The Manifesto: Literary Outlaw, or Outlaw of Literature?

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Abstract: Some manifestos are anthologized with other literary genres. Marx and Engles' The Communist Manifesto is one example. Then there are manifestos we might prefer to forget: Theodore Kaczynski's The Unabomber Manifesto. Why do some manifestos receive literary recognition, while others do not? In this paper, I will look at two examples of manifestos, the first a selection of Tristan Tzara's Seven Dada Manifestos, a document announcing the art movement known as Dada. The second manifesto is more of an "outlaw" or exile of literature, Valerie Solanas' radical feminist theory presented in her Scum (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto. Despite this document's lack of literary recognition, it refuses to die as a text. Is the genre ofthe manifesto itself always suspect? Will it be a genre always on the fringes of the literary canon? Are some of the questions I will try to address in this paper.

Keywords: Manifestos, Dada, Tristan Tzara, Valerie Solanas, Literary Outlaw

UNLIKE THE OTHER, established literary genres like the novel, the manifesto seems less concerned with a place in the literary canon, and more concerned with evoking immediate social or cultural change. Yet some manifestos are anthologized with other literary genres. Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* is one example. Even if you have not read this document, you are probably familiar with some of its language: "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of Communism" and "Workers of the world unite! We have nothing to lose but our chains!" Why do some manifestos receive literary recognition while others are exiled from the literary canon or from literary criticism and appreciation? In this paper, I will look at three examples of manifestos, the first a selection from Tristan Tzara's *Seven Dada Manifestos*, a document announcing the art movement known as Dada, (a movement well respected today). The second manifesto is more of an "outlaw" or "exile" of literature, Valerie Solanas' *Scum Manifesto*. Despite this document's lack of literary recognition, it refuses to die as a text. The third and final manifesto I will look at is Theodore Kaczynski's *The Unabomber Manifesto*, a political statement that tries to justify the so-called political murders committed by its author. Given the previous examples, the manifesto seems born from discontent, desperation, and anger. But does the manifesto's anguish, desperation, and anger make it unfit to be anthologized along side of the other literary genres like the short story or essay? And if so, is this an unfair judgment? These are just some questions that come to mind when evaluating the manifesto as a work of literature, and some of the questions I will look at in this paper.

Because the manifesto is often created for an immediate political need or as an assault on contemporary culture or values, the genre seems more rhetorical than literary. Yet the tag of "rhetoric" should not preclude or deny any literary quality or nature. In many ways, the manifesto seems more like an essay, but a student essay: writing that does not get recognized or privileged the way an anthologized poem or story does.

Yet the way the student essay is valued is also similar to the way the manifesto is valued—or rejected. The student essay must adhere to a set of criteria before it can be accepted as a plausible piece of writing in an academic setting. Notes Victor J. Vitanza,

a contemporary scholar of Rhetoric in his essay, "Three Counterthesis: Or, A Critical In (ter) vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies": "Learn to write this way and you too, can be successful as a white, male, and middle class *producer* of clear, coherent, easily consumed prose" (Vitanza 142). It is the "un-privileged" student essay that Vitanza delineates and argues for, that more closely reflects the rhetorical nature of the manifesto. For Vitanza, traditional pedagogical composition theory pushes students into a "false discipline." "What we want, then, is not a discipline or metadiscipline, but a "nondiscipline" (165). Vitanza's post modernist evaluation of composition pedagogy strongly lends itself to the three manifestos that will be discussed below. These manifestos are at war with the nature of pedagogy the same time they try to instruct. Also, these pieces are equally concerned with the constraints of language as they are with the constraints of their subjects. Similar to traditional composition pedagogy, tradition and culture have enforced a utilitarian nature on the manifesto with no concern or need for creativity or discovery. As a genre then, the manifesto has been "oppressed" just as Vitanza argues that the traditional university essay has. As Vitanza declares about the traditional pedagogical theorists: "While they allow, they simultaneously disallow and disenable" (141). The selection from Tzara's manifesto, along with Solanas' *Scum Manifesto* and Theodore Kaczynski's *The Unabomber Manifesto* seem to be written with this "pedagogical oppression" in mind; and in trying to break through this oppression, (by creating a type of playful but ironic iconoclasm that Vitanza calls "perverse comedy") these manifestos create narratives that are complex and rich in language, play, and creativity.

Before the play, however, come the antagonism, the outrage, and the fury: elements that are often the reason for a writer to create a manifesto. As one of the founders of the early 20th century Art movement known as Dada, Tristan Tzara is true to its playful and iconoclastic spirit. Nevertheless, Tzara keenly perceives the opposition and antagonism that launch a manifesto when he begins his second Dada manifesto with: "To launch a manifesto you have to want: A.B. & C., and fulminate against 1, 2, & 3"(Tzara 3). The first three letters of the alphabet versus the first three numbers do not seem to have the same weight or consequence of the battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie that Marx and Engels outline in their *Communist Manifesto.* Nevertheless, the antagonism that Tzara creates from an unlikely pair of combatants already gives his manifesto a sense of dramatic conflict as if it were a short story or even play. At the same time he mocks the clash of would be-great ideas, Tzara also composes such mockery with a poetry and nonsense worthy of Lewis Carroll. Tzara urges the reader to "work yourself up" in order to "conquer and circulate lower and upper case As, Bs & Cs" (3). These three letters are imposed with the same gravity as if they were the philosophy ofa powerful political ideology; indeed, the imposition of these letters lead to the irrefutable proof of the existence of God, (proof of which, Tzara notes, has been helped by the role of the accordion) (3). Yet what seems like nonsense is also a mock-delineation of the way philosophical, artistic, and even religious ideas create and engage discourse. Tzara, (and the Art movement known as Dada) is trying to

disengage Art and the nature of creativity from the way philosophical or political discourse can often calcify its ideals and principles through orthodox rules and procedures. Therefore, the manifesto itself must be mocked as a vehicle for discourse. "I'm writing a manifesto and there's nothing I want" Tzara declares, before adding, "and yet I am saying certain things.. .I am against principles" (3). Specifically, Tzara is wary of the way moral or political judgments control discourse. Dada is a movement that wants to liberate discourse and Art from such control. Ironically, the best literary vehicle to engage in such discourse is also the vehicle that may seem the most political and rigid: the manifesto. The manifesto, however, also happens to be a creature that has not been codified. The manifesto has no Aristotle who will codify poetry and drama as "A whole.. .which has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Aristotle 65). The manifesto is able "to show that you can perform contrary actions at the same time, in one single, fresh breath" (Tzara 4).

In this second manifesto, Tzara will continue to remind the reader how the chaos of his medium is no different than the chaos of his message. Preceded by a pictograph of a dark hand pointing, Tzara writes in upper case letters: "DADA DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING" (4). Further into this manifesto, Tzara interrupts a poetic rant with a crazy squiggle of lines, such as a child might suddenly draw across a drawing that he or she was getting bored with, or perhaps just felt this impish urge to do something playfully destructive. This "playful destruction" is also indicative of Dada's philosophy, for which "Every page should explode, either because of its profound gravity, or its vortex, vertigo, newness, eternity, or because of its staggering absurdity" (7). With creative use of graphics and more squiggles (that appear to resemble barbed wire) Tzara continues to assault the medium conveying his message. Towards the end of this manifesto, Tzara exaggerates the font of the word Dada, along with writing it in different styles and even portraying it in boldface. Thus we have Dada written as **DADA**, *DADA*, and **DADA DADA DADA**. (13) In between such textual assault, Tzara defines what Dada is, and in so doing, he seems to be creating a declaration of principles, something you would expect to see in a polemical piece of writing such as a manifesto. Yet such a logical declaration would also go against the spirit of Dada; therefore, if Tzara does declare Dada's nature, he does so through a stream-of-consciousness type of writing that approaches poetry, religious visionary rant, and even madness, and thus Dada is finally defined as "the roar of contorted pains, the interweaving of contraries and of all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies: LIFE" (13).

Tzara's second Dadaist manifesto (where the medium mirrors the same chaos and disintegration as the message) is reflective of Vitanza's notion of "Perverse Comedy" in rhetoric. "Perverse comedy" as Vitanza notes, "is not a mere attack on the status quo but a meditative questioning of it through an act of ironic 'critical in (ter) vention'" (Vitanza 139). Such comedy, however, is not for the entertainment of the reader; for Vitanza, perverse comedy is a method of discourse, one where the medium that conveys the discourse does not codify it to preconceived definitions or even rhetorical systems. Aristotle is not welcome in this discourse; where an object "must not only have an

orderly arrangement of parts, but must be of a certain magnitude" (Aristotle 66). Vitanza views discourse as a living, and often-flawed organism; nevertheless, such flaws or "Perverse Comedy" are necessary since they allow discourse to "bear witness to what has been disallowed" (Vitanza 140). As a literary genre, the manifesto is more like a witness for a voiceless community, ideology, art rather than a finished work of art, treatise, or legal declaration. And if the primary nature of the manifesto is to give voice and witness to such marginalized groups or individuals, it seems just as natural for the genre to reflect a similar "guerilla" style composition and even format. As a genre then, the manifesto seems less focused on its finished literary state and more focused on the immediacy of its message. Before the manifesto can be dismissed as being too polemical and didactic for it to be considered a genuine literary genre like fiction or poetry, it is important to note the outlaw nature of the manifesto. While a manifesto may not aim for the finished polish and structure of a poem or short story, the manifesto is also free from the danger of turning into artifice, a danger that Vitanza sees in the way contemporary compositional pedagogy is taught in North American universities today. "Teaching students how to write is also teaching them a view of (economic) reality and 'identity' for themselves that is to be attempted, though never realized, in 'sameness'" (142). Yet what about the manifesto that aims for the polemical, the didactic? Does it unwittingly fall into a rhetorical calcification that Vitanza feels reflects current pedagogical theory in rhetoric?

The *SCUM Manifesto* by radical feminist Valerie Solanas will at first strike the reader as less ofa literary work, and more ofa barrage of rant and invective. The *SCUM Manifesto* exists only for its radical feminist political message, whose aims are to overthrow the North American capitalist system and government that supports it, and once that is achieved, to then "institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex" (Solanas 1). The author's life often echoed or paralleled the hyperbole of her manifesto, which was also the announcement for her radical feminist movement, SCUM, or Society of Cutting Up Men, which she began in the mid 1960s in New York City. (*SCUM Manifesto* 49). Despite Solanas being the only member of this movement, she photocopied her manifesto to sell on the streets of New York City, which caught the eye of famed 1960s publisher Maurice Girodias, (publisher of pornography as well as underground literary works such as Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer).* (49) While not specifically interested in Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto,* he did advance her money for an upcoming novel. Also, despite Solanas' antipathy towards men, she briefly became part of painter Andy Warhol's bohemian scene at his 1960s studio "The Factory" where she tried to interest Warhol in producing her play, *Up Your Ass.* (48-49). Solanas' blunt rhetoric and fringe politics initially attracted 1960s impresarios of the underground like Girodias and Warhol. That same radical tone, however, is also what caused these initial supporters of her work to distance themselves from her. That distancing, along with a deepening descent into social isolation and poverty, is what led Solanas to try to assassinate Warhol on June 3, 1968. Warhol, (and several others wounded in the attack) survived this attempt on his life. (52-53) Solanas was arrested after turning

herself in. After her trial she "was declared incompetent and was sent to Ward Island Hospital" (54). Solanas spent the next several years "in and out of mental institutions" (55). Eventually, she drifted to San Francisco, living as a drug addict and prostitute while continuing to defend her manifesto as "hypothetical...;-! literary device...;-! state of mind" (55). Solanas died "broke and alone" on April 26, 1988. Is her manifesto that survives her, due to her bizarre lifestyle and assassination attempt on one of the 20th century's most famous artists? Or does The *SCUM Manifesto* have some "hypothetical" credence, some form or manner that makes it "a literary device" and even its own unique piece of literature that creates its own "state of mind"?

Perhaps the manifesto needs to be looked at from the representation of its creator, rather than the representation of the work itself. As a Composition and Literature teacher at a small urban community college in the United States, the tradition ofmy profession locks me into a mode where both students and instructor examine and evaluate a literary work as a text. The author is secondary, and only examined if a specific conflict or time in his or her life shaped the work studied by the class. Such an approach then already establishes the text being studied as a work of literature because a *poet* wrote "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; a *novelist* wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; a *playwright* wrote *Death ofa Salesman*; an *essayist* wrote "Civil Disobedience." When does a *manifesto-ist* write a manifesto? *A Rumanian exile and raconteur wrote Seven Dada Manifestos*, while the *SCUM Manifesto* was written by a feminist and also bohemian fringe character and interloper in the 1960s Pop Art and Drug Culture. To my knowledge, there is no "Manifesto-ist" the way there is a poet, a novelist, and essayist. Yet poets, novelists, essayists are among those who write manifestos. There are also manifestos written by people who have no established literary connection in their lives. The manifesto then, seems to be more of a creation that redefines or even rejects the traditional role of the author, a role that Michel Foucalt says, "constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences" (Foucault 101). The author, according to Foucault, is more often like a "mediator" of the text; a composer as well as a judge making sure that various level of culture discourse, ideology, social hierarchy are balanced into a composition that rises above a text message or a grocery list. The author is also like a producer and manager of all of the above-mentioned discourses, his or her "function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (108).

The manifesto, which often deliberately attacks managed heterogeneous social discourse, also challenges the traditional role of the author. Even ifa manifesto contains complex and well-argued ideas, this genre of writing is more like a grocery list, or better yet, akidnapper's ransom note or a terrorist's note of demands. The writer of the manifesto is not so much concerned with trying "to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts" (111). Neither is the writer of the manifesto any more concerned with creating an "author function" that results in questions arising from a literary text, such as "From where does it [the text] come from, who wrote it, when,

under what circumstances, or beginning with what design?" (109). My earlier recounting of Solanas' life might seem to contradict her "unAuthor" like status as the writer of the *SCUM Manifesto*; nevertheless, her manifesto (like many others) was not created to "manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor.. .to pin a subject within language" (102). Because of the deliberately announced "plainness" or "homeliness" that the genre of the manifesto is characterized by, it often becomes a text "creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (102). The *SCUM Manifesto* is such a text where its creator often seems to lose herself within the madness of her extreme feminist vision. Yet the "madness" of the *SCUM Manifesto* is more often the result of the institutionalized discourse the text often reflects. Unlike Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo S Nest,* a novel that recreates a mental healthy facility and its nightmarish authoritarianism told through the paranoia of one of the patients, the *SCUM Manifesto* often echoes the deranged nightmarish clinical observations written by a doctor or orderly. The nightmare being observed, however, is the male species, which Solanas notes, "is just a bundle of conditioned reflexes, incapable of a mentally-free response" (Solanas 11). Observed in the closed off and safe, laboratorial setting of the "text" the male, is "an incomplete female" and as a result, "spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female" (3).

Over the top as Solanas's thought may seem, her language and even analysis closely parodies the scientific clinical observation that European hospitals began to institute in the early 19th century. Solanas' observations of males parodies the medical or clinical "gaze" that doctors began to develop in the 19th century. Ironically, such "gaze" was supposed to be neutral, free from emotion, or any other interference that would prevent a doctor from treating a patient. But as Foucault notes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, such unprejudiced viewing was nothing more than looking at disease within a new picture frame, and such framing was used to diagnose and look at the disease. Thus, such "syntactical reorganization of disease" follows a new pattern, one that sees "the abyss beneath illness" as "the illness itself" (Foucault 195). Ironically, such clinical, neutral or scientific language is the same discourse that Foucault observes used in such controversial, violent, and perverse texts such as De Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* and *Juliette.* (195). The previously mentioned works, however, are distinctly works of fiction. Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto* makes no such claims, yet still parodies a distinct form or style of language much as other novelists, poets, and playwrights do. Does such "parodying" of language give Solanas' manifesto enough stylistic or literary texture to be considered a literary work? For that matter, does Tzara's language game and dream-like landscape and humor, and non sequitur provide similar literary credence to his Dada Manifestos? (After all, Lewis Carroll uses such elements in *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland.*)

The manifesto may have elements that are literary. Are such elements necessary in order for the manifesto to be considered a genre of literature the same way a poem, short story, or novel is? Rather than contest whether the manifesto can or cannot ever be considered literature, I pose that there is another way to view this genre. The way

the manifesto does not need or seek the validation of *authorship* the way a novel or poem does, leaves this genre more under privileged, the same way a student essay is. The manifesto then, is like Vitanza's "Perverse comedy", where the composition "is an attempt at a discourse" but eventually becomes "a discourse.. .without (a) discipline, nor is it especially in search of (a) discipline" (Vitanza 140). The manifesto is also a genre that seems to subliminally echo what Vitanza is searching for in his Rhetoric and Composition studies, i.e., "not a discipline or a metadiscipline but a 'nondiscipline'" (165). Frustrating as this may be for the traditional literary critic, advocating writing as a "nondiscipline" approach does not mean posing a formless literary genre that cannot be analyzed or critiqued. The strength of such a "nondisciplined" orun-codified genre, however, lies in the way it critiques social institutions and more particularly, the language that represents and reinforces such institutions. Thus the "perverse comedy" or "nondiscipline" that Vitanza advocates in his essay "Three Countertheses" seek "strategies [that] would attempt to lessen the oppressive forces of discursive language" (165). The manifesto is no different in eschewing literary quality the same time it parodies some aspects of it, while still maintaining any outlaw nature it may have as a kidnapper's ransom note—or as sometimes happens, the banality ofa grocery list.

Of the three manifestos I am looking at in this paper, Theodore Kaczynski's *The Unabomber Manifesto* (also known as *Industrial Society and its* Future) is a manifesto that followed the political actions of its author, rather than to announce them (as is the case with many manifestos). Since Kaczynski wrote his manifesto after posting several letter bombs that resulted in maiming and killing several people, his political statement is a rare example of being forged by political and combative action, (rather than demanding such action at some future date). *The Unabomber Manifesto* was not written as a utopian vision; its author was (in his mind) a revolutionary, even ifhe was the only revolutionary carrying out his vision. *The Unabomber Manifesto* is one of the those rare extremist political documents that come after the shooting has started. In that case then, his manifesto should forego the utopian vision and hyperbole that often characterizes many manifestos. Ironically, it doesn't. *The Unabomber Manifesto* has a strong, hyperbolic and utopian vision. Its often dense, analytical language (and metaphysical flights of language) would seem to doom this piece as another example of poetic but eccentric writing. Nevertheless, Kaczynski's manifesto tries to mimic literary style while being a good example of both kidnapper's ransom note and grocery list.

Kaczynski's life, however, had more of the banality of a grocery list, living as a recluse in Montana after failing at an academic career in Math. But starting in the late seventies, Kaczynski mailed off untraceable mail bombs to corporate CEOs, university professors, and other figures that he felt were responsible for imposing a technological enslavement upon human kind. Eventually Kaczynski mailed off a copy of his manifesto to *The New York Times,* which printed it, and where Kaczynski's brother felt that the language and idioms reflected the writings his brother Theodore sent him in letters (Klosterman 251). After informing the government, Kaczynski was arrested and is presently serving a life sentence without parole.

The Unabomber Manifesto has its unpractical, utopian vision. Even if he notes how his vision has "no illusions about the feasibility of creating a new, ideal form of society" (Kaczynski 84) his call for completely eliminating modern technology in our lives seeks to create a Garden-of-Eden type world, one whose "wild nature" is "not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions)" (85). His prose is often hyperbolic, characterized by upper case spellings, as if the logic he tries to display throughout this manifesto cannot always hold back his anguish, desperation, and anger. "It is probably best not to try to introduce religion into the conflict of nature vs. technology unless you REALLY believe in that religion" (118). Finally, Kaczynski's acts of terror should discredit his manifesto, leaving it only as a surreal footnote in the life of one of America's more "eccentric" but deadly homegrown terrorists.

Yet as the United States comes out of its harshest recession since The Great Depression of the 20th century, some of Kaczynski's ideas in *The Unabomber Manifesto* capture the bleak reality of a post-recession landscape. When Kaczynski writes: "In the future, social systems will not be adjusted to suit the needs of human beings. Instead, human beings will be adjusted to suit the needs of the system" he could be writing about the labor market today, especially for working class Americans, struggling to retrain themselves for the few middle class professions open to them, such as in the health or criminal justice fields. (Kaczynski 69) We may not be ready to ditch our cell phones, blackberries, personal computers, and other state of the art digital creature comforts, but how many ofus also feel that such devices have made our lives more complicated, more stressful? "Without the entertainment industry the system probably would not have been able to get away with putting as much stress-producing pressure onus as it does"(70). Cultural critic Chuck Klosterman boldly admires some of Kaczynski's ideas without condoning the author's acts of terror. Kaczynski's manifesto, notes Klosterman, "becomes more and more interesting" despite the way "it contains a lot of problematic fascist ideology" (Klosterman 248-9). Nevertheless, by the end of his essay on Kaczynski, titled, "Fail", Klosterman is able to separate some of the brilliant ideas from the terrorist acts of the author. "My apologies, Ted" Klosterman ends his piece. "Your thirty-five-thousand word document makes sense to me, but I cannot be saved. You'll have to blow up my hands" (263). As a manifesto, Kaczynski's *The Unabomber Manifesto* seems to have come closet to acting out its vision. Despite that (and the failure of its vision) his document still shares the "outlaw" qualities of the other two manifestos discussed in this essay. Like the other two manifestos, Kaczynski's was born from fanatical opposition to mainstream society. While it lacks the comedy and surrealism of Tzara's Dadaist manifesto, it still seeks to destroy the same middle class society and values that the Dadaists sought to destroy in their art. And similar to Solanas' outlandish vision where the male species must be wiped out, so doesn't Kaczynski demand the same of all modern technology. Again, it seems as if the manifesto is created from anguish, desperation, and anger.

And the manifesto also seems to be written up as a kidnapper's ransom note, a grocery list, a mock "clinical" report, or as a surrealistic word game. Where then, does the manifesto stand in terms of literature? As an "outlaw of literature"? Part of the canon, but as an unfavored stepchild? Or as a Literary Outlaw? "Literature" that will seldom if ever become accepted by any literary canon, despite the literary merits some manifestos possess. I will argue that the manifesto is more like the unprivileged student essay that Vitanza writes about in "Three Countertheses". In his essay, Vitanza ultimately argues for a pedagogy that will let students write in a literary voice of their own discovery, and not in the voice that mimics the institution or discipline teaching them, as Vitanza argues. As a result, Vitanza advocates "not a discipline or metadiscipline but a 'nondiscipline'" (165). The chaotic, unprivileged, and often-subversive nature of the manifesto strongly reflects this "nondiscipline" state. Just the same, this un-canonized and unprivileged genre known as the manifesto, can often privilege the canon with a unique philosophical perspective often told in a unique literary style or voice.

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