

This is a full transcription of the first English appearance of F.T. Marinetti's manifesto 'The Variety Theatre' (abridged from the French and Italian versions) from the *Daily Mail*, 21st November 1913. Included is the original single illustration – a small photograph of Marinetti. The English text was later republished in *The Mask: A Quarterly Journal of the Art of the Theatre* in January 1914 under the title "In Praise of Variety Theatre".

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## THE MEANING OF THE MUSIC HALL

BY THE ONLY INTELLIGIBLE FUTURIST

F. T. MARINETTI

*In those literary and artistic circles where Life and Decadence meet on equal terms at midnight, Signor Marinetti has created something like a furore by his unexampled power of explaining and illustrating the philosophy of Futurism in terms which are capable of being comprehended, after supper, by the merely human brain. In the article which we print below he attempts to show what the modern music-hall is, as seen through his own remarkable temperament. We accept no responsibility for this effusion, which is sure to interest both those who understand it and those who do not: except to this extent, that in the interest of the latter class, who are possibly less numerous than we suppose, it has been slightly - very slightly - edited.*

We Futurists are profoundly disgusted with the contemporary stage because it stupidly fluctuates between historic reconstruction (*pastiche* or plagiarism) and a minute, wearying, photographic reproduction of actuality. We delight in frequenting the music-hall or variety theatre, smoking concert, circus, cabaret, and night club, which offer to-day the only theatrical entertainment worthy of the true Futurist spirit.



**SIGNOR MARINETTI**

Futurism exalts the variety theatre because, born as it were with us, it fortunately has no tradition, no masters, no dogmas, and subsists on the moment. The variety theatre is absolutely practical because it aims at entertaining and amusing the public by performances either comic or startling to the imagination. The authors, actors, and mechanics of the variety theatre exist and conquer their difficulties only for one purpose, that of everlastingly startling by new inventions. Hence the absolute impossibility of stagnation or repetition, the desperate emulation of brain and muscle to beat all previous records in agility, speed, strength, complexity, and grace.

## **FUTURISTIC WONDER**

The variety theatre offering the most lucrative medium for endless inventive effort most naturally produces what I call the *Futuristic Wonder*, a product of modern mechanism. It presents caricature in its fullest form, foolery of the deepest kind, impalpable and delicious irony, absorbing and decisive symbols, torrents of irrepressible hilarity, profound analogies between human beings and the animal, the vegetable, and the mechanical world; swift revelations of cynicism, a network of spritely wit, puns, and cock-and-bull stories which pleasantly fan the intellect; all the scales of laughter to relax the nerves; all the scales of such fun, foolery, doltishness, absurdity as insensibly urge the soul to the very edge of madness; all the new meanings of light, sound, noise, and speech and their mysterious, inexplicable correspondence with the most unexplored centres of our sensibility.

The modern variety theatre is the overflowing melting-pot of all those elements which are combining to prepare our new sensibility. It lends itself to the ironical decomposition of all our worn-out prototypes – the beautiful, the great, the solemn, the religious, the fierce, the seductive, the terrible; and also to the abstract forecasting of those new prototypes which shall succeed them.

The variety theatre is the only kind of theatre where the public does not remain static and stupidly passive, but participates noisily in the action, singing, beating time with the orchestra, giving force to the actor's words by unexpected tags and queer improvisational dialogues.

## **IDEAL SCHOOL OF SINCERITY**

The variety theatre is the ideal school for sincerity for man, in that it brutally strips woman of all her veils, of the romantic phrases, sighs, and sobs which mask and deform her. On the other hand, it shows up all the most admirable animal qualities of woman, her powers of attack and of seduction, of treachery and of resistance. The variety theatre is a school for heroism by reason of its various record difficulties to be beaten and record efforts to be surpassed, which produce on its stage a strong and healthy atmosphere of danger (looping the loop on a bicycle, in a motor-car, or on horseback). The variety theatre is the only school to be recommended to adolescents and young people of promise, because it explains in the swiftest and most striking manner the most mysterious sentimental problems of life and the most complicated political events. In fact, the variety theatre explains and most luminously illustrates the dominating laws of life:

The interpenetration of separate rhythms.

The inevitable nature of lying and contradiction.

The synthetic combination of speed with transformation (Fregoli).

The variety theatre is, of course, anti-academical, primitive, and ingenuous, and therefore all the more significant by reason of the unforeseen nature of all its fumbling efforts and the coarse simplicity of its resources (singers who walk

methodically round the stage after every verse, like caged beasts). The variety theatre destroys all that is solemn, sacred, earnest, and pure in Art – with a big A. It collaborates with Futurism in the destruction of the immortal masterpieces by plagiarising them, parodying them, and by retailing them without style, apparatus or pity, just like any ordinary turn. And that is why we loudly applaud the execution of “Parsifal” in forty minutes.

#### **“TO PROVOKE IMMENSE ROWS”**

Futurism wants to perfect the variety theatre by transforming it into the theatre of wonders and of records. It is absolutely necessary to abolish every vestige of logic in the performances of the variety theatre; to exaggerate luxury; multiply contrasts and give the supreme place on the stage to the improbable and the absurd (example: to oblige singers to dye their necks, their arms, and especially their hair, all colours, hitherto unused for purposes of seduction: green hair, violet arms, blue neck, orange chignons, etc.). Futurism wants to abolish those Parisian revues whose *compère* and *commère* merely replace the chorus of the Greek tragedy. Out upon logic and consecutive ideas!

To introduce surprise and some necessity for action in the audience, I hazard a few random suggestions: To smear gum on a stall so that its occupant may be stuck to his seat and excite general hilarity. Naturally the evening coat or dress would be paid for by the management. To sell the same place to ten different persons; obstructions, discussions, and quarrels will necessarily follow. To offer free seats to ladies and gentlemen who are notoriously cracked, irritable, or eccentric – calculated to provoke immense rows by bizarre or objectionable behaviour.

To debauch systematically all classical art, producing, for instance, in one single evening all the Greek, French, and Italian tragedies in abridged form. To enliven the works of Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, Bellini, Chopin by cutting into them with Neapolitan songs. To soap carefully the planks of the stage so that the actors may slip up at the most tragic moments.

To encourage in every way the genus of the American Eccentric, all his mechanical grotesque effects, his coarse imagination, his immense brutality, his surprise waistcoats and his baggy trousers, deep as a ship’s hold, from which will be brought out, with a thousand other cargoes, the great Futurist hilarity which shall rejuvenate the face of the earth.

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