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Theatre/Data:

Cate Blanchett's Manifesto of Futurist Finance



Fig 1. Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*, 2015 © Julian Rosefeldt and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016

In *The Data Revolution* Rob Kitchin writes: 'given their utility and value, and the amount of effort and resources devoted to producing and analysing them, it is remarkable how little conceptual attention has been paid to data in and of themselves' (2014: 1). An important reason for this, suggests Kitchin, is that data have been treated as technical phenomena that almost by definition precede interpretation, and exist outside representation. And yet, '[d]ata do not exist independently of the ideas, instruments, practices, contexts and knowledges used to generate, process and analyse them' (2). In

response, Kitchin argues that we need to understand these developments within the context of a 'data assemblage,' which is 'composed of many apparatuses and elements that are thoroughly entwined, and develop and mutate over time and space', framing, in the process, 'what is possible, desirable and expected of data' (24).

Such an undertaking clearly requires a large-scale inter-disciplinary effort: Kitchin asserts that such an assemblage is composed, amongst other apparatuses, of systems of thought, political economy, materialities and infrastructures, practices, places, and subjectivities and communities. And while theatre and performance studies certainly has no *privileged* role to play here, resonances with the kinds of multi-modal critical engagement that scholarship in the discipline requires do suggest a *distinctive* contribution might be made to the larger project. Understanding performance as a resource for thinking through the apparently novel questions big data raise about self-identity, prediction, social behaviour, sentiment monitoring and so on is one approach to this.¹ The other approach is to register where and how data already feature within theatre, albeit in ways that promise to change what we understand theatre to be. The latter is perhaps less vaulting in ambition, but a necessary stage in the larger enterprise, inaugurated in publications such as this issue of *Performance Paradigm*, of working out the place and function of theatre and performance in the public understanding of big data.

In this article, I wish to conduct one such focused enquiry, in response to one part of one artwork that, hovering indeterminately between theatrical performance and financial practice, promises to disclose something about both, and the relations between them. Julian Rosefeldt's installation *Manifesto* (2015), consists of multiple projection screens, variously distributed through the gallery—at least at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne, where I viewed it—in parallel and perpendicular to each other. The first shows a four-minute 'Prologue': manifesto-related comments from Marx and Engels, Tzara and Philippe Soupault spoken over close-up, slow-motion footage of a burning firework fuse. The remaining screens show 12 films, each approximately 10 minutes in length and featuring the well-known Australian actor Cate Blanchett in a different guise, declaiming a themed collage of texts drawn from a range of 20th and 21st century artistic manifestos. Directional speakers positioned overhead mean that the viewer can attend to the soundtrack of their nearest film within the cacophony of the whole; a whole that periodically harmonises when each character turns in synchrony to address their viewers, intoning words at a distinct pitch that combine with all the rest to create the effect of a thirty-second choral incantation throughout the room.² Thereafter, each film dissolves back into its own distinct sound- and image-world.

By recontextualising fragments from many different manifestos alongside each other and within the distinct representational worlds of each film, then, Rosefeldt invites the viewer to assess the currency of the pronouncements, their validity across contexts, and their implications for the new scenarios to which they have now been applied. As such, it establishes in its own method, as it were, and the interpretive mode it fosters provokes something of the comparative and/or integrative approach that I highlighted above as being a means to understanding the relationship between theatrical practices and the



Fig 2. Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*, 2015 © Julian Rosefeldt and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016

uses of data. It is in this context that I was particularly struck by the first film the viewer encounters in *Manifesto* after the Prologue, which places the pronouncements of the Futurists into the mouth and mind of an individual working at an array of screens on the trading floor of a large financial institution.

'My friends and I stayed up all night', we hear: the evocative, excitable opening of F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto (1909) here delivered in New York drawl as an overhead shot scans several ranks of workers at their desks, line managers circulating slowly amongst them. The manifesto continues as the camera homes in on Blanchett's character, absorbed in her screen, making calls, and idly throwing a crumpled paper ball at an adjacent colleague. We hear lines like: 'We want to sing about the love of danger, about the use of energy and recklessness as common, daily practice.' Alongside a paean to 'the iron network of speedy communications which envelops the earth' (from the 'Manifesto of the Futurist Painters' [1910]), we have time to examine the details of the character's set-up: the red apple on her desk (a nod to the Garden of Eden?); the impulsive way she twiddles her pen while staring at the screen (a displacement of anxious energy?). Then, she turns her head to the camera to intone a passage from the Futurist Manifesto, beginning: 'We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, pleasure or rebellion; of the pulsating, nightly ardour of arsenals and shipyards, ablaze with their violent electric moons...' The overhead shot returns for a long denunciation courtesy of the Italian Futurists and Apollinaire ('We will destroy the cult of the past...Shit to Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Goethe. Beshitted dilettantisms...'), and then slowly, as we are instructed 'Look at us! We're not exhausted yet!', the camera tilts to reveal Blanchett's workspace reproduced in a dizzying number of staggered mezzanines in a long, narrow

hall, flanked by massive stock ticker display boards. ‘Let the reign of the divine Electric Light begin at last. Make room for youth, for violence, for daring!’ commands Blanchett in voiceover, before the fluttering and clicking sound of the ticker boards takes over.

At first blush, the combination of Futurism and finance has the gestural force of a manifesto in its own right: a blunt provocation that also makes intuitive sense. Exactly how these characteristics are configured depends on one’s knowledge of the subject matter, and political sympathies. For some, it may be a travesty of the Futurist project, and of the avant-garde impulses it exemplified: the reduction of a startlingly inventive and wide-ranging set of revolutionary aesthetic practices and intellectual positions to the most defining baleful feature of globalisation, where all aspects of the human and natural world are standardised according to an abstract exchange value, whose differentials are then exploited, with radically inequitable benefit to the societies in which they are embedded. For others, the charging of such activity with Futurist energies discloses a truth about financial markets that the preceding critique tends to overlook. Namely, that an entity classically conceived to exist independently of human agency—‘the market’, whose ‘invisible hand’ efficiently distributes capital without fear or favour—is a highly disruptive force fuelled by the affective exuberance of its most devoted participants, as they invent ever more creative ways to realise value from all that is emergent in the world. A third perspective would view the film as dishing out poetic justice to both: that, in so far as the Futurists’ devaluation of the human and their uncritical celebration of speed, technology and war, which first ran aground in Fascism, now finds its logical consequences played out in the field of finance, their vision finds itself doubly condemned; meanwhile, today’s brokers and traders stand accused by the analogy of a nihilism whose own consequences can only be malign.

It is perhaps in the nature of *Manifesto* as a whole, which is already calling the spectator on to other screens, other alignments, other manifestos, that one leaves ‘Futurism’ there, and moves on. Indeed, as a manifesto, it is important that one *not* linger beyond the juxtapositional gesture. Certainly, that was my own experience upon my first visit to the work, where the overlapping soundtracks and visual draw of adjacent films seem designed to invite the visitor into circulation through the installation. And yet *Manifesto*’s manifesto-like aspect is not what stuck with me, for reasons that are hinted at by a distinction—over-neat in the main, but useful in context—made by Martin Puchner when he writes that the manifesto form is both performative *and* theatrical: ‘Political manifestos frequently overcompensate for the actual powerlessness of their position with theatrical exaggerations ... At the same time, even the most theatrical avant-garde manifestos achieved some performative effects and left some traces on history precisely through their calculated theatricality’ (2006: 5). While theatre, conventionally conceived, is nowhere actualised in Rosefeldt’s multi-channel video installation, it is everywhere present. Building on the explicit theatricalism of the two other works that preceded *Manifesto* in the exhibition when I saw it early in 2016, theatre and performance feature prominently in the manifestos cited, and several of the scenarios presented on-screen.³ In ‘Fluxus/Merz/Performance’, a turbaned Blanchett represents a diva-ish, chain-smoking Eastern European choreographer as she utters manifestos by Rainer, Cage and Maciunas,

amongst others; ‘Surrealism/Spatialism’ is shot in a puppetry workshop, where a dowdy artisan makes a puppet of herself; and ‘Stridentism/Creationism’ sees Blanchett as a boorish rock chick, haranguing her fellow participants in a woozy post-gig club environment.

An additional dimension of theatricality arises from the effect of moving between such contrasting representations—there is something consistently stagey about all of Blanchett’s performances: having so many accents, wigs and makeovers to juggle, with the characters conforming to closely observed stereotypes, and with the spoken text sitting at a remove from the immediate situation, it is inevitable that Blanchett’s performance hovers somewhat at a distance from each specific representation. That Blanchett’s reputation encompasses stage as well as screen work—especially in Australia, where from 2009 to 2013 she was a CEO and Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company—provides an additional contextualising factor here.

As such, theatrical performance can be seen not only as an occasional reference point for *Manifesto*, but an informing practice and organising principle. And in so far as the Futurists occupy a historically privileged place in this trajectory—Puchner calls the centrality of the manifesto to avant-gardism ‘the futurism effect’ (93)—then what can be said for Rosefeldt’s ‘Futurism’ film may also stand for the installation as a whole. In what follows, therefore, I will be less concerned with explaining how ‘Futurism’ is *about* theatre, than with what can be gained by watching the film and thinking theatre. In order to do so, I begin by following Rosefeldt’s method, examining in detail the underpinnings of the otherwise sloganeering alignment of Futurism and finance. This involves understanding the place of commerce, quantification and finance in the artistic theories of the Futurists, which in turn opens the way to thinking about financial practice in relation to Futurist ideas. Here, I will draw on a number of ethnographic and conceptual contributions to the emerging field of the sociology of finance, arguing that it is in the spirit of an engagement with Rosefeldt’s work to sustain a detailed attention to the material particulars of the activities Blanchett presents us with. It is through such attention—rather than by launching ourselves into the speculative critique that is all too common when finance and financialisation is discussed in the critical humanities—that we arrive at a way of thinking about theatre that is informed by the conditions under which finance is practiced, and which has implications for diverse aspects of everyday life and cultural production in advanced post-industrial economies.

Back to the Futurists

The conjunction of Futurism and finance may make an intuitive kind of sense in the early 21st century, but is it anything more than a punchline? What does it *mean* to draw these two phenomena into alignment? One way of responding to these questions is to follow the prompt of *Manifesto* and return to the source material, re-reading it in light of Rosefeldt’s provocation. The first discovery is a bit of a disappointment, albeit a predictable one: the Futurists got there first. While one of the basic conceits of *Manifesto* is the re-presentation of source material in anomalous situations that prove unexpectedly

apposite, the Futurists had already explicitly embraced finance, recognising both its significance to the worldview they were propagating, and the challenge it posed to aesthetic practice. In 'The Destruction of Syntax—Radio Imagination—Words-in-Freedom' (1913), Marinetti identified 'The passion, art, idealism of Business' and 'New financial sensibility' (in Rainey et. al. 2009: 144) amongst a host of developments in technology, communications and information that were effecting 'the complete renewal of human sensibility' (143). The immediate aesthetic implication of this is the renunciation of all structures associated with antiquarian, romantic or humanising art, such that, for example, '[t]he rush of steam-emotion will burst the steam-pipe of the sentence, the valves of punctuation, and the regular clamp of the adjective' (145). Conceptually, it would be necessary to liberate humans from their self-absorption and fixation on the past by enabling them to act creatively in a world nevertheless regulated by a cosmos comprised of 'infinite molecular life' (148), unfolding through constant processes of integration and synthesis.

The Futurists coined a variety of phrases to describe how this might be achieved, including 'wireless imagination', 'words-in-freedom', and 'body-madness.' The forms employed would be correspondingly multifold: visual art, dance, theatre, and poetry, fashion, architecture, graphic design and urban planning. But, importantly, alongside this inventive approach and associative attitude, they developed a concept of value informed by the scientisation and quantification they were seeing in the world around them. Attaining, as one 1914 manifesto title put it, 'Geometrical and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility' would involve taking the electric power station as a model for creativity, introducing mathematical symbols into language in order to abstract it from subjectivism, and in the process supplanting 'the poetry of the human' by reaching 'the point of expressing infinitely miniscule entities and molecular movements' (176). The question of artistic value would need to be re-thought accordingly, and in 'Weights, Measures, and Prices of Artistic Genius' (1914), Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli argued for the quantification of creativity in line with the globalisation of commerce and communications. Since '[t]alent is a commodity in vigorous demand in all the markets of the world' (184), artistic genius need be treated no differently, but instead quantified according to a disinterested formula based on the quantity of 'cerebral energy' (182) required to produce a given work. They continue:

That done, the artist will finally find his place in life, along with the sausage-maker and the tire manufacturer, the grave-digger and the speculator, the engineer and the farmer. This is the basis of a new universal financial organization through which a whole series of activities will be integrated into modern civilization, activities which are formidable in their development, completeness, and importance, and which up until now have remained in the grip of barbarism. (184)

Within the larger context of the Futurist worldview, two key elements are present here. An insistently material aspect places the artwork alongside a range of other goods, services and entrepreneurial activities. Indeed, full participation in systems of exchange

would itself be the material guarantor against the false economy of idealism and unmerited prestige that what the Futurists called 'passéist' artists had hitherto enjoyed: 'The producer of creative artistic forces must join the commercial structure which is the muscle of modern life. Money is one of the most formidably and brutally solid points of the reality in which we live. Turning to it will suffice to eliminate all possibility of error and unpunished injustice' (186). Once quantified by being removed from the domain of human subjectivity and aligned instead with the rapidly increasing power and productivity of new technologies, art could be produced that would represent, in the Futurists' estimation, a thousand-fold improvement on current offerings.

At the same time, this focus on the anticipated multiplier effect of full economic participation points to a condition that appears to exceed the material world of money, commodities and the provision of specific services. The 'new financial organization' envisaged by Corra and Settimelli, characterised by the integration of diverse activities 'formidable in their development, completeness, and importance', is readily recognisable to us today as financialised globalisation, where a seemingly infinite variety of objects and behaviours are absorbed into an apparently totalising market. The Futurists had several strategies for squaring the circle of their materialist commitments and their embrace of what has come to be viewed as the abstractions of globalisation, but perhaps the most persistent was the invocation of intuition and analogy. It will be by means of intuition that 'we shall overcome the seeming irreducible divide that separates our human flesh from the metal of motors' (124); and the poet 'will involuntarily link his sensations to the entire universe as he has known and intuited it' (145). When paired with "analogy", a more concrete sense of how the Futurist artist would function emerges, by intuiting novel correspondences between diverse phenomena: the dancer and the airplane, for instance, or the ocean liner and the *Galeries Lafayette*. Unhindered by conventional associations or structures of meaning, this process would be of a piece with the ways globalising economic activity and communications and transport infrastructures were composing reality. The analogy here would run in both directions. On the one hand, these developments reproduced the force and power of creativity: 'An airplane's or an automobile's great speed lets us embrace and rapidly compare different distant points on the earth, a mechanical form of the labor of analogy. ... Great velocity is an artificial reproduction of the intuitive analogy of the artist' (226). On the other, these developments provided a model for the artist's activities in and upon the world: '[I]n order to render the exact weight and proportion of the life he has experienced', wrote Marinetti of the artist, 'he will hurl immense networks of analogies across the world. And thus he will render the analogical ground of life, telegraphically, which is to say with the same economical rapidity that the telegraph imposes on war correspondents and journalists for their synoptic accounts' (145).

Conceptually, the reason for the mutual correspondences between these phenomena is hinted at in that phrase 'the analogical ground of life': these relations were not simply likenesses, but rather '*qualitative continuities* which permeate the universe on the electrical waves of our sensibility' (166). In practical terms, however, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the best artform for expressing this infinitely expansive and

associative worldview, would be the theatre. Needless to say, the Futurists did not find their inspiration in bourgeois theatre, which was ‘worthy, at best, of the age of the oil lamp’ (159), but rather in the variety theatre, which was ‘born as we are from electricity’ (159), and served as ‘the crucible in which the elements of a new emerging sensibility are seething’ (160). Demotic, fragmented and frenetic, the variety theatre’s characteristics had the capacity to generate ‘deep analogies between the human, animal, vegetable, and mechanical worlds’ (159), and to represent ‘the seething fusion of all the laughter and all the smiles, all the guffaws, all the contortions, all the smirks of humanity to come’ (160). It followed that in the next manifesto on the theatre—“‘The Futurist Synthetic Theatre’” (1915)—an attempt would be made both to describe the performance form the artists had been developing as they traveled around Italy promoting their vision and provoking their audiences, and to conceptualise a genre that could ‘compress innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts, and symbols’ into a few minutes (205), thereby attaining **‘an absolute dynamism through the interpenetration of different times and environments’** (207).

For the Italian Futurists, theatre excelled at the somewhat paradoxical role of harnessing the power of analogy within a complex and heterodox material assemblage. It provided a means of bringing to light those aspects of modern life whose suggestive force rendered them immanently theatrical, even when, in their scope and quantity, they appeared antithetical to theatre. This is why, as Marinetti, Settimelli and Cora put it, life itself ‘is for the most part *antitheatrical* and yet even so still offers *innumerable possibilities for the stage*.’ As a result, **‘[e]verything of any value is theatrical’** (206), and it this logic, sometimes compelling, sometimes twisted, that, beyond the basic alignment of Futurism and finance, and regardless of intention on Rosefeldt’s part, establishes a conceptual and aesthetic rationale for the ‘Futurism’ film.

Futurist Finance

If the film demands attention to the place of finance in Futurist ideas, what, in turn, does Futurism have to tell us about financial activity? Perhaps most immediately, we can note that some of the key components of contemporary finance were already making their presence felt at the time the Futurists were active, and the material and phenomenological affiliations between the two are highly suggestive. The stock market ticker was widely adopted in the late nineteenth century, and had a significant impact on patterns of communication at the time. In his financial history of that period, Alex Preda contrasts letters and conversations, which served to transmit information and maintain social relationships within complex, context-dependent narrative structures or rich embodied interactions at intermittent times, with the continuous flow of pricing information from the ticker, transmitted simultaneously to multiple brokerage offices. The resulting behaviours correspond closely with Futurist attitudes towards language, the human and the machinic, and connectivity. Brokerage houses developed telegraphic codes to reflect the new flows of information: Preda gives an example from 1898, where ‘army event bandit calmly’ stood for ‘cannot sell Canada Southern at your limit. Please reduce your limit to 23.’ Preda goes on: ‘This language was exclusively centered on

representing the world of finance: one could build sentences using the word bandit [*sic.*], but it was impossible to formulate sentences about bandits' (2009: 130). Such ciphers reached into the hundreds of thousands of words, and it is not hard to see how the continuous flow of codified ticker information, disassociated from specific interactions and received simultaneously at multiple locations, would come to be seen as reconstituting the world in a new representational form. Preda cites a passage from a 1907 novel, where one of the characters gazes upon a ticker tape so intently that the print-out 'ceased to be numerals and became living figures,' granting him a vision of a great deal of social and economic activity, but rendering him insensible to any possible sounds of suffering, since 'they would not reach the ears of a man whose soul had soared so high that the entire State of Virginia was spread before him in miniature like an outrolled map' (129).

The similarities with the Futurists' attitudes towards the 'destruction of syntax', to the new perspectives on the world afforded by technological developments, and to the capacity of aesthetic entities not simply to represent but to materialise global phenomena, are clear. Just as important, however, are the ways in which both the stock ticker phenomenon and the material practices of the Futurists problematise any over-hasty move towards 'abstraction.' Alongside the capacity of the tape to appresent the world, writes Preda, the ticker made new demands upon the bodies and time-management of market participants: 'The observation of prices, encapsulated in machine-generated rhythms, bound actors to the marketplace in a way which no [investment] manual could have achieved' (135). Similarly, the Futurists' description of money as 'one of the most formidably and brutally solid points of the reality in which we live' underscores the persistently material ways they understood the composition and effects of those experiences and objects they otherwise celebrated for their velocity or capacity to attain what Jeffrey Schnapp has called the 'statistical sublime' (2012).

Moving away from the historical moment of the Futurists and the early stock ticker (its electronic versions remain with us), the point is worth bearing in mind. The Wall Street anthropologist Karen Ho describes as 'neoliberal exceptionalism' the tendency amongst critics of finance capital to 'privilege distant logics over particularity and grounded cultural analysis', thereby preventing detailed scrutiny of financial practices, and 'ironically parallel[ing] the marketing schemes and hyped representations of Wall Street capitalist promoters' (2009: 33). If we are to follow *Manifesto's* lead in seeing aspects of the Futurists' vision realised in contemporary finance, then we will do as well to recall that the Futurists were as much a small and somewhat ragged band of distinctive and flawed individuals as they were the originators of 'the Ur-form of accelerationism' (Noys 2014: 14) who effected "the cultural and ideological inauguration of the twentieth century" (Berardi 2011: 17).

Indeed, this is particularly important if we recall that this consideration of futurism and finance is ultimately circumscribed by a preoccupation with the 'synthetic theatre' as most proximately manifested in a gallery-installed 10-minute film featuring Cate

Blanchett. I will return to these conditions of reception in due course. But first, let us ask what this attentiveness to the human scale can tell us about the financial fate of Futurism.

There is probably no better place to begin than with the future itself. Whether they are aligned or contrasted, both Futurism and finance are commonly viewed as being defined in relation to the future. Franco Berardi, for instance, writes that the futurist manifesto ‘introduced the century that believed in the future,’ a vision since overturned by the crisis in ‘a financial system that was founded on the futurization of the economy, debt, and economic promise’ (2011: 164). Yet one of the striking things about the Futurists’ writings is how little they discuss the future. They are much more focused on the voluble repudiation of the past, and it is arguably this that they define their vision against—a process that inevitably anchors them *to* that past. The technologies they celebrate, and from which they draw aesthetic inspiration, are largely extant, or composites thereof. As a result, the Futurists’ future is neither distant nor especially fantastical, but imminent, if not certain. The performative declarations in the manifestos, and the energy that animates them, are better seen as attempts to steer the emerging future in their preferred direction, than to overthrow the present in favour of a revolutionary alternative.

This preoccupation with the lived anticipation of the immediate future over a grandiose, abstract conceptualisation is also a striking theme in ethnographic studies of financial traders’ behaviour. To be sure, finance is differentiated from other kinds of economic activity by its orientation towards the future—lenders and borrowers alike are willing to play current capital and assets off against the uncertainties of the future in anticipation of subsequent profit. However, on a day-to-day, indeed, second-by-second, basis, these broad principles are played out by financial traders in a domain far removed from the details of investment, productivity and so on. Caitlin Zaloom describes how traders discipline themselves to screen out contextualising information and personal emotion and attachments, the better to inhabit ‘the edge of the present moment’ (2006: 173) and to maintain ‘a flexible relationship to the just emerging future’ (135). This, she writes, is ‘the arena of competition in which the individual trader must take decisions and, he hopes, profit. Joining the market’s emergence with temporal unfolding creates a new kind of edge where masculine adventurism takes hold, and threshold where the pursuit of money and moral standing merge’ (2012: 183).

Zaloom’s focus on the culture of trading that results from such high stakes work in the face of continuing uncertainty produces a range of insights that resonate strongly with the milieu of the Futurists, and suggest that if there is real value in Rosefeldt’s alignment of the two, it may lie more in their practical correspondences than in a fanciful analogy. Zaloom’s reference to ‘masculine adventurism’ highlights the fact that financial trading is an overwhelmingly male profession with a distinctive culture: misogynistic and homophobic in its language, macho and aggressive in its attitudes, and highly aestheticised and performative in its behaviours. Subservience to the vicissitudes of the market, argues Zaloom, produces an ‘economic man’ who is essentially asocial. Those she observed on the open outcry floor of the Chicago Board of Trade during her fieldwork wore colourful jackets, height-enhancing shoes and absurd ties that

simultaneously observed and repudiated the official dress code; they ‘delight[ed] in the carnage’ (117) wreaked by a belligerent self-interest that periodically spills over into fist-fights; and they sought competitive advantage through a distinctive repertoire of gesture and voice: all characteristics, one might speculate, drawn from the celebration of ‘antineutral suits’, ‘dynamic and synoptic declamation’⁴ and “the slap and the punch” (Marinetti in Rainey et al. 2009: 51) found in the Futurist playbook. ‘The maverick performances coupled with traders’ risk-taking bravado critique and reject the constraints of bourgeois social life’ writes Zaloom, in a resonant echo of some of the central tenets of the modernist avant-garde (2006: 198, n.14).

Zaloom’s use of the language of performance is part of a common pattern in the sociological literature on financial trading, where its usage is more than metaphorical.⁵ On the open outcry trading floor, these performative strategies were vectors of rich information that could help brokers and other traders evaluate what was being bought or sold. The introduction of screen-based trading of the kind represented in Rosefeldt’s ‘Futurism’ film sought to rationalise this situation by isolating numbers from their contexts. As Zaloom demonstrates, however, the cultural and interpretive dimensions of trading have been adapted to the new technologies, and once again we find echoes of the Futurists’ visions being played out there. The title of Marinetti’s final manifesto, written with Marcello Puma and Pino Masnata, ‘Qualitative Imaginative Futurist Mathematics’ (1941) is as good a description as any of Zaloom’s account of what numbers *are* to traders, in light of the ‘velocity and volatility’ (2012: 177) of the time-frames in which they operate. These conditions radically relativise the numbers, whose value comes overwhelmingly to reside in their short-lived status within the seemingly autonomous but all-encompassing world of an ever-changing market. In consequence, while on the one hand the number is ‘only a symbol in a sequence that stands apart from its mathematical significance’ (Zaloom 2006: 145), on the other, traders scrutinise patterns for qualitative meanings and sentiments—what Zaloom calls ‘states of market affect’ (158)—that can grant them competitive advantage.

The result is a conception of morality rooted in interpretive ability and the capacity to sense the movements of the market and respond in kind. One of Zaloom’s informants explained the process with reference to that exemplary Futurist figure, the racing driver, who ‘doesn’t look at the scenery as he’s doing two hundred miles an hour going down the track. He’s looking at the hazy outline of the road. He’s looking at the numbers on his dial. That’s it. He’s focused’ (2006: 153). Over time, profit and loss distinguish ‘the virtuous and those the market has deemed lacking’ (2012: 180), where the qualitative criteria of financial virtue appear to meet the Futurists’ attempts at the quantification of artistic genius, as it were, halfway. The successful trader combines disciplined control of their emotions and biases, absorption in the dynamic present of the market, a finely-balanced set of judgements about where the market may be heading, and a contingent but nuanced sense of why it might be doing so. ‘With discipline speculators train themselves to become embodied instruments for reading the market and reacting to its every twitch,’ writes Zaloom (179); a neat updating of Marinetti’s description of the intuitive artist who ‘hurl[s] immense networks of analogies across the world. And thus he

will render the analogical ground of life, telegraphically...’ (145). Thus do the Futurists of a century ago enter into dialogue with today’s traders, in the process providing a methodological framework for thinking about financial activity as an embodied, material practice that manifests a precarious but intimate and aestheticised—rather than abstract—relation to the future. We are now in a position to turn our attention more directly to Rosefeldt’s film, and examine its meanings and implications more closely.

Regimes of Attention

To begin, we can note some thematic specificity where previously there appeared to be only generalised relevance. Textual references in the voiceover to aggression and to the daring of youth underline the extent to which financial trading has been a machismo-soaked young man’s game, highlighting Blanchett’s gender (and, albeit to a lesser degree, her age). Her characterisation has been built at least in part around meeting the conditions for entrée into this world. Her delivery is blunt and laconic, and she chews gum and observes the screen with a kind of bellicose nonchalance. There is nothing especially playful in the way she throws a ball of paper at an adjacent male colleague: more a kind of ‘microaggression’ that has little to do with discrimination and everything to do with the pecking order.



Fig 3. Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*, 2015 © Julian Rosefeldt and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016

That said, this is not a purely individualistic enterprise. The third person plural figures prominently in the composite text, which begins with the evocative, excitable opening of the first Futurist manifesto: ‘My friends and I stayed up all night.’ As the speech continues, ‘we’ provides the cornerstone of the declarations it accumulates (‘we believe...’; ‘we

rebel against...'; 'we shall sing of...' and so on), and the final section begins: 'Look at us! We're not exhausted yet!' Who is this "we"? At a first pass, one might conclude that it refers to Blanchett's character and her co-workers, here representative in their nihilism and Wall Street stylings of the widely disdained (though poorly defined) "1%." But there are at least two refinements we can make to this impression. The first is to recognise the distributed nature of that 'we', comprising, as the voiceover puts it, courtesy of the Futurists, 'the iron network of speedy communications which envelops the earth,' for it is not limited to the people in the room where Blanchett's character works. Echoing Marinetti's famous exhortation to 'murder the moonlight,'⁶ the sociologists Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger have described how some traders pass their books 'from time zone to time zone, following the sun' (2002a: 906). They go on to propose that the result is a reconfigured 'we relation,' one that replaces physical co-presence with a 'community of time' as a defining characteristic of intersubjectivity. As a result, the temporality of the market—as instantiated in electronic trading—has several characteristics. One effect of collectively observing the market around the clock is total, uninterrupted, obligation to it during trading hours—a more practical explanation for the apple on Blanchett's character's desk than biblical symbolism, alongside the food and coffee the viewer sees on other people's desks. Another is the way that announcements and events 'pace and interrupt' (930) the flow of the market, supplanting clock time with what Knorr Cetina calls 'analytic' time, 'that of the speed and clustering of incoming messages', whose rhythms are uneven, and which 'may suddenly speed up as message intervals get shorter and more items stream onto the screen' (2012: 128).

The composition of such occasions, as an assemblage of information, materials, people and affects, is of particular interest to the interpreters of financial behaviour. When asked what the market is, one of Knorr Cetina and Bruegger's informants answers 'everything', and goes on to list a range of factors, from the volume of his colleagues' shouting, through details of the trade, to financial policy, to 'what the Malaysian prime minister is saying' (2002b: 168). None of these are distractions, and in his study of these heightened moments of emotional arousal in financial decision making, Alex Preda writes: 'By using emotional displays, online traders achieve several things: they pace their observation of the screen; when necessary, they keep observation focused on particular transactions; they evaluate the character of a situation they are in; they encourage themselves to a particular course of action' (2012: 160–61).

These observations provide us with a basis for understanding the narrative of the Rosefeldt film, which we can now view as being structured around an 'analytic moment' in the life of Blanchett's character. The drifting overhead shot with which the film begins, and the engaged but unfocused way Blanchett's character grazes across screens and phone establishes that she is in a 'flat' period. Indeed, Blanchett herself is of insufficient interest to hold the gaze of Rosefeldt's camera, which slides away from her to dwell on the screens that she and her colleagues are keeping a wary eye on. And then, a moment of what Knorr Cetina and Bruegger identify as 'emotional arousal' (2002a: 930) takes place, where 'everything' fuses in a moment of intense market activity—except, instead



Fig 4. Julian Rosefeldt, *Manifesto*, 2015 © Julian Rosefeldt and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016

of leaning in to her screen array to make a trade, Blanchett turns to address the camera directly, and chants, in monotone, the core of the Futurists' vision, beginning: 'We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, pleasure or rebellion.' This is followed by the exultation of post-climax victory ('Shit to Florence, Montmartre and Munich') and then, upon the command to 'Look at us! We're not exhausted yet!' the shot opens out to encompass the entire trading hall. The viewer is invited to marvel (or perhaps shiver) at the vision of countless individuals, all serving, like Blanchett's character, as, in Zaloom's description, 'embodied instruments for reading the market and reacting to its every twitch' (2012: 179). But the wider the shot, the more the humans themselves recede into the materiel of the structure. The regularity of the screen arrays obscure the individual bodies, and the electronic graphs and tickers on either side of the hall, along with the clean, recessed paneling of the walls, suggest that financial activity, of which human participation is only one small part, extends infinitely, towards a never-met vanishing point that is not so much abstract as infrastructural. 'A financial market', as Knorr Cetina writes, 'is an intermediary arrangement involving hardware, software, and human components' (2012: 127).

And, of course, where there is a vanishing point, there is also a perceiver—in this case, the viewer of Rosefeldt's film. This where the second set of additional participants in that 'we relation' comes in. For one cannot reflect for long on this particular component of *Manifesto* without recognising the correspondences between *what* one is watching, and *how* one is watching it. Simply stated: the viewer watches a screen showing Cate Blanchett watching screens. The climax of the narrative is folded into the ecstatic moment when she addresses the viewer directly, which, in my experience at least, is the

point at which my own hitherto restive gaze locks onto a focal point—Blanchett’s eyes—and my attention narrows correspondingly. Then, just as the film ends with a slide towards a multiplicity of screens, so the viewer turns away from the ‘Futurism’ film to encounter a geometric array of screens showing the remaining eleven films in the installation.

So the screen relations that are shown and experienced are more than homologous, and indeed while this is distinct in the ‘Futurism’ film, one could most likely identify other such affiliations amongst the other films of the installation. In this particular instance, however, I would like to suggest that there is a further association that makes ‘Futurism’ particularly compelling within *Manifesto*, namely that the connection resides not only in the duplication of screen-watching, but in the kinds of relations and experiences that are thereby explored. In order to establish this, it is useful to examine more closely the work of Karin Knorr Cetina and her collaborators, whose focus on traders’ screen relations has been motivated in part by an attempt to update Erving Goffman’s sociology of situations—what he called the ‘interaction order.’ Noting that electronic trading requires a heightened attention both to one’s physical surroundings and to the screen environment, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger write:

This arrangement implements a split in orientation in the interaction order, forcing, on the one hand, an orientation toward the screen that links the physically present person with a global sphere and, on the other hand, a secondary orientation to the local setting and the physically present others participating in it. We can distinguish here between the living presence of the trading floor, with its possibilities for immediate rapport, and the engrossing presence of the screen and the global sphere (2002a: 923).

From a theatre studies perspective, perhaps the most distinctive point made here is that traders’ orientation to what the authors elsewhere call ‘embodied presence’ is secondary to ‘response presence,’ which ‘corresponds to situations in which participants are capable of responding to one another and common objects in real time without being physically present in the same place’ (2002a: 909). This is not simply a matter of being preoccupied by a screen, but rather being bound into an entity which, while serving as an interface with other globally distributed individuals, nevertheless gathers and displays so much of what traders require as to effectively be, rather than represent, the market.

While one would be hard-pressed to say the same thing is happening in *Manifesto*, this approach to what Knorr Cetina elsewhere calls the market’s ‘regime of attention’ (2012: 116) is nevertheless suggestive. Specifically, the moment when Blanchett’s character addresses the viewer is timed to coincide with similar moments in the other films, so that one is simultaneously compelled by the screen, even as one becomes aware of a larger moment of ‘harmonisation’, when the individual—and carefully pitched—tones from the other films briefly overwhelm the otherwise protective umbrella of sound provided by the parabolic directional microphone, above. It is here—in this moment and for these

reasons—that we find an experience akin to the synthetic theatre envisioned by the Futurists.

Conclusion

Watching Rosefeldt's 'Futurism' film is only lightly analogous to the situation it depicts, but it is the lightness that is suggestive here. Consistent with the tenets of 'neoliberal exceptionalism,' there is a tendency to treat trader activity like nothing else in its scale, intensity and consequences: a world apart. However, what sociologists and ethnographers of finance are at pains to point out is that while such environments and the behaviours they elicit are indeed highly distinctive, they are also deeply embedded in cultural norms and practices. One of the central findings of Zaloom's *Out of the Pits*, in part a study of the transition from open outcry to screen trading, is that any attempt to rationalise the market and 'purify' the trading process will be recuperated back into a social and cultural milieu as all-too-human market participants seek strategies for profit-making. The point helps demystify financial activity by emphasising its continuities with the rest of the social and cultural world.⁷ But it also raises questions about the extent to which material practices and relationships common to the world of financial trading are found elsewhere in society. As Zaloom notes, our everyday relationships with screen-based devices "structure similar qualities of attention that traders evince", and our constant monitoring of the information they provide 'establishes a form of social connection that mimics market linkages and exchanges' (184). The point has been theorised by Knorr Cetina (2009), who extrapolates from her research into financial trading to analyse what she calls 'the synthetic situation' in contemporary life. The echo of the Futurists' paeon to a 'synthetic theatre' is apposite. Like them, Knorr Cetina seeks to articulate what it means to participate in an immediate situation that is informed by, and open to, actions at a distance.⁸

In Rosefeldt's 'Futurism' film, I have suggested, the narrative climax produces a similar moment of synthesis, where a thematic preoccupation and 'regime of attention' that is primarily redolent of financial trading activity is reproduced in the publically-accessible, historically-informed, and theatrically-oriented space of the galley. There, in lieu of entering a moment of communion with the market, Blanchett directly engages the viewer, her character intoning lines from the Futurist Manifesto. This moment of fusing, where 'everything' comes together, might also be seen as indicative of the method I have employed in this article. Following Rosefeldt's initial provocation of placing the words of the Futurists in the mouth of a financial trader, I have sought to trace the lines of connection and association that inform it. Instead of taking what is most anomalous in the connection in order to provide a performance theory of finance (or vice versa), I have instead explored those areas where—perhaps more unexpectedly than the anomalies, even—there is substantial overlap. I have revisited the Italian Futurists' writings with an eye both to finance and to theatre; I have established how contemporary trader behaviour realises some of the Futurists' ideas; and I have explored how this, in turn, enables an attentive analysis both of Rosefeldt's film, and the viewer's experience of it. In concluding, I would further suggest that such an experience provides a means of

appreciating the cultural dimensions and aesthetic forms of activities that are practiced in a range of social and economic milieus that, after both the Futurists and Knorr Cetina, are better described as 'synthetic' than 'multi-media'.

In developing this detailed interpretation of one film within *Manifesto* I have sought to identify and characterise one site where theatre and data meet. On the face of it, the two could not be more different—indeed, they might be negatively defined against each other. However, insofar as the most distinctive thing about data is how it promises to make the massively quantitative newly qualitative, it does not escape the world of social and cultural meanings that it has been theatre's historical function to track and inflect. And while it is tempting to leap into theoretical speculations about the apparently unprecedented and unique phenomenon of finance, as the term 'speculation' illustrates, the risk immediately arises that in doing so, one reproduces the aspirations or claims of finance at the expense of the actuality. As Zaloom writes, today, 'the market has become a key object that citizens generate collectively—the entity that is simultaneously made up of the interactions of participants and that creates another entity beyond and above them' (2012: 184). As such, it is as useful to use theatre as a means of examining how financial practices are already 'in here', as part of our existing social and cultural landscape, as they are 'out there', creating new forms of reality that we are impacted by and implicated in, even if our understanding of what this means is limited.

Taken together, the pairing of 'theatre/data' suggests that theatre has something to contribute to an understanding of the emergence of data as a major phenomenon, because, if one examines its manifestations in detail, one is liable to find a theatrical dimension to it. But this cannot happen without a change in our understanding of what theatre is and where it happens. We cannot expect the place where theatre and data meet to look exactly like either. In this case, the enquiry was triggered by—and turned on —Rosefeldt's film. But it need not be a film, as long as it draws out those synthetic aspects of theatre or theatrical aspects of data that are already immanent, and awaiting realisation.

Notes

1. For two stimulating examples of this approach, see Martin (2012) and Jucan (2015).
2. Anna-Catharina Gebbers and Udo Kittelmann clarify that two chords are created, since "[a] total of thirteen notes are heard: one chord consists of six notes; the other contains seven" (2016: 87, n. 16).
3. Screened in separate rooms in the gallery, *The Soundmaker (Trilogy of Failure I)* (2004) presented a multi-perspectival view of a foley artist recording the soundtrack for a film of himself moving aimlessly about his apartment; *Stunned Man (Trilogy of Failure II)* (2004) showed two subtly different views of a man moving back and forth through an obviously contrived apartment set; and in *Deep Gold* (2013), a man makes a hallucinatory odyssey through a surrealistic streetscape to watch a series of erotic and disturbing performances.

4. See 'The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto' (1914) by Giacomo Balla; 'Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation' (1916) by Marinetti in Rainey et al. 2009.

5. A notable example in the present context is Melissa Suzanne Fisher's analysis of how Wall Street women's networks use performative events to work out "new discourses and images of gender relations, finance, and women's status" (2010: 265). Describing the 30th annual gala of the Women's Campaign Forum, she writes: "I slowly began to think that I was witnessing some dimensions of avant-garde, even radical, feminist performance practices being incorporated into the WCF's presentation of elite women leaders" (277).

6. See Marinetti, "Let's Murder the Moonlight!" in Rainey et. al (2009: 54-61).

7. For the finance activist Brett Scott, this is an important step towards meaningful political engagement. He writes: "Finance is a cultural system, and so is money. Many people believe actual coins and notes are more 'real' than electronic money, but money is money if people accept it. ... It's thus a system which crucially rests on social confidence" (2013: 44).

8. And like the Futurists, we may add, Knorr Cetina's ideas are at once antithetical towards, and oddly reliant on, the theatre. She illustrates her account of conventional interactionism, where human social situations are grounded in face-to-face encounters in a shared space, with an image of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton as Martha and George in the 1966 film adaptation of Edward Albee's 1962 play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The synthetic situation, by contrast, is illustrated by a photoshopped image of Taylor and Burton arguing in front of a trading floor screen array which would replace the accumulated clutter of history and the domestic environment with "strictly what is relevant to the argument, nothing more" (2009: 66). Needless to say, a good deal of complexity concerning Knorr Cetina's choice of example needs to be disregarded for the argument to 'stick' in the way she wishes it to.

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