

BRIAN GANTER / Preface: Manifesto, Unremitting

Today, there is a spectre haunting the manifesto: the spectre of modernity. One can scarcely begin to assemble a volume such as this one without meeting abrupt detours, flights, and turnabouts to the avant-garde “isms” of the early 20th century, a mark of the continuing regard for the manifesto as THE genre of high modernity, or, with a nod to José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel*, of modernismo.

Of course the historical record, of which the current volume is both a condensed and an overdetermined microcosm, registers and reveals the much more expansive range and uncontainable sweep of this fundamentally transformative and interventionist mode of writing.

That world-transforming struggle-text, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, launched not just a revolutionary movement but an equally revolutionary mode of writing, one that pioneered what has come to be called (and is now frequently reviled as¹) “symptomatic reading” quite some time before Althusser and Macherey would later famously name it as such.

Of course not all manifestos plot a course of symptomatic diagnosis or rigorous critique, nor do they engage in rallying their publics to join in the overthrow of the existing state of things. The manifesto of refusal, which charts more modest, local interventions (the Manifesto of Intellectuals, for example, signed by the painter Monet, among others, protesting the innocence of Dreyfus) and the anti-festo, the “manifesto” that takes manifesto writing itself as its object of criticism, have established themselves as well. Claude Abastado, who has been a productive contributor to recent critical discussion of the manifesto adds an additional twist: he coins the term “manifestary” writings to acknowledge the more traditional, non-manifesto forms (prefaces, essays, novels) that, due to the demands of their audience and their times, have taken on the historical or political function of manifestos, from Wordsworth’s “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads* to Robbe-Grillet’s *Pour un nouveau roman* to Whitman’s *Song of Myself* (cited in Yanoshevsky 265).

¹ See Mark Edmundson’s “Against Readings” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (24 April 2009).

² See Galia Yanoshevsky’s “Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto: The Making of a Genre” in *Poetics Today* 30:2 (Summer 2009), 265.

Still the fundamental calls for transformative critique and the practice of change writing have underlain the manifestos of three centuries, from anti-establishment critiques of cultural and religious conservatism such as *Le refus global* to Valerie Solanas' feminist *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* to the post-humanist and digitalist idioms invoked and articulated in Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." Today, manifestos, far from the pages of the modernist art book, continue to emerge and to circulate with critique-al energy and vitality on the streets and in the interstices of the everyday wherever global capitalism is confronted and resisted, as evidenced by the student writings, posters, and pamphlets found on the streets and walls of Nanterre, of Seattle, of Turin, of Athens, of London, of Vancouver's Downtown East Side (a point highlighted in different ways in the works here by Peter McLaren, Reg Johanson, and the participants in Margot Leigh Butler's HUM 101 Writing Course).

History teaches that the manifesto it is almost always "out of time" and "out of place": the time for it is never "now"; to say that now is not the time for manifesto is in keeping with its historical necessity. The continuing marginalization of manifesto, within both traditional (expressionistic) and experimental (anti- and post-realist) circles of writing and scholarship, in other words, can only in part be attributed to the "proprietary modernism" outlined above. It continues to be an outlaw mode of writing, rejected on writerly grounds (as polemic and as a violent will-to-closure of the subtle pleasures and ecstasies of reading); on pedagogical grounds (as a violation of the disinterested pursuit of ideas and imaginative agency of the individual subject); and on historical grounds (as a violation of the distance called for in historical analysis and critique: the manifesto writer is artist/writer in the role of side-taking, partisan historian).

The texts assembled here share only one commonality: they fruitfully explore and expose the promises and limitations, the continuing risks, and possible futures of the manifesto. As a mode of writing, of speaking, and as a visual and digital practice the manifesto has an established past, and, as the contributors show here, is quite capable of being remobilized as an energetic textual force in the present. Will it have a future? In *The German Ideology* Marx lays the charge against Feuerbach that when his writing is historical it is not materialist and when it is materialist it is not historical. Similarly, the manifesto's future will depend on its capacity for producing writing and imagery that is simultaneously and rigorously "material" and "historical" at once: the more it falls on one side exclusively or circumvents both altogether, the more its "future" will lie in the literary archives and in the textual museums of human history.