Infinity – Speed – Futurism – Freneticism – Effervescence – Smoke
Heroism – Thunder – Kicks – Punches – Lightings
Pum! – Prac! – Fracata! – Bum! – Bum! (Onomatopoeic sounds)
Create – Synthesis – Invention – Onomatopoeia – Graphism – Dynamism
Audacity – Intuition – Simultaneism
Primary Figures
Credit tomorrow but not today
The rows continue – The rows continue – The rows continue – The rows continue
When Marinetti (1876–1944) visited Buenos Aires in 1926, his best time had passed. Not only was Futurism a dated aesthetic, but Marinetti himself was almost fifty years old, which was shamefully old for the preacher of a doctrine that had once stated: “The oldest among us are thirty; so we have at least ten years in which to complete our task. When we reach forty, other, younger, and more courageous men will very likely toss us into the trash can, like useless manuscripts. And that’s what we want!”¹

The first of Marinetti’s nine lectures in Buenos Aires took place on 11 June at the Coliseo Theatre. The event was entitled El futurismo bajo sus diversos aspectos en los países en que imperan las escuelas de vanguardia (Futurism: Its Various Aspects in the Countries Where the Avant-garde Schools Hold Sway)² and elicited a great deal of interest, not because of its relevance to local aesthetic debates, but rather because the press – mainly the popular journal Crítica – had fuelled expectations regarding a potential scandal due to the Italian poet’s association with Fascism. The Argentine press rallied against Marinetti, mocking and attacking him as an ambassador of tyranny. Only the poets gathered around the avant-garde magazine Martín Fierro – who were generationally indebted to the poet – saved Marinetti from the porteño press, but even they made sure to distance themselves from his political leanings.³ To the general disappointment, the Buenos Aires lectures took place in relative calm. Marinetti behaved in a conciliatory way, affirming constantly that he was not a Fascist, and concentrating exclusively on preaching the ‘novelties’ of his more-than-a-decade old aesthetic.

Two months after the first lecture, the avant-garde magazine Valoraciones: Revista bimestral de humanidades, crítica y polémica (Assessments: Bimonthly Magazine of Human Culture, Criticism and Controversy, 1923–28) published an issue featuring drawings by important local writers such as Oliverio Girondo, Jorge Luis Borges, Leopoldo Marechal, Eduardo Mallea and Ricardo Güiraldes.⁴

² The Argentine journal La nación reviewed the lecture on 12 June under the title Orígenes y verdadero concepto del futurismo (On the Origins and True Concept of Futurism). This title has been sometimes mistaken as Marinetti’s own title (see Schnapp and Castro Rocha: “Brazilian Velocities.”)
⁴ [Anon.]: “Primer Salón de Escritores.”
The latter, one of the oldest and more respected martinfierristas, drew a sketch entitled “Síntesis de la primera conferencia de Marinetti en el Coliseo de Buenos Aires” (Synthesis of Marinetti’s First Conference at the Buenos Aires Coliseo, 1926). A Futurist work itself, the sketch immediately evokes action and energy. The focus point is a child-like robot from which flashes of lightning, waves and smoke violently emerge. Güiraldes made sure to include a complete repertoire of Futurist jargon: heroism, dynamism, simultaneism, invention, synthesis, audacity, intuition, infinity and speed. Planes, cars and trains are also present in order to evoke the Futurist obsession with machines; a skyscraper serves as another iconic element of the Futurist landscape. The onomatopoeias that characterized Futurist poetry also occupy a prominent place in Güiraldes’ sketch: Pum! Prac! Frácata! Bum, bum! The sketch is a poem evoking the sounds of modernity. At the bottom of the stage, the primary geometrical figures – square, triangle, rectangle, hexagon, trapezium – confirm the powerful influence of proto-Cubist painting (1906–1910). A playful mockery of Futurism, the sketch made no reference to the debate over Marinetti’s supposedly Fascist affinities.

Of interest, however, is the assumed artificiality of the scene. Güiraldes’s sketch is not just a satire, but also a visual representation of a historical event. The stage in the drawing is perfectly delineated, separating the audience from the events that take place on it. Seven spectators remind us of the debate that followed Marinetti’s first lecture. Journals such as La nación and La prensa reported a large audience that night, while others, such as La Vanguardia and La fronda, mentioned small crowds and empty seats. The spectators in the image occupy the first three rows, while the other rows appear to be empty. To ensure that his message was understood, Güiraldes wrote Siguen las sillas (the rows continue) several times across the bottom of the image, suggesting that the Coliseo was, in fact, more than half empty on that night. The crowd, which we know about from various sources, consisted mainly of a select group of writers, artists, intellectuals and members of the upper class. According to Schnapp and Castro Rocha, 498 spectators attended the 11 June lecture, a very impressive number indeed; however, since the Coliseo had a capacity of 1700, reporters could also leave the event with the impression of a half-empty venue.

By showing the spatial division between the audience and the stage, Güiraldes suggests that what we are seeing is a ‘performance’ of Futurism. As Carlos Fonseca notes, the small crowd at the bottom of the image is portrayed in a manner that ref-

---

erences cinema.⁸ The clear differentiation between the stage and the audience turns Marinetti into a spectacle, into a show that could, indeed, be a film. Marinetti himself is replaced with a fictional character – a robot – belonging, paradoxically, not to the future but to the past. By replacing Marinetti with a smoke-emitting automaton, Güiraldes implied the repetitive, mechanically reproduced aspect of Futurism, and insinuated that what the audience was watching could, in fact, be an animated film.

The satirical vein of the sketch is confirmed by the sentence: *Hoy no se fía, mañana sí* (Credit tomorrow, but not today), written by Güiraldes at the bottom of the stage. The saying relates to the signboard that small shops and restaurants in the Hispanic world often display in order to make clear that no credit is given. It is a joke that directs the reader toward a future that will never arrive. The audience that attended the Coliseo event was left with a similar promise: Futurism is not yet here, but *mañana sí* (it will be here tomorrow). This was a creed Marinetti had been preaching for seventeen years, but which by that time had mutated from an exciting social and aesthetic project into an entertaining – albeit ridiculous – science-fiction show. By the late 1920s, the Argentine artistic and literary community was moving forward into more Realist, socially engaged realms, thus fulfilling Marinetti’s prophesy of consigning him to the waste bin.

**Bibliography**


**Homenaje a Marinetti.** Special issue of *Martín Fierro* 3:29–30 (8 June 1926).


