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A History of Aristocracies: Old and New Avant-Gardisms in Poggioli and Marinetti

Sascha Bru and Bart Van den Bossche

IN 1965, AFTER RENATO POGGIOLI'S DEATH in 1963 in a brutal car-crash near the Oregon border of California, Harry Levin at Harvard gathered a number of shorter studies by his former colleague in a collection entitled *The Spirit of the Letter: Essays in European Literature*. In his preface to this book, Levin drew attention in passing to how Poggioli's view of the avant-garde, developed in his *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (1962), was based on a "critical method" in literary history derived from the work of Vilfredo Pareto.¹ Few critics since have taken note of how Pareto's work, indeed, deeply influenced Poggioli's theory of literature and of literary history. By closely examining the ties between Pareto and Poggioli's theory of the avant-garde in the first part of this article, we aim to cast a different light on his *Teoria*, which ever since its English translation in 1968 has left a substantial mark on the understanding of avant-gardism in the West. Turning to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's work and career before 1912 in the second part of this article, we intend to explore further and to problematize certain tenets of Poggioli's theoretical outlook.

A literary historiography based on Pareto's sociology

In April 1947, writing to Cesare Pavese, one of the main editors of the Turin-based publishing house Einaudi, Poggioli mentioned that he was preparing a *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* and asked whether Einaudi would consider publishing the book.² Two years later, when the first chapters of the *Teoria* appeared in the review *Inventario*, Pavese and Poggioli resumed the conversation, but during the next months it became clear that, notwithstanding Pavese's enthusiasm for Poggioli's work, many editors and collaborators of Einaudi considered him too conservative and too critical towards communism³ to feature in the catalogue of a publishing house that maintained a special relationship with the Italian Communist Party.⁴ Anyone who has ever read Poggioli's *Teoria* knows indeed that he was a critical observer of communism and Soviet Russia. While Pavese made no mention of this, Poggioli's case must also not have been helped by the fact that his book on the avant-garde was to some considerable measure based on the work of engi-

neer, economist, sociologist, and political scientist Vilfredo Pareto, who had been offered a seat in the senate by Benito Mussolini in 1923. Leaving aside the political skirmish that surrounded Poggioli's own *Teoria*, it is illuminating to trace the influence of Pareto on his work, not least because it unearths how Poggioli saw Western avant-gardism as a whole as a deeply reactionary phenomenon.

Poggioli indeed made no attempt to hide that his theory of the avant-garde was built on insights drawn from Pareto. As he stressed in the "Prologue" of his book, his main objective was to present a psychological and sociological analysis of avant-gardism in the West. Less interested in literature per se, his book above all aimed to clarify how much of modern writing since Romanticism, and especially the art and literature of the so-called classic avant-gardes (futurism, surrealism, expressionism, etc.), was held together by a certain "psychological condition, a unique ideological fact":

By psychological I mean that part of avant-garde art which remains a fact of nature (if only historically). I mean the instinctive forces and primary currents, what Pareto would call "residues": psychic seeds or roots, often to be perceived under the form of irreducible and unsuppressible idiosyncrasies. And by ideology I mean the rationalization of these forms, currents, or residues into formulas of logic: their translation into theory, their reduction to programs and manifestos, their hardening into positions or even "poses."⁵

Returning explicitly to Pareto twice further on in his book (once to explain the avant-garde's experimentalism, and once to underscore the fact that it lacked the essential backing of an elitist audience [Poggioli, *Theory* 137, 117]), Poggioli's whole book implicitly presented itself as working within a Paretian frame of reference. For the modern avant-garde, as he made clear from the outset of his book, was the expression of Paretian "residues."

Already in 1949 Poggioli had written a long and dense essay on this notion entitled "For a Literary Historiography Based on Pareto's Sociology"⁶ and later published in *The Spirit of the Letter*. This text aimed to promote Pareto's "cynical idealism" (Poggioli, *Spirit* 311) as a historiographical method superior to positivism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. Poggioli believed that Pareto's sociology allowed for a more complex view of literature. Whereas Taine confused culture with itself through the fuzzy notion of race, while Marxists (contra Marx) saw literature as propaganda of the ruling class, and Freudians psychologized the social by turning to an eternal subconscious, Pareto's method neither reduced literature to a mirror of the social nor situated it outside the pale of history. Poggioli ventured that two basic concepts, both of which were prominent in Pareto's *Trattato di sociologia*

generale (1916, translated into English as *The Mind and Society* in 1935), made up this method: that of “residue” and that of “derivation.”

Residues are manifestations of deeply rooted, a-logical psychic complexes that inform irrational conduct. They are near universal in that they change or disappear only very gradually; all of them have a *longue durée*. A derivation, by contrast, resembles an ideology and is a logical system of belief people construct to account for the residues that drive their actions; it is “the super-structure which the mind of man imposes on the various residues” (Poggioli, *Spirit* 229). Derivations, as a consequence, rationalize the unrationalizable. For example, at all times and everywhere, Pareto observed, people have developed derivational doctrines with regard to the sexual sphere that range from asceticism to libertarianism. Such modes, styles, fashions, and ethical theories have varied immensely in human history, but they are united by a residue of sexuality, a nucleus or core that connects them all. Similarly, ruling classes in the course of history have come up with the widest variety of explanations for why they, and not some other group, were entitled to rule. Yet these various derivations are all an expression of what Pareto termed the conservative residue of “group persistence.” Likewise, the large number of derivations in itself testifies to humanity’s irrepressible urge to rationalize through metaphysics, science or art. According to Pareto, this urge to rationalize was a residue in its own right, called an “instinct for combinations.”⁷ From this it follows that all derivations built on or around the same residue are in essence equal and to some extent interchangeable, in that they are mistakenly taken for the truth that escapes mere reason. Derivations are also of little historical importance, as Poggioli concluded, when we look only at them. Real history, he claimed, had to “determine the relationship” between residues and derivations (Poggioli, *Spirit* 301). For if residues take part in the *longue durée*, historicity arises only in their particular relationships with derivations at a specific moment or within a given period.

At this point Poggioli turned to literature, for what does literature express: residue or derivation? In his 1949 essay Poggioli painstakingly extracted the (not so numerous) paragraphs from Pareto’s *Trattato* that dealt with literary works. These paragraphs illustrate, Poggioli claimed, that literature in all cases has to be read as an instrument of derivation, for example as a didactic tool used by social groups to push their derivations. Only in rare cases does literature, additionally, express residues. The “masterpieces of classic literatures” (Pareto himself referred to Homer and Racine, among others) survive, for instance, because despite their long-gone historical context of emergence, they continue to “express residues of which we still partake” (Poggioli, *Spirit*

306). In other words, only the great, canonical works directly express residues, and at the same time allow us to gauge derivations.

As Poggioli observed, this doesn't make the bulk of literature and culture at large, which is mainly composed of (second-rate) derivations, worthless. Literature and culture here still show themselves as "an intrinsic [sociological] document." For non-canonical works merely expressing derivations show that changes in the perception of the social are never entirely "new." Always and everywhere, they somehow form part of an uninterrupted return of the same, a repetition in difference, an endless variation on near universal, irrational, human, and thus social issues. Nonetheless, Poggioli observed, literary historians study "literature" and as such a product of "high" or elitist culture. As a result, "high" culture and society in its entirety can never be simply equated, nor do they necessarily run parallel.⁸ Just like religious and metaphysical ideas or scientific theories, literature is one of many "synthetic vision[s] of the real" (Poggioli, *Spirit* 320). But "high" and canonical literature can additionally tap into or directly express residues. Only in the "great books," as a result, does real history manifest itself, for within culture only they manifest the changing relations between derivations and residues.

As illustrated by the quote above from his *Teoria*, Poggioli's theory of the avant-garde, too, was heavily indebted to the notions of residue and derivation. Calling modern avant-garde art and literature an ideological expression, in short a derivation of underlying residues, Poggioli at first sight did not seem to think highly of the avant-garde; at least, it apparently did not fit well among the classics of the canon. Before analyzing Poggioli's use of Pareto in his *Teoria*, however, it is essential to stress (as did Poggioli in his 1949 essay) that the Paretian notion of residue is inherently vague. For how does one distinguish such residues from derivations?

To this end, Pareto used a "logico-experimental" method: having gathered historical data, he began to distinguish that body of materials that seemed culturally contingent from those elements and materials, the residues, that appeared to persist throughout longer stretches of time. His aim, in so doing, was to explain why social groups changed and evolved, what drove their specific actions as well as what tied their actions to those of previous periods. Interestingly, Poggioli did not think much of Pareto's logico-experimentalism and in his 1949 essay in fact rejected it.

His reasons for doing so appeared to have been political more than anything else, because this "logico-experimental" method also had led Pareto to right-wing political convictions in the early twentieth century. Poggioli clearly wanted to distance himself from these convictions, which emerged

from Pareto's application of a similar method in economics. In particular, Pareto's famous micro-economical principle, which dictated that eighty percent of the land and modes of production, allegedly, were always owned by twenty percent of the population, was arrived at by using exactly the same procedure: after having collected historical data stemming from centuries of Italian history, Pareto had abstracted a principle, which he believed to be a fact of nature. As a result, he became a great defender of the free market and of the stimulation of upward mobility toward the elite. He attacked socialism in Italy for the same reasons (and found himself backed by Mussolini). As Poggioli observed, Pareto had thereby fallen victim to the errors he "ridiculed" in others (Poggioli, *Spirit* 319), because he had come to consider certain of his own ratiocinations or derivations as truths. If any rational attempt to make sense of human and social residues was a derivation, then Pareto's own views of economics and politics too were derivations.

Thus distancing himself from the method used by Pareto the political scientist and economist (who, around the same time, notably, had acquired considerable influence at Harvard University as he deeply influenced Talcott Parsons's work, among others), Poggioli's 1949 essay also appeared to throw out the baby with the bathwater. For how, then, does one determine residues? Poggioli gave the example of Rousseauism, which, resembling a complex of residues, was not only more important than the work of Rousseau, but which also preceded the latter and thus surpassed it in duration and influence (Poggioli, *Spirit* 312). Just what residues Rousseauism voiced, however, remained vague. In a similar vein, Poggioli at one point in his essay launched the idea of a "cultural instinct" or residue, recalling Hazlitt's notion of the "poetic animal" (Poggioli, *Spirit* 317). Why, indeed, could there not be a residue that drives people to produce aesthetic objects in ever-shifting ways? But then he let go of the idea, as it would have created all kinds of new problems. In sum, Poggioli's "literary historiography based on Pareto" was a creative one, to say the least.

As he observed in his 1949 essay, "the literature of our own times, paradoxically, instead of establishing an external balance between residues and derivations, seems to keep the two elements within each work in a state of confusion, conflict and disorder, which perhaps suffices to define it as the literature of an *age of decadence*" (Poggioli, *Spirit* 317, our emphasis). To a large extent, his theory of the avant-garde set out to analyze that age of decadence and to remedy its artistic confusion, using, as we saw, a method inspired by Pareto. In the central chapter (also literally) of his *Teoria*, entitled "The State of Alienation," Poggioli (following Max von Wydow) called the avant-

garde a “culture of negation” (Poggioli, *Theory* 107). Drawing on Edmund Wilson and Ortega y Gasset, among others, Poggioli’s basic—and, as his “Prologue” had announced, most important—argument was that the avant-garde was a subculture built around a series of derivations all (in various degrees) expressing deeply-rooted psychological residues.

Interestingly, two residues surface in the central chapter of his book: liberty and alienation. As Poggioli summed it up, “the avant-garde is condemned and destined to endure, blessed in its liberty and cursed in its alienation” (Poggioli, *Theory* 108). Referring to various myths, such as that of Philoctetes, Poggioli, in a truly Paretian fashion, suggested that alienation had always figured in human culture. However, with the arrival of modern society, that is, of bourgeois liberalism, democracy, technological modernization, and capitalism, alienation had taken over the mind of modern man in general, and the avant-garde was in part a pathological expression of this. Poggioli dissected the avant-garde to uncover the various ways in which, unconsciously more often than consciously, it gave a voice to alienation. As a psychological phenomenon, alienation surfaced in avant-gardists’ self-portrayal as demoralized, isolated, and at times victimized members of society. A social phenomenon, too, alienation showed itself in the avant-garde’s marginal economic position, its unease and uncertainty about its livelihood. Cut off, *pace* Poggioli, from mass culture, it disliked all forms of popular culture and as a result also felt culturally alienated. Above all, it lacked a clear audience, while paradoxically, “for the first time in history, the potential public for literature and art equals the greatest part of the population” (Poggioli, *Theory* 116).

Only here did Poggioli venture his basic hypothesis about the avant-garde in his *Teoria*, bringing in the second residue of liberty. For alienation, he claimed, was due mainly to liberal democracy, a system that sharply contrasted with pre-modern political systems. At this point in his theory, too, Poggioli returned to Pareto, and called on his thesis about the “‘circulation of the elites,’ which really means a circulation within the elites” (Poggioli, *Theory* 117). Poggioli, also in his 1949 essay, seemed to have taken the social cycle theory put forth in Pareto’s *Trattato* for granted. This theory dictated that elites were an essential part of human society. At any time in history derivations about elites could be found, and thus a society without an elite seemed unthinkable. As Pareto famously put it, “history was a graveyard of aristocracies.”⁹ And literature, Poggioli had come to conclude through Pareto, made up the tombstones testifying to this fact—for only canonized, “high” or elitist literature also expressed residues, and first and foremost the residue of “group persistence.” Now, modern liberal democracy, being characterized by dissent,

debate, and at least the idea of personal freedom, was also marked by an acceleration of the succession of elites, Poggioli implied. In pre-modern times writers had always adapted themselves to successive elites, in modern times that well-defined audience disappeared or at least became more oblique as elites were chosen by the masses, often in rapid succession during elections. This resulted in what Poggioli called the historical alienation of the avant-gardes, the form of alienation to permeate the avant-gardes' aesthetic actions and ideology perhaps the deepest. Here, indeed, in the realm of culture and in the avant-gardes in particular, the radical changes democracy brought to society were made the most visible. In a way continuing the old, 'aristocratic' role and function writing had been endowed with for centuries, modern art, with the avant-gardes as its prime manifestation, struggled to cope with the new freedom democracy had given it at the same time. This led to stylistic and aesthetic alienation, too—here Poggioli drew on Georg Lukács—and to a loss of consensus on beauty and form due to an excess of liberty. It further gave rise to ethical alienation, to a revolt against the system that made the avant-garde at once possible and impossible. For in Poggioli's mind all the experimental, radical, and revolutionary projects of the avant-garde (be they progressive or conservative in nature) further testified to the "eminently aristocratic nature of avant-gardism, [...] the quasi-ritualist posture of aristocratic protest" (Poggioli, *Theory* 99) within the inherently anti-aristocratic system of democracy. Thus, what the classic avant-gardes in essence uncovered, Poggioli implied, was a clash between the residue of 'freedom' or individual well-being, and a modern political system devised exactly to safeguard that individual. Only it did so by removing the pre-modern elites that had been essential to art and writing in previous historical periods and substituted it with an oblique mass of people.

Today Poggioli's theory is remembered mainly for all the other aspects of the avant-garde it uncovers: its nihilism, its agonism, its futurism, its experimentalism, and its antagonism. Yet all of these, in Poggioli's Paretian view, were subordinated to, if not triggered by, the classic avant-gardes' expression of a much more deeply rooted malaise in modernity that also thoroughly affected art and literature: the arrival of democracy. Calling on his readers to avoid "value judgment" (Poggioli, *Theory* 106), Poggioli's assessment of the avant-garde was rather bleak, not least because he averred that the condition of avant-gardism was "chronic and destined to continue," unless there arrived a "fatal fall of our society and civilization" (Poggioli, *Theory* 108-09). For the avant-garde according to Poggioli also resembled the last of the aristocrats, the "single intellectual minority to survive" (Poggioli, *Theory* 109). Were it to

perish, so would Western culture as it had been known thus far. His book concluded, unsurprisingly, by claiming that the classic avant-gardes, too, would one day become history, which, as will be clear by now, to Poggioli meant canonized. The avant-garde would be canonized not so much because it would one day be institutionalized (as that other famous *Theorie der Avant-garde* by Peter Bürger would argue a few years after Poggioli), but because it had expressed, perhaps more than any other phenomenon, a recalibrated relation between derivations and residues. The avant-garde, at least as Poggioli saw it, would one day expose itself as the once unrecognized elite of its own time, an inherently reactionary, ‘aristocratic’ response to the freedom that man—as well as art—had gained with the introduction of modern democracy.

Marinetti, *poète français, poeta italo-francese*

Poggioli’s *Teoria*, when read through the lens of its Paretian frame of reference, shows itself above all as a history of the avant-garde. Naturally, this history is not without problems. Apart from its already mentioned fuzzy method of determining residues, Poggioli’s conceptual and historiographic tour de force seems problematic mainly on a factual level. The many forms of alienation his theory scaffolds do not stand at par with more recent findings. While it is true that an important number of writers mentioned in his theory kept popular and mass culture at bay, many avant-gardists clearly did not, and so the cultural alienation Poggioli evoked certainly requires qualification.¹⁰ Moreover, when considering the bulk of archival material and biographical information that has been disclosed since the publication of his *Teoria*, it is hard to maintain that the avant-gardes as a rule formed economical outcasts. Above all, today it is perhaps the hardest to cling to his idea that the avant-gardes, and in particular the classic avant-gardes, lacked an audience, and an elitist, if not authoritative audience at that.

The case of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is interesting in all these respects for various reasons, but mainly because with Marinetti we end up in Poggioli’s own backyard, so to speak, with the avant-garde literature he himself grew up with in Italy before he fled to the United States from Mussolini’s reign. It suffices to trace briefly the career of Marinetti so as to illustrate that it is highly problematic to claim that the avant-garde lacked an audience or operated in a somewhat disoriented, alienated fashion. If anything, Marinetti’s career, and maybe in particular the early stages of his career, is evidence of shrewd planning and scheming.

In spite of Marinetti’s all Italian name, virtually the entire body of his literary work written before 1912 was published in French and translated into

Italian afterwards. The Egyptian-born Marinetti had received his training in French, first at the Institut Saint-François Xavier in Alexandria, then at the Université de la Sorbonne in Paris. After moving back to Italy in 1896, he continued to be connected with francophone literature, among others via the magazine *L'Anthologie—Revue de France et d'Italie* of which he became a contributor and coordinator. In 1898, after winning the poetry contest of the *samedis populaires* with a poem called “Les Vieux Marins,” he managed to build up a quite impressive network of francophone literary contacts and started to publish in various *revues* (*La Revue Blanche*, *La Vogue*, *La Plume*, *Mercur de France*). After the turn of the century, he published one volume after the other, invariably in French: *La Conquête des étoiles* (1904), *D'Annunzio intime* (1904), *La Momie sanglante* (1904), *Destruction* (1904) and *Le Roi Bombance* (1905). Although most of these texts were sooner or later available also in Italian (often published under the banner of the Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*¹¹), during the first fifteen years of his literary career Marinetti clearly considered French as the most appropriate language for his creative literary work, and was therefore at times referred to as a *poète français*.¹² The reasons for these considerations seem obvious: Paris was the cultural capital of Europe, and French was Europe's ‘high’ cultural *lingua franca*.

Despite the choice of French as his sole means of literary expression, Marinetti never renounced his Italian identity. While travelling frequently to France from his home base of Milan, he did not consider himself as a poet belonging exclusively to a French literary sphere that was sealed off from Italy. He was also active on the Italian literary scene, so that his activities there in the first years of the twentieth century can be seen mainly as a local extension and application of his literary endeavours in international francophone literary circles.¹³

Things began to shift gradually with the foundation of the review *Poesia* (1905). Defined in the subtitle as *Rassegna internazionale*, the review hosted contributions from various literary traditions, but it acted first and foremost as a bridge between French (or francophone) literature on the one hand and Italian literature on the other. Through the magazine, Marinetti started to act in a more systematic vein as a mediator between francophone and Italian poetry, promoting French symbolism in Italy and encouraging the innovation of Italian symbolist poetry by actively looking for converging interests, exchanges, and dialogues between both literatures.¹⁴ Marinetti's endeavours strengthened his image of a poet and critic with a hyphenated identity, to the extent that on the first page of the 1908 volume *Il Poeta Marinetti* by Tullio Panteo he was

called “il poeta ormai per antonomasia ‘italo-francese,’”¹⁵ writing mainly or exclusively in French but continuously expanding the connections and cross-overs between his well-established francophone network and steadily growing Italian literary and artistic connections.

Now of course it could be argued, as Poggioli suggested in his *Teoria*, that Marinetti’s career planning as well as his recognition of the capital role of Paris and the language of French all simply testify to the fact that the avant-garde formed a mere subculture, a layer or substratum in culture at large, operating in a relatively autonomous manner and cut off from the rest of culture, in a position of (self-)isolation that found its artistic outlet and celebration in the promethean and cosmic stances of the symbolist poetry Marinetti embraced.

With the foundation of futurism at the beginning of 1909, however, Marinetti’s hyphenated identity and his position on the artistic and literary scene would see substantial changes. The launch of the various futurist programmes had a profound impact on Marinetti’s poetics, substantially symbolist by affiliation and inspiration, but now bound to undergo a process of aesthetic radicalization and explicit translation in social and institutional agendas that eventually conflicted at least in part with his symbolist background. This shift led to an increasingly complex relationship between his futurist agenda and his symbolist literary writing, as is documented not just by some of the explicit and well-known anti-symbolist stances in manifestos,¹⁶ but also by the changes in the relationship between his writings in French and in Italian. These changes did not concern just the use of language as such, but mainly the function of the choice of language in terms of broader literary repertoires and in terms of distribution and circulation of his writings within mass culture. Paraphrasing Poggioli, one could conclude that the shifts in Marinetti’s artistic career reveal a state of incessant confusion between derivations, yet it could also be argued that behind these striking and apparently contradictory transformations in Marinetti’s art and poetics there is a coherent and strategic attempt to achieve (or at least initiate) a profound rearticulation of a set of contemporary derivations vis-à-vis the cultural-aesthetic residue of artistic expression as such.

This paradoxical coexistence of confusion between derivations and strategic rearticulation of their foundations is particularly visible in the early development of futurism in Italy. Right from the launch of futurism in February 1909, the movement was promoted both on a local or national (Italian) level and on an international one. It is a well-known fact that the publication of “Le Futurisme” in *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909 was preceded by a number of

versions in Italian published in particular by local newspapers, especially in northern Italy.¹⁷ This was basically what Marinetti would continue to do in the years to come: while making sure that his manifestos circulated as widely as possible in an international context, publishing in French but also in various other languages (often on the occasion of conferences, exhibitions or performances), he was particularly concerned with the widespread promotion of futurist ideas in Italy. Manifestos were published in newspapers and magazines, as separate leaflets, as prefaces to books of poetry,¹⁸ to such an extent that futurism soon became a popular cultural phenomenon in Italy, Marinetti himself enjoying the status of a national popular figure. His often spectacular actions and performances, as well as the recruitment of many poets and artists in the ranks of futurists, were all aimed at constructing a movement as visible and as widespread as possible. The first two years of futurism witnessed quite an impressive number of actions, performances, manifestos, and leaflets specifically devoted to the Italian audience and press and adapted to local circumstances, such as political pamphlets on the occasion of elections or texts written as speeches delivered to factory workers.¹⁹ From early 1910 on, various Italian cities saw the *serate futuriste*, with public reading of manifestos and bellicose discourses, often with strong political (anti-Austrian) content. The two issues of *Il Futurismo*, published in 1910 as a supplement to *Poesia*, were written exclusively in Italian and devoted considerable space to the actions of the futurists in Italy.

As is well known, a large number of Marinetti's manifestos and discourses were translated into French and came to circulate outside the Italian peninsula. Yet on the whole it can be said that Marinetti's actions in Italy were much more linked to specific contexts and interventions (adapting to local agendas and needs regarding the propagation of the movement), whereas the translation and circulation of futurist materials in French was of a different nature. In 1911 Marinetti collected most of his manifestos in a French translation in the volume *Le Futurisme* published by Sansot (the book would appear only in 1915 in Italian as *Guerra sola igiene del mondo*), apparently as a way of offering an international readership a transversal idea of what the movement represented. That some of the news on the trial against *Mafarka il futurista* was also aired in French had to do with the fact that the novel was also published in French (in fact, the French version was published one year before the Italian version).

Significantly, in his creative literary work Marinetti continued not only to prefer French but also to use the same stylistic and rhetorical repertoire of his pre-futurist, symbolist work. In 1908, just before the launch of futurism, he

had published a book of verse, *La Ville charnelle*, and the prose texts of *Les Dieux s'en vont*, *D'Annunzio reste*. In 1909 he published in French *Poupées électriques* and *Mafarka le futuriste*, both of which were readily translated into Italian.²⁰ In 1911 Marinetti's reports on the war in Libya, first published in the French magazine *L'Intransigeant*, were written in a highly literary style and collected in a volume in French (*La Bataille de Tripoli*) that was immediately translated also in Italian (*La Battaglia di Tripoli*). Eventually, in 1912, he published the last of these symbolist texts in French, *Le Monoplan du Pape*.

In sum, many of the derivational aspects Poggioli associated with the avant-garde are remarkably absent from the case of Marinetti, notwithstanding the fact that his work and the movement of Italian futurism to this day are considered a prime example of the classic avant-gardes. We could go on to qualify Poggioli's claims about the avant-garde's symptoms of alienation by looking at the at times impressive print runs of futurist publications, the size of the audiences attending their *serate*, or even by turning to many other avatars of the avant-garde.

It has rightly been argued that only from 1912 onward did Marinetti's own literary work, from then on first published in Italian, gain a clear avant-gardist edge. Marinetti's poetological and literary writings displayed an acute awareness of their inflammatory rhetoric. However, against the academy, juries, and self-professed gatekeepers of aesthetic quality, against sentimental and romanticized depictions of love, against the Symbolists, against museums and against archaeologists, tourists, and antiquarians, Marinetti's iconoclasm offered scant resistance. To say that until 1912 Marinetti's literary work was predicated on little more than performative acts of announcement may be overcharged,²¹ yet, as John J. White has shown convincingly, whenever Marinetti actually outlines the nearing 'liberation' of Futurism for us, be it during the "serate," or in prose texts such as "La Guerre électrique" (1911) or *Mafarka le futuriste* (1909), his texts remained much indebted to late nineteenth-century Nietzschean Decadentism, and, when compared with the writings of Jules Verne or Mario Morasso, proved "remarkably jejune" attempts at imaginative science-fiction.²² The glorification of machines and of the modern metropolis so typical of his work in French before 1912 further belonged to the stock of a previous generation (including the Unanimists, Émile Verhaeren, Laurent Tailhade, and Paul Adam).²³ All this only adds to the impression of Marinetti's knowing very well how to play both the cultural elites as well as the masses, and his (occasionally admittedly hysteric) celebration of modern technological advances does not stand at par with a personality alienated from those advances.²⁴

The fear of democracy—by way of conclusion

Nonetheless, it is much harder to rebut the political alienation Poggioli evoked. Many avant-gardists, including Marinetti, regarded modern representational democracy as the ventriloquist's dummy of not always visible, economically powerful groups and classes incapable of endorsing revolutionary change, and more often than not avant-gardists presented themselves as a group capable of such a task. The case of Marinetti, who would go on to launch his own Futurist Political Party, speaks volumes in this respect. Others, however, felt outright threatened by it, fearing, as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill did before them, the rule of the mob.²⁵ Fear of mass politics in many cases incited the classic avant-garde's dislike for conventional, mimetic art. To many, the avant-gardes formed a passive imitation of themselves, an imitation they tried to escape through semiotic experiment.²⁶ Thus there is certainly a case to be made, as we have shown at length elsewhere,²⁷ for the necessary connection between the avant-garde and democracy which Poggioli's *Teoria* kept coming back to time and again. There is in this respect, too, an aristocratic element to the avant-gardes, one that also surfaces in the work of Ortega y Gasset, among others. And so, the historical alienation evoked by Poggioli amounts to an apt observation. Whether Poggioli really needed Pareto's method to arrive at these insights is another matter, however.²⁸ As Raymond Aron once remarked, "One does not dare say that the results [of Pareto's method] are false, but perhaps they are not very instructive."²⁹ Or perhaps it could be said that Pareto's remarks on "residue" and "derivation" were at least instructive to the extent that they helped Poggioli to work his way through the paradoxical intertwining of aristocratic isolation and claims of radical freedom in so many of the avant-gardes.

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Notes

1. Harry Levin, "Preface," in Renato Poggioli, *The Spirit of the Letter: Essays in European Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1965), x-xi.
2. See Cesare Pavese and Renato Poggioli, "A Meeting of Minds," *Carteggio 1947-1950*, Silvia Savioli, ed. (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2010), 41-43 (the first time Poggioli's *Teoria* is mentioned), 93-94, and 99-100 (Pavese's enthusiastic reactions on the chapters of the book republished in *Inventario*).
3. *Il Fiore del verso russo*, an anthology of Russian poetry edited in 1949 by Poggioli and published by Einaudi, contained such critical comments on the Soviet regime that the publishing house decided to include a disclaimer at the beginning of the book. See Pavese and Poggioli, "A Meeting of Minds," 99-101.
4. In 1947, it was Einaudi who published Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere*.

5. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Gerald Fitzgerald, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1968), 4.
6. Renato Poggioli, "For a Literary Historiography Based on Pareto's Sociology," *The Spirit of the Letter*, 291-322; first published as "A Tentative Historiography Based on Pareto's Sociology," *Symposium*, 3 (1949): 1-28. The Italian version of this essay, mentioned also in the correspondence with Pavese, was published in the review *Inventario*, 2/3 (1949): 41-74.
7. See also Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 393. The literature on Pareto is quite elaborate, and it should be highlighted that Poggioli's use of Pareto is peculiar. Insightful studies on Pareto in English are Alasdair Marshall, *Vilfredo Pareto's Sociology: A Framework for Political Psychology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), and Joseph V. Femia and Alasdair James Marshall, eds., *Vilfredo Pareto: Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).
8. Real history, he added elsewhere in his essay, was therefore probably to study "the situation of equilibrium or lack of balance which comes to be established between the residues that control the individuals of the subjected classes and the residues of a different order that prevail among the members of the governing class or elite" (Poggioli, *Spirit* 301). Unfortunately, literature in Poggioli's mind could not be of significant help here.
9. Pareto as quoted in Daniel W. Rossides, *Social Theory: Its Origins, History, and Contemporary Relevance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 203.
10. See Sascha Bru et al., eds., *Regarding the Popular: High and Low Culture in Modernism and the Avant-Gardes* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).
11. Marinetti's first book of verse was *La Conquête des étoiles* (Paris: La Plume, 1902; Paris: Sansot, 1904 and 1909) and was translated into Italian only in 1920 (Milan: Sonzogno). His second book of epic poetry, *Destruction* (Paris: Vanier-Messein, 1904) was translated into Italian in 1911 (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*, 1911). Also in 1904 he published *La Momie sanglante*, published in Milan by Edizioni di Verde e Azzurro. His theatrical play *Le Roi Bombance* was published in 1905, first staged in 1909, and translated into Italian in 1910. His witty portrait of D'Annunzio, *D'Annunzio intime*, was published in 1903 by the Edizioni di Verde e Azzurro and translated into Italian in 1906. Also on D'Annunzio he published *Les Dieux s'en vont, D'Annunzio reste* (Paris: Sansot, 1908).
12. In a review of *Le Roi Bombance* published in *Gil Blas*, the critic Jules Bois writes, "Marinetti a de quoi rendre jaloux Stendhal: il est né à Milan et il est poète—poète français" (quoted in Tullio Panteo, *Il Poeta Marinetti* [Milan: Società Editrice Milanese, 1908], 151).
13. On Marinetti's conferences on and readings of French (symbolist) poetry throughout Italy, following his acclaimed reading performances in France, see Panteo, *Il Poeta Marinetti*, 87-102. On Marinetti's promotion of francophone literature, and on the 'osmosi simbolistica franco-italiana' realized in the reviews Marinetti actively contributed to, see Gaetano Mariani's seminal study *Il Primo Marinetti* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970) and Ermanno Paccagini, "Marinetti francese prefuturista," in *F. T. Marinetti=Futurismo*, Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Fondazione Stelline, Milan, 12 February-7 June 2009 (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2009), 53-81; English version 285-99.
14. One of the most telling examples of how the review functioned as a bridge is the debate on the *vers libre*, which resulted in Gian Pietro Lucini's *Ragion poetica e programma del verso libero* (Milan: Edizioni di *Poesia*, 1908) and the volume *Enquête internationale sur le vers libre et manifeste du futurisme* (Milan: Edizioni di *Poesia*, 1909).
15. Panteo, *Il Poeta Marinetti*, 13. In the same volume, Marinetti is called "egiziano di nascita, francese d'origine, italiano d'adozione" (Egyptian by birth, French by origin, Italian by adoption), 128.
16. The most well-known examples are "Tuons le clair de lune!" published in the last issue of *Poesia* (August-October 1909) and republished in the volume *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*, 1911), and "Noi rinneghiamo i nostri maestri simbolisti ultimi amanti della luna," published in *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*, 1915).
17. See Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2009), 4-5.

18. In 1909, for instance, the founding manifesto was included as a preface in *Le Ranocchie turchine* by Enrico Cavacchioli (Milan: Edizioni di *Poesia*), and “Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!” now with the title “Proclama futurista” figured in Paolo Buzzi’s book of verse *Aeropiani* (Milan: Edizioni di *Poesia*, 1909). Aldo Palazzeschi’s *L’Incendiario* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*, 1910) was published with a lengthy introduction by Marinetti with a well-known report of the first *serata futurista* in Trieste. For a list of flyers distributed by the Direzione del Movimento Futurista, see “Manifesti e comunicati stampa in foglio volante,” in *Bibliografia del futurismo*, Claudia Salaris, ed. (Rome: Biblioteca del Vascello, 1988).
19. See the “Manifesto politico futurista” published in March 1909 in *Poesia* on the occasion of the upcoming elections; in March 1910, the anarchist magazine *La Demolizione* hosts “I nostri nemici comuni” (our common enemies), a call by Marinetti for an alliance between futurists and worker’s movements against enemies such as *clericalismo*, *affarismo*, *moralismo*, *accademismo*, *pedantismo*, *pacifismo*, *mediocrismo*. In the same year 1910 Marinetti holds various lectures on violence for factory workers’ associations, publishing a written version of this conference in *L’Internazionale* in 1910. The well-known manifesto *Per la guerra, sola igiene del mondo* is published in 1911 on the occasion of the outbreak of the war over Libya. It is noteworthy in this respect that Marinetti’s emphasis on (political) violence and demolition in his conferences of 1910-1911 is echoed by the publication of the Italian translation of *Destruction* (*Distruzione*, 1911).
20. *Mafarka le futuriste* is translated by Decio Cinti in Italian and published by the Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia* in 1910, and *Poupées électriques* is performed in January 1909 as *La Donna è mobile* at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin.
21. Christoph Hoch, “S C R A B R R R R R A A N N G! Zu Programm und Literaturästhetik des Futurismus im europäischen Kontext,” in *Der Lärm in der Strasse: Italienischer Futurismus, 1909-1918*, Norbert Nobis, ed. (Hannover: Sprengel Museum, 2001), 258-74.
22. John J. White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant-garde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 324.
23. Daniele Lombardi, “In Principio fu l’armonia,” in *L’Uomo e le machine*, Mimma Bresciani Califano, ed. (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2002), 181-94.
24. As some have suggested, the “modernolatria” of early futurism could be read as an expression of a latent fear of technological advances. See Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996).
25. See Rachel Potter, *Modernism and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006), Andrew John Miller, *Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2007), Michael Tratner, *Modernism and Mass Politics* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1995), and Tom Villis, *Reaction and the Avant-Garde* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).
26. Gunter Gebauer and Cristoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture—Art—Society*, Don Reneau, trans. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995).
27. Sascha Bru, *Democracy, Law and the Modernist Avant-Gardes: Writing in the State of Exception* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2009), 41-86.
28. Admittedly, Pareto himself, in his final, 1921 study *Trasformazione della democrazia*, set out to tackle the problems and dynamics inherent to democracy. Yet he was arguably not the only one to do so at the time.
29. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (1967) (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 204.