UDK 793.3:7.037.3
DOI 10.51937/Amfiteater-2025-2/46-65

Abstract

This article discusses the development of Futurist dance and Giannina Censi's role as a key figure in this artistic form. As an artistic movement, Futurism rejected traditional aesthetics, particularly ballet and classical dance, and sought a radical reinvention of dance's means of expression. The central ideas of Futurist dance were based on denying gracefulness, beauty and symmetry, while celebrating machines, technology, speed and aggression. The concurrent development of modern and contemporary dance introduced freedom, the liberation of the body and rebellion against social norms into the artistic realm, enabling women to emerge as autonomous performers and creators. Pioneers such as Isadora Duncan, Loïe Fuller and others emphasised subjectivity, self-confidence and feminist elements through their innovations in dance. These two influences merged in dancer Giannina Censi, who represented a unique figure in the field of Futurist dance through her collaboration with F. T. Marinetti and by directly realising his vision, thereby creating the concept of aerodance or *aerodanza*. Her dance was based on mechanical gestures, expressing the mechanical quality of machines while also containing erotic elements and emphasising the female body as the carrier of futuristic technology. Through her artistic expression, she rejected the male Futurist ideal and introduced her own female subjectivity, marking an important departure from traditional, ideologically sanitised forms of Futurist dance.

Keywords: Futurism, modern dance, gender, women of Futurism, avant-garde movements, Giannina Censi

Manca Lipoglavšek is a doctoral student and young researcher at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). She completed her master's degree in Dramaturgy and Performing Arts at the same institution in 2024, with a master's thesis examining the role and position of women in Italian Futurism. Her research focuses on the overlooked contributions of female authors and artists to the histories of theatre and film. She regularly publishes scholarly reflections on performing arts and cinema in academic journals, newspapers and theatre programmes. In addition to her research, she writes plays, develops original performance projects and works in the field of theatre pedagogy.

manca.lipoglavsek@agrft.uni-lj.si

Futurist Aerodance and Giannina Censi

Manca Lipoglavšek
Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana

This article[1] offers a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between Futurist and modern dance, focusing on the pioneering figures and experimental movements that sought to redefine the art of movement in the early to mid-20th century. It situates the development of Futurist dance within the broader context of avant-garde art and societal transformation, emphasising how revolutionary impulses in visual art, literature and technology translated into radical approaches to choreography and performance. The author asserts that Futurist and modern dance shared an overarching aim: to break free from the constraints of classical ballet, to embrace the immediacy of industrialised modernity and to express the dynamism of contemporary life through abstract, mechanised and often provocative gestures.

The article begins by outlining the development of Futurism as an artistic movement that originated in Italy in the early 20th century, with F. T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) pioneering its anti-traditional stance. Futurism's aesthetic valorisation of speed, machinery, violence and primal energy fundamentally challenged the classical ideals of grace, harmony and narrative in dance. As conceptualised in Marinetti's *Manifesto of the Futurist Dance* (1917), Futurist choreography sought to overturn historical dance forms and replace them with disorderly, fragmented and mechanised gestures that mirrored the technological and industrial realities of the modern age. The Futurist dancer – envisioned for the first time as female – was conceived as a machine, an agent of noise and chaos, embodying the heroism of the heretical fusion of human and machine, thus articulating the destructive and disruptive forces of war, violence and primal instinct.

Modern dance is presented as a parallel response to analogous social and cultural shifts: industrialisation, the decline of Victorian social strictures and the push for individual liberation, particularly for women. The article underscores how early modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Loïe Fuller and Katja Pollak Delak defied patriarchal norms and conventions of dance, advocating for a spontaneous, expressive

1 The author's research is supported by the Young Researchers programme, co-funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) from the state budget, and by the research programme Theatre and Interart Studies (P6–0376), co-funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) from the state budget.

and often feminist approach to movement. Duncan's principle of "free" and "natural" dance sought to express genuine emotion and reject traditional decorum, positing the body as an autonomous, expressive instrument. Her work, deeply rooted in classical antiquity and folk traditions, was revolutionary in asserting female subjectivity and political agency through movement, challenging restrictive cultural and artistic constructions of femininity.

While Futurism embraced the use of mechanistic and industrial motifs and sought to incorporate sound, noise and violent gestures as symbols of progress and upheaval, modern dance focused on liberation and corporeal authenticity. In (female) Futurist dance, both of these ideals merged. The article highlights how female pioneers of modern dance contributed to a feminist interrogation of the body's semiotics, resisting objectification and expressing agency through abstraction and transcendence. Conversely, Futurist dance, as articulated in Marinetti's manifesto, sought to produce abstract, non-narrative forms that celebrated the heroism of mechanised and warlike energies, poised to shock bourgeois audiences with their innovation.

The author emphasises Giannina Censi as a unique figure in this landscape, bridging the aspirations of Futurist aesthetics with innovative corporeal practices. Her brief yet impactful collaboration with Marinetti's movement introduced a feminine perspective into Futurist dance. Censi's development of "aerodance" (*aerodanza*) exemplifies an avant-garde attempt to synthesise movement, sound and technology, inspired by her fascination with flight and mechanised motion. Her performative work, characterised by expressive gestures and the use of her body as a linguistic and aeromechanical instrument, challenges the dominant masculine narratives of Futurist machinery. Through her performances, particularly her interpretation of the *Dance of the Aviatrix* as outlined in Marinetti's manifesto, she sought to materialise the Futurist ideal of the mechanised, industrial body fused with feminine sensuality and power. Her approach was deeply experimental, aiming to blur distinctions between human and machine, material and spiritual, erotic and technological.

The article concludes that these pioneering efforts in dance, despite their upheavals and often limited immediate success, laid the groundwork for a perpetual interrogation of how movement can embody technological, political and gendered discourses. The author argues that Futurist dance, though often marginalised in mainstream art history, represents an underexplored domain of radical innovation that foreshadowed later developments in performance art and multimedia expression. The case of Gianinna Censi illustrates how the subversion of gender and corporeality through mechanisation and technology revealed new potentials for female subjectivity and artistic autonomy within the avant-garde. Ultimately, the article asserts that understanding the dialogues between Futurism and modern dance is vital for

grasping the complex cultural negotiations surrounding technology, gender and artistic expression in the modernist context. These pioneering experiments continue to challenge contemporary notions of body, machine and identity, reaffirming dance's role as a site of radical transformation and critique.