ACCELERATION, MONTAGE, INTERMEDIALITY, AND THE SUBJECT: FUTURISM AND ITS LEGACY

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Abstract

Futurism adopts new technologies of early twentieth century as central tenets of its aesthetics and worldview. Its technomorphism prefigures cultural theory’s views on the end of the humanist subject and the posthuman. The eternity of the technological flesh is the most far-reaching expression of the Futurist utopia centred on the machine. The Futurists’ objective is to dislodge conventional forms of representation as a way to displace conceptual, cognitive, and behavioural models. Their aim is to revolutionize human identity and subjectivity. They foreshadow Virilio’s concepts of instantaneity and ubiquity in our electronic culture, as well as Bauman’s notion of liquidity as a sign of an ever-changing sense of selfhood. The intensification of sensorial elements and the colonization of the body by the machine recall McLuhan’s theories. Futurism creates fusions and fluid exchanges of the arts and opens them to intermediality, abstraction, performance, and conceptualism. It opens many doors that lead to contemporaneity.

Keywords: Futurism, Technomorphism, Intermediality, Montage, Post-humanist Subject, Avant-garde

In 2009 there were celebrations around the world to mark the 100th anniversary of the publication of the first Futurist Manifesto. They highlighted an extraordinary creativity that expressed itself in a plurality of art forms. The questions I propose to address are the following: What lies at the core of the Futurist aesthetics? What is its legacy? Was the movement’s objective to incite a social and anthropological revolution through the arts? What type of culture and consciousness did it foreshadow with respect to our present-day life models?

Between the end of the 1800s and early twentieth century, numerous technological inventions began to have a deep impact on the social life and on the perceptions of the world: electric engine, automobile, airplane, camera, X-ray machine, radio, and cinema. Writers and artistic movements of that time react in conflicting manners to these innovations. Several modernist writers and artists respond negatively and critically to the overwhelming scientific and technological transformation of life. The malaise and the angst associated with many modernists can be directly related to these developments. A case in point is represented by Italian literary movements such as Crepuscolarismo [Twilight Poetry] and Ermetismo [Hermeticism] which manifest an “apocalyptic” reaction to the

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technological changes brought about by late modernity. On the other hand, Futurism is the most “integrated” movement into the technological culture of that period. Indeed, the Futurists embrace the new technologies as the centre of their aesthetics, mythologies, and worldview.

Generally, the new technologies force modernism to reinvent the modalities of representation and to revise sensory and cognitive orientations. The aesthetics of the naturalistic realism of the 1800s is questioned and the new technologies of cinema and photography displace it forcefully. Futurism is the first avant-garde movement that articulates the full awareness of this new reality and the ways it alters both the aesthetic field and the fundamental nature of being human. Futurism shares with the culture of the avant-garde the conviction that by dislodging conventional and atrophied forms of representation, it would be possible to displace conceptual, cognitive, and behavioural models. This process put in motion a radical transformation of the dominant versions of the world and, ultimately, of consciousness itself.

The point of departure espoused by the Futurist aesthetics revolves around the notion that new technologies generate a modern world deeply distinct from that of the past. Technology inspires novel and singular expressions of life and determines an evolutionary metamorphosis of the self. It is no longer religious or ethical principles that act as a foundation of artistic creation, but technology, inasmuch as it reconfigures both the natural environment, human identity, and subjectivity. Indeed, the celebration of the machine questions the essence of the humanistic version of the subject. The machine age opens the way to a social and anthropological revolution. In “Multiplied Man and the Kingdom of Machine”, Marinetti writes:

It is necessary to prepare the imminent and inevitable identification of man with the engine, thus facilitating and making perfect an incessant exchange of intuition, rhythm, instinct and metallic discipline [...] We believe in an incalculable number of possibilities for human transformations, and we declare without a smile that in the human flesh there are dormant wings [...] we will reign as sovereigns over a tamed Space and time. (De Maria 39, 40, hereinafter translations from the Italian are mine)

Inhabitation of the new technologies involves their interiorization and the construction of a new technomorphized humanity. Indeed, Marinetti breaks away from the notions of invariability and stability associated with established conceptions of the human subject.
He proposes a multifaceted and fluid subjectivity: “Multiple and simultaneous consciences in the same individual [...] A multiplicity of human ambitions and desires without boundaries.” (De Maria 100,101)

Technomorphism rests on the conviction that technology is not a mere instrument for accomplishing a task. It constitutes the core of human reality. The impact of the machine on Futurism’s aesthetics and postures prefigures the views in cultural theory that revolve around the end of the humanist subject and the posthuman. The glorification of technology not only foreshadows a new bionic human being, but it removes temporal limits from its condition: “the mechanical man” liberated from “the idea of death” (De Maria 84). Or, as Marinetti writes in 1917, “[h]umanization of the steel and metallization of the flesh in multiplied man. Body engine of different interchangeable and replaceable parts. Immortality of man!” (Marinetti 103). The eternity of the technological flesh represents the most far-reaching expression of the Futurist utopia centred on the machine. The movement supplants the anthropocentric notions tied to the traditional tenets of the subject and moves towards the abolishment of the unyielding dualism of subject-object. It foresees the collapse of the distance that traditionally separated human beings and their technological artefacts.

The technical manifesto of Futurist painting (produced by Boccioni, Carrà, Balla, Severini, Russolo) reads: “Our new awareness does not allow us to consider man at the centre of universal life. To us a man’s sorrow is as much interesting as that of an electric lamp” (De Maria 24). Balla, for instance, translates the glorification of the machine (fastmoving trains, airplanes, streetcars, and automobiles) into abstract forms—geometrical lines and contrasts of light that provide the perceptions of the new mechanical speed. Aeropainting (from Sironi to Fedele Azari and Achille Lega, aeropoems (by Marinetti or Folgore) share similar perspectives, as do innumerable poems that pay tribute to the new beauty and exhilarating effects of cars and other machines. The connection between technology and speed is a recurrent binomial of Futurist art and poetics. Marinetti possesses the full awareness that industrialized modernity is dominated by velocity. He continually insists on the “acceleration of life” and its “rapid rhythm” (De Maria100). Indeed, the machine causes a radical shift of the perceptions of time and space: space is shrunk and time has increased its pace. The refusal of the past coincides with the view that the version of the human being elaborated in a pre-technological environment no longer holds. This orientation is reinforced by the 1922 manifesto “Futurism and Mechanical Art” by Ivo Pannaggi, Enrico Prampolini, and Vinicio Paladini. Traditional
literature was still tied to agricultural metaphors and figures. Technomorphism embraces all aspects of life. Art opens both the psyche and the senses to the overpowering technical transformations of the world. Agricultural life ties art to a cyclical notion of time. Technology links it to the notion of progress, to the time of the future. Within the context of art, the Futurists are the first to elaborate the acceleration of the new age. The first manifesto states: “Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, inasmuch as we have already created the eternal omnipresent speed.” (De Maria 6)

Similar observations can be traced in the field of sociology, specifically in the seminal essay by Georg Simmel “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), but also in his The Philosophy of Money (1900). For the German sociologist, the slow rhythm of rural existence has been replaced, in the industrialized urban society, by an accelerated pace on life distinguished by the rapidity of shifting “stimulations of the nerves”. On the one hand, “outer and inner stimuli” produce an “intensification” of emotional life due to their “swift and uninterrupted change”, on the other, they generate a process by which the individual is “levelled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism”. The metropolis of the early 1900s generates a culture of mobility, dominated by the “objective spirit”—the material culture, cultural forms and objects—over the subjective sphere—beliefs, ideas, ways of seeing the world—(Simmel 178, 175, 70). Simmel’s social and philosophical orientation correlates closely to the modernist malaise and angst associated with the anonymity of life and depersonalized spaces of modern urban centres. Even though his evaluation of a technologized modernity is moved by a dystopic view, antithetical to the celebrative fervour of the Futurists, both positions share the vision of a space governed by simultaneity of events, discontinuity of perceptions, immediacy, instantaneity, fleeting emotional and mental experiences.

Notwithstanding the Futurists’ boisterous excitement for the fast and floating experiences of modern life, they anticipate the contemporary notion of “dromocracy”, as defined by Paul Virilio (1977). Technologies shift our ways of seeing, the ways in which the world is sensed. Indeed, Marinetti stated that “different forms of communication, of transport, and of information exercize on […] the psyche a decisive influence” (De Maria 100). As photography and cinema contributed to reshape perceptions, the digital technologies are doing the same. Their core is constituted by speed and they are ruled by the force of rapidity (“dromocracy”, from the Greek “dromos”, racetrack, and “kratos”, with the meaning of power, rule). The Futurists’ theoretical and artistic production, grounded on the notion that the world, its occurrences, manifestations, and sights, are inextricably
connected to the new technologies (engines, planes, cars, telegraphy), corresponds to Virilio’s interpretation of the electronic culture and society based on instantaneity and ubiquity. As with Simmel, here too, the difference is in the evaluation of the conditions generated by technological revolutions. For Virilio, the digital speed is at the core of contemporary adversities: decline of the real, impermanence of spatial and temporal coordinates, pervasiveness of media communication and representation in its various expressions. The idea of a “liquid modernity”, as expressed in the works of Zygmunt Bauman (2002), is foreshadowed as well by the Futurists’ outlooks. The reconfiguration of space, time, and identity informs them both. Bauman’s notion of “liquidity” corresponds to the Futurists’ abolition of space and to their version of an ever-changing sense of selfhood.

The definition of our present age as a ‘surmodernity’, marked by an acceleration of history and a narrowing of space, proposed by the cultural anthropologist Marc Augé (2003), also fits their predictions. The difference between Futurists and these contemporary theorists can be summarized by adopting the antithesis used by Umberto Eco (1964) in one of his early works: the latter represent the apocalyptic intellectuals and the Futurists the integrated ones. The impact of technologies on reality and modes of communication, however, rests the same on both. What differs is the assessment.

Futurism embodies the objective to build a modern and cosmopolitan Italian society, at that juncture still tied to a predominantly agricultural and traditional way of life. Within the poetic context, it counters the longing for the rural and the pastoral world conveyed by the poetry of Pascoli and D’Annunzio who were tied, also from a linguistic standpoint, to traditional canons. The transformations produced by the new technologies are either absent or openly opposed. Futurism unquestionably expresses the ambition of industrialization and imperialism advocated by the Italian bourgeois class. Marinetti’s belligerent nationalism is closely linked to these goals. However, Futurists embrace modern life and its technologies also with the scope to transform the cultural constructs of the body, subjectivity, and time-space. Their practices of simultaneity, ubiquity, and instantaneousness are not to be interpreted as autonomous aesthetic principles, but as cultural conceptions linked to the formation of a modern human subject. Futurists would feel at home in our electronic age in which space is contracted and simultaneity and ubiquity are daily events created by our dual-monitor computers, split-screens, remote-controls, TV’s multiple panels, cellular phones, iPods, intercontinental jets, and ventures into outer space. Marinetti anticipates various tenets of McLuhan’s theories as well, although he fails to spell out the subtle distinction between electronic and mechanical
technologies. Here are a few revealing observations:

Earth has become much smaller because of speed [...] Today human beings possess a sense of the world [...] they have a constant need to know what their contemporaries are doing in every part of the world [...] the individual has the need to communicate with all the people of the earth [...] Love for speed, for abbreviation and synthesis. “Tell me everything quickly, in two words!” (De Maria 102)

In this passage, the notion of a new form of communication that embraces “every part of the world” is essentially the equivalent of McLuhan’s notion of the “global village”. But let us make a quick and schematic reference to two of McLuhan’s elements of the tetrad: extension and obsolescence, fundamental laws that govern, in his view, the grammar of all media. It is apparent the Futurists articulate the same principles. The extension brought about by the new media, for the Futurists, as for McLuhan (1997), amplify and intensify sensorial elements. Indeed, the new visuality spawned by the new technologies is amplified and plays a central role in all areas of Futurist works. Actually, the Futurists realized, as McLuhan, that humans establish a symbiotic relation with technologies in as much as they are colonized by the machine. Furthermore, at the same time, these notions forecast the theoretical orientation that informs posthuman theory. A couple of examples will suffice: “We have stretched our iron nerves in the sun, / we have arched our metallic spines [...] / We have launched on the heavens’ tides / -far beyond the rocky patches of clouds- machines made of steel-plated / will-power” (L. Folgore, “Song of the Airplane Hangars”, in Bohn 2005a, 35); “I love you throbbing heart! / Throbbing mechanical heart / eager heart of steel: / in your beat anxious rhythms / of eager spatial life / in you ignite gleaming shudders / conquering temporal virginity / in you burns the ardent fever / of your hot dense blood / of your perilous life / gasoline!” [M. Goretti, “Conversing with the Motor”, in Bohn 2005b, 180]). As for the principle of obsolescence, the Futurists are keen to highlight the effects of contraction of experiential components, in as much as new media renders outdated and passé previous ways of being and, thus, former modes of communication. Sufficient to point out that the new media of that time, such as the telegraph and cinema, render obsolete traditional modes of writing and, in particular, the syntactic organization of the text. For Futurists, the “medium is the message”, in as much as it is the revolutionized language and its effects on the readers/viewers that constitute their messages and not the content. Their awareness of medium specificity is remarkable, as is its materiality.
It is useful in this perspective to see briefly how Futurism is tied to the Marconi effect. Indeed, its aesthetic practices are grounded on homological expressions of radiotelegraphy: the transmission of written communication sent through radio waves. The invention of this technology was made by an Italian: Guglielmo Marconi sent a message across the English Channel in 1898 and in 1903 across the Atlantic. In 1909, the same year of the first Manifestos, he received the Nobel Prize in physics. Radiotelegraphy is a wireless form of communication. In fact, Futurism conceives writing as a wireless form (“the wireless imagination”) and it insists on analogical devices and the abolition of syntax, as a projection of a wireless (without connections) construction of the text. This correlation is foregrounded by Marinetti in 1913 in “Destruction of the Syntax, Wireless Imagination, Words-In-Freedom”. He states that the new style must express the “analogue sense of life, telegraphically, namely with the same rapidity and economy that the telegraph imposes on reporters and war correspondents” (103). Futurists would feel completely at home with the rapidity and the contractions of text messaging made possible by digital technology.

The homologies between technology and Futurist aesthetic raise several issues: the relationship between subject and object, the crisis of the naturalistic-mimetic representation, the disintegration of the object and its relation to abstract art. Let us examine the following statements of poetics:

We proclaim that motion and light destroy the materiality of bodies (Bocconi and others, “Technical Manifesto of Painting”, 1910, De Maria 24)

Destroy the ‘I’ in literature, namely all the psychology. The man completely contaminated by the library and the museum [...] has absolutely no interest to us. Thus we must abolish him in literature and finally substitute him with matter [...]. Substitute human psychology—by now at a point of exhaustion—with a lyrical obsession of matter [...] We do not intent to humanize the dramas of matter. It is the solidity of a steel plate in itself that arouses our interest—the incomprehensible and inhuman alliance of its molecules or of its electrons [...] the heat produced by a piece of iron or wood provides us by now with much more passion than the smile or the tears of a woman. (“Technical Manifesto of Literature,” 1912, De Maria 81)

The Wireless Imagination and Words-In-Freedom will open us to the essence of matter [...] instead of humanizing the animal, vegetable, and
mineral (a hackneyed system), we will be able to animalize, vegetalize, mineralize, electrify and liquefy style, making it live of the same life of matter […] We must express the infinitely small that surrounds us, the imperceptible, the invisible, the agitation of atoms […]. I want to introduce poetry to the infinite molecular life. ("Destruction of Syntax Wireless Imagination Words-In-Freedom", 1913, De Maria 105-106)

These and other similar statements express a surprising foresight of the visual and verbal experiences that would mark twentieth-century’s key artistic expressions: materic art, abstract expressionism, op art. The bracketing of the ‘I’ and the exploration of the materiality of the artistic medium are at the core of late modernist art. In this sense, Boccioni advocated the necessity to engage art with a multiplicity of materials: “glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric light” (De Maria 73). Futurism uproots solipsistic versions of art that dominated the humanistic-romantic-symbolist paradigms and ushers in physical, material constructions of visual works and written texts. Within the literary domain, it is possible to draw a correlation with the ‘reduction of the I’ that guides, not only the poetics of the Novissimi in the 1960s, but essentially all the experimental practices from the late 1950s to the 1960s and beyond, from the école du regard to the nouveau roman in general, to the narrative produced by the Italian new avant-garde. Here is a significant statement by Marinetti: “Our literary I burns and self-destructs in the great cosmic vibration, so that the declaimer, in some ways, disappears as well, in the dynamic and synoptic manifestation of words-in-freedom” (“The Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation”, De Maria 177).

There are, however, contradictory bearings. On the one hand, Futurism declares the dissolution of the subject in matter and, on the other, it erects a heroic subject to be reshaped by the vitality of the new technologies. That said, central figures of the movement, Boccioni in particular, possess the solid understanding of art as a self-sufficient construct: “A piece of sculpture”—he writes—“as a painting, cannot but look like itself, inasmuch as the figure and the things in art must live outside of the physiognomic logic” (De Maria 71). For Boccioni, art must break with models of mimesis. Art is conceived as a production of meanings and not as a reproduction of the lifeworld. However, autonomy is not to be confused with separateness. The artistic realm explores forms and materiality of its medium and, in the process, it establishes a heteronomous relationship with the world, in as much as it displays its own visions within the specificity of the communication tools. Undoubtedly, the recurrent trait of all avant-garde movements is to create forms of
difference and antagonism within the context of the dominant systems of signs. Futurism reveals a peculiar feature: it establishes clear homologies with the technological and the industrial world of its times. It does not place itself in a conflictual position with the new value systems linked with the coeval material culture. This, in part, explains, its adherence to the intervention in WWI or, subsequently, its association with the established political orientation, fascism. However, Futurism expresses difference and antithesis at the level of the literary-artistic models of the times. Indeed, its conflict is directed towards the lingering effects of the pre-industrial and agricultural aesthetic forms of the past. As it has already been underscored, the correlation between forms, representation, new technologies, and industrial realities is at the centre of its aesthetic renewal.

The issue of representation acquires a crucial significance if considered in relation to the techniques of collage and montage adopted by artists such as Severini and Carrà. Within the context of painting the use of newspaper strips, cigarette wrappers, pieces of fabric, and other materials on the canvas questions representation, inasmuch as it abolishes the distance between art, as mirror-like reflection, and life. Life enters directly into art. On the other hand, within the poetic realm (works of poets such as Govoni, Soffici, or Marinetti) the rupture of conventional boundaries of genres is striking. The verbal text is propelled towards forms of hybridization that draw attention to visuality. Indeed, it is projected into the realm of intermediality, the core of contemporary creativity. They bring into poetry newspaper cut-outs, variations of typeface and daring layouts of the text. Futurists inaugurate a dialogue, a synergy among the arts. Poetry takes the first steps in adopting a fusion of elements pertaining to different media. Intermediality blurs the rigid confines of conventional genres and inaugurates a dialogue among the arts to foster new possibilities of meanings and versions of the world. It can be argued that forms of intermediality can be traced back to the Greek technopaegnia and the Roman carmina figurata, from Simmia of Rhodes to Optatianus Porfirius, and later expressions such as those by Rabelais or Lewis Carroll. The Futurist experience develops within an advanced technological context that favours forms of radical intermediality. Indeed, when visual poetry makes a significant breakthrough in the early 1960s, some of its most prominent representatives, such as Miccini, Pignotti, Marcucci, and Isgrò, members of the so-called Gruppo 70, declare unambiguously the objective to reconnect with the Futurist experience. (For an overview of Gruppo 70, see J. Picchione 180-189; for an anthology of visual poems and theoretical texts, see Miccini).

Whereas modernist aesthetics generally utilizes collage and assemblage to recall
the past through quotations, scraps of memory whose traces are retrieved into the present, Futurism calls for the obliteration of any past memory with the objective to usher in a new era centred on an updated notion of being human. These techniques, combined with the Futurist pursuit of putting an end to outmoded perceptions of the world, are directly linked to the art form that was about to revolutionize the twentieth century aesthetic landscape, cinema. The manifesto “The Futurist Cinematography”, published in 1916 and signed by Marinetti, Corra, Settimelli, Ginna, Balla and Chiti, is a celebration of the new medium. Cinema is presented as the quintessential Futurist expression “with no past and free of traditions” (De Maria 190), in opposition to the book, a medium of antiquated technology, “absolutely passéist” (De Maria 189), “tedious and oppressing” (De Maria 190). As the new art form, cinema must depart from the dramas of traditional theatre and explore its inner potentialities. Here are a few fundamental statements of this manifesto:

Cinema is an art in itself. Cinema must never copy the stage [...] It must become antigraceful, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, free-wording [...] Futurist cinema creates [...] a poli-expressive symphony [...] The Futurist cinema will adopt, as expressive means, a plurality of elements: from the slice of real-life events to a colour spot, from a line to free wordings, from chromatic and plastic music to the music of the objects. In other words, it will be painting, architecture sculpture, words-in-freedom, music of colours, lines and forms, a jumble of thrown-together objects and chaotic reality [...] Simultaneity and compenetration of shots of different times and places. We will give at the same instant-frame 2 or 3 different views one beside the other [...] Painting + sculpture + plastic dynamism + words-in-freedom + art of noises + architecture + synthetic theatre = Futurist Cinema. (De Maria 191, 193, 194)

Futurists are fascinated by cinema’s ability to capture the object in its spatial movement from a multiplicity of perspectives. Indeed, for Futurism, cinema is the medium that abolishes syntax and establishes distinctly a culture of montage. The world is no longer thought in terms of syntactic linearity, but in terms of analogies, rhythms, combinations, simultaneities. Although much of Futurist cinema was destroyed, particularly during WWII, clips of films like Vita Futurista (Marinetti, Ginna, Corra, Balla, Settimelli, 1916) or Thais (Anton Giulio Bragaglia, 1917), give us a glimpse of its production. In addition, several descriptions of films provided by the artists are available. A case in point is that of the Corradini Brothers. Even before adhering to Futurism they had
experimented with chromatic music (1910). Colours substituted musical notes. They built a special piano in which 28 electric lamps corresponded to 28 piano keys; the pressure on the keys allowed colours to be projected on a screen. These early experiments were followed by the technique of painting directly on film with the objective of producing colour symphonies, accords, correspondences, visual rhythms that clearly pioneer aspects of abstract cinema. Futurist film theory and cinematographic accomplishments have certainly contributed to creating the terrain for the development of pure cinema and other experimental tendencies expressed in the works by Richter, Eggeling, Vertov, Chamotte, or Léger. In “The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” we read:

Cinema offers us the dance of an object that divides and recomposes without human intervention. It also offers the movement in reverse of a swimmer’s feet that come out of the water and violently bounce back on the diving board. Lastly, it offers us a man running at 200 kilometres per hour. They are even more movements of matter, outside the laws of intelligence and thus made of a much more significant essence. (De Maria 82)

Futurism conceives film as a total aesthetic medium that, if used according to its new conceptions of art, would go beyond the “boundaries of literature” or “be an inspiration for the research of those painters who try to force their art beyond the limits of a painting” (De Maria 191). As a “joyful deformation of the universe, an a-logical and fleeting synthesis of the life-world” (De Maria 190), Futurism sees not only the experimental potentialities of the new medium, but champions cinema as the new art that will drive all other artistic endeavours towards unimagined territories. “We must liberate cinema as a means of expression in order to make of it an ideal instrument of a new art that is immensely broader in scope and much more versatile than all the present ones,” the manifesto declares (De Maria 191). The other arts look at cinema and indeed, as with poetry, they absorb its practice of montage and its visual communication. Poems by Marinetti and Soffici are a clear demonstration, as are those by Govoni. This latter poet is one of the first to experiment with visual poetry. He has the clear objective to push the boundaries of verbal communication beyond its limits. The result is the creation of synergetic practices that involve the phonetic, the semantic, and the visual (see Govoni 1916). On the other hand, cinema looks at poetry. Futurism's objective is to create through the new art “cinematographic poems” (De Maria 192).
The Futurists do not produce a comprehensive theory of montage that can equal the technical reflections that inform Soviet cinema, from Lev Kuleshov to Sergei Eisenstein. They, however, capture the essence of cinematic language and adopt an aesthetic orientation of intermediality that has been a recurrent trend of modern and contemporary art. Futurism realizes the necessity of a dialogue among the arts and the urgency to transgress the confines of the single aesthetic medium by crossing borders: fusions and fluid exchanges, heterogeneity of materials and modes of communication generate new encounters, new sensory and conceptual perceptions. Cinema plays a fundamental role by engendering processes of re-mediation: poetry acquires forms of marked visualization, word and image cohabit, montage gives rise to collage, cinematic movement (together with the other technologies of speed) makes its way into the language of painting. In the intermedia practices, the components of any work cannot be disjointed, inasmuch as signification occurs at the level of their interaction. From this standpoint, the stimulus towards intermediality produced by the medium of cinema (at the time, the most advanced expression of the encounter of different arts) plays an essential role. The juxtaposition of different materials, semantic fields, or conceptual frames generate an ideological montage that expresses Futurism’s overall postures and a worldview driven by the subversion of received ideas and of outmoded attitudes towards reality. Montage (but, to some extent, collage as well) reconfigures space-time coordinates, inasmuch as simultaneity is articulated by non-chronological time and by incongruous spatial properties that defy ordinary sequences and narratives. In his Futurist Photodynamism (1911), Bragaglia highlights the effects of “dematerialization” of the object and “pure movement” and, most importantly, the unprecedented aesthetic relation between time and space made possible by the new media. He writes that “in movement time is being translated into space” and that “time will become a fourth dimension of space” (Bragaglia 375. Bold in the original). The new media demolish the hierarchical modes of forms driven by a mirror-like reproduction of reality and of chronological time. In these early reflections on Photodynamism and cinema, there is no doubt Bragaglia exhibits symptoms of agon towards cinema. In fact, he stresses the cold and mechanical techniques of the new medium:

Cinematography does not register the shape of movement, but subdivides it, without rules, with mechanical arbitrariness, disintegrating and shattering it without any kind of aesthetic concern for rhythm […] cinematography never analyzes movement, but shatters it in the frames of
the film strip, quite unlike the action of Photodynamism, which analyzes movement precisely in its details. (Bragaglia 369)

In the early stages of Futurism, as in Bragaglia’s case, surface signs of rejection of the new medium. Bruce Elder claims that “radical artists and thinker working in traditional media saw cinema as a rival, and they proposed to transcast the media with which they worked by endowing them with the attributes of cinema, so that they might stand up the rivalry from cinema” (Elder 519). However, Bragaglia’s “inter-movemental” creations and multiplication of objects, contractions or amplifications of time, resurface in “The Manifesto of Futurist cinema”: “[s]imultaneity and interpenetration of different times and places […] in the same instant-picture 2 or 3 versions different one besides the other” (De Maria 93). The homological relationships between these artistic practices and the coeval conceptions of space-time, advanced by the physics of Einstein and the initial theories proposed by quantum mechanics, acquire special significance. Indeed, Futurism draws constant analogies between aesthetic production and scientific investigation, from “the infinite molecular life” to the “imperceptible, invisible agitation of atoms” (De Maria106).

This radical shift towards re-mediation, embraced by Futurism, is at the centre of aesthetic transformations that cut across the entire twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from visual poetry to video art, from pop art to Fluxus, to multimedia installations and new media art. There is no doubt, the figure of synaesthesia and the asyndetic syntactic constructs, together with the practices of simultaneity and daring semantic connections (pursued by poets), are directly linked to the trend of intermedia. The interaction among media correlates to the association of distant sensory responses, realities and ideas, or to the simultaneity of events and experiences. Indeed, Futurism contributes to shifting the focus of art, not only in the direction of self-reflexivity (reassessing aesthetic principles, questioning consolidated canons, or opening the way to an art grounded on the conceptual communication of self-critique), but also guiding it towards the avant-garde’s key objective: to thwart the reader-viewer’s expectations and to promote the shock of the new. This is an objective pursued also through animated gatherings and outings planned to demolish old artistic sites: on the one hand, they function as reflection of art on itself and, on the other, they pave the way to performance art and conceptualism, movements that will be at the centre of the experimentation several decades afterwards. Futurism opens central doors that lead to contemporaneity.

The Futurist musical renewal is extraordinary as well. It does not advocate harmony
or sounds of traditional instruments, but dissonance, noises made by factories, sirens, motorcycles, machines. They inspire new creativity. In his manifesto on the art of noises Russolo writes:

> evolution of music is parallel to the multiplication of the machines that collaborate with man everywhere. Not only in the noisy environments of cities, but also in those of the countryside [...] the pure sound in its scantiness and monotony no longer raises emotions [...] we enjoy much more combining ideally the sounds of streetcars, combustion engines, train wagons, and rowdy crowds than listening to Beethoven’s Eroica or Pastoral. (De Maria 92, 93)

The objective is not that of composing through a mimetic process, a reproduction of pre-existing sounds. The “art of noises must not be confined to an imitative reproduction”, Russolo writes (De Maria 96). The Futurist musical aesthetics stresses the process of combinations and associations of sounds, rhythms, and resonance, imaginative melanges and fusions that become worlds in themselves, independent of externality. Indeed, Russolo’s intonarumori are the new instruments for the realization of these compositions. The expectations of the public were radically destabilized. The reactions were violent, as in the case of Pratella’s ‘concerts’ during which the stage was often littered with eggs and tomatoes. These events express the antagonistic thrust of the avant-garde, its disdain for established bourgeois norms and value systems. The refusal of conventional harmonies and the attack on society’s dominant ways of being cannot be disjointed. Most importantly, however, Futurists explore the elements of chance, randomness, atonality, key features of the musical language produced by the innovative trends both in the first and second half of twentieth century.

And what about the Futurists projects for urban and architectural space? Here too, Futurists, thanks to the adherence to the movement by the Lombard architect Antonio Sant’Elia, accomplish a radical break with the past. The “Manifesto of the Futurist Architecture” (1914) expresses the total rejection of the field’s history and the urgency to develop an architectural style in sync with the technologies and the cultural experiences of modernity. The urban space must be reinvented, refuse “grotesque anachronisms” and make “use of all resources offered by science and technology” (De Maria 149). It is conceived as a “gigantic machine” (De Maria 150), capable to convey the mobility and the dynamism of the modern metropolis. The architectural lines are meant to relay the agility,
the elasticity, the lightness, and the movement inherent to the speed of the new machines. Sant’Elia’s projects encompass the rethinking of materials: cement, metal, glass. They must suit industrial structures inhabited by large masses. The utilisation of new technologies, such as exterior elevators and escalators connecting considerable distances inside huge buildings, railroad stations, shopping centres, and hotels, are all key elements of his urban designs. Unfortunately, he died prematurely and his projects could not become a reality. The architectural language that informs his visions, however, found an outlet in the works of Enrico Prampolini or Virgilio Marchi during the years following WWI. The works of architects not directly tied to Futurism, such as Giacomo Matté-Trucco (responsible for the FIAT Lingotto, 1916-1926) or Giuseppe Terragni (an advocate of the Rationalist Movement) show the marks of the Futurist architectural innovations.

The Futurist new aesthetic forms are inextricably linked to the need of provoking a cultural revolution that could reinvent life and make it a true expression of modernity. The Futurists celebrate it with the cult of technology. In their view, the time was ripe for a true anthropological revolution that would make possible the birth of a truly modern human being. They put into motion a state of euphoria that if, on the one hand, contributed to giving rise to new subjectivities and new aesthetic expressions, on the other, it created several mythologies that were blind to the critique both of technologies and of modernity itself. But this is the fate that time reserves us when we embrace a cultural paradigm. We cannot help but be historically situated, even while being firmly projected into the future.

WORKS CITED


