the focus is primarily on the process of organizing, advertising, performing, and the aftermath of the productions rather than their political motivations.[8] Other studies of Futurist theater dismiss the need to address the political components of the theater altogether because ultimately the performance is the subject of study. *Futurist Performance*, written by Michael Kirby, provides commentary on the different aspects of performance such as acting, costuming, and set design, as well as a descriptions of the different types of Futurist theater and

[7] Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater, 1909-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.
[8] Ibid., 135.

cinema. Kirby explains his purpose in writing the book only as a study of artistic value: "why an artist produces a particular product may be interesting from a psychological or sociological point of view, but it is unimportant aesthetically."[9] The study of Italian Futurist theater and spectacle has largely been limited to two very different fields of study—purely political and purely aesthetic—but the intersection of the two has often been ignored.

Futurism, as an artistic movement, had many and various focuses; it spanned architecture, sculpture, painting, drawing, theater, poetry, dance, and even fashion. Members refused to accept as law the classical methods; they abhorred convention; and they rejected the idea that a work of art was good because it was well-received by an assumedly uneducated public.[10] This group, which shocked the contemporaneous art world, was seen as vulgar and crude by those who believed in the quality of classical works and the value of realism in art. More than anything, the goal of Futurist art—in any form—was ingenuity: Marinetti and others asserted that artists "should have no preoccupation except innovative originality."[11] To be connected at all to the past, which was filled with people content to waste away in their own archaic values, was viewed as the most powerful condemnation for a Futurist—it meant he was lazy and lacked the creativity it took to be a true artist. Futurist artists in every field sought to rebuild Italy "in violent spasms of action and creation" that would revitalize the country and finally establish a modern and cohesive identity for a country that had been clinging to a crumbling legacy established thousands of years previously.[12] The founding manifesto decried the antiquated idea of fine art which so idealized life that it became a mockery of reality to the Futurists, and instead glorified

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[9] Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1997), 18.
[10] F.T. Marinetti, "The Pleasure of Being Booed," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 96.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Marinetti, "Founding Manifesto," 23.

the present, immediate future, and the sensational results possible with a complete artistic break from the past. Writers were able to express Futurist politics in a revolutionary way through the theater's inherent connection to fiction and imaginative fabrication. This politically-charged theater became the primary medium for propagating Futurist ideals when the First World War began and Italy yet clung to neutrality.

As a political group, Futurism was marked by a demand for war and a new nationalism that permeated and motivated all of their actions. While the Futurists' political leanings heavily influenced the art they produced, there were certain media that were better suited to the advancement of their goals. Sculpture, painting, and music often carried political undertones, but the most politically influential modes of Futurist expression were poetry, the manifesto, and theater. Yet painters and musicians such as Giacomo Balla and Luigi Russolo were actively involved in the most spectacular events performed by the Futurists—the early *serate*, or Futurist Evenings—even if their art was less political than others'.[13] As a clearer ideology of nationalism and interventionism began to develop in Italian Futurism with the invasion of Libya, in 1911, the theater became increasingly important in making these views available to the public. At the *serate*, a group of Futurist poets and artists delivered manifestos, declaimed poetry, gave concerts, and showed paintings to audiences that loudly and, at times, violently opposed the actions onstage; it was not uncommon for readers to resort to shouting the lines of poetry while the audience voiced their displeasure with the material being exhibited.[14] These events created a reputation for the Futurists' antagonism and spread the guarantee that they would provide an

[13] F.T. Marinetti, "Futurism's First Battles," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 156.
[14] Berghaus, 89.

evening of entertainment during which spectators could nearly riot and not only escape punishment, but perhaps even be actively encouraged in this behavior. Marinetti himself noted in an interview that his political goals were being ignored, yet he remained positive that some good was being achieved through subjecting his supporters to regular attacks from the audience's vegetables: "it does not matter whether we are booed or applauded. What matters is that our program is surrounded by a lot of noise and notoriety."[15] Marinetti knew that political influence was only possible if the Futurists were first well-known and recognizable. Publicity forces witnesses to make a choice either for or against the movement or idea in question, and while it may not always generate positive reactions it requires some sort of action from people who might otherwise never form an opinion.

Nationalism and interventionism clearly existed in Italy prior to Futurism; however, this group had an advantage in creating an atmosphere in which such sentiments could thrive. They expressed their support for both ideas in a way that was neither reminiscent of mainstream politics—which were not always trustworthy—nor comfortable for audiences, but challenged them to get involved in the political debates of the time. Futurist theater used revolutionary and antagonistic methods to deliver some of the same propositions that other political figures had made and that already some Italians supported, but in a way that—at least in theory—created a need for immediate action. When Futurism was founded in 1909, it was an intensely nationalist group in that they called for a modern and unified Italian identity that superseded the provincialism that remained from before Italian unification in 1861.[16] Their glorification of war was already well-known by the outbreak of World War I in August of 1914, and interventionism

[15] Ibid., 101.
[16] Duggan, 383.

quickly became another clear objective of the Futurists and their supporters. Futurist theater and performance developed an even more blatantly political attitude in the months leading to Italy's entrance into the war in May of 1915. They no longer demanded warlike living and violent creation alone; they now called for the reality of war and the participation of a country which they believed needed to be shocked out of "every neutrality, fearful and enervating indecision, negating pessimism and nostalgic, romantic, and flaccid inertia."[17] Italian Futurist theater sought —through energetic, antagonistic, and violent performance—to form a truly national identity which only the trials of war could assert.

[17] Giacomo Balla, "The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 202.

CHAPTER 2
FUTURISM AND THE MODERNIZATION OF ITALIAN POLITICS

Futurism was but one form of reaction to the classical artistic and literary traditions in Italy, and, in fact, there were several new approaches to theater that were created out of discontentment with the failures of Italian theater as a true art form. Magic realism, the Theater of the Grotesque, and the Theater of the Mute all arose out of the same "general sense of pessimism and skepticism" for Italian culture and society in the early twentieth century.[18] Marinetti's Futurism used the theater to "reflect the new realities of the 'modern age' that had finally dawned on Italy."[19] Such new realities included industrialization and the demand for participation in world affairs—as in the imperial invasion of Libya in 1911 or the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Futurists used the theater as their primary method for disbursing propaganda because modernity and nationalism were intimately connected in Futurist ideology, and the theater allowed this connection to become personal for their audiences. This was to be the starting point for "a total spiritual revolution that must begin from culture and invest and radically renew politics and society, and the very character of the Italians."[20] Changing the character of Italians from a traditionalist, passéist, and seemingly apathetic group to a militant, active, and passionate people would make intervention an attainable goal. But Futurists were not the only ones who believed that an all-encompassing external conflict could do good for a

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[18] Berghaus, 22.
[19] Ibid., 23.
[20] Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 29.

country that had yet to prove itself on an international scale. Following the 1911 expedition in Tripoli, Giustino Fortunato—an ardent pacifist—remarked on the value of war for the development of nationalist sentiment in Italy: "only when Italy has secured a virile victory of its people over an enemy—no matter who...only then will it be able to say that is has avenged a millennium and a half of shameful history."[21] Prominent political figures recognized that only victory in war could secure national unity for Italy, and it was through the theater that the Futurists attempted to promote the idea of intervention in World War I.

The importance of theater specifically was further established by the growing skepticism of the government and political systems in Italy in the early twentieth century. Giovanni Giolitti, named "the minister of the criminal underworld" by some of his contemporary historians, had ceased to inspire confidence in the Italian government by 1910.[22] Instead, major political groups —Futurists, socialists, nationalists, and others—had to find ways to attract followers and accomplish their own political goals without any connection to "a degenerate political system."[23] For Futurists, this separation was emphasized by using nontraditional advertising for their nationalist and interventionist goals and establishing the theater as their primary venue for political action. Groups such as the Futurists chose to operate outside of the expressly political constructs through which the established leaders of Italy had gained power. The cult of youth that Futurism continually promoted could also be interpreted as an attack on the government headed by Giolitti, who was himself 72 years old at the beginning of World War I. Futurism's continual reminder to the Italian public that men were essentially useless past the age of 40 would have

[21] Duggan, 384.
[22] Ibid., 369.
[23] Ibid.

been a recognizable commentary on the advanced age of most members of the Italian government. Marinetti used every conceivable difference between Futurism and the contemporary Italian government to establish credibility with the discontented Italian public. Futurists worked with the "iconoclastic fury of a new barbarian" to replace the established political and social order with a new and vigorous national lifestyle.[24] Writers and artists used theatrics in the presentation of their work to both gain notoriety as modernists and establish themselves independently of the political system at work in Italy.

"War, A Heroic Poem"

Valentine de Saint-Point's 1912 work, "War, A Heroic Poem," is a commentary on the virtues of war, specifically referring to the Italian attacks on Tripoli in October of 1911.[25] The poem begins with a description of a flood of soldiers loading into a ship heading to the war in Libya. Masses of soldiers whose "laurels await" in the imperial war go seeking the glory and heroism to be gained in the face of possible death.[26] Through the voice of a soldier, Saint-Point illustrates the necessity of a war for the prosperity of the Italian nation and the new generation of Italians themselves: "we do not have the eternal wound that spurts our surplus blood; we need a wound or we will suffocate."[27] The bloody war in another country will allow the youth of Italy, who have never been involved in any sort of military conflict, to mature into men and true Futurists. The author later mentions the current breed of Italians that would sooner buy the newest fashionable cloth than purchase food to keep their family from starving as an example of the sumptuous and impractical values prevalent Italy. The idea of placing the the "collectivity"

[24] Gentie, *Struggle for Modernity*, 35.
[25] Valentine de Saint-Point, "War, A Heroic Poem," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 570.
[26] Ibid., 444.
[27] Ibid.

above the individual was a reference to the patriotism that war inspires and a will to act for the good of the country above the good of the self, or the individual cities. Saint-Point believed the war was a curative and cathartic event that would give a productive outlet to the political tensions in Italy: "that we not be at each others' throats, set us loose against the others!"[28] Instead of allowing the discontent with government and its seemingly increasing failures to represent Italian interests to affect internal politics, this anger would be channeled into the war effort and subsequent the process of recreating the country. Such a diversion of politics would allow Italy to truly unite against the common enemy and would promote the economic, social, and industrial progress of the country. The poet's final assertion that "people are sick of peace, they are dead with it," speaks to the Futurist idea that the majority of Italians were living lives already committed to the grave by choosing the neglect the war that was raging in other European countries—both in 1911 and 1914.[29] The concept of an Italian "fatherland" was to be established in the aftermath of the Libyan invasion or the Great War, and interventionism was to be the true cure for the stagnancy of Italy.

Poems such as this were often declaimed at Futurist *serate* intending to use the antagonistic format of these events and the incendiary language of poems or manifestos to wake audiences from the mental passivity that was associated with the contemporary political regime. Neutrality in the face of war offered a kind of certainty of safety and security from change which those in the government would be happy to protect because it solidified their retention of power. Futurism sought intervention as a way to destroy the certainty of continued political stagnancy and passéism, and to create a vacuum that would be filled with capable and energetic young

[28] Ibid., 445.
[29] Ibid.

politicians. Saint-Point called to the Futurist soldiers of her poem—represented in reality by those who supported interventionism and were unhappy with the established political order—with the supposed cry of all Italians: "we are suffocating with certainty, repressed daring oppresses our breasts, smothers our courageous hearts."[30] Without the possibility of political change, neither economic nor social change was possible. The Futurists believed Italian involvement in war would foster changes in the Italian identity, making the country and its people more industrial and more aggressive. This change is what their sensational theater actively tried to produce. Believing Futurism to be a kind of militancy, they used the theater as a preparation for the actual war. The manifesto of the synthetic theater, published in 1915, explained this idea: "war—Futurism intensified, obliges us to March and not to rot in libraries and reading rooms."[31] If war was the natural progression from Futurism, then there could be no supporters of the movement who did not seek the immediate involvement of Italy in the first World War when it erupted in 1914, and thus no supporters who did not want a significant change in Italian politics.

"Futurism's First Battles"

Marinetti's account of the early *serate* in "Futurism's First Battles" was published in 1915 and offered a description of Futurism's extension beyond an artistic movement into the political sphere. The *serate* began as showcases for art and literature, but soon gathered large crowds which the Futurists could not "spare from the most insolent and most cruel truths."[32] Marinetti and other poets, painters, and sculptors made Italy's poor reputation in the world

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[30] Ibid.
[31] F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, and Emilio Settimelli, "The Futurist Synthetic Theater, 1915," in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. R.W. Flint (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), 183.
[32] Marinetti, "First Battles," 153.

known. They denounced "the opportunism and the mediocrity that presided over our foreign policy, and the urgent need to raise [Italian] national dignity at all costs."[33] Opportunism in foreign policy was exemplified by Giolitti's suggestion to simultaneously—and secretly—investigate exactly what could be gained by entering World War I on the side of the Triple Alliance or the Triple Entente, and the resulting Treaty of London of 1915. Such underhanded politics would do nothing but further degrade Italy's national dignity and ruin any political integrity it had yet maintained. By attacking such provocative issues as the dignity of the national government, audiences were moved to passionate reaction—even if only against the Futurists. It was, however, one of the Futurists' goals to wake people from their apathy. Marinetti describes seeing "courage increase, as well as the number of men who were truly young at heart, but also mummies bizarrely stirring into life, drawn by our words from their ancient tombs," even in the earliest Futurist Evenings.[34] The *serate*, which publicized Futurists' rejection of the traditional in art, came to be used to emphasize their rejection of traditionalist politics as well. All of the advertising and publicity that went into the *serate* also helped to establish the Futurists as an opposing political ideology to that of the contemporary government. Another section of the 1915 publication of *War, Sole Hygiene of the World* in which "Futurism's First Battles" appeared, revealed Marinetti's belief that their theatrics had established two opposing political camps: "today, in Italy, *traditionalists* is synonymous with *neutralists, pacifists, and eunuchs*, while *Futurists* is synonymous with *violent antineutralists*."[35] This kind of a binary system would ostensibly create an environment in which anyone not content with the current establishment

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 154
[35] F.T. Marinetti, "In This Futurist Year," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 234.

would be drawn to the Futurist platform—if indeed Marinetti's analysis of the political environment was accurate. Whether he was able to provide an entirely unbiased account of the political atmosphere of his time, Marinetti did witness the aggressive reactions of the people to Futurist political theater both for and against their anti-traditionalist and anti-neutralist politics.

War was inherently an event for the youth of the country and offered one more comparison between the rising generation which was eager to get involved and the generation in power that tried desperately to maintain neutrality. Emilio Gentile suggests that a new, modern Italian could not be formed without first ridding them of their "indifference and skepticism for everything that concerned politics."[36] Marinetti recognized the naturally limited influence that Futurist propaganda—and indeed any political propaganda—could have due to this skepticism, but he saw, in the war, the natural continuation of his own political beliefs. He attributed much of the success of the Futurist movement in establishing a following to the sense of urgency that the outbreak of the war had created. He noted that "by themselves, our verbal propaganda and our immediate, swift actions would never have been able to achieve such rapid, easy success…The current war is indeed the finest Futurist poem that has appeared until now!"[37] Interventionism became a central tenet of Futurist political ideology because it expanded the virtues of Futurist living actively and aggressively into a national duty to fight for one's country, which allowed the dignity and identity of the unified Italy to finally be recognized by its own people as well as by other countries.

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[36] Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 38.
[37] F.T. Marinetti, "The Meaning of War for Futurism: Inverview with L'Avvenire," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 241.

CHAPTER 3
THE SYNTHETIC THEATER AND INTERVENTIONISM

The establishment of the synthetic theater created the perfect stage for Futurist political propaganda to be disseminated to the Italian people: each play was to be written to last under two minutes and to be acted in a series with other synthetic plays, in which authors could illustrate simple, yet powerful ideas and emotions without concern for an overarching storyline. Though not every synthetic play was expressly interventionist, the manifesto of Futurist Synthetic Theater, published on February 18, 1915 by F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, and Emilio Settimelli, directly stated their positive position on Italian involvement and extolled the "much prayed-for great war" before even one mention of theater.[38] The synthetic theater attempted to imitate life as it would exist under the circumstances of war: "fierce, overwhelming, synthesizing," in contrast to the existing passéist theater which reflected the "pacifist, neutralist" nature of the Italy that refused to fight.[39] But more than limiting art merely to an imitation of life, the Futurists used this new form of theater as a weapon to prepare the Italian people for the day when the foreign war would become a personal reality. The themes in synthetic plays were often blatant calls-to-arms or praises of militarism, which, only three months before Italy would declare war on Austria, would have found a somewhat receptive audience, even if the performed actions themselves still retained many of their offensive qualities. F.T. Marinetti's argument for the importance of the theater in Italy was based on public exposure: "in fact ninety percent of all Italians go to the

[38] Marinetti, Corra, Settimelli, "Synthetic Theater," 184.
[39] Ibid.

theater, whereas only ten percent read books and journals."[40] In these plays, the merits of Futurism, and by extension war and their other political goals, were propagated.

"Toward Victory"

Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli's play "Toward Victory" chronicles the last fight between a man and woman before he leaves, presumably, for the war. Anna begs Iacopo not to go, but he accuses her of fighting "against the Hero inside that wants to prove himself at every cost!"[41] The love of a woman is intoxicating, calming, and distracting—the most dangerous thing for a man who intends to pursue what the Futurists believed to be the greatest and most important challenge in life: war. Iacopo fights against the loving hands that put his "burning head to sleep" and saps his strength of will to live as a real man should, only to fall to his death after tripping on a fig skin just outside Anna's door.[42] The young man's last words seem to indicate his success at being able to overcome the power of woman, but they ironically foreshadow his death: "I am immortal now, I cannot fear any danger, any obstacle, everything will fall before me!"[43] Corra and Settimelli created a character that, to all appearances, achieved a major breakthrough in escaping a relationship that sought to emasculate him by keeping him out of military service. This play, however, suggests that Iacopo's relationship with Anna was a weakness in itself before it even threatened to influence his decision to serve, and that without the relationship he would have already been actively involved in the war. Without the distraction of a woman he could have entirely avoided the fig skin that sent him to his patently unheroic death.

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[40] Ibid., 183.
[41] Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli, "Toward Victory," in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 273.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 274.

Written and performed after the outbreak of World War I but before Italy became involved, this play addressed the fears of mothers, wives, and girlfriends throughout Italy that their men would join the military and never return home. Yet while many women would have found this play a confirmation of their worst fears, the authors clearly intended it to attract the men of the country with their descriptions of heroism and victory that could only be found in the war. It established a rhetoric of duty and heroism that were inherent to fighting for Italy in the great war, and consequently also expressed the idea that choosing not to fight was to deny the very purpose of existence. Iacopo claimed it was his "mission" to leave for the war and that this mission was really the only thing that was important: "it is the greatest in the universe, it is purer and brighter than the sun, it is more intoxicating than the most intoxicating drink!"[44] Corra and Settimelli established a scene in which an ordinary man gave up his incapacitating relationship for a cause that was truly noble. Propagandistic plays such as this one allowed young men to witness someone very like themselves committing a heroic deed, not of self-restraint in the face of necessity but of recognition of his own duty to the country's war effort and passionate acceptance of the role he was expected to play. Political speeches and pamphlets could only accomplish so much without their motives being questioned due to the unpopular political atmosphere of the time, but plays allowed an escape into another person's reality in which military service was not only expected, but glorified.

"The Troop Train"

Mario Dessy's play, "The Troop Train" stands in stark contrast to Corra and Settimelli's "Toward Victory," which warns of the power of women. Both offer an obvious pro-war setting

[44] Ibid.

and a propagandistic view of the heroic act of becoming a soldier, but Dessy chose to highlight the dedication and unfailing enthusiasm of the young men instead of the obstacles they had to overcome in order to enlist. The author describes a train that is filled with expectant, smiling men who are making their way to the front lines of war, but is stopped and boarded by a seductive woman in search of someone. Though the men react with awe when they see her, they are unmoved by her departure and in fact remain excited and ready to continue on towards the fighting, seeming to forget she ever existed.[45] The play—subtitled a "synthesis of environment and state of mind"—contains no words and would last perhaps one minute, but the effect is striking.[46] Dessy claims that the power of a woman is no match for the seductive call of war. Instead of being an obstacle to overcome, the beautiful, perfumed woman is an illustration of the soldiers' extreme commitment to what the Futurists are attempting to teach is right. An audience member comfortably sitting in the theater might question where the woman had gone but upon realizing that the men heading off to the glories of war spare no thought for the woman, would see that their complete disinterest in her stems from their preoccupation with the victories they are about to achieve and the heroic deeds they are sure to complete. The thought of war is so inspiring that although these men are possibly traveling to their death in battle, they cannot be distracted from their happy reveries. The author leaves the audience with the image of "smiles of those who are going toward THE WAR."[47] The ultimate goal, set in all capital letters, at the foot of the transcript establishes a reverence for a thing that is still relatively foreign to the Italian people. The young men of Italy have had little experience with war, and thus have no personal

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[45] Mario Dessy, "The Troop Train," in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 283.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

understanding to attach to the still abstract idea. That "THE WAR" is made to stand out typographically, reflects the event's universality and importance—no further identification is required for people all over the world to understand what is referenced. However, despite the war's importance and global reach, Italy officially proclaimed neutrality until nine months after the war had begun.

"Old Age"

A departure from the explicitly interventionist plays they wrote together, "Old Age" is Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli's commentary on the lifestyle of passéist Italy. The play is the identical repetition of a lunch scene three times with only the calendar indicating how much time has passed. It is first set in 1860, a seminal year of the reorganization of Italy, next in 1880, and lastly in 1910. An old man and old woman exchange inquiries about their digestion, "remove the usual leaf" from the calendar, and then, in the last scene, die at the very table at which they have spent so much of their lives.[48] Members of the audience could easily relate to such an ordinary scene of friendship and routine, but would then be shocked by the sudden and seemingly meaningless deaths. That the man and woman are both described as old, even in the earliest scene, indicates they have spent their entire lives as slaves to such schedule and routine. Corra and Settimelli epitomize the pointlessness of life for the man and woman, and by extension the whole of passéist Italy—the Italy of previous generations who had grown up in the cities of provinces and still operated under provincial identities, rather than a unified Italian identity.

Futurists ostensibly believed that past the age of 40, men were no longer useful and should be tossed "into the wastebasket like useless manuscripts," letting the younger generations

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[48] Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli, "Old Age," in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 270.

take their places as leaders and creators.[49] This obsession with youth was a well-advertised tenet of Futurism and would have been easily recognized in such plays as "Old Age." This performance established an ordinary routine, but allowed it to take on a sinister feel as it slowly became a trap that prevented the characters from ever being able to truly live, and indeed by making it impossible for them to even recognize their complete detachment from life. True living, as a Futurist, meant "love of danger…courage, boldness, and rebellion…and the beauty of speed"—as compared to the sedentary and repetitive lifestyle of Italians of the past.[50] This play, though seemingly apolitical, was a denouncement of the power of old men and women who had long ago ceased to truly live, and a call for the reinvigoration of a country that was floundering under the influence of leaders who lacked the vital energy to make sufficient political or social change in Italy. As such, it would have been an obvious commentary on the government headed by Giovanni Giolitti and other aging political figures.

"A Birth"

Mario Scaparro wrote synthetic ballets—self-termed "cinemagraphic poems"—which contained no words, but created fantastic scenes with propagandistic themes to validate the war effort in Italy.[51] "A Birth" required performers to become airplanes falling in love with one another. Scaparro tells the story of their relationship through four scenes, which he calls visions, culminating in the seaplane giving birth to four human figures. The children born to an albatross and a seaplane, two mechanical beings, are fully human in this play. As the seaplane, who had been transformed into a biplane throughout her pregnancy, gives birth, "her belly opens up and

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[49] Marinetti, "Founding Manifesto," 23.
[50] Ibid., 21.
[51] Mario Scaparro, "A Birth," in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 304.

four aviators jump out completely equipped!"[52] This last line of the ballet's script leaves audiences with the incongruous image of machines giving birth to human figures, but they are born grown men in complete readiness for combat instead of infants with no experience or talents. Scaparro esteems the idea of man as a descendent of machine and explains that men are born with a natural ability and need to fight. The idealization of war and the representation of man as inherently war-ready from the moment of his birth gives audiences the idea that this is man at his most natural state—as a soldier. This play was written in the early years of the first World War and sought to convince audiences of the necessity and validity of Italian involvement in the war. The glorification of the machine and the image of instruments of war giving life to man attempted to inextricably tie the two together. Neither Futurist art nor life could exist in a world that chose to ignore the war, because they upheld it as the greatest test of character for both individuals and for the country itself. Futurism hoped and truly believed their involvement would lead to the construction of "an even greater Italy of the future!"[53]

It was through plays, especially in the synthetic theater created immediately leading up to Italy's involvement in World War I, that the Futurists expected to lead Italians into support of the war. These plays exemplified Marinetti's observation that the theater was able to make a much deeper impact on audiences than other forms of Futurist expression or outright political campaigning. He claimed, "today, it is only through the theater that we can instill a warlike spirit in Italians."[54] The recognition of the value of theater created a need for the development of political writing and propagandistic poetry. Interventionist sentiments already existed throughout

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Marinetti, "First Battles," 156.
[54] F.T. Marinetti, "The Futurists, the First Interventionists," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 228.

Italy which allowed the polarized themes of Futurist theater to resonate with the public even while the plays themselves remained abstract, shocking, or offensive as works of art. Marinetti declared his purpose in establishing a Futurist theater to expose the equivocating nature of Italians and push his audiences towards committing to what he viewed as the greatest opportunity to recreate Italy and finally realize the goals of the Risorgimento: "our words brutally unmasked souls, leaving no room for half-measures."[55] In his autobiography, Futurist painter Giovanni Severini, described the atmosphere in Italy before Futurist influence. Though he was more ambivalent about the politicization of Futurist art than others, he still believed that "Italians, besides being philistines and in a daze, actually needed an Italian movement to shake and wake them up."[56] Synthetic and other Futurist theater hoped to wake Italians up and to inspire political action and grassroots involvement of the population in the creation of a new, unified national identity that would rise out of the challenges of involvement in World War I.

[55] Marinetti, "First Battles," 154.
[56] Giovanni Severini, *The Life of A Painter*, trans. Jennifer Franchina (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 105.

CHAPTER 4
ITALIAN NATIONALISM AND FUTURIST NATIONALISM

For all the debate regarding the Risorgimento's starting date, the idea of forging a unified state out of Italy's provinces was established long before the foundation of Futurism in 1909. Nationalism in Italy often stemmed from the demand of an ideological component to the legal reorganization of the Italian provinces into a single state, whether before or after this unification occurred. After the Risorgimento, the structure of the country had changed officially in the eyes of the world, but it had not been fully recognized in the lives and beliefs of the people: the citizens of Venice still self-identified as Venetians, people of Rome considered themselves Roman above all else, and men and women from Piedmont were Piedmontese before they were Italian. Guiseppe Carle, an Italian statesman, defined nationalism as "the memory and awareness of a common past that convinces peoples that they will have to cooperate in undertaking a common task for the future and, therefore, convinces them to desire and aspire to become part of the same state."[57] The nationalists that existed prior to the foundation of Futurism, and indeed existed throughout the lifetime of Futurism, believed that intervention in the Great War could help to create a national identity such as Carle described. Massimo D'Azeglio, the Italian author, painter, and nationalist, noted the failures of the Risorgimento: "political unification is useless without intellectual and moral redemption; it is useless to have created Italy without the Italians."[58] The Futurists also sought the creation of a completely unified Italian identity through

[57] Gentile, *La Grande Italia*, 31.
[58] Ibid., 39.

their involvement in the war, and it became one of the major struggles of Futurism to differentiate itself from the preexisting nationalism in Italy while yet seeking similar goals. Marinetti believed that theater was the most influential method of circulating political ideals and used this to emphasize the differences between his group of active, theatrical Futurists and the passive, political nationalists who—according to Marinetti—were not doing enough to achieve their own goals.[59]

Eighteenth Century Cultural Nationalism

Italians' search for national unity was not confined to political spheres alone; it also inspired some to seek change in academic and cultural fields. Many nationalists asked how the state could become truly Italian without a history to support it or without a culture that was entirely its own. The increase in Italian translations of classic works as well as the call for new Italian literature revealed the hope of the country to establish itself by its own right, rather than relying on the intellectual developments of France, Spain, or England to create a national culture.[60] This kind of intellectual nationalism was not a widely supported goal, but it was instead promoted by several separate groups who worked toward the replacement of Latin or French with Italian in academic writing as a way to assert the legitimacy of Italy on a world stage —intellectually if not politically. As early as 1764, there were small groups—such as the *Il Caffé* literary publication—whose entire purpose was to call attention to the need of a new and inherently Italian literature to replace the "dull, trivial, and imitative" work that existed before.[61] This was, however, deemed a "shrill and premature" gesture for an Italy that was yet divided into

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[59] Marinetti, "Meaning of War," 240.
[60] Richard S. Cunsolo, *Italian Nationalism: From Its Origins to World War II*, ed. Louis L. Snyder (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990), 35.
[61] Ibid., 34.

separate kingdoms and states.[62] Even at such an early point in the development of Italian nationalism, the theater asserted itself as a medium inherently valuable to the establishment or destruction of a national identity. The theater of the 1700s reduced the once esteemed Italian states to "regional caricatures" and "spoofed aspects of local living."[63] While not originally used as a tool for propagating nationalist ideals, the blatantly provincial and antiquated depictions of Italy even in their own theater called attention to the failings of a country that continued to exist as provinces in a world moved by powerful and singular countries such as England or France. The actors, who intended to produce comedy, effectively isolated from the theater an entire group of people who believed a united Italy was possible by portraying Italians as "silly, superficial, unstable, and alienated from one another."[64] Even the most traditional theater had the power to make both Italian and foreign audiences aware of the acute separation between the Italian states and the failures that would represent in world politics, without acting based on any political, much less nationalist, intentions.

Though this early cultural nationalism is seemingly prescient of Futurist ideology, there are important differences that oppose the argument for extensive influence. While Futurists proclaimed Dante the representation of everything wrong with passéist Italy and fought for his eradication from the country's literary and academic milieu, eighteenth century cultural nationalism required supporters to "embrace Dante's Italian for the sake of ethnic pride and because it was pliable and expansive enough to accommodate the most discriminating of literary tastes."[65] The political ideal underlining the nationalism of this age may have been similar to that

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 37.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 35.

which Marinetti's Futurists espoused, but the methods for achieving a national identity worth recognition on a world stage were completely polarized. Before the reorganization of Italy, the goal of nationalists was to establish a culture that would appeal to the masses and uphold the classical merits of philosophy and art, though adapted to the Italian language. The only modernization they sought was in language, while their other campaigns were quintessentially passéist according to Futurist thought. Even *Il Caffé*'s condemnation of contemporary Italian literature as "imitative" was not meant to incite the kind of originality the Futurists demanded, but rather to establish a literary canon on par with that of other enlightened countries, merely in a more personalized voice for the Italian people.[66] Richard S. Cunsolo claims these individualized and rare attempts to recognize Italian culture were forming "something of a nationalist temper" that would be solidified into a political movement in the years of the Risorgimento and beyond.[67] The Futurist demand for nationalism in the twentieth century was not only a cry for the completion of a unification left unfinished, but also a cry for the progress and freedom of a country that had become stagnant culturally and politically. Instead of looking backward to an established culture, they wanted to create something new and original, something explicitly Italian.

Nineteenth Century Nationalism

Beginning with similar goals as the cultural nationalists of the eighteenth century had set, the concept of nationalism in the nineteenth century soon shifted towards the political as specific groups began actively pursuing the unification of the country's individual states. Giuseppe Mazzini began the "Young Italy" movement in late 1831 as an intensely nationalist group that

[66] Ibid., 34.
[67] Ibid., 39.

hoped to create a new political order in which there was a central government—led, of course, by young men under the age of forty, much as Futurism demanded—to replace each separate state government.[68] The prevailing nationalism in italy in the early and mid-nineteenth century was, however, cultural and largely based on language, as had been the case in eighteenth century nationalism. The history of Italy in the age of the Roman republic and the Renaissance were periods all Italians could proudly claim as the foundations of a national culture, and many attempted to use this as their assertion of an independent and perfectly Italian culture free of foreign influence, even in their previously separated state.[69] Nationalist sentiment became more expressly political and more organized as the country began fighting France and Austria for control of Italian states in 1848 and 1849.[70] The war for Italian independence in 1859 regained territory once controlled by Austria, and by March 17, 1861, Italy was officially unified, though it would not gain control of Rome until 1870.[71] The new parliamentary monarchy was a single country in political and geographical terms, if not entirely in terms of a national identity. Attempts to develop this kind of national unity in the post-unification years were abundant. The idea of the fatherland was emphasized through patriotic literature and monuments to victories of the pursuit of unification "to popularize, spread, and foster faith in the values of nation, freedom, and progress among the masses."[72] But even these public displays of national unity acted as poignant reminders that the country was far from united. The fiftieth anniversary of unification was celebrated by building the monument for Victor Emmanuel II, which stood as an enormous

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[68] Martin Clark, *The italian Risorgimento*, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1998), 38.
[69] Ibid., 41.
[70] Cunsolo, 66.
[71] Ibid., 71.
[72] Gentile, *La Grande Italia*, 51.

memorial to Italy's "unsatisfied aspirations to greatness."[73] In its early stages, Futurism was surrounded by celebrations of the unification's anniversary and was aware of Italian historians' fear that "there was no authentic test of fire" for the country's supposed unity.[74] 1911 was also the year that Futurists would emphatically call for the invasion of Libya, hailing it as a way to establish national unity through external conflict. Nineteenth century nationalism had made the unification of the country possible; it had shifted from cultural to political, and had reincorporated culture as a means to solidify the nominally unified country on a personal level by using the idea of the fatherland and appealing to patriotic sentiments. Yet, as the Italian Nationalist Association had remarked, "struggle abroad demanded increased unity and harmony at home," and that had never been achieved.[75]

Futurist Nationalism

The Futurist conception of nationalism was inherently bellicose and, when the First World War began, expressly tied to interventionism. Marinetti told an interviewer from the newspaper *L'Avvenire*—incidentally, another Futurist—that the political platform of Futurism endeavored "to embed the idea of nation and war in the concept of progress and freedom."[76] The interview, entitled "The Meaning of War for Futurism," was published on February 23, 1915, and publicized the differences between Futurist nationalism and the Nationalist organization.[77] If the Futurists were successful in gathering a following and involving Italy in the Great War, Marinetti believed that "the Italy of tomorrow must be, and will be, infinitely greater than the

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[73] Ibid., 53.
[74] Cunsolo, 73.
[75] Alexander J. De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism in Italy*, (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 50.
[76] Marinetti, "Meaning of War," 239.
[77] Ibid., 244.

archaeological and cultural one the nationalists are hell-bent on cobbling together, restoring, and setting up on pedestals."[78] Rather than rebuilding and renewing a past Italy, much like the earliest proponents of a cultural nationalism supported, Futurism looked to the development of an entirely new culture, economy, and society to make Italy a world power. The rejection of tourism as the most important industry would give the country the resources and opportunities to become "industrialized and commercialized, powerful and domineering, first among other nations," by reclaiming the land, money, and manpower wasted on museums and ruins for the development of industrial factories.[79] Marinetti believed that the only truly nationalist move economically would be to increase economic independence. The shift from reliance on a foreign market for economic prosperity to the intended increase in self-sufficiency would release the country from its fetters to ruins and impractical artifacts and allow progress to advance Italy into the modern age as a world power.

Futurists held these nationalist beliefs, but they were not so provocative that the Italian people completely rejected them. In fact, there were large groups of people who agreed that a new Italy needed to be formed, who were just as disillusioned with the government as the Futurists were, and who demanded a unified national identity. People were unhappy with the stagnation in the government and when the Treaty of London was signed on April 26, 1915, effectively pledging Italian intervention on the side of the Triple Entente, supporters of neutrality made Giolitti question his decision. Nationalists and interventionists marched in the streets against the idea of neutrality, however "the anger of the demonstrators was also directed generally towards parliament and an entire political system that was felt to have betrayed the

[78] Ibid., 240.
[79] Ibid.

hopes of the Risorgimento."[80] Futurism, observing this discontent in the Italian people, used the theater to rouse them to action. The antagonism and violence of Futurist theater and spectacle was intended to create a revolution among the people that would inspire the country to enter the war, which the Futurists saw as the ultimate opportunity for Italians to unite as a single country in the face of opposition. Ultimately, Italy entered the war as a member of the Triple Entente, and the Prime Minister Antonio Salandra gave a speech indicating his hope for a "marvelous moral unity" to arise out of the impending conflict.[81] This was exactly the kind of rhetoric Marinetti and his Futurists had espoused in their theater and manifestos as promotion of interventionism in any major military conflict since their foundation—specifically the invasion of Libya in 1911 and the Great War in 1914.

There were other nationalist groups operating at the same time at the Futurists, but their approach to Italian nationalism were inherently different. The Italian Nationalist Association had been founded in 1910 in favor of imperial expansion as a way to fix Italy's economic troubles. Vehemently anti-Socialist, anti-Giolittian, and eventually interventionist, they shared many common beliefs with the Futurists; they did not, however, agree on the value of Italian culture and what would come to comprise a truly national identity. Marinetti believed the principles of the Nationalists were not "and can never be a truly Futurist nationalism."[82] The writers and supporters of the Florentine journal, *La Voce*, also called for a cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century. The publication was founded in 1908 by Giuseppe Prezzolini, and it continually published articles and reviews on "both the best the rest of Europe had produced and

[80] Duggan, 388.
[81] Ibid., 389.
[82] Marinetti, "Meaning of War," 239.

the best of Italy's own tradition."[83] Though it represented the cultural avant-garde, it also upheld the history of Italian art and culture as well as the art of other countries. Futurism was remarkably different in this regard—the primary goal of Futurist art and publication was to create not only an Italian culture, but a completely new and autonomous art, literature, theater, and even architecture that did not rely on other countries or time periods for guidance. And while *La Voce* proclaimed themselves "nationalists no, Italians yes!," Futurist identity viewed nationalism as an explicitly Italian character trait.[84]

On November 29, 1914, Marinetti published a pamphlet which would later be reprinted as the "Manifesto to the Students."[85] Throughout the pamphlet, he wove the metaphor of Italy as a wounded body desperately trying to cure itself and proclaimed Futurists "its timely surgeons" armed with the cure for the nation—an invigorating nationalism that would drive out the "obsessive love for the past" and replace it instead with anti-traditionalist innovation.[86] Marinetti's description of Futurism as "an impassioned attempt to introduce life into art," indicates the importance placed on art in this metaphorical surgery.[87] A Futurist artist must be a soldier as well as a painter, writer, or sculptor. The melding of life and art necessitated the introduction of contemporary issues into the realm of artistic expression—the politicization of art. The *serate* and other spectacular Futurist events acted as bridges between the artistic, theatrical, and political goals of the group. At these kinds of events, political manifestos were read to the public in a way that rejected typical political campaigning and created an

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[83] Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 119.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Marinetti, "Futurist Year," 237.
[86] Ibid., 231.
[87] Ibid., 233.

environment that encouraged an urgent reaction. But for the Futurists, theatricality and spectacle were not limited to the *serate*; the daily lives of Futurists were supposed to be lived with "courage, audacity, and revolt."[88] It was through Futurism's inherent theatricality that creations such as the anti-neutral suit could transform an ordinary day into a blatant cry for Italian nationalism and intervention in the Great War.

"The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto"

While Italy still proclaimed neutrality in World War I, Futurists continued their demands for intervention as a way to assert nationalist pride. Giacomo Balla's manifesto published on September 11, 1914, called for an increasingly obvious demonstration of nationalism in everyday life.[89] "The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto" suggested replacing the black, brown, and gray clothing which represented the outer "modesty, fear, caution, or indecision" of the men who wore them with "joyful and bellicose clothing" that would inspire not only the wearer, but also casual observers to take notice of their country's flag and the values it was intended to represent.[90] The antineutral suit became in itself an expression of nationalism, interventionism, and Futurism—a visual assault of green, white, and red on the eyes of everyone who came into contact with the wearer. Francesco Cangiullo was dressed in the suit at Rome University for a debate on interventionism where the suit caused "violent scuffles between teachers, students, and janitors" according to Marinetti's account of the event.[91] Again, antineutral suits were worn by Cangiullo and others at the "third great interventionist demonstration" that took place at the Piazza di Trevi in Rome on April, 12, 1915—just over one month before Italy entered the war.[92] That the artists

[88] Marinetti, "Founding Manifesto," 21.
[89] Balla, "Antineutral Suit," 202.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Marinetti, "First Interventionists," 229.
[92] Berghaus, 76.

behind its creation "vehemently prohibited" the use of yellow and black—the colors of the Austrian flag—in the suits' production, indicates that their attack on neutrality extended beyond the boring dress of Italians well into the political sphere.[93] The design of the suits were intended to be dynamic and aggressive, but at the same time simple and comfortable enough to allow the wearer to engage in battle while still wearing the modified Italian flag. The antineutral suit took the idea of displaying patriotism to an entirely new level and attempted to use the clothing as "Futurist banners for our URGENT **and imperative** great war."[94] Balla ends the manifesto with a direct warning to the government to "take off its passéist attire of fear and indecision" and allow the youth of the country to bring it into the modern age through the trials of war. Futurist theatricality and imposition of life into art was exemplified by the creation of the antineutral suit. It attempted to inextricably intertwine the tricolor flag with the ideals of nationalism and interventionism. Cangiullo created a spectacle wearing the Italian colors in a conspicuously-cut suit because the Futurists used it to demand that Italians live up to the honor of their country and pursue the glory and identity that could only be found in an all-encompassing conflict such as war.

"The Rainbow of Italy"

Mario Scapparro, the author of cinemagraphic poems, wrote "The Rainbow of Italy" as a synthetic ballet consisting of only two brief acts. First, a Hurricane rages with red lightning striking Italy and damaging vases left behind by 311 artists intended to "collect all the colors of the Hurricane."[95] In the second scene, Good Weather follows the Hurricane, but does not bring a

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[93] Balla, "Antineutral Suit," 203.
[94] Ibid., 204.
[95] Mario Scaparro, "The Rainbow of Italy," in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 306.

rainbow, which was clearly the expectation. Just before the play's end, a dirigible full of painters appears and they paint a rainbow of green, white, and red on the sky.[96] This brief play openly illustrates some of the core beliefs of Futurism: interventionism and its ability to create a truly national identity through the ordeal of a war. The Hurricane, as a violent force upsetting the natural order of the Italian landscape, served as a metaphor for the war disturbing the old way of life in Italy. The rainbow is typically a metaphor for the promise of new things, and in this case the promise of new things is painted in the colors of the Italian national flag. The vases collect the tricolored products of the destructive Hurricane which form the paints that will be used to color the sky. That the rainbow is actively painted by the hands of Italian men indicates Scapparro's belief that the future, an intensely nationalist one at that, will be crafted by the hands of the people rather than simply appearing out of the aftermath of the conflict. The dirigible that carries the painters is also an indicator of the success of the post-war, nationalist age: Futurism had long anticipated the age of machinery which allowed for technological innovation and industrialization. Though short and wordless—like Scapparro's other cinemagraphic poems—this play propagates the idea that involvement in a great conflict such as World War I will give Italians the material needed to forge a national identity that will hold the promise for a successful and prosperous future.

Marinetti, in his speech to the Venetians in 1911, forcefully reminded them that they were called to support their country before preserving their own provincial and passéist interests. He asked them, "have you forgotten, above all else, to be Italians, and that this word, in the

[96] Ibid.

language of history, means 'builders of the future'?"[97] This speech was originally shouted from the top of a clock tower at the unsuspecting Venetians below, upon whom 800,000 pamphlets containing more Futurist writings were thrown. The reward for such theatrics was a fight between Futurist poets and artists and "Traditionalist Venice"—a riot against the improvised speeches and antagonizing pamphlets.[98] Futurist theater and spectacular events, like the *serate* or interventionist demonstrations, were used to promote the idea of a united Italy throughout the country and to eliminate the provincial sentiments that the comedies of the eighteenth century had mocked and the nineteenth century had failed to eradicate. One of the first steps toward intervention, and thus the creation of a new, modern Italy, was to make the Futurists' repeated assertion that "the word Italy must predominate over the word freedom," a reality.[99] The freedoms of cowardice and indecision which were represented politically by the neutralist position needed to be made subservient to the "grandeur of Italy."[100] The theater of Futurism was intended to appeal to the longing in the hearts of Italians for the completion of the Risorgimento's goals, and then, by using avant-garde presentation of these political motivations, to inspire a warlike, Futurist attitude that would help to achieve their goal of intervention in the First World War. The spectacular, aggressive theater and political art—such as the antineutral suits—were expected to shock audiences out of their complacency and motivate political action in a national call for war.

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[97] F.T. Marinetti, "The Battles of Venice," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 167.
[98] Ibid., 166.
[99] F.T. Marinetti, "The Futurist Political Movement," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 217.
[100] Ibid., 216.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Futurism was a movement marked by sensationalism in art, politics, and life in every form. Marinetti's "ability to use everything towards promoting his Futurism" was a talent that forced the Italian people to acknowledge the presence of the militant movement in the midst of a static society.[101] The introduction of violent action for the sake of action into art and life was a radical departure from the neutrality and traditionalism that had represented Italy for so long. Theatrics in politics and the revolution of the theater were the chief means of spreading the ideology of Futurism because they demanded attention and offered a personal connection to their beliefs. Intervention was displayed as a remedy for the myriad social, economic, and political ills of the country because it would finally complete the process of national unification in the most important ways—both culturally and ideologically. Through involvement in the war, the country would become more fully modernized and industrialized; finally able to keep pace with the rest of the world. The war would also require a change in government that would gain Italy international respect by finally establishing a leader with integrity. Behind this leader, the country would be filled with Italians who were proud of their fatherland and would become active participants in a new society, economy, and culture. Futurists used the theater and political demonstrations, such as Marinetti's speech to the Venetians or the creation of the antineutral suits, to illustrate the merits and necessity of intervention. The use of theatrics and art was often used by Marinetti to draw his audiences' attention to the political objectives of Futurism.

[101] Severini, 105.

Though the merit of their art was questioned by contemporary critics and opposing modernist groups, the political activity of Futurism was unquestionably effective in gathering followers and promoting a national culture. They managed to use their movement towards a unified political goal and "had marshaled themselves as a political unit, as a protopolitical party."[102] Acting out of mistrust for the Giolittian governmental system and as an artistic movement, Futurists independently established their credibility as political figures through their art. They appealed to the nation through their rejection of tradition, and while it may not have been entirely accepted as a popular artistic movement, the political beliefs found attentive audiences. Futurists took advantage of this disparity between the cultural and political aspects of Futurism, using the shock value of their art as a means to "shake and wake" Italians out of their neutrality, skepticism, and traditionalism.[103]

Marinetti's war-cry, "Long live Italy! Long live Futurism!" was memorialized in his record of the 1910 *serata* in Trieste.[104] In this phrase, he intrinsically connects Italy with Futurism, claiming that without one the other cannot exist, because to be truly Italian is to be Futurist. The connection is apparent in the acutely nationalist art and writing throughout the history of Futurism. Rather than relying on the Classical and Renaissance examples, Futurism attempted to establish a national culture through the development of their own autonomous art, literature, and theater. Their demand for the creation of a new and original culture demonstrated the difference between them and past nationalists, but their pursuit of a culturally unified country was a continuation of the goals of the Italian unification of the nineteenth century. Radical

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[102] Adamson, 223.
[103] Severini, 105.
[104] F.T. Marinetti, "The Battles of Trieste," in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Tompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 164.

nationalism, as the Futurists promoted it, was different than nationalism had been in the past, but it appealed to similar enough ideals that they could be understood by other nationalists and the Italian people themselves. As this nationalism expanded beyond the artistic realm, the demand for political action in every facet of life was made. The theater offered a model for the kind of politically involved lifestyle that Futurists believed to be every Italian's duty. The departure from traditional political campaigning that this technique of using art and theater as propaganda allowed was Futurism's most powerful tool for establishing credibility with their audiences and for attracting followers.

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