Doing Logic with a Hammer: Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and the Polemics of Logical Positivism

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I. The Manifestos of the Vienna Circle

How does one start an avant-garde movement? First one needs a group of people ready to subsume their differences in the name of a common cause. Second, this cause must aspire to a fundamental, revolutionary change, a new departure, a utopian promise. And third, the new movement must be inaugurated in some form of public event and through the distribution of a collective statement, usually written anonymously, in the form of a manifesto. The genre of the manifesto crystallizes the most central features of early twentieth-century avant-gardism: utopian fervor, exaggerated claims, condensed slogans, a shrill tone, and demands for revolutionary action.1 Fuelled by the rapid translation and distribution of the *Communist Manifesto*, which helped create the manifesto as a genre, avant-garde manifestos such as those of Futurism and Surrealism proliferated with breath-taking speed in the early twentieth-century and quickly became the dominant genre of modernism, drawing everything from art to politics into its vortex.2

One example of this wider impact of the manifesto is a group of philosophers and scientists commonly known as the Vienna Circle.3 Although this circle was primarily concerned with a technical form of philosophy, it conforms to the features outlined above: it was founded through a collective mani-

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festo that called for a radical movement of which the Circle was to be the vanguard. If the collectivist and polemical features of the Vienna Circle are acknowledged at all, they have been seen as external to its philosophical problems, as features interesting from the point of view of biography or sociology but not from the point of view of philosophy. It is this assumption that I seek to challenge in this paper, arguing that the participation of the Vienna Circle in the polemics of modernist and avant-garde movements and their manifestos can be traced into the center of its philosophical project, effecting what organs of publication it chose, how it defined its own aspirations, and finally how it conceived of the form of philosophical writing.4

The manifestos that inaugurated the Vienna Circle conform exactly to the rhetoric, tone, and function of avant-garde and socialist manifestos including the most classical of all classical manifestos, Marx and Engels’s Communist Manifesto. Where Marx and Engels start by evoking the “reactionary forces” of church and state, the manifesto of the Circle evokes the reactionary forces of theology, metaphysics, astrology; and while the Communist Manifesto demands the unification of proletarians in the battle against capitalism, the Circle’s manifesto calls for the unification of all scientistically thinking people.5 The first manifesto of the Vienna Circle is driven by a sense of crisis that characterizes all manifestos. Addressing itself “To all Friends of the Scientific World View!” this manifesto begins with the exclamation, “We live at a critical intellectual moment!” and raises the specter of a newly dominant metaphysical and theological thinking which must be defeated at all cost.6 Calling for a battle against metaphysics, it pleads that “No one exclude themselves” from this pressing endeavor. The tone is one of intense urgency: it is high time that action be taken against the forces of metaphysics. This urgency is a question of philosophy, but it also has a social and political valence. The new school presents itself as a “modern” way of thinking that transforms public and private life as much as the practice of philosophy. This manifesto of the “scientistic world view” has fully absorbed the language of the socialist and the avant-garde manifesto, including its revolutionary rhetoric, its high concentration of exclamation marks, and its use of bold letters and caps that underline central slogans and demands. In addition, like many avant-garde manifestos, this text appeared not in a journal but rather as a leaflet distributed at the foundational event of the Vienna Circle. Tied to the ephemeral sphere of agitational leaflets, this manifesto was not meant to be anthologized but to be immediately enacted: everyone join the fight of the scientistic world view against metaphysics! Now!

At the same foundational gathering of the Circle during which the first manifesto was distributed, a second and longer text circulated, a text that is often referred to as the proper “manifesto” of the Vienna Circle: “The Scientific World View: the Vienna Circle” (1929) (*Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*). This second manifesto exemplifies another set of features commonly found in socialist and avant-garde manifestos. Like most manifestos, this text does not designate a single author and instead mentions three names, Hans Hahn, Otto Neurath, and Rudolf Carnap, as the collective signatories and authors who act on behalf of an entire group or collective. Like the first and foundational manifestos of many avant-garde art movements such as Futurism and Surrealism this second manifesto tries to found, name, and baptize a movement through a series of performative speech acts, and like these other manifestos it establishes a critical genealogy or history of the movement thus founded. At the same time this second manifesto continues the revolutionary and apocalyptic rhetoric of the inaugural leaflet. Indeed, the second manifesto goes so far as to claim that the Vienna Circle is part of the continuing struggle of Marxism against the forces of reaction. While the initial leaflet had only borrowed from the *Communist Manifesto* without directly referring to it, the second manifesto thus places its collective endeavor explicitly in the tradition of the *Communist Manifesto*. The enemy, metaphysical thought, is branded as a mystification of social exploitation, the philosophy of past oppressive modes of production and social organization, while the scientific thinking advocated here is on a par with a modernity marked by machines and “modern methods of production.”

The scientific philosopher thus becomes a “fighter” engaged in the “rational organization of economic and social life.” The association of logical positivism with Marxism may be surprising, since Marx’s Hegelian heritage was anathema to logical positivism, but one should remember that for the Marxist tradition from Lenin to Althusser the most important adjective of Marxism was “scientific.” Marxism and logical positivism thus share a project of demystification based on the aggressive propagation, through manifestos, of a modern and scientific world view.

The author behind the Marxian formulations in the second manifesto, *The Scientistic World View*, was without doubt the Socialist Otto Neurath, who believed that the proletariat alone could assure the future of logical positivism.

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11 Neurath, “Lebensgestaltung und Kassenkampf,” in Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften (Vienna, 1981), I, 227-93, 293, “the proletariat will be the carrier of a science without metaphysics.”
Otto Neurath’s attempt to fuse Marxism and logical positivism can be compared to the work of another major philosopher whom Neurath considered one of the leading members of the scientific world view, namely, Bertrand Russell.

Both were politically active figures, writing lectures, open letters, papers, articles, and actual manifestos on political issues. Neurath became a significant member of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic, and Russell was willing to be imprisoned as a conscientious objector and critic of his government at a time of war. For all their political affinities, however, there is one striking difference; while Russell kept his logic and his political pamphleteering more or less apart, Neurath saw his work in the Vienna Circle as an integral part of his politics. Neurath highlights this difference in his 1928 review, “Bertrand Russell: the Socialist,” in which he ends up criticizing Russell for not proceeding in a “scientific way” in the sphere of politics.

Neurath is astonished to find that the “exact philosopher” deviates from the scientific, i.e. Marxist, method when it comes to social phenomena. It was a mark of the Vienna Circle’s avant-gardism to attempt precisely a fusion of logic and politics.

Other members of the Vienna Circle were more hesitant about Neurath’s Marxist understanding of logical positivism, and sometimes critics speak of a second, Marxist circle within the Vienna Circle. Moritz Schlick, for example, resented the collectivism and the manifestos of the Vienna Circle, objecting to the affinity of the Circle’s polemical texts to those shrill avant-garde movements and manifestos that in his view had so little to do with science, logic, and philosophy. He thus complained about a “style taken from advertisement” and the “dogmatic pronouncements” of the Circle’s manifestos. Wittgenstein joined him in this critique, dismissing these manifestos as “bombastic boasting” (Großsprecherei).

And yet, the distinction between logical positivism and avant-garde pamphleteering which Wittgenstein and Schlick tried to preserve ultimately does not hold. All members of the Vienna Circle participated in the utopian and revolutionary understanding of logical positivism, whether strictly Marxist or not. This revolutionary utopianism was the reason why they were eager to present themselves as a collective movement, with a manifesto, a program, and a journal. I insist on a pervasive sense of revolutionary utopianism in the Vienna Circle because I argue that its collective manifesto and program were not accidental, polemical texts that can be separated from its other writings. On the contrary, a sense of utopian urgency and avant-garde polemics infiltrated all of its philosophical writings, however disinterested and detached.

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12 See Russell, “First Manifesto of the No-Conscription Fellowship” (1915) and the “Second Manifesto of the Non-Conscription Fellowship” (1917).
they may otherwise pretend to be. This infiltration has far-reaching consequences for it implies an uneasy marriage between truth and rhetoric, argument and agitation in the writings of logical positivism.

One example of the Circle’s fusion of logic and propaganda is its reliance on polemical slogans, such as “overcoming metaphysics” and the call to “begin all over again.” They are prominently placed in both manifestos, but they are repeated almost obsessively everywhere else as well. The militant nature of this “overcoming” characterizes, for example, Carnap’s essay “The Elimination [Überwindung] of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language,” which is a curious combination of logic and aggression. In this essay, Carnap reveals that when he and other logical positivists conjure the specter of “astrology” and “metaphysics” they are thinking not only of contemporary mysticism such as anthroposophy but also and perhaps especially of contemporary philosophers such as Martin Heidegger. Carnap’s essay tries to exemplify what it means to conduct a logical analysis of language through a critique of Heidegger’s *What is Metaphysics* (1929). Whatever one might think about Heidegger’s philosophy, Carnap’s text is less an argued critique than a polemic, for it does not even pretend to reconstruct the concerns and arguments of Heidegger’s text, of which it analyzes only a single paragraph. Rather, the logical analysis of language, here, presents itself as a weapon with which one can fire almost randomly at so-called metaphysical sentences. Such battles with contemporary philosophers are, however, only part of the project of logical positivism. In the more ambitious formulations that abound in these texts, the entire history of philosophy is seen as a history of error that must be both ignored and done away with once and for all so that a new, true philosophy can finally arise. Schlick, for example, who had tried to dissociate himself from the manifesto, *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung* (which was nevertheless dedicated to him), published a text emblematically entitled “The Turning Point in Philosophy” in the programmatic first issue of the newly-founded and newly-baptized *Erkenntnis*. The sense that philosophy had reached not one but the main turning point, an absolute rupture or revolution, permeates most texts published by the collective.

The claim to have “overcome” metaphysics by virtue of having reached an absolute “turning point” is interwoven with an additional figure or concept, that of construction. The critique of metaphysics fulfills the work, as the *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung* has it, of “cleaning up a thousand years of

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rubbish.”¹⁷ This, however, is only what Schlick calls the movement’s “rearguard action,” the negative side of what presents itself as a veritable avant-garde project.¹⁸ This positive, or avant-garde, side is what one could call the Circle’s utopian constructivism: after the ground is leveled and the rubbish cleared away, a new house of philosophy can be built. The architectural metaphor is important here, and Peter Galison has shown its central place not only for Wittgenstein, who designed a modernist building for his sister Margarethe Wittgenstein Stonborough, but also for Carnap, who gave lectures at the Bauhaus.¹⁹ Although the writings of the Vienna Circle were often concerned with technical problems pertaining to mathematics, logic, and science, the discussions devoted to these problems were embedded in a constructivist utopianism that shares many features with the Bauhaus, but also with the Russian constructivists.²⁰

Carnap’s central work is entitled “Der logische Aufbau der Welt” (1928), which should be translated as “The Logical Construction [literally: Building] of the World,” defines its task as that of finding “a system of construction” for language.²¹ The text itself attempts to mirror its constructivist metaphor by being divided into a “plan,” a “foundation,” a “ground level,” a “middle level,” and an “upper level.” This mode of procedure is repeated at every level of the work, which imagines a basic type of sentence, Protokollssatz, to function as the building block of this edifice. In order to obtain such sentences Carnap endeavored to create an axiomatic system that would allow him to reduce other sentences to these basic axioms, through the principle of “Zurückführbarkeit” (reducibility). Ultimately, Carnap’s axiomatic system would allow all sciences to be incorporated into one system, thus bringing about the unification of science under the roof of logical positivism. If this constructivist unification of science, which was perhaps the most central program of the Vienna Circle, sounds dangerously close to the rationalist hubris of the French Encyclopedistes, this association is appropriate, for Neurath envisioned nothing short of an “international encyclopedia of unified science.”²² The negative gesture of “overcoming metaphysics” is thus complemented by the utopian project of unifying all sciences by means of a constructivist and all-encompassing system of logic. The Circle’s avant-garde polemics were part and parcel of this aggressive utopianism that permeated the Circle’s most elaborate and important works.

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¹⁸ Ibid., 7.
²¹ Rudolf Carnap, Der Logische Aufbau der Welt (1928; Hamburg, 1998).
The shrill tone of manifestos were not an error in judgment, as Schlick and Wittgenstein claimed, but on the contrary the moments when the Circle’s aggressive and revolutionary utopianism showed its true face.

II. The *Tractatus* as Mirror and Manifesto

At first sight the language of the manifesto as employed by the Circle could not be further from the intricate form and the theory of language developed in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. What is commonly called the mirror or picture theory of language holds that well-formed sentences present a picture of the world, or rather a possible state of affairs in the world, and just as Wittgenstein’s mirror-theory of language is opposed to the interventionist polemics of manifestos, so his individualism is opposed to the collectivity that is encoded in these manifestos. Yet I will argue that the genre of the manifesto does inform the *Tractatus* in significant ways. In the end the *Tractatus* does not practice what it preaches and must invest its energy in a performative language built on condensed slogans and polemical coinages to accomplish its revolutionary project. “Manifesto” is the name for the genre most clearly defined by its investment in the effects and the efficacy of its own language, and for this reason one can use it to uncover the performative dimension of the *Tractatus*.

A first hint of this performative dimension can be found in the reception of the *Tractatus*, which was taken by many members of the Circle as a kind of foundational document, comparable to a foundational manifesto, of logical positivism. The second manifesto grounds its own revolutionary ambition in the fame of three figures, which it calls the “leading representatives of the scientific world view”: Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Most writers associated with the circle mentioned Wittgenstein as a central predecessor and treated him with great admiration if also with puzzlement. *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*, for example, warns that the *Tractatus* is “difficult to understand” and recommends to the reader Waismann’s more comprehensible adaptation. Nevertheless, the Vienna Circle not only drew on Wittgenstein’s ideas but also took some of Wittgenstein’s own formulations and placed them directly in its manifestos, claiming, for example, that all problems discussed in the history of philosophy are “fake problems” and that there are absolutely no genuinely “philosophical questions” let alone “riddles” which philosophy could venture to solve. Apparently, the Vienna Circle recognized the polemical overtones in sentences such as “6.5: The riddle does not exist”; “6.421: It is clear that a formulation of ethics is impossible”; and “Philosophy

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23 *Wissenschaftliche Weltsauffassung*, 332-36.
is not a proper discipline [Lehre].”25 These sentences are pointed and provocative, aggressive missives directed at traditional philosophy and metaphysics, which the Vienna Circle had sworn to overcome, eliminate, and épater. One sentence in particular was almost immediately appropriated as the central slogan of logical positivism and thus became a chief weapon against metaphysics: “7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one shall remain silent.” Reiterated innumerable times, this sentence became the rallying cry of the most militant wing of the Vienna Circle, the final command through which the battle against metaphysics, riddles, astrology, Heidegger, and the allied reactionary forces of Europe would be won.

One might of course take the position that such quotations and allusions did in fact do gross injustice to Wittgenstein’s self-reflective and subtle text. Wittgenstein’s own attitude toward the Circle and the obscure and difficult language of the Tractatus have led almost all critics to side with Wittgenstein in his defense against the collective, polemical propaganda of the Vienna Circle, its “Großsprecherei.” However, what this defensive strategy has obscured is how easily the Vienna Circle could appropriate the Tractatus for its polemical purposes, which points to the fact that something akin to “Großsprecherei” was at work in Wittgenstein’s own text. Even if it were true that the manifesto-like or sloganizing extractions from the Tractatus constituted simplified or even falsified versions of the text, the reception of the Tractatus as something like the original manifesto of logical positivism was made possible by the fact that the Tractatus itself contained some of these manifesto-like features, informed, as they may have been, by Wittgenstein’s interest in Socialism—he moved to Russia in order to work on a collective farm—as well as by the relentless pamphleteering of his teacher Bertrand Russell.26

The sloganizing tone of the Tractatus calls for a reconsideration of its own theory that language functions as a mirror. Indeed, the Tractatus itself admits that the fantasy of a mirroring language composed out of elementary sentences is little more than a pious hope, for such sentences are nowhere near in sight. At least the Tractatus itself is incapable of providing them. Wittgenstein’s own sentences cannot rest comfortably on a system of elementary sentences guaranteeing their constative status. Failing to practice what it preaches, the Tractatus itself cannot function as a mirror and instead must engage in acts of persuasion and propaganda, convincing the reader of the feasibility and desirability of a future in which a properly mirroring language will have been found or constructed. It is here that the Tractatus is, almost despite itself, complicit with the manifesto-like writings of the Vienna Circle. In her excellent book Wittgenstein’s

Ladder Marjorie Perloff remarks that the *Tractatus* is akin to the “gnomic and aphoristic manifestos of Malevich or the meditative poems of Wallace Stevens” because of its “recognition of a mystery that cannot be solved.”\(^{27}\) I would like to extend this remark and claim that the *Tractatus* participates in the manifesto-obsessed polemics of the avant-garde more generally.

One of the features the *Tractatus* shares with the standard form of the manifesto is that it consists of short, declarative, and therefore immensely extractable and quotable sentences. This is in fact the aspect of the *Tractatus* which the later Wittgenstein criticized most vehemently, declaring it “arrogant” and admitting ruefully that “In my book I still proceeded dogmatically.”\(^{28}\) Where the *Communist Manifesto* had begun with the axiomatic claim, “The history of society is the history of class struggles”\(^{29}\) the *Tractatus* opens with the claim that “1: The world is everything that is the case.”\(^{30}\) And where the *Communist Manifesto* culminated in the command “Proletarians of all Countries, Unite!,”\(^{31}\) the *Tractatus* ends with the command: “7: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.”\(^{32}\) Like most avant-garde manifestos, which are substantially shorter and choppier than the *Communist Manifesto*, the *Tractatus* rests its hopes on the force of individual sentences that follow one another abruptly, without transition or mediation. At the end of the preface to the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein reveals an awareness of this style, claiming that the value of his text is twofold, the truth of what it claims but also the manner in which this truth is expressed. To illustrate this second point Wittgenstein writes, “... the better the expression of thought, the greater the value of my work. The more the nail is hit on its head.”\(^{33}\) This formulation resonates with Nietzsche’s “philosophizing with a hammer,” the aggressive, provocative, and polemical rhetoric of Nietzsche texts.\(^{34}\) This rhetoric informs the *Tractatus*, most clearly so in its staccato rhythm, which is that of a hammer hitting in sentence after sentence, nailing down point after point. This rhythm and tone becomes audible by analyzing the *Tractatus* through a kind of reader response criticism, gauging the experience of having to jump from sentence to sentence, taking in all those absolutist claims, commands, and polemical directives one after the other without

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\(^{29}\) Marx and Engels, *Das Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 525.


\(^{31}\) Marx and Engels, *Das Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*, 560.


transition or explication. It might not be fortuitous to mention here that *Tractatus*
is, among many things, a war book and therefore a text written under the influence of *polemos*.

Wittgenstein’s system of numbering each sentence or group of sentences has a similar effect on the reader, namely that of accentuating and amplifying the force of individual sentences. It is true that the avant-garde manifesto and its way of numbering sentences and declarations might not have been the first model Wittgenstein had in mind when he decided on his complicated numbering system. Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*, one of the most important points of reference for the *Tractatus*, also uses such a system, as does Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, to which Wittgenstein refers in his title. Usually, the numbering system has been read as an attempt to create some form of constructivist or axiomatic system. After all, the *Tractatus* seeks to pave the way for the construction of “elementary sentences” with which a unified system of science can be built. There can be no doubt that its numbers somehow try to mimic such a system, suggesting that the *Tractatus* is already infused with something resembling axiomatic certainty, even if the real system has not been found yet. But this attempt at simulating through numbers an axiomatic system cannot hide the fact that the *Tractatus* can be nothing more than an anticipation of a true axiomatic system to come. Indeed, the heated controversy about the function of these numbers demonstrates that they failed to clarify anything and on the contrary have contributed to considerable misunderstandings. What remains, therefore, is a pretend-axiomatic, an axiomatic as rhetoric and as wish-fulfillment.

While the numbers fail to erect an axiomatic system, they have a very different effect, which is that of contributing to the polemics of the *Tractatus*, condensing as they do the text and heightening the force of individual sentences. In a footnote Wittgenstein writes, “the natural numbers associated with individual sentences indicate their logical weight [logisches Gewicht], their emphasis [Nachdruck].” While the first characterization speaks merely about “weight” as indicating importance, the second, however, implicates the use of force, the term “Nachdruck” literally referring to a pressure that is being applied, the making of an “impression.” One is reminded here once more of the hammer and the nail. The natural numbers allow the most important sentences to make particularly forceful impressions, while the decimals devaluate their sentences to the status of mere commentary. What this numbering system cre-

Wittgenstein’s Tractatus

ates is a hierarchy of sentences that enhances the force of select, individual sentences, giving them the weight of slogans. Wittgenstein’s numbers thus fulfill a function similar to the bold letters and aggressive type face used in many avant-garde manifestos, which were obsessed with questions of impact.

The figure who coined the term “art of the manifesto” and to whom one can in fact attribute the invention of the avant-garde manifesto was a lover of both war and polemics: F. T. Marinetti. Marinetti and other Futurists wrote hundreds if not thousands of manifestos, thus turning the manifesto into the most important form of expression of Futurism and the avant-garde more generally. Marinetti propagated precisely the hammering, Nietzschean understanding of language, with its concern for the right slogan (hitting the nail on its head) and emphasis. The terms Marinetti uses are “intensificando e serrando,” which mean “intensification and tightening,” and he insists on the importance of coming up with the right names and labels. Similarly, Antonin Artaud, when forced to defend his use of the manifesto, speaks about the manifesto’s peculiar “accent.”

Wittgenstein speaks about the form of the Tractatus in similar terms. Writing to Ludwig von Ficker about the publication of his text, Wittgenstein explains, “The numbers have to be printed at all costs because they alone provide the book with ‘distinctness and clarity’” (Übersichtlichkeit und Klarheit); at other moments he speaks of the “complete clarity of formulation” (vollkommen klare Formulierung) to which the Tractatus aspires. Wittgenstein here once more echoes Marinetti’s insistence that only the condensed, numbered style of the manifesto would let the ideas shine “in full light, not in half light [piena luce, non in mezza luce]” (Marinetti’s emphasis). Like the numbered declarations in manifestos, Wittgenstein’s sentences are exposed, highlighted, and condensed so that they can be used as instruments to fulfill their polemical purpose. Wittgenstein the craftsman already knows what he would theorize in his later work, namely that his sentences are tools and that what matters most is that they are successful and effective in achieving their goal. It is in this light that one should read Wittgenstein’s declaration, “Philosophy should only be done as poetry.” Wittgenstein uses the verb “dichten,” which indeed means “to write poetry,” but more literally it means “to condense.” What the practice of doing logic with a hammer amounts to is a particular performative

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38 Ibid., 294.
39 Antonin Artaud, letter to Jean Paulhan (13 September 1932) in Le Théâtre et son Double, in Œuvres Complètes (Paris, 1956-74), IV, 120.
41 Marinetti, Letter to Severini, 295.
dimension of the *Tractatus*, whose sentences cannot be true in themselves but instead are capable of doing things with words.

Not that I am advocating a “literary” or “aesthetic” reading of the *Tractatus*, even though Wittgenstein described his text to von Ficker as being “streng philosophisch und zugleich literarisch [strictly philosophical and at the same time literary].”\(^{43}\) This remark has led to a heated debate about the literary, aesthetic, or poetic value of Wittgenstein’s text.\(^ {44}\) While opening up the study of philosophy to questions of genre, this interest in the literary form of philosophy often continues to keep the two, philosophy and literature, apart because it envisions their conjunction as that of a philosophical content that is then poured into some literary form. What I propose instead is a reading that examines Wittgenstein’s investment in the polemical efficacy of his language. Rather than labeling the *Tractatus* a poem or discovering its “literary” dimension, one should view it as a text that seeks to condense language as much as possible to execute an act—drawing the line between the sayable and the unsayable, solving the problems of philosophy.

Once one becomes attuned to the hammering rhythm, tightened condensations, and interventionist efficacy of the *Tractatus*, it becomes easier to evaluate another tonal attribute, which is its breathtaking hubris. While modest in some of his concessions, Wittgenstein harbors the illusion, one he shares with many modern philosophers, of having solved all solvable problems and thus of having written the last philosophical book: “The truth of the thoughts expressed here is un-touchable and definitive. I am of the opinion to have essentially solved the problems once and for all.”\(^ {45}\) This declaration surely takes the hubris of logical positivism to an extreme. While Carnap, Neurath, and Schlick might have thought that all metaphysical problems were just rubbish, their confidence in their own contributions was somewhat more modest. Wittgenstein, by contrast, speaks with the full-blown confidence of the last philosopher.

Here, too, Wittgenstein participates in a feature of the manifesto, which had been formed by Karl Marx for the purpose of bringing the history of philosophy to a close. It is a genre created in the spirit of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, that philosophers stop interpreting the world and start changing it.\(^ {46}\) The problem each last philosopher faces is the paradox of still belonging to philosophy while also at the same time declaring it to be over, in Wittgenstein’s famous metaphor of climbing up the ladder of philosophy but at the same time

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throwing this ladder away. The *Tractatus* is infused with a sense of superiority, the self-righteous tone of the philosopher who ignores past philosophers and who has mastered the border between sense and nonsense. Due to its orientation toward action, the manifesto is impatient with “talk” and privileges action, it is a genre intent on changing the world rather than just interpreting it. And so it considers its own speech acts to be the last necessary speech acts, the final word before the real action begins. Every manifesto thinks that it is the last manifesto, that it has expressed everything that needs to be expressed. The bitter truth that all avant-garde manifestos only led to more manifestos is repeated in Wittgenstein’s own oeuvre: after having said the last word, Wittgenstein had to begin all over again.

III. The Manifestations of the *Tractatus*

However much Wittgenstein’s pose of the last philosopher might be a product of hubris, it is a hubris shot through with self-critique, with Wittgenstein’s sense of the limits of his own language. One such limit is addressed at the end of the text, under the category of showing, *zeigen*. The *Tractatus* here gauges the limits of its own speech, the ultimate meaninglessness of its own sentences, and it does so by reverting to the second, earlier meaning of “manifesto,” not that of a polemical and programmatic declaration but of a revelatory manifestation. I will argue that Wittgenstein’s vexed notion of “zeigen” or “sich zeigen” should be translated as “manifestation” and that this term is as both an extension and a critique of the manifesto-informed features of the *Tractatus*.

How does the *Tractatus* investigate the limits of its hubris and the paradox of the last philosopher? True to the Kantian project of drawing the line between the sayable and the unsayable from the inside, Wittgenstein can characterize the unsayable only in negative terms: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” However in a small but significant way Wittgenstein gives into the temptation of doing more than simply being silent by charging this silence with the notion of “sich zeigen [to reveal oneself; to manifest oneself].” “6.522: The unsayable exists. It reveals/manifests itself....” The unsayable must be expelled from the sayable of philosophy and this means from the speaking of philosophy, but it is allowed to return in the particular mode of “manifesting itself.” Wittgenstein’s ladder metaphor confirms that the ultimate purpose of the *Tractatus* lies in this non-verbal “showing”: the person who has climbed up the ladder and thrown it away must “overcome” what the *Tractatus* says in order to “see the world correctly.”

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However, the category of “manifesting/showing [sich zeigen]” lies not only in the forbidden realm beyond the sayable and beyond philosophy, but also at its very center. The sentences of logic, Wittgenstein admits, are not meaningful and do not refer to anything in the world. Rather they “manifest/show [zeigen]” the structure of the world, because they are the condition of possibility of meaningful sentences about the world. The double function of the verb “showing/manifesting,” one beyond philosophy and one at its core, has been recognized by most interpreters, and many have concluded, quite reasonably, that Wittgenstein must have been operating with two uses of the verb “to show,” one reserved for logic and the other for aesthetics and ethics and whatever else might lie outside the provenance of philosophy. One argument summoned for this proposal is the fact that Wittgenstein sometimes uses the verb “zeigen” reflexively, in the sense that something “shows itself” or “manifests itself” while at other times he talks about something simply “being shown” or “manifested.” And so it has become common to assume different uses of “zeigen,” one working inside and one outside the Tractatus. While demonstrations of this sort might be faithful to Wittgenstein’s Kantian project of maintaining the integrity of the line between the sayable and the unsayable—logic might be unsayable but it guarantees the sayable whereas aesthetics does not function as the condition of possibility of the sayable—they are unfaithful to the movement of Wittgenstein’s text. Wittgenstein chose to use the exact same word, zeigen, to characterize logic, aesthetics, ethics, and the mystical. Are we really to presume that a writer who builds up his text with single, numbered sentences, who carefully introduces every word, who condenses each sentence, and who tries to hit the nail with each swing of the hammer would suddenly, when it comes to one of the central concepts of the text, choose to confuse his readers by using a central term in two or more totally different ways?

Wittgenstein did indeed recognize a parallel between ethics, aesthetics, and logic, a recognition clearly recorded in the notebooks on which the Tractatus is based. Ethics, Wittgenstein had observed, is “life seen sub species aeternitatis,” while aesthetics is “the object seen sub species aeternitatis.” Now, suddenly, Wittgenstein is led to a conclusion with far-reaching consequences: “(now the thought suggests itself): the thing seen sub species aeternitatis is the thing in its relation to the space of logic.” Logic, aesthetics, and ethics thus share this point of view of eternity, the view that sees life, objects, and things in their totality. This parallel position of aesthetics, ethics, and logic thus did not es-

52 See Wolfgang Stegmüller, Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie. Eine kritische Einführung (Stuttgart, 1989), I.
53 Felix Gmür, Ästhetik bei Wittgenstein: Über Sagen und Zeigen (Freiburg, 2000).
cape Wittgenstein. Indeed it was one of his most important discoveries. The consequence of this discovery, however, is that all sentences of the *Tractatus*, and not just the silence at the end, participate in the mode of manifestation. It is possible to interpret the ladder metaphor in this sense: only those who recognize that all sentences of the *Tractatus* are not only logical but also aesthetic and ethical—and therefore equally transcendental, equally seen, equally meaningless—will be able to see the world correctly, and this means they will see it *sub species aeternitatis*.

The *Tractatus* probes the limits of language, for these limits do not appear simply at the end, after the sayable has been fully exhausted. On the contrary this text constantly has to overreach this limit in order to make a forceful point, to hammer in the nails, to accomplish the task of having the last philosophical word. This task is impossible to achieve not only because such attempts have always failed, but also because Wittgenstein recognizes the specific impossibility of his own sentences, calling them meaningless and demanding that they be thrown away. In this sense the *Tractatus* does not draw the line between the sayable and the unsayable “from within language.” Rather, the *Tractatus* is a text that recognizes that it has overstepped this limit and overstepped it with every single sentence. Rather than fulfilling the neat project of demarcation, it has become entangled in the messy project of trying to keep track of its transgressions.

The sense of the limits of his own sentences finally led Wittgenstein to the “mystical” or “religious” vocabulary that emerges at the end of the *Tractatus*. This vocabulary not only contributed to the mystique surrounding the *Tractatus* and its author, but it has also led to a series of outright religious interpretations, fuelled by the discovery of Wittgenstein’s so-called secret diaries. However, I will suggest that this theological vocabulary is also embroiled in the relation between the *Tractatus* and the genre of the manifesto, namely in the religious roots of the manifesto as manifestation.

Indeed, before the manifesto became a political genre, it had been a religious one. The transition from a religious to a political genre can be seen in the writings of the Diggers and Levellers, whose manifestos—the first modern texts bearing that title—borrowed heavily from the prophetic passages of the

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These early manifestos rely on aggressive invectives, but in addition they know that their own language, no matter how pointed and powerful, needs to be complemented by forms of revelation. It is from this source that the two meaning of the manifesto, as violent speech and as mystical revelation, are ultimately derived. Similar to those revelatory manifestos, the Tractatus seeks to complement or even complete its sentences with a mode of revelatory manifestation. After writing a powerful text in the manner of a socialist or avant-garde manifesto, Wittgenstein eventually reverts to the older form of the manifesto as religious manifestation.

Philosophical treatise and avant-garde manifesto—these two genres evoke a series of oppositions, including truth and agitation, philosophy and polemics—and yet in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus they are variously intertwined. The manifesto, after all, is the genre that wants to end and inherit philosophy, and therefore, in his attempt to write the last philosophical text, Wittgenstein was indirectly drawn to it. The manifesto, however, is more than simply the genre that replaces philosophy. In the course of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it continues to gather and connect various hitherto separated spheres and disciplines, such as politics, art, and philosophy, while impressing on them specific features, such as collectivity, revolutionary utopianism, and a peculiar polemical style and tone based on choppy sentences, abrupt changes, forceful interventions, and brevity. Philosophy somehow continued, but for the price of being haunted by the manifesto. There is perhaps no better place than the Vienna Circle to measure the influence of the manifesto on modernism because the Circle’s philosophical practice seems so utterly remote from the manifesto. That even logical positivism would be drawn into the manifesto’s sphere of influence is a final testament to this genre dominance over early twentieth-century culture.

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