

Caffeine of Europe

The centenary of the birth of Futurism in 1909 was marked a few years ago by exhibitions, conferences and reprints of Futurist writings; the celebrations seemed a bit paradoxical. F. T. Marinetti famously despised dusty museums, stodgy academics, and their fossilized institutions (even if he loved the official accolades issued by them under Mussolini's Partito Nazionale Fascista), and he spent more than three decades trying to transform Futurism in Italy into a *modus vivendi*: it could change the way people dress (innovatively and experimentally), what they eat (no pasta!), where they live (cities of iron and cement stripped of any ornament), what they read and listen to (Futurism and Futurists, of course), how they smell, and even how they drink alcohol (moderately), sleep (little), have sex (electrically), drive (dangerously), travel (by air when possible), and walk (quickly).

The Futurists mobilized print media in the twentieth century the way that the Protestants did in the sixteenth century with their networks of colporteurs and rebellious printers, and the results, though maybe less revolutionary in world-historical terms, were nevertheless magnificent. Part of what made Marinetti such a genius was his ability to harness the full potential of modern print media and make it work for the movement he founded. But if Futurism was born when he published his first manifesto on *Le Futurisme* in a newspaper, it grew up in the pages of the *riviste*, or little magazines, that appeared in a variety of formats across Italy.

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Claudia Salaris and
Pablo Echaurren, editors

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that organizes the development of the movement so carefully around its publications. Given Salaris's deep familiarity with the subject, including her groundbreaking study of Marinetti's talents as a publisher-promoter (1990), I don't suspect that anyone will be chiming in soon with a new reference or correction.

Riviste Futuriste provides a history of Futurism through its most beloved medium. Manifestos were crucial to the formation and reformation of the movement, but it was the *riviste* that kept its members connected with one another, making it possible for those scattered in and between Palermo and Trento to pass along bits of information, share their *parole in libertà* (words in liberty), swap gossip, announce new publications, praise their founder, and denounce their enemies. Looking through the more than one hundred strictly Futurist titles organized alphabetically from *Affrica* to *Za-Bum*, it is hard to ignore how much fun they were having along the way. These *riviste* were being adapted as artistic sites in their own right, a place to experiment with typography, design, materials and layout. My favourite in the list, oddly enough, is one

With the publication of *Riviste Futuriste*, now is the time for a comprehensive reassessment of what happened during the decades when Marinetti and his followers were launching their salvos on a public either indifferent or quick to resort to ridicule. Claudia Salaris has been writing about Futurism for more than three decades, putting together monographs, encyclopedias, catalogues and histories on Marinetti and his avant-garde machine, all the while assembling a massive archive of printed matter to use as her primary source. Her husband, Pablo Echaurren, first began to organize this "universo cartaceo" (universe of paper) in the 1970s when there was no real market for buying and selling Futurist goods, making it all the more difficult to identify and track down copies of everything they published. Even worse was the fact that Futurism still carried the stench of Fascism.

A lot has changed since Echaurren and Salaris first started sniffing around bookstalls in search of Futurist ephemera, and it is safe to say that in recent years the movement has received the academic imprimatur that will keep it alive far beyond the twenty-first century. *Riviste Futuriste* is Volume I in a series of six that will be devoted to the magazines of other avant-garde movements (II), manifestos (III), books (IV and V), postcards/photographs/ceramics/catalogues/autographs (VI). Flipping through the thousand pages or so of this first instalment, it's hard to believe that nobody has tried something like this before. There have been dozens of catalogues and bibliographies (a majority of them in Italian), but nothing in both English and Italian

I had previously only heard about: *L'Almanacco dell'Italia veloce* (Almanac of Fast Italy) was designed by Marinetti and his fellow artist Fillia in 1930 but never published, most likely because of the exorbitant cost of production and distribution: 300,000 copies of *L'Almanacco* were to be printed in three languages, complete with recordings by Mussolini and Marinetti. It actually appeared in a more modest version with a silver-and-gold cover made to look like metal followed by a series of typographical experiments on paper in different colours and thicknesses, with pieces of cellophane and cardboard thrown in.

Marinetti contributed hundreds of articles and letters of support to any *rivista* with Futurist sympathies, but he also designed, edited and collaborated on the production of others devoted to everything from fashion and cooking to architecture and politics. The most ambitious titles tended to focus on multiple subjects, and they were to be used by others looking for advice about living *la vita futurista*. For that reason, Marinetti would regularly rely on an eclectic cast of specialists to guide him, from Carlo Carrà, Mario Carli and Fortunato Depero to Mino Somenzi, Enrico Prampolini, Emilio Settimelli and others. An "official" title usually resulted from these collaborations around which all others were meant to gather: *Italia Futurista*, *Roma Futurista*, *Vetrina Futurista*, *Futurismo* (which changed its name to *Sant'Elia* and then to *Artecrazia*), and *Stile Futurista* are among them.

Though Marinetti was the self-proclaimed "caffeine of Europe", even he needed others

to make this Futurist conflagration of print possible. He was especially supportive of the young, encouraging them to produce *riviste* as part of an informal initiation rite. And what these student productions may lack in sophistication they make up for in spirit. One of them was edited in 1915 by Giorgio Balabani, a self-proclaimed young Futurist from Bassano del Grappa, who brought out five issues under five different titles, including *La Torpedine* (The Torpedo) and *Lo Schrapnel*. And there were still others such as *Azione Imperiale* from 1936, which was produced by the Fascist party (and co-edited by Marinetti) to garner the support of Italy's youth for the conquest of Abyssinia.

Futurism persisted while Italy underwent major political and social changes. But it did so only by modifying its stance on the relationship between art and politics again and again; and the *rivista* was one of the places where this happened, from the early days when the Futurists were clamouring for Italy's entry into the war to the later stages when they tried desperately to prove the movement's worth to the Fascist Party. Each title, then, needs to be read within and against this panorama of Italian history. In the process, it becomes possible to see the Futurists not just as a part of history, but as makers of it.

Looking through so many different *riviste*, you begin to wonder if you need to hold the copy in your hands to feel the force of the Futurist punch. A catalogue like *Riviste Futuriste* is one possibility, but the publica-

tion of a book about these titles is not an end in itself. Anyone with a real interest in the subject is going to have to track down the originals – and how likely is this given that so many of them are hard to find? Right now, digital reproductions of a few can be found on websites like CIRCE (Catalogo Informatico Riviste Culturali Europee), but the digital copies, which do actually reproduce full runs of magazines, are still two-dimensional reproductions mediated by the screen.

In the process of unpacking her archive, Salari has certainly shown us that a lot of work remains to be done if we want to understand Futurism's legacy. And, though *Riviste Futuriste* provides a wealth of valuable information about primary sources, it asks more questions than it can possibly answer: Why, for example, were some cities and regions in Italy more amenable than others? Why were so many single issues produced? How many titles were "live" in any given month or year? And, finally, why is it that Futurism needed so many magazines in the first place? These are questions worth thinking about much more, especially because they will oblige us to consider the fact that the emergence of this avant-garde movement was intimately bound up with the refunctioning, to borrow Bertolt Brecht's phrase, of an older medium, one forced to accommodate a range of printing experiments and postal practices. The *rivista* wasn't new in Italy in the twentieth century, but Futurism made it new, and the trick now is figuring out why it refuses to grow old.