

FROM WRITINGS ON PERFORMANCE TO WRITING AS PERFORMANCE

Geneviève Marcil

*We knew that if we were famous, if we were glamorous,
we could say we were artists and we would be.
We did and we are¹.*

Dedicated to the performative aspects of art manifestoes, the first part of the exhibition *Reading Performance: An Annotated Bibliography in Real Time III* raises certain issues surrounding the dialogue between text and performance. Whereas the annotated bibliography that formed the basis for this project consisted of a compilation of theoretical and critical essays on the topic of performance, this portion of the exhibition flips this relationship on its head by proposing to study writing as a performative act in itself.

As the epigraph suggests, the goal here is to situate the manifesto's underlying acts of writing, speaking and creating in the context of performance art. In Quebec, this angle of analysis has benefitted from several noteworthy precedents. In the introduction of their collection of cultural, political and economic manifestoes drawn from Quebec's history, Daniel Latouche and Diane Poliquin-Bourassa cite as essential features of the manifesto both its relation to reality and its reference to concrete action². Similarly, Jeanne Demers and Line McMurray's *L'enjeu du manifeste, le manifeste en jeu* introduces the pragmatic and social dimensions of the manifesto as a genre. In line with philosopher J. L. Austin's³ theories on linguistics, the authors propose to analyze the manifesto "[...] in its whole, that is as a phenomenon that comprises both an act and a context of utterance"⁴. This fully reflects the current project's intent, in that it considers the art manifesto as a text whose objective is to implement a new reality.

However, whereas Latouche and Poliquin-Bourassa use a rhetoric of identity to establish the temporal boundaries of their review—namely the Conquest of 1760 and the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976—and Demers and McMurray include all Francophone countries in their typology, this first portion of *Reading Performance* more closely follows the framework of the research project. Thus this selection of manifestoes focuses on early-20th-century-to- contemporary Quebec and Canadian texts, with a concern for the equal representation of Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, Women and LGBTQIA artists.

Despite these constraints, the exhibition aims to represent the various stages of the manifesto's life cycle, namely drafting, broadcasting and public reading. From Françoise Sullivan's colourful writings⁵ to the trenchant style of *Allez chier*⁶ magazine, the exhibition mainly deals with multiform texts that refer to performative practices in a broader sense; practices at the crossroads of poetry, video, dance and theatre. In this perspective, the first editorial of *Parachute* magazine is treated as analogous to Tom Konyves' self-proclaimed manifesto about his videopoems⁷ in that both are seen as calls to action and creation acts for groups, movements and ideas.

The different modes of dissemination of these texts are showcased in publications made available to visitors, who are invited to observe the changing forms of access to culture—from the physical exhibition catalogue, printed on glossy paper, to PDFs uploaded online by the artists themselves. Rudimentary photocopies affixed on the walls underscore the graphic sensibility of these different formats and, rather than fetishize the original document, draw focus on the usefulness of their content for ongoing research.

Lastly, video projections showing public readings of various manifestoes serve to illustrate the performative nature of these writings in the strictest sense. Emblematic of this section, stage performance is highlighted through footage of the various speakers of the March 27, 1970, *Nuit de la poésie*⁸. Conversely, the public reading of General Idea's ode to celebrity by AA Bronson, who arrogantly conceals his identity throughout the event, subverts the notion of self-presentation inherent to the performance of the manifesto⁹.

In addition to being integrated to the research project's annotated bibliography, all selected manifestoes are compiled in the exhibition booklet so as to facilitate further research on the topic. That is in essence the objective of any bibliographic approach: to serve as a tool for further studies on an issue. *The Art Manifesto as Performative Text* examines the relationship between researchers and primary sources, as well as the use of these sources in the methodology of art history and production¹⁰. Clearly this type of compilation work, although not itself a performative act, still possesses an intrinsically generative quality.

1 General Idea. (1975). Glamour. *FILE Magazine*, 3(1), p. 21.
2 Latouche, L. and Poliquin-Bourassa, D. (1977-79). *Le Manuel de la parole : Manifestes québécois*, vol. 1. Québec Boréal Express, p. 16.
3 Austin, J.L. (1962/1955). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
4 Demers J. et McMurray, L. (1986). *L'enjeu du manifeste, le manifeste en jeu*. Longueuil : Le Préambule, p. 24.
5 Sullivan, F. (1971/1948). *La danse et l'espoir. Dans Teyssède, B. et Dumont, F. (dirs). Borduas et les Automatistes, Montréal, 1942- 1955* (p. 140-146).Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.
6 David, G. (1969). L'enfin théâtre, *Allez chier* (1), s.p.
7 Morin F. et Pontbriand C. (1975). Editorial. *Parachute* (1), p. 3.
8 Konyves, T. (2011). *Videopoetry: a Manifesto*. Récupéré de https://issuu.com/tomkonyves/docs/manifesto_pdf.
9 Labrecque, J.-C. et Massé, J.-P. (1970). *La Nuit de la poésie 27 mars 1970*, Office national du film du Canada.
10 General Idea, op. cit.
Bronson, AA. (1975). *Mixed Metaphors*. Vancouver: Western Front.
10 See *Why Bibliographies Now? A discussion on bibliographical research at Artex*, a discussion presented as part of *Reading Performance* with Nicole Burisch, Joana Joachim (associate member of the Ethnocultural Art Histories Research Group, Concordia University) and Victoria Stanton. Moderators: Barbara Clausen and Geneviève Marcil. Available online: https://artex.ca/en/2017/11/why-bibliographies-now-a-discussion-on-bibliographical-research-at-artex/?noredirect=en_CA