

HOW TO WRITE A REVOLUTION

Dr. Martin Puchner

Professor Sarah Pike: Good evening everybody. Thank you for coming. I'm Sarah Pike. I'm the Director of the Humanities Center at Chico State, and before I introduce our guest, I'd like to thank some of the people who made this visit possible: Dean Joel Zimbelman and Associate Dean Robert Tinkler of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts; the Humanities Center Advisory Board, and; the Department of English. The Humanities Center theme this year is "Revolutions." And there are a lot of other events coming up so I am encouraging you to contact me if you'd like to be on our mailing list and you are not. My email is spike@csuchico.edu or you can check out our Calendar of Events on the Chico State website. And we also have a Facebook page, so you can find about what's happening in Humanities Center through Facebook. After the talk tonight, I'd like to invite everybody to join us for refreshments in Humanities Center and that's right across the first street of plaza in Trinity Hall, that's the bell tower building and we have some nice treats for you over there so please don't go home. You can come across the street and join us. Also, in the Humanities Center Gallery where the reception is located, we have a new exhibit of photographs called Gone To Ground, and that's a collection of photos of underground bunkers by a New Zealand photographer, Wayne Barrar. So that's new and you can check it out later if you are at the reception.

So when the Humanities Center Board decided on this year's theme of "Revolutions," Martin Puchner's name came up immediately, and you'll soon see why. Dr. Puchner is Byron and Anita Wien Professor of Drama and of English and Comparative Literature at Harvard University. He studied philosophy, history of literature at the University of Konstanz, the University of Bologna, UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine. He earned a PhD at Harvard University in 1998. He then taught English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University from 1998 until 2010. He took his current position at Harvard in 2010 and also serves as the Founding Director of the New Mellon School of Theater and Performance Research at Harvard. Some of the classes he teaches include Theater and Philosophy, Modern Drama, the contemporary novel, literature and humanities and my favorite title, Machine Art.

Dr. Puchner's research in writing has focused on modernism, philosophy and literature, politics, drama theory, and the relationship between literature and theater. His book, "Poetry at the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes," exemplifies Puchner's impressive mastery of writing disciplines and historical eras. For instance, in a single book, he discusses the history and influence of the communist manifesto across Europe and around the globe, radical church and reformers of the 1600s, Italian futurism, Ezra Pound, surrealist art, Dada and Cabaret, contemporary literary theory, the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground, 1960s Performance Art, and most other movements and figures related to revolutions and manifestos. Dr. Puchner has published over 30 journal and encyclopedia articles and introductions. He also writes essays on contemporary literature, philosophy and politics for such venues as The London Review of Books and Raritan Review on topics as diverse as World Literature in Istanbul in 2012 and Guantanamo Bay in 2004.

He is the author of three important books, "Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama," "Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Gardes" (which one of modern language

associations gave the James Russell Lowell Award), and “The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy,” which won the Joe A. Callaway Prize for best book in drama and theater and the Walter Channing Cabot prize. He is the co-editor of “Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage” and the “Norton Anthology of Drama.” He is the new general editor of “The Norton Anthology of World Literature,” third edition, which just came out – congratulations -- and 6 volumes and 6,000 pages. According to [inaudible] the book is 11 inches high, 9 inches wide and weighs over 10 pounds, so quite an accomplishment.

Dr. Puchner has given talks across North America including at Princeton, Cornell, Dartmouth, University of Toronto, University of Chicago, UC Santa Cruz, and many other colleges and universities. He has also given talks across the globe and including Beirut, Istanbul, Linz, Berlin, Oslo and Shanghai – and all those just in the past 5 years. So it may not surprise you to hear that he's currently working on a travel book about world literature. But tonight he's going to tell us how to write a revolution. So please join me in welcoming Dr. Martin Puchner to Chico State.

[Applause]

Dr. Martin Puchner: Thank you very much, Sarah, for this lovely introduction. Can everyone hear me? Is this loud? Is the mic on and loud enough? Can you turn it up a little bit or I'll go closer. It seems to be on and I'm a little bit under the weather so I hope I'm talking loud enough. And so thank you very much for this introduction and invitation. I thank the members of the Governing Board of the Humanities Center. It's great to be here and it's great to be here as part of a longer series, speaker series, and event series on revolution.

An interesting term, “revolution,” that has itself undergone a revolution from meaning a kind of cyclical movement of the stars. Copernicus still used it in that sense to the meaning we associate with it now, namely a kind of rupture or break, a difference from the past. So really, the opposite of the kind of cyclical movement that revolution used to mean, and I'm sure that that's something that's changed that has come up and will come up in this year dedicated to two revolutions. Now revolutions, social revolutions, are a great subject for historians. Just a few weeks ago, you may know that Eric Hobsbawm died – one of the great historians of revolution. His volume, “Age of Revolution” – which begins with the French Revolution and ends in 1848 – is really one of the great contributions, sort of synthetic contributions, to the history of revolutions.

Revolutions are also a topic for obvious reasons, for political philosophy and sociology, disciplines equipped with the tools for understanding social and political revolutions and how they unfold. I want to begin my talk by asking what literary studies, my home discipline, can contribute to the understanding of revolutions, and my title, “How to Write a Revolution.” Now, by that I don't mean how to write about revolutions the way Eric Hobsbawm and many others kind of are and many others have done, but rather what did--how did literary works themselves contribute to the making of revolutions and how, therefore, the study of these works can illuminate how revolutions get made.

Now, with this general purpose in mind one could, for example, study the lyrics of revolutionary songs, the history of “La Marseillaise,” let's say. Just two weeks ago, I saw a piece by a New York-based theater

company called The Civilians, kind of documentary piece about a Paris commune that was really structured around revolutionary songs like “La Marseillaise,” which is maybe why revolutionary songs are on my line. So that would be one way in which literary study could contribute to the understanding of revolutions and one might call such a book “poetry of the revolution.” Now, as Sarah just mentioned, I did write a book called “Poetry Revolution,” but it was not about revolutionary songs or lyrics. I kind of succumbed to the temptation of a metaphorical title, at least a somewhat metaphorical title. And I know that some of you have read a chapter from the book so I don't want to dwell too much on it but use it and sketch a little bit its trajectory and use it as a kind of jumping off point for talking about much more recent and almost contemporary revolutions in the art.

So, in any case, poetry of the revolution, the kind of text, the literary object that I ended up focusing on were not revolutionary songs but a whole different kind of text, namely manifestos, and this is what I'm going to dwell on today. Now, manifestos haven't received a lot of attention from literary critics in part because they were seen as part of a history of propaganda, of campaign literature. And as such, there wasn't much place for literary subtlety and greatness. And living as we are now through a campaign maybe can sympathize with that. But at some point, it occurred to me that manifestos did in fact play a crucial role in revolutions. Not only did they articulate revolutionary demands of various kinds, more important they did that, but more important is that they somehow translated the ideas, the philosophy behind revolutions into action. This is what started to interest me in that genre. And I realized that in order to understand how manifestos did that, I needed to analyze these documents, these manifestos, with the tools of literary study. And that meant in particular by looking at it through the lens of genre to understand what kind genre the manifesto really was.

Now the word genre doesn't usually solicit a lot of excitement. I remember when I started teaching, in one of my very first student evaluations, students made fun of me for using the word genre too much. I think they also made fun of how I pronounce the word. And, you know, the reason why people usually don't get too excited about the word genre, I think has to do with the fact that the expectation is that someone will kind of lay out a genre taxonomy, lots of sub-genres and so on and so forth and trying to label them in that form. And I think, actually think that's kind of interesting but that's not what I'm going to do today. I'm not going to subject you to a taxonomy of manifestos. What I'm going to do is look at manifestos as a particular kind of revolutionary genre. Now, another reason why the study of genre has kind of fallen by the wayside in literary studies a little bit has to do with the fact that for several decades in those--in literary studies, you'll know what I'm talking about, genres have been seen as constricting, as limiting. Genres after all are a set of rules that tell you what you should do and what you shouldn't do. And for a couple of decades, literary critics tended to celebrate when texts broke with genre rules as if they were kind of casting off a bunch of straitjackets and that was often sort of especially the modernness of the area in which I studied a lot. So this idea of genre is somehow being limiting, imposing limits that literary text needed to break out of was quite prevalent. But the more I have worked on genres including the genre of the manifesto, I begin to realize that these limitations are actually the crucial thing about genres because they allow you to do certain things with texts. Genres, I started to think, were tools – or to use a slightly more contemporary term almost like apps that allow you to do certain things that also prevent you from doing other things. But they are really kind of tool-oriented which is

why they are constantly updated and upgraded. So this is the kind of conceptual view of genre that I developed and that sort of operated behind my thinking about manifestos. And probably this interest in genre--literary genres – as tools or apps grew out of this interest in manifestos because manifestos are genres--is the manifesto is a genre that really tries to accomplish something, to get something done and this task increasingly answers to the notion of revolution. So revolution--manifestos over the course of a process that I'm going to sketch out in a moment, the manifesto became a revolutionary genre, channeling the ideas and philosophies behind the revolution and directing these ideas towards the world.

Speaking with Marx, they don't just interpret the world, they tried to change it. And indeed I credit Marx and his co-author Engels with having invented that particular genre or app, if you will, in the process of composing the communist manifesto. So, to be sure they existed, texts calling themselves manifestos before, before “The Communist Manifesto.” But this text, this genre title, this genre title existed side-by-side more or less indistinguishable from other alternatives like open letters, declarations, proclamations, refutations, theses, defenses, catechisms, and much more. Calling a text “manifesto” was just one more convenient way of giving a name to a document whose intent was to state publicly, on making manifest, a set of a rules or beliefs.

Now, when they were charged with the task of drawing up the beliefs of the newly formed Communist League around 1846, Marx and Engels experimented with all of these rival forms. For example, initially they thought that the best way of expressing the principles of this new party was through the form of the catechism, the kind of question and answer testing of knowledge introduced by theologians of the church. And indeed the finished text of “The Communist Manifesto” still bares traces of this earlier experiment. But increasingly, the two authors realized that they were confronted with an unprecedented challenge and that they needed to meet that challenge with an entirely new kind of text. This older form, the catechism, wouldn't do.

So what was this challenge? The challenge was how to write a revolution. In 1846 to 1847, the French Revolution had long receded into history. All across Europe, monarchies and empires were entrenched, fortifying their position. But they also were watching jealously for any sign of a new revolutionary upheaval threatening the status quo. The French Revolution was passed but it wasn't forgotten. And word had gone around of a new revolutionary movement sowing discontent. But no one knew exactly what they were--what that movement was about. It was nothing but a rumor difficult to pin down and handily, it was called communism. And there was something to this rumor. Carefully, Marx and Engels had--and others had started to knit a network of revolutionaries scattered across Europe. But now in 1847, revolution was in the air again. It was time for the new group to present itself to the world. Famously, they opened “The Communist Manifesto” with the phrase that there's a specter haunting Europe, a specter called communism, and now was the time to replace the specter, this rumor of communism, with the real thing. The secret society needed to become public manifest. And for this purpose, the two authors invented and forged this new genre of the manifesto.

Now this manifesto made the principles of communism manifest but it did much more. Marx, a trained philosopher, had developed a philosophy of history based on the struggle of different classes; a history

leading up to the present and culminating in the manifesto, in the text of the manifesto itself, which declared a kind of point zero of history, a break, a rupture. All prior history leading up to the present and all subsequent history, future history, would be shaped by this moment. And at the fender of this turning point stood the proletariat, a new class of disenfranchised workers idly dependent on the owners of factories and capital. Of course, everyone knew about disenfranchised workers in 1846, but "The Communist Manifesto" took the unusual step of describing this group as the future power of Europe.

So in addition to just stating beliefs, the manifesto included a history of mankind told at breath taking speed. leading up to the present and into the future. And in order to bring this revolutionary future about, the manifesto introduced a new agent of history, namely the proletariat, the proletariat, and all but called this agent into being. Action was the ultimate goal and hence, the manifesto was a genre singularly intent on translating words into action. If there was going to be a revolution, it had to be incited by the manifesto itself. So, quite ingeniously, Marx and Engels combined these various elements in their manifesto. The declaration of principle, a long view of history, the creation of a turning point or revolutionary break, and the introduction of a new historical agent, the proletariat -- encouched all of these elements into a style singly intent on transforming ideas into actions. And out of these discrete elements, they forged "The Communist Manifesto."

Now, this new genre, this communist manifesto, is--can be used as a lens through which we can look backwards at the prehistory of the manifesto and forward to its many successors and imitators. And I want to take a moment to do that. Now looking backwards, it is striking that many of the earlier manifestos, manifestos written before 1848, were not revolutionary documents at all. On the contrary, they tended to be declarations by the heads of states, by kings, by heads of churches, utterances by those in power declaring a new set of rules or laws. And by making them manifest, by publicizing them in text called manifesto, they were--became laws and they were instituted. So, utterances by those in authority and by those in position to declare and to transform their words into actions.

One of the things Marx and Engels quite cunningly did is to use that history of the genre and turn it into a genre for the opposite, for a group that was disempowered and was trying to assert power. So, the word--the genre of the manifesto moves from the kind of powerful position to the powerless position but in the process also to a position that was trying now to assert power, an important change. Now, alongside these earlier authoritative declarations and manifestos, somewhat more subversive text existed. Although they didn't always call themselves manifestos, they were. For example, Luther's 95 Theses nailed to the church store in Wittenberg, which certainly had long term if somewhat unintended revolutionary consequences. There were other more explicitly or insurrectional documents, for example, those emanating from the so-called Diggers and Levellers in England who hoped to claim to common property against land owners. And, like Luther, they made ample use of Christian texts to articulate these demands, quoting liberally from the Bible. And I know that there are quite a number of religious studies, scholars, associated with the Humanities Center. So, I--it's an interesting kind of religious prehistory of political manifestos.

But religion was not the only language available for these earlier texts. There was, importantly, enlightenment philosophy and its principle philosopher Immanuel Kant, who authored the text that one might call retrospectively kind of enlightenment manifesto but which Kant named more humbly, perhaps, "What is enlightenment." Now, enlightenment wasn't just a matter of philosophy, of course, it aided those hoping to reorganize society without recourse to older authorities, seeking to play society on new foundation. And of course, one of the places where this kind of experiment was carried out most fully was of course in the English colonies in North America, which ultimately led to the declaration of independence and the constitution, important other documents in the prehistory of the manifesto.

So we have protest literature, we have enlightenment philosophy, and a new kind of republican constitution, and these were some of the strands that Marx and Engels changed and knit together into this new kind of document, the manifesto proper. But despite the later success of this document which truly changed the world, its immediate effects were disappointing. The timing was right or almost right, for it was published in 1848 just when revolutions were erupting all around Europe at that time, but it was published with a very small print run in London which was more insulated from this revolutionary fervor that was moving across the continent, and was published in German. And when the revolutionary energy of 1848 ebbed, enthusiasm for this new text, "The Communist Manifesto," ebbed as well and it would take decades for--and a concerted program of translation to catapult "The Communist Manifesto" to the forefront again. This happened by the final decades of the 19th century when the manifesto began its triumphant rise. So, Marx and Engels had created a new formula or app but it took quite a long time for it to be widely used.

Now, two developments resulted from this increasing success of "The Communist Manifesto" itself. The first was that the manifesto became the preferred genre of the left, inaugurating a long tradition of political manifestos seeking to found communist or socialist parties or to update and revitalize the international communist movement. Now from time to time it is true, right leaning groups try to answer this leftist tradition with manifestos of their own but never really to lasting success. "The Communist Manifesto" cast a shadow over all subsequent manifestos from which they could never quite extricate themselves.

The second development was perhaps more surprising. As "The Communist Manifesto" gained prominence, artists started to write text calling themselves manifestos as well. Now, most didn't want to revolutionize society; instead, they wanted to revolutionize the arts. So in a sense they imported that revolutionary fervor into the arts and the way in which they did that was by using that genre that had become so associated with the revolution, namely the manifesto. And they used also the kind of features that were--the features that were now post-Marx and Engels associated with the manifesto -- telling a grand history -- in this case, of art -- that culminated in the present and with a the rupture, the creation of an entirely new movement or entity, and aggressive denunciation of rivals and predecessors, and a list of demands or actions to be taken. This trend started in the late 19th century with a group called the Symbolists when they sought to articulate their break with what they considered the kind of dominant artistic paradigm of their time, the new realism. But the art manifesto really took off when an Italian by the name of Marinetti got his hands on the form. At the time he was an obscure symbolist poet, but he recognized the potential of the manifesto in the sphere of art and authored a text called

“Manifesto and Foundation of Futurism” in 1909. And when this text created quite a stir, Marinetti felt encouraged and started to write more and more manifestos flooding the art market with his missives. No futurist artwork had been created yet, but the new movement existed just by virtue of the power of this new genre of the manifesto. And I would say that, of course, later were wonderful, interesting futurist music and literature and visual art created, but I still think that the manifesto is the genre which captures the spirit of futurism most fully. In any case, this futurism, the new artistic offshoot of the political manifesto, had come into its own.

Now, I should add that artistic manifestos too had predecessors that should not be forgotten. Artists after all had always wanted to articulate their principles and views, sometimes quite succinctly and polemically, and some of these texts have certain--they have certain elements in--together with the manifesto. For example, there existed the tradition of “The Defence of Poetry,” which Percy Shelley had perfected while other contemporaries of his, like William Wordsworth, contented themselves with writing pointed prefaces to their poetry collection. And over the course of the 19th century, these declarations of artistic principle edged closer to the manifesto; for example with Emile Zola's on naturalism in the theater, which is quite a prominent example. But it was really only with futurism and with Marinetti's rewriting and re-forging of the manifesto for the purposes of artistic revolution that the manifesto really came into its own and entered the art world.

And once it arrived there, things were never the same again. More and more splinter groups and sub-formations sprang up at everywhere, fiercely fighting over minor points of aesthetic doctrine and articulating that by fighting through the genre of these kinds of manifestos. It was a veritable manifesto war. And that really changed the whole landscape of art. One effect was a proliferation of “isms,” futurism, symbolism, surrealism, Dadaism, these new isms that are so peculiar to the early 20th century. They really were, I think, a product of the manifesto having entered the art markets and encouraging these kinds of formations and rivalries. Many artists were simply no longer content to exercise their craft. They felt they needed to be part of an ism to the point where it looked like this war of the manifestos became more important than the different types of artwork actually created under the auspices of this or that movement.

Now a term started to circulate to capture this new landscape, this landscape of these rival movements all articulated by manifestos, namely the “avant-garde.” It is originally a military term designating the advance troop of an army, but now it described the new ambition of artists who found the latest and most advanced ism through the latest and most advanced manifesto. We've become very used to this kind of logic but it is a logic that has actually been in place only for a little more than a hundred years.

So now we have two strands of the manifesto: Political manifesto that continues to be written and an artistic manifesto. And from that point onward, the 20th century is a history, is a kind of dual history, of political and artistic manifestos. And sometimes these two histories kind of intersect and cross each other but they can also be kind of distinct, seen as distinct from each other.

So all of this happened in the early 20th century, but with World War II and its aftermath, both types of manifesto, the political manifesto and the artistic manifesto, seemed to be on the wane. As fascism and

fascist-leaning regimes took hold in Europe, calling both leftist revolutionary energy and artistic revolution. And even those movements that have sided with fascism like, for example, Marinetti and Italian futurism, were quieting down and once the war was over, discredited.

The time of the manifesto seemed to be over, but not for long. In the '50s, in the late '50s and early '60s, a second wave of both political and artistic manifestos began to make itself felt and gaining momentum as the '60s wore on. And the second wave was quite different from the first. The political manifestos, those still primarily leftist, were no longer dominated by communist parties but rather were used by smaller groups seeking recognition and justice including African-Americans, feminists, immigrants, gays, and other disenfranchised groups. So those were prime--this was the new landscape of political manifestos. And they were more international. Now there had been both political and artistic manifestos outside the first world in the early 20th century as well, in part driven by the global rise of communism and also the global reach of modern--of artistic modernism. But now in the '60s, this international reach of the manifesto was no longer the exception but the rule.

And the third change is important as well. Writing manifestos was no longer new. On the contrary, if you now wrote a manifesto, you knew that you were joining a long tradition of manifesto writing. In a sense it meant pledging allegiance to a tradition of leftist thought, even as the origin of that tradition -- maybe "The Communist Manifesto" -- was receding into history. And something similar happened on the artistic side. It happened to the avant-garde manifesto. Originally, both conceived as a way of declaring a new departure, a radical break with the past and with all preceding art. But now, this so-called neo avant-garde manifestos had to admit that they were part of a tradition, a tradition of manifesto writing.

What to do? It seems like an impasse. You declare a rupture, you want to dismiss all preceding tradition and yet you have to recognize that there is now a tradition of that in which you stand. Now some artist started to out-do their early 20th century predecessors by trying to be even more radical and revolutionary than they had been. For example, one French group, the Situationists even declared that they were against the production of anything resembling art all together. So now you really have sort of the logic of the art manifesto dominating. Now, I've made a similar claim about futurism but the Futurists still acted as if the whole point of these futurist manifestos was the ultimate creation of futurist artworks. For the Situationist, in a sense, the manifesto and sort of its variations became the only thing that was still permissible to do. And others found novelty in new technologies from which they hoped a complete revolution of the art world would arise.

Now, as this double history of political and artistic manifestos was moving closer to the present, I found myself increasingly unsure about how to proceed. The end of the 20th century saw the demise of communism in politics, and the emergence of so-called post modernism in the arts. And both seemed to spell the end of the manifesto. Without communism as a credible alternative to capitalism, how could one write in a genre that was after all originated by "The Communist Manifesto"? And within an art world declared--declaring that everything goes, it didn't make sense to found a new movement that would do away with all proceeding movements and rival art forms. If the late 20th century didn't quite experience the end of history, as Fukuyama predicted, it certainly seemed to experience the end of the manifesto.

Now in this--in the book, I kind of left things open simply because I didn't know how to proceed and what kind of conclusion to draw from this double history of manifestos for the present. Fortunately, other people did. After the book was published, people started sending me their manifestos [laughter] by the dozens, including – I received manifestos from a union worker organized in Pretoria, South Africa, and from the recent author, the author of the recent “Hacker Manifesto.” Now, having written the history of the avant-garde that kind of hesitantly went up to the present or almost to the present, I suddenly found myself kind of drawn into the periphery of various avant-garde and political movements. And what was striking was that these avant-garde activities were not shallow repetitions or empty commodifications or betrayals of the original avant-garde as many people had claimed, nor were they kind of anachronistic texts that somehow didn't get that history had moved forward and that we weren't living in a kind of manifesto atmosphere anymore. Rather, many of them proved to be extremely canny in negotiating this complex history of repetition that connected them to their early 20th century predecessors and how to deal with that.

So I want to just give you a few brief examples of some of these recent manifesto activities and how they dealt with this tradition of manifesto writing which they were now able to look back at.

And the first example comes from 2009 in London when a kind of quite established avant-garde gallery, the Serpentine Gallery, presented what they called a manifesto marathon. And the most immediate manifestation now is a book published in 2009. It's a large format book, it's about 200 pages with a red cover on which itself is printed a kind of manifesto or I should say kind of meta-manifesto that defends their choice of engaging this manifesto marathon and of taking the manifesto seriously. The manifesto is alive and kicking was their big claim. Now between the covers, they assembled reflections on the history of the manifesto as well as the manifestos themselves. And these manifestos they commissioned and collected came from different art forms and disciplines including film, performance art and architecture. And they included, in alphabetical order, Marina Abramovic, Brian Eno, Rem Koolhaas, Yoko Ono, Yvonne Rainer and many others. They really managed to get a lot of different kinds of artists to write manifestos and they collected through this effort really a panoply of manifestos that show the kinds of different attitudes one can take today towards the history of the manifesto. That their manifestos that declare what they are against and what they are for. Many manifestos interestingly include commentaries on the genre of manifesto itself and its conditions in the 21st, early 21st century. Some talk at great length and very eloquently about the impossibility, about the impossibility of writing manifestos today. Some of them use large fonts and sort of aggressive layout as the early 20th century manifestos had done. Others are more essayistic and quiet. Some even take the form of dialogues with different voices. Some are handwritten while others include images and drawings. The various--they call for political revolution and an end to the ban on smoking and one denounces abstract cinema. Some of them are against modernism. Others are for a return to modernism. One simply states in big white letters against the black background, “It doesn't get any better.”

Now the most notable thing about this Serpentine Gallery project is that it was what it is called, namely that it was a marathon. It was a marathon. The text were originally not just written but they were performed, recited in front of an audience. The Serpentine Gallery is located near Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, and the organizers in fact mentioned the proximity to Marx. It occurred in a pavilion, in a

temporary pavilion designed by Frank Gehry. And the performance styles varied some really treated the manifesto as a performance genre, which I think deep down it is.

Now, the most unusual manifesto that stood out a little bit was not really a manifesto at all. It was a dialogue namely a dialogue between one of the organizers and Eric Hobsbawm, whom I just mentioned a moment ago. It was a dialogue and at first, I was kind of disappointed. I wanted Eric Hobsbawm to write a manifesto. I thought he would be the person to write a real manifesto. But then I remembered that indeed Marx and Engels had toyed with idea of a dialogue in their earlier drafts of "The Communist Manifesto" themselves. So it helped me see something in their original manifesto that I hadn't quite seen before. So this was the Manifesto Marathon organized by the very kind of cool Serpentine Gallery in London.

Next, I want to take you to 537 Broadway in New York City. I first was drawn to 537 Broadway when I studied a little bit the history of Fluxus, one of these new--neo avant-garde movements that started in the 60s and that kind of revitalized or reinvented the manifesto. It is a loft that was originally bought by George Maciunas, one of the leaders of Fluxus, in 1966. Space in [inaudible] and Soho, space was cheap at the time, and this loft was one of several of what Maciunas called Fluxus houses which he bought, sometimes with the support of the NEA. Now I got involved with the space later when an organizer, an artist in charge of curating the space, contacted me with the hope of doing a manifesto event there. It was kind of a discussion about manifestos but at the same time, it was also this discussion that became material for a film, the resident artists in that space did. So again a kind of moment of meta-manifesto, with an artist using a discussion about manifesto as a way of thinking of integrating arts, integrating the manifesto, into art-making today.

Now the last stop is Spiegelgasse 1 in Zurich. This was my final destination in my travels that was leading me to various of these former avant-garde sites. And through these visits, hopefully, I hoped to understand a little better what the aftermath of the avant-garde and therefore the aftermath of that kind of revolutionary manifesto writing might be today. Now Spiegelgasse 1 is located in the old city center of Zurich in a maze of small streets and pretty shops. It's located on a corner and when you approach it, there's immediately kind of a museum sign that tells you quite unequivocally that this is the site of the original Cabaret Voltaire which was the home of one of the most radical artistic movements, namely Dadaism, during World War I. So it's a historical building, part of the history of the avant-garde. That historical moment actually didn't last very long at all, barely three months. In 1916, the Dadaists took possession of this space, which was kind of a bar, really nothing more, before they were kicked out due to noise complaints. Afterwards, the space still existed as a kind of bar until it was closed permanently, again due to noise complaints, in the 1950s.

It was not until 2002 that a group of artists intent on both preserving this historical avant-garde space and of using it for their own purposes occupied the building. In response to this action, a committee to save the space was formed. An early supporter was Swatch, the large Swiss watch manufacturer which offered funds, and also the City of Zurich provided matching funds to preserve this avant-garde space. This way, the building has been turned once more into a bar and performance space. Now clearly the

challenge of this new Cabaret Voltaire is this kind of balancing act between history and present. And I think they actually do that with considerable sophistication.

There are two organizers, one of them Adrian Notz. He represents that historical face and attempt to preserve Dada's legacy. There is for example a glass display case that includes publications by the Dadaists and about the Dadaists near the entrance. And Notz, who calls himself a Dadaologist, also travels to conferences, gives talks about Dada, and seeks out traces of Dadaism everywhere. Indeed, this--the project started as a literal excavation project. The website, if you can go to the website for the new Dada Cabaret Voltaire, details the various uses of the space before and after Dada. And actual archaeologists managed to excavate a pillar, for example, that was part of the original construction of the space; clearly being interested in this avant-garde movement today is a kind of archeological endeavor.

But there's another organizer, Philipp Meier, who represents the current face of the Cabaret Voltaire. He curates the performance space without exercising too much control because Dada – Dada is the most – kind of the ultimate – anarchistic rejection of order in the arts. Now the interesting thing is that Philipp Meier also puts his name and that of the new Cabaret Voltaire on behind other events supporting them with advertising and logistics.

Now in the middle of the financial crisis a former professional swimmer, Roland Wagner, announced that he would participate in a Swiss swimming competition, declaring that he was confident that he would break a new world record. So lots of people came, the media came, but to the great surprise of his--of the sports fans he turned around half way, swam back to the beginning and acted as if he had won the race. [Laughter] He let it be known that this performance was meant as a critique of the performance-oriented mindset that had caused the financial crisis.

Now avant-garde purists have frowned at the combination of art and commerce at work in the new Cabaret Voltaire, protesting as much against the involvement of the city government as against corporate sponsoring: "Wasn't this precisely what Dada was against?" I would say, "Not really." From the beginning Dada actually maintained a very playful attitude towards commerce. After all, the whole reason why the group had been invited into this bar was to increase sales. And several Dadaists developed their collage technique by working as graphic designers. And indeed, Dadaism promoted itself through forms of publicity not dissimilar to advertising, and manifestos were among them. In this context, I think it would have--would have amused the Dadaists rather than outraged them that, in order to finance its support, Swatch created a Dada watch called "Dada Traces," whose limited edition contains actual fragments of original Dada documents. Not only the Swiss corporate world has embraced Dada, the Dadaists themselves printed business cards at the time, identifying their gallery and their space, Cabaret Voltaire, as the Dada world headquarters. And the Swiss republic has embraced Dada as well by putting Sophie Taeuber – one of the few women associated with Dadaism and one of the few Swiss citizens associated with the movement – on the 50-franc note. As the Dadaists had recommended back in the teens – a piece of advice that has never been as sound as it is today – invest your money in Dada. Thank you.

[Applause]

Dr. Puchner: So do you want me to moderate myself and call on, okay, all right. The gentlemen in the back.

Audience Member – Dr. Michael Coyle: Hi I'm Michael Coyle, from our Political Science Department. Thank you for the talk – I enjoyed it very much. A thousand questions that I want to ask you but I'm going to limit myself to one [inaudible]. There are two ideas I wanted to I wanted to [inaudible] ask your sort of grip on it, if you would. What is the idea of the manifesto as an educational document, like thinking about it as a document that has distinctly the purpose to carry ideas to people who don't have a lot of access to a lot of ideas.

Dr. Puchner: Yeah.

Dr. Coyle: So the only way you really think about this is if you actually got one of these things and got to read about it. [Inaudible] the purpose of that. On the other hand, taking that idea and thinking about how our age today is one where our capacity to write our manifestos about anything is ever present at every second, you know [inaudible] making film. Most [inaudible] as manifestos really.

Dr. Puchner: Right, right.

Dr. Coyle: You know you can create a blog about absolutely anything and—and, you know, again pass on your manifesto as a political statement. So I'm wondering, you know, I love the way you are sort of blogging this idea of the manifesto. You know I was sitting here I was thinking about your Platonic dialogues, these manifestos. You know, the Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations is a manifesto. And I think—I think it has its uses. But I wonder what you think about that, that when you compare it to, especially to, our age and now.

Dr. Puchner: Right.

Dr. Coyle: Where you know the Occupy movement doesn't have a manifesto and the very idea of having one would seem actually insane.

Dr. Puchner: Well, so there was a big struggle as you may know in the Occupy movement about how to express their ideas. And there was, I would say, there was actually a big debate about whether to write a manifesto or not so—[inaudible] -- that the journal came closest. But it's something, kind of a spreadsheet that it's not a manifesto. But it is clearly a document that tried to fill this kind of vacuum because they realize that they needed something. They needed – I mean that was the big thing about Occupy, that no one knew what they were standing for. So I would say, I actually would to my mind, in principle – I want to come back to the other points – but I would say that it's pretty clear in the Occupy example that they were struggling. It was not a done deal, but they were struggling with and worrying about whether to write a manifesto or not. Decided against it, but several parts of the Occupy movement I would say came kind of close but it was the kind of--was the problem, they had to grappled with the question, I would say. And so to my mind, the Occupy movement is actually a good example, a kind of counterpoint to these neo-avant-garde artistic manifestos that are springing up.

It's a struggle and that is perhaps itself what distinguishes them from these earlier times. Marinetti didn't worry about whether to write a manifesto or not. He just turned them out one after the other. And today, in part because of the long history, I think it's a much more self-reflective moment. So I think Occupy actually came close. It's very interesting what you say about YouTube and the availability of vehicles for publicizing yourself, and I would probably use that as a lens to look back at the early 20th century and see how manifestos [inaudible] an easy and convenient way of publicizing yourself. I mean Marinetti developed, for example, many techniques. He threw [inaudible] manifestos out of windows of racing cars. He threw them down from church towers, let them, you know, rain down and that was a cheap way of publicizing it so you know I--one could if I can see that today maybe but all these other technologies.. The one thing that strikes me as different is that the YouTube and many of these other forms are usually about yourself, right? About an "I," a "me," that is presenting itself. Whereas the manifesto usually speaks as a group, a "we." There's always a group even as it happens in the--more in the 68, in '68 and its aftermath. Sometimes these "groups," in fact, only consisted of a single person but still it was a "we." Whereas--I mean I don't know that maybe others want to chime in -- but it strikes me that the YouTube is about "me," not "we." So maybe that's an interesting difference.

And the pedagogical—yes, I think you're absolutely right. The manifesto, "The Communist Manifesto," does have a pedagogical import, and that's perhaps why Marx and Engels went first to the catechism -- which, after all, it's kind of a teaching tool -- testing, communicating. But I would say that doesn't drop out entirely, but I would say in the end it's not the dominance. I would say with the genre it really becomes about is this kind of formative intervention in history, this translation of ideas into actions. And that is more than just spreading the word. So that's where the kind of exalted rhetoric, the demands, and so on and so forth that for me became, so the pedagogical is part of it but it's pedagogical in this particular way of really trying to intervene, it's such an interventionist genre. Whereas pedagogy can happen in a variety of ways, although I agree it also happens in this document. Yes?

Audience member: [Inaudible] ...although part of the lecture towards the end I would get [inaudible] I want to return to the very beginning, before futurism, and it stuck me that you did connect the first "ism" that we know of, impressionism. Although it happened at the same time as Marx and Engels were writing [inaudible] and they does--and I'm trying to think of why it was not the first one with that you connect [inaudible] manifesto change and I will also ask you to [inaudible] on it but on a couple of things that occur to me is that there were several splinters within that group but they did not identify themselves. They were [inaudible]. They knew each other and [inaudible] you know so called [inaudible] on each other in their bars and their studios but they did not coalesce as a movement.

Dr. Puchner: What?

Audience member: And they were defined by others the way [inaudible]...

Dr. Puchner: Exactly. It wasn't--it was, as a pejorative. It started as a pejorative term by others.

[Inaudible Remarks] But you were saying...the salon and the academy...

Dr. Puchner: Yeah, it's a fascinating test case and it shows how, once you zero in on it, how complex the history is. Because you are absolutely right – a lot, many of the features we associate with avant-garde groups where there – and you enumerated them – and yet they didn't quite amount to the manifesto itself. So I think, well, two conclusions can be drawn there. Yes the mani--the kind of world of the manifesto “ism” was exclusively created by the genre of the manifesto itself. There had to be certain conditions for it to actually be adopted into the art world and this kind of increasing interest and breaks with the past and splinter groups was part of that. And I would say was, in that, once the art world had developed those characteristics it became the--it became ready to use the manifesto, so to speak, and once it did I think the manifesto actually did add to that logic and drove it to its extreme that's how we put it probably.

Audience member: There's one question that occurred to me is that obviously some of the questions they had a social agenda--

Dr. Puchner: Right.

Audience member: [Inaudible Remarks]

Dr. Puchner: Right. So I think the first move has to be separation to understand that these are quite – political manifestos and artistic manifestos -- quite separate, but obviously I mean and that's in the sense the whole interest of studying this phenomenon that I think it became a nice way of thinking about this broad and important topic of politics and the art and, you know, in the late 19th and 20th centuries. And, in a way, you could--I started to think of it almost like the manifesto sort of as a membrane or as a way in which politics get moved into the art and it also became an interesting kind of gauge about moments when art and politics became really close so there's--the famous manifesto that Trotsky and Breton co-authored, for example, for free revolutionary art where they, you know, become almost the same and there are many moments of overlap and vicinity, obviously. This is why certain artistic groups are drawn to this political genre. But it also became a way of checking when that wasn't the case. So I think it's a kind of relatively finely grained instrument for thinking about politics and the arts without having to say, "Oh of course all art is politics," and something like that so...But, so yes, sometimes complete affinities and overlaps and attempts to kind of bring those two traditions together again, and other times it's much easier to separate them out. Yes?

Audience member: I was wondering if you could go back maybe earlier than the communist manifesto, some 60 years before the war. Have you thought about or found evidence of what was undeniably a proletarian revolution, which was the revolt of the slaves and the--

Dr. Puchner: Yes. Yeah--

Audience member: ..in Haiti, resulting in kind of [inaudible] Marx and Engels and “The Communist Manifesto.”

Dr. Puchner: Right. Though, though it's true and it's interesting though probably – and maybe there are historians here who would be better at that. I mean they were amount--I mean there were certainly

texts, these are non-published texts about the revolution, though the more important event was probably the American Revolution and independence movement in the New World. But it was one of the first, wasn't it? So yeah...I think I've lost track of your question.

Audience member: Whether you have found evidence or thought about the influence of that revolution because undeniably it was proletarian--

Dr. Puchner: Yeah. Right. Well, so on Marx and Engels? So the big difference was, of course, that for Marx and Engels – and this became famously a problem later on for the communist parties – were very invested in a kind of historical process and the proletariat. So the slaves in the New World wouldn't be as clearly a proletariat--you know, if you think of an industrial proletariat. And that was not--that was not the same thing, so the idea that only once capitalism has reached a certain stage will it create its enemy, namely the proletariat, and then it will come to an end. So a slave revolt like that actually does not fit very neatly in that particular history that Marx and Engels, but in particular Marx, had in mind. So this has to do really with the importance for their view of history of the industrial revolution and an industrial proletariat. So they would, you know, put that in a kind of prehistory of revolts and so on and so forth. Obviously you're interested in it, but I don't think it was crucial in their--in the development of their and especially for Marx, which is all based on, you know, political economy. So I don't--that's not the end, maybe there are some--would you like to weigh in here?

Audience member: [Inaudible Remark]

Dr. Puchner: Right, yeah. No, I totally see that, I get that argument but and I agree with it. I agree with it up to a point and that is it leaves your--you know this position to explain the continued ways of manifesto writing that actually occur. So you know, it looked like the manifesto was dead in you know 1940 and it came back in a different form..

Audience member: What form?

Dr. Puchner: In a partial or farcical?

Audience member: Both.

Dr. Puchner: Both, yeah But then you know if you look at Dada's manifesto--

Audience member: [Inaudible Remarks]

Dr. Puchner: Oh no--all right. First we would have to distinguish the art manifestos from the political manifestos because I would say certainly the art man--I mean the Dada's manifestos, were very farcical, very, and also very small. It was the small three months in some random bar in Zurich, I mean to put in. Because there are so much been written about it now it creates this kind of mythical proportions and that pens the whole history of it. So I would say the art manifesto was -- had features of the self-aware, playful, farcical element from the beginning which makes it little harder, and you know people tend to do that. But I think it's partially wrong to tend to see the later manifestos as the betrayal of the real authentic great manifesto and it's just repetitions, and so on and so forth, and that history has never

quite convinced me. In fact in part because I think the Fluxus manifesto is a great inheritor of the Dada's manifestos. It really adds to it, is aware of the differences. So those are the--to my mind now I'm becoming normative, the good manifestos are of course the ones who understand that things are not the same. And in the realm of politics, you know, it's obviously – there's nothing like the “Communist Manifesto,” but what does that mean? You know, “The Communist Manifesto” took half a century to be known by anyone, and I'm not predicting that such a text will happen again. But I think that legacy is still you know, to come back to the Occupy Wall Street, I think there are still--it's still something that we are grappling with or that groups are grappling with. So I would say it's not just over with although, you know, and it is tied to what has happen to modernity. But I think 15 years ago people would have been much more ready to make--or a lot of people would make the claim you made. It's over. That history of modernity, somehow over. There's a closure. But I think in the last 10, 12 years things look a little different. It's not the end of history and we'll see.

Audience member: Coming off the part [inaudible] you mention precisely the fact that this was discussed within the movement, the idea that they would not present the manifesto and why? Well the equivalent you know in Spain was the Occupy [inaudible].

Dr. Puchner: Yeah.

Audience member: Now they did exactly the same thing except that it wasn't focused on Wall Street. It was focused on politics in general,

Dr. Puchner: Yeah.

Audience member: We are in the [inaudible] of course means that you are just angered about the situation, about the political class and the bankers and the leaders of financial leaders and politi--all of them combined are [inaudible] that led society into this terrible situation. The interesting thing is--well, I'm from Spain, I was involved. I live in Barcelona, and I went to the square and I talked to the people there. I'm too old to participate now in anger [inaudible], you know. I did back in the 60's already. But it's interesting because the same discussion arises, should we proclaim something?

Dr. Puchner: Yeah.

Audience member: Well that was precisely the opposite of what they wanted to do because the idea was that, that we don't know what we are for but what unites us is what we are against. So we condemn the situation. But if we propose something – and that, I presume, is the main purpose of a manifesto. It's what you declare that should be done. Then of course you think, “Well then we're going to become another political party.”

Dr. Puchner: Right.

Audience member: We'll be the same thing.

Dr. Puchner: So that's very interesting. Although I actually would say this negative move – what we are against – is stronger. And, you know, “The Communist Manifesto” doesn't paint a Utopia. It's doesn't

really say what they are for except in a few very general terms, but it's very, very precise about what they are against and why. And this continues to be the case. I mean, there are, you know, some manifestos where the positive is more important, but I actually would say this rupture, the break, is how ultimately I think of manifestos, very much in a kind of gestural term. It's the gesture of the break and so this "against"... I think it's a very powerful ingredient. And you know, if I were to hazard a guess about why the [inaudible] or the Occupy Wall Street didn't want to write a manifesto, it has to do with what of course everyone now associates with the authoritarian tradition of communism. And though I would say that '68 navigated that pretty successfully, in any case, so I--I would say the "against" is a pretty good condition out of which I could imagine manifestos arising.

Dr. Coyle: Can I comment once more? I think one comment I would make to both of you is that you know the--speaking of Occupy as a movement is very dangerous proposition because there was no central office.

Dr. Puchner: Right

Dr. Coyle: And, you know, Occupy got a big share of the national and international media attention. I traveled and kind of did a stenography, really, of that year in terms of the Occupy at some of the 12 major US cities I visited and spent time talking to people etc. And I would say that it would be more accurate to say that they all pretty much had leaflets with manifestos on them, letting passersby know this is why we are here, this is what we're doing, with websites, with information. If Marx says they individually have manifestos that had shared common elements between them,

Dr. Puchner: Yeah.

Dr. Coyle: Then there was such. I mean, you've got to be really careful with the phrase Occupy movement because there was no central office

Dr. Puchner: Sure.

Dr. Coyle: And there was never was a possibility for a manifesto in that sense. I mean they considered doing a political party, running the election and all that kind of thing, but that never really took off.

Dr. Puchner: Yeah, and that's a very interesting--description and so you know that--that's our conception of movement imply a central office. But you know whether or not – the interesting thing that is, and to come back to conditions of manifestos today that it is precisely this kind of decentralized group that actually, you know, resembles many of the artistic avant-garde movements. Surrealism, Dadaism – these were sort of allies, with some going off to found branches of the movement elsewhere, but then broke off. So this kind of dispersed network, or something like that is that, characterizes some of the early 20th century avant-garde movements, as well, and they are certainly no--I mean that's why the business card of talking about a Dada headquarters is so funny because it was an absurd idea, as absurd as saying where--where is the you know, where is the Occupy office. So--but then you know it becomes an interesting question, how--what so they have different leaflet that share certain elements

that that is sort of the form the manifesto has taken now. I guess would be the conclusion to draw from that.

Audience member: [Inaudible Remarks] Are the times in which the manifesto becomes embedded in the movement itself? [Inaudible Remarks].

Dr. Puchner: Yeah, and you know what's fascinating is that, retrospectively, some of these texts you can find them in collections where a naturalism in the theater will be called "the naturalist manifesto" or where you will have this excerpt from [inaudible] sold as the "realist manifesto" because we now feel that's what they should have done. And we couldn't project the moment where the--when it has congealed as a genre, backwards into history, which is fascinating. The same with symbolism there are all these--you know and these are pretty small scholarly editions but they will put the word "manifesto." And it--when I started to look at these documents I realized none of them called themselves "manifestos." They come close to being manifestos. But as a title to call your text the "X Manifesto" is very, very rare. I think there's one. I now forget where there is a single symbolist [inaudible] I think it's really a Marinetti thing who copies it from the political manifesto. So it's an interesting history of backward projection, if you will. But, you know, so it's easy to make fun of it and it is, it's problematic. But it also points to a truth, namely that they are, now that we know what to look for, we can find it here and there, we can find it in a preface, we can find it a long sort of authorial essayistic aside. We find it in these different places and now once we have the genre, we retrospectively write its prehistory, and so this is how this process works, I think.

Audience member: And what constitutes now [inaudible] changing. Do you think of it more now in terms of something very general that this [inaudible] or guess, once we set the idea down in pen--That somehow we negate the power of the ideas and make it conventional rather than revolutionary?

Dr. Puchner: That's very interesting. I mean there is certainly something. I mean the manifesto is an ephemeral genre to begin with. I mean it is leaflets, or you know, the interesting thing is The communist manifesto which is absurd in retrospect, was serialized. That's how it was first published -- serially -- and then it was published (as a whole). I mean almost like a Victorian novel, so to speak. So that's interesting but certainly these artistic manifestos are quite ephemeral. But I hear you saying it's not ephemeral enough. But it's an interesting thought -- that because for us, you have this clear concept of a manifesto and its expectations and the weight of its history that that scares people away or makes people want to avoid it. That make sense to me I think. You know what--when, what you can see in for example in this Manifesto Marathon, is that some -- and this maybe goes back to the earlier point that some people are embarrassed to think it's unbelievably presumptuous to write a manifesto. I mean it's--I think it goes back to your point. So there is this that exists, too, and that is part of the new landscape or debate or force field around manifestos now, very much so. And wasn't so much earlier.

Dr. Pike: I'm going to suggest maybe one more question and then we'll make a transition to more informal conversation. How does that sound? One more question, anybody?

Dr. Puchner: Okay.

Audience member: [Inaudible Remarks]

Dr. Puchner: Right. So declaration of principle is a crucial ingredient of the manifesto. I would say probably without declaration of principle, no manifesto. So it's definitely a big part but it's not sufficient. It's not a sufficient ingredient, there is -- because just the declaration of principle -- something else has to be part of it, including all these kind of performative strategies for turning ideas into actions and all these other elements. But declaration of principle is an irreducible part of the manifesto. But it's probably the first thing you think of when you hear manifestos is principles. So that's why I then started to focus more on these other elements of the genre that are less apparent, the rhetorical strategies, the telling of history, all of that -- that I focus more in that, but declaration of principle is part of it. No doubt about it.

[Applause]