

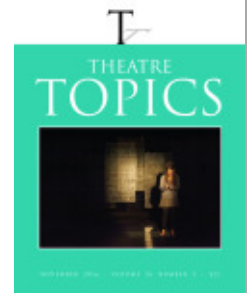


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Aesthetic

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Theatre Topics, Volume 26, Number 3, November 2016, pp. 307-319 (Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2016.0055>

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Futurismo: Linking Past and Present through an Artistic Aesthetic

David J. Popalisky and Jeffrey Bracco

“Ah Futurismo” shouts the recorded voice of F. T. Marinetti as the performers’ stark, uplifted gestures arrest the descending light at the conclusion of *Futurismo*, a dance theatre production at Santa Clara University collaboratively created in 2013 by theatre artist Jeffrey Bracco and choreographer David Popalisky. This collaboration grew out of a mutual interest in the ideas, strategies, and values articulated in the pre–World War I foundational Futurist manifestos by F. T. Marinetti and how he and his collaborators implemented them through performance. Recognizing that the early Italian Futurists’ embrace of speed through glorification of machines resonates with our present reliance upon technological innovation, we chose to use performance to critically investigate our relationship with speed and technology in the twenty-first century. This essay considers the implications for undergraduate students and ourselves as teaching artists of the creative choices employed in *Futurismo*. Our process, with its strengths and challenges, may prove useful for other artist-educators working in academic settings.

Futurismo premiered in *Images*, the Department of Theatre and Dance’s annual dance concert that develops students’ performance skills through a diversity of choreographic approaches.¹ Santa Clara University’s student population represents a cross section of young adults who live in the heart of Silicon Valley, a region emblematic of the speed and technology demanded by our contemporary consumer culture. The cast of *Futurismo* consisted of the two faculty creators and nine student actor-dancers, who participated as part of their undergraduate training. With no prior knowledge of Futurism, these student performers were asked to engage with performance history through unfamiliar ideas and methods, drawn from early Italian Futurist avant-garde techniques such as nonlinear structure, alogical language and events, and clipped, disconnected dance phrases, all emblematic of the performance strategies called for by Marinetti.

By utilizing these techniques we intended to energize and disturb both our creative process and the performers’ normal working methods—allowing, even cultivating confusion among them, as well as our audience. Kyle Gillette, in his article “Upholstered Realism and ‘The Great Futurist Railroad,’” discusses how the Futurists regularly disturbed performance expectations in order to disrupt accepted cultural values. He notes that “[f]or Futurism, the theatrical ‘train wreck’ provided a way to explore modernity’s destructions through a performance paradigm that would celebrate disruption, improvisation and annihilation” (91). Similarly, *Futurismo* allowed for performance as disruption while evoking Marinetti’s central tenant of “art as action,”² achieved through Futurist *serate*—evenings featuring a pastiche of disparate performance elements, as discussed in Günter Berghaus’s “Futurist *Serate* and Gallery Performances.” In this analysis we address the relevance of creating an original performance work that incorporates Futurist concepts and strategies in order to challenge undergraduate actors and dancers as performing artists, while also commenting on contemporary culture.

What follows is a rationale for why the early avant-garde period of Futurism prior to World War I was most relevant to *Futurismo*’s creation and thematic development. Next, we discuss how early Italian Futurist strategies and specific historical artifacts influenced the conceptualization of

Futurismo. We then review specific artistic choices and key performance highlights that illuminate our themes. We conclude with reflections on the creation of *Futurismo* within a zeitgeist of technology and speed, as relevant today as for Marinetti and company, and further articulate how this process energized our students and, just as significantly, ourselves.

While we acknowledge the historical derailing of Italian Futurist artistic ambitions toward an alignment with fascism between the world wars, this dubious historical legacy has, until recently, largely overshadowed the energy and excitement generated by the movement prior to World War I.³ Futurism's dynamic contributions during this prewar period significantly influenced the questioning of nineteenth-century European, Old World values, which stood in contrast to the emergence of mass production and a rising commodity culture. Walter Adamson's "How Avant-Gardes End—and Begin: Italian Futurism in Historical Perspective" offers a rationale for focusing on this early period of Italian Futurism: "Indeed there are important critics and historians of Futurism who see its period of genuine creativity and social impact as having ended in 1916" (856). In his discussion on the life cycle of avant-garde movements, Adamson analyzes the trajectory of Italian Futurism and delineates the early Futurist period (1909–16) according to the notion of myth as articulated by Georges Sorel's "Reflections on Violence." Commenting on the impulses of those who initiate avant-garde movements, Adamson writes that "[m]yths, for Sorel, lead people who have made them their own into action, action that is likely to be truly revolutionary. . . . Marinetti was not satisfied merely to articulate a myth; he also needed to perform it in a context in which the masses might make it their own" (860–61). He later discusses 1916 as a shift from Futurism's mythic projections to the utopian period, when Marinetti formed the Futurist political party and the journal *L'Italia futurista* as new vehicles to propagate change, which were less focused on art-making.

We propose that art-making embodies myths relevant to a particular time by making creative choices that shape the communication of those myths. Through grappling with prevailing myths about speed and technology—assumed positive characteristics of our time—*Futurismo* disrupted our creative process within our university microcosm during the second decade of the twenty-first century, reflecting Futurism's mythic period prior to 1916.

In contrast to Futurist ideology, *Futurismo* communicates that uncritically embracing speed and technology is potentially hazardous. To explore this premise, our contemporary creation addressed the following themes as relevant to both time periods:

- The attraction to technology packaged in gleaming exteriors: for the Futurists, mechanical power; for today, electrical computing power.
- The quality of love, intimacy, and relationships in the twenty-first century expressed through a tension between individual physical experience and communal experience facilitated through technology.
- The loss of individual privacy as a consequence of technological groupthink,⁴ reflective of the Futurists' pivot toward fascism.
- The relevance of the artist's role in society as a reflective and ultimately critical voice.

By linking the Futurist artistic agenda with the present, undergraduate students had to wrestle with these themes that reflect twenty-first-century challenges and opportunities.

The Conception, Creation, and Performance of *Futurismo*

Futurismo drew on Marinetti's writings from the inception of Futurism in 1909 in order to identify the key ideas, strategies, and delivery mechanisms that resonated with the present. His movement was not content with aesthetics only, but strived to achieve a crucial fusion between art and life. In the 2014 Guggenheim exhibit *Reconstructing the Universe*, curator Vivien Greene summarizes how Marinetti's movement captured the spirit of its age and made this vital leap: "Inspired

by the markers of modernity—the industrial city, the machine, speed, flight—its adherents celebrated disruption, seeking to revitalize what they saw as a static, decaying culture” (21). The aesthetics of early Futurism that we adopted as part of our own disruptive creative process, such as speed and brevity of action, a physical, machine-like dynamism, and a pastiche of non-sequitur story elements, are further echoed in Greene’s comments: “They experimented with the fragmentation of form, the collapsing of time and space, the depiction of dynamic movement, and dizzying perspectives” (ibid.). Futurism was not only inspired by modernity, it helped define it “by formulating new aesthetic languages fit for the modern age,” as Claudia Salaris confirms in “The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde” (22). In fact, Marinetti was uncannily prescient of the twenty-first century by trumpeting the potent values of speed and technology in his “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism.” He advocates not just a rejection, but a destruction of all things passé—the stolid and staid society he saw around him: “Why should we look back over our shoulders if we wish to smash down the mysterious doors of the Impossible?” Marinetti continues: “We believe that this wonderful world has been further enriched by a new beauty—the beauty of speed,” a “beauty” offered as a challenge and provocation to the masses to disturb the status quo of quotidian life (2006a, 16). *Futurismo* intentionally investigated the implications of such an unreflective acceptance of speed and technology in contemporary society.

Not unlike the contagion of today’s social media, Marinetti’s Futurism spread rapidly across Europe and the world prior to World War I. Key artistic collaborators included painters Umberto Boccioni⁵ and Giacomo Balla, and composer Luigi Russolo, as well as female Futurist and dancer Valentine de Saint-Point,⁶ several of whom were represented by their creative works inserted into *Futurismo*. With his followers Marinetti toured Italy and other countries, renting theatres to present Futurist *serate*, fusing performance, speech-making, and audience provocation in order to reach the broader public he knew attended theatre. “The *serate* fused art and life in a compact union and became Futurism’s most original contribution to the twentieth-century avant-garde” and served as Marinetti’s principal means to disseminate Futurist propaganda (Berghaus 2014, 90).

Drawing on elements of Futurist *serate*, *Futurismo* commented on the ubiquity of technology in the early twenty-first century, just as the Futurists’ glorification of speed was influenced by early twentieth-century technological advancements in communication, transportation, and media. Marinetti marveled at new possibilities and mused about their effects on humanity. In his 1913 manifesto “Destruction of Syntax,” he writes that

Futurism is based on the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries made by science. Anyone who today uses the telegraph, the telephone, and the phonograph, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the airship, the airplane, the cinema, the great daily newspaper (which synthesizes the daily events of the whole world), fails to recognize that these different forms of communication, of transport and information have a far-reaching effect on their psyche. (2006b, 120)

Marinetti’s comments still resonate today when one considers the contemporary manifestations of the computer age, such as the internet, the smartphone, and social media, as well as current scientific inquiry about how the use of these communication mediums and devices affect the brain.

The smartphone, perhaps the most pervasive example of current technology, functions as more than a convenient means for communication by virtually connecting people through text, sound, image, and video. Contemporary students’ unconscious clutching of their smartphones has achieved Marinetti’s vision of “additional organs,” as articulated by Patrizia Veroli in the journal *Avant Garde Critical Studies*. She argues that dancer Loïe Fuller’s fusion of technological lighting effects with prosthetic costume constructions to enlarge the dancing body exemplified Marinetti’s imagined future. Veroli writes that “[a]s a grand visionary, he imagined the realization of a perfect synchronization between human beings and machines, in which the latter would become additional organs whose extraneousness would be annulled by human will power” (139). Furthermore,

Hal Foster, in “Prosthetic Gods,” says of Marinetti’s goals for technology: “Rather than master the machine, he admonishes the worker to be ‘educated’ by it, for its mastery is the only one that now exists. And rather than resist the machine as a force of fragmentation and reification, he urges that it be embraced as the very figure of totality and vitality” (15). The mass-marketing campaigns of Apple and other tech companies clearly promote the ability to achieve “totality and vitality,” leading to the mass consumption of smartphones and their facile integration into our daily lives. Documentary director Alex Gibney reflects in his 2015 film *Steve Jobs: Man in the Machine*: “The genius of Jobs was that . . . he made an exciting and seductive pitch, that this machine wouldn’t just be an extension of you. It would be you” (qtd. in D’Souza).

In contrast, noted dance educator Peggy Schwartz offered an alternative and cautionary perspective in 1993 when cell phones, laptops, and the internet first emerged as prominent technologies. By connecting dance education and the integration of technology with Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences of learning theory,⁷ Schwartz reinforces the relevance of studying the performing arts in academia: “If we stay committed to the actual physical reality of bodily experience while embracing the interactive potential of the new technologies, we will have embodied in action many of Gardner’s ideas, and we will be exercising our multiple intelligences in creative form” (8–9). *Futurismo* sought to creatively integrate young artists’ dance education with the conceptual challenge of exploring technology’s role in contemporary culture.

A century earlier Marinetti not only envisioned the renewal of the human race through technology, but he viewed art and the artist as central to that renewal. Later in the “Destruction of Syntax” manifesto, Marinetti writes about his concept of poetry as a kind of wireless imagination. For him, imagination utilizes speed and simultaneity, and, with the abolition of traditional syntax, poetry becomes “Words-in-Freedom” (2006b, 123). In this same spirit, we proclaimed the thematic essence of *Futurismo* with our own program note “manifesto”:

2013 Speed! Progress! Power! We bask in the Garden of Silicon, hook up ’round the Tree of Technology and devour the newest fastest Apple. The Group clamors for what’s next and best on TwitFaceTube. What then is Future Love? Relationship and human connection? And what happens to the Artist, to the Lover: their questions, thoughts, feelings and touch? Nonsense! Destruction! Creation! We are the Futurists! 1909. Btw—drink your milk.

This brief manifesto compressed the century between the Futurist’s mythic period and the present. What follows outlines a series of creative choices in *Futurismo* made to realize our understanding of Marinetti’s concept of art as action.

Echoing the Futurists’ *serata*, we structured the performance of *Futurismo* as a frantically paced series of dances and acting scenes interspersed with other diverse artistic elements, such as video projection, eclectic music, compressed *sintesi*-like dialogue, mechanistic movements, and alogical events like the intermittent drinking of milk by various characters. This whimsical idea was emblematic of our intention to enter the Futurist mindset.⁸ In order to embody our aforementioned themes, we created various characters for *Futurismo*. We decided that one character could not represent the inherent contradictions and struggles of the prototypical “artist.” Examining the qualitative tension between new communication technologies exemplified by smartphones and the nuanced nature of emotional face-to-face interaction, the artist character was split into two: the Artist and the Lover. The Lover embodied impetuosity through an urgent desire for both a meaningful relationship *and* the latest, greatest device. Since the Lover frequently needed to dance with the Group, we cast a strong female actor/dancer. The Artist, a male actor, was left to question, reflect, and even slow the Lover’s lust for things outside of a relationship while wrestling with his need to make art. To represent the cultural drive toward speed as progress, the Group was crafted—played by seven female dancers who periodically lured the Lover away from the Artist with their frantic and precisely meshed mechanical dances, promising newer, faster communion with technology. Representing a unified whole rather

than individuals or specific genders, we cast skilled female dancers to best convey the Group's dynamism. As discussed below, the Group's costume design deemphasized the gendered body; therefore a dynamic love triangle among the Artist's quest to create, the Lover's desire for stimulation, and the Group's fad-oriented temptation of technology fueled the dramatic tension of *Futurismo*.

We added two more characters—the Futurists—in order to frame the conflict among the Artist, the Lover, and the Group. With a nod to the historical Futurists these characters were often seated at a café table as if in continuous discussion about the ongoing action around them. The onstage presence of these Futurist characters also suggests a lack of privacy for the other characters' unfolding actions. As a further metatheatrical device, we chose to play these characters, inserting ourselves into the work just as the key Futurists went beyond articulating their radical ideas to physically performing them. Late in the work the Futurist characters go beyond observing to dancing with the Group, complicating the conceptual and kinesthetic comfort of the student dancers required to dance with their professors (fig. 1).

The major scenic elements and costumes drew on actual Futurist works of art and period photographs. The house framed a large window that revealed the elevated interior action. The design of the walls echoed Boccioni's paintings, one of which is later projected onto the roof. The Group's costumes emulated the machine-like fascination of the Futurists, with metallic bronze vests and sleeves partially covering dancers' arms and legs worn over a silver unitard. This design presented an impenetrable outward surface, which echoed some actual costumes used in Futurist dances;⁹ it also aligned with Foster's analysis about how Marinetti's vision of human "techno-transformation" anticipates the Freudian notion of an organism's "protective shield," which "develops as the surface of the organism hardens into inorganicity" (14).¹⁰ The Artist and the Lover wore loose-fitting shirts and pants in bold primary colors representing their energy, passion, and vulnerability, while the two Futurists wore charcoal suits and hats like those seen in pre-World War I photos of Marinetti and his cohorts.

Futurismo's eclectic sound score ranges from excerpts of contemporary composer John Adams's vibrant minimalism, to the corny sound of Earl Scroggs's banjo tunes, to the jarring, mechanized musical excerpts composed by Russolo and Marinetti on Futurist noise-making instruments known as *intonarumori*. While Russolo's instruments concretely integrate Futurist sound into *Futurismo*, Scroggs's revolutionary three-fingered banjo-picking style introduces super-human dexterity, exemplifying the Futurists' driving quest for speed. This range of styles and sounds cultivates a vibrant though intentionally confusing mix of audible elements, including the performers' live voices and Marinetti's recorded voice lecturing on Futurism in Italian. While literally unintelligible to the majority in the audience, the two Futurists playfully mime a heated argument that embodies Marinetti's vocal dynamics.

The following thematic concerns and creative choices of *Futurismo* manifested the link between past and present within the context of Futurist aesthetics. The opening scene reveals the Artist following a miniature, motorized house as it wobbles downstage, enlarged by a rooftop projection. After the unexpected arrival of a glass of milk, he enters the house, a place of reflective privacy for the Artist. Immediately, two dancers stride onstage to powerfully claim the public space and duplicate aggressive, angular lunging poses with outstretched, sturdy, machine-like arms. Throughout *Futurismo* the house represents a private space, which different characters either seek or violate upon entering it.

Suggesting the force, gleam, and dynamism of a complex machine, *Futurismo's* first dance introduces the Group's identity through emphasizing strong lines, quick-snapping transitions, and multiple shifting-group forms. The magnetic power of this dance (and the two subsequent ones) attracts the Lover onstage, demonstrating her fascination with technology. True to her impetuous nature, the Lover inserts herself into the dance until the Artist leaves his privacy to seek her out in the public space to initiate their first dialogue (fig. 2).



FIG. 1. The Futurists with the Artist in the house. Futurists (Jeffrey Bracco and David Popalisky, foreground) and the Artist (Nick Manfredi on platform) in *Futurismo*, presented in Santa Clara University's 2013 production of *Images*. (Photo: Stan Olszewski/SOSKIphoto.)



FIG. 2. The Artist seeks the Lover dancing with the Group. The Lover (Samantha Pistoresi, foreground) and the Artist (Nick Manfredi, background) with the Group in *Futurismo*, presented in Santa Clara University's 2013 production of *Images*. (Photo: Stan Olszewski/SOSKIphoto.)

The scenes of dialogue in *Futurismo*, conceptualized and written according to principles similar to Marinetti's words-in-freedom, are brief with onomatopoeic words strung together through free association rather than conforming to a linear logic. These scenes capture the Artist and the Lover, at first discovering their relationship and then in crisis as the Group attracts the Lover's attention away from the Artist. In the first scene they meet and move in together, all within twenty lines of text using language from cliché, to poetry, to social-media abbreviations, to nonsensical gibberish, suggesting the twenty-first-century swiftness of a wireless relationship. The two-minute up-tempo and seductive "Fast Love" dance that follows in the privacy of the house conveys the Lover's identity as someone who embraces an intimate relationship.¹¹ While this first scene parodied the quickness and relative ease of contemporary hookup culture, which includes dating websites and connecting through social media, as well as no-strings-attached sex, one of the thematic arguments of *Futurismo* is proposed: contact is easy, but developing a relationship takes time.

Before a second scene of dialogue, significant events take place, several drawn specifically from the Futurist body of work. First, Boccioni's painting *Dynamism of the Body* (1913) projects above as the Artist mimes painting it below. Second, the tonal grind of the *ululatore* accompanies the Group rushing back onstage to introduce Scruggs's up-tempo banjo rhythms that propel an energized Group dance, reifying its identification with intricately fast technology and once again attracting the Lover to join. Finally, a tableau concludes this dance just as the Futurists reappear, appreciatively swallow a glass of milk, then in slow motion walk across the stage to reclaim their table. Deliberately situated after frantic action in *Futurismo*, this abrupt contrast of stillness and slow motion disturbs the assumption of speed as irreproachable, allowing for a comic, yet self-reflective appraisal of our rapid pace of life.

The Artist and the Lover's second dialogue develops the tension of how technological gadgets tear at the fabric of time needed to sustain meaningful relationships. The introspective Artist probes the impulsive Lover's propensity for group interactivity, with the Lover revealing her attraction to

“Freedom and excitement . . . numbers and strength” by saying, “Many. A bunch, a bundle.” This last word was specifically chosen for its etymological link to fascism—the most dangerous result of conformity to groupthink, and also reminiscent of the Futurists during the interwar period.¹² The final lines of dialogue echo the tumult and violence of a historical past and a theatrical present:

ARTIST: Shall we start over?
 LOVER: It's getting late.
 ARTIST: Destroy it all?
 LOVER: It moves so fast.
 ARTIST: Create something new?
 LOVER: It's all been done.
 ARTIST: There must be a spark.
 LOVER: A flame. An inferno. A firestorm.
 ARTIST: Art for art's sake?
 LOVER: Heart for heart's sake.
 ARTIST: Love for love's sake?
 LOVER: Me for my sake.

Further complicating this dialogue, the dancers, slowly rolling upstage like logs, force the Lover and the Artist to precariously step over them. This additional absurd inconvenience incorporated the Futurist emphasis on disruption, necessitating a heightened attention by the Lover and the Artist. Confronted with the potential destruction of their relationship through the Lover's growing identity with the Group, the Artist is left with questions about the role of art and the nature of love in a world dictated by connective technology.

Even for the experienced actors portraying the Artist and the Lover, *Futurismo's* spoken text proved challenging. They found it difficult to abandon their familiar linear approach to character relationships, as they searched for logical connections between the truncated dialogue. As dialogue descended into gibberish, they struggled to find an authentic, committed voice. Gestures and movement became problematic, as the more abstract language called for less realistic physicality. These brief snippets of language forced the actors to investigate a freshly visceral vocal quality to achieve the emotional intensity of the Lover and the Artist's entangled relationship.

Futurismo's final spoken text adapts an authentic *sintesi* by Giacomo Balla, *Disconcerted States of Mind*. Parading in a curling path, the seven Group dancers reenter, simultaneously shouting a sequence of repeating numbers and letters, accompanied by a random series of disconnected, mundane actions. The climactic, frenzied “Chaos Dance” follows, suggesting the explosion of the machine and its consequences. Engulfing the entire cast, including the two Futurist characters, it achieves Marinetti's mantra of “Destruction! Rebellion! Nonsense!” Like giant gears, traveling circle forms mesh with partners reaching across to one another like spokes connecting the center with the perimeter. The Chaos Dance builds to the Group's invasion of the house, led excitedly by the Lover, which the Artist protests as he recognizes this intrusion into his private life and intimate relationship. The final banjo twang leaves the entire cast sprawled on the floor, a broken machine, except for the Artist, who survives upright to survey the scene. Emblematic of an artist's potential rejuvenating role in society, the Artist systematically reimagines this chaos back into motion of slowly twirling bodies to restart the harmonious circles of the “machine” once again. “Ah Futurismo!”

Reflections

Futurismo ultimately questions how the ubiquity of technology affects contemporary artists. The Chaos Dance expresses the overwhelming speed and quantity of data that challenge an artist's ability to maintain a secure vantage point for observation. By engulfing the Futurists and

the Artist, and with the Lover's encouragement of the Group's giddy penetration of the house, the distinction between public and private is destroyed. This performance action echoes a point made by Gillette: "Thus Marinetti sought to achieve 'AN ABSOLUTE DYNAMISM THROUGH THE INTERPENETRATION OF DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERES AND TIMES' (Marinetti 1970 [1915], 195). This 'interpenetration' itself was a form of crash, a collision of worlds. To create the new consciousness, the old modes of conceiving the world had to be destroyed" (92). This climatic moment in *Futurismo* embodies the lack of boundaries fostered by an uncritical embrace of speed and technology and potentially results not in the "new consciousness" desired by Marinetti, but rather the ominous pervasiveness of these technologies. *Futurismo* invites a significant rethinking about the contemporary loss of privacy in our digital communications—an eerie echo of fascist omnipresence. Interestingly, more than a century ago, Boccioni's painting *The Street Enters the House* (1911) addressed the invasion of privacy in depicting a woman looking out from her balcony on a chaotic street scene, disturbing her composure if not her actual personal space. For the Futurists, art functioned to disrupt conformity because tradition led not only to cultural stagnation, but cultural destruction, therefore this disruption would be interpreted as positive. In *Futurismo*, however, the violation of the house suggests that artists today create while aware of their lack of genuine privacy, potentially encouraging conformity through self-censorship and challenging integrity.

One safeguard against the loss of integrity in the modern world is for the artist to stay attuned to a reality not defined by technology, but one grounded in the "actual physical reality of bodily experience" emphasized by Schwartz. Maintaining this awareness is critical, especially at a time when technological innovations to integrate humans and machines, from exoskeletons to digitally enhanced prosthetic devices, move quickly toward fulfilling Marinetti's vision. Gibney, while acknowledging the addictive appeal of his own iPhone, suggests that it is possible to resist: "you should remember that you are a human, you shouldn't have to be poked and prodded by technology every minute. You should also try to live" (qtd. in D'Souza). His comment points to the genuine challenge to "unplug" in contemporary society.

What then is the role of the artist in the midst of the modern technological tumult we call the twenty-first century? Is it best exemplified in *Futurismo* by the Lover-half of this split characterization who maintains her kinesthetic, fleshy engagement with the creative process, as Schwartz suggests? Curiously, the Lover, the most engaged, self-actualizing, and boisterous character, never drinks the milk, never needs this external source of nourishment as she cultivates holistic health through her engaged but always present self. The Lover counterbalances a need for reflection through intimacy with her energizing fascination with the new technological objet du jour. And what of the Artist, her other half, with his considerate questioning, his need for personal time with his partner, and his innate ability to regenerate after the signal is lost, the battery needs recharging, or the tech bubble bursts? *Futurismo*, as a performance piece, proposes that we need both halves to survive.

All of the participants in *Futurismo*, both student artists and ourselves as collaborating teaching artists, also wrestled with this complex dichotomy throughout the creative process. Post-performance written reflections by the students revealed that *Futurismo* stimulated a fresh engagement with the creative process and increased awareness of Futurism as an artistic movement. By working with the unfamiliar body of ideas and methods of early Italian Futurism, our embrace of confusion provided the cast with a tangible opportunity to react viscerally, not just intellectually. With dancers unaccustomed to acting and some actors unaccustomed to dancing, the rehearsal period was filled with uncertainty and discomfort. The students' struggle to integrate both performance skills and historical antecedents provided an opportunity for growth as performers through the necessary heightened attention to resolve their confusion with engaging the material. One student noted that "*Futurismo* was the most wild and confusing piece of choreography I have ever performed and I think this pushed me outside of my comfort zone as a performer. I realized that when I performed this piece the unusual and different nature of the theme made it the most exciting to perform." Within this air of confusion, *Futurismo* took shape, ultimately strengthening the execution of the work. The Group

dancers asked to act within the “Parade” scene were simultaneously excited and daunted. This challenge both upset and ultimately refreshed their familiarity with learning choreography. “The day we learned the lines of numbers, letters, and random actions, also known as our ‘Parade,’ confused me on what Futurism was,” according to another student. Despite discussions with the cast about how Futurist *sintesi* included *non sequitur*, even nonsensical language, the text in *Futurismo* was a barrier to their acting until words were integrated with physical actions. As a third student later explained, “[t]he first rehearsal we had as a group deepened my confusion because it was a lot of information to get all at once.”¹³ Although it may seem counterintuitive in an educational setting, accepting the confusion embedded in this process was essential. For other artist educators dedicated to promoting critical thinking through performance, the potential confusion resulting from fusing artistic periods is not to be avoided, but rather embraced as part of a process that enhances learning. Despite the challenges, the student performers were eventually able to integrate many of the confusing elements of historical Futurist methods.

As collaborating artists, the mining of the Futurist past continuously informed how we investigated our culture’s present obsession with speed and technology. This process revealed more nuances than we initially anticipated, such as how the fusion of man and machine has evolved from Marinetti’s vision to a developing reality in the present. We suggest that creating an original performance work like *Futurismo* can potentially serve as a model for others working in an academic environment because aesthetically linking past and present was pedagogically rich, as well as creatively stimulating, for both student and faculty artists.

The key pedagogical value of *Futurismo* resulted from collapsing the century between its Futurist sources and present performance. Foster’s article notes that for Marinetti, “speed means more than new machines of movement, more than a new technological sensorium: it is also a psychic figure, a trope of time travel, a way to beat the clock in order to recreate the self” (11). As the future continuously explodes around us, meaningful access to the past becomes ever more challenging to maintain. Therefore, for young artists to understand how to recreate themselves in relation to the past serves to validate our model. Similarly, Gillette writes: “To account for the radically new world, torn open by speed and the crash, theatre itself would have to collide space and time to highlight perception over representation, phenomenology over semantics” (92). As a dance theatre hybrid, *Futurismo* broke our department’s traditional distinction between dance concerts and theatrical productions, as well as disturbed perceptions for performers and the audience. *Futurismo* collapsed “time” in order to heighten the impact of the present moment in a variety of ways. First, mixed-age casting contrasted youthful and agile dancer/actors with the mature Futurists played by the creators. Ironically, the older performers portrayed the early twentieth-century brash and youthful Italian Futurists. Second, the still tableaux and brief slow-motion movement provided a counterpoint to the general up-tempo action. Third, within a twenty-minute performance, the eclectic musical selections integrated different cultural time periods: the scratchy recorded voice of Marinetti and the strange, mechanical *ululatore*, the Scruggs banjo music (associated with the 1960s sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies*), and the contemporary, postmodern classical music of Adams. All of the above obscured the century between Futurists origins and the present, encouraging our focus on shared themes and the contemporary implications.

Nonetheless, we acknowledge some missed pedagogical opportunities and, on reflection, offer several suggestions. While we did introduce Futurist ideas and strategies to the cast, time constraints during the rehearsal process inhibited the presentation of more comprehensive dramaturgical materials, with ensuing discussions about how these ideas influenced our creative choices. Had we presented, prior to the start of rehearsals, a more thorough overview of the cultural moment from which Italian Futurism emerged amid the emerging technologies at the turn of the twentieth century, we might have encouraged more substantive thinking about *Futurismo*’s themes in relation to students’ lives. To best capitalize on the pedagogical potential of this model, we now appreciate the importance of investigating conceptual ideas earlier in the rehearsal process to further student engagement.

Futurismo positions the regenerative creativity of the Artist as essential to society—the antithesis of the Futurists’ capitulation to fascism and our Group’s blind embrace of new technology. This artistic regeneration stands in stark contrast to how the Italian Futurists allowed their creative ideas to be subsumed by fascism—where the dynamics and goals of the group always trump the individual. After 1916 Marinetti lost his artistic autonomy and became, as Adamson states, “a faithful sheepdog” for Mussolini’s fascist regime (865). Although perhaps compromised, the individual identity of *Futurismo*’s Artist is an antidote to groupthink: he stops, questions, and even resists the rush toward the conformity of adopting new technology, whereas Marinetti’s embrace of his contemporary machine age was a way to rebel against conformity to the past. Calling for the masses to disrupt, disturb, and literally destroy tradition, Marinetti railed: “Set fire to the library shelves!” (2006a, 15). *Futurismo* is less concerned with the destruction of tradition than with affirming a role for the artist to shape society through critical art-making, whether as an individual or in collaboration. In *Futurismo*’s final movement, it is the Artist who survives to reanimate the action after the Lover’s enthusiasm for the Group’s dynamism and speed ends in chaos and destruction onstage.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge professors Courtney Mohler and Fr. Michael Zampelli S.J., in addition to the anonymous reviewers for *Theatre Topics*, who assisted them in revising and shaping this essay for publication. They further acknowledge Santa Clara University’s Faculty Writing Retreat, which allowed them to develop the essay.

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Notes

1. See Peggy Schwartz, *Creativity and Dance: Implications for Pedagogy and Policy*.
2. Günter Berghaus’s article describes *serate* as an embodiment of Marinetti’s term art in action, from “*Prime battaglie futuriste*” (1915). A leading contemporary Futurist scholar, Berghaus contributed this piece to *Reconstructing the Universe*, compiled as part of the 2014 exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum, mounted after the creation of *Futurismo*.

3. Michael Kirby asserts this in his *Futurist Performance* (1971), written at a time when the Futurists were largely ignored. Their recent reemergence to critical attention reconsiders the Italian Futurists' contributions, despite their associations with fascism.

4. The term groupthink was coined in the early 1970s by Yale psychologist Irving Janis, who established the theory that groups, working together to solve a problem, often tended toward group loyalty and conformity rather than independent thinking or seeking alternate perspectives. This often leads the group to errant conclusions or irrational behavior. He observed that "[m]embers consider loyalty to the group the highest form of morality," according to Kathrin Lassilla's "A Brief History of Groupthink."

5. Umberto Boccioni, an avid Futurist and Marinetti colleague, authored several *sintesi* and manifestos. He sought to capture simultaneity and dynamism on canvas, as well as the energy inherent in Futurism. "Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing," Boccioni wrote in his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" (qtd. in Humphreys 24). One of his paintings is a key performance element in *Futurismo*.

6. Günter Berghaus's 1993 article "Dance and the Futurist Woman" discusses in some depth Valentine de Saint-Point's significance as a Futurist dancer.

7. For information about Howard Gardner's theory of the multiple intelligences of learning, see <<http://howardgardner.com/multiple-intelligences/>>.

8. Referencing the dairy industry's "Got Milk?" campaign, it suggested random nourishment that fueled the action. The Lover, the most engaged and boisterous character in *Futurismo*, never drank the milk.

9. See Patrizia Veroli's "Futurism and Dance" about the Futurist dance by Fortunato Depero, *Balli Plastici* (1918), that used cardboard tubes on the arms, which hampered the "fundamental tenet of Futurism: movement" (229).

10. Foster's considers how "Marinetti poses technological shock against the 'old syntax' of the bourgeois subject, its culture, experience, and sense" (14). He further notes how Marinetti writes, in "Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine," that the Futurist subject must accelerate this process "of transformation" so that humans would "be endowed with surprising organs: organs adapted to the needs of a world of ceaseless shocks" (ibid.). *Futurismo's* Group, in metallic vests, conveys invulnerability to shock, in contrast to the Artist's permeable creative persona.

11. Marinetti praised Vaslav Nijinsky as "free of imitation and without sexual stimulation," according to Veroli in "Futurism and Dance" (228). In contrast, the Lover's persona and dancing recalls French Futurist dancer de Saint-Point, who embraces sensuality in her "Manifesto of Lust."

12. The word *fascism* derives from the Latin word *fascis*, meaning "a bundle." In "Prosthetic Gods," Foster articulates that "[t]his binding is signaled in the etymology of the term: in the fasces, the rods wrapped round the ax as a symbol of power in Rome; in the fascia, the tissue that binds muscles . . . a strapping of energies of all sorts." Mussolini's fascists chose a bundle of sticks and ax as their emblem (9). "Bundle" may also remind contemporary audiences of their technology service plans.

13. The students' quotes are taken from the "*Futurismo* Post-Performance Student Questionnaire" (February 2013).

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