

## **The Manifesto: Text and Praxis**

A common trait of the different avant-garde movements, from the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde and maybe up until the avant-gardes of today is their insistence on a restructuring of society as a whole and all its institutions. Everyday life, art and the political life; all must be torn down and a new society, a new way of living which integrates all of these aspects in one, must be constructed from the ground.

The avant-garde movements – political orientation disregarded – fundamentally perceived the existing society as bourgeois and conservative. On these grounds that society was perceived as dubious, a critique leading towards a more practical critique of the institutions of society, especially the institutions of art – from the museum to the work of art as such.

Following this critique the classical concept of art is problematic. The autonomous bourgeois art does not aspire to change society, thus it is deemed reactionary. An art without critical and revolutionary intent or potential is not just useless but actually harmful in its reproduction of the existing structures of power and society.

In the same line of thought traditional political work is also problematic. Political action in the traditional sense always takes place within the frameworks of existing society and therefore does not aim at the fundamental change of all society's institutions and practises that the avant-garde seeks. Thus the bare idea of political action is viewed as conservative and inherently part of the problem.

It is our claim that the avant-gardes in their use of manifestos seek to at once both synthesize and solve all of these problems.

In the avant-garde manifesto the artist, the citizen and the revolutionary political subject are combined into one coherent figure, who in all areas of life – art, everyday life and politics – can and will radically reshape society.

The avant-garde manifesto is to be seen as an action leading towards this goal in itself: it is an artistic occupation of a hitherto exclusively political form of expression and thereby points toward the intended convergence and merger of the different spheres of society. It is at once a precise direction marker for the intended societal change and the first step in this direction.

But the way the avant-garde movements use the manifesto is not without its problems. For one, do the avant-gardes with their use of the manifesto actually succeed in changing anything at all? Do they manage to bring anything new about, do they even create a new point of origin for the criticism of society?

And what may be more important: do the avant-gardes manage to create a viable connection between the visions laid out in their manifestos and the way they act in practice?

These are the basic questions that we will address in our work on the subject.

Paperproposal, Nanna Bisbjerg

## **The Manifesto: Negotiating reality**

The manifesto plays a crucial role in the avant-garde.

Both the so-called historical and the neo-avant-gardes produced an almost endless number of manifestos, and the manifesto has often been appointed as the genre of the avant-garde per se.

the avant-garde manifesto places itself in between the spheres of art, theory and praxis, it outlines directions for a new artistic and political praxis and is at the same time to be seen as an action in itself, as the first step in this direction. The manifesto is at the same time theory, action and (work of) art and in this way points towards and exemplifies the avant-gardes' intended merger of the different spheres of reality.

At the same time the manifestos play an important role in the historization of the avant-gardes, both regarding the avant-gardes' historization of itself and the historization it is submitted to in posterity

Since both the avant-gardes and the manifesto are historically tied to a political opposition and a wish for revolution, the manifesto will most often supply us with an account of history that is an alternative or in direct opposition to the dominating account of history.

As a founding and defining text and action the avant-garde manifesto also considerably influences how the aftermath defines and understands the avant-gardes.

It is my claim that the manifesto as a genre possesses the possibility of making aware of a version of history alternative to the one presented by the dominating power and discourse. This quality together with its status as both theory, work and action makes the manifesto capable of lining out, establishing a starting point for, exemplifying, and taking the first step of action in direction of, the changes the avant-gardes wanted.

With early futurist and dada manifestos as cases this paper will argue for the above.

It will discuss how and for what ends the avant-gardes used the manifestos.

Which qualities does the manifesto possess that were appealing for the avant-gardes, and what influence did the use of the manifesto have on the avantgardes?

Which ends, goals and changes, if any at all, did the (use of the) manifesto help the avant-gardes achieve?

Paperproposal, Jan Nejd Rasmussen  
**(Dis-)Organizing Utopia?**

Throughout history several avant-garde movements have been in situations where society around them was marked by radical change and conflict, conditions that would be ideal for the movements to bring about the kind of revolutionary transformation of society they wished. Even so, neither the futurists, whether in Italy or Russia, the surrealists in France nor the situationists in France of the sixties and seventies managed to bring about the they desired changes.

It is my claim that in at least some of these cases, the cause of these failures can be found in the nature of the programmes presented in the avant-garde manifestos.

In the case of the Situationist International it is my claim that the visions presented in various analyses, manifestos and communiqués were not treated as the utopian visions they rightly were, instead they were treated as concrete goals and thus directions for practical action.

This lack of conceptual clearness within the organization was at least a partial cause of the Situationist International's failure to seize the momentum the organization had, especially in Paris 1968, where it was right in the middle of the massive riots.

On one hand it isolated the organization: it is hard to cooperate with other groups and movements even when they have converging goals if one insists on the absolute truth of one's analysis and goal. On the other hand the all-encompassing and utopian analysis hampered the manoeuvrability of the organization, it was easily paralysed by internal strife, a problem made clear by the waves of exclusions and splits that hit the Situationist International during the years. Also the Situationist International was completely unable to give proper answers to the reforms of society, that actually came about. As the organization had made "The Society of the Spectacle" their arch-enemy, they had to insist on its utter destruction. When this society decided to enter into real negotiations, they had no answer.

I shall try to make these points clearer by a study of two central episodes in the history of the Situationist International: first off the episode, where Jorn left the organization (and partly continued working there under a new identity). Second is the way the Situationist International acted during the riots in Paris in 1968.

Both points will be treated with a focus on the (lack of?) connection between the goals of the organization as presented in various communiqués and the actual organization and organizational practice.