



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>  
*Scholarly journals online*

# Books



*Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes.* By Martin Puchner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; 320 pp.; illustrations. \$60.00 cloth. \$22.95 paper.

The question of how art relates to politics has been staged a thousand times. A healthy question it is, as it shows no sign of abatement. Its life resides in a delicate balance between posing the question anew and posing it again. Within the framework of modernity, with its emphasis on making the self and the world, form reigns supreme. The language of form implies the art of making legible, tangible, and material that which is implicit all around us. As a genre, this work of negotiating aesthetic and worldly poesis is borne by the manifesto. That, at least, is Martin Puchner's elegant formulation, one that he pursues with remarkable erudition and toward very productive ends. Puchner takes his title and lead from Marx's genre-making text, the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which teaches us that it is manifestos' "form, not their particular complaints and demands, that articulates most succinctly the desires and hopes,

maneuvers and strategies of modernity: to create points of no return; to make history; to fashion the future" (2).

Puchner is interested in the ways in which the *Communist Manifesto* proliferates over time and space, accumulating a transnational audience along the way that it imagines can actually change the world by means of its own distinctive "form of literary agency" (32). This political-aesthetic agency is in turn animated by a productive entanglement of key terms of performance studies—performativity and theatricality. Puchner's book is at once an intricately wrought mapping of the manifesto's trajectories and an invitation to think the collaboration between art and politics generally in the register of performance studies. His temperament is never shy of generous as he tracks the manner in which the manifesto braids a politics of means and ends, words and deeds, theory and practice, tradition and innovation. These resources of creative possibility he locates in Marx's own poetic address, a speech act that poses as its own authority, in a manner that violates the linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin's claim that the theatrical mode disallows the performative. (Austin's example argues that saying "I do" onstage does not a marriage make [1962]). Instead, Puchner insists that the *Manifesto* constitutes its political efficacy (socialism) and historical agency (the proletariat) by means of a polyvalent bond. "The *Manifesto* speaks for the proletariat; it creates—makes in the sense of a performative poesis—the proletariat; and it theatrically enacts its future" (31). In this display of self-generating prophetics, performative means are entwined with theatrical ends.

The body of the book takes stock of the manifesto's manifold expressions. After showing us how the *Communist Manifesto* works, Puchner documents how the tract was put to work as an instance of globalization *avant la lettre*. Through the first part of the 20th century, the artistic and political avantgardes huddled closely together and nestled in the manifesto. Puchner illustrates this with respect to the Italian and Soviet Futurists, whose art will come to mark a form that, while ever variant, is aggressive rather than introverted and collective rather than individual (6). The movement of the manifesto is crucial to Puchner's account, for while it proclaims a future anterior, its political inflection is never singular, as British rear-guardists Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis make evident. Transnational movement

is part and parcel of the Dadaist and Surrealist incarnations of “manifesto art.” Yet, in this movement, Puchner wisely refuses a simple diffusionist model of the advanced or developed forms traveling to the world’s hinterlands. In contrast, he considers the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro’s global impact to observe the multidirectional feedback loop between Europe and the Americas (175). Rather than a simple displacement from center to periphery, Puchner considers that the most radical modernities appeared where the force of modernization violently confronted older forms of life. The (then) unexpected revolutions of Italy, Russia, and Latin America could open still-Eurocentric eyes to the emergent radicalism of China or India today.

*Poetry of the Revolution* also considers Artaud’s manifestos that serve as ends in themselves, his anti-theatre as the mid-century expression of artistic and political avantgardes becoming unmoored. But he concludes his study with the manifesto movements of the 1960s, such as the Situationists and lastly this very journal, *TDR*, both sites where he sees the artistic and the political rejoined. For Puchner, theatre like revolution requires repetition (a persistent series of breaks) to enact its novelty. Ultimately, he sees performance studies’ refusal of canonization as a resource to “make the new once more.” Let us hope that the future, as we now find it, can repay his confidence.

—Randy Martin

### Reference

Austin, J.L.

1962 *How To Do Things With Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Randy Martin is Professor of Art and Public Policy and Director of the graduate program in Arts Politics at Tisch School of the Arts/NYU. He is author, most recently, of *An Empire of Indifference* (Duke University Press, forthcoming) and coeditor of *Artistic Citizenship with Mary Schmidt Campbell* (Routledge, 2006) and *Returns of Alwin Nikolais with Claudia Gitelman* (Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming).

*TDR: The Drama Review* 51:1 (T193) Spring 2007. ©2007  
New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

***Tree: belief/culture/balance***. By Ralph Lemon. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004; 288 pp. \$34.95 paper.

*My father calls, an excited voice. Leaves a message. He’s never called me before, ever. I’m shocked and call him right back. “How did it go?” he asks.*

—Ralph Lemon (258)

Ralph Lemon’s manuscript takes the form of a documentary album about the making of the second installation of the Geography Trilogy, *Tree*, commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre for its inaugural 2000 performance in New Haven.<sup>1</sup> Album is the choice term here, as the volume records Lemon’s photographs, drawings, love letters, dreams, correspondences, journal entries, travel itineraries, weather reports, working notes, interviews, and poignant reflections on sound—focusing especially on



1. Lemon’s collaborating *Tree* dancers: Bijaya Barik (India), Carlos Funn (USA), Djédjé Djédjé Gervais (Cote d’Ivoire), Wen Hui (China), Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole (Ghana/USA), Manoranjan Pradhan (India), Asako Takami (Japan), David Thomson (USA), Wang Liliang (Yunnan, China), Li Wenn Yi (Yunnan, China), Cheng-Chieh Yu (Taiwan/USA), “and all our teachers” (273). Lemon’s other collaborators, especially Katherine Profeta (USA), also make appearances in the work.