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Futurism in the Netherlands, 1909–1940

Abstract: This essay aims to supplement, bring into focus and explain the image of the ways in which Italian Futurism manifested itself in the Netherlands in the years preceding the Second World War. This will be done on the basis of contemporaneous periodicals, especially De Kunst: Een Algemeen Geïllustreerd en Artistiek Weekblad (Art: A General and Artistic Illustrated Weekly), directed by Nathan Hijman Wolf and one of the most important Dutch information channels about the Futurist movement, and several other, less specialized magazines geared towards a broader readership. This analysis provides an overview of the exhibitions, lectures and publications in which Futurism took shape in the Netherlands. After its breakthrough in 1912–13, the movement appears to have found some positive responses. At the same time, however, it was not always taken seriously. That is the reason why it did not take root; at the outbreak of the Second World War, the movement had almost been forgotten. This can be explained by the fact that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the rupture with tradition advocated by Futurism seemed already to have been realized in the Netherlands by a former generation. Furthermore, the ambition of the Futurists to break through the limitations of the traditional artistic disciplines found little understanding, whereas its artistic, social and political radicalism raised much resistance.

Keywords: Futurist touring exhibition of 1912/13; Kunstzaal J.J. Biesing (The Hague); Galerie De Roos (Amsterdam); Kunstzaal Oldenzeel (Rotterdam); Rotterdamse Kunstkring; Louis Couperus; Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg

1 Introduction

The Historical Avant-garde played only a marginal role in Dutch literary history, as Gillis Dorleijn concluded in a study on Dutch cultural periodicals in the early twentieth century. The Dutch rejected the avant-garde almost unanimously, and Futurism along with it. Yet F.T. Marinetti belongs to the canon of authors who serve as international reference points in histories of Dutch literature, and such

1 Dorleijn: “Weerstand tegen de avantgarde.” Some initial efforts to chart the history of how Futurism was received point in the same direction: Reuten: “De Nederlandse pers”, Fontijn and Polak: “Modernisme”, pp. 185–188, and Den Boeij: “Futurisme in domineeiland.”
works also refer frequently to the manifestos of the Futurist movement. That is why it is still useful to determine how this movement emerged in the Netherlands and explore what kind of reactions it evoked. Such responses appeared not only in periodicals that set the tone in literary life, but also in newspapers and magazines with a different or broader readership. Considering these periodicals—a more feasible proposition nowadays when they can be searched digitally—allows us to add new insights and nuances to the existing picture. It is the aim of my contribution to outline how Futurism manifested itself in the Netherlands and how it was received here, as Walter Gobbers did with reference to the situation in partly Dutch-speaking Belgium.

I will limit myself to Italian Futurism, as, in the period under discussion, Russian Futurism was rarely discussed in the Netherlands. Anyone who referred to Futurism had in mind a group of revolutionary Italian artists led by Marinetti, who noisily opposed the established, traditionalist culture. In the period during which Futurism presented itself in the Netherlands, I shall distinguish four phases that will also define the structure of this essay: after a prelude from 1909 until 1912 (section 2), Futurism experienced a breakthrough in 1912–1913 (section 3 and 4). In the years 1913–1924, it received only a modest response, but those critics who wrote about it tended to malign the movement (section 5); between 1924 and 1940 it fell into obscurity (section 6). In the final section of my contribution, I shall summarize my findings and search for an explanation as to why, in the end, Futurism failed to gain a firm foothold in the Netherlands.

Here, the Futurists almost exclusively attracted attention in the fields of fine art and literature. Quite early on, the magazine Van Onzen Tijd (Of Our Time) printed a piece from an anonymous “Fransch hoorder” (French listener) to explain the ideas behind Futurist music. After that, however, only the compositions of modern composers generally regarded as belonging to other movements, like Leo Ornstein and Arnold Schönberg, was referred to as Futurist, and occasionally even the works of Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy. Piet Mondrian appears to have been the only person who called, in 1921, for a new musical practice corresponding with contemporary reality and lacking any harmonic melody or individual expression—a practice that required a new, impersonal musical language. To achieve such a musical art form, it seemed to Mondrian that new instruments would be needed. The Futurists did not go far enough in this respect, he thought, although the bruiteurs or intonarumori (sound machines) which Luigi Russolo had developed over the past decade would deal a fatal blow to traditional music, he believed. Mondrian expected the emerging practice to profoundly influence music in the future. After his essays, however, nothing more was heard of musical Futurism in the Netherlands. I will therefore concentrate on visual and literary manifestations.

2 Prelude (1909–1912)

The Netherlands first encountered Futurism after Marinetti published his Foundation and Manifest of Futurism in Le Figaro of 20 February 1909. Six months later, in the monthlies Den Gulden Winckel (The Golden Angle) and De Gids (The Guide), Jan Greshoff and Johan de Meester respectively quoted passages from Marinetti’s manifesto, accompanied by their own ironic comments. At the same time, their fellow writer Frans Coenen, also a museum curator, adopted a more ambivalent attitude in the weekly De Amsterdammer (The Amsterdam Weekly), reproducing the complete manifesto. It is possible that the leader of the Futurists had approached the Dutch intellectuals directly, because Coenen wrote that he received from Milan four issues of Poesia in which Futurism was recommended in various ways.

At first, Coenen took a bantering tone with the contributions to the magazine: “The content is very ordinary and even rather boring... just like the prospectus of a new shop for fancy goods.” He concluded: “We should not have to live in Holland in order not to believe that all of this is completely crazy and in order not to be convinced that—unless he be an overzealous agent of a motor car business—we are dealing here with a poor wretch who has been driven raving mad by automobiles and aeroplanes.” In the course of his article, however, Coenen appears to have taken Marinetti seriously, suggesting that at least in places the manifesto was beautifully written, that the author had succeeded in causing a commotion...

3 Gobbers: “Literatuur en kunst.”
4 It was mentioned in passing by, for example, Van den Eeckhout: “El Lissitzky’s electro-mechanisch amphitheater.”
5 [Anon.]: “Futuristische muziek.” Van Onzen Tijd 13 (1912/1913).
9 Greshoff: “IL Futurismo...!” and De Meester: “Krachtsvertonen.”
with a drama, and that he had published a well-received collection of poetry. On second thought, Coenen could imagine that the Futurist movement would have some positive effect. Although it was less revolutionary than it claimed to be, it might turn out to bring a wind of change to a civilization that had become stifling and ineffective. Coenen abhorred the ‘humbbug’ and ‘advertising’ of Futurism, but he fully endorsed what the movement was essentially trying to achieve. “That is why”, he concluded, citing the manifesto: “we also seek that giddy feeling that seizes us when we become aware that we are standing ‘sur le promontoire extrême des siècles’. We don’t want anything from the past behind us, we hate the places of reflection and remembrance, and we feel good only when we experience the endless possibility of the future.” Coenen did incidentally realize that his own position as a curator was at odds with his sympathy for Futurism: “In other respects one can actually agree with its requirements of destruction and glorification, except for the requirement of the ‘demolition’ of museums and libraries, to which I object for purely personal reasons.”

A year later, the Netherlands received another introduction to Futurism by the new Amsterdam journal De Kunst (Art). It is true that this “Illustrated Weekly for Drama, Music, Visual Arts, Letters, Architecture and Applied Arts” had a much smaller readership than De Amsterdammer, but in the following years it came to distinguish itself as the most important medium in the Netherlands to report on Futurism. In the issue of 10 September 1910, permanent staff member Werner Frankenmölle wrote about the Manifesto of Futurist Painters, which had recently been discussed by the critic Fritz Stahl in the Berliner Tageblatt. Frankenmölle translated the main passages and, following the example of Stahl, assessed them in positive terms, although he had not been able to personally see an exhibition of Futurist art. “But it is not really that bad. The manifesto gives an impression of how their paintings are ‘doing’.” On the basis of quotations, Frankenmölle revealed some important principles that appeared to underlie the paintings: that a portrait should not resemble the model, that the painted objects and their surroundings should merge, that human feelings were just as interesting as an electric lamp, that paintings should be noisy colour sensations and that the nude should be banished from art. According to Frankenmölle “some of these sentiments exist in some of the youngest of the young from all countries, (although) not as fiercely as in an Italian temperament that readily tends to extremes.”

For the time being, however, those sentiments were barely perceptible in the Netherlands. It would not be until 1912 that Futurism again appeared on the Dutch scene. The Hague publishing house Belinfante acquired in June the translation rights for Marinetti’s Le Futurisme (Paris: Sansot, 1911) and La Bataille de Tripoli, 26 Octobre 1911 (Milano: Edizioni Futurista di “Poesia”, 1912). However, the planned translations never materialized, perhaps because Marinetti was still not well enough known as a writer in the Netherlands. That same year, 1912, the editor in chief of De Kunst, Nathan Hijman Wolf (see Fig. 1), did however print a Dutch translation of Marinetti’s Foundation and Manifest of Futurism in his magazine. He did so in the context of a series of exhibitions which finally gave the Futurists their breakthrough in the Netherlands. By then, most of their paintings had been purchased by Berlin banker Wolfgang Borchardt.

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10 "Die inhoud toch is heel gewoon en zelfs nogal vervelend… als het prospectus van een nieuw galanteriemagazine" – "Wij zouden niet in Holland moeten leven, om dit allemaal niet volkomen gek te vinden en niet overtuigd te zijn, dat – tenzij mogelijk een overijverig agent van een automobielenzaak aan ‘t woord is – wij hier met een stakker te doen hebben, die door automobiel en aëroplane stapel gek geworden is" – “Daarom willen wij ook het gevoel van duizeling dat over ons komt als wij bedenken dat: Sur le promontoire extrême des siècles, en willen wij niets achter ons ons verleden, heden wij de plaatsen van bezinning en herinnering en gevoelen wij ons eerst wel als wij de eindeloze mogelijkheid van het toekomstige over ons gevoelen.” – “Maar overigens kan men het met zijn eischen van verwoesting en glorificatie toch eigenlijk best vinden. Behalve met dien eisch van ‘demolisatie’ der museën en bibliotheken, waar ik, om zuiver persoonlijke redenen, tegen ben.” Coenen: “Il Futurismo”, pp. 3–4.

11 “Maar dat is niet erg. Uit hun manifest kan men zich een indruk vormen, hoe hun schilderijen het ‘doen.’” Frankenmölle: “Futuristen”, p. [3].


14 One exception, though very positive in tone, was an anonymous announcement of Marinetti’s “L’Amant des étoiles” in De Hollandsche Reuver, 23 July 1901, pp. 533–534. The cycle was originally published in La Revue Blanche 25 (1901): 433–438. The Dutch magazine quoted a few lines from the poem “La Prière des amants.”

15 F.T. Marinetti: “Het manifest der Futuristen.”

16 See Loosjes-Terstra: Moderne kunst in Nederland 1900–1914, pp. 112–113.

17 On the rather uncertain identity of this person see note 19 in Pál Derék’s essay in this volume.
3 The Borchardt collection on tour (1912)

3.1 The exhibition at Biesing’s art gallery in The Hague

At the beginning of 1912, the first Futurist exhibition to be mounted outside Italy took place at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris and made the Futurists the talk of the international art world. Immediately, the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring (Rotterdam Art Club) and several other art galleries vied to be the first to exhibit the controversial paintings in the Netherlands. Eventually, the gallery Biesing in The Hague succeeded. On 3 August 1912, De Kunst was able to report that the first Dutch exhibition of the Futurists would open at Biesing in two days’ time.18 For this occasion, Herwarth Walden, editor in chief and publisher of the Berlin weekly Der Sturm, came over to explain the intentions of the exhibitors. The exhibition would run from 5 to 28 August.

18 [Anon.]: “De Futuristen.” De Kunst, 3 August 1912, p. 698.

It was accompanied by several articles by Wolf in De Kunst, beginning on 10 August.19 After having recommended the exhibition as an event that every artistically educated person should not miss and which had already attracted a rush of interested visitors, Wolf reiterated what Walden had said in his opening speech. He did so on the basis of a German translation of the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting in Der Sturm, a translation that also appeared in the exhibition catalogue.20 In the manifesto, Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo D. Carrá, Luigi Russolo and Gino Severini reported on the “Battle of Turin”, which they had staged in the Chiarella Theatre in Turin on 8 March 1910, and expounded their theory of a Divisionist painting technique that would enable them to depict simultaneity and dynamics and to place the spectator in the centre of a picture. All of them except for Balla displayed their work in the exhibition, which comprised 24 paintings in total. Borchardt had deposited them in a Gesellschaft zur Förderung moderner Kunst (Association for the Promotion of Modern Art) and had entrusted the artistic direction to Der Sturm, i.e. to Walden. In the Berlin exhibition catalogue, Wolf had read that the Futurist movement in Italy also included thirteen poets and a composer. From Der Sturm he learned that quite a few German painters and writers had joined the movement, including Alfred Döblin, Else Lasker-Schüler and Oskar Kokoschka.21 Wolf reproduced a portrait drawing of Walden by Kokoschka and he further illustrated his article with reproductions of some of the works exhibited.22 Finally, Wolf characterized the works of each of the exhibitors...
by means of quotations from the explanatory texts in the Berlin catalogue. He appeared particularly impressed by Boccioni and Severini.

Later, a critic on the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (New Rotterdam Courant) recalled how in The Hague “the visitors – and I assure you, some of them claimed to be extremely serious art connoisseurs – looked around with the most earnest faces, peering through the hole of a squeezed fist, nodding their heads in solemn approval.”23 Most of the critics, however, were rather ill at ease with the paintings. According to an anonymous reviewer, the Futurists appeared to have taken the view of “Why should one paint something just as it is? Does one not have much greater choice if something is painted as it is not?”24 Cornelis Veth, writing for Elsevier’s Geïllustreerd Maandschrift, also had trouble taking the Futurists seriously. He presented them as a travelling theatre company providing “some pleasant distraction in the silly season”, and the impresario of this summer entertainment enterprises being Herwarth Walden, “an unmistakable Teuton with long hair”. Veth explained in his review, which also included two reproductions,25 why he did not like Futurist art. Although he could understand the need to try something new, he still objected to a form of painting that added up to a return to chaos: the Futurists had “scrupulously ensured that one could almost nowhere recognize a face, a body part or an intact object in its right place.” Their works were doomed to failure, because art could emerge only from capturing a fleeting impression and not, therefore, from painting the movement itself.26 That the Futurists thus neglected the specific restrictions of visual art was an objection several critics shared with Veth. Frits Lapidoth, for instance, felt that Futurism had no future, “because it is based on a fallacy, because it is a painted confusion of ideas, denial of the most elementary truth about the boundaries of the arts.”27

In the meantime, contradictory reactions came from De Amsterdammer. Critic Albert Plasschaert was very negative, refusing to regard the Futurists as a cohesive grouping. He believed it was an “aggregate” of talented, ignorant fools and people in pursuit of profit. They were not as modern as they would like to appear. Futurism, Plasschaert said, was just a continuation of Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism and tended towards a “mosaic-like”, purely decorative art, in which any logical cohesion was missing. Futurism was too inconsistent to be able to produce something beautiful. Moreover, it “raged against things against which it should not rage.” At best, Plasschaert thought, it could contribute to the development of a new style.28

This conclusion was far removed from a previous assessment by a certain ‘D.’ in the same magazine. This unidentified critic set out to win the sympathy of the Dutch public for Futurism and to make clear that the movement “will dominate upcoming art.” He did so by stressing the relationship between the Futurists and several prominent contemporary Dutch artists, like architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage, painter Jan Toorop and writers such as Carel Steven Adama van Scheltema, Hendricus Johannes Boeken, Pieter Cornelis Boutens, Lodewijk van Deyssel (pseudonym of Karel Joan Lodewijk Alberdingh Thijm) and Herman Gorter. According to ‘D.’ the great value of Futurism lay in its search for truth in modern life.29 The attitude of the painter and writer Jacobus van Looy was, again, more ambivalent. In reply to an editorial question he noted in De Amsterdammer how he felt about the movement. Although he had not visited the exhibition, he showed an interest in the manifestos sent to him. He liked the name of the movement and sympathized with its unconventional character. On the other hand, he

23 Quoted from: [Anon.]: “Persoverzicht.” De Kunst, 5 April 1913, p. 419. The original text reads: “De bezoekers – en ik verzekere u, er waren daarbij die zich uitgaven voor uiterst ernstige kunst- kennis – met de zwaarwichtigste ernst-gesichten aan ’t rondkijken toegen, door ’t holteje van een samengesnepen vuist te krulden, ’t hoofd knikkend van toestemmend ernsteszet.”


25 By Ruzsol The Memory of a Night and by Severini La danza del Pan Pan al Monico (Dancing the “Pan-Pan” at the Monico, 1911).


27 Quoted by [Anon.]: “Persoverzicht.” De Kunst, 17 August 1912, p. 730. The original text reads: “Omdan het gebaseerd is op een dwaalbegrip, omdat het is een geschilderde herinnering, negatie van de meest elementaire waarheid omtrekt de grenzen der kunsten.” A similar opinion was expressed by N.N. [= H.C. Elout]: “Kunst in Den Haag: De Futuristen bij Biesing.” Algemeen Handelsblad, 7 August 1912.


29 D. [= ?]: “Futurisme.” De Amsterdammer: Weekblad voor Nederland, 11 August 1912, p.7. The original text reads: “de komende kunst zal beheersen.” That there existed an affinity between the Futurists and contemporary Dutch writers was also suggested by other critics. Frits Lapidoth, for example, illustrates this idea with a sonnet by Adama van Scheltema. See [Anon.]: “Persoverzicht.” De Kunst, 17 August 1912, p. 730.
was not able to handle the militaristic attitude of the Futurists and he did not understand their views on women.30

Previously, on 18 August 1912, De Amsterdammer had presented a translation of Valentine de Saint-Point's Manifeste de la femme futuriste, in which she attempted to neutralize the misogynistic bias of Futurism. De Kunst hastened to take it up in translation in its issue of 24 August 1912. Not long after, the magazine published a number of other Futurist pieces, to mark the next presentation of the Borchart collection, this time in Amsterdam.

3.2 The exhibition at the De Roos gallery in Amsterdam

It was the editor in chief of De Kunst himself who organized the next stop of the touring exhibition at the art gallery De Roos, owned by auction house C.F. Roos & Co. That is why Wolf referred to it as “our exhibition.”31 It ran from 29 August to 22 September 1912 and, again, was guaranteed the necessary publicity – Wolf called it “protection” – via De Kunst. For instance, the magazine presented an essay by Alfred Döblin, in which he expressed his sympathies for Futurism,32 and, in the same issue, published a portrait of Walden by Else Lasker-Schüler.33 Once again, Walden made a speech at the opening, which was attended by the Mayor of Amsterdam and other dignitaries, as well as painters, critics, collectors, and other guests. Walden not only repeated what he had said in The Hague, he also stated that the reviewers had failed to understand Futurism, except for the above-mentioned “D.”34 In order to provide more insight into “the nature and significance of Futurist art,” Walden gave a lecture on 18 September, elucidating the exhibited works one by one and concluding with a consideration of the future of Futurism “in relation to the other modern artistic ideas.”35

An endorsement of the works came from Bernard Hélène Joseph van Dieren, a Dutch composer and music critic who was living in London at the time. In De Nieuwe Gids (The New Guide), he observed that the comments Futurism had provoked to date had been far from benevolent, while the critics never took note of the originality of the works. Van Dieren discussed the principles of the movement as presented by Marinetti in a lecture, presumably in London, in connection with an exhibition of more or less the same collection as was now being exhibited in Amsterdam. Like the Futurists, Van Dieren detested the “admiration of the past that is typical of idiots”, and believed firmly in the future. The Futurists’ error, however, was that they had upgraded their principles to a system of rejecting all earlier art. Moreover, they underestimated the public’s taste and had been too much concerned with penning provocative manifestos rather than creating art. Van Dieren judged the paintings to be more convincing than their writings and lectures. On balance, however, he appreciated Futurism as a “remarkable and in a sense thoroughly invigorating movement.”36

Literature was now deployed in order to propagate Futurism. Wolf not only published Döblin’s essay but also Marinetti’s Supplemento al Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista (Supplement to the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature, 1912), which he had recently received from Milan. Here, the Futurists’ leader argued for the liberation of the noun from the adjective and the adverb, for the use of onomatopoetic words and against the use of syntax and punctuation in poetry. The same issue of De Kunst offered an example of how Marinetti put his ideas into action: “Bataille: Poids + odeur” (Battle: Weight + Stench, 1912), an impression of the Battle of Tripoli.37 Its first lines, by the way, had previously been printed in the Nieuwsblad voor den Boekhandel (News Bulletin for the Book Trade), to which Marinetti had apparently also submitted the text. The Nieuwsblad editors had joked: “Hopefully we have not cut one of his sublime thoughts into two!”38 The fact that Marinetti also inspired others to witticisms can be seen

“het wezen en de beteekenis der Futuristische kunst” – “in verband met de overige moderne kunst-opvattingen.”


38 [Anon.]: “Futuristisch proza.” Nieuwsblad voor den Boekhandel, 23 August 1912, pp. 1090–1091. The original text reads: “Als we met de schaar nu maar niet een van zijne sublieme gedachten in tweeën hebben geknipt!”
in *De Revue der Sporten* (Sports Review), where the new style of Futurist literature was parodied in a telegram-like story of an argument between a motorcyclist and a drunken carter.\textsuperscript{39}

According to Wolf, the Amsterdam exhibition was a resounding success, visited by an average of two hundred visitors a day in the first week. After two weeks he noted lively discussions on Futurist art taking place among art practitioners and art lovers in Amsterdam, and by the time the exhibition closed, 4,300 visitors had seen it.\textsuperscript{40} Despite these impressive attendance figures, there were few responses in the press, there were few responses in the press,\textsuperscript{41} but the reasonable success of the show prompted Wolf to transfer the paintings to Rotterdam.

### 3.3 The exhibition at Oldenzeel's gallery in Rotterdam

Wolf did so at the request of the Rotterdam art gallery Oldenzeel, which thus managed to beat the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring, a multidisciplinary art club that was also extremely interested in the exhibition. After the collection had been delivered to Oldenzeel, in giant crates – one of them measuring 3,50 x 4,50 m – and under police escort, it was to be seen in its present constellation in the Netherlands for the last time from 24 September to 6 October 1912.\textsuperscript{42} Again, the opening was attended by local dignitaries while, just as in Amsterdam, a four-metre long Futurist flag in red and white adorned the venue. Due to illness, Walden could not attend this time, so Wolf took care of the verbal explanations himself. He reported that, from the very beginning, the exhibition room was “chock full of visitors” and that, after two weeks, about two thousand people had seen the paintings.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} See Davis, "Auto-lol en auto-woo: 'n Vertelling van sport." Another example was an article by Jan Felth reporting that designs for Futurist hats had been presented in Paris. See [Anon.], "De Futuristische Hoed."


\textsuperscript{41} Wolf, for instance, only mentions a short editorial article and a reserved discussion of the exhibition by a certain G.B.I.W., both in the weekly *De Fakkel* of 30 August and 6 September 1912 respectively (not traced). They were cited by [Anon.]: "Persoverzicht. II." *De Kunst*, 14 September 1912, pp. 785–786. A positive review of the Amsterdam exhibition was also written by the American critic James Huneker in his *Ivory Apes*, pp. 262–274.

\textsuperscript{42} Requests for transfer of the collection to other Dutch towns were rejected, since by then it had been booked for exhibitions in Germany and Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{43} See on the Rotterdam exhibition: [Anon.]; "Naar Rotterdam." *De Kunst*, 21 September 1912.
Art critics, however, were still unable to come to terms with Futurism. Henri Dekking, who had also written about the Hague exhibition, expressed his continuing inability to understand and appreciate the Futurists, whose "bizarre impressions leave us unmoved [...], because we are different, hopefully healthier people." Dekking even suspected – wrongly – that one of the paintings had been accidentally hung upside down.\(^{44}\) Johan de Meester was slightly more receptive and admitted that he found the lively colours of the paintings rather agreeable. However, he felt that they were too much following a preconceived theory and that their meaning would remain obscure unless one read the explanations in the catalogue. "The reporter frankly admits that he has never written about anything of which he understood less." It seemed to him – and he was not entirely alone in his views – that the public kept coming to the show because of all the advertising undertaken on behalf of the Futurists.\(^{45}\)

Around the time the exhibition closed, novelist Carel Scharten made an attempt to capture some of the paintings in words, in order to demonstrate their relationship with the Sensitivist\(^{46}\) prose poems with which Dutch writers like Delang (pseudonym of Jan Hoëker), Lodewijk van Deyssel, Frans Erens and Herman Gorter had experimented twenty-five years earlier – experiments which in Scharten’s view had surpassed those of the Futurists and were now out of fashion. That is why Scharten labelled the Futurists passéistes and expressed the view that neither Dutch Sensitivism of the past nor Futurism from "retarded Italy" had a future. Firstly, because artworks from the Italian movement could only be appreciated individually and for no longer than a moment: "And imagine the terrible fate of having to possess such a painting and of keeping it in your room for twenty years!” Secondly, it was abstract and purely cerebral art lacking any

human emotion. And thirdly – as had been stated many times before – their creators exceeded the boundaries of their artistic discipline. They had not learned from Lessing that visual art should not depict movement, only its synthesis, its essence.\(^{47}\) Therefore, the Futurists themselves would remain unsatisfied with their art, as the poet and painter Jacobus Hendrikus Speenhoff predicted at the time:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Zij zijn de zonen en dochteren} &\quad \text{They are the sons and daughters} \\
\text{Die niet tevreden blijven} &\quad \text{Whose satisfaction is not lasting} \\
\text{Nu zij hunne gedichten} &\quad \text{Now they have drawn} \\
\text{Groteken hebben} &\quad \text{Their poems} \\
\text{Want ze zijn schilders} &\quad \text{For they are painters} \\
\text{Die hunne schilderijen} &\quad \text{Who have to sculpt} \\
\text{Moeten beeldhouwen} &\quad \text{Their paintings} \\
\text{En die hunne gebaren} &\quad \text{And who want to set to music} \\
\text{Wollen toonzetten.} &\quad \text{Their gestures.}\end{align*}
\]

Remarkably enough, it seems that Wolf himself was unwilling to stake his reputation on the commercial and artistic potential of Futurism. As early as August 1912, he was openly questioning whether the movement could ultimately be successful in the Netherlands.\(^{48}\) In December, while still emphasizing the genius of Marinetti and his followers and expressing his belief that they would succeed, he nevertheless felt that their work lacked something.\(^{49}\) He believed that the Kandinsky exhibition Walden had organized at Oldenzeel’s in November 1912, thanks to his new contacts with the company, was much more interesting.\(^{50}\) No doubt, Wolf was unwilling to irritate such contacts, or the Dutch Cubists. In October 1912, he quoted their leader, Conrad Kickert, who had recently called the Futurists "bandits and impostors," and gave Henri le Fauconnier an opportunity in his periodical to explain his conception of art and why he disagreed with Marinetti’s.\(^{51}\) Wolf tended to agree, as he wrote in June 1913, with what Arie van Veen had recently written about the Modernists. Van Veen welcomed both Cubism and

\(^{44}\) The original texts reads: "achterlijk Italië" – "En stel u het vreemdje voor, één zoodanig schilderij te moeten bezitten en het twintig achtereenvolgende jaren te moeten hebben in uw kamer!" Scharten: "De passeësten", pp. 175 and 176 respectively.

\(^{45}\) Cited by Wolf: "Pers-Overzicht." De Kunst, 28 September 1912, p. 820. The original text reads: "Zijn bizarre impressies laten ons onberoerd [...], omdat we andere, laat ons hopen, gezondere mensen zijn."

\(^{46}\) N.N. [= Johan de Meester]: "De Futuristen. Kunsthandel Oldenzeel." Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant, 24 and 25 September 1912. The original text reads: "De verslaggever erkent openhartig, nog rood over iets geschreven te hebben, waar hij minder van begreep." A similar view of the Futurists was taken by Piet Koomen, cited by [Anon.]; "De Futuristen." De Kunst, 5 October 1912, pp. 6–7; clever painters but apparently wanting to take a new direction anyway, no matter which, while their theoretical principles formed an obstacle to expression.

\(^{47}\) Sensitivism was a Dutch literary movement of the 1880s. It was concerned with capturing unique and fleeting moments of sensory perception with an almost mystical intensity. The poems often possessed a fragmentary character and sometimes made a complete break with traditional syntax.

\(^{48}\) [Anon.]: "De Futuristen." De Kunst, 3 August 1912, p. 698.

\(^{49}\) Wolf: "Dirk Gootjes", p. 195. See also [Anon.]: "De zevenende." De Kunst, 3 October 1914, pp. 1–2, an editorial in which Wolf ranks the exhibitions in Amsterdam and Rotterdam amongst the achievements of the magazine De Kunst.

\(^{50}\) Wolf: "W. Kandinsky-Kunstzaal Oldenzeel Rotterdam.".

\(^{51}\) Wolf: "Moderne Kunstkring: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam." The original text reads: "bandieten en bedriegers."
Futurism as a form of resistance to fossilized and antiquated art, but he found the “rattling and hollering propaganda” of the Futurists annoying and their destructiveness too radical, while their image of nervous movements seemed forced and ambiguous to him. A new exhibition in 1913 – this time finally at the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring – evoked similar reactions.

4 The exhibition and lectures at the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring and the Phoenix Club (1913)

In February 1912, the president of the Kunstkring, Pieter Julius van Wijngaarden, sent a request to the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in Paris, asking whether his society would be allowed to show the works of the Italian Futurists. His request was turned down, as the exhibition had already been promised to venues in London, Berlin and Brussels. In June, however, Marinetti personally took over the negotiations with the Kunstkring. This was the beginning of an extensive correspondence, mainly with Kunstkring secretary Albert Reballio, with whom the Futurist leader now organized the next Dutch exhibition. He promised a new and more comprehensive collection, including – as a special scoop – the very first Futurist sculptures, and also some lectures, in an attempt to remain on good terms with the board of the Kunstkring. Its members had found their bearings by now, probably due to the publication of Marinetti’s collection of manifestos, _Le Futurisme_ (Futurism, 1911). However, they were considerably annoyed by the appearance of the Borchartd collection at several locations, even in Rotterdam at Oldenzeel’s gallery. The pompous manifestos the board was receiving in the meantime did not help to increase their enthusiasm. The same was true of a lecture, “Kunst in verband met Kubisme en Futurisme, esthetisch toegelicht in matemathischen zin” (“Art in Relation to Cubism and Futurism, Aesthetically Explained in a Mathematical Sense”) by the painter Willem van Konijnenburg at the Haagse Kunstkring (The Hague Art Club) on 12 November 1912, and again in the Rotterdam Doolenzaal on 18 December. Van Konijnenburg, too, appeared to have reservations about the Futurist movement.

From now on, the board became rather nervous about the whole Futurism affair – not least because of the manifestos it received – and decided not to pay Marinetti a fee if he were to come over to the Netherlands. Following reports in the press that the Futurists had been given a beating by the public at a demonstration in Rome in connection with an exhibition being held there – the exhibition that would come to Rotterdam – the board hoped to be spared their arrival altogether. Marinetti continued assiduously with his preparations, however, and the Kunstkring was obliged to honour the agreements they had entered into. So, in the end, Marinetti arrived and personally hung the exhibition. It ran from 18 May to 15 June 1913, featuring paintings by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Severini and, this time, also by Balla and Soffici, as well as two sculptures by Boccioni. The catalogue Marinetti had compiled for the occasion, _Les Peintres et les sculpteurs futuristes italiens_, therefore had a slightly misleading title. It included an adapted version of the introduction “Les Exposants au public” that had previously been printed in the catalogue of the Paris exhibition. Furthermore, the Rotterdam catalogue contained reproductions of six highlights and a price list. During the exhibition, an offprint of an article by the Flemish writer Raymond Nyst was made available, in which the author explained how he had become a Futurist thanks to the exhibition in Brussels.

Marinetti gave the promised lectures on 20 and 23 May. In the first one, he spoke about the rise of the Futurist movement in Italy and explained the works on

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52 [Anon.], “Lodewijk Schelfhout, III”, in which Van Veen’s review, “Kunsthandel De Protecto’l: Lodewijk Schelfhout”, _Algemeen handelsblad_, 12 June 1913, signed with the initials A.v.V., is cited. The original text reads: “rammelende en kakelende propaganda.”

53 Unless otherwise specified, the following information is based on the section on the exhibition and Marinetti’s involvement with it in Van Kalmthout, _Muzentempels_, pp. 640–649.

54 The dates for these legs of the touring show were March 1912 (London: Sackville Gallery), 12 April to 15 May 1912 (Berlin: Galerie Der Sturm) and 20 May to 5 June 1912 (Brussels: Galerie Georges Giroux).

55 For the complete text of Marinetti’s letters in French, their English translations and explanatory comments: Van Kalmthout: “Batailles et idées futuristes.”

56 The exhibition in question was _Prima esposizione pittura futurista: Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, Severini, Soffici_. Roma: Ridotto del Teatro Costanzi, 11 February - March 1913. The negative audience reactions were less concerned with the exhibition than with the _serata futurista_ at the Teatro Costanzi that had given occasion to the exhibition. A detailed description of both events can be found in _Berghaus: Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944_, pp. 111-118.

57 _Elasticità_ (Elasticity, 1912) by Boccioni; _Forza centrifuga_ (Centrifugal Forces, 1913) by Carrà; _Sintesi plastica dei movimenti di una donna_ (Synopsis of a Woman’s Movements, 1912) by Russolo; _Dinamismo di un cane al guinzaglio_ (Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash, 1912) by Balla; _Geroglifico dinamico del Bal Tabarin_ (Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin, 1912) by Severini, and _Sintesi della città di Prato_ (Painterly Synthesis of the City of Prato, 1912) by Soffici.

58 The essay by Raymond Nyst, “Les Salons: Les peintres futuristes italiens”, originally appeared in _La Belgique artistique et littéraire_ 82 (July 1912) and was reprinted as a broadsheet, _La Peinture futuriste en Belgique = La Pittura futurista nel Belgio_. Milan: Direzione del Movimento Futurista, 1912. It reported on the Futurist exhibition at the Galerie Giroux in Brussels on 20 May – 5 June 1912, a lecture held by Marinetti on 2 June and a round-table discussion with Marinetti and Boccioni on 4 June.
He concluded by reciting his own poetry, including one poem about the bombing of Adrianople which he had recently experienced in the Balkan War. In the second lecture, he first gave a theoretical introduction to Futurism in general, paying special attention to the dynamics and increased human sensibility of modern times. In the second part, he turned to the literature advocated by Futurism to express the dynamics of the new era. Finally, he demonstrated this new sensibility again by reciting his own texts. Marinetti had also given an additional lecture earlier that day for students at the technical university in the neighbouring city of Delft. Six years later, one of those present would recall:

“I became acquainted with him during his visit to Delft, when he addressed the assembled students in the Library of the Phoenix Club. The historical setting amidst books was ill-chosen for the destroyer of tradition. At one point, he exclaimed: “An affair with a cocotte will teach you more than all the books collected here!” Marinetti had just experienced the Balkan War, and as a souvenir he recited an onomatopoeic war song, The Fall of Adrianople. He gave an admirable performance of the rat-a-tat of the machine guns, the booming of the cannons and the ripping sound of the projectiles. During the supper that followed, while Marinetti appalled us with tales of the horrors of war, the now deceased Capt. R., who had travelled with him as a reporter, smiled as he whispered in my ear: “Neither he nor I was ever admitted to the front by the Bulgarians.”

The lectures did not attract a large audience, but the exhibition was visited by 1,192 people. Several Dutch cities submitted requests to show the exhibition — in vain, for the Kunstkring had demanded exclusive rights for the Netherlands, as Wolf revealed in a moderately positive review. In De Kunst, he published the introduction from the catalogue, and other periodicals also paid due attention to the modernist activities of the Kunstkring, although not always in a positive tone. De Meester, for instance, still showed little sympathy for the movement in the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant. He saw in the paintings only broken limbs and in Marinetti’s literary texts nothing but “dislocations of language.” He characterized Futurism as “much ado about non-living art.” In a letter already published before the exhibition, he had explained “Why I hate Futurism.” He argued that it could not exist without the publicity that accompanied it, and by acting deliberately in an extravagant manner, Marinetti speculated on the fact that extraordinary art was initially always considered extremist. A reviewer in the Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad (Rotterdam News) distanced himself in no uncertain terms from such assessments and expressed his appreciation of the “unprecedented beauty” of the Futurists’ play of line, colour and light. De Meester, however, seems to have captured the general feeling of the viewers better.

It is not certain whether the board of the Kunstkring finally came to see more in Futurism than they admitted to in 1913. Nevertheless, the society did invite Marinetti to contribute to a commemorative publication to mark the association’s tenth anniversary. He responded by sending an autographed excerpt from his “Bataille: Poids + odeur.”

5 Recognitions and rejections (1913–1924)

A few months later, popular writer Louis Couperus discovered Futurism, probably as a result of his short stay in Florence, where he attended the riotous Futurist serata at the Teatro Verdi, accompanied by Maurits Wagenvoort, a correspondent for several Dutch periodicals. Couperus devoted his weekly newspaper column in Het Vaderland (The Fatherland) to the Futurists. From the end of December 1913 until mid-February 1914, he declared himself in several articles...

59 This recollection comes from a correspondent of Het Vaderland, quoted by [Anon.]: “Worlgeschiedenis.” De Hollandsche Revue, 1 October 1919, pp. 573–574. The original text reads: “Ik maakte met hem kennis bij zijn bezoek aan Delft, toen hij de verzamelde studenten in de Bibliotheek der Sociëteit Phoenix toesprak. De historische boekenongevégenheid was slecht gekozen voor den verniel-der-traditie. Ook riep hij op zeker moment: ‘Een avontuur met een cocotte zal u meer leeren dan alle boeken hier verzameld!’ Marinetti had toen juist den Balkanoorlog medegemaakt en hij droeg als souvenir een klanknabooztend krijgslied voor: De val van Adrianopel. Het gerikletter der mitraleuren, het hozen van het kanon en het verscheurende geluid der projectielen werden bewonderenswaardig vertolkt. Tijdens het souper-na-afloop, terwijl Marinetti ontstelten de oorlogsverschijnselen vertelde, fluitste de thans overleden kapt. R., die als journalist-reporter zijn reisgezel was geweest, mij glimlachend in het oor: ‘Hij noch ik zijn oor door de Bulgaren aan het front toegelaten.’

60 Wolf: “Futuristen: Rdamse Kunstkring.”

61 [Anon.]: “Nieuw manifest der Futuristen.”
to be a dedicated passéiste, while at the same time admiring its fortitude and innovative ideas. He was very impressed, for instance, by Giovanni Papini’s Un uomo finito (A Failed Man, 1912).\(^{68}\) Couperus recognized in this novel much of his own life and of the generation of writers who had been reforming Dutch literature since the 1880s, like Van Deyssel and Gorter. Wagenvoort arranged a short interview between Papini and Couperus, but the latter was not over to Futurism. He felt uncomfortable with Papini’s xenophilic attitude towards tourists and with the Futurists’ destructiveness. Couperus wondered why the wealthy Marinetti did not buy land to found a new city and leave Florence in peace. Couperus expected Futurism to prevail for a while, but to be defeated in the end by irresistible human attraction to Beauty.\(^{69}\)

Nevertheless, after the touring exhibitions of 1912–13, Futurism was regarded in the Netherlands as a movement to be reckoned with. There were several indications that Marinetti and his followers managed to elicit a certain response. In 1916, for instance, Wagenvoort published the roman à clef, Het koffiehuis met de roode buisjes: Roman uit het Italiaansche kunstenaarsleven (The Coffeehouse with the Red Jackets: Novel from Italian Artistic Life). The following dedication was printed on its title page:

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ALL’ ILLUSTRISSIMO
MAESTRO DELLE LETTERE ITALIANE MODERNE
F.T. MARINETTI,
AMMIREVOLMENTE, AMICHEVOLMENTE,
DEDICA
L’AUTORE.\(^{70}\)
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The main character is the Marinetti-like writer A.F. Donaldi, leader of the “aveneristico” movement in Italy, whose followers gather in public places in Florence, such as a coffeehouse where the waiters wear red jackets (Café Reiningshuis, known as Giubbe Rosse [Red Vests], not named as such). The wealthy, fast-living A.F. Donaldi is fond of speed and technology, and he travels exclusively by motorcycle, automobile and aeroplane. Wagenvoort describes, among other things, a scandalous event in a Florentine theatre, undoubtedly based on the serata at the Verdi Theatre mentioned above. The plot of the novel, however, revolves around the burgeoning love and subsequent marriage between A.F. Donaldi and the Roman Catholic Gemma Parini. In this context, Marinetti’s visit to Rotterdam is mentioned twice.\(^{71}\) Remarkably enough, the story ends with A.F. Donaldi making a fatal dive in his aeroplane, shortly after becoming a father.

Both the main plot and an additional intrigue consisting of several love affairs involving secondary characters explain the artistic ideas of the Futurists. However, this novel of ideas is at least as emphatically concerned with the emancipation of prostitutes and homosexuals. Wagenvoort is clearly opposed to the Catholic faith and bourgeois morality. Yet it would be difficult to call him a disciple of Futurism. The novel relies heavily on Naturalistic ideas of genetics and race, and it is written in a rather dated, romanticizing style.\(^{72}\) That Wagenvoort was not a closet-Futurist was confirmed by the novelist and critic Herman Robbers, who thought the book was neither one thing nor another: being a cross between a novel and journalism, it was less edifying than a newspaper report or a Futurist exhibition. Robbers was of the view that Futurism had passed and gone, and was already forgotten by most: “It was really an amusing ‘intermezzo’, not very important, but so young and wild, so stunningly captivating, and at any rate

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\(^{68}\) Ellen Ruse’s Dutch translation Jeugdstorm was not published until 1932, by Teulings in ’s-Hertogenbosch.


\(^{70}\) To the illustrious master of modern Italian letters, F.T. Marinetti, admiringly, friendly, dedicated by the author.”

\(^{71}\) During the honeymoon: “The couple had stayed in Rotterdam. This city in particular, a port teeming with life, seemed to have made an impression of mighty labour on them.” (p. 197) And after their return: “His friends did understand that he would recover his old self, but he still saw the world with, not through, the eyes of his beautiful wife who seemed to have enchanted him, so that the conversation only testified to his fantastic old fiery spirit when he was recounting tales of his honeymoon: what ‘my wife and I’ had been admiring in Paris, London, Hamburg, Rotterdam and Berlin, whom they had met there, what Kroupenski [– Emil Krupa-Krupinski] had said, what the anarchist Debidsjan [-? ] had argued, what the exile De Carolis [- Adolfo de Carolis?] had predicted, whether the poet D’Aranda [- Joë Perea da Graça Arañha?] had been reciting.” (p. 219) The original text reads: “Het paar had zich geprezen in Rotterdam. Vooral deze stad: haven van overstelpende levenskracht, scheen een indruk van machtigen arbeid op hen gemaakt te hebben” – “Zijne vrienden begrepen wel, dat hij zichzelf herwinnen zou, maar nog zag hij de wereld wel niet dûr doch met de oogen van zijn mooi vrouwtje, dat hem bovendoor scheen te hebben, zoodat zijn gesprek slechts van den ouden vurigen fantastengesprek getuigde, wanneer hij vertelde van zijn huwelijksreis: wat ’m nou vrouw en ik’ in Parijs, Londen, Hamburg, Rotterdam en Berlijn bewonderden, wien zij er ontmoet hadden, wat Kroupenski gezegd, de anarchist Debidsjan beweerd, de banneling De Carolis voorspeld, of de dichter D’Aranda voorgedragen had.”

\(^{72}\) As Komrij, *Verzonken boeken*, p. 75, “Concerning Wagenvoort’s story, the Avenirists fell back into the style of a sentimental novel” (“De aveniristen raakten, wat Wagenvoorts verhaaltek betreft, verzeld in een kasteelroman”). In a review of the novel, Scharten, *Kroniek der Nederlandsche letteren*, pp. 202–212, describes a Futurist meeting he himself had attended in Florence.
to somebody like me, as a man who simply loves children and lunatics, not at all unlikelihood.”

However, this ‘intermezzo’ was not yet a thing of the past in 1916. In the years 1912–1914, several Modernist painters in the Netherlands, amongst them Jan Sluyters, Leo Gestel and John Raedecker, had been inspired by Futurism, as designer and painter Theo van Doesburg some years later. From 1915 onwards, Van Doesburg became more supportive of Marinetti’s ideas, after having condemned Futurist ideology at the Hague exhibition in 1912 as something “highly immoral and criminal”, “a blow in the face of humankind” and “a revival of bestialities.” This change of heart was probably resulting from his contact with Erich Wichman, a Dutch artist who contributed to Der Sturm and who defended Futurism against the accusations made by Carel Lodewijk Dale, a conservative professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam. Van Doesburg’s dislike of sentimental poetry and the primary importance he attributed to independent words was directly correlated to Marinetti’s Futurism and caused him to open his magazine De Stijl (The Style, 1917–31) to contributions by Futurists and on Futurism. Piet Mondrian supplied the essays on modern music mentioned above, and the works of several Futurists were repeatedly discussed in other articles, alongside reproductions of their works. Van Doesburg himself, using the pseudonyms I.K. Bonset and Aldo Camini, pleaded for a revival of Futurism, at a time when once leading lights of the movement, such as Carrà and Severini, had turned their backs on Marinetti’s group. Van Doesburg’s appreciation of Futurism led him to attract Severini to De Stijl, even though the painter had by then turned to Cubism.

In another magazine, entitled Het Getij (The Tide), Van Doesburg reprinted in 1921 the eleven points of the Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism as well as the main points of the Manifesto of the Futurist Painters (1910). Despite of this, he never turned into a thoroughbred Futurist and remained interested in other Modernist schools as well. The same goes for Dutch poets such as Hendrik Marsman and Martinus Nijhoff, who wholeheartedly endorsed Marinetti’s demands for linguistic austerity, but never identified with the Futurists’ aesthetic programme in other respects.

Meanwhile, thanks to the press, Futurist ideas radiated beyond the small circle of experts and insiders. Magazines with a general readership sometimes ran educational articles in which Futurism was popularized. “Perhaps these paintings seem strange to us”, De Hollandse Revue (The Dutch Review) suggested in 1915: “but if such a play of colours had been embroidered in wool, everyone would have liked it.” By this time, however, the majority of art critics had had enough of the Futurists, a point that Herman Robbers had clearly seen coming. This is


77 On the influence of Futurism on Van Doesburg and the De Stijl group see Woods: “Focus on Noun and Verbs”, p. 28; Larmoyeur: “Theo van Doesburg”; Den Boef: “Een verbluffende interesse”; Stoop: “De rol.” See also Eliaison’s work on the De Stijl contributions by Aldo Camini, especially “Theo van Doesburg, Italian Futurist?”, where he argues that Van Doesburg also wrote his essays under the name of Aldo Camini in order to legitimize his infidelity to his wife. On
attention, or like a clever way of hiding a lack of craftsmanship." Severini was no exception: "At that time, people thought they could make their name and money with eccentricities, so in 1909 they would join the vainglorious Marinetti with their 'Futurisme Pictural.'" Knaap remembered how he frequently met Severini in Paul Fort's circle at a Parisian restaurant, where the painter would expound on Futurist aesthetics. Without mentioning any titles, Knaap discusses six works by Severini as if they were war scenes, apparently to make it clear that they are open to completely arbitrary interpretations. He finishes with an urgent appeal to Severini:

In the "future", after the war, get rid of Futurism or leave it behind in a trench and go back to your... passéisme, on which you turned your back at an unfortunate moment, not by conviction – I am sure of that – but because you wanted to give yourself some sardonic pleasure [...]. Throw the Futurist mess in the enemy's trench, for you know damn well that all your statements about the intentions of Futurism were nothing but camouflage.  

The decline of Futurism after 1915 was also highlighted by the fact that it became an increasingly rewarding subject to joke about. This actually benefited the Futurists, as evidenced by the cartoon "Het futurisme voor de zedelijkheidsrechters" (Futurism before the Morality Courts), published by De Amsterdammer after it had first appeared in the German satirical weekly Simplicissimus. It shows two art critics disapproving of a Futurist work of art because they cannot discover any moral standards in it. More often, however, the Futurists were the butt of the joke, as happened at a number of artists' parties in Amsterdam. The assem-

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82 Twice a "Female Dancers"; "The Dance of the Bear"; "The Bus"; "The North-South Metro"; "Portrait of Miss Jeanne Fort."


Het futurisme voor de zedelijkheidsrechters (Simplicissimus)

Fig. 4. Het futurisme voor de zedelijkheidsrechters (Futurism before the Morality Courts). Cartoon by Karl Arnold in De Amsterdammer: Weekblad voor Nederland, 8 March 1914, p. 11, after it had first appeared in the German satirical weekly Simplicissimus, 16 February 1914, p. 799, as 'Staatsanwalt und Futurismus'. The caption in De Amsterdammer reads: "Dear Colleague, I definitely object to this direction; for nobody is able to discover the morality of this.

— Kollega, ik ben bestiet tegen deze richting; niemand is immers in staat de zedelijkheid hiervan te ontdekken.

Bled company, Wolf wrote, sang along with a popular song by Speenhoff about "The Futurists", which included lyrics like "don't keep on futururalizing!" In 1914, the monthly Op de Hoogte (Well-informed) reproduced a "Futurist" painting "Het ontwaken" (The Awakening) by a certain Walsky Kanniky (which sounds to Dutch ears like "incapable of anything"), with the following accompanying text:

Description of the twilight state before awakening. Oh! Eh! Beneath the threshold of consciousness nocturnal impressions fuse together — vague memory images become fixed scenes all mixed-up in a chaotic hotchpotch — "She! Ah! She!" — The undigested herring — Brrihhi! — Climbing over the wall! — The difficulty of climbing stairs! — The tottering houses! The unruhy bed! — Oh! Oh!88

Three months later, the magazine printed a drawing entitled "De Express" (The Express) by one Quicciano Fasolini (which sounds like "Quatsch, brabbling" and "fagiolino, string bean", a word that is also used in Dutch to denote a strange person), accompanied by the following lines: "Hurrr! Hurrr! Ksh! Ksh! Tacketacketelleletack! — Light serpents! — Rattling wheels! — Vibrant rails! — Billowing smoke! — Rrrt, around the corner! — — — ."88

Futurist art, its critics mocked, was an odd combination of fragments randomly thrown together, a combination which could represent almost anything or in which, by contrast, it was almost impossible to identify anything.89 The viewer of a Futurist work might just as well stand on his hands, as suggested by a Punch cartoon printed in De Hollandsche Revue.90

The painter Frits Lugt was dressed as a "funny Futurist violn virtuoso" ("grappig-futuristisch violinfuuroo").


89 See the photograph of a hairy "Old-English sheepdog" in De Revue der Sporten, 17 August 1921, p. 963, with the caption: "Wat ziet men hierboven? Een piano-virtuoso? Een futuristisch schilder? Mis! Een hond!" (What is that up there? A piano virtuoso? A Futurist painter? Wrong! A dog!)

90 De Hollandsche Revue 25:5 (1920), p. 290. The caption beneath the picture of a man standing
6 Obscurity (1924–1940)

In the 1920s, the inclination to ridicule Futurism seems to have waned significantly in the Netherlands. It gradually became almost impossible to find anyone who supported or actively opposed the movement. In the 1924/25 volume of De Stijl, even Van Doesburg declared Futurism a failure, just like other Modernisms. Movements such as Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Constructivism he now regarded as mere stages in a transition to a truly new art that was more than merely a traditional form of expression in a new guise. According to Van Doesburg, Futurism itself was defunct because it had ended its resistance to ‘classicomania’. Once it had allied itself with Fascism, “the museum spirit and the conservation of the romantic-lyrical form” had taken the upper hand. Van Doesburg therefore concurred with the by now widespread opinion that Futurism was a dead-end road belonging to the past. It had been a movement full of excesses, it had never taken root and, hence, it had not been able to exert any substantial influence.

Occasionally, Futurist events were still reported on, but only as a phenomenon that was a relic of the past. For example, when Depero exhibited at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, April – October 1925), a Dutch reviewer only saw “arch-domestic doilies” and “sofa cushions” with Futurist motifs. He expressed the view that “if a movement has fallen back on such miserable ‘Art décoratif’, little of its spirit remains.” Someone else reviewed Enrico Prampolino's...
lini’s *Théâtre de la Pantomime Futuriste* (Futurist Pantomime Theatre, Théâtre de la Madeleine, 12 May – June 1927) and declared it to be “childish experimentation.” He arrived at the conclusion: “If these Futurist mimees are designed to advocate anything, the time for it has passed.”\(^99\) As early as 1922, even Wolf said he would welcome the moment when ultramodern currents such as Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism were finished, for they had alienated the public from art.\(^96\) In the second half of the 1920s, the Dutch art world turned more and more to Neo-Classicism and to the romantic sentimentalism and beauty Couperus had referred to earlier.

In the 1930s, Futurism finally came to be regarded as a mistake and Futurist art was only very rarely exhibited.\(^91\) One of these rare occasions was a display of the polychrome metal book, *Parole in libertà futuriste tattili termiche olfattive* (Words-in-Freedom: Futurist, Olfactor, Tactile and Thermoic, 1932), by Tullio d’Albisola (pseud. of Tullio Mazzotti from Albisola), with Futurist poetry by Marinetti, at Louis Jean Charles Boucher’s bookshop in The Hague. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* reported on it in 1933 and endorsed Marinetti’s glowing description of the work: “It is a masterpiece reflecting the great aesthetics of the machine and all that which we can express in this single phrase: the warm geometric splendour of the coming ideal of the metal world.”\(^98\) *Het Vaderland* wrote: “It is an interesting publication [...], although we don’t believe that there is a future for it.”\(^99\)

If there was any talk of Futurism in the Dutch press now, it was seen as being merely an Italian affair, where it seemed to have retained some significance and therefore still featured in a few exhibitions.\(^100\) The fact that Marinetti had failed to have Futurism accepted as the official art of Mussolini’s Fascist State did not go unnoticed in the Netherlands.\(^101\) As of 1929, when he was appointed Accademico d’Italia and became chairman of the Classe di Lettere, he came to be seen as a Fascist heavyweight and classified as a servant to the establishment, or – as Nathan Hjiman Wolf wrote – “a very normal and calm Fascist”.\(^102\) Between 1930 and 1940, Wolf was one of the few publicists in the Netherlands who still regularly reminded his readership of Futurism, albeit by repeatedly observing that no one talked about it anymore.\(^103\)

### 7 Conclusions

After the Second World War, reflections of Futurist styles and techniques could be found in Dutch-language avant-garde magazines such as *Gard Slijt* (1955–1965) and *De Nieuwe Stijl* (1965–1966).\(^104\) However, by that time, as we have seen above, the Futurists had long disappeared from the radar of the Dutch art world. It was only in the first phase, lasting from 1912 to 1928, that Futurism, thanks to four exhibitions and a few samples of Marinetti’s poetry, attracted any significant attention in the Netherlands. Some of the Futurist manifestos were reprinted in exhibition catalogues and periodicals, principally *De Kunst*, or summarized in critical essays. The motives of the movement were explained in lectures by F.T. Marinetti and Herwarth Walden. N.H. Wolf, editor of *De Kunst*, acted as a sort of publicity agent for the movement, but in actual fact he was never fully convinced by Futurism, nor were the thousands of visitors attending the exhibitions. Even a Modernist like Theo van Doesburg, whose work was still relatively unknown at that time, could only find limited aspects of Futurist aesthetics to be of relevance or interest to him. Most reactions from art and literature critics ranged from being disapproving to being completely dismissive, in line with the anti-avantgardism Dorlein observed in the Netherlands at the time.

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97 For instance paintings by Marinetti’s wife Benedetta Cappa, a Futurist writer and painter, at an exhibition of De Onafhankelijken [The Independents] in Amsterdam. See Wolf: “De Zilveren Jubileum-Tentoonstelling der Onafhankelijken.” *De Kunst*, 20 February 1937, pp. 28–29 (which incorrectly introduces the painter as Marinetti’s daughter).

98 Quoted from [Anon.]: “Een metalen boek”, p. 59. The original text reads: “Het is het meesterwerk van de groote aesthetiek der machine en van alles, wat wij in dezen eenen zyn kunnen samenvatten: warme geometrische pracht van het toekomstig ideal der metalen wereld.”

99 Quoted from [Anon.]: “Het metalen boek”, p. 155. The original text reads: “Het is een interessante uitgave” – “al geloooven we niet, dat hierin toekomst zit.”

100 See for example Fles: “Gherardo Dottori”; D’Ors: “Aesthetica in de Gendelstad: De tentoonstelling te Venetië”; Schüch: “De twintigste biënnale van Venetië.”

101 Sculptor and publicist Antonio Maraini is quoted on this matter by Ro van Oven in “Het fascisme en de Italiaansche kunstnijverheid”, pp. 324–325.


103 For example Wolf: “Concertgebouw-Kroniek: Vera Janacopoulos. – Igor Markevitch”;


105 Foppe: “Oude principes.”
Dorleijn explained this reluctance with the fact that in the Netherlands, starting from around 1885, the "Eighties Movement" had already rejected many of the outdated artistic values of the nineteenth century, to the effect that the radical reform advocated by the Futurists had already been put in place before the turn of the century. Several of Marinetti's contemporaries in the Netherlands confirmed this assessment, but also suggested other reasons for Futurism's lack of resonance. Some of these objections concerned Futurist art itself, which mystified people and could often not be understood without additional information. The radicalism of the underlying ideas, e.g. the repudiation of the culture of the past, the passion for war and violence, the disdain for women, were not at all appreciated by the Dutch public. Furthermore, the excessive promotion campaigns undertaken by Marinetti annoyed many people and, finally, in the 1920s, Futurism's association with Fascism did not go down well in the Netherlands. As a consequence of all these factors, Futurism reared its head only briefly in the Netherlands, merely serving – unwillingly – to confirm the hegemony of a previous generation.

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Volume 4
2014

DE GRUYTER