

CHAPTER ONE – HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURIST ART AND LITERATURE OF THE 1940S

I. FROM AVANT-GARDE TO KITSCH?

History often seems to me to be a stooping and laboured eye to the keyhole that does not see the space [or] the light [...] that the room under scrutiny contains

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I.I. Overview

It is a striking fact that within the vast literature produced since 1945 on the subject of Italian Futurism there is no text in existence capable of offering a comprehensive analysis of the movement's concluding phase – a state of affairs that contrasts markedly with the attention given to its earlier periods of activity. The fact that such a study has never been attempted² is even more surprising when one considers the efforts made by (predominantly Italian) scholars over the last sixty years to challenge and discredit the persistent notion that Futurism was

¹ From a speech delivered at Italy's Royal Academy, 11 January 1943, published as *Camicie nere e poeti futuristi combattenti a Sviniuca sul Don, 12 settembre 1942-XX* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1943); this quotation taken from the version published under the same title in *Autori e Scrittori*, March 1943 (Cra.3.39).

² Claudia Salaris's indispensable *Storia del futurismo. Libri giornali manifesti*, 2nd rev. edn (Rome: Riuniti, 1992) chronicles this period in detail, but almost exclusively from a literary angle. In 2008 the volume *I futuristi e le Quadriennali* (Milan: Electa) was presented as 'perhaps [...] the most complete [work] ever to have been dedicated to Futurism as it developed during the Thirties and the early Forties' (taken from the 'blurb' on the inside cover); yet this too has a somewhat restricted scope in terms of the present enquiry, given that only one edition of this particular exhibition took place during the period which concerns us here.

mortally wounded in World War One, and the proliferation of books and exhibitions during the same period exploring the many facets of 'Second Futurism'.³

And yet there are a sufficient number of sidelong glances at this period in surveys of the movement to discount the notion that it might simply have been forgotten about, lying undiscovered like a chest of buried treasure. Even those most implacably opposed to considering the final phase of Futurism as a relevant and vital chapter in the history of modern art are unable to deny the fact that Marinetti remained committed to his movement – and continued to attract artists, writers and musicians to it – until his death. Consequently, the dates 1909-44 are now universally (if often somewhat grudgingly) accepted as representing the full span of Futurist activity. It is evident, then, that a value judgement has been made in relation to these concluding years and that they have been found wanting in some respect.

Biographical research on the Futurist leader represents one of the few contexts in which detailed study of the period has been undertaken, its specific remit making it naturally less

³ First proposed by Enrico Crispolti in 1958, 'Second Futurism' is an umbrella term that does not delimit a precise period of time, but which is broadly used to denote developments within the movement during the inter-war years and (nominally) those of World War Two. The movement's first, 'heroic', phase has traditionally been seen as having ended around 1916, fragmenting after Italy's entry into the Great War in 1915, the subsequent deaths of Antonio Sant'Elia and Umberto Boccioni, and the gradual withdrawal of other key figures such as Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini. In terms of the fine arts, the 'Second' Futurist period is commonly divided into a further two phases: the first being characterised by the geometric 'machine art' of the 1920s, and the second by the 'aeropainting' of the 1930s. However, the movement's ambition of realising a 'Futurist reconstruction of the universe' by intervening in almost every conceivable creative sphere is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the period as a whole. See Enrico Crispolti, 'Second Futurism', in Emily Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988*, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel, 1989), pp 165-71. Whilst Crispolti's division of Futurist activity into two distinct periods has been considered somewhat arbitrary by certain scholars (see, for example, Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* ([London]: Art Data, 1986), pp. 58-59), 'Second Futurism' remains a term widely accepted and used in Futurist studies.

forgiving of bowdlerisation than art-historical narratives. Informative texts by authors such as Claudia Salaris, Gino Agnese, Gianni Eugenio Viola, Giordano Bruno Guerri and Ernest Ialongo, among others, have provided fascinating insights into Marinetti's personal, political and financial situations during these years.⁴ Indeed, somewhat ironically, whilst Futurist art of the 1940s has been largely sidelined, the concluding five years in the life of the movement's leader are perhaps more familiar than any other period in his entire career, even to the very general reader. The facts of his declining health around 1940, his military service in the Soviet Union during 1942, his flight from Rome to Venice following the fall of the Fascist regime in 1943, his subsequent peripatetic lifestyle, moving ever-further north from the advancing Allied troops, his death in December 1944 and the state funeral ordered for him in Milan by Mussolini (in whose leadership he had maintained an unwavering faith throughout this period, at least publicly) are all episodes in a dramatic story that will have seeped into the consciousness of those with anything more than the most cursory interest in the movement in a way that the day-to-day events of Marinetti's life during the 1920s, for example, will have not.⁵

Futurism's literary output during these years has also received a degree of scholarly attention. Certain formal innovations made at this time have been recognised as precursors of important

⁴ Claudia Salaris, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1988); Gino Agnese, *Marinetti. Una vita esplosiva* (Milan: Camunia, 1990); Gianni Eugenio Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: lo spettacolo dell'arte* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2004); Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Invenzioni, avventure e passioni di un rivoluzionario* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009); Ernest Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Artist and His Politics* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015). A study focusing exclusively on this late period has also been provided by Antonino Reitano, *L'onore, la patria e la fede nell'ultimo Marinetti* (Carlentini: Angelo Parisi, 2006).

⁵ The key events of Marinetti's final years are related in the following introductory surveys: Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 208-09; Richard Humphreys, *Futurism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), p. 76; Lawrence Rainey, 'Introduction: F. T. Marinetti and the Development of Futurism', in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman, eds, *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 1-39 (pp. 38-39).

post-war developments in isolated works such as Mary Ellen Solt's survey *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, as well as in positive essays by Matteo D'Ambrosio, where the work of Marinetti, Crali and Belloli has been presented as evidence of the survival of a genuine spirit of avant-garde enquiry and experimentation within the Futurist ranks (although elsewhere his appraisal of the period has been rather less positive).⁶ The period is also given fair consideration in Willard Bohn's useful volume *Italian Futurist Poetry*, and is represented in a selection of texts assembled by Laura Wittman for the major 2009 publication *Futurism: An Anthology*.⁷

Other (far) more specialised publications and limited editions have reproduced the work of writers such as Ubaldo Serbo, Bruno G. Sanzin and Franca Maria Corneli over the years.⁸ Poems by a number of Corneli's fellow women Futurist writers dating from the 1940s have been included in an anthology compiled by Cecilia Bello Minciaccchi,⁹ while several of Marinetti's late works have also been reprinted (or indeed published for the first time) in recent years. These have included a 1942 volume based on the poet's experiences at the Eastern Front, and the

⁶ Mary Ellen Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1968); Matteo D'Ambrosio, 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', in Walter Pedullà, ed., *Il futurismo nelle avanguardie. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Milano* (Rome: Ponte Sisto, 2010), pp. 189-204. See also the latter's essay 'Strategie, procedimenti e modelli testuali della poesia futurista', in Matteo D'Ambrosio, *Futurismo e altre avanguardie* (Naples: Liguori, 1999), pp. 1-37 (pp. 36-37). On D'Ambrosio's inconsistent attitude toward late Futurism, see below, p. 25; pp. 27-28, n. 49; p. 30.

⁷ Willard Bohn, ed., *Italian Futurist Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, cit.

⁸ Ubaldo Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo aeropoeta futurista*, ed. by Roberto Floreani (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 2007); Bruno G. Sanzin, *Bruno G. Sanzin aeropoeta futurista triestino. Tutte le poesie dal 1923 al 1942*, ed. by Enrica Mezzetta (Milan: EDUCatt, 2009); Franca Maria Corneli, *L'aeropoema futurista dell'Umbria* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia' della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Futurista e Aeropittura di Guerra, 1943; repr. Terni: Alessandro Pellegrini, 2009). The latter volume was published in an edition of just 200 copies.

⁹ *Spirale di dolcezza + Serpe di fascino. Scrittrici futuriste – antologia* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2008).

later novel *Venezianella and Studentaccio*.¹⁰

In reviewing Bello Minciacchi's aforementioned anthology, Lucia Re congratulated her for 'astutely' (that is to say, prudently) stressing that the poems dating from Futurism's controversial later years 'have little literary merit, but [...] are certainly of interest to cultural historians'¹¹ – hardly a glowing recommendation. Bello Minciacchi herself singled out the poet Laura Serra for criticism on the basis of 'her leaden, celebratory and empty Fascist rhetoric'.¹² Nevertheless, whilst not altogether uncritical – and in no way 'mainstream' – in character, the level of attention given to the literary aspects of 1940s Futurism contrasts sharply with that awarded the visual arts, which have received practically no consideration whatsoever outside the context of highly focused and specialised studies of regional groupings and associations whose activities straddled the 1930s and 1940s.¹³ Whilst greatly useful and important, many studies of this kind tend primarily to fulfil the necessary task of reconstructing and chronicling historical events, rather than engaging in any in-depth analysis or critical appraisal of the works created by the protagonists of such groups. *Aeropittura di guerra* – arguably the most

¹⁰ *Originalità russa di masse distanze radiocuori* (Rome: Volland, 1996); *Venezianella e Studentaccio* (1944) (Milan: Mondadori, 2013). Other available works by Marinetti dating from the 1940s include a memoir written with Alberto Viviani in 1944 concerning Futurist activity in Florence, titled *Firenze biondazzurra sposerebbe futurista morigerato* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1992), *L'aeropoema di Cozzarini. Primo eroe dell'esercito repubblicano* (Milan: ERRE, [1944]; repr. Genoa: Associazione Culturale Italia, 2009) and the aforementioned *L'aeropoema di Gesù*. Extracts from other late memoirs ('Great Traditional and Futurist Milan' and 'An Italian Sensibility Born in Egypt') can be found in F. T. Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, ed. by R. W. Flint (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), pp. 169-283.

¹¹ 'Futurism and the Feminine: New Perspectives', *The European Legacy*, vol. 14, no. 7, December 2009, pp. 877-80 (p. 879).

¹² 'Introduzione', in *Spirale di dolcezza*, cit., pp. 17-44 (p. 30).

¹³ See, for example, Anna Caterina Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche* (Rome: De Luca, 1982); Mario Maritano, *Futurismo in Sardegna. L'episodio sardo alla fine degli anni Trenta* (Oristano: S'Alvure, 1993); Giorgio Cortenova and Cesare Biasini Selvaggi, eds, *Futurismi a Verona. Il gruppo futurista veronese U. Boccioni*, exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 2002); Alberto Cibirin, ed., *Corrado Forlin e il Gruppo futurista Savarè* (Trento: Scripta; Rovereto: Mart, 2012).

characteristic genre of Futurist painting during these years – has only received anything resembling serious analysis in a mere handful of texts concerning Futurism's relationship with Fascism, including a long out of print academic study in German by Susanne von Falkenhausen and another, more recent, volume by Monica Cioli.¹⁴ Save for a characteristically objective and open-minded evaluation by Willard Bohn,¹⁵ these brief appraisals – as well as other, even more fleeting, references – have tended to be far from positive, as we shall see.

Given the evident marginalisation of 1940s Futurism, the most pressing concern of the present chapter is not so much to examine the relatively few objective scholarly assessments of this period, but rather to consider the negative (or indeed, wholly non-existent) evaluations constituting the majority of responses to it; in the process, I shall attempt to extrapolate the reasons for this void in the field of Futurist studies.¹⁶ As I hope to illustrate, it appears possible to distinguish between a *passive neglect* of this phase – primarily the consequence of mainstream art history's reductive narratives – and an *active rejection* of it, driven by deeper ideological and aesthetic objections.

¹⁴ Susanne von Falkenhausen, *Der Zweite Futurismus und die Kunstpolitik des Faschismus in Italien von 1922-1943* (Frankfurt: Haag + Herchen, 1979), pp. 170-89; Monica Cioli, *Il fascismo e la 'sua' arte. Dottrina e istituzioni tra futurismo e Novecento* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki; Rovereto: Mart, 2011), pp. 134-37. See also Maritano's aforementioned volume *Futurismo in Sardegna*, pp. 114-18, where the theoretical principles of art from this period are explored to a greater extent than in many other studies of a similar nature.

¹⁵ *The Other Futurism: Futurist Activity in Venice, Padua, and Verona* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹⁶ For an up-to-date and comprehensive historiographical survey of Second Futurism see Cibir, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 29-48.

I.II. Art-historical Imperatives

Whilst the significance of a period of artistic activity is not determined by its duration, the disregard this phase has suffered is perhaps due in some measure to its rather truncated, curtailed character. In talking of Futurism during the 1940s one is not, after all, referring to an entire decade of artistic experimentation, evolution and production, but rather an ‘epilogue’¹⁷ that lasted for five brief years, sputtering to a halt in the small hours of 2 December 1944 with the death of Marinetti in Bellagio, a small town on the shores of Lake Como in the heart of Mussolini’s squalid and divisive Italian Social Republic.

Given that it was a phase which coincided with five of the most turbulent years of the twentieth century, this reference to the contemporary political situation is not irrelevant, for the momentous events that served as a backdrop against which the final act of Futurism was played out have been seen as having compressed even further the available time in which its scattered and mobilised members were able to formulate their ideas and create, publish or exhibit their work, rendering these fleeting years even briefer in real terms and thus more easy to dismiss or pass over. Even Salaris has characterised Futurist activity at this time as ‘patchy’, having been undertaken ‘in a period so tragic that it left little space for creative distractions’.¹⁸

Whilst the precise extent of the disruption caused by the war is debateable,¹⁹ it undoubtedly had an impact on the movement. Of course, Futurism was not alone in this respect – the war

¹⁷ The term is used by both Salaris and Berghaus – scholars whose appraisals of the artistic worth of 1940s Futurism would nevertheless appear to differ markedly. See Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 265; Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), p. 255.

¹⁸ *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 277.

¹⁹ On this point, see below, Chapter Two, pp. 56-57.

having taken its toll on many artists. As a consequence, the early 1940s have tended *generally* to be seen as representing something of a parenthesis or hiatus in art-historical terms, and to be relatively neglected as a consequence. For instance, in his 1948 essay 'The Decline of Cubism', Clement Greenberg characterised the conflict as a 'six years' interruption',²⁰ culturally speaking, during which little ground-breaking work was created and the avant-garde baton was passed from Europe to the United States.

Timing would appear to represent a crucial factor in other respects in the context of our enquiry, for attitudes to this phase have certainly also been influenced by the position it occupies within the historical development of Futurism itself – a movement that had already been in existence for over three decades by this point. To a certain extent, the neglect of 1940s Futurism *specifically* may be considered part of an altogether wider disregard for the movement's activities after World War One – something which continues to characterise art-historical attitudes toward Futurism in the English-speaking world, to varying degrees. Certain commentators have asserted that despite the attractiveness of Futurist ceramics, or the whimsical nature of concepts such as Futurist cuisine, the exploration of these 'minor'²¹ avenues of research was also a clear indication that the movement had lost interest in tackling more weighty aesthetic concerns and had, by the end of the 1930s, long since 'run out of steam'.²² Part of the problem, it has been observed, is that the transformation of Italy into a modern, industrialised nation following the First World War had emasculated Futurism, which

²⁰ In Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds, *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 569-72 (p. 570).

²¹ Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 256.

²² Humphreys, *Futurism*, cit., p. 76. See also his afterword 'Futurism: May the Force Be with You', in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., pp. 221-27 (p. 227).

subsequently metamorphosed into a kind of 'presentism'²³ since 'that which had been futuristic in 1910 was by now an everyday fact: the automobile – that emblem of the new art for Marinetti in the early years of the century – had become an unremarkable protagonist of the city streets'.²⁴ Consequently, as Crispolti has noted, the movement's 'creative impulse [...] was no longer aimed at challenging the "passéist" present with the "Futurist" imagination, but at fashioning a tenable image of the present world, a world that had already been updated'.²⁵ It goes without saying that scholars such as Salaris, Evangelisti and Crispolti have not presented this tendency in inter-war Futurism as a reason for justifying its exclusion from the art history books, but rather as representing Italy's own, distinctive, contribution to the wider European Modernist experiment. However, with its visionary avant-garde rhetoric and drive having been outstripped by actual industrial and technological progress, others have argued that 'by the mid-twenties, the movement known as Futurism was no longer the same movement; it had lost its edge, its humor, its fantastic wit and daring – indeed, its *raison d'être*, which was to provide a vision of a possible future'.²⁶

Elsewhere, the progressive erosion of Futurism's cultural relevance has simply been seen as the unavoidable consequence of its longevity. Renato Poggioli has asserted that 'the inevitable, inexorable destiny of each movement [is] to rise up against the newly outstripped fashion of an

²³ See Claudia Salaris, 'Aerial Imagery in Futurist Literature', in Bruno Mantura, Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris and Livia Velani, eds, *Futurism in Flight: 'Aeropittura' Paintings and Sculptures of Man's Conquest of Space (1913-1945)*, exh. cat. (Rome: De Luca, 1990), pp. 27-32 (p. 31).

²⁴ Silvia Evangelisti, 'Futurismo e avanguardia europea tra le due guerre', in Silvia Evangelisti, ed., *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Milan: Mondadori; Philippe Daverio, 1986), pp. 13-34 (p. 14).

²⁵ Enrico Crispolti, 'Futurism and Plastic Expression Between the Wars', in Pontus Hulten and Germano Celant, eds, *Italian Art 1900-1945*, exh. cat. (Milan: Bompiani, 1989), pp. 201-18 (p. 208).

²⁶ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986; repr., with a new preface, 2003), p. xxvi.

old avant-garde and to die when a new fashion, movement, or avant-garde appears',²⁷ being deeply critical of Futurism's 'attempt to survive itself'.²⁸ In keeping with this imperative, Futurism has not only been viewed as a spent force in terms of its own internal dynamics after the First World War, but also as having been overtaken or superseded by newly emerging movements and cultural forces around this time²⁹ – something in fact eagerly anticipated by Marinetti himself in a famous passage from his 1909 founding manifesto.³⁰ Chief among these on an international level were, of course, Constructivism and Surrealism, while *Pittura metafisica* and later associations such as Corrente are generally considered to have been among the next staging posts along Italy's domestic avant-garde trajectory during the inter-war years. Futurism's apparent reluctance to succumb to that fate identified by Poggioli as necessary for any movement purporting to cherish avant-garde values has undoubtedly been considered evidence of curiously passéist tendencies within late Futurism. According to Tisdall and Bozzolla, by resisting that 'violent symbolic death at the hands of a yet more revolutionary generation envisaged in the "Founding and Manifesto"', Futurism was destined to undergo 'a process of gradual atrophy',³¹ its artists having reneged on one of the key duties of any self-respecting cultural radical: the 'immolation of the self to the art of the future'.³²

Above all, the fact that the Second Futurist period coincided with the Fascist era – and that the figure of Mussolini was endlessly eulogised in Futurist painting and poetry during these years –

²⁷ *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap, 1968), p. 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²⁹ J. M. Nash, *Cubism, Futurism and Constructivism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 44.

³⁰ 'The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen!' F. T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 47-52 (p. 51).

³¹ *Futurism*, cit., p. 209.

³² Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, cit., p. 67.

remains the main reason why it has tended to be marginalised, being ‘tarred with the Fascist brush and condemned as a product of Mussolini’s corrupt regime’.³³

As stated, such attitudes have proven to be remarkably resilient outside Italy. In her 1968 study *Futurist Art and Theory 1909-1915*, Marianne W. Martin maintained that by the time Italy entered the Great War the movement’s ‘most original phase had virtually ended’.³⁴ In itself this is not altogether surprising, given that the study of Futurism outside Italy was still in its infancy at that time. More striking, however, is the fact that in 1986 a scholar such as Marjorie Perloff could still refer to Martin’s volume as the ‘definitive’ account of the movement³⁵ – a claim that she was to repeat in 2003, despite the fact that by this time the text was thirty-five years old and had not been updated to take account of new research. Likewise, the volume *Concepts of Modern Art* persists in repeating Norbert Lynton’s assertion that ‘the 1914-18 war spelt the end of Futurism’.³⁶ This text – perhaps one of the first ports of call for the English-speaking student seeking reliable information about the movement from a reputable arts publisher – was most recently reprinted in 2015.

In terms of exhibitions, the Guggenheim’s 2014 show *Italian Futurism 1909-1944:*

Reconstructing the Universe has significantly raised the bar in this regard, and has gone some considerable way toward expunging the memory of a travelling exhibition organised to mark the centenary of Marinetti’s founding manifesto.³⁷ Something of a travesty, the latter gave no

³³ Willard Bohn, ‘Introduction’, in Bohn, *Italian Futurist Poetry*, cit., pp. 3-10 (pp. 3-4).

³⁴ Cit., p. xxvii.

³⁵ *The Futurist Moment*, cit., p. 52.

³⁶ ‘Futurism’, in Nikos Stangos, ed., *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, 3rd rev. edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 97-105 (p. 105).

³⁷ *Le Futurisme à Paris. Une avant-garde explosive*, Paris: Centre Pompidou, subsequently touring to Rome’s Scuderie del Quirinale as *Futurismo. Avanguardia-Avanguardia*, and to London’s Tate Modern as *Futurism*. See Didier Ottinger, ed., *Futurism*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2009).

indication whatsoever of the movement's evolution after 1915: an emblematic example of the way in which mainstream art history has considered – and continues to consider – Second Futurism as little more than an art-historical footnote, particularly outside Italy.

Yet even within Italy, Futurist art of the 1940s still awaits comprehensive consideration in its own right, such as that which has long been given to the work of the 1920s and 1930s, neatly defined in terms of the aesthetics of *arte meccanica* and *aeropittura*, respectively.³⁸ Considered to be lacking a distinct profile of this kind, the 1940s have been presented as a coda that possesses a certain historical interest, and is undoubtedly full of incident,³⁹ but which is of scant *artistic* worth. D'Ambrosio, for one, has asserted that Futurism's 'final developments confirmed and consolidated (but, in certain instances, mortified) those tendencies already fully elaborated in various spheres'.⁴⁰ Ultimately, despite the inclusion of isolated examples of works from the period in publications and exhibitions over the years,⁴¹ studies of *il secondo futurismo* generally

³⁸ See, for example, Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (Paris: Terrail, 2001); Enrico Crispolti, 'Second Futurism', cit.; Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Pannaggi e l'arte meccanica futurista*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1995); Enrico Crispolti, 'Svolgimenti del futurismo', in *Gli anni Trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia*, exh. cat., 2nd rev. edn (Milan: Mazzotta, 1983), pp. 175-84.

³⁹ Decidedly ambivalent as to the quality of Di Bosso's works of the 1940s on the subject of aerial warfare, Maurizio Scudiero nevertheless concedes that the painter's recollections of his time as a war artist (see below, Chapter Four) constitute 'some of the most interesting pages' in the artist's personal history. 'Di Bosso futurista. La poetica dell'essenzialità', in Maurizio Scudiero, ed., *Di Bosso futurista*, exh. cat. (Modena: Fonte d'Abisso, 1988), pp. 13-20 (p. 18).

⁴⁰ *Futurismo a Napoli. Indagini e documenti* (Naples: Liguori, 1995), p. 221.

⁴¹ See, for instance, Enrico Crispolti and Franco Sborgi, eds, *Futurismo – I grandi temi 1909-1944*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1998), and Giovanni Lista and Ada Masoero, eds, *Futurismo 1909-2009. Velocità + Arte + Azione*, exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 2009). In 2015 two large exhibitions of Tato's aeropaintings were held in Rome and Sesto Calende, including several examples of *aeropittura di guerra* – a particularly rare and welcome occurrence. See Salvatore Ventura, ed., *Tato. Sessanta opere del Maestro dell'Aeropittura*, exh. cat. (Rome: Palombi, 2015) and Salvatore Ventura, ed., *Tato futurista. Cinquanta aeropitture in mostra nel centenario della SIAI Marchetti*, exh. cat. (Rome: Palombi, 2015).

remain tightly restricted to the inter-war period, with developments between 1940 and 1944 failing to receive focused – let alone dedicated – attention.

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the fact that this period has been seen as an unpromising area of study by those who declare the movement finished by 1916 is not surprising. Altogether more remarkable is the existence of a similar attitude on the part of figures whose work has engaged with Second Futurism in some considerable depth. To more fully account for its neglect it is therefore necessary to move away from considering mainstream art history's broad disregard for the period, and attempt to identify other, more profound and problematic, issues relating to the art and literature produced during the war years.

I.III. Ethics and Aesthetics

Futurism of the 1940s is frequently (although inaccurately) conflated with the aforementioned genre of *aeropittura di guerra* – the most emblematic examples of which tended to be characterised by aggressive depictions of aerial bombardments in a markedly more figurative style than that of almost any other Futurist art before it. Undoubtedly, this misconception has had negative consequences for the overall reception of the period. Desiring to make the movement more relevant to modern audiences, art historians have tended to stress the significance of its extra-pictorial innovations – such as those in the field of performance art – or its positive legacy for the evolution of post-war Italian abstraction.⁴² Neither of these narratives are particularly well served by aeropainting of war.

⁴² See, for example, Maurizio Calvesi, '*Informel* and Abstraction in Italian Art of the Fifties', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., pp. 289-94 (p. 290); Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 172; Renato Miracco, *Italian Abstraction 1910-1960*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 2006); Matteo Fochessati, 'In

Some have identified the existence of an inevitable correlation between what they see as the art-historical insignificance of such work and its political character. Humphreys has stated that ‘when war came in 1940, Marinetti became an unashamed apologist for the regime and Futurism degenerated into vulgar and inflammatory propaganda for the war effort’.⁴³ Berghaus has likewise concluded that ‘Futurist production of the 1940s [was] little more than Fascist war propaganda’.⁴⁴ His use of the word ‘unadulterated’⁴⁵ when describing this imagery is significant, clearly being intended to be interpreted as shorthand for ‘devoid of artistic merit’: a means of contrasting such work with earlier imagery that had managed to engage with Fascist themes without entirely losing its visual interest and commitment to formal experimentation, enabling it to transcend its practical purpose in some measure and be appreciated independently of its content. Futurist art of the 1940s, we are often told, appeared to share no such noble aspirations, having ‘degenerated’ into a jarringly conservative ‘neo-figurative’ style.⁴⁶ Scudiero, for example, has criticised Di Bosso’s aeropaintings of these years for their ‘purely documentary character’, in which Futurism’s earlier ‘plastic-dynamic discoveries’ were abandoned in favour of ‘a mannered figurative vocabulary’.⁴⁷ Even Massimo Duranti – a formidable opponent of reductive histories of Futurism – has described much of the work of this period as ‘too engaged with naturalism and a celebratory purpose’.⁴⁸ Similarly, without differentiating between the various forms it took, D’Ambrosio has spoken of Futurist literature at this time as being fatally

Astratto. Abstraction in Italy 1930-1980’, in Matteo Fochessati, ed., *In Astratto: Abstraction in Italy / Arte astratta in Italia 1930-1980*, exh. cat. (Milan: Silvana, 2012), pp. 14-30 (p. 18); Enrico Crispolti, ‘Introduzione’, in *Storia e critica del futurismo*, 2nd edn (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1987), pp. v-xxi (p. vii).

⁴³ Humphreys, *Futurism*, cit., p. 76.

⁴⁴ Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 234.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁴⁶ Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 156.

⁴⁷ ‘Di Bosso futurista’, cit., p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Dottori e l’Aeropittura. Aeropittori e aeroscultori futuristi*, exh. cat. (Florence and Siena: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996), p. 25.

‘undermined by a rhetoric lacking [...] expressive interest and potential’.⁴⁹ The general opinion would therefore seem to be that during these years the Futurists devoted themselves entirely to the production of ‘absurd’,⁵⁰ crude imagery, geared solely toward obtaining the approval of the reactionary regime to which they were ‘enslaved’.⁵¹

Such interpretations are entirely consonant with Clement Greenberg’s persuasive theories concerning the always conventional nature of political art, which he set out in a seminal essay of 1939 titled ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’.⁵² For Greenberg, a clear qualitative distinction existed between these two diametrically opposed art forms: the first emphasising those abstract formal and intellectual issues peculiar to the medium of painting, the second being characterised by easily interpreted, illusionistic-figurative imagery – a style having mass appeal due to its intellectually undemanding, yet technically impressive, nature. Observing that all art sanctioned and praised by political regimes partakes of the latter tendency, Greenberg noted how this forms part of a cynical strategy by means of which those in power ‘seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects’:

If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. [...] Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses [...] they will flatter [them] by

⁴⁹ *Futurismo a Napoli*, cit., p. 221. D’Ambrosio’s inconsistent attitude toward Futurism of the 1940s was noted earlier (p. 17, n. 6). In an email of 30 May 2014, Berghaus told me how he and D’Ambrosio had ‘very carefully sifted through this material [from the 1940s] in order to detect signs of fresh life and innovation in Futurist aesthetics’ when deciding which texts to include in an anthology of the movement’s manifestos. Berghaus went on: ‘We both agree that not much of that material could be put into the “innovative” bracket.’

⁵⁰ Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 156.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² In Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, cit., pp. 529-41.

bringing all culture down to their level. [...] Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be a danger of isolation.⁵³

Greenberg goes on:

Mussolini seems to have realized lately that it would be more useful to him to please the cultural tastes of the Italian masses than those of their masters. The masses must be provided with objects of admiration and wonder; the latter can dispense with them. And so we find Mussolini announcing a 'new Imperial style.' Marinetti, Chirico, *et al.*, are sent into the outer darkness, and the new railroad station in Rome will not be modernistic.⁵⁴

Futurism's apparent drift toward a more conservative vocabulary would generally appear to be considered as reflecting an awareness of, and an adjustment to, these contemporary political realities. The years 1937-39 had certainly proven difficult for Marinetti and his movement, as the aesthetic pluralism that had distinguished Fascism's cultural policies throughout the first decade of the *ventennio* came under increasing pressure as a direct consequence of Italy's ever-closer relationship with Nazi Germany. Appreciative of Hitler's attacks against 'degenerate' art, and eager to see the prevailing *laissez-faire* Fascist policy toward culture renounced, journalists and politicians such as Stefano Tuscano, Telesio Interlandi and Roberto Farinacci waged war against avant-garde tendencies through journals and newspapers such as *Perseo*, *Quadrivio*, *Il Tevere* and *Il Regime Fascista*.⁵⁵ According to Lista, the angry denunciation of such reactionary ideas by Marinetti's group in the late 1930s constituted 'the last noteworthy episodes of an avant-garde that was no longer able to get a grip on the realities of the time'.⁵⁶ Likewise, Berghaus states that this vicious campaign ultimately 'brought to an end a movement that had been gagged for a

⁵³ Ibid., p. 539.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 540.

⁵⁵ See below, Chapters Two, Three and Six.

⁵⁶ *Futurism* (2001), cit., p. 197.

while but nevertheless had continued to give support and to function as an essential survival aid to a large number of artists'.⁵⁷ In making such claims, Lista and Berghaus present the 'degenerate' art campaign as determining the course, character and reception of all subsequent Futurist art.

Evidently, then, Futurism of the 1940s is widely regarded as representative of 'kitsch' rather than 'avant-garde' tendencies. Its greater realism, and its appeal to popular sentiment through images of duelling aircraft and other scenes of derring-do, is considered to have been dictated entirely by political requirements, while the presumed aesthetic concessions entailed in the creation of such work have been seen as representing a betrayal or a 'negation of the creative achievements of the avant-garde'.⁵⁸ Those who subscribe to such an interpretation evidently consider it entirely justifiable that the art of these years be excluded from the history of this previously *bona fide* avant-garde movement – which is exactly what appears to have happened in most cases. Indeed, whilst still a fundamental text for English language students of the subject, Berghaus's volume *Futurism and Politics* devotes little more than one page to the relationship between Marinetti, Mussolini and their respective movements in these climactic five years, clearly considering '1940s Futurism' to be a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, the text concisely and explicitly sets out better than any other a number of objections to the art and theory of this period that can be discerned in the hostile response of many scholars and critics over the years, and which – one may surmise – underpin the reluctance of yet others to engage with it on any level whatsoever. Brief they may be, but Berghaus's reflections are greatly illuminating.

⁵⁷ *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 255.

⁵⁸ D'Ambrosio, *Futurismo a Napoli*, cit., p. 221.

Greenberg's aforementioned theories are instructive and useful for the purposes of our enquiry insofar as they articulate widely held beliefs concerning the injurious artistic compromises inevitably demanded of any aspiring 'art of the state', regardless of its specific ideological complexion. However, his arguments only help us see half of the picture. Far more serious than any criticisms based on aesthetic criteria are those objections to 1940s Futurism that are of an ethical nature, condemning the movement for its continued endorsement of Fascism in what was undoubtedly its darkest and most brutal hour. Presenting it as having completely lost its moral compass, Berghaus asserts that 'compared to [that of the preceding decade], Futurism in the 1940s was an epilogue, and one of the most unsavoury kind', noting how during these years 'the worst traits of the Futurist ideology of war, patriotism, machismo etc., which in the early phase had possessed a counterbalance in other, progressive, aspects of the movement, were now exhibited with unmitigated brutality'. If the artistic products of this period were poor, stylistically speaking, 'their content was even more objectionable', notes Berghaus – something he insists holds equally true for Futurist poetry and literature, where 'chauvinism, racism, misogyny [and] anti-Semitism abound'.⁵⁹

At least part of the problem with this period, then, would appear to be one of relativity. If Futurism's well-known support for Fascism throughout the 1920s and 1930s has been considered regrettable enough, its continued faith in the regime during the war years is seen as a bridge too far. Berghaus, for instance, has lamented the fact that 'whereas most intellectuals and artists with some sense and integrity moved across the front-line into the anti-Fascist ranks, Marinetti remained faithful to the Fascist cause right up to the last minute of his life'.⁶⁰ The Futurist leader's stubborn attitude at this time therefore prevented him – and, by extension, his

⁵⁹ *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 256. In his caption to fig. 14 – illustrating the cover of Piero Bellanova's 1940 novel *Picchiata nell'amore* – Berghaus reiterates this final point, describing the volume as 'a typically chauvinist and misogynist product of the late-Futurist period'.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

movement – from adopting a ‘position of opposition that might at least have vindicated him in the eyes of history’.⁶¹ Implicit in such criticism is an unfavourable comparison of the Futurists with artists such as Renato Guttuso or Armando Pizzinato, who had exhibited in state-sponsored shows and contributed to the regime’s journals throughout the Fascist era, but who were to become increasingly critical of Mussolini’s government following the declaration of war and, later, members of the Resistance.⁶² As Stone has noted, this ‘trajectory from collaboration or accommodation to resistance was common among Italian artists’.⁶³ For instance, Guttuso – a leading figure in Corrente and the post-war Realist movement – ‘trained under Fascism, accepted its patronage and evolved his Picasso-inspired social expressionism and his Communist politics in response to the regime’s failings and collapse’.⁶⁴ What Denis Mack Smith has stated in relation to certain post-war appraisals of Mussolini’s political judgement in 1940 could therefore equally well be applied to Marinetti and his critics: ‘Some historians argue that this was the point where, after years of skillful and beneficent government, [he] accidentally miscalculated and took the wrong road.’⁶⁵

Here then, in a nutshell, are the charges commonly levelled at Futurism of the 1940s: moral bankruptcy and the production of kitsch. The movement was judged guilty of both in damning articles written by the art critics Jonathan Jones and Philip Hensher in response to the 2005

⁶¹ Tisdall and Bozzolla, *Futurism*, cit., p. 208.

⁶² See Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 5, 9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* On the political choices of Futurist artists during the 1940s – which were in fact far more varied than is often assumed – see the ‘epilogue’ to this thesis.

⁶⁵ Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 403. Italy entered World War Two on 10 June that year.

exhibition *Futurist Skies: Italian Aeropainting* at London's Estorick Collection.⁶⁶ Like Berghaus's text, these reviews went beyond a recognition of the deleterious aesthetic implications of Futurism's pursuit of Fascist patronage to emphasise the movement's consequent moral squalor and degradation. Whilst scorn was heaped upon aeropainting in general, in keeping with the aforementioned failure of non-Italian art historians to acknowledge the significance of Second Futurism ('after the first world war, Marinetti sailed on but futurism no longer had anything to say')⁶⁷ particular opprobrium was reserved for that later imagery (ostensibly) containing a more pronounced political dimension, upon which the reviews focused. In relation to Crali's work *Nose-diving on the City*, exhibited in the artist's solo exhibition at the 1940 Venice Biennale,⁶⁸ Jones asked: 'Who [...] would have got this kind of view [...] if not the pilot of a Stuka dive-bombing an east-European city? Is there really any doubt this painting praises the dynamism of Blitzkrieg?'⁶⁹ Hensher, writing in *The Mail on Sunday*, concluded that even to have conceived of creating such an image Crali 'must have been either naïve or wicked'.⁷⁰ Quoting from Marinetti's introductory essay for the 1942 Venice Biennale catalogue, he went on to state:

⁶⁶ Jones was in fact rather more forthright in his language, describing the works on display as 'fascist crap'. 'Birds of Prey', *Arts* (supplement to *The Guardian*), 5 January 2005, pp. 12-13 (p. 12).

⁶⁷ Ibid. Jones went on to assert: 'The painters and sculptors in this show have no claim at all to be taken seriously as modern artists. Their work is mediocre, derivative, clumsily uncertain whether it wants to be abstract or figurative.'

⁶⁸ See *XXII^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte – 1940-XVIII. Catalogo*, exh. cat., 2nd edn (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1940), p. 187, no. 28.

⁶⁹ 'Birds of Prey', cit., p. 12.

⁷⁰ 'When Taste took a Dive', 9 January 2005, p. 82. In fact, although Crali admitted that the work was created in a military context, inspired by flights undertaken with members of the 42nd Fighter Squadron in Gorizia, he vehemently denied that this particular painting constituted anything other than a study of the novel perspectives seen from the cockpit of a plunging aircraft, asserting that in the post-war period 'ignorance and presumption attempted to demonise my acrobatic experiences'. *Crali futurista*, exh. cat. (Trieste: Galleria Rettori Tribbio 2, 1998), p. 29. Naturally, such claims cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Indeed, Crali's disarming forthrightness about his wartime experiences was frequently balanced by attempts to minimise Futurism's political character – as when he chose to reprint the 1940 manifesto 'Aeropainting of Bombardments' under the rather more prosaic title of 'Plastic Criteria of Aeropainting' in

I would be glad for anyone to explain to me how it differs from the aesthetic statements of Hitler from the same period, or how it could produce art of any value whatsoever. [...] What on earth does the Estorick Collection think it is doing, displaying this incredible, poisonous rubbish?⁷¹

For his part Jones concluded that such products of 'Marinetti's shameful avant garde [...] deserve to be buried and forgotten for all eternity, or at least exhibited for what they are: documents of barbarism'.⁷²

II. FROM KITSCH TO AVANT-GARDE: SOME COUNTER-OFFENSIVES

II.I. Moral Dilemmas

To defend Futurism of the 1940s against its ideological and political shortcomings is, of course, an impossible task. It is certainly not my intention to do so here; nor indeed is it *necessary* to do

the early 1970s, omitting the text's more controversial points in the process. See 'Crali. Scheda futurista 3 – Misurazioni di F. T. Marinetti', in Tullio Crali, *Crali futurista* (n. p.: n. pub., [1973]), [p. 4]. Nevertheless, the artist's claims in relation to *Nose-diving on the City* bear repeating here, given the vituperative nature of the attacks against it made by both Jones and Hensher.

⁷¹ 'When Taste took a Dive', cit. Precise points of agreement with Hitler's ideas are not specified by Hensher. Again, it is important to note here that in his introduction to the catalogue the exhibition's curator, Renato Miracco, observed that the increasingly political dimension of aeropainting gradually led it to lose its former spirit of wonder and lyricism, describing a manifesto of these years as 'demented', and lamenting the way in which the genre's 'spirit of exploration' gave way to 'the spirit of war'. 'Futurist Skies; or, The Turns, Ups and Downs of Aeropainting', in Renato Miracco, *Futurist Skies: Italian Aeropainting*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 2004), pp. 11-23 (p. 23). In so doing, Miracco paraphrased Scudiero's own assertion that during the 1940s 'the celebration of cosmic lyricism [and] of mankind's celestial supremacy became instead the celebration of instruments that brought death from the skies'. 'Di Bosso futurista', cit., p. 18.

⁷² 'Birds of Prey', cit., pp. 12, 13.

so. One surely need not condone the views of movements or individuals in order to consider them fascinating subjects for study, to acknowledge their historical, social and cultural significance, and attempt to evaluate their artistic products in as objective a manner as possible.

However, it would be inherently problematic to argue that Futurism's bellicose hymns to aerial bombardment, or dramatic images of tail-gunners strafing enemy convoys, somehow represent a perversion of the movement's original spirit, iconographical interests or political philosophy during these later years. As Maritano has observed, the theme of war was 'certainly no great novelty'⁷³ in Futurist art and literature by this point. In 1915, for instance, Carrà had stated: **'I affirm [...] that today the pictorial masterpieces and the most beautiful poems that the world has ever seen are those incessantly created by the Cannon! [...] War is a motor for art.'**⁷⁴

Indeed, World War Two merely offered Marinetti an 'opportunity to re-propose, with some modifications, the old Futurist creed'⁷⁵ – something true in both an ideological and aesthetic sense.

Pondering the opinions of those historians who speak of Mussolini's decision to go to war alongside Hitler in 1940 as something of an aberration on the part of an otherwise level-headed ruler,⁷⁶ Mack Smith points out that 'against such a view one must consider whether war was not the logical conclusion of totalitarianism and of the propaganda which taught Italians that they and the Germans constituted a mighty master race destined to inherit the earth'.⁷⁷ Similarly, one might ask, was not 1940s Futurism in many ways simply the culminating point of the

⁷³ *Futurismo in Sardegna*, cit., p. 114, n. 19.

⁷⁴ 'La Guerra e l'Arte', in Carlo Carrà, *Guerrapittura. Futurismo politico. Dinamismo plastico. Disegni guerreschi. Parole in libertà* (Milan: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1915), pp. 99-104 (pp. 100, 103); original emphasis.

⁷⁵ Maritano, *Futurismo in Sardegna*, cit., p. 114, n. 19.

⁷⁶ See above, p. 32.

⁷⁷ *Modern Italy: A Political History*, cit., p. 403.

movement's thirty-year glorification of nationalism, militarism and colonialism? Certainly, it comes as no surprise to note that all of the slogans which appeared on an invitation to a Futurist event organised in 1942 by the Udine branch of the GUF (Gruppo Universitario Fascista, or Fascist University Group) (**Fig. 1**) were lifted, word for word, from the 1913 'Futurist Political Programme': a document which had also advocated 'a cynical, astute and aggressive foreign policy', 'colonial expansion' and 'pan-Italianism'.⁷⁸

In short, an undeniable continuity exists between the movement's opening and closing phases in terms of its attitude to industrialised warfare – not only in terms of its contribution to the Futurist *estetica della macchina*, but also in relation to its ability to achieve the movement's concrete (and broadly consistent) 'high' political aspirations. Consequently, although Martin has claimed that whilst the early Futurists 'glorified war and encouraged belligerence [...] this was above all an aspect of their desire for a courageous and active creative life',⁷⁹ and Perloff has reassured concerned readers that 'by "war," Marinetti really meant revolution, the throwing off of the yoke of Church and Monarchy',⁸⁰ any attempt to 'ring-fence' the artistically decisive years of *il primo futurismo* by a recourse to solely metaphorical or idealised interpretations of Futurism's early theoretical statements concerning conflict and aggression necessitates a wilful

⁷⁸ F. T. Marinetti, and others, 'Programma politico futurista', in Luciano Caruso, ed., *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo 1909-1944*, 4 vols (Florence: SPES-Salimbeni, 1980), vol. I, no. 45.

⁷⁹ *Futurist Art and Theory*, cit., p. xxvii.

⁸⁰ 'Preface', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., [pp. 5-7] [p. 6]. Perloff's art-historical idol, Renato Poggioli (from whom she borrowed the phrase 'the futurist moment' for the title of her own aforementioned study) at least recognised the double-edged nature of Marinetti's pronouncements, stating that in them 'war is often spoken of (and not only metaphorically) as the "world's purifier."' Referring to acts of Futurist 'hooliganism', he went on to state how these 'happened more than once, and in more than words, in the course of Italy's futurist movement, particularly hard-fisted and vulgar as it was'. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, cit., pp. 28, 32. Jones has likewise been consistent in his criticisms of Futurism, acknowledging that 'there was never any doubting the overtly military and nationalist nature' of the movement ('Birds of Prey', cit., p. 12).



Fig. 1 *Futurism in Wartime* – invitation to the *serata d'arte futurista* held at Udine's Istituto Tecnico 'A. Zanon', 22 January 1942 (Cra.2.225)

misrepresentation of the facts. In every sense, whilst the movement's later phases have tended to be

ignored out of a postwar desire to maintain modernism's moral edge, to avoid ambiguity, and to create viable and strict categories of collaboration and resistance [...] Marinetti and the futurists cannot be divided into a 'good,' authentically modern, early period (pre-1914 and non-Fascist) and a 'bad' post-1922 period [...].⁸¹

In noting such continuities, my intention here is simply to enable the admittedly often challenging work produced during the movement's final period to be judged on something of a more level playing field with earlier expressions of the Futurist *estetica della guerra*: expressions that would generally seem to be considered significantly less objectionable (indeed, even 'appealing and radical',⁸² or a constituent element of Futurism's 'mystical union of art, life [and] beauty')⁸³ by the vast majority of the movement's scholars.

II.II. Formal Concerns

To discount Futurism's artistic products on a formal basis – considering the figurative tendencies alive within the visual arts at this time, for example, as evidence of increasingly retrogressive inclinations on the part of its painters – is as problematic as doing so on ideological grounds, for four principal reasons.

First, it presupposes a watertight definition of what constitutes 'genuine' Futurist painting or sculpture, despite the fact that the movement's members consistently failed – or rather, refused

⁸¹ Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 8.

⁸² R. W. Flint, 'Introduction', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 11-44 (p. 15).

⁸³ Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 248.

– to establish a house style, believing the hallmark of Futurist creativity to consist in the manifestation of a certain ‘state of mind’ rather than the employment of a particular pictorial vocabulary or artistic idiom. As Umbro Apollonio has observed, for all its programmatic statements Futurism ‘was not a formal problem’,⁸⁴ but rather a spiritual attitude for which a precise visual equivalent simply did not exist. Writing in a 1941 monograph on the artist Mario Menin, Luigi Scrivo confirmed this to be the case, characterising the authentic *stato d’animo futurista* – what one might term the ‘Futurist minimum’ – and describing the means of its expression in the least prescriptive terms imaginable:

inventive capability, originality, swift intuition, sensitivity, emotional responsiveness to the new conquests of mechanical civilisation, patriotism, courage, optimism and passion. [...] Menin, correctly, understands Futurism [...] as a movement in the broadest sense, affecting wide swathes of the populace, where each individual working in the sphere of poetry, literature and the arts can express himself *with the utmost freedom* provided that he possess at least some of the fundamental qualities noted above.⁸⁵

Crali likewise asserted that ‘the Futurists are enemies of schools and grammatical regulations; therefore, it would be nonsensical [for them] to want to establish a rule, a method. This might have been important for Cubism, but not for Futurism’.⁸⁶ Such convictions had been a consistent feature of Futurist thinking throughout the movement’s lifespan, as illustrated by a manifesto of 1919 in which ‘originality, force, vivacity, enthusiasm, clarity, simplicity, agility and synthesis’

⁸⁴ ‘I firmatari del primo manifesto futurista’, in *XXV Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo*, exh. cat. (Venice: Alfieri, 1950), pp. 55-58 (p. 55). Crispolti has similarly defined Futurism as ‘anti-formalist’ in his *Storia e critica del futurismo* (‘Introduzione’, cit., p. xviii).

⁸⁵ ‘Rapporti Mario Menin-Futurismo’, in Luigi Scrivo, *Mario Menin Camicia Nera Futurista e primo battaglista del mondo* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia’, 1941), pp. 13-16 (pp. 14-15); original emphasis (*liberissimamente*).

⁸⁶ Crali. *50 anni di aeropittura futurista*, exh. cat. (Udine: Girasole, 1979), [p. 2].

were identified as being the key attributes of the true Futurist painter.⁸⁷ Given the length and breadth of the movement – spanning more than three decades, incorporating various phases and comprising hundreds of artists, many of whom were not even born when Marinetti's founding manifesto was published⁸⁸ – Futurism cannot usefully be considered in terms of a monolithic body of aesthetic precepts by reference to which one may establish a given work's Futurist credentials. Moreover, while scholars have been quick to criticise the movement's stylistic orientation at this time they have given little indication as to what formal vocabularies they believe might have been more fruitfully or appropriately explored by Futurist painters during the 1940s. In the final analysis, if the movement's products were 'Futurist' they were so more by virtue of each artist's emotional commitment to it as an 'attitude to life'⁸⁹ than by his or her allegiance to a specific painterly vocabulary or poetic form. As the Futurist poet Ubaldo Serbo has asserted: 'We didn't [just] write Futurist poetry; *we were* Futurists.'⁹⁰

Secondly, it is once again to throw a 'cordon sanitaire'⁹¹ around early Futurist art and theory, for Marinetti would appear never to have been taken to task for exhorting his artists to create works of greater legibility during the *First World War*, despite the fact that in so doing he had not been motivated by a desire to confront the viewer with the horrific realities of industrialised conflict in as unflinching and direct a manner as possible, but rather by a visual appreciation of the hardware employed in waging modern warfare and – significantly – by a desire to transmit

⁸⁷ F. T. Marinetti, [Emilio] Settimelli and Mario Carli, 'Che cos'è il futurismo. Nozioni elementari', in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. II, no. 137.

⁸⁸ Among others: Alessandro Bruschetti (1910-80), Sante Monachesi (1910-91), Tullio Crali (1910-2000), Corrado Forlin (1912-43), Umberto Peschi (1912-92), Bruno Tano (1913-42), Mino Delle Site (1914-96) and Wladimiro Tulli (1922-2003).

⁸⁹ A view ascribed to Crali by Claudio Rebeschini. See his 'Prefazione' in Mirella Duci, ed., *Fondo Tullio Crali. Inventario* (Rovereto: Nicolodi; Mart, 2008), pp. 11-13 (p. 11).

⁹⁰ Quoted in Beatrice Buscaroli Fabbri and Alessandro Ortenzi, eds, *Futurismo. I gruppi futuristi Boccioni e Savaré*, exh. cat. (Ferrara: Edisai, 1999), p. 44; original emphasis.

⁹¹ Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 52.

the bellicose, nationalistic and interventionist messages of political Futurism to the general public in an aesthetically sophisticated yet still accessible style.⁹²

Thirdly, it is misleading to equate the ‘realism’ evident in the *aeropitture di guerra* created during these years with that technically accomplished, yet utterly bland and pedestrian brand of veristic naturalism favoured by those on the extreme right wing of Fascism, in thrall to the aesthetics of National Socialism. In fact, not only did such figurative Futurist imagery continue to explore and develop the movement’s long-standing preoccupation with concepts such as simultaneity and the painting of ‘states of mind’, it also reflected important contemporary stylistic tendencies in the hands of certain key artists, whose works contained pronounced expressionist overtones. Viewed in this light, the ‘realism’ of late Futurism is revealed to have been not so much a backward step on the part of a once proud and innovative avant-garde movement as a stylistic shift reflecting an altogether wider tendency explored by a number of other painters at this time who are generally considered to have been at the cutting edge of visual culture during Fascism’s twilight years.⁹³

Finally, to focus solely on such aspects of Futurist art during the 1940s is to glimpse only one detail of a bigger picture, as we shall see. Futurism was not *defined* by such imagery during the war years, and it is misleading to suggest otherwise. That painters such as Monachesi or Tato represented only one – albeit significant – tendency within Futurism at this time is evident from contemporary press reviews of the group’s exhibitions. The critics were, for the most part, united in drawing a sharp distinction between the relatively accessible work of these painters and that of many other, unnamed, figures whose creations were considered to be as bizarre and incomprehensible as ever. For instance, an article of 1942 observed how

⁹² See below, Chapter Four, for a further development of this argument.

⁹³ See below, Chapter Four, for a further development of this argument.

at the most recent Venice Biennale everybody admired the aeropaintings of Crali. But these were perfect works [...] in terms of their design, their composition and their colour – that is to say, works possessing precisely those merits that were lacking in the works of the other aeropainters [...].⁹⁴

In reviewing the Futurist contribution to the 1943 Quadriennale, Nicola Vernieri spoke admiringly of the work of various artists whose imagery reflected the figurative tendency within aeropainting, such as Giovanni Chetoffi, characterising his style as one ‘not entirely ensnared in the rarefied speculations or the captious illogicality of his extremist colleagues’. He concluded by admitting: ‘We gave up trying to understand the others; indeed, we confess that we left these rippling rooms feeling somewhat giddy, as when one exits the witch’s castle at a fun-fair.’⁹⁵

Further, if it is true that the creation of figurative imagery concerned with bellicose subject matter occupied much of the Futurists’ energies during the 1940s in the sphere of the visual arts, for the most part it was of questionable efficacy as outright ‘propaganda’ in the generally accepted sense of the term. Rather, in the majority of cases, the movement’s own thematic and aesthetic preoccupations continued to take precedence over the explicit communication of politically exigent content – something that cannot be said of many other artists working at this time.⁹⁶ The same is true of the movement’s literary output during these years, as Cinzia Sartini Blum has correctly pointed out:

⁹⁴ S. G., ‘L’arte moderna e i profani’, *L’Italia*, 2 April 1942 (Cra.2.307).

⁹⁵ ‘L’ala alla IV Quadriennale d’Arte’, *Le Vie dell’Aria*, 20 June 1943 (Cra.2.416).

⁹⁶ A number of Futurist works produced during these years undoubtedly *did* aspire to a more manifestly propagandising role; these are considered below in Chapter Three. Interestingly, the Futurists were conspicuous by their absence in the sphere of poster art or graphic design during this period (although see below, Chapter Three). On Fascist propaganda during the Second World War see, among others, Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda – The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1976), pp. 65–104.

When we compare [the Futurist leader's politicised texts of the 1940s] with more popular works in the so-called fascist-heroic genre, it becomes apparent that Marinetti's war literature, even at its most apologetic, cannot be labeled mere propaganda. The fascist-heroic genre built on a preexisting production of nationalistic, militaristic, and patriotic inspiration spurred on by World War I. In time, it acquired a more specifically fascist character, incorporating themes inspired by the regime's rhetoric: Mussolini's biography, enterprises and heroes of fascism, and the fight against communism or the plutocratic nations. The works that best performed the function of publicizing fascist accomplishments, ideals, and objectives were generally in novelistic form and were characterized, both stylistically and thematically, by simplicity, conventionality, and repetitiveness. These features produced an effect of familiarity and ensured easy assimilation of an unequivocal political content. Despite a (partial) recuperation of syntactic and narrative structures, Marinetti's war poems hardly conform to the parameters of this genre. [...] Such a gap does not blot out the author's political commitment and the texts' essentially fascist political content; it does, however, pose an obstacle to reductionist and dismissive critical gestures. In 1941, Marinetti broadcast a series of war poems, which elicited a shower of protests from the audience: his lyrics were qualified as 'ridiculous,' 'incomprehensible,' and 'counterproductive.'⁹⁷

One can of course identify sentiments and imagery in Futurist art and literature of the 1940s that are ideologically indefensible. But as Berghaus tacitly admits, the same can be said of Futurism in 1910, 1920 and 1930.⁹⁸ And just as with its other phases, this final chapter likewise possessed a 'counterbalance' to these more troubling expressions of the Futurist world-view, despite the fact that its existence has been ignored by the majority of art historians and critics. Futurism's continuing engagement with (and defence of) abstraction, its exploration of pioneering poetic techniques, and the multifaceted nature of its visual art all ensured that the

⁹⁷ *The Other Modernism*, cit., pp. 145-46. On Marinetti's radio broadcasts, see Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Invenzioni, avventure e passioni di un rivoluzionario* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010), pp. 257-58, and Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., pp. 286-88.

⁹⁸ See above, p. 31.

movement remained a vibrant, rounded and dynamic cultural force during this dark, tumultuous period, despite everything.

II.III. Toward a Definition of *Terzo Futurismo*?

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, one might go even further than this. As that stable world from which the Futurists had drawn inspiration throughout the inter-war years began to give way to a turbulent period of flux and upheaval following Italy's declaration of war – ultimately collapsing under the weight of catastrophic military defeat – the movement would appear to have rediscovered a truly 'futurist' impulse within itself, something manifested particularly vividly in the realm of poetry and literature around 1943. No longer focusing solely on motifs drawn from the contemporary environment, or literary idioms inspired by it, the true ambition of certain poets and artists at this time was instead to divine the lineaments of the society that would soon take its place, and to anticipate the linguistic and cultural needs of that very different, yet 'very beautiful day after tomorrow'⁹⁹ that Marinetti repeatedly assured his daughters would emerge from the ashes and chaos of the Second World War. Far from representing the nadir of Futurist avant-gardism, then, this period of crisis actually appears to have offered a means of overcoming that 'presentism' which could be said to have hamstrung the movement somewhat during the inter-war years, bringing about a rediscovery of what Perloff has identified – correctly, I believe – as Futurism's fundamental *raison d'être*: that of providing 'a vision of a possible future'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Un bellissimo dopodomani*: a phrase recalled by Vittoria Marinetti in an interview with the artist Luca Buvoli, which he subsequently used as the title for a video installation shown at the Venice Biennale in 2007. See www.lucabuvoli.com/html/biennale/Biennial_Vid_C.html [accessed 17 September 2013].

¹⁰⁰ *The Futurist Moment*, cit., p. xxvi.

Indeed, Poggioli's characterisation of the futurist sensibility¹⁰¹ as one in which 'the present [is] subordinated to the future'¹⁰² perfectly sums up the spirit of these final two years. On this basis – as well as in terms of the movement's renewed focus on the fine arts, its reviving political fortunes and its distinctive revision of the prevailing *estetica della guerra* – one might legitimately talk of the 1940s as representing a 'Third Futurism'. Never having achieved the currency or consensus of *secondo futurismo*, this term has been used in reference to both a somewhat nebulously defined 'last phase' and an (in fact non-existent) post-war period of continuity. Scudiero has applied the term in the former sense – although without assigning any specific characteristics to the art produced during this phase, or even identifying its precise temporal span¹⁰³ – while José Pierre has instead referred to a 'third version of Futurism' which failed to materialise since 'it was soon abundantly clear that the second version suffered greatly because its Fascist context prevented its ever achieving the drive and passion of Boccioni and Carrà, the unbridled lyricism of Severini or the boundless dream-world of Russolo'.¹⁰⁴ However, as I hope to illustrate, *terzo futurismo* should in fact not be considered either an anticlimactic hangover from what had come before, or an abortive attempt to reboot a depoliticised version of the movement, but rather a wartime phase of artistic activity possessing a characteristic physiognomy and worth all its own.

¹⁰¹ For Poggioli, Marinetti's movement 'was only a significant symptom of a broader and deeper state of mind' shared by many other early twentieth-century avant-garde associations. See his *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, cit., pp. 68-74 (p. 69).

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰³ Scudiero's vagueness on this point would appear to be a consequence of his ambivalence regarding the ultimate worth of such distinctions. 'Di Bosso futurista', cit., p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Futurism and Dadaism* (London: Heron, 1969), p. 51.