

# Preface

## International Futurism

Between 1909 and 1925, Futurism became a catchphrase for a broadly felt desire for cultural renewal. Although originating in Italy and proclaimed to the wider world in France (on the front page of *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909), its ethos and rebellious drive could be found in many other countries, too. Its foundational manifesto had been composed in autumn 1908 by the Italian poet, critic and editor Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) and was widely distributed on flysheets or in magazines and newspapers, first in Italy and soon after in many other European countries. Within months, it also reached Asia and the Americas. The author received so many critical responses and letters from writers of international standing that, in August 1909, he filled 50 pages of his magazine *Poesia* with them. In 1910, he even intended to publish a two-volume press review to document the national and international impact of his new school.

The *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* was supplemented soon after, in anticipation of the March 1909 general elections in Italy, by the first *Futurist Political Manifesto*. Thus, from the very beginning, Marinetti signalled that Futurism was to be a force not only in the cultural but also in the social domain. Although Marinetti was, in the first instance, a poet, he had graduated in law with a thesis on *The Crown in Parliamentary Government*. Throughout his early career, he entertained close contacts with anarchist circles, observed the political trends and events of his time and never restricted his interests to literature alone. He was a consummate musician and published many reviews of opera performances; he was friends with painters and sculptors and possessed a sound knowledge of the latest trends in the fine arts. It therefore does not come as a surprise that in early 1910 he received in his house a group of painters with whom he discussed how Futurism could be expanded from the literary domain into adjacent fields. Thus, in quick succession, the Futurist aesthetic was outlined in manifestos concerned with painting, sculpture, music, theatre and architecture.

The stream of manifestos published by F. T. Marinetti was not only geared towards an Italian public but also addressed to audiences in other countries. In June 1910, the poet issued a *Futurist Proclamation to the Spaniards*, followed in August 1911 by an *Address to the English on Futurism* (originally given as a lecture on 2 April 1910 in London at the Lyceum Club). However, Marinetti knew well that the European hub for new artistic developments was undoubtedly Paris and, thus, his prime focus was always directed towards France.

Marinetti was well prepared for launching Futurism's international career in France, as he had gone to a French school and had received a thoroughly French-oriented education. After his studies, he commuted regularly between France and Italy, ran the Milanese office of *L'Anthologie Revue* and collaborated with a number of literary journals in France. His early poems and plays were all

written in French and show that he was intimately familiar with the latest trends on the French literary scene. A fellow anarchist, Félix Fénéon, served as a director at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune and was sympathetic to Marinetti's iconoclastic programme. He agreed to exhibit some 27 paintings in a show that ran from 5–24 February 1912 and turned out to be a major success, garnering reviews all over Europe. It became the first leg of an international tour, which, in combination with other paintings, travelled to London, Berlin, Brussels, Hamburg, Copenhagen, The Hague, Amsterdam, Cologne, Munich, Vienna, Budapest, Karlsruhe, Lviv, Dresden, Prague, Leipzig, Halle and Hanover.

In Russia, reports on Futurism and translations of its first manifestos coincided with a radical turn in painting and literature that bore many similarities to Italian Futurism. Being conversant with the publicity methods employed by the Italian Futurists, the writers and artists in Russia began to organize public debates and other provocative actions that attracted a great deal of public attention. The critics and journalists attached the name *Futurizm* to these activities, and by 1913 the term 'Cubo-Futurism' came to be employed as a designation for the works produced by these groups. Marinetti was keen to meet these artists and visited, from 26 January to 17 February 1914, Moscow and Saint Petersburg. His lectures were enthusiastically received by the public and given a very favourable response in the press. However, some local representatives of avant-garde proclivity disapproved of Marinetti's assumption that they formed a local branch of Italian Futurism. To them, the Italian poet seemed to adopt the pose of a general who had come to inspect one of his remote garrisons. Rather than submitting to a commander-in-chief from a foreign country, they insisted on the inherently Russian character of their revolution and asserted their independence from parallel developments in Western Europe.

This feature of Russian Futurism – being inspired and influenced by Italian Futurism yet insisting on the original and sovereign status of their own works – can also be observed in other countries where Marinetti's manifestos were widely circulating. When surveying the international responses to Futurism in the 1910s, one can detect three principal tendencies. There was one camp that viewed Marinetti's movement in a positive light because it suggested novel ways of depicting the technical and industrial achievements of the modern age (machinery, factories, transportation, electricity, skyscrapers, etc.) as well as the new lifestyles shaped by an industrialized civilization. Then there were the artists who criticized Marinetti not because they disapproved of his ideas but because they had already developed similar ideas themselves and wished to be seen as an independent force in the intellectual marketplace. There also existed a third camp that deemed Marinetti to be a notoriety-seeking businessman who was primarily interested in scandal-mongering for the sake of generating publicity for his movement. They satirized the Futurists' media hype, their aggressive, 'American-style' public-relations campaigns and their hyperbolic press releases. They saw in Marinetti's merger of art and business an example of cultural merchandising that was displacing authentic art.

Newspapers and magazines across Europe and other continents offered scattered information about Futurist activities in Italy and attracted the attention of artists and critics alike. Commentators picked up, in a rather superficial fashion, certain elements of Futurism and ignored others, thereby distorting its aesthetic agenda. Stripped of its theoretical basis, Futurism began a ‘second life’ that often bore little relation to the aims and visions pursued by the movement’s founding fathers. Nonetheless, Futurism acted as a stimulant and exerted a fertilizing influence in many countries, especially when an artist or writer had gained access to manifestos, either in the original or in translation. Thus, significant aspects of the Futurist aesthetic filtered through and influenced artists and writers who did not always acknowledge that they were adopting some of the movement’s tenets.

The first, ‘heroic’ phase of Italian Futurism came to an end with the First World War. By that time, a number of original members had left the movement and others lost their lives on and off the battlefields. After the war, Marinetti re-launched Futurism as a political movement and forged an alliance with the *Fasci di combattimento*. However, when the former Socialist Benito Mussolini verged towards the Right, Marinetti reoriented his troops towards the newly founded Communist Party. In 1920, he came to realize that neither political direction was on the same wavelength with him, and he outlined a new artistic programme that is usually characterized by the epithet *secondo futurismo* (second-wave Futurism).

Marinetti’s political disillusionment became even more acute after the March on Rome (28–29 October 1922) and Mussolini’s appointment as prime minister (30 October 1922). Marinetti, who had resigned from the *Fasci di combattimento* on 29 May 1920, had good reason to be worried when Mussolini started obliterating the traces of his former alliance with the Futurists. A new brand of Fascism, which had only the name in common with the movement Marinetti had supported in 1919, established law and order in the political and artistic spheres. The National Institute of Fascist Culture, created in 1925, was full of exactly those traditionalist forces against which Futurism had rebelled since 1909. The new cultural apparatus was in large part negatively disposed towards Futurism and made sure that in the battle for State sponsorship the Futurists were given only limited support. Nonetheless, the Futurists managed to exploit niches in the literary and art market.

In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Marinetti adopted a highly contradictory attitude towards the régime and could often be found to criticize in private what in his public announcements he endorsed. He was experienced enough to know that the survival of his movement depended on tacit concessions granted by Fascist bureaucrats. He had to mince his words and conceal his opposition to the new cultural establishment. Attentive observers could witness a ‘smooth operator’ acting in accordance with what was expected of him in higher quarters. This allowed him to attract more than one thousand artists to his movement, organized in local cells strewn across the peninsula and often operating only in loose connection with the headquarters in Rome. During this period, ‘Futurism’ acted as a broad term for a

rather diverse collective, whose avant-garde leanings stood in marked contrast to the retrograde culture that was fostered by the Fascist régime, and whose works offered a rare breath of fresh air in an increasingly stifling climate. Marinetti, who had always sought to link art and politics, decided now to draw a clear dividing line between the two domains. Mussolini acknowledged Marinetti's new strategy, but gave his backing to a rival organization, Novecento, that advocated a modern classicism and embraced the figurative art of the past.

Italian Futurism of the years 1923 to 1930 was characterized by a desire to gain recognition from the new régime. But Marinetti's attempt to present himself as a major figure in the Italian cultural landscape and to portray Futurism as a movement of international significance bore only limited fruit. Nonetheless, Futurism continued to attract a lively following and could act as an umbrella for a large number of artists from a wide range of media. Already in its first phase, Futurism had had a strongly multidisciplinary orientation, but it was in its second phase, in the 1920s and early 1930s, that it translated its key aesthetic principles into fields as diverse as ceramics, cuisine, dance, fashion, furniture, graphic design, interior design, mural décor, photography, radio and so on. This creative activity was given a theoretical foundation in more than five hundred manifestos.

## The concept of 'Worldwide Futurism'

In Italy, as in many other countries, Futurist ideas were merged with doctrines taken from other Modernist movements. Dynamic cross-influences occurred between various -isms, and this reception process bore close resemblance to what in chemistry is called 'elective affinities'. In its aesthetic test tubes bubbled a seething mixture of ingredients – Symbolism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dada, Constructivism and/or Surrealism. When these came into contact with a given artist's personal predisposition, they interacted in an unpredictable manner and produced a diverse and highly original range of works of art. Futurists never followed a monolithic set of prescriptions but incorporated ideas and devices from many sources. When Futurism became fused with indigenous traditions in other countries, a multifaceted and often erratic assimilation occurred. This explains why, in the course of its thirty-five years of existence, Futurism developed so many forms and facets in dozens of countries and artistic disciplines.

Marinetti observed with great interest how critics and avant-garde artists responded to the ideas emanating from Italy and devised a diagram that presented Futurism as the fount and mother of most movements of the historical avant-garde. This served as the basis for *Le Futurisme mondial: Manifeste à Paris* (Worldwide Futurism: Manifesto Launched in Paris, 1924), in which he placed Futurism at the centre of a genealogy of avant-garde art and co-opted a large number of artists under

the rubrics “futuristi senza saperlo o futuristi dichiarati” (Futurists without knowing or Futurists of conviction). In the 1920s, *futurismo mondiale* became a code word for inter-avant-garde alliances and contacts. The new stationery of the Futurist headquarters summarized the key principles of what Marinetti considered to be the *Ideologia del futurismo e dei movimenti che ne derivano* (Ideology of Futurism and of the movements that derive from it) and listed in a diagram such “derivative movements” as Orphism, Cubism, Dadaism, Simultaneism, Creationism, Purism, Zenitism, Surrealism, Rayism, Cubofuturism, Vorticism, Expressionism, Constructivism, Suprematism, Imaginism and Ultraism. The same list can be found in Marinetti’s *Quadro sintetico del futurismo italiano e delle avanguardie* (A Concise Picture of Italian Futurism and the Avant-garde), published repeatedly in the years 1927 to 1934, and in modified form until 1939. It is therefore not astonishing that the Futurist periodical *La città futurista* (The Futurist City, 1928–29) carried as its subtitle *Sintesi del futurismo mondiale e di tutte le avanguardie* (Synthesis of Worldwide Futurism and of All Avant-garde Movements). More extended versions of this interpretative model circulated in the form of essays, where the title was clearly signalling the programme behind it: *L’influenza mondiale di Marinetti e del futurismo* (Emilio Settimelli: The Global Influence of Marinetti and Futurism, 1924), *Il trionfo mondiale del futurismo italiano* (Mino Somenzi: The Worldwide Triumph of Italian Futurism, 1933), *Les Influences du futurisme* (Giuseppe Lo Duca: The Influences of Futurism, 1937) or *F. T. Marinetti e l’influenza mondiale del futurismo* (Angelo Rognoni: F. T. Marinetti and the Global Influence of Futurism, 1942).

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University preserves a manuscript that shows that Marinetti planned to set up a creative hub to be called *Centrale futurista italiana di creazione e di espansione allacciata ai centri culturali d’avanguardia di tutto il mondo* (Italian Futurist centre of creation and expansion connected to the cutting-edge cultural centres of the avant-garde around the world). There is no doubt that the artists who marched under the banners of *zenitismo*, *creazionismo*, *simultaneismo*, *vorticismo*, *ultraismo*, etc. were well informed about Futurism and that their concepts at one point or another were boosted by a tributary influx of ideas stemming from Italy. But this, of course, did not turn them into “Futurists without knowing”, as Marinetti called them in his manifesto *Le Futurisme mondial* (Worldwide Futurism, 1924). Despite the existence of mutual influences, it would be misleading to speak about one artist *imitating* another. When we examine the multifaceted art scene of the 1910s and 1920s, we have to question our common, linear concept of ‘influence’. The Futurist impulse coming from Marinetti and his Italian followers was simultaneously repealed and preserved in the receiving cultural environments. The imported conceptions were creatively transformed into a new aesthetic that operated on a different level and was recognizable as something dissimilar to Marinetti’s brand of Futurism, yet also intimately connected to it. It would be much better to consider these developments as a dialectic process, for which Hegel employed the term ‘Aufhebung’. In German, this word entails three meanings, all of which can be encountered

in the reception processes we are concerned with in the countries covered in this handbook: to cancel out, to preserve and to raise to a higher level.

Especially when examining Futurist influences outside Europe, it becomes obvious that Marinetti's heuristic model of centre/periphery, which is still widely adhered to even nowadays, is rather misleading as it ignores the originality and inventiveness of art and literature in other cultures and on other continents. Futurist tendencies in Asia or Latin America may have been, in part, 'influenced' by Italian and Russian Futurism, but they certainly did not simply 'derive' from them. The complexity of this reception process was further complicated by the fact that reports on Futurism were not always coming directly from Italy and Russia. The information that was circulating around the globe was mediated (or filtered) by the art scenes in Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Barcelona or Lisbon. All of these intermediate pathways strongly shaped the attitudes towards Futurism that prevailed in European and non-Western countries. Thus, it was not always Marinetti's or Mayakovsky's provocative pronouncements that determined the cultural discourses on Futurism outside Italy and Russia, but also the (often prejudiced) viewpoints of critics and journalists in other European countries. Especially French and Spanish, but also German, assessments of the Futurist revolt circulated widely in Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America, where they could produce reactions that were as forceful as the passions provoked by the Futurist publications and exhibitions themselves.

Futurism formed part of a widespread revolt against academic art and classical models of literature. The call for renewal found much sympathy amongst Latin American and Asian artists, as they were engaged in a similar battle against the canonical discourses of colonial rule. One can therefore detect many parallels between the European avant-garde and the innovative movements in non-Western countries. Attempts to find alternatives to traditionalist art meant that artists adopted aspects of Futurism and combined them with other, often indigenous, sources of inspiration. The result was a hybrid form of art and literature that was indebted to Futurism and other movements, yet also distinctly different from them. It was therefore only natural that many heterogeneous forms of Futurism emerged in other European countries and in far-away continents.

## **International Futurism in recent scholarship**

This handbook documents the impact of Futurism on the international avant-garde. In the course of the past decades, numerous scholars have directed their attention to the ebb and flow of aesthetic concepts in the European and worldwide network of the avant-garde. A handful of books are dedicated to the comparative study of Futurism, but otherwise publications have tended to focus either on individual artists or groups of artists, or on a small geographical unit. By bringing together in this volume

55 essays on 38 countries and 14 media, we are providing an overview of the manifold configurations of Futurism and thus inviting more comparative studies of these formations.

The major cities of Europe have long been considered birthplaces and homes of twentieth-century avant-garde movements. In recent years, the drive within Avant-garde Studies (and its sister field, Modernism Studies) to look beyond narrowly defined (Western) European borders has been gathering pace, and transnational approaches have increasingly been adopted. One need only think of such landmark volumes as Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel's *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (2005), James Harding and John Rouse's *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (2006), Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough's *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), Elaine O'Brien's *Modern Art in Africa, Asia and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms* (2012) or Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson's *Decentring the Avant-Garde* (2014). These volumes, and many others, have focussed on aspects of avant-garde cultural production in Africa, Latin and Central America, as well as parts of South Asia. Modernism and the avant-garde have now been clearly established as global phenomena, slowly pushing back the Eurocentrist attitudes that have long been a defining feature of the discipline and are still dominating a great many books published in this field.

In the domain of the fine arts, the most significant demonstration that Futurism was not an Italian or Russian preserve came in 1986, when Pontus Hultén mounted the monumental and path-breaking exhibition *Futurismo – Futurismi* at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. Leading museums from many countries sent some two hundred and fifty paintings and sculptures that documented the international linkages and differences between many brands of Futurism across the world. The sweeping vista was accompanied by a symposium, *Futurismo, cultura e politica*, later issued as a book, which consolidated many of the insights that could be gained in the exhibition. The landmark venture in Venice was followed up by many projects focussing on a smaller number of countries in Western or Eastern Europe, or on the rapports between Europe and Asia, or Europe and Latin America. Thus, we are now much better informed about the influence of Russian Futurism in Japan, Korea and China, or in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, and on the reception of Italian Futurism in Brazil, Argentina and the USA. Artists who have long been seen primarily within the traditions of their own country are nowadays understood to have operated in a global network, in which Futurism played a particularly significant rôle.

## Format and genesis of this handbook

This *Handbook of International Futurism* is situated within the above-mentioned 'transnational turn' in Avant-garde Studies and ties in with the *International Yearbook*

of *Futurism Studies*, which has published many essays on responses to Futurism outside the Western hemisphere. The thirty-eight regionally focussed chapters in this volume are not neglecting the familiar and well-established locations in Western Europe where Futurism made its mark (such as Great Britain, France and Germany), but they also draw attention to countries and regions that have long resided at the margins of the topics pursued in avant-garde scholarship. This handbook highlights processes of cultural exchange across political, geographic and linguistic borders. One key area is Central and Eastern Europe. For a long time, the countries in this region have been considered under the umbrella of ‘Russian Futurism’. However, in this publication the peculiarities and singular features of Futurism in nations such as Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine are explored on their own merits. In total, the *Handbook of International Futurism* features twelve non-European countries, and particular attention is given to Latin America, perhaps unsurprisingly, due to Marinetti’s own trips to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay in 1926 and 1936 and the continent’s cultural proximity to Italy, caused by the large numbers of Italian immigrants it received in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Asia is represented by entries on Japan, China and Korea. An entry on Egypt documents the repercussions Futurism elicited in the Middle East.

The idea of organizing a handbook on international Futurism goes back to a conference on “Futurism in an International and Interdisciplinary Perspective”, held in May 1995 at the Institute of Romance Studies in London. Out of this symposium evolved a volume of twenty-five essays, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*, published by De Gruyter in 2000. Some ten years later, following the Centenary of Futurism in 2009, the same publishing house agreed to institute a forum of discussion for a worldwide community of Futurism scholars in the form of an *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*. This periodical investigates the relations between Italian Futurism and other Futurisms worldwide, the artistic movements inspired by Futurism and a broad range of artists operating in the international sphere with close contacts to Italian or Russian Futurism. So far, it has fulfilled its function of fostering intellectual cooperation between Futurism scholars across countries and academic disciplines. The eight volumes that have been issued since 2011 offer 4,500 pages of detailed examinations of the impact of Futurism in some thirty countries and on three continents. By using English as its medium of communication, the yearbook offers an international readership access to current research published in over fifty languages in disciplines as diverse as literary studies, fine arts, design and architecture, Italian Studies, Hispanic Studies, Slavonic Studies, theatre history, music history, and so on.

More than one hundred contributions to the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* have demonstrated that Futurism was never a coherent national style but an artistic impulse that radiated from one culture to another and, in the process, gave rise to extraordinarily complex and often contradictory forms of cross-fertilization. The essays in the *Yearbook* identify these elements and discuss the multifaceted influences of Futurism; they have thus contributed to a better understanding of Futurism



in its manifold guises. However, these publications serve the primary purpose of presenting original research and do not have the aim of summarizing the state of scholarship in a given country or artistic medium. Even thematic volumes, like the ones on East-Central Europe (2011), the Iberian Peninsula (2013) or Latin America (2017), were primarily designed to inform on current debates and to stimulate further investigations. It therefore became obvious at an early stage that a general and comprehensive guide might be required for a wider academic audience, which would offer an overview of the main developments in the countries and disciplines in which Futurism had a marked influence.

In 2011, the Editorial Director for Language, Literature and Culture at De Gruyter suggested at a meeting in Berlin that we should contemplate a handbook that would summarize and complement the information communicated via the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* and the earlier volume, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*. Some two years later, more than fifty authors had agreed to contribute to the handbook. But as is so often the case with extraordinarily complex projects operating with contributors from many countries and cultures, the editing process was far from easy and smooth. It was therefore a great relief when the last essays were finally received and by spring 2017, all fifty-five entries had undergone final edits.

## Aims and scope of this handbook

This reference work is geared towards Futurism scholars with varying levels of experience and interests and is designed to offer a synthesis of the state of scholarship regarding the international radiation of Futurism in some fourteen artistic disciplines and thirty-eight countries. It acknowledges the great achievements in the visual and literary arts of Italy and Russia, yet at the same time treats Futurism as an international, multidisciplinary phenomenon that left a lasting mark on the twentieth-century avant-garde. It offers guidance to readers relatively unfamiliar with the reactions to Futurism in a given country or discipline and unlikely to speak many languages beside English. The fifty-five entries discuss the oeuvre of artists who were actively involved in the movement and others who absorbed Futurist ideas and stylistic devices during a brief, yet important phase in their career. They are presented here in the context of their national traditions, international connections and the media in which they were predominantly active. However, this handbook is not a biographical dictionary; rather, it offers an encyclopaedic overview of countries and media in which the movement exercised a particularly noteworthy influence.

Individual entries vary in length and are syntheses, not textbook chapters. The limited length of each contribution means that authors can only highlight the salient points of the ways in which Futurism was responded to, absorbed and transformed in a given country or medium. Information is presented in a concise manner and only

highlights the Futurist features in the works of significant artists and writers. Every contributor was encouraged to assemble factual evidence and to communicate the material in a manner that can be understood by a diverse readership from many countries and disciplines. All entries, of course, reflect the authors' scholarly viewpoints and professional judgment, but they avoid bias and subjective opinion. Controversial topics that have a significant corpus of scholarly literature attached to them are marked as such and are presented in a manner that balances important arguments put forward on both sides of the fence.

Entries include quotes from primary or secondary literature, with references to the sources given in parentheses. Long quotations have been avoided, and well-known facts are not necessarily supported by a detailed citation. As a handbook, this volume attempts to lay out facts and widely accepted views on the topic under discussion and does not seek to intervene in topical scholarly debates. Although the Table of Contents suggests a clear division between countries and media, no attempt has been made to eliminate overlap altogether. Thus, for example, Russian Futurist theatre is covered in both the entries on Russia and on theatre. While the first has more of a historiographical orientation, the second focusses on the medium and the ways in which it was employed by various artists. Cross-references are inserted when other entries in the volume offer complementary information. Each essay is followed by a bibliography, which not only lists all quoted sources but also provides a guide to other and more detailed studies. As Futurism was highly influential in some cultures and media and less important in others, and since research into Futurism tends to be vigorous in some countries and disciplines and rather neglected in others, it is inevitable that these reading lists vary in length and scope.

The list of countries and artistic media featured in this volume is far from exhaustive. It is to be hoped that the entries in this handbook, and future contributions to the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, will encourage scholars to direct their attention to regions not covered in this publication and to investigate new links and lines of interaction that will further enrich our knowledge of Futurism's global, interdisciplinary reach.

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