The birth of Futurism was bombastically announced to the world from the pages of the French newspaper, Le Figaro (29 February 1909). The announcement, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" by the Italian poet F. T. Marinetti, started a trend of manifesto writing which expanded beyond the Italian movement to the world avant-garde.

The influence of Futurism on the many avant-garde movements that mushroomed all over Europe in the years immediately preceding and following World War I is undeniable. Russia was the only country besides Italy, however, where Futurism as such became a banner for the most radical groups of artists and poets. The differences between the Italian and the Russian modes of Futurism are many and varied, and the Russian Futurists were the first to place a great deal of emphasis on them. The desire to dissociate themselves from the Italians is shown in several heated declarations and in their boycott of Marinetti's visit to Russia in 1914. The basic aesthetic principles of Futurism are common to the two countries, however, and are evident in the Futurists' experiments in several art fields, among which is the field of theatrical performance.

The Futurist contribution to the development of modern theater began to be studied and assessed approximately twenty years ago, when the cultural revolution of the 1960s, both in Europe and in the United States, stirred an interest in avant-garde movements and in Futurism in particular. The fundamental text that appeared in those years is Michael Kirby's Futurist Performance. Several other books with a focus either on modern theater or on Futurism in general also devoted some attention to the role the Futurists played in the renewal of theatrical forms and in the broadening of the performance space, from stage to streets and squares.

1. For a detailed analysis of the divergencies and convergencies between the two modes of Futurism, see my article, "Russian and Italian Futurist Manifestoes," Slavic and East European Journal, 20, No. 4 (Winter 1976), 405-20.
The sense of performance that pervaded all Futurists public appearances was partly due to a utilitarian motivation—to get publicity. On a deeper level, however, it reflected the most vital impulse of the movement. Futurism, as the expression of a new sensibility, was an attempt to integrate all art forms with the reality of the big city, and ultimately to transform everyday life into an aesthetic performance. The Italian critic, Germano Celant thinks that Futurism was the first mass-oriented aesthetic movement: "Apart from the strong political ambiguities and increasing connotations of exaggerated masculinity that drove the Futurist movement into the foul den of Italian fascism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and his followers created at the beginning of this century a truly 'contemporary' cultural phenomenon. Indeed, although it assumed tasks that exceeded its real possibilities, because the ideological and philosophical foundations were lacking, Futurism was the first artistic movement of mass society. It grew out of a period that was experiencing the growth of quantitative and consumer impulses at the expense of qualitative and elitist ones. It was aware of the arrival of the mass media and prophesied the end of an avant-garde destined to be buried—today—under mass creativity."4

The Futurists with their iconoclastic fervor demystified many taboos and brought art down to a level supposedly accessible to the masses. Their interest in fashion, design, cuisine, and other aspects of cultural and political life attests to the concept of Futurism as a global integration of art and life.5 In recent times, we have witnessed a tendency to lower art to the level of consumer products, from Pop to Christo's artificial landscapes, from theatrical happenings to rock festivals. Whether this tendency is a direct development of Futurist theory and practice remains to be seen, but it is undeniable that Futurism, notwithstanding all its formal experimentation and its we-against-

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5. An obvious example of the Futurist abasement of art is Maiakovskii's work as a cartoonist for the ROSTA agency.