Riot and Ruckus: Nationalism on Stage in the Early Modernist Theater of the Futurists and Ballets Russes, 1909-1914

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Riot and Ruckus: Nationalism on Stage in the Early Modernist Theater of the Futurists and Ballets Russes, 1909-1914

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Abstract:

Objective: How and why did the early modernist groups of the Ballets Russes and the Italian Futurists utilize nationalism in their early theatrical programs?

In this study we look at the genesis and early artistic influences of Sergei Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes, and F. T. Marinetti, founder of the Italian Futurists. We consider the political affiliations and ideals of nationalism of these two men and those artists crucial to both movements. The issue of the crisis of modernity is discussed, and how both art movements react to, and are products of this crisis. Through early writings, compositions, poems, manifestos, performances, and reviews, this thesis illuminates two very different imaginings of nationalism. That of the Ballets Russes looks to the past, and to folk and pagan Russia for rejuvenation and self-identity. They had no program for war or explicit politics, whereas the Italian Futurists, under the direction of Marinetti, use their frenetic and bellicose theatrical serate to propagate a political program of war and technology.
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Introduction: Destruction and Creation

To any historian or student of modernism, the opening night of Alfred Jarry’s play Ubu Roi in 1898 is well known. With a bold, unapologetic voice, the character of Père Ubu defiantly proclaimed “Merdre,” and the audience erupted. As the house struggled to contain the uproar, “the actors waited patiently, beginning to believe that the roles had been reversed and they had come to watch a performance out front.”¹

The anecdote has become ubiquitous in writing on the subject, and Jarry’s life, one full of eccentricities and excesses, has passed into avant garde legend and lore. He was known to carry loaded pistols, ride his bike through the rain to appear at prestigious salons covered in mud, and fish for his dinner out of the Seine. On one occasion he invited a group of friends to his apartment to be “initiated,” where he then read from the Bible with his owl on his arm using only a single candle for light. He arranged for the stools on which his guests were sitting to simultaneously collapse, which blew out the candle and resulted in a scramble of people and a screeching owl. Only after his chaffed guests had left did they realize he had covered the doorknob in excrement.² If there were a modernist

equivalent to Vasari’s *The Lives of the Artists*, it would quite possibly start with Jarry (Fig. 1).

While mentioning the riot of *Ubu Roi* in such a general way undoubtedly serves specific purposes, doing so omits the whole of the larger, composite picture. It glosses over the fact that Jarry, then secretary and assistant at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre where the play was first produced, pulled every string and connection he had in the literary world while promoting his play. It forgets that the audience, an eclectic gathering that was peppered with Jarry’s friends and supporters, had been told by the playwright himself to cause commotion, that “The scandal must be greater even than that of *Phèdre* or *Hernani*. The performance must not be allowed to reach its conclusion, the theater must explode.”

It also fails to consider that three years earlier, Jarry had been in attendance at the original riot at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre. Lugné-Poë, director of the theater, had produced Ibsen’s politically charged play *An Enemy of the People*, with an inflammatory introductory lecture by Laurent Tailhade, who was known for his anarchist sympathies. He began his speech by admonishing the current state of French drama and the torpor of the audience, followed by insults against the church and family. The crowd erupted after he referred to a character in the play as the embodiment of the bourgeois *arriviste*, described as “greasy vermin whose

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4 Laurent Tailhade is author of the famous quote, “What do the victims matter, if the gesture be beautiful?” See Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism*, 17.
appalling stupidity numbs everything it touches,” and embodied “the fetid and carnivorous soul typical of so-called ‘honest men.” Coins and vegetables were thrown at the speaker, while Lugnè-Poë pleaded for order. Interruptions and squabbles marred the performance, and after the play was over the police came to try and pick up those with anarchist leanings.\textsuperscript{5} It is of interest that the local prefecture, after this seemingly seditious event, opened up a file on the theater and began sending undercover agents to productions. No doubt they had in mind the wave of anarchist bombings that had recently rocked the capital.\textsuperscript{6} The government accounts of the opening night of \textit{Ubu Roi} make for primary source reading on the event.\textsuperscript{7}

Jarry was certainly at the theater the night of this event, and a spectacle of this nature undoubtedly had an effect on his ideas for future productions of his own. Jarry observed the effectiveness of damaging the bourgeois sensibility, the same sensibility that his creature Père Ubu chews up and spits out (Fig. 2). Louis Dumur wrote of the character:

\begin{quote}
Ubu is a summary in caricature of everything wretched, cowardly, contemptible and disgusting that lurks in the human animal living in society. A cruel glutton, a mastodon of selfishness and vanity, a self-important swine inflated with stupidity and stuffed with presumption, this epic marionette, reigning over Poland . . . wonderfully symbolizes the apotheosis of the belly and the triumph of the gut in universal history.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{7} Brotchie, \textit{Alfred Jarry}, 55.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 137.
Père Ubu was and remains, as Lugnè-Poë described, “a machine for crushing humanities.” The humanities crushed by Ubu were the niceties of bureaucracy, the complacency and manipulation of simple minds, and the ease in which respectable people can hide behind false morality.

For Jarry, and many other modernists and avant gardists, the dominant theme is destruction, that is, destruction of the bourgeoisie, destruction of normalcy, the past, and of apathetic attitudes. In this prevailing attitude of ruination, the various inciters of theater riots had different agendas, despite using the same esoteric language of hyperbole, dissonance, sex, and the grotesque.

One such as Jarry simply, or not so simply, wished to abolish. He found little to no worth in the society he knew; etiquette repulsed him, and he not only wrote, but lived his life in a farcical revolt. His contemporary Raymond Roussel, whose play *Impressions of Africa* (1911-1912) attracted a clamorous reaction for its remarkably innovative, albeit bizarre imagery, diminished from the negative attention. Jarry gladly wallowed in the riotous reaction, but for Roussel it was disheartening. He thought himself a genius, and arguably he was, but in the crowd’s need for entertainment they had no use for Roussel’s long descriptions and stage

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9 Ibid, 155.
design that could not aptly represent the fantastic machines of his books, or of his promotional posters.\textsuperscript{13}

Others who wrote music for ballet and opera such as Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky, and Richard Strauss wished to be free from the bonds of populism, romanticism, and in the case of the French corpus of music, they wanted to be free of Wagner. They felt the need to innovate music beyond that of their esteemed predecessors and invent something new and expressive, often times much to the annoyance of less adventurous concert-goers. Yet it was exactly this demographic that the modernists wanted to reach; they wanted to bring these people out of their sheltered complacency and into the fray. God was dead, birth rates were down, neurosis was on the rise, and the modernist believed that Europe, especially Paris, needed a shock treatment into revitalization.\textsuperscript{14}

Such was the prerogative of impresario Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, who brought the compositions of these musicians to the stage in a terrific and visceral way. The choreography of Valsav Nijinsky for Stravinsky’s \textit{Sacre du printemps} (1913) was the dismemberment of classical ballet, put back together in a series of awkward movements, that told the story of an ancient pagan ceremony where a young girl dances

\textsuperscript{13} Abba Cherniack-Tzuriel, “The Theater of the Mechanized Grotesque. Roussel’s ‘Impressions of Africa,’” \textit{The Drama Review}, 20 (June 1976), 108-123.
herself to death in ecstasy for the coming new season.\textsuperscript{15} At the end of 
*L’après-midi d’un faune* (1912), beautifully scored by Debussy, the faun 
(played by Nijinsky) gives up on chasing nymphs and resigns himself to 
self-pleasure in communion with the universe.\textsuperscript{16}

These productions were modernist in execution, from the ‘toe-in’
choreography of Nijinsky, to the stage design of Léon Bakst and the 
promotional tactics of Diaghilev, but they operated under the guise of old, 
even ancient story lines. *L’après-midi’s* faun, sex, and Dionysia were 
borrowed from Ancient Greece, and *The Rite* was set in the stone age of 
Russia. The pagan qualities of these works were certainly of a 20th 
century flavor, as Debussy said, *The Rite* was, “primitive with every 
modern convenience.”\textsuperscript{17}

Artists such as these contrasted sharply with Marinetti—impresario 
of a different nature over the Futurist movement. Their theatrical 
innovations encompassed these sentiments about the need for change, 
but their nationalistic and militaristic convictions set them apart. Whereas 
Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes looked to Pagan Russia or to the 
unbridled Dionysian elements of Ancient Greece, both free of the sexual

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 27.
and spiritual constraints of Christianity, the Futurists looked to the machine for the rejuvenation Europe needed.

As the genius artist they found it their mission to awaken Italy to its latent greatness, and this would be realized only in war. They wanted Italy to look forward and trust in modernity, and stop looking backward to the Vatican or ancient Rome. They took their mission to the cafes and theaters where they energized their campaign by inciting riots. The Futurists would hurl insults at the crowd comprised of the aristocracy, blue collar workers, and students, and would thank the crowd to hurl vegetation at the stage in response. For the Futurists bad press was good press, and press for their cause meant moving Italy toward external conflict, first in Libya and then in World War I.

For all of this destruction, however, of aesthetics, of classicism, of social order, of etiquette, these early adherents to modernism and the avant garde were creators. They were innovators of a new artistic language for a time in which a new language was needed. Things looked different, sounded, and smelled unlike they had 50, and certainly 100 years before. Social structure was in flux, the bourgeoisie was no longer safe from the masses. Mass politics had, and was continuing to change the political structure of Europe. The artistic languages of pre-industrial

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times were simply not sufficient to relay the dynamism of electricity or locomotives. Romanticism and symbolism were not even sufficient anymore. As Gertrude Stein said of these new modes, it was “the only ‘composition’ appropriate to the new composition in which we live, the new dispositions of space and time.”

These artists were also the creators of new worlds. Either through content or political utopian imaginings, the modernist artist took part in a program to render the arts viable and legitimate in a world where autonomous art was in danger of being dictated by the public via capitalism. The strange rhythms of Stravinsky or use of flourishes by Debussy were not what the public expected, nor necessarily wanted, but the artists delivered them anyway, without apology. Whether illuminating its imbecility or primality, the performance told the audience something about itself or the world to which it had not previously been privy. The search and/or use of new and strange methods was a means to an end. There is a sense of saving the public from itself in the way that Jarry destroys the existing, ridiculous order, or in the way that Marinetti charges the crowd’s complacency as the cause of Italy’s place as a lesser power. Diaghilev told Western Europe that they were too prudish and should liberate their spirit and embrace themselves, free of restraint.

From this we see two very different but analogous forms of nationalism emerge in the artistic programs of the Futurists and the Ballets Russes. Moving into the twentieth century, liberal nationalism had matured from its beginnings in self-identity and cultural cohesion to a largely more chauvinistic and aggressive program. We find this to varying degrees in these two art groups. Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes thought it was an innate wisdom and vitality that existed in the Russian consciousness that was needed by Western Europe. The Italian Futurists embraced this new nationalism, modernist nationalism, to the fullest in their violent rhetoric that urged Italian conflict with other nations as their right and duty. The Futurists were radical and explicitly political, whereas the Ballets Russes kept their experiments within the world of aesthetics.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate these constructive elements of modernist theater through the lens of nationalism. It is because of the overt, yet different use of nationalist sentiment in the early works of the Ballets Russes and the Futurists that I have chosen these two groups as a comparative study. In addition to looking at these two groups for their content, they are a good match for comparison as the year both groups officially began is the same, 1909. The other common thread in

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this investigation is that of theater riots. Like Jarry, who would be a large influence on Marinetti’s early work, both the Ballets Russes and the Futurists provoked riotous responses from their audiences, and these reactions were largely planned. How both groups resolved or embraced these occurrences will be a preoccupation of this thesis.

I will look at the origins of the Ballets Russes in the neo-nationalist school that became popular in Russia in the late 19th century, and their early productions in Paris, focusing mainly on Stravinsky’s early Russian ballets *The Firebird*, and *The Rite of Spring*. For the Futurists we will also look at Marinetti’s early years including his political and artistic influences, and how the movement he founded decidedly made their theatrical productions into political action theater.
1. On Modernism and the Avant Garde

We must take some time here to discuss the terms modernism and avant garde. These terms contain many nuances that I will attempt to address, and at the end draw conclusions as it pertains to this paper. The two terms are similar, with all of the avant garde being modernist, but not all that is modernist belonging to the avant garde. What, then, differentiates the two? Renato Poggioli, in his pivotal book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, traces the use of the term back to the early 19th century, where in the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848 it had acquired a specifically political and leftist meaning.\(^1\) After France’s defeat to Austria-Hungary in *la débâcle* of the 1870’s and the Paris Commune that followed, artists on the literary and visual front fell into alignment with the political radicals in their hatred of the bourgeois that they held responsible for the catastrophe. This union lasted until the 1880’s when the cultural avant garde started to distance themselves from radical politics; and with this distancing came the ability to be both avant garde and reactionary.\(^2\) Moving into the 20th century, according to Poggioli, the avant garde

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becomes by and large a cultural and aesthetic term with no fixed political affiliation.\(^3\)

Turning to modernism, in his book *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism’s Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe*, Walter L. Adamson writes that modernism:

Refers first of all to a discourse and set of attitudes with three central features: the perception of a civilizational crisis in which the expansion of commodity culture loomed large; the belief that the crisis could be resolved by reconfiguring modernity rather than retreating to some premodern state; and the conviction that a self-consciously modern art is fundamental to resolving the crisis because of its potential to reshape the public sphere in a way that would give new life to the qualitative dimensions of human experience.\(^4\)

The thought of Western Europe as being in a cultural crisis is key to the idea of modernism. These artists were not simply *enfant terribles* in a vacuum, but were reacting to a stimulus. As Matei Calinescu writes of modernism,

The one that would bring into being the avant garde, was from its Romantic beginnings inclined toward radical antibourgeois attitudes. It was disgusted with middle-class scale of values and expressed its disgust through the most diverse meaning, ranging from rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism to the aristocratic self-exile. *What defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity, its consuming negative passion.*\(^5\)

This begs the question, why so much hatred of the bourgeoisie? In fact, many of the artists to be discussed in this paper were from this or an

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\(^3\) Poggioli, 12.  
aristocratic class. In France, as aforementioned, there existed the residual sting of the unequivocal defeat to Prussia in 1870. In addition, the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), in which the French government accused a Jewish officer of espionage, brought underlying currents of liberal dissatisfaction and reactionary sentiment to the surface. France was deeply divided over the issue of the guilt or innocence of this alleged spy, because at stake was not only this man's fate, but also the credibility of the Third Republic. The French government had exiled Dreyfus to Devil’s Island on the authority of shoddy evidence and fabricated documents, and the case against him was tenuous at best. The famed writer Émile Zola joined the Dreyfusard cause and published the scathing open letter to the French government “J’accuse . . .!” in 1898 outlining the case against the officer’s condemnation. This gesture helped to secure the defamed officer a retrial. In the end Dreyfus was exonerated of all charges, and the Third Republic was found morally bankrupt with little credibility.⁶

In Italy the situation moving into the 20th century was that of provincialism and disillusionment. The various kingdoms of Italy achieved official unification in 1871, and in the aftermath, Italy had not risen to be a shining power on the continent, but remained largely unindustrialized and secondary. Garibaldi’s Romantic notions of the Risorgimento were effective in mobilizing the masses, but there was much left be desired by

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the parliamentarian government of Giolitti. His government ruled for ten years at the end of the century, and although it was a progressive time, “in the population at large he was still seen as a representative of the old, corrupt system. For them, he was a symbol of the deceitful, selfish, greedy and materialist oligarchy of industrialists, bankers and landlords . . .” who had set up a governmental system inclined to benefit the wealthy minority.

Besides a stifled economy and lack-luster leadership, several cultural Italian areas, including Dalmatia and Trieste, were not included in the unified Kingdom of Italy. The litmus test for being Italian became that of language, and irredentist sentiments would play a major part in Italian politics through World War I. Many of the Futurists to-be grew up in this period of disenchantment, and looked to more radical solutions to the problem. They generally started in Socialist and Anarchist circles, but the complicated relationship with the public which is the crux of this thesis impeded this relationship. They had to look for and invent new forms of expression.8

This is a terse overview of the political restiveness in France and Italy at the fin de siècle, but what of the cultural crisis to which Adamson and Calinescu refer? The world was changing, yes, but in what ways,

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7 Giovanni Lista, “The Activist Model; or, the Avant-Garde as Italian Invention,” Trans. Scott Sheridan, South Central Review 13, 2/3, (Summer-Autumn 1996), 23-24.
exactly? Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane offer a helpful outline in their essay *The Name and Nature of Modernism* that will act as our guide:

It is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos . . . of the destruction of civilization and the reason of the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the literature of technology. It is the art consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and . . . of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities become discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions. Modernism is then the art of modernization.9

Here we have listed the negative influences of capitalism, space-time compression, overbearing technology, shifting reality, and meaninglessness. The influential thinkers of the day had a profound affect on the cultural climate, and to the list of Freud, Darwin, and Marx we must also add Nietzsche, whose ideas became widely read and discussed after 1888. He came along at a time when the secularism of past centuries, which had filled the spiritual void with positivism and science, was giving way to irrationalism and mysticism. Nietzsche railed against Christianity and found Western culture to be fetid, and believed that “at the terminus of a long era of civilization . . . that all human values must be subjected to total revision.”10

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10 Ibid, 79.
It was not all fallen skies for the Modernists, though. Although art had, for the most part, lost its royal and parochial funding, and it struggled to find its place in capitalist market driven by popular demand; self-assuming the role of architects of a new cultural structure for a new Europe became their raison d’être. It also helped determine their aesthetic inclinations. Focus on the new and undiscovered became a common thread throughout the disparate modernist groups. As Bradbury and McFarlane write, common to modernist aesthetic are, “anti-representationalism in painting, atonalism in music, vers libre in poetry, stream-of-consciousness narrative in the novel. And certainly, as Ortega y Gasset has said, the aesthetic refinement involves a dehumanization of art, the ‘progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production’.”11

The Futurists were all too happy to adhere to the de-humanization aspect of modernism, of which they arguably were some of the first developers and innovators. Marinetti saw the answer to Italy’s lethargic development not in the parliamentarianism or bureaucracy of the bourgeoisie, but in steel and electricity. Instead of fearing the machine and its often anxiety-provoking influence, the Futurists welcomed the transformations it was making on society and intended to harness its power to achieve permanent and lasting social change. He wrote of men

not only utilizing the machine, but becoming more machine-like themselves:

In order to prepare for the formation of the nonhuman, mechanical species of extended man, through the externalization of his will, it is very important that the need for affection, which man feels in his veins and which cannot yet be destroyed, be greatly reduced. The man of the future will reduce his own heart to its proper function of blood distribution. The heart, by some means or other, must become a sort of stomach of the brain, which is fed systematically, so that the spirit can embark on action.\textsuperscript{12}

In Marinetti’s 1909 novel \textit{Mafarka the Futurist} he very absolutely dehumanizes sex by having Mafarka create his machine-son Gazourmah asexually.\textsuperscript{13}

Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes focus, initially, much more on the redevelopment of artistic language than on the dehumanization elements of modernism. The developments of the impresario and his troupe had no precedent and would forever alter the world of ballet, but their earlier seasons focused largely on the exoticism and primitivism inherent in their nationality to Western eyes. They also focused on eroticism, thus taking risks in a more conventional way, so to speak.\textsuperscript{14} They unabashedly broke the conventional rules of ballet, but it is not until their brief flirtation with the Futurists that they take an acute step toward de-humanization with the 1917 ballet \textit{Parade}, in which Picasso’s costumes, owing great influence to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{14 Eksteins, \textit{Rites of Spring}, 33-37, 52-53.}
\end{footnotes}
the Futurists, completely cover the human body in a awkward and bulky shell.\textsuperscript{15}

We may also here consider the particular case of democracy, both political and cultural.\textsuperscript{16} Without these liberal environments modernism and the avant garde would not have been possible, as these movements cannot survive under patronage or totalitarianism.\textsuperscript{17} The public had come dangerously close to the artistic process, and for the artist this produced an exciting yet resentful relationship. The risks that Diaghilev took in his programming and the use of hyperbole by Marinetti, these are things that could have only been conceived of and born under capitalism and commodity culture. This new model, according to Virginia Woolf, “set the artist free to be more himself, let him move beyond the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of the light.”\textsuperscript{18} This artistic freedom was checked, however, by popular demand. It allowed for a project like the Ballets Russes to exist and thrive creatively, but dancers, choreographers, set designers and stage hands must all be paid. Their initial season in 1909 was a triumphant success in all areas except for the bank.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} The term cultural democracy is borrowed from Adamson, referring to the purchasing power of the public and with that their power to dictate elements of culture. See Adamson, \textit{Embattled Avant Gardes}, 105-108.
\textsuperscript{18} Bradnubry and McFarlane, 25.
\textsuperscript{19} Garafola, \textit{Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes}, 178.
Marinetti, with all of his explicit hatred of the public, thrived on its attention. Without push-back from the public for his bombastic claims to burn the libraries and museums, his initial impression from the front page of *Le Figaro* in 1909 would have been nil. Both impresarios calibrated their artistic endeavors to exist and at times thrive in the bourgeoning commodity culture of the early 20th century, and learning how to put on not only a good show but a good spectacle and riot helped their success tremendously.

By considering this new relationship to the public we may understand the self-consciousness innate in modernist art that did not exist in the art of previous eras. The struggle to exist in a market economy while trying to retain autonomy, along with the international aspects of modernism thanks to the shortening of distances, made the art movement awkwardly aware of itself, and in turn it became “less a style than a search for a style in a highly individualistic sense . . . and each work a once-and-for-all creation.” With this self consciousness also came contempt, and modernist art bifurcated the population into those who got it, and those who did not, creating an us vs. them sentiment between artists and the public.  

If the public did not demand it, then what was its function? The theater of older times existed organically, as a festive and community building endeavor, and even after that it belonged to the state or

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20 Bradbury and McFarlane, 29.
aristocracy. In the uncharted territory of art in the free market, how would the modernists, brought into existence by these crises and changes, react? As Bradbury and McFarlane observe, “The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over; and the explosively lyrical, or else the ironic and fictive modes, modes which included large elements not only of creation but of de-creation, were inevitable.”

In the artists’ new quest for a place in society, nationalism lent itself as a vehicle for the taking. In the 19th century this manifested itself in the mode of realism and populism. The notion that art had to perform a specific utilitarian function for humanity dominated until the notion of “art for art’s sake” sought to replace it. The modernist, even with their cosmopolitan and often panhuman outlook, still retained a significant amount of self-consciousness that made harnessing nationalism continually desirable.

Again Adamson gives a helpful and concise explanation of the function of nationalism within modernism, when the two things may at first seem mutually exclusive. First, he points out the benefits of attaching one’s artistic program to an older, “genuine culture” which generally involved making goods by hand rather than by machine. Demonstrating a link to this culture showed a deep cultural as well as religious comprehension. Secondly, he argues, with the increased pressure of

\[21\text{ Ibid, 27.}\]
modern space-time compression, the artist felt their nationality, and also
the nationality of others, more acutely. They were often émigrés to other
countries, and for them, “questions of nationalism cut very close to the
bone.” Thirdly, the use of nationalism was part and parcel of the need to
gain an ever wider audience. Nationalist motifs were powerful, and “lent
itself beautifully to modernist performative practices aimed at audience
expansion.” Lastly, and this is more true of the interwar years, the
modernist sought to ingratiate themselves with a particular regime. Considering these points, nationalism had a viable foothold in the
modernist movement.

It is here that we may revisit the avant garde, and consider how it
differs from modernism. As stated, these modernist movements had a
strained relationship with the public and were reacting to the general
feeling of cultural crisis and change in Europe. If these were the concerns
of the modernists, however, then they were the obsessions of the avant
garde. Here we may consider and adopt Calinescu’s definition, of:

“Avant garde,” advance guard, or vanguard. The obvious military
implications of the concept point quite aptly toward some attitudes
and trends for which the avant garde is directly indebted to the
broader consciousness of modernity—a sharp sense of militancy,
praise of non conformism, courageous precursory exploration, and,
on a more general plane, confidence in the final victory of time and
immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable
and transcendentally determined . . . Thus, during the first half of
the nineteenth century and even later, the concept of the avant

Adamson, Embattled Avant Gardes, 13-14.
The avant garde was more militant, utopian, and caustic than mainstream modernism. It considered the crises and changes of modernity, and it not only reacted, but offered solutions, generally on the pages of superfluous and sometimes incoherent manifestoes and pamphlets.

These solutions interjected art directly into life. Whereas the modernist looked for new artistic languages that could mirror the world they saw around them, the avant gardist naively sought a position of real power for the arts in government and culture. As Miklos Szabolcsi notes about the difference between Modernism and the avant garde, that “the avant garde . . . registers this crisis but also tries to master it, to find the way out . . . to recreate the unity of art and public, and bring about a change in art and society, even if these attempts are sometimes utopian and anarchic.”

They looked at an expanded role of art in politics as not only a way to legitimize themselves in a market economy, and in an environment where art, “after the demise of religion (lacked) any compelling moral or metaphysical justification,” but also as a pedagogical tool for their programs. As mentioned previously, the avant garde of the 20th century could take either rightist or leftist positions, and the Futurists would adopt

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the former in their bellicose nationalism, and through the dogmatism inherent in avant garde militancy they became wedded to the idea of a glorious Italy through means of technology, destruction, and war.

I will posit here, per the discussion of modernism and the avant garde thus far, that the Ballets Russes, in the years that concern us here (1909-1914), were modernist, and not avant garde, as the Futurist were. Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Debussy, and Stravinsky were certainly concerned with innovation and rejuvination, but they lacked any coherent political or cultural program on the scale of that of the Futurists. It is true that Diaghilev once wrote and open letter to the Russian secretary of state advocating for a ministry of fine arts,27 but by the time he had become impresario of the Ballets Russes he was not only concerned with artistic legitimacy and modernist sentiments, but he was equally concerned with the vast expense of his enterprise. At a time when Lugnè-Poë and Astruc went bankrupt and had to close their theaters, Diagliev persisted for 20 years, until his death in 1929. He adhered to the project of modernism and used its excitement well, as we will see in the case of The Rite, but he held the reigns of capitalism tight. At the end of the day he could simply not afford to be as bombastic and creatively carefree as Marinetti.

Marinetti had created a movement, no doubt, from scratch, but he had only a loose affiliation of individual artists, not to mention a large inheritance from his father. Perhaps he was more radical simply because

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27 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 42.
he could be—it is plausible. However, he did understand the use of propaganda well, and exhibited this through his original idea of branding the Futurist movement. He published the initial bombastic “Manifesto” on the front page of Le Figaro in Paris before the movement even had any followers. Letters and documents sent out had Futurist letterheads, and artists in the circle tacked the name of the movement onto their own. He made an intangible ideology something recognizable, and other later groups such as the Dadaist would take cues from this model.28

Thus the two impresarios differ in their handling and mantra of modernist theater. Diaghilev is of a more introverted species, where Marinetti is an absolute extrovert in his program. He took on Italy as his plight, using nationalism as his communal tying factor. The function of his theater was wrapped up in a concept that was not available before modernity, being that of the nation-state. Instead of acting as a bonding mechanism, however, Marinetti’s nationalist message from the stage was accusatory and frenetic, and his fervor for the machine was unwaveringly linked to the future success of Italy.

The Russian figurehead did not completely share Marinetti’s penchant for the cult of the machine or rabid nationalism, but rather thought it was an amalgam of the modern and the Russian peasant spirit, something old and untouched, that could revitalize Western Europe. For Diaghilev the past had a pivotal part to play in the present, and his nationalism was

more abstract than that of Marinetti. He sought to bring the idea of “total art,” Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to its logical conclusion in the culmination of plastic art, drama, dance, fashion and music; and bridge the primal, the volkish, exotic and erotic. In this synthesis one would rise above the confines of Western morality and self-deprecation. Influenced by Nietzsche, he felt that Christian morality had no place in autonomous art, that the Dionysian spirit must be embraced for one to be free.\(^{29}\)

\(^{29}\) Eksteins, 25, 29-33.
2. The Ballets Russes—A Modernist Take on Nationalism

“Why do we always hear Russian music spoken of in terms of its Russianness rather than simply in terms of music? Because it is always the picturesque, the strange rhythms, the timbres of the orchestra, the orientalism—in short, the local color, that is seized upon; because people are interested in everything that goes to make up the Russian, setting: troïka, vodka, isba, balalaika, pope, boyar . . .”

-Igor Stravinsky¹

“To create a ballet company from scratch is never easy; to create a vital producing organization is even harder. To do both in the commercial arena is almost a miracle. This near miracle Diaghilev performed again and again for twenty years.”² Thus writes Lynn Garafola of Sergei Diaghilev and his dynamic organization, the Ballets Russes. The group involved some of the most brilliant artistic minds of the 20th century—Stravinsky, Picasso, Nijinksy, Prokofiev, Matisse, Bakst, Fokine, and Coco Channel—to name a few. From the years of 1909 to Diaghilev’s death in 1929 they toured Europe, North and South America, and set the bar for artistic excellence in ballet and theater.

They began their foray into Paris in 1909 by giving the fashionable audience exactly what they wanted: Orientalist fantasy featuring virtuoso talent. Their early years were an unequivocal success in Paris and Western Europe. After winning the French capital, they were invited to perform in London for the coronation of George V, where they danced for the heads of state from all over the world. After this performance Diaghilev cabled to Parisian theater owner Gabriel Astruc, “Announce unparalleled triumph . . . audience indescribably smart. London has discovered Nijinsky and given warm welcome to Karsavina, . . . Fokine, Tcherepnin.” Elsewhere the impresario would remark, “Thus, in one evening the Russian ballet conquered the whole world.” Even though they had toned down their program for post-Victorian tastes (as Diaghilev would always do for London), they were a resounding success.

In Europe ballet had fallen into a state of pretty complacency. It was predictable and mediocre, and found itself rated well below opera in the sophisticated mind of the fin de siècle theatergoer. Diaghilev sought to impress Paris, then the undisputed culture capital of the world, by exhibiting not only the dancer’s amazing technique, but also elements of their Russianness. He capitalized on the Russians’ heterogeneous identity and emphasized the exotic elements so attractive to Western

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audiences. In contrast to using the ballerina as the star, he emphasized Nijinsky, his most talented male performer (and his lover), whose sexuality occupied the space between the dancer’s feminine details and masculine athleticism. The talent and experiments of the Ballets Russes caused a resurgence of the art. As Serge Lifar comments, “the Russian ballet signified the resurrection of ballet art at a time when the European ballet seemed doomed to die.”

This success stands in contrast to a night in 1913 when, although details vary, all who were in attendance agree an absolute riot was caused by the premiere of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*. The battle lines were drawn between the aesthetes who were for the work, and the bourgeoisie who felt insulted and betrayed by it. This chapter will look at the early years of the Ballets Russes and consider not just the aesthetic shift that happened during this time, but also the role of nationalism and national identity.

In the early years that concern us here, the Ballets Russes was keen to exploit the idea of Russia as exotic and alien to France, and played heavily upon folk and neonationalist themes. The rise of the neonationalist school in Russia is closely related to the country’s complicated relationship with France and the rest of Western Europe. A

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6 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 33, 44.
cursory explanation of this Russian self-awareness is helpful to our understanding of the organization’s use of the peasant and folk inspired elements in their works.

**Westernization and the Peasant**

Russia’s cultural fixation on the peasant begins with its obsession with France and the emulation of Western Europe. When Peter the Great came to power and founded St. Petersburg, Russia was still considered “backward” and “dark,” entrenched in the religious mysticism of Muscovy. Because of reasons both historical and geographical, Muscovite society had received little knowledge of the Reformation or Renaissance, and with no proper cities, no middle class, and a dearth of scientific discoveries, Russia more closely resembled Medieval Europe than a modern state.⁹

Peter sought to change this when he came to power. He had travelled and studied in Europe and resented the state of his native land. When he founded St. Petersburg in 1703, he based the architecture and aesthetic on that of European cities, especially Paris. Yet beyond the facades of buildings, he wanted to change the aesthetic of his people as well. In the new capital, Peter told his nobles “where to live, how to build their houses, how to move around the town, where to stand in church, how many servants to keep, how to eat at banquets, how to dress and cut their

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hair, how to conduct themselves at court, and how to converse in polite society."\textsuperscript{10} The aristocratic class adopted French as their primary form of language, leaving many nobles knowing barely enough regional dialect with which to communicate to their serfs. When one particular noble was banished with his wife to Siberia after the failed Decembrist revolution (1825), they were only allowed to communicate in Russian, leaving the couple with little way to express the depth of their feelings, as they had thought in and lived their life up to that point in French.\textsuperscript{11}

While some nobles loathed their station in life as Russian, wishing they had been born English or French, there was a growing undercurrent of resentment against Westernization. The mannerisms and mindset of France seemed arbitrary to many, and some preferred the wooden and traditional decoration of their personal quarters to that of their austere European drawing rooms and ballrooms.\textsuperscript{12} There was a dichotomy of mind present in the way the Russian upper classes saw themselves; as Dostoevsky wrote, “We Russians have two fatherlands: Russia and Europe.”\textsuperscript{13} However, both of these fatherlands were problematic, as the nobleman felt both cut off from his own country’s past, but not fully accepted by Western Europe either.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 97.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 43-45.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 55.
\textsuperscript{14} Marc Raeff, “Russia’s Perception of her Relationship with the West,” \textit{Slavic Review} 23, 1 (March 1964), 15.
The school of thought was growing that Westernization had forever altered the noble class for the worse, and that the only unadulterated representative of Russianness was the peasant. The uneducated and orthodox serf was the antithesis to the French, who many saw as decadent and godless.\footnote{Figes, Natasha’s Dance, 59-60.} Russian literature was rife with the idea that the West was spiritually deficient and ideologically superficial, whereas the Russian spirit was pure and connected to the earth. With this mindset Westernization played a pivotal role; it gave the Russians a way to think about and define themselves in contrast to a different “other,” and think about themselves by not only what they were, but by what they were not.\footnote{Ibid, 65-66.}

This was solidified by the patriotic fervor which naturally accompanied the invasion of Napoleon.\footnote{Ibid, 102.} France, under Napoleon, did much to paint Russia as the aggressor ready to pounce on and destroy Western Europe. In the \textit{Journal de l’Empire} written in January 1814, an article reads, “Russia, which for a century had systematically crushed Sweden, partitioned Poland . . . which precipitates her asiatic legions into France, declares that she is waging war against the preponderant power of Emperor Napoleon in Europe!”\footnote{Raymond T. McNally, “The Origins of Russophobia in France: 1812-1830,” \textit{American Slavic and East European Review} 17, 2 (April 1958), 175.}

These sentiments about the peasant and resentment to Westernization had interesting ramifications in the arts. Russian genre

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Figes, Natasha’s Dance, 59-60.}
\item \footnote{Ibid, 65-66.}
\item \footnote{Ibid, 102.}
\item \footnote{Raymond T. McNally, “The Origins of Russophobia in France: 1812-1830,” \textit{American Slavic and East European Review} 17, 2 (April 1958), 175.}
\end{itemize}
painting became more psychological and realist, and Russian language, which had already begun its ascent in literature, became readily accepted by the upper classes. In the later half of the 19th century, there grew the popular movement of “going to the people,” in which the younger generation of nobles shunned their aristocratic lifestyle and attempted to blend with the local population (although this usually ended in failure or half-hearted attempts such as that of Tolstoy). It was during this period that the aesthetics of realism, a utilitarian view of art, became cemented in the Russian viewpoint. Out of these phenomena in the arts, the two developments which most concern us here are the canonization of the Russian “sound” in music, and the private opera of railway magnate Savva Mamontov.

As the native Russian tongue gained acceptance, Russian folk music also came into vogue. Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach produced the first *Collection of Russian Folk Songs* in 1790. This volume preserved the essence of the musical character of the songs and their distinctness, yet conformed them to a Western musical context, especially regarding instrumentation. However, the Russian “sound” was not coined until the second half of the 19th century by the *Kuchka*, or the “Mighty Five,” comprised of Balakirev, Cui, Musorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov.

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20 Ibid,228-229, 237-239.
They consciously sought to create a form of music closer to that of the people and not of the academy.\(^\text{22}\)

The *Kuchka* is responsible for what we know today as characteristically Russian music. As Figes writes, “This ‘exotic’ styling of ‘Russia’ was not just self-conscious but entirely invented—for none of these devices was actually employed in Russian Folk or church music.” We have little need to go into the music theory behind this labeled sound, only to note that rhythm was treated differently, and that the octatonic scale, which Stravinsky would make liberal use of in his Russian ballets *The Firebird, Petrushka, and The Rite of Spring,* was frequently utilized.\(^\text{23}\)

The Five appropriated folk tunes and incorporated folk polyphony, but also worked in those traits of Western music they found most valuable.\(^\text{24}\)

Among the many admirers of this new Russian music was railway magnate Savva Mamontov. He and his wife were not only ardent folk art and music lovers, but they were also fantastically rich and acted as patrons to those artists and musicians who fell outside of the patronage of imperial circle. In the 1870s Mamontov purchased the country estate of Abramtsevo close to Moscow, where he established an artist colony. He wanted to stimulate the peasants’ crafts that were dying out and sell the goods in city boutique shops. The irony can not be ignored that the trades

\(^{\text{22}}\) Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 116, 179.

\(^{\text{23}}\) Ibid, 179-181.

were diminishing because of the shipment of goods by rail which had made the Mamontovs so wealthy.\textsuperscript{25} The couple was also deeply interested in theater and established the Moscow Private Opera there in 1885.\textsuperscript{26} The opera established by Mamontov produced many operas by “The Five,” and championed Rimsky-Korsakov especially. Neonationalism ruled the stage at Abramtsevo.\textsuperscript{27}

The institution was decided in its ideological allegiance, but the mentality was something different than that of the Populist thought and realism that had ruled Russian art throughout the 19th century. Mamontov embraced nationalist sentiments, to be sure, but he did so with a passion for the individual and a keen interest in the aesthetic of beauty, or art for art’s sake. The utilitarian function of art had been in vogue, but “as Western civilization stood on the verge of the modern era, the age-old debate over the meaning and value of art in society was once again taking center stage in aesthetic discourse.” The conversation in Russia had been dominated by Vladimir Stasov, arguably the most well-known and influential art critic in the country, who was a staunch supporter of realism. The two camps of thought, the realist with their mantra of “truth” and the

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\textsuperscript{25} Figes, \textit{Natasha’s Dance}, 199.
\textsuperscript{26} Olga Haldey, “Savva Mamontov, Serge Diaghilev, and a Rocky Path to Modernism,” \textit{The Journal of Musicology} 22, 4 (Fall 2005), 568.
\textsuperscript{27} Garafola, \textit{Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes}, 15.
modernist aestheticians with theirs of “beauty,” entered into the debate with new zeal.\textsuperscript{28}

Mamontov did not shun the realist, populist, and nationalist traits in art, but was happy to not be limited to them. As much as the masses, which his generation of the ‘60s had been so obsessed with helping, needed art to speak for them, both the artist and the subject needed to find solace and pleasure in it as well.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, as Haldey writes, “instead of ‘art as a representation of reality’ (a realist motto), Mamontov preferred ‘art for art’s sake’ as his own.” This sentiment is expressed in his letter to Konstantin Stanislavsky, another giant of Russian theater, written in 1908, “There is no need to make people face the difficult, the desolate, the depressing. Life itself will make sure to offer each his share of terror and decay. There is only one consolation—live in art, [. . .] seek beauty and joy—there lies all the happiness of our lives.\textsuperscript{30} One eye was set on Populism, but the other was fixated on making his productions both relevant and beautiful, something Diaghilev and his cohorts would seek out themselves. The operas produced by Mamontov in the 1890’s would appropriate the Russian past, but would not confine themselves to strictly utilitarian uses.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Haldey, “Savva Mamontov, Serge Diaghilev, and a Rocky Path to Modernism,” 562-563.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 566.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 570.
\textsuperscript{31} Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 15.
Another profound influence the Moscow Private Opera had on Diaghilev was the idea of a collaborative approach to production. Mamontov did not believe that opera was destined to be developed by musicians, artists, costumers, and musicians in their respective corners, and sought to bring them together to discuss the details of a production. It was Wagner’s idea of the total work of art—*Gesamtkunstwerk*—in a Russian amateur opera. These productions brought forth the visual element in theater in a new way, and as Taruskin boldly claims, “without the Mamontov precedents, neither the Diaghilev enterprise nor the works of Stravinsky’s early maturity could have turned out as they did.”

The World of Art Movement: Dark Owls and Spiritual Beggars

From this tradition at Abramtsevo came the *Mir iskusstva*, or “World of Art” movement. Founded by Diaghilev, Alexandre Benois, Konstantin Somov, Dmitry Filosofov, Léon Bakst, and Eugene Lansere in 1898, the journal sought to give artists outside of the imperial circle a place to exhibit their work, raise the level of art criticism in Russia, and as a larger overarching goal, to “remake Russian art so that it would be equal to Western European art.” They wanted to educate Russians, who had been consistently behind the Europeans regarding art trends and stuck in

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the rut of realism which had played itself out. Of Russia’s creative lethargy Diaghilev wrote, “I do not know whether it is the change in track gauge or the general sluggishness of our trains that has kept us from entering this international convention, this ‘contemporary style.’”

Following down the path that Mamontov had forged, they especially wanted to break with the utilitarian view of art that had dominated the 19th century. Under realist auspices art was expected to be accurately rendered, liberal, understandable, in favor of the “common man,” and Russian in subject matter. However, the World of Art group could not abide these regulations and adopted as their motto, “life is fettered, but art is free.” As Garafola writes, Diaghilev’s program consisted of “his belief in the autonomy and subjectivity of art, his worship of beauty and his identification of this with the revelation of the artist’s personality.”

This notion would not have seemed radical in the West where this conversation had begun decades prior, but in St. Petersburg it was blasphemy, at least according to Stasov. Diaghilev, perceptive that baiting the old librarian would gain them rapid exposure, wrote purposefully inflammatory open letters to Stasov. The venerated critic responded, and in an article entitled “Spiritual Beggars” he writes,

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37 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 26.
But enough! Implacable is the enmity any healthy person with a mind as yet untwisted must feel toward this good-for-nothing decadence! They're all a bunch of dark owls, spiritual beggars, swimming in darkness and getting drunk on their impenetrable nonsense.38

By getting the preeminent art critic in Russia to criticize their publication, he also lent to the young aesthetes legitimacy and notoriety.

In addition to the journal’s emphasis on education and symbolism, it was nationalistic in its approach. The sentiments of nationalism and free, unfettered art co-exist in the journal—as antithetical as the two may seem. Their view of the role of the nation in their artistic endeavors was different than that of their predecessors, and “in their emphasis on emotion, they supported that nationalism which came from internal conviction but not that which they saw as external and superficial."39 It was their elevation of the individual in the artistic process, the individuals in question that possessed innate Russianness, that blended the two sentiments.

Diaghilev tackles the subject of nationalism in the journal, but it was not the neonationalism of the 60s, but a nationalism with qualifications. In his article “Principles of Art Criticism” he writes,

Nationalism is another painful problem in contemporary art, particularly Russian art. Many see it as our salvation . . . but what can be more destructive for an artist than the desire to become an expression of nationalism? The only possible nationalism is the unconscious nationalism of the blood. This is a rare and most precious inheritance. The sensibility must in itself be truly of the people and involuntarily . . . perpetually reflect the brilliance of deep rooted nationality. One has to carry nationality within one— . . . with the pure, ancient blood of the nation in one’s veins. Then there

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is a value in it, and that value is immeasurable. But nationalism on principle is a pretense and an insult to the nation.

Diaghilev goes on in the same essay to state that, some would argue, that the influence of the West was deleterious to the Russian spirit. He refutes this as ridiculous, because the Russian resolve is unshakeable, and “the true Russian nature is too pliant to be broken under the influence of the West.”40 The addition of European influence to the Russian soul was not only tolerated by the World of Art ideology, but it was viewed as productive. Benois, known for being the moral conscience of the Ballets Russes, writes in 1901,

> Those forms which once upon a time grew naturally from the Russian soul are closer to the Russian heart. We believe that the Russian artist, in finding inspiration in them, will find himself, will find the expression of his own, still obscure, ideal. Better he do that than examine foreign models of art and imitate them. **However,** the reform of Peter the Great did not pass completely without a trace even for art. To cease being European now, to take shelter from the West behind a wall, would be very strange, even absurd. . . That is why, alongside works of our own national art we will not be afraid to present everything foreign and European that is preserved within the borders of Russia. That is why we focus equal attention on what was created both before and after Peter.41

Even though the World of Art publication loved its country, the Czar and academy did not love the World of Art. The Czar would give and take back funding from the journal as he would from the ballet troupe after their first year.42 However, this loss of funding from the Czar was appropriate. He was becoming an anachronism, and their society was on the verge.

41 Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 519.
42 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 167-175.
This was something that Diaghilev sensed acutely. While he was traveling Russia collecting paintings from estates for the 1906 exhibition, he could not help but notice the change of social structure and way of life in Russia. It was a story he knew all too well, as his family had gone from landed aristocracy to bankrupt within his lifetime. At a gala thrown in his honor as the editor in chief of the *World of Art*, he spoke:

> I ended my long travels across the boundlessness of Russia. And it was precisely after these avid wanderings that I became especially convinced that the time of reckoning had come . . . Remote estates boarded up, palaces terrifying in their dead splendor are strangely inhabited by the nice, mediocre people of today, unable to endure the gravity of past regalia. Here it is not people who are dying but a way of life, and that is when I became quite convinced that we are living in a terrible moment of crisis: we are destined to die so that a new culture can be resurrected, a culture that will take from us the relics of our weary wisdom. This is what history tells us, and this is what aesthetics confirms. And now, plunged into the depths of artistic images and thereby invulnerable to reproaches of extreme artistic radicalism, I can say boldly and with conviction that whosoever is certain that we are witnessing a great historical moment of reckoning and ending the name of a new, unknown culture is not mistaken—a culture that has arisen through us, but will sweep us aside. And hence, with neither fear nor doubt, I raise my glass to the ruined walls of the beautiful palaces, as I do to the new behests of the new aesthetics. And all that I, an incorrigible sensualist, can wish for is that the impending struggle not abuse the aesthetics of life and that death be as beautiful and as radiant as the Resurrection!

This is the world that Diaghilev was leaving behind. One where massive estates stood as specters of their former selves, and, not to speak anachronistically, but the 1905 revolution had set into motion events that would come to a bloody fruition twelve years later—causing Diaghilev to

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44 Bowlt, “Early Writings of Serge Diaghilev,” 68-69.
see Russia only a few times after his departure in 1909. Dighilev, Fokine, Benois, Bakst, and scores of dancers felt oppressed both artistically and personally under the imperial auspices, and although they detested the bureaucratic machine of the Czar, this had very little to do with how they felt about Russia.

This is the attitude that Diaghilev brought to Paris: that the Russian spirit was an essential element. It could be mixed with other sources (as in the case of Pushkin, Tolstoy, and the West), but it was a cornerstone of their creativity. This Russianess was not that of the Imperial courts, fussily weighed down with etiquette and pomp, but an intrinsic sense of nationalism,\textsuperscript{45} one that exists outside the confines of modernity and, for Diaghilev, morality.\textsuperscript{46} Benois would later say of their initial season, “this trip was clearly a historic necessity. We are in contemporary civilization the ingredient without which it would corrode entirely.”\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Exotica and Russianness: “For Russian Export”}

The first few seasons of the Ballets Russes offered the French public a sultry and seductive exotica. The ballets of \textit{Cléopâtre} and \textit{Schéhérazade}, two of the most popular works from 1909 to 1912, focused on sex and violence with lavish scenery and twisting torsos.\textsuperscript{48} The

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{45} Acocella, “Diaghilev’s “Complicated Questions,”” 91.
\bibitem{46} Eksteins, \textit{Rites of Spring}, 30-32.
\bibitem{47} Ibid, 48.
\bibitem{48} Garafola, \textit{Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes}, 33, 42-43.
\end{thebibliography}
dancers sported bared feet and midriffs at times, and the Parisian public was fixated on Nijinsky, the brilliant and beautiful young dancer, as he played the role of the golden slave in blackface. Although these ballets were overtly sexual and scandalous in that right (in Schézérazade an orgy was broken up by mass murder) they were tame enough for the Parisian bourgeoisie in the boxes.  

In the 19th century Flaubert had written a highly sexualized Orient into fine literature, and Delacroix had painted it into high art. Now the Russians had brought it to life on the stage in Paris. A key element in their success was the “conceptualization of Russia as historically and ethnically non-Western” by Europeans, a sentiment that Diaghilev understood and to certain ends exploited. Garafola writes that, “exoticism—or more properly speaking, orientalism—was a thread woven into the high and popular art of the fin de siècle even if theatrical fashion and design awaited the inspiration of Bakst, Golovi, and Roerich to discover it.” Diaghilev was merely playing off of these and other Orientalist artists who knew that explicit erotic scenes were acceptable when set in the perceived barbaric Near East, and that the Parisian public was tantalized by such dark sexuality.

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49 Sjeng, Diaghilev: A Life, 201.
51 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 16.
52 Ibid, 286.
Aside from these fantasy pieces, the impresario also commissioned new “Russian” ballets. Although the Orientalist ballets were Russian in the sense that they were both willingly and unwillingly playing the part of the “other,” and featured the music of well known and respected Russian composers; Diaghilev wanted new works as categorically Russian as *Swan Lake* or *Boris Godunov*. Even though these new original ballets were to be closer to actual Russian folklore, “Diaghilev and Benois knew quite well that the French also expected a measure of “barbarism” from the Russians, and, of course, Diaghilev satisfied this desire with his productions.”

In the fall of 1909 the committee was deciding on what would be included in the 1910 season. As in Mamontov’s opera, most decisions were reached by discussion between the set designers, costumer designers, choreographer, and the impresario. In Sergei Grigoriev’s memoirs he recounts that Michel Fokine, then the principal choreographer of the Ballets Russes, desired to do a ballet based on a Russian fairy tale. Grigoriev remembers, “I obtained several collections of Russian fairy tales; and between us we evolved a story by piecing together the more interesting parts of several versions.”

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For the music, Diaghilev made a fortunate bet on a then largely unknown composer, Igor Stravinsky, who had been a student of Rimsky-Korsakov. He had heard the young student’s composition *Fireworks* in Russia at a conservatory concert in the spring of 1909 and was impressed by the originality of the piece. After Diaghilev’s first choice of composer fell through, the task was then given to Stravinsky, thus beginning the turbulent and productive alliance between the impresario and the composer.\(^{56}\)

The story line for *The Firebird* is a straightforward fairy tale. The hero of the story, Prince Ivan, finds and then struggles to overpower a beautiful and mystical Firebird in the magical land that is her domain. Upon capture by Ivan she barters a magic feather for her freedom, and swears to come to his aid when he is in need of help. Later, Ivan encounters twelve dancing princesses who are prisoners of the evil ruler-sorcerer Koschei. Ivan falls in love with one of the princesses, but Koschei finds Ivan and turns his minions on him. Just before Koschei turns Ivan to stone, the latter summons the Firebird who uses her magic to hypnotize the minions into a frenzied dance until they all pass out in exhaustion. During this time the Firebird instructs Ivan to break the egg that harbors the sorcerer’s soul. He does this, killing Koschei and freeing

the princesses. The ballet ends in a typical coronation scene where all is bright and right.\(^{57}\)

The ballet made its premier during the second Saison Russe, the first of which to have commissioned pieces. This fact gives *The Firebird* specific importance in its representation of Russianness. Even though it is based on native fairy tales, it is not true to one particular story, but rather it is a hodgepodge of different stories. Nor was it intended for the home audience. The Ballets Russes never performed this or any other ballet in Russia during its lifetime. *The Firebird* was, in fact, a selected narrative to represent Russia to a solely Western audience.\(^ {58}\) As Taruskin writes it was, “made expressly for foreign consumption, a circumstance that had led naturally to an emphasis on those aspects of Russian national art that were exotic to Western audiences.”\(^ {59}\)

The Firebird as a being was a staple of modern Russian folklore, and was one of the many incarnations of the ancient Slavic sun-god.\(^ {60}\) In addition, the Firebird was a common symbolist and late romantic avatar. As portrayed in the Ballets Russes production, she is ephemeral and organic. She occupies the duality of being both explicitly connected to the Earth but yet otherworldly. Although Ivan is pegged as the obvious story book hero in the work, it is the Firebird who knows the mystical secrets,

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\(^{58}\) Ibid, 120.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 568.

\(^{60}\) Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 519.
and with her help that Ivan succeeds. She is the embodiment of an unfettered life, a virtual stand-in for art for art’s sake. By choosing to employ the Firebird, the artists combined their sense of Russianness with Symbolist art; they took the Neonationalism on which they were raised and omitted the element of realism—replacing it with the supernatural.

This synthesis achieved varying degrees of success. The Russianness they offered Paris was steeped in the orientalist fantasy of *Shéhérazade* and *Cléopâtre*. The Firebird was costumed in lavish jewels and armbands, and her dance styling suggested an exotic flare. The *pas de deux*, danced between Prince Ivan and the Firebird instead of the prince and his beloved Princess, recalls the sadomasochism so prevalent in the 1909 season as Ivan seeks to dominate the willful creature.

Stravinsky’s score reinforced this clichéd notion of Russianness. Not only did he use folk tunes in the work, but he also borrowed the 19th century musical convention of depicting a character of the real world by use of the diatonic scale, and the otherworldly characters through the use of the octatonic or chromatic scales—those scales associated with the Russian sound that Westerners had come to know and recognize. He had composed a piece closer to the earlier *Kuchkist* period rather than a contemporary piece, and he realized it only when he heard it performed the first time with a full orchestra. As he later remembered, “The words

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61 Ibid, 557.
'For Russian Export’ seemed to have been stamped everywhere, both on the stage and in the music. Either despite this fact, but most likely because of it, France adored *The Firebird*. The French press would sing the praises of the work in the light of the composer’s mentors. However, the Russian critics would not be so kind. Although they acknowledged Stravinsky’s superb talent, they felt that the work lacked originality and personality.

For any advances that might have been made by Fokine choreographically or by Stravinsky symphonically, *The Firebird* was still an orientalist ballet, replete with all the niceties that the French public desired. This means it was also a safe bet at the box office for theater owners. Diaghilev had a huge enterprise to keep afloat financially, and he was always on the brink of ruin, but still he was restless artistically and discontent to hover over any artistic space for too long. This would be a problem for the impresario for the duration of the life of the Ballets Russes—how to remedy his need for artistic invention with the paying public.

In 1911 the Ballets Russes produced *Petrushka*, a ballet about a group of Russian dolls with Nijinsky as the lead, Fokine as choreographer, and Stravinsky in charge of the music. Again, the ballet delivered to the audience a brilliant performance. Nijinsky’s interpretation of the doll

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64 Ibid, 639-645.
became the stuff of theater legend, and Stravinsky’s status as a major composer was solidified. *Petrushka* operated within the framework for success that the Ballets Russes had already established.\(^{66}\) However, this platform would be radically rocked by the developments in the 1912 to 1913 seasons when Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes took a bold but uncertain leap towards Modernism.

**The Rite of Spring: The Conception of “Our Child”**

Now considered one of the greatest orchestral works of the 20th century, *Le Sacre du printemps*, or *The Rite of Spring*, was received at its premiere on May 29, 1913 by a tremendous scandal.\(^{67}\) It was the third of the three ballets choreographed by Nijinsky, and the third of Stravinsky’s Russian Ballets. The latter had been, up until this premiere, lauded by Paris; the former, although still beloved for his virtuoso talent, had not struck so favorable a chord with the critics for his choreography. His work *L’après-midi d’un faune* (1912) was the story of a willful faun who falls in love with a nymph. After succeeding in catching only her scarf, the faun resigns himself, and on the night of the premiere Nijinsky mimicked a masturbatory motion at the end of the ballet. The public was outraged, and according to witnesses a ruckus ensued. The second performance

\(^{67}\) Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 10.
featured a slightly altered ending which pleased the audience. Despite the press and notoriety the incident garnered, the reviews were mixed. ⁶⁸ Many did not know what to think of this ballet set in two-dimensional bas relief or Nijinsky’s skin tight leotard, and although the theme of sex was certainly present, the eroticism of Schéhérazade was not. ⁶⁹

The second Nijinsky ballet, also scored by Debussy, was Jeux. The ballet premiered merely two weeks before the Rite and was poorly received. The scenario involved a love triangle between two women and one man, played out during a game of tennis. The costumes were sports attire—far removed from the luxurious and sheer fabrics used in previous seasons, and again, the theme was sex, but it was not erotic. ⁷⁰ With the ballet being set in 1920, Diaghilev had originally conceived of a floating airship rising in the background at some point during the performance. As Diaghilev biographer Sjeng Scheijen points out, “this talk of airships and aeroplanes strongly evokes Futurism, especially when we take the date in account.” Although Diaghilev had not yet met F. T. Marinetti, leader of the Futurists, it is probable that he had at least heard of them. The art group had their first exhibition in Paris on Feburary 5, 1912, and at least one member of Diaghilev’s group was there to see Marinetti speak. After Marinetti decried the Futurist ideals of burning the museums, the night

⁶⁸ Scheijen, Diaghilev: A Life, 247-250.
⁶⁹ Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 56-58.
⁷⁰ ibid, 59-62.
ended in a brawl.71 Per Debussy’s request the airship idea was scrapped,72 and the reception of this ballet, which largely perplexed the audience, was lukewarm at best. Although Diaghilev was always careful to pair these new experimental works with crowd favorites, on the night of the premiere the public went into The Rite with these other risky experiments in mind.73

The conception of The Rite of Spring was unique. Up to this point, most ballets produced by the Ballets Russes came about by means of committee, but The Rite differs in this respect. As Stravinsky recalls, “The idea of Le Sacre du printemps came to me while I was still composing The Firebird. I had dreamed scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death. This vision was not accompanied by concrete musical ideas, however . . .”74 Having received such inspiration, the composer immediately sought out the help of Nikolai Roerich. Roerich was an obvious choice, as he had already designed two sets for the 1909 season of the Ballets Russes. He was an amalgamation of scholar, archaeologist, and artist, obsessed with Slavic ethnography and mythology, and considered a leading expert in the field. As Stravinsky

71 Scheijen, Diaghilev: A Life, 262
72 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 59.
73 Scheijen, Diaghilev: A Life, 266-271.
74 Peter Hill, Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3. It must be noted that Stravinsky had numerous origin tales about The Rite, all which change slightly throughout his career. Some put the locust of the work in the libretto, others in the music. Later in life Stravinsky and Roerich would have a discrepancy of memoirs as to who was the original author of idea of The Rite. The argument is outlined elsewhere, but most scholars agree that The Rite as we know it today came about by the ideas of both men.
wrote in 1912, “. . . who else could help, who else knows the secret of our ancestor’s close feeling for the earth?”

The two men had met during rehearsals for The Firebird in Paris to talk about the project, but Stravinsky became consumed by Petrushka and the work was put on hold. In 1911, after the distraction of Petrushka was over, Roerich and Stravinsky resumed their collaboration with new zeal. They were both back in Russia by July, but Roerich was at work on a neonationalist church he had designed for Princess Tenisheva, patron of the artist colony at Talashkino. The colony very much resembled Mamantov’s Abramstevo estate, but without a musical company. Talashkino was dedicated to neonationalist style art, crafts, and architecture, and along with Savva Mamantov, the Princess had been the other original financial contributor to Diaghilev’s magazine, World of Art.

Roerich could not cease his work to travel to Stravinsky, so the composer had to make the trip. As Peter Hill writes, “There is something so apt about Talashkino as the birthplace of the Rite.”

This aptness comes from the ballet being, as musicologist Richard Taruskin calls it, a “landmark of neonationalism.” Ethnography not only informed the work, but it was taken extremely seriously during its conception. Taruskin points out that at this time, Alexander Afanasyev’s tome The Slavs’ Poetic Attitudes Toward Nature (1866-1869) was

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75 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 64.
76 Hill, Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring, 6-7.
77 Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 871.
regarded as the “veritable Bible” of folklore. Afanasyev’s methods are
highly contested today, as he looked at contemporary Slavic folklore to try
and reconstruct prehistory and was prone to unfounded conjecture and
scholastically detrimental enthusiasm. Nonetheless, the book was a
widely accepted resource for artists at the time—Stravinsky and Roerich
included.

The presiding deity over the action is Yarilo, who, according to
Afanasyev, possessed the attributes of vernal light and warmth, of youthful
impetuousness, violent awakening forces, erotic passion, lasciviousness,
and fecundation. The rite itself is a combination of the Semik holiday
when the rites of augury and fertility were observed, and that of Kupala,
which was more of a revelry of fecundity. Afanasyev cites a Christian
authority writing in 1505, in which the correlations to The Rite are obvious:

On this holy night [the feast of St. John the Baptist, coincident with
the old Kupala], practically the whole village gathers in the
countryside and goes wild . . . They beat on tambourines, and raise
their voices, and saw on fiddles, the women and the maidens flail
about and dance, they roll their eyes, from their mouths come
revolting howls and yelps, disgusting songs, they give rein to all
sorts of mad deviltry, they reel about leaping and stamping. For
men and boys there is great temptation and downfall in roaming
and gawking among the women and girls at will, likewise for women
in the men’s unbridled profanity, and for the maidens in seduction.78

However, there is no precedent of human sacrifice in Slavic folklore.

Stravinsky might have very well dreamt this, but it is also as likely that
Roerich borrowed this from Herodotus’ account of the Scyths. The

78 Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions, 880-884.
Scythian gravesites, or Kurgans, excavated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries offered a horde of gold artifacts with which Roerich was well acquainted, along with the knowledge that human sacrifice was practiced in Scythian burial. The fact that Roerich’s first published paper in 1898 was titled “On a Kurgan” and that the set design for the first tableau of The Rite depicts a Kurgan makes it highly probable that the designer pulled from Herodotus for the libretto.79

If the literary and ancient influences were overt in the libretto and scene painting, then they were woven into the musical fabric of The Rite of Spring. After the Russian Revolution (1917) Stravinsky, along with the Ballets Russes, sought to absolve themselves of the influence of folklore and neonationalism.80 With such a suspect piece as The Firebird, there was no denying the influence, but in the The Rite, with its unconventional rhythms and lack of melody, he could almost get away with this piece of revisionism. However, in the 1970s musician and friend Lawrence Morton had the idea to check the score of The Rite against the one folk source that was acknowledged, and found that the melodies for the Augurs of Spring, the Ritual of Abduction, the Spring rounds, and the Introduction to Part I all come from the Juskiewicz anthology of 1,785 Lithuanian folk

79 Ibid, 888.
80 Richard Taruskin, “Russian Folk Melodies in “The Rite of Spring,” Journal of the American Musicological Society 33, 3 (Autumn 1980), 504-506. After the revolution the operas and ballets by Nikolai Cherepnin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Musorgsky, Steinberg, and Liadov all ceased to be performed by the Ballets Russes.
songs. Roerich may have advised Stravinsky to use a collection of Lithuanian songs because of their provenance. It was believed that Christianity had come latest to the area just west of Great Russia and that therefore the contemporary people had the closest ties to pagan ritual.

Such is the relationship of *The Rite* to its neonationalist origins. It is important to note that although exacting ethnography ran deep in the work, the piece is completely modernist. Stravinsky and Roerich gave great attention to historical legitimacy, and the painter’s set design and costumes were faithful replicas of neonationalists crafts of the time, but Stravinsky’s music seemed to swallow up its influences and predecessors. As Taruskin writes, “The *Rite* sketches show more powerfully than any other source just how committed a neonationalist Stravinsky was, how determined he was to anchor his maximizing innovations in a folkloristic reality that would justify and validate them.” The work managed to take two strains of music—folk and modern art music—and fuse them together in an altogether original way, absorbing the folk elements in such a way that they could be “felt” but not categorized. He was harnessing the energy of the idea of the pre-Christian and the uncivilized, and pushing the existing and acceptable order of music to extremes—extremes that some

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82 Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 900.  
83 Ibid, 906.  
84 Ibid, 937.  
85 Ibid, 948.
hailed as genius and some, such as Debussy, felt it haunted them “like a beautiful nightmare.”

**Bringing The Rite to Paris**

By November 17, 1912 the score was complete, and Diaghilev summoned their regular conductor, Pierre Monteux, to hear it. Stravinsky played a version of *The Rite* on the piano. The conductor’s recollection is telling of the innovation and brutality of the piece:

The old upright piano quivered and shook as Stravinsky tried to give us an idea of his new work for ballet. I remember vividly his dynamism and his sort of ruthless impetuosity as he attacked the score. By the time he had reached the second tableau, his face was so completely covered with sweat that I thought, ‘He will surely burst, or have a syncope.’ My own head ached badly, and I decided then and there that the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms were the only music for me, not the music of this crazy Russian! I must admit I did not understand one note of *Le Sacre du printemps*. My one desire was to flee that room and find a quiet corner in which to rest my aching head. Then my Director (Diaghilev) turned to me and with a smile said, ‘This is a masterpiece, Monteux, which will completely revolutionise music and make you famous, because you are going to conduct it.’ And of course, I did.”

Another telling precursor of the reception *The Rite* would receive happened in the garden of Louis Laloy. On June 9, 1912 Debussy and Stravinsky played a four hand reduction of the piece for a small audience. Laloy remembers the famous meeting:

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87 Scheijen, *Diaghilev, a Life*, 264-265.
One bright afternoon in the spring of 1912 I was walking about my garden with Debussy. We were expecting Stravinsky. As soon as he saw us, the Russian musician ran with his arms outstretched to embrace the French master, who, over his shoulder, gave me an amused but compassionate look. Stravinsky had brought an arrangement for four hands of his work, the *Rite of Spring*. Debussy agreed to play the bass. Stravinsky asked if he could remove his collar. His sight was not improved by his glasses, and, pointing his nose to the keyboard, and sometimes humming a part that had been omitted from the arrangement, he led into a welter of sound the supple, agile hands of his friend. Debussy followed without a hitch and seemed to make light of the difficulty. When they had finished, there was no question of embracing, nor even of compliments. We were dumbfounded, overwhelmed by this hurricane which had come from the depths of the ages, and which had taken life by the roots.\(^{88}\)

These were the reactions of Stravinsky’s and Diaghilev’s friends and piers; what could they expect from the Parisian bourgeoisie who had already been put out by Nijinsky’s previous two ballets? After the commotion surrounding *L’après midi d’un faune* Diaghilev had a hunch, and the audience did not disappoint.

*The Rite of Spring* is a demanding piece of the listener. It is dissonant, stark, unapologetic in its driving rhythms, and at the time it was unlike anything anyone had ever heard. The first part is the *Adoration of the Earth*, where ancient pagan peoples gather to play festive games to celebrate the coming season. Twice they are interrupted, once by a mystical old woman who knows the secrets of prophecy, and then by the sages who bless the Earth. After the blessing the people dance wildly becoming one with nature. In the second part, *The Sacrifice*, the virgins

\(^{88}\) Hill, *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring*, 27.
hold mysterious games and twice fate points to the chosen one. She accepts her fate and dances a frenzied dance to her death in adulation of the Earth.\textsuperscript{89} Nijinsky’s choreography was devoid of the grace and elegance of traditional ballet; he replaced it with angular and heavy choreography. Besides the Chosen One, there is no soloist, no \textit{pas de deux}, and the costumes were bulky and completely hid the body of the dancers. There was no sex to be found in \textit{The Rite}. As Garafola writes, “For Stravinsky, as for Nijinsky, this past was only a metaphor, a vehicle for conveying the tragedy of modern being. \textit{Sacre} exposed the barbarism of human life and the cruelty of nature, the savagery of the tribe, the violence of the soul.\textsuperscript{90}

The opening night of \textit{The Rite} resulted in a fiasco. The details—whether or not the police were called in to bring order, whether or not the orchestra could be heard over the ruckus, or whether or not Nijinsky was standing on a chair in the wings because the dancers could not hear the music or because that was their method—are all contested in various accounts of the event. But the fact that from the opening bars forward there was some variation of a riot is not.\textsuperscript{91} As S. L. Grigoriev, \textit{regisseur} for the \textit{Ballets Russes}, remembers,

After the first interval the curtain rose on \textit{Le Sacre}, and not many minutes passed before a section of the audience began shouting its indignation; on which the rest retaliated with loud appeals for order.

\textsuperscript{89} Eksteins, \textit{Rites of Spring}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{90} Garafola, \textit{Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes}, 68.
\textsuperscript{91} Eksteins, \textit{Rites of Spring}, 10-16.
The hubbub soon became deafening; but the dancers went on, and so did the orchestra, though scarcely a note of the music could be heard. The shouting continued even during the change of scene, for which music was provided; and now actual fighting broke out among some of the spectators; yet even this did not deter Monteux from persisting with the performance. Diaghilev, who was with us on the stage, was extremely agitated; and so was Stravinsky.  

Monteux proved imperturbable by the commotion and never looked up from the score. As he recalled, he was concerned with maintaining “the exact tempo Igor had given me and which, I must say, I have never forgotten.”

There are many colorful accounts of the night, most of them recorded long after the event. In the press there had been much hype surrounding the premiere, and all of the respectable people of Paris were seemingly out in their diamonds and silk. Although Nijinsky’s new ballets had been received with some animosity or lukewarmness, Stravinsky’s reputation was still secure. They were expecting a treat. To counterbalance this polite company, Diaghilev had given out free tickets to those who he knew would be supportive of the ballet and its new forms. Of this group Cocteau wrote that, the aesthetes, “would applaud novelty simply to show their contempt for the people in the boxes . . . Innumerable shades of snobbery, super-snobbery and inverted snobbery were represented . . . The audience played the role that was written for it . . .”

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94 Ibid, 30.
Carl Van Vechten gives a dramatic recount of the scene, which outlines the contemptuous reception and the conflict:

We warred over art (some of us thought it was and some thought it wasn’t) . . . Some forty of the protestants were forced out of the theater but that did not quell the disturbance. The lights in the auditorium were fully turned on but the noise continued and I remember Mlle. Piltz [the chosen maiden] executing her strange dance of religious hysteria on a stage dimmed by the blazing light n the auditorium, seemingly to the accompaniment of the disjointed ravings of a mob of angry men and women.95

Kessler also provides an insightful and reliable account of the event, as he recorded his thoughts the day after the premier. He wrote in his diary of the ballet,

Suddenly an utterly new vision has arisen, something never before seen, gripping, persuasive. A new type of savagery in art and anti-art at once: all form is destroyed, and a new form suddenly emerges from the chaos. The audience, the most dazzling house I’ve ever seen in Paris, aristocracy, diplomats, the demi-monde, was restless from the start, laughing, whispering, making jokes. Here and there a few got up to leave. Stravinsky, who was sitting behind us with his wife, dashed out like a madman after just five minutes.96

The good people of Paris felt as if they had been lied to, as if they had had a joked pulled over on them. The reviews of the opera were mixed but largely negative. Some questioned Diaghilev’s taste, while other questioned the relationship of Paris with the Russian dancers. The collective wish was for Nijinsky to go back to being the beautiful golden

96 Scheijen, *Diaghilev, A Life*, 271.
slave in blackface. Alfred Capus, writing for *Le Figaro*, felt that for things to be amiable between the Russians and the Parisians once more, that:

Nijinsky would have to agree not to stage any more ballets that aspire to a level of beauty inaccessible to our feeble minds, and not to produce any more three-hundred-year-old “modern” women, or little boys feeding at breasts, or for that matter even breasts. In return for these concessions we would continue to assure him that he is the greatest dancer in the world, the most handsome of men, and we would prove this to him. We should then be at peace.

They had been charmed by the generic neonationslism of *The Firebird* with its fairy tale setting, because the public wanted a fairy tale inhabited by strange people not like themselves. The fallout over *The Rite* gave some the opportunity to re-access the Russians as being wholly different from the French. Capus writes in the same article for *Le Figaro* a cheeky comment: “It seems that they are not at all aware of the customs and practices of the country they are imposing on, and they seem ignorant of the fact that we often take energetic measures against absurd behavior.”

Here Capus insinuates that the Russians are not cultured enough to understand the correctness of French ways, or that the French, when feeling threatened, are able to band together under said Frenchness to vanquish the enemy of good taste. He also writes of the Russians “imposing on” the French, when most everyone in opposition to the work had, in fact, paid dearly to be at the performance that night.

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With *The Rite of Spring* the Ballets Russes coterie did not bring to the stage the version of Russia they thought the Parisians would find amusing, but they displayed the actual Russia, or at least the actual Russia of their interpretation. Not only that, but in a primitive and modernist form that was unrecognizable when held next to their previous work that had been so successful. Not even all of the art snobs were appreciative of this new work, as Scheijen puts aptly, “The same people who flew into raptures at the sight of Mata Hari’s glorified stripteases or Nijinsky’s masturbating faun were now confronted with a work of art which did not exist merely to affirm the superiority of their refined decadence, but which had the audacity to be taken seriously. And that was a bridge too far.”

Diaghilev was enthusiastic about *The Rite* from the beginning and sensed early on that it was a masterpiece. However, for all of his longing for artistic experimentation and the desire to unleash an unconventional genius like Stravinsky on the public, Diaghilev was a businessman. The premiere of *The Rite* did not happen all on its own that night, but was situated between *Les Sylphides* and *Le Spectre de la rose*, two very well received ballets of the Ballets Russes repertoire. After the debacle of the premier, order was restored and Paris got to see one of their favorite Ballets Russes works. In order to keep his beloved enterprise,

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98 Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life*, 270.
Diaghilev would have to backtrack on his artistic progress for the next season. Some of the major theaters where they played were refusing to put any Nijinsky choreographed ballets on the bill. *The Rite* had given Diaghilev worldwide headlines and a flurry of notoriety both good and bad, but business wise it gave him an incredibly expensive ballet that his company could rarely perform. He patched things up with Fokine, their regular choreographer from the first few seasons, and, in one of those quirks of fate that reads like fiction, Nijinsky set off for South America in August of 1913 with the troupe where he met a young Hungarian lady on the voyage. The two fell in love and hastily wed. Diaghilev, whose lover Nijinsky had been until recently, completely washed his hands of the dancer and unequivocally refused to work with him any further. A few years later Nijinsky’s mind would succumb to schizophrenia.  

Although Diaghilev had to backtrack for the next season, he was still happy with *The Rite*, and its reception. After the performances that night those involved took taxis around Paris in revelry of the event, and Diaghilev imparted, “it was exactly what I wanted.”

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100 Scheijen, *Diaghilev, a Life*, 274-280.
101 Ibid, 272.
3. Futurism—The Pleasure of Being Booed

“Venetians! Venetians! Why do you still desire to be ever the faithful slaves of the past, the filthy gatekeepers of the biggest brothel in history, nurses in the most wretched hospital in the world, in which souls are languishing, mortally corrupted by the syphilis of sentimentalism?”

—F. T. Marinetti, The Battle of Venice

Futurism was the brainchild of F. T. Marinetti, a brilliant propagandist and enthusiastic Italian nationalist. Having grown up in Alexandria, Egypt, he received a classical education at a French Jesuit Lycée and moved to Paris in 1894 to attend the Sorbonne. While he studied in France, his own country of Italy was making advances in industrialization, particularly in the north, but lagged far behind its counterparts on the continent. Marinetti viewed this lethargic pace of industrialization along with a resistance to cultural change as another way in which the country appeared inferior to the rest of Europe. Motivated by these reasons, he published The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism in the popular French daily Le Figaro on February 12, 1909. This designedly bombastic manifesto called for the destruction of museums and libraries, the love of speed and technology, the glorification of war,

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4 F. T. Marinetti, Critical Writings, xvii-xix.
and the idealization of youth and boldness.\(^5\) Instead of fearing the machine and its often anxiety provoking influence, the Futurists welcomed the transformations it was making on society and intended to harness its power to achieve permanent and lasting social change.

This publication achieved Marinetti’s intended effect; it produced indignation, interest, and a following. Some of the first recruits to the movement included Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini. These men became the core members of pre-World War I Futurism.\(^6\) They felt the need to abolish academic aesthetics, form new ways of communicating both visually and in literature, and they sought to explain an unprecedented era. Their dogma included a belligerent advocation of war and violence both before and after WWI, producing such Nietzschean manifestoes as “The Necessity and Beauty of Violence” (1910) and “War, the Sole Cleanser of the World” (1911).\(^7\) They maintained their unrelenting nationalism and support of violence through WWII and became closely involved with the Fascist regime.

Marinetti sought to make Italy a contender among the European superpowers in all areas, from military might to the arts. To most of Western Europe, Italy appeared both industrially and culturally lacking.

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\(^5\) Ibid, 13-14.
\(^7\) Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 53-54, 60-72.
When a show of Futurist paintings toured Europe in 1912 Georges Bataille wrote to Marinetti, “To our foreign eyes the greatest fascination of Italy is that it is so retarded.” Marinetti was keenly perceptive of his day and age, and realized that to gain notoriety, he would have to compete for the public’s attention against newspapers, advertising, variety theater, and sensationalism. It is for these reasons that as a tireless self-promoter he adopted a flamboyant approach to the disposition of the Futurist and the projects they would produce. Their theatrical productions and Futurist Evenings would marry their sanguinary rhetoric with popular entertainment, and gain them the notoriety and press that the movement needed. However, before we begin our discussion of the Futurist serate, it is useful to understand the legacy of regeneration in Italian nationalism, and the myth that had been birthed by the Risorgimento.

**The Risorgimento and the Land of the Dead**

Marinetti inherited the idea of regeneration, as the Italian people had inherited the huge, burdensome history of Ancient Rome and the Renaissance. The presence of these long dead grandiose painters and politicians was everywhere and inescapable. Contemporary Italian people became labeled as the degenerate offspring of their illustrious ancestors; and in the travel literature of the Grand Tour, taken by so many European

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8 Tisdall and Bozzolla, *Futurism*, 14.
men of means in the 18th and 19th centuries, Italians became categorized as “indolent, morally and sexually lax, and easy to resort to fights and arms.” This was in addition to the fact that “Romanticism then added yet another layer to this complex edifice by insisting on the passionate nature of the Italian people.”

Napoleon’s conquest and the other military occupations over the course of several centuries caused the emasculation of Italian men, and the demilitarization of the country.

The inhabitants of the country seemed to have lost their vigor, and as Alphonse de Lamartine described in 1820, in contemporary Italy it seemed as if “everything is asleep.” Nearly 100 years later the Futurists would proclaim in their Manifesto of the Futurist Painters that, “We are nauseated by the vile laziness which, from the sixteenth century on, has made our artists live by an incessant exploitation of ancient glories. In the eyes of other countries, Italy is still a land of the dead, an immense Pompeii of whitewashed sepulchers.”

A cohort of intellectuals set out to rectify this national humiliation and change the widely held view of Italy as a country of backward people, to one of a nation on par with England and France. If contemporary

11 Ibid, 390.
12 Ibid, 382.
Italians lacked much in contrast to their ancestors of genius, the locus of blame for the degeneration of their character had to be placed somewhere. Thanks to these intellectuals and the revisionist history of Genevan historian Jean-Léonard-Charles Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age*, the thought was adopted that the problem lay not within the Italian people themselves, but with their loss of liberty. It was during times of self rule that the natural Italian genius was allowed to flourish. Most groups involved in the nationalist cause believed that “centuries of foreign oppression had made the Italian people servile and deprived them of hope for positive change.”\(^\text{15}\) Thus a crucial point of *Risorgimento* nationalist ideology was that individual freedom and equal rights of man had to work in tandem with the nation-state.

The myth of regeneration and greatness that permeated the *Risorgimento* was a liberal nationalism, and believed in the autonomy of all people and nations. It was not framed by the conquest of other nations, but by the reawakening of the innate greatness of Italians for their betterment, and so that they might compete on an international stage as an equal. Mazzini, unarguably one of the greatest and most romantic figures of the unification, believed that “Not even the greatness of one’s nation . . . could demand the occupation and the humiliation of other nations.”\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Patriarca, “Indolence and Regeneration,” 397-402.  
In 1861 the Italian parliament met for the first time in Turin, after forty years of fighting for unification.\textsuperscript{17} The transfer of power, begun in 1859, was surprisingly calm. Having taken lessons from the 1848 revolutions, the moderates turned from revolution and operated under the guide of pragmatism and bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{18} However, this seemingly smooth transition proved problematic. After decades of failed insurrection and the rousing patriotism exhorted by Garibaldi and Mazzini, the subdued unification of Italy seemed, in a word, unheroic. In addition, the Italian man was supposed to have been renewed, to have lost those traits of being “lazy” and “effeminate,” through the struggle for liberty through revolution. Silvana Patriarca writes that the “almost “miraculous”
acquisition of Italian independence . . . left many democratic patriots worried that the very miracle was in fact a mixed blessing: too little blood had been shed, no real moral regeneration had occurred, and much more work lay ahead.”\textsuperscript{19} The task was still in part undone, as Massimo D’Azeglio observed, “Having made Italy, now we must make Italians.”\textsuperscript{20}

In the following decades, disillusionment with the parliamentary government was widespread. In 1887 Francesco Crispi came to power as Prime Minister, and not only did he lose the Battle of Adua in 1896, thus

\begin{itemize}
  \item Raymond Grew, “How Success Spoiled the Risorgimento,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 34, No. 5 (Sep 1962), 241-244.
  \item Patriarca, “Indolence and Regeneration,” 407.
  \item Giovanni Lista, “The Activist Model; or, the Avant-Garde as Italian Invention,” Trans. Scott Sheridan, \textit{South Central Review} 13, No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1996), 16.
\end{itemize}
ruining the chances of an Italian empire in Africa, but he was greatly exposed for bribery and fraud. His successor, Giovanni Giolitti, did much to initiate and further industrialization in Italy, but he was moderate and therefore viewed as soft and lacking patriotism; eventually he became very unpopular with the people. Most of the Futurists grew up during this time of disenchantment, where the parliamentary government was viewed as a new interpretation of the old and corrupt system.21

As previously mentioned, Marinetti grew up in Alexandria but received a French classical education. When of age, he went to complete his education in Paris. Although he lived a cosmopolitan existence, he had been imbued with Italian nationalism. His parents had been a part of the generation to see the Risorgimento come to fruition in name, but by the time Marinetti was grown, the parliamentary system had been discredited and the sense of nationalism it represented started to appear passé. He and his generation were well aware that the goals of the Risorgimento had not been accomplished, and that Italy never rose to the level of equals with its “big brothers” in Europe.22

Italian art, poetry, theater, and lifestyle—in addition to its government—remained moribund and antiquated. The young Marinetti understood the marked difference between the culture in Paris and that in Milan, and observed that Italy, “appears most unsophisticated, absolutely

21 Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 3-5.
unaffected by the modern spirit and contemptuous of the turbulent research that animates the soul of our century.\textsuperscript{23} The poet, whose work was still firmly rooted in symbolism and under the tutelage of Gustav Khan, started to formulate his ideas on nationalism that would be so important to the Futurists and their program.

The liberal nationalism of the 19th century had imparted Italy with corrupt politicians and a continued lack of industrialization and might. A new school of intellectual thought was gaining traction that for the “New State” and a “New Man” to emerge, a cultural revolution needed to take place. This revolution would not operate through religion or democracy, but through the conditions of modernity. The historian Emilio Gentile defines these new parameters as “modernist nationalism,” as he explains:

With this term, I am not referring to a specific cultural or political movement, but to a common state of mind, to an attitude toward life and modernity. Modernist nationalism was the product of the myth of a Greater Italy and of the enthusiasm for modernity. These nationalists perceived modernity as an epoch of social and technical transformations dominated by the struggle between nations for the conquest of world supremacy. Modernist nationalism was essentially the expression of a general revolt.\textsuperscript{24}

Instead of immutability, the nation was to offer rapid change and development as its form of service to the people, and it was through this new nationalism and the struggles it would present that Italy would be


\textsuperscript{24} Gentile, \textit{The Struggle for Modernity}, 5-6.
reborn. As George L. Mosse writes, “This was a very Nietzschean nationalism, always in movement, aggressive and hard.”

Modernist nationalism, as opposed to liberal nationalism, most certainly advocated an expansionist policy. The humiliating loss of the Battle of Adua was a residual sting on the Italian national imagination, and the only way to correct it was to successfully fulfill the imperial dream. War was not only necessary for expansion, but an agent of renewal in and of itself. It would fulfill the regeneration left undone, and replace the bourgeois concept of individualism, liberalism and materialism with an organic community working toward the same goals.

It was this nationalism that grew inside of Marinetti in the first decade of the century as he began to make his name known as a poet, playwright, and editor. The goals of modernist nationalism were set, but its methods were not. We will now look at this decade of Marinetti’s career to see how he went from a symbolist poet in Paris, to the leader of Futurist riots through the major cities of Italy.

**Le Roi Bombance, Poupées électriques, and Poesia**

In 1894 Marinetti arrived in Paris at the age of 18 to finish his baccalauréat. Aside from his studies, he spent much of his time enjoying the entertainment of Montmartre and honing his writing skills. Then, to

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appease his father, he finished his law degree in 1899 in Milan. However, his dedication to his studies had been less than enthusiastic, and he spent as much time on his poetry as he had on his law studies. This was the height of Marinetti’s symbolist allegiance, and in 1898 he was awarded the first prize in a national poetry competition organized by Gustave Kahn. With this notoriety and his trademark indefatigable energy, Marinetti had become a prominent fixture of the Parisian literary scene.\(^27\)

It was in 1903 that the young Marinetti was introduced to playwright and author Alfred Jarry, who was discussed at the beginning of this thesis. His work would prove to be a large influence on the poet. The acquaintances maintained a correspondence even after Marinetti left Paris, and Marinetti published some of Jarry’s writings in his magazine *Poesia*. In his memoirs, Marinetti gave not only an account of the author’s trademark demeanor, but also of his admiration for Jarry:

> . . . I had the pleasure of meeting an unquestionable literary genius of the underworld Alfred Jarry in the editorial offices of the *Revue Blanche* which was mainly political-social in content . . . Thirty and thin with an emaciated face strings instead of buttons holding his baggy jacket together . . . a flagrant banner of voluntary poverty Tender affectionate grateful for very little he followed me everywhere and I would insist on introducing him the most threadbare genius in the world into the most elegant salons despite what horrified people were saying I could get away with it because Parisian salons then had a certain passion for ingenious creators and bright minds I can see myself now with Alfred Jarry in the ornate salon of Mme Périer where from three to eleven at night thirty or forty men and

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\(^{27}\) Ibid, 15-16.
women spouting poetry would parade... I toss off my ode on the speed of cars and Jarry his metamorphosis of a bus into an elephant."

Alfred Jarry authored the outrageous play *Ubu Roi*, which was produced in the Théâtre de l’Œuvre in 1896 while Marinetti was commuting between Milan and Paris. Jarry’s play is about an obnoxious and cruel dictator, Père Ubu, whose ridiculousness borders on lunacy, and set in Poland, which, at this point in time was not technically a country. According to Jarry it was “nowhere.” Being set nowhere, the play employed masks for costuming and, according to Jarry, should contain “as little local color and historical accuracy as possible... because they make the action more wretched and repugnant...” The first word that the character *Père Ubu* utters confidently to the crowd is “merdre,” or “shit.” This so offended the delicate sensibilities of the waning *Belle Epoch* that a ruckus ensued. As the negative reviews would confirm, he had succeeded in “throwing dung in the public eye.” Yet it was thrown on a calibrated trajectory as to ensure that what he had created, a spectacle, took people out of their comfort zone and challenged them on what they might have thought would be another night at the theater.30

Marinetti was familiar with this scandal and the sensation it caused. People were divided over whether the work was genius or idiocy.

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29 Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 35.
Although the nihilist theme of Jarry’s play was outside the scope of Marinetti’s budding nationalism, he adhered to its scathing critique of bourgeois mentality and petty bureaucracy. He also saw the advantage of scandal and largely based his farcical play *Le Roi Bombance* on the model of Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*.\(^{31}\) When Marinetti, through connections from his father, had his manifesto on Futurism published on the front page of the popular Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, he understood that the bigger the spectacle, the more publicity for his nascent art movement.\(^{32}\) A movement which, even though it had a manifesto in a major European paper, had no adherents besides its leader. Thus was Marinetti’s confidence and ambition. To ensure the publicity he needed, he framed the printing of the manifest with the premiere of two of his plays: *Poupées électriques* in Turin, and *Le Roi Bombance* in Paris.

He chose the less shocking of the two, *Poupées électriques*, to present in Italy. The play is an attack on romantic preoccupations, and tells the story of an engineer who constructs life-size automatons and expresses a dark view of sexuality. The wife of the engineer has a cliché love affair which ends by her committing suicide.\(^{33}\) The play seems conventional enough, but its themes and delivery were more than what the crowd could stomach; a crowd that had, “for decades . . . been fed a


\(^{32}\) Ibid, 39.

staple diet of bourgeois comedy and well-made plays, i.e. that form of ‘digestive’ theater which Marinetti despised most and had always been opposed to.”34 The crowd showed up that night expecting to take in nice, light, and pleasant entertainment—for Marinetti had cleverly not billed it as anything besides.

The play is not so much interesting for its content, as it was mediocre and has largely been lost to history. What is most interesting for our study is Marinetti’s reaction and baiting of the crowd. During the first act of the play the audience exhibited concerns ranging from criticism to boredom. After the second act the crowd became even more agitated with the play that did not fulfill their expectations. When the act was over, Marinetti faced the crowd and endured a harangue of catcalls and boos from the crowd. However, he was perfectly content with the reception, and in the style that his Futurist serate were soon to adopt, he addressed the crowd thus: “I thank the organizers of this whistling and hissing concert which profoundly honours me.” Marinetti claims that there were 418 newspaper articles about Poupées électriques, but in true Marinetti fashion that number is probably greatly massaged. Whatever the number of reviews, it is certain that there was a substantial disruption, as La scena di prosa recounts: “Marinetti appeared at the proscenium arch and with a few ironic words thanked his audience for the whistling, saying that he felt

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most honoured by this. And the audience went into a rage! Somebody shouted: Let’s go on honoring the audience!” The review from *La ribalta* on January 25, 1909 was quite telling of the situation:

Confronted with such a negative reception, the author approached the footlights and addressed the malcontent spectators . . . Against their vociferous disapproval he launched haughty and contemptuous invectives from the stage, just like a political speaker would do against his adversaries.35

Such a response from a playwright had never been experienced in a major theater in Italy, and his provocation of the audience turned the play from mediocre performance to a major scandal which people were sure to talk about for weeks to come.

Marinetti had the idea to have his play *Le Roi Bombance* produced at none other than the Théâtre de l’Œuvre in Paris, and staged by the same director as *Ubu Roi*, Lugné-Poë.36 He had to pay dearly for it, as Poë was not keen on the play, and was worried about the cost it would incur. When Marinetti’s millionaire father died and he received his inheritance, the cost was no longer an issue.37 In addition to the choice of director and location, Marinetti further linked his play to Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* with the use of masks and attention to oral-anal metaphors.38

Marinetti, like many others looking for the solution to what they viewed as an inadequate government ruling Italy, had originally been

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37 Ibid, 36.
seduced by anarchist, revolutionary-syndicalist, and socialist circles, but
during this time he definitively broke from these modes to be an advocate
of a nationalism that included intervention and invasion. He saw the anti-
war stance of the socialist as weak, and the lack of patriotism of the
anarchist as intolerable. It is with Le Roi Bombance that Marinetti’s
Futurist ideals begin to take their concrete form, while he was still using
traditional theater convention.\textsuperscript{39} The play revealed Marinetti’s feelings
about socialism and the masses, as the main character, the Idiot-Poet,
who, after failing to convince a famished and starving public that human
suffering can only be abated by a government of artist-revolutionaries,
strikes himself dead by a blow to the head with a hammer. This play was
completed by Marinetti in 1904 after observing the Milanese general strike.
He noted the “irreducible popular imbecility and the ferocity of human
nature” in the strikers.\textsuperscript{40} Aside from this critique on the public, it was, to
quote Günter Berghaus from his comprehensive work on Futurist theater,
“an attack on the shambolic world of parliamentary democracy on the one
hand and of socialist politics on the other.” The revue in Le Provençal de
Paris summarizes the action succinctly, “The symbolism is clear: Marinetti
wanted to show the futility of revolutions, failure of parliamentarianism,
which leads to the return of tyranny.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, 33-35.
\textsuperscript{40} Poggi, Inventing Futurism, 37.
\textsuperscript{41} Burghaus, Italian Futurist Theater, 37.
Thanks in part to the thunderous guttural sound effects of a priest (the church) in the second act, pandemonium ensued. On opening night Marinetti wished to address the crowd as he had in Turin, but Poë informed him that it was against the law in France. There was no need for a speech from the playwright, as the play was successful in causing a scene on its own. Much of what Marinetti set out to do with Le Roi Bombance was accomplished: all of the reviews related the play and playwright with the new art movement of Futurism; the majority of reviews went to varying effort to tie Marinetti’s play with its predecessor Ubu Roi in both content and spectacle, and the crowd had been provoked and enraged. Victor Hugo’s riot of Hernani was invoked, and interestingly enough, military jargon entered the reviews, referring to the riots as “battles” and compared the situation to the “heroic days of Ubu Roi.” Marinetti was quite pleased with the stir he had caused, and in L’Intransigeant he wrote:

Several things have been revealed to me in one week. First of all, the moving sight of a Parisian audience amused or revolted—one never knows which—to the point of delirium. I have noticed differences from Italian audiences, because I was—yes, by God, I was!—whistled, hissed, booed at in Italy, at the Teatre Alfieri in Turin, where one of my pieces was performed ‘in a meeting of locomotives in rage’, as one Italian critic amusingly put it. It was more blazing and less witty. Paris is above all itself when it jeers.

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42 Tisdall and Bozolla, Futurism, 90-91.
43 Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theater, 38-39.
From the year of 1909 on Marinetti was on a one-track path. His intellectual and artistic gestation period was over—one informed by Le Bon, Sorel, Nietzsche and Bergson to name a few.\textsuperscript{44}

With this he also had to bid adieu to his symbolist magazine \textit{Poesia}. The magazine marked the beginning of Marinetti’s “cultural crusade” in Italy. As a man of means he was able to fund the magazine of poetry aimed at bringing the literary life of Paris to his home country. He published works by Paul Fort, Yeats, Jarry, Gustave Kahn, and Georges Duhamel, in addition to Italian poets such as Paolo Buzzi, Corrado Govoni, Armando Mazza and Enrico Cavacchioli—many who would become Futurist poets. As Tisdall and Bozzolla write, “\textit{Poesia} served the double function of offering a much needed platform to the young Italian poets, for whom Marinetti had an infallible nose, and educating its public on internal developments.”\textsuperscript{45} He would later call the initiation of the magazine in 1905 the “birth of Furutism,” but the Futurist dogma had outgrown the publication. Per the successes of early 1909 Marinetti had bigger projects in mind, as he was now the head of a movement, and the magazine no longer offered him the platform he needed to prosthelytize Italy with his Futurist ideas and cultural revolution. As Marinetti writes in \textit{Futurism’s First Battles}:

\begin{quote}
On October 11, 1908, having worked for six years at my international journal \textit{Poesia}, attempting to free Italian lyric genius
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} Berghaus, \textit{Futurism and Politics}, 22-27.

\textsuperscript{45} Tisdall and Bozzolla, \textit{Futurism}, 91.
from its traditional, commercial shackles that threatened to kill it off, I suddenly sensed that articles, poems, and polemic were no longer enough. The approach had to be totally different; we had to go out into the streets, lay siege to the theaters, and introduce the fist into the struggle for art.\textsuperscript{46}

In an opportunistic movement of conviction, Marinetti shunned his symbolist upbringing, and adopted the mantra of “artificial optimism” that was woven into enthusiasm for modernity, speed, and industrialization. He also recognized the value of the riot in debasing the normative societal structure he wished to thoroughly change. Depicting Bourgeois society caught up in violent action towards one another was a repeated theme by the painter Boccioni. The Futurists found the impressionability of the public contemptible, but saw beauty in the violence of an excitable mob.\textsuperscript{47}

The next step for Marinetti and his fledgling movement was the Futurist serata.

\textbf{The Serate and Intervention: Battles and Boos}

It was with the invention of the serata Futurista, or Futurist evening, that the artists themselves sought to foment this chaos. Marinetti wanted to reach the largest possible audience on all levels of society.\textsuperscript{48}

Considering Italy had a high illiteracy rate and, by his calculations, ninety percent of Italians went to the theater whereas only ten percent read

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{46} Marinetti, \textit{Critical Writings}, 151. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Poggi, \textit{Inventing Futurism}, 39-47. \\
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 12. 
\end{flushright}
print, the explicit interjection of the Futurist program into theater seemed an obvious next step. Le Roi Bombance and Poupées électriques utilized shock tactics to jar the audience, but these plays still adhered to traditional plot and character development. In contrast the serata rejected these conventions and sought to deconstruct normalcy and reinvent the concept of theater.

With the publication of the The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism Marinetti’s terms of operation were solidified. It is a dramatic document that begins with Marinetti crashing his sports car in a ditch to avoid hitting a pair of cyclists. In the ditch he is baptized and renewed by the sludge, crying, “O mother of a ditch, brimful with muddy water! . . . How I relished your strength-giving sludge that reminded me so much of the saintly black breast of my Sudanese nurse . . .” After the car is revived, thanks to the owner’s caress, they continue “darting along.” The rest of the manifesto is then dedicated to “all men on Earth who are truly alive.”

It continues with eleven points which outlines the Futurist program. Several are odes to speed and new forms of transportation. There are a few of special interest to our study:

7. There is no longer any beauty except the struggle. Any work of art that lacks a sense of aggression can never be a masterpiece. Poetry must be thought of as a violent assault upon the forces of

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49 Marinetti, Critical Writings, 149.
51 Ibid, 117-120.
the unknown with the intention of making them prostrate themselves at the feet of mankind.

9. We wish to glorify war—the sole cleanser of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the libertarian, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.

11. We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, by pleasure, or by rebellion; . . .

Here we have the basic components for Marinetti’s new form of theater. It was aggressive, violently patriotic, unsentimental, and aware of the public.

The rest of the manifesto is a tirade against museums as graveyards that extinguish the creativity of the people. It was published first in Italy and France in February of 1909, then subsequently excerpts were published in dozens of newspapers and magazines. The manifesto was translated into English, German, Spanish, Russian, and Czech, and a four page leaflet was distributed in both Europe and the Americas. Marinetti had launched a proper movement, one whose aim “was not just to bring about an aesthetic revolution, but to effect a total overhaul of society.”

The serate were the culmination of the events and ideology of the movement thus far.

Futurist evenings were conducted not just in the Futurist home base of Milan, but also toured around Italy. The first of these occurred in the northern town of Trieste, an apt starting point as its Austrian occupation

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52 Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 11-17.
made for a politically charged environment. Fitting the argument propagated by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* that continuity of language lies at the core of nationalist sentiment, Trieste was one of several Italian-speaking areas that patriotic nationalists sought to bring into the unified Italy and out of the control of Austria-Hungary. Marinetti sought to exploit the irredentist sentiment that had been growing within Italy alongside anti-Austrian feelings. In a speech in 1909 Marinetti referred to the location as, “Trieste, Our Beautiful Powder-Magazine”

The Futurist leader had already caused a stir in the town in 1908 when the mother of Guglielmo Oberdan passed away. Oberdan was considered an irredentist martyr for his attempted assassination of the Austrian Emperor in 1882. He was, of course, swiftly executed by the Austrians. The death of his mother was cause for memorial, and Marinetti spoke at the Gymnastic Society and exhorted a forceful irredentist and anti-Austrian speech, which resulted in fights and Marinetti’s arrest. The Futurists sought to make such a scene at their *serata*.

In contrast to his *Poupées électriques* performance in Turin the previous year, the performance for Trieste on January 10, 1910 was widely advertised as a literary soirée under the direction of the new Futurist school. Marinetti visited the journalists of the city himself, sent out

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55 Tisdall and Bozzolla, *Futurism*, 92.
invites to local élites, and gathered supporters to attend the event. The theater was packed for the performance, with approximately 2,000 people in attendance. Marinetti set the tone for the evening by proclaiming:

Friends, maybe enemies! I think it is necessary to introduce our declamation of Futurist poems with a brief explanation. First of all: What does Futurism mean? To put it simply: Futurism means hatred of the past. Our aim, in fact, is to fight with all our energy against the cult of the past and to destroy it.

However, after what could be the called the “first act” of accosting the crowd with Futurist ideas, the crowd still applauded politely—not exactly the response for which the Futurist leader was striving. The declamation of the Futurist Manifesto got a few audience members riled, but they were counteracted by enthusiastic supporters. The rest of the night continued in the same way, and the reviews reflect as much. Although they had provoked some response, Marinetti was not satisfied. They continued “performing” in the streets of Trieste that night, talking to students and looking for trouble with Austrian soldiers. Upon their departure the next morning, “a hundred new adherents to Futurism accompanied them to the railway station with shouts of Viva l’Italia! Viva il Futurismo.  

Marinetti wrote a follow up manifesto for this serata as he does for the events in Milan, Florence and Venice. They are all set in terms of a military struggle of great purpose and absolute resolutions for their cause. In The Battles of Trieste (1910), Marinetti inveighs the crowd for their

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60 Berghaus, Futurist Theater, 86-91.
complacency and lack of patriotism, while suggesting that war is the only thing radical enough to shake the people out of this stupor. He writes,

We revere patriotism and militarism, our song is war, sole cleanser of the world, proud flame of enthusiasm and generosity, noble baptism of heroism, without which peoples would stagnate in self-centered torpor, in their economic ambitions, in their poverty of mind and will. . . therefore we seek pleasure only in our great Futurist ideal, and of a hostile public we ask nothing more than to be booed!  

However, Marinetti and company sought to provoke the crowd for reasons other than publicity. The purpose of these “battles” and “attacks” was to remake his audience into active participants not only for the theatrical event, but in the larger context of the nationalist cause. Italians had yet to be regenerated, and this regeneration would happen not only through war, but through art as well. The changes that modernity wrought on society needed a counterbalance, and that could be provided via a revolutionary art.  

In the Futurist program, art was no longer confined to the museum or to conventions, but could and would act as a literal agent of renewal in everyday life. This sentiment is expressed visually in Boccioni’s painting *Street Enters House* (1911), where the viewer is swallowed by the composition which happens simultaneously and everywhere. There is no stability to be found; the viewer must simply adjust to the cacophony of the

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62 Bowler, “Politics as Art,” 771-774.  
63 Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*, 166.
modern city. The Serate aimed to break down this wall between the audience and the stage.

The second Futurist evening happened a month later in Milan at the Teatro Lirico. It touted the same party line of irredentionism and anti-Austrian declamations, but Marinetti knew it would have to go a step further in Milan, which was a modern metropolis. The Trieste incident garnered a flurry of press which certainly helped to ensure a full theater. In addition to their normal press junket, they released thousands of flyers announcing the impending serata from their posh hotel window onto the busy street Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, and repeated this action from the top of the cathedral to the square below.

Some claim there were 2,000 spectators in attendance, others 4,000, but all accounts agree that it was a packed house that night in February. The public had a sense of how the night would go, and were heckling the Futurists from the start. As Mazza was declaiming the Foundations and Manifesto of Futurism, the interaction went as such:

Mazza: ‘We stand on the furthest promontory of past centuries . . .’
Spectator: ‘Take care or you might fall off!’

Mazza: ‘We want to liberate this country from its smelly gangrene of professors . . .’
Spectator: ‘Did they fail you in the exam?’

Mazza: ‘Upright we stand on the summit of the world and hurl our challenge to the stars . . .’
Spectator: ‘Let’s see if they take it up!’

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64 Berghaus, Italian Futurist Theater, 91-92.
65 Adamson, Embattled Avant-Gardes, 93.
The people of Milan, more so than the provincial people of Trieste, were familiar with the antics of the Futurists and had retaliation ready. But what the audience dished out was returned to them in kind by the artists on stage. However, the crowd was not prepared for the *Ode to General Vittorio Asinari di Bernezzo*. The General had made some anti-Austrian and irredentist speeches to his soldiers, and as a result was forced into early retirement. The crowd was clearly uncomfortable from the start of the poem. The last lines were the clincher, “Let’s go and conquer other irredentist parts for the fatherland. Maybe, in spite of this pedantic decree, we shall soon bring back the tattered Austrian colours to the Capitol.”

With this the crowd erupted, and Marinetti was arrested on stage. When the police tried to escort the Futurists out there was another wild scuffle, with pro-Austrians and anarchists trying to attack the artists, and Futurist sympathizers attempting to protect them. The incident prompted Austrian and German consuls to deliver formal protests to the authorities the very next day.  

In the manifesto *Futurism’s First Battles*, Marinetti writes about this incident. He recalls:

> The ode, which was full of insults against the cowardice of the government and the monarchy, raised a tremendous uproar. I then addressed myself to the public in the stalls—the conservatives, the priests, and the out-and-out pacifists—and then to those up in the gallery, where the mass of workers from the Labor Exchange were

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67 Tisdall and Bozzolla, *Futurism*, 92.
roaring like the menacing waters of a sluice . . . my cry . . .
unleashed a battle throughout the whole building, which
immediately divided into two camps.

In the same manifesto he goes on to describe following *serate* in much the
same way, with battle lines clearly drawn. In Turin he claims that the
“great hall became a veritable battlefield: punches and beatings with
sticks; countless brawls and scuffles in the stalls . . .” The happenings in
Naples, Venice, and Padua were described as Futurist successes in
debasing and enraging the crowd. “Everywhere they split the audience
into two camps, the free and the salves, the living and the dying, the
builders of the future and the stuffers of corpses.” Aside from these
theatrical brawls, Marinetti was put on an obscenity trial in 1910 for his
misogynistic African odyssey *Mafarka the Futurist*. He delighted in these
trials and relished their publicity value.69

**The Demise of the Serata**

The Futurist evenings continued on this way, and in the 1911
season Marinetti changed the formula slightly to include the exhibit of new
Futurist visual works, discussions on painting, and the introduction of
Futurist music. However, the aim was still the same. It was to provoke
the members of the audience—bourgeoisie, students, anarchists, and
academics—to action, and national aims were always the impetus.

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69 Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, ix.
Alongside the theatrical manifestos, Marinetti had been publishing a series of writings outlining the Futurist political program which further explained their advocaton of irredentism, hatred of the Triple Alliance, support of war, and scorn for women. The Futurist leader had claimed that these sentiments needed to go beyond the page, and the theatrical fiascoes were the manifestation of that urge.70

A particularly boisterous serata happened in Florence in 1913 at the Teatro Verdi. The literary group Lacerba were allies with the Futurists and showed their support on stage. From the time the curtain went up the artists and writers were bombarded with vegetation, and the artists had a hard time controlling the audience. At one point Marinetti was hit in the face with a potato, to which Carrà shouted, “Throw an idea instead of potatoes, you fools.” A short while later when Marinetti was declaiming a poem that alluded to a gunshot to the head, a member of the audience was brazen enough to offer the Futurist leader a revolver. To this Marinetti retorted, “If I need a ball of lead, you deserve a ball of shit!”71

In the manifesto The Battle of Florence, Marinetti once again hails the commotion as a great success. It was printed in Lacerba just a few days after the happening, and offers the Italian people a lesson:

The word “Italy” must prevail over the word “freedom.” The word “freedom,” which had an absolute value of violence and regeneration on the lips of Garibaldi and Mazzini, has become idiotic, worn-out word in the mouths of the anti-Libyans . . . In

70 Marinetti, Critical Writings, 47-77.
71 Tisdall and Bozzolla, Futurism, 92.
contrast, the word “Italy” today attains its deepest radiance, its maximum, most dynamic and combative importance.\footnote{Marinetti, \textit{Critical Writings}, 176-177.}

Marinetti sought, as always, to stir the crowd’s patriotism, and the Futurists’ excitement about the Libyan war gave them new energy.\footnote{Many adherents to the Futurist movement joined war efforts, as Marinetti urges in the \textit{Second Futurist Political Manifesto}, “Futurist poets, painters, sculptors and musicians of Italy! While ever the war lasts, leave aside your verses, your brushes, . . . The blood-red vocation of our genius has begun! The only things we can admire today are the immense symphonies of shrapnel and the bizarre sculptures.” See Marinetti, \textit{Critical Writings}, 74.} They wanted to rouse the masses as the figures of Garibaldi and Mazzini had; but without the comforting image of the past on his side it was a difficult task. Marinetti meant to remake their consciousness and activate their innate Italian genius through art and provocation, but to what ends were Marinetti and his friends being successful? In \textit{The Battle of Florence}, the Marinetti of the publicity machine wrote of a great deed, but in a letter to Papini in 1913 he wrote, “I’ve heard from Boccioni that Gonnelli has the intention of organizing another serata in Florence . . . I preserve an absolutely repugnant memory of the last serata, which was greatly and damaging from all points of view. It makes me sick to think of it.” In a different letter he imparts that he would be willing to declaim and lecture in a:

Private hall, where one has a chance to be listened to. But certainly no Futurist serata! The one in Florence has been sufficiently damaging . . . Explain that at present the Futurist movement has no need for great clamor, but rather for entering into direct communication with the few truly Futurist spirits that a city can muster!\footnote{Berghaus, \textit{Italian Futurist Theater}, 126-127.}
Even for all of the heroics of the manifesto, you hear this sentiment’s echo there too, “We shall ask those who support us to make their presence felt by the crowd, violently if needs be, so that you listen to us, and boo us only after you hear what we have to say.” Marinetti’s message of regeneration through war and modernity was being drown out by the noise.

Although the *serata* had been conceived of as an important tool in the regeneration of the Italian people, and it was largely these events that put the group in the public consciousness not just in Italy but also in Europe, it had been commandeered by those in the audience who were too obtuse, by Futurist standards, to internalize the ideals. Worse yet, the audience, largely the bourgeoisie whom the Futurists despised, were now calling the shots at the *serate*. The events had been initiated to introduce the fist into the artistic battle, had become too formulaic and the public no longer responded to a stimulus (i.e. Ode to General Bernezzo) but to the context of the Futurist evening. It had become obvious that “the rationale that had informed the first serate no longer applied when too many spectators had simply switched off their brains.” The Futurists would

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75 Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 175.
77 Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater*, 142-144.
have to utilize new means to regenerate Italians and mold them into the artists’ vision of a glorious modern nation.

**Conclusion: Failed fireworks and rejuvenation**

We have seen from the ending of chapter 2 and chapter 3 that both of these groups—the revered Ballets Russes and the conspicuous Futurists—had their programs curtailed by the public. *The Rite* sought out new symphonic forms and expressions while shunning a Christian, written history, and sought to access the roots of humanity. The Futurists shunned not just the immediate past but all past, and focused their hopes for the Italian nation in the power of the irrational machine in conjunction with the genius artist. Liberal nationalism had failed, and a nationalism lacking altruism and humility had filled its space. Whereas the Ballets Russes sought to rejuvenate Europe in a panhuman experience, the Futurist guarded their prize for Italy alone.

The two groups, for all of their similarities in their approach to art and the public, were radically different. After the experiments of Nijinsky that thrust the Ballets Russes into modernism, then their brief backtrack to Fokine, the Russian group found themselves in the middle of a war and searching for a new artistic direction. Diaghilev knew of Marinetti and the Futurists, but it was not until 1915 that he decided to attempt to “form an
alliance with Marinetti,” for, as he said in 1917 even after this failed alliance, “we can’t be less modern than Marinetti.” The “Grand Futurist Concert of Noises” had been held in London at the same time as the Ballets Russes’ 1914 June season, and it was most likely that Stravinsky heard of Russolo’s noise intoners at this time.

It was during this year that the key figures of the Ballets Russes retreated to Rome to regroup with their new choreographer, Léonide Massine. Stravinsky was part of this group in Rome, and he began to acquaint himself with the Futurist composers who were working in outrageous new forms of notation and sound. The noise intoners, an invention of Russolo, were the mainstay of Futurist music, and they recreated everyday sounds with the crank of a lever. Russolo was an amateur musician but extremely creative and would make liberal use of these contraptions in his music, whereas the Futurist composer Balilla Pratella had received formal musical training, and would incorporate the use of the intoners into his scores. There was a meeting between the Russians and the Italians in 1915 to discuss Futurist music and these new instruments. In attendance were Marinetti, Russolo, Pratella, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Diaghilev, Massine and a few others. Forty years later, in typical Stravinsky revisionism, the composer relayed that he had

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79 Ibid, 303.
80 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 77.
“pretended to be enthusiastic,” but contemporary sources show him as having a genuine interest at the time. Francesco Canguillo wrote of the encounter:

. . . the major attraction was Luigi Russolo and his twenty intonarumori. Stravinsky wanted to have an exact idea of these bizarre new instruments and, possibly, insert two or three in the already diabolic scores of his ballets. Diaghilev, however, wanted to present all twenty at Paris in a clamorous concert. He had also come to hear the compositions of Pratella . . . These gentlemen remained enchanted and called the new instruments the most original orchestral discovery.\(^{82}\)

Unfortunately, no collaboration of this sort ever took place.

Of all the joint projects imagined by Diaghilev and Marinetti, only one ever made it to the stage. It was Balla’s stage set for Stravinsky’s Fireworks, which “sought to translate Stravinsky’s music into the abstract spatial language of the stage.”\(^{83}\) Balla filled the stage with crystalline forms of cones and spirals made of wood and all sorts or colored material (Fig. 16). These shapes were lit from the inside and were supposed to be accompanied by a highly technical light show, with the premier in Italy functioning as practice for its incorporation into the Ballets Russes 1917 season in Paris. Unfortunately for Balla, on opening night there was a dispute between the theater’s technicians and electricians, which resulted in the light show not being produced. The curtain went up, and besides Stravinsky’s music, nothing happened. When this was realized, Balla


\(^{83}\) Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater*, 255-256.
rushed to man the switches himself, but the work could not be salvaged. The next night went slightly better, but the audience was not impressed enough to convince Diaghilev. The Futurist Fortunato Depero had also been hard at work on the set and costumes for the ballet *Le Chant du Rossignol* which was also supposed to see a Paris performance. However, after the *Fireworks* fiasco, Diaghilev withdrew his lot from the risky Futurists and employed an all-French line up of artists for the 1917 production of *Parade*.

The retraction of Diaghilev seems a bit cruel and snobbish, and to an extent it was, but as I expressed in chapter one, that Diaghilev, like Marinetti, was trying to form answers for the crisis of modernity and invent new languages for an unprecedented time—but he was also a businessman with a hefty price tag to his enterprise. With the onset of World War I, the nationalism and neonationalism on which the Ballets Russes had relied as its intellectual home base was eroding, and the impresario needed something to fill its absence. As Garafola writes of this situation, “Diaghilev, ever the pragmatist, shied from the group’s confrontational tactics, but the idea that inherited categories could be bent, reshaped, combined with others, and injected with new material was one he found highly congenial.” He simply picked and chose from the Futurist what aesthetics he wanted to keep, those that could be appealing

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84 Ibid, 257-259.
85 Ibid 300-303.
86 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 81.
to a larger consumer base, and left the rest for the more radical Marinetti and company. Both of the impresarios had concerns about gaining notoriety from the public, but the Futurist leader did not have the same boundaries as Diaghilev. Marinetti had only an ideological battle to wage with the public, and he facilitated that battle by inciting theater riots alongside other avenues such as his many manifestoes. He did not have to worry very much, if at all, about the finances of the Futurist movement. Diaghilev had both ideology and finances with which to wrestle.

To be sure, both Marinetti and Diaghilev had an element of opportunism about them, but that does not mean they were without conviction. The early career of both men, from their genesis to the Great War, was preoccupied with their country of origin. Not only were they interested in the current state of their nation, but also how it was perceived by the world, and how its position could be improved through a pedagogical campaign of art ideas that disseminated from Western Europe and especially Paris. Diaghilev’s *World of Art* publication was designed to import French symbolism to Russia and to challenge the Populist and utilitarian view that had been held in Russia for much of the 19th century, and in some respects they were successful in opening up the conversation and inspiring a new generation of artists. Marinetti’s journal *Poesia* had much the same goals. The Futurist leader wanted to introduce
new and vibrant poetry to the young writers and artists of Italy, also in the form of symbolism, and raise the caliber of art being made in the country.

The Ballets Russes brought their Russianness and ideas of Russia to Paris, as outlined in chapter 2. Their early program focused not only on well-known Russian works and Russian storylines, but capitalized on the perception of their ethnicity as exotic. They had been imbued with the neonationalism of the previous century, and sought to wed it with the new artistic forms that they were creating. The apex of this marriage was indeed Stravinsky and Nijinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, which left the audience stunned, emotionally moved, angry—or a combination of the three. Diaghilev and his artists felt it was their duty to the public to awaken their sleepy bourgeois mentality through their nationality, primitivism, experimentation, and sexuality.

However, the Futurists were not initially interested in the importation of Italian art, but rather in the remaking of their own country. In chapter 3 the lowly state of Italy was discussed, not just in their industrial lethargy but also their diminished place as a people in the European imagination. Marinetti took up the cause of regeneration of the Italian people and sought to achieve it through a radical art program that was based on confrontation, technology, the machine, and war. Once the Futurist movement was established they would preach their love of modernity and irredentism, and their hatred of bourgeois mentality and Austrian rule.
From this synopsis it is clear that both groups, through their modernist and avant garde programs, sought to change not only artistic aesthetic, but also the state of their country of origin. They produced publications to educate the public, and utilized nationalism in their theatrical programs as a conduit with which to reach the audience and procure an emotional or psychological effect. With the onset of World War I, the Ballets Russes would lose many aspects of the nationalism found in their earlier program. However, the Futurists would remain lovers of war and the machine until their strained alliance with the fascist regime.
Bibliography:


Figure 1. Alfred Jarry, photograph attributed to Nadar, probably from late 1894.

Figure 2. Alfred Jarry, Veritable portrait of Monsieur Ubu, 1896.
Figure 3. Léon Bakst, World of Art symbol designed for the 1898-1899 volume of Mir iskusstva.

Figure 4. Léon Bakst: Portrait of Diaghilev and his Nanny (1906).
Figure 5. Vaslav Nijinsky as the Golden Slave in *Schéhérazade*.

Figure 6. Tamara Karsavina and Michel Fokine in *The Firebird*, 1910.
Figure 7. Jean Cocteau, Stravinsky playing Le Sacre du Printemps, 1913.

Figure 8. Six women dances in Le Sacre du Printemps, 1913.
Figure 9. Martini, Cover of 'Poesia' 1909.
Figure 10. Umberto Boccioni, *The Riot*, oil on canvas, 1911.

Figure 11. F. T. Marinetti in his 4 cylinder Fiat, 1908.
Figure 12. Umberto Boccioni, *The Street Enters the House*, oil on canvas, 1911.
Figure 13. Futurist serata in Milan, 1910.

Figure 14. Giovanni Manca, Serata at the Teatro Chiarella, Turin.
Figure 15. 'Leaving the theater with a broken skull, either because of the music, or because of the brawls.' Caricature of the *serata* in Milan, 1914.

Figure 16. Balla, set for Stravinsky's *Fireworks* (reconstruction), 1917.