

F. T. Marinetti's Vocalizations

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It was a matter of astonishment what Marinetti could do with his unaided voice. He certainly made an extraordinary amount of noise.
Wyndham Lewis¹

Language is the primary and ultimate structure of madness.
Michel Foucault²

For the Italian Futurists and their admirers, portraiture posed a difficult, but crucial challenge since, even as many artists adopted radical forms of visual representation to disrupt traditional techniques and pictorial categories, it remained (and remains) rooted in capturing the likenesses of individuals, individual personae, or general social types, such as poets, pilots, or peddlers. No matter how inventive or subversive their methods, early twentieth-century avant-garde artists typically reaffirmed the constitutive principle of portraiture: to establish correspondence—whether naturalistic, approximated, idealized, or even metaphorical—between an image, on the one hand, and a person, persona, or social type on the other.³ Such correspondence may derive from a sitter's observable qualities, including facial features or idiosyncratic behaviors, but it also may depend on the symbols of a person's vocation, stature, or beliefs, as well as on his or her clothing, setting, or other contextual factors. For Italian Futurism, a central concern when addressing portraiture—not just the act of representing, but also of being represented—involved creatively interpreting the underlying structure of what abstract meanings correspond to which concrete visual referents. By focusing on representations of the larger-than-life founder of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, this text explores how different pictorial and linguistic solutions seized upon distinct aspects of this man and his persona, even though at times these solutions magnified or even contradicted his literary contributions. Just as the best portraits are not necessarily the most naturalistic, but instead most adeptly stage the revelation of character,⁴ the Italian Futurists aimed—as much as any other aspect of their idea to modernize art and society—to embody and signify modern character. Within this context of staging, Marinetti's

¹ Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 33.

² Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 237.

³ Dadaist artists Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia played deftly with the notion of visual correspondence that carries the deeply engrained idea that portraits or figures should capture the essence of a person, persona, or social type. In effect, their mechanomorphic ripostes to conventional portraiture leverage these entrenched views, which become constitutive through intentional repression. The Cubist Pablo Picasso typically set caricatural emblems of persons/personae within more complicated figural contours, thus dissolving clear delineations between the figure and its ground.

⁴ Ernst Gombrich observed: "The correct portrait, like the useful map, is an end product on a long road through schema and correction. It is not a faithful record of visual experience, but the faithful construction of a relational model." E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), 90.

portraits offer a valuable glimpse of underlying tensions or outright contradictions related to this Futurist aim, such as how this dominant, and domineering, figure came to signify disparate anarchical tendencies within the movement at large and to overshadow the artistic achievements of others, as well as how early Futurism's popular success in Italy may have played a role in hastening an authoritarian return to political and ideological traditions, in spite of its antitraditionalist ideas and practices.⁵

Beginning with his February 1909 announcement of the launch of Italian Futurism on the front page of the Parisian daily *Le Figaro*, Marinetti was the face and voice of Italian Futurism, and he remained so until his death in December 1944. Even by 1909, he had become a well-traveled, widely read author, editor, and publisher, who would quickly establish himself as a cultural entrepreneur of the first order. He soon committed himself to a vision of Italo-centric avant-gardism that became integrated into a widening international circuit of intellectuals, artists, and cultural and political figures, which attracted large audiences in Italy and abroad, whether out of fascination, sympathy, or disgust.⁶ Alongside his activities as the director of Futurism, prompting voluminous personal correspondence, he penned an astonishing number and variety of published texts, including manifestos, poems, plays, novels, memoirs, and prefaces to books by authors he championed. Despite inconsistencies related to the frequency and quality of his contributions across his thirty-five years as a Futurist, Marinetti's enduring literary legacy primarily rests with two parallel projects: first, the exploration of the manifesto as a highly adaptable genre mixing firsthand reportage, promotional jargon, and programmatic lists of principles or positions, and second, his advocacy for the technique of free-word composition, leading to an expanded mode of oration, as well as typographical innovations.⁷ Beyond the world of letters, he introduced art-action, a central and influential idea underlying Futurist activities, which fused radical cultural activities with an overtly political program. For instance, their events combined literary, theatrical, musical, and plastic arts with highly politicized content, or included public demonstrations and political parades, at times resulting in the participants' arrest.

⁵ While the relationship between Futurism and Fascism will be discussed later in this text, this preliminary characterization pertains to artistic strategies used by the Futurists to serve the ends of a disruptive and revolutionary program (such as sharply worded manifestos, raucous public demonstrations, and images of energetic social and bodily activity), the success and popularity of which influenced the manner in which other social and political groups asserted their radical ideas. Likewise, the domineering figure of Marinetti became a unifying, patriarchal force for diverse, disparate artistic aims, which has a close historical analogy to the emergence of Mussolini within the fragmentary socialist circles of pre- and post-World War I Italy.

⁶ A recent exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum titled *Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe* (Feb. 21–Sept. 12, 2014) included an informative overview of the movement, including several portraits of Marinetti. This exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, containing several texts on the art program and performances of Futurism and the political and historical context of early twentieth-century Italy, especially the movement's relation to Fascism, as well as on Marinetti's own literary contributions. See Vivien Greene, ed., *Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2014). On the popularity and legacy of the figure of Marinetti, see the chapter "Il personaggio" in Sabrina Carollo, *I futuristi* (Florence: Giunti, 2004), 73–78.

⁷ Futurist free-word poetry (parole-in-libertà) was an updated version of the free-verse principles espoused by Gustave Kahn, who Marinetti met while living in Paris in the 1890s. See Gustave Kahn, *Premiers Poèmes avec une préface sur le vers libre* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1897). As early as 1901, Marinetti expressed his intent to expand on the free-verse principle to found "a style, where the unity of the book disintegrates in order to open up the freedom of the page; where the unity of page [disintegrates] to give space to the freedom of the sentence; where the unity of the sentence disintegrates to give room to the freedom of the word." F. T. Marinetti, "Mascagni contra Wagner," *La Plume* 284 (Feb. 15, 1901); 128; cited in translation in Günter Berghaus, *The Genesis of Futurism: Marinetti's Early Career and Writings, 1899–1909* (Philadelphia: Maney, 1995), 7.

His presence at the Italian Nationalist Association Congress in 1910 (and perhaps in 1912 as well) and his close acquaintance with Benito Mussolini indicate that, even outside the cultural sphere, Marinetti was instrumental in the development of a style of participatory engagement that the Italian Fascists would mobilize and extend with military precision under the banner of mass collective agency.⁸

Marinetti's life, work, and personality generated ample material for his portraitists who, in addition to interpreting the concept of likeness in a suitably Futurist manner, emphasized specific aspects of Marinetti's personality and his accomplishments in their efforts to create an acceptable image of the man. This challenge would have been made all the more difficult given their subject's role as the main gatekeeper for Futurist projects and styles. Any given portraitist would need to select from among the multiple, noteworthy aspects of Marinetti's person or persona: his centrality to the founding and daily activities of Futurism, including his role as its chief financier and its main arbiter of artistic merit; his artistic achievement as a multifaceted writer; his efforts as a publisher and promoter of others' artistic works and statements; his persona as a sociocultural agitator; his skill as an orator; and his vociferous identification with and support for a united and strengthened Italy.⁹ Whether the maker was a Futurist hardly changed the nature of the representational problem: to depict the "father of Futurism" meant paying homage to a man who inspired others to think beyond traditional approaches, while synthesizing his overarching spirit, especially in relation to the ambitious reach of the movement. Stylistically and symbolically, images of Marinetti struggle with the task—no doubt counterintuitive to some—of monumentalizing this modernist and resolutely anticlassical figure. Given that each picture of Marinetti addresses specific facets of his life and character, and that each artist brings a different repertoire of visual strategies and abilities, each finished portrait uniquely coordinates distinct registers of visual meaning, while yielding subtly different ideological valences.

Among the portraits of Marinetti, those from the years leading up to World War I by Futurist Carlo Carrà most strongly suggest a productive writer. A well-known portrait from circa 1911–15 depicts Marinetti hunched over a desk writing—with his brow knitted, his lips clasp a cigarette, and his eyes burning with deranged intensity, as his right hand presses an inked nib to the page.¹⁰ As if catching him amid a flurry of intellectual or poetic outpouring, the image conveys folk simplicity: disconnected dabs of pigment join roughly wiped or scraped passages to

⁸ Based on their correspondence, Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni were likely in Rome during the Second Congress of the Italian Nationalist Association, December 20–22, 1912. It follows that, given Marinetti's close acquaintance with prominent members of the Italian Nationalist Party, both men would have attended the conference. Also, in late 1918, Marinetti joined political forces with the war veteran group the Arditi ("Daring Ones") to form the Futurist Political Party (an immediate forerunner of the Fascist Party), and would later form alliances with Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party in 1919 and 1920. Mussolini credited Futurism with being an important inspiration for Italian Fascism. Despite political differences that made ongoing collaboration untenable, Marinetti and Mussolini would remain closely allied until late 1944.

⁹ For a recent exhibition and publication chronicling Marinetti's widespread cultural and political influence, see the exhibition catalogue *F. T. Marinetti=Futurismo*, ed. Luigi Sansone (Milan: Fondazione Stelline and Federico Motta Editore, 2006).

¹⁰ Precise dating of this painting is complicated by the fact that the version exhibited in February 1912 did not contain features found in the present work, including an inscription on a page represented in the image, added circa 1915 at the request of Marinetti for the new owner of the painting Marchesa Casati. See Fabio Benzi, "Luisa Casati e il futurismo: Una musa per la modernità," in *La divina marchese: Arte e vita di Luisa Casati dalla Belle Époque agli Anni Folli*, ed. Gioia Mori (Venice: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, 2014), 97–98. The inscription translated into English by the author reads: "I give my portrait/painted by Carrà/to the great futurist/Marchesa Casati/to her slow eyes/of [the] jaguar digesting in the sun/the devoured steel cage/Marinetti."

inform a textural atmosphere lacking in mathematical precision. Traversing this figure are geometrical lines, some of which form a sheet of orange marks that expand like glowing embers across the painting's surface. Perhaps to underscore his disciplinary focus, a similar orange hue outlines the two curvilinear clocks above and behind him, each of them similarly transected by rectilinear angles. These chromatic and geometrical impulses suggest a vividly generative space around the darkened silhouette. Marinetti appears to be calmly exploring the murky reaches of his poetic imagination.



Fig. 1. Carlo Carrà, *Portrait of Marinetti*, 1914, ink, watercolor, gouache, and collage on paper, 21 7/8 x 15 7/8 in. (55.6 x 40.3 cm), Milwaukee Art Museum. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).

A less well-known collage titled *Portrait of Marinetti* by Carrà from 1914 (fig. 1) mimics the logic of the earlier portrait, but its lighter palette largely stems from fragments of newspaper and journal clippings pasted to the picture surface alongside volumetric contour lines that simulate a tourbillion of verbiage enclosing the figure. Although Carrà employed an idea reminiscent of the other painting—with the irregular orange ledger hovering in the foreground—this alternate rendition maintains a clearer association with the process and products of writing. In this image, the Futurist leader has become obscured by a profusion of texts emitted by his pen, a visually subtle meditation on the power of his writings to mold others' perceptions of him. The expanding spiral logic of this work reproduces and modulates the visual structure of what is arguably Carrà's best-known work, from this same year, *Interventionist Demonstration: Patriotic Holiday* (1914). The turbulent forces unleashed by Marinetti (and his pen) resemble the stimuli circulating in and through the Italian urban space of this work, stimuli that likewise correspond with various types of notation. If this juxtaposition of expanding forms unexpectedly reimagines the evanescent, but mute Marinetti in relation to metropolitan commotion, this correlation extends to the images' comparable intensity and inscriptive excess, which take shape

around a calm, impassive core. The words of the Futurist leader often had the power to stir crowds.

Among the countless drawn, painted, photographic, and sculptural images depicting Marinetti throughout his life, most are caricatures in which his visage, head, or full figure follows a rudimentary schematization and emphasizes features that are more often than not juxtaposed with his trademark bow-tie: his mouth closed or agape, a trimmed mustache, bulging eyes, or a rounded, smooth pate. This group includes some especially notable examples employing caricatural visual simplicity: brothers Francesco and Pasqualino Cangiullo's 1917 word-image *Marinetti Wounded, Free-Word Portrait* depicts an alien-looking creature composed from capitalized (and colorized) letters jousting for territory on the page, according to a distended pictorial logic that gives way to subtle, textual circumstances; a frightening portrait by Leo Longanesi from 1922 (fig. 2) projects a single, haunting eye within a strangely disarticulated head-qua-stump with its chin raised in defiance; a larger, but no less caricatural oil painting from 1925 by Enrico Prampolini (fig. 3) formulates a ferociously mechanized Marinetti-construct with machinelike mouth, as if to deliver verbal ballistics; and Oswaldo Bot's 1929 ink rendering (fig. 4) of the Futurist's head with a riveted jawline, again raised defiantly, amid a lyrical patchwork of interlocking patterns and lettering haphazardly spelling his name. The outsized personality of Marinetti emerged, in part, from these multifarious projections.



Fig. 2. Leo Longanesi, *Portrait of F. T. Marinetti*, 1922.



Fig. 3. Enrico Prampolini, *Portrait of F. T. Marinetti (Plastic Synthesis)*, 1925, oil on canvas, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.



Fig. 4. Oswaldo Bot (born Osvaldo Barbieri, also known as Barbieri Oswaldo Terrible or simply BOT),
F. T. Marinetti, 1929, India ink on paper.

Among these somewhat cartoonish depictions, Fortunato Depero's magnificent 1924 painting (visible in fig. 5) of Marinetti as a mythopoeic orator stands apart. The portrait constitutes a kind of apotheosis within Depero's idiosyncratic repertoire of puppetlike animals enacting panvitalistic scenes on modernist stage sets. A monumentalized, hypermasculine Marinetti single-handedly harnesses and redirects energetic forces for the cause of Italo-centric modernity.¹¹ While graphically transcribed vocalizations merge with stylized lightning gathering Zeus-like around his head, his right arm tapers to an emphatic point.¹² Set against a creased blue sky and towering above patriotic terra firma, this semideified Futurist carries an Italian flag in his coat pocket, as the swirling national colors of Italy envelope him like celebratory bunting. Signaling Marinetti's gestural and oratory prowess, this iconic image embodies the Futurist ethos of demonstrative art-action, but such an incarnation of irrepensible political forces is delivered using a conciliatory palette—particularly a strategic substitution for the flag's brilliant red with a softened range of cerise, salmon, or rose—which offers a playfully chromatic variation that contrasts with the figure's aggressive attitude.

¹¹ Depero's menagerie of diverse creatures within the same congested environment have a literary correlate in scenes from Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste: romain africain* [Mafarka the Futurist: African Novel] (Paris: E. Sansot, 1909) and *Gli indomabili* [The Untameables] (Piacenza: Ed. Futuriste di 'Poesia,' 1922), in which separate classes (or races) of people are assigned different tasks within fairytale worlds of carnal desires and exaggerated conflict. The theatricality of Depero's work conveys light-hearted and comedic qualities, which can seem discordant with more aggressive, even authoritarian aspects of Futurism.

¹² Other notable images of Marinetti by Depero include: a three-color printed double-portrait of the poet as a predatory figure, rising Phoenix-like amid a patterned motif of jagged, colored shapes which swathe this modern creature with an ornithological plumage; and a manipulated photographic portrait, in which hand-drawn lightning bolts gather around his balding cranial precipice, as words and other energetic matter are propelled from his orifices.



Fig. 5. F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 1932, Rome (in front of Fortunato Depero's *Stormy Patriotic Marinetti: Psychological Portrait*, 1924), black and white photograph, Marinetti Papers, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).



Fig. 6. F. T. Marinetti speaking in Buenos Aires, August 1936, black and white photograph, Marinetti Papers, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).

The Depero image of 1924 maintains a privileged place among the myriad portraits of the Futurist, in part because, alongside Marinetti's reputation for literary works that he authored, edited, or published, he was well known as an astonishing orator.¹³ If, as he entered the stage in a dark suit with a bow tie, the audience might mistake him for a conventional speaker or soloist, he would proceed to cajole, startle, and provoke assembled crowds with his free-word texts rendered as forceful barrages of words and sounds (fig. 6). His booming voice with swooping,

¹³ Prior to his Futurist years, Marinetti won a major literary contest in 1898 (judged by Gustav Kahn) for his poem written in French. See Berghaus, *The Genesis of Futurism*, 6, 16, 36, 73. He also received attention early on for his oration of his Symbolist-inspired poems conveyed by images of him at poetry recitals; see *ibid.*, 35 fig. 5 (an unattributed photograph captioned "Marinetti as a declaimer of Symbolist poetry, c. 1902") and 65 fig. 11 (a hand-drawn illustration by N. Musini captioned "Marinetti [...] receives the Poet's Laurels at a literary convention in Teatro Regio of Parma, 1906").

onomatopoeic modulations would, at times, become shrill with siren-like glissandi and would, at other times, employ staccato phrasing or machinelike repetitions. Through these assaults on his listeners, which predated the widespread use of electronic microphones, this poet-novelist-orator generated sonic forces that framed a radically embodied appeal to the transformative potential of modernity: his vocalizations manifested those qualities associated with a Futurist sensibility—excitement, danger, speed, and improvisation—which often corresponded thematically with his first-person accounts of military conflict.¹⁴ Recalling his initial astonishment at (but hostility to) Marinetti’s aggressive verbalization, the British artist and writer Wyndham Lewis found sardonic comparison with his own military service during World War I: “My equanimity when first subjected to the sounds of mass-bombardment in Flanders was possibly due to my marinettian preparation—it seemed ‘all quiet’ to me in fact, by comparison.”¹⁵ At the same time that Marinetti’s unsettling oration had irked Lewis in London, the sheer ferocity exhibited during such vocal demonstrations gave Marinetti the reputation of a provocateur—such that, through this auditory intensity, the shocks of life under modern conditions could be made more experiential, if not necessarily more comprehensible.¹⁶

Considering the Futurist’s legendary ability to fill spaces with his voice, it is curious that some of the more interesting photographic portraits of him are those that stage a seeming lack of audibility. With a healthy dose of irony, for instance, Marinetti poses (ca. 1933) in profile in front of the Great Sphinx of Giza (fig. 7), playfully imitating a symbol of muteness, which had already become synonymous with inscrutability due to the lack of material evidence related to its origin or fabrication.¹⁷ In Egypt, where he was born, spent his childhood, and set several fictional narratives, the author stands mutely immobile, in contrast to his international reputation as an aggressively outspoken personality; his participation in this humorous setup may indicate his begrudging acknowledgement of his own mortality. Another notable posed photograph catches Marinetti standing tight-lipped at the Turin Book Fair in 1934 (fig. 8), holding a copy of his *Poemi Simultanei Futuristi* (1933).¹⁸ The poet’s playful inaudibility is again highlighted: the book—held away from his body, at the level of his head, and with the words on the cover plainly

¹⁴ The Futurist sensibility is outlined by Marinetti in “Destruction of Syntax,” among other texts. His poems chronicling his experiences of war include “The Battle of Adrianople” (1912), “Battle Weight + Smell” (1912), and “Bombardment” (1913).

¹⁵ Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 33. This statement is preceded by his expression of surprise: “It was a matter of astonishment what Marinetti could do with his unaided voice. He certainly made an extraordinary amount of noise.”

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin developed the idea that avant-garde practices functioned as anesthetic for viewers or audiences by preparing them more adequately for modern life. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (version 2; early 1936), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935–38*, ed. Howard Eliand and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2002), 101–33, especially 117–20. The correlation between aesthetics and anesthetics in Benjamin’s work is also investigated in Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October* 62 (Autumn 1992); 3–41. According to Laurence Senelick, Marinetti’s radical provocation came at a time when theatrical audiences were increasingly expected to repress their visible and audible responses to performed works. See Laurence Senelick, “Text and Violence: Performance Practices of the Modernist Avant-Garde,” in *Contours of Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality*, ed. James M. Harding (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 15–42.

¹⁷ The image is part of the Marinetti Papers (box 50, folder 1950, no. 206) at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

¹⁸ Marinetti, *Poemi Simultanei Futuristi* [Simultaneous Futurist Poems] (La Spezia: Edizioni di Casa d’Arte, 1933). A print of the original negative resides in the Marinetti Papers (box 50, folder 1952, no. 221) at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

legible—occupies the place of a nonverbal gesture for stopping or silencing (i.e., a vertical hand at mouth level), and at the same time it substitutes a visual imprint of language for any spoken content (i.e., a written command that usurps the role of the voice). As if to demonstrate heightened awareness of the muteness of this photographic medium, these emphatic indications of auditory absence by the Futurist become all the more amusing; the images and posed figures within them draw attention to an obdurate materiality that contrasts with, and counteracts, the animating force of his voice.¹⁹ The mute figures are intentionally subjected, or subjecting themselves, to an alternate time signature—inert, material stillness.



Fig. 7. F. T. Marinetti in Egypt, ca. 1933, black and white photograph, Marinetti Papers, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).



Fig. 8. F. T. Marinetti at Turin Book Fair, 1934, black and white photograph, Marinetti Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).

¹⁹ Other photographic portraits of Marinetti during oratory forcefully contradict such amusingly staged muteness. One example is a multiple exposure (fig. 10) circa 1930 by Elio Luxardo to be discussed later with respect to the logic of an aggressive, media-savvy masculinity in Italian Fascism.

While many portraits of Marinetti emphasize his abilities as orator, excepting those photographs that lightheartedly inscribe muteness, his ongoing experimentation with typography and other graphic dimensions in his printed texts—as another mode of inert materiality on the page—underscores an auditory dimension that figuratively enlivens his texts. Marinetti adopted a style of visual representation (i.e., typography) that indexed and symbolized auditory stimulation (i.e., phonetics), both processes which were, at times, rerouted through the performer’s body as cacophonous vocalization.²⁰ Even as the written and spoken forms of language typically externalize internal linguistic processes, they also share, within the scope of Marinetti’s writings, a similar aim to disrupt the normativity of language. His disruptive methods intentionally induced a type of linguistic madness (as suggested in this text’s epigraph), a mind-body disordering, which can be difficult to summarize because it operates across the authorial and performative dimensions of his work and across the varied genres of his literary output—primarily in his poetry and manifestoes, but also evident in his novels and plays. Prominent literary historian Marjorie Perloff characterizes Marinetti’s mode of parataxis (i.e., the juxtaposition of short phrases or sentences without conjunction or transition), while art historian Christine Poggi draws attention to an abundant use of analogy and onomatopoeia.²¹ Alongside parataxis, hyper-analogization, and onomatopoeia, the literary devices and tactics employed also include (but are not limited to): accumulation, catachresis, heteroglossia, hyperbole, non sequitur, neologism, panvitalism, phonetic exaggeration and repetition, rejection of standard punctuation, as well as experimental orthography and typography. This dizzying confection of radical linguistic and paralinguistic techniques amounts to a sustained assault on the formal rules governing the use of language. Marinetti’s anarchical refutation of syntactical cohesion and semantic coherence were likely intended to counteract the well-constructed, well-reasoned language that underpins and inscribes traditional social and political ordering. Upsetting these syntactic and semantic functions could produce textual and auditory disruptions that might ultimately lead to social discord and even political disorder.

As part of this linguistic and performative method, Marinetti seized upon the phonetic and graphic dimensions of language as a means to challenge well-policed syntactic and semantic functionality.²² An explanation of normative linguistic processes can help to frame the nature and extent of this disruption. In the normative, real-time processes by which a person formulates and then articulates a spoken or written utterance, the proto-linguistic impulse (or message) triggers an abstract syntactical framework and simultaneously activates networks of semantically related words.²³ These syntactical and semantic processes work in parallel to form a conceptual engine,

²⁰ When these written works return to audibility during declamation, the body of the orator can be rendered irrational, uncontrollable, or “mad” through the aggressive, dislocated vocal repetition and exaggerated prosody. Marinetti introduces the concept of body-madness (*fisico-follia*) in “The Variety Theater” (September 1913), reprinted in translation in F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günther Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 190.

²¹ Marjorie Perloff, “‘Grammar in Use’: Wittgenstein/Gertrude Stein/Marinetti,” *South Central Review* 13, no. 2–3 (Summer–Fall 1996); <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3190371>. Christine Poggi, “Marinetti’s Parole in Libertà and the Futurist Collage Aesthetic,” in *The Futurist Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).

²² His verbal attacks on syntax can be found, among other texts, in “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” (May 1912) and “Destruction of Syntax—Untrammelled Imagination—Words-in-Freedom” (May–June 1913), in translation in F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 107–19 and 120–31, respectively.

²³ This basic synopsis of real-time language processes, as well as what follows, was informed by the work of Merrill Garrett; see Merrill F. Garrett, “Processes in Language Production” in *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey: Vol. 3, Language: Psychological and Biological Aspects*, ed. Frederick J. Newmeyer, 69–96 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). I’m grateful to the late Marco Haverkort for bringing this research to my attention.

which typically follows schematic forms associated with sense or logic—for instance, the rules of grammar. Under the supervision of this conceptual structure, a person selects specific words and phrases to fill a preliminary framework, which further entails the mobilization of motor routines associated with physiological elements of speech (i.e., phonemes) or physical inscriptions (i.e., graphemes), or both. Constructing grammatically correct sentences requires precisely timed sequences of mental activities. In effect, Marinetti corrupted this normative progression by inverting the usual temporal sequences by which syntax and grammar precede the routines associated with producing spoken or written forms. Arriving much earlier than expected, the phonetic and graphemic (and later typographic) elements in his texts exert undo influence over the organizational framework of the utterances. As his words and sounds (and scripts) generate their own automatic, anarchical strings of text, the syntactic and semantic functions become overwhelmed and incapacitated—and, amid the disruptive chaos, the material manifestations of speech and writing essentially reject their presumptive role as mere functionaries for higher-level governance. This inversion of linguistic functions and authority amounts to the harnessing of aberrant forces for the purpose of destabilizing the prevailing psychosocial order. By re-creating a microcosm of the avant-garde disruption Marinetti inaugurated in 1909, these free-word compositions and performances posed a direct challenge to the traditional or classicist paradigms of linguistic order and literary canon.

By flooding the conceptual engine of language with disorderly phonemes and graphemes, Marinetti found another domain for his ideas of words-in-freedom (*parole-in-libertà*) and art-action—within real-time language processes. He implemented an anarchical procedure for the production of strings of sounds and distended or conjoined lexical forms. If linguistic processes cannot be precisely distinguishable from the complex psychosocial systems associated with subjectivity, the linguistic disruptions Marinetti generated may be taken to be part of an attack on the isolated, rational speaker or writer, an attack that he memorably termed the “death of the literary ‘I.’”²⁴ As such, these linguistic maneuvers mark a shift away from the thinking, morally responsible subject (closely associated with Enlightenment philosophy) toward a dispersed or distributed model of subjectivity that seeks to diffuse individual responsibility within an adaptable, elusive framework that the Futurists had correlated with modern collective agencies.²⁵ Since many of Marinetti’s fragmented prose-poems revolve around the subject matter of military battle, his assault on textual normativity is doubly inscribed: anarchical phonetic, graphemic, and typographic elements are joined by the themes of conflict and destruction. In *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914) and *Guerra, sola igiene del mondo* [*War, the World’s Only Hygiene*](1915), for example, warfare functions as a model for sensory overload (i.e., shock) in which disordered subjects may become better acclimated to, and can even thrive amid, the disruption and chaos rendered

²⁴ Marinetti, “Destruction of Syntax,” 125. The same idea is mentioned in “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature,” 110.

²⁵ Luigi Ballerini observes that Marinetti’s language, which often lacks traditional syntax, is open to diverse interpretations and thus fits with an idea of democratic leveling: “The Futurists, who were among the first avant-garde artists to see no obligatory connection between communication and information, did not construe this form of entropy as a negative condition. They regarded it as a truly democratic emancipation not only of lexicon, but of all actual and potential signifiers (linguistic and otherwise).” Luigi Ballerini, “Italy and/or Marinetti: From Alexandria to Vittorio Veneto,” in *The Untameables*, 25. Alongside this lexical and syntactical foment, individual agency is challenged by and then subsumed within diversely formulated ideas of collectivity in visual and textual works by Carlo Carrà and Umberto Boccioni.

typographically.²⁶ These revitalized creatures may no longer fear the forces of industrial modernity or a debilitating sense of self-doubt, but rather they can embrace (with equal parts parody and tragedy) the disorienting and destructive conditions, and then even urge the process to accelerate and to affect more profound social changes.²⁷ If, as this text argues, these disruptions might be framed as part of the wider Futurist project to rethink the self-satisfied bourgeois subject according to discordant principles, it is ironic that a predominant mode of Italian Futurist imagery are caricatural portraits that had the effect of simplifying and reifying the creative activities associated with certain individuals—none more so than images of Marinetti.

When the portraits of Marinetti refer to his oratory or poetry, the understandably difficult problem of visualizing his linguistic innovations led artists to adopt caricatural forms, which resonated within a media-savvy approach appealing to a mass audience, but which also contradicted thematic and stylistic aspects of his written works. By depicting voice and sonic production as an individualized process, the caricatural images of him undermine the author's stated program to mobilize words-in-freedom to disperse a Romantic egocentric subjectivity (or literary "I"). Most of the imagery depicting Marinetti comprises easily recognizable caricatures that emphasize his dynamic, aggressive personality, as an easily identifiable embodiment of demonstrative art-action. Of course, this imagery is consistent with the wild antics of the early Futurist years, including the widespread distribution of propagandistic texts; notwithstanding the sophisticated critique embedded within his literary process and performances, the name Marinetti became synonymous with a domineering, hypermasculine personality that imposed a modern sensibility on audiences by force. Such images cast a long shadow across Futurism to the detriment of those visual, sonic, or literary works that departed from the founder's strident and bellicose rhetoric.²⁸ The monumentalized personality of Marinetti dominated the Futurist program to the extent of eliding important differences of intent and implementation by Marinetti as well as others within the movement.

²⁶ Parts of *Zang Tumb Tumb* were published separately in French in 1911 and 1912; it first appeared as a single collection in Italian in 1914. Alternate titles are *Zong Toomb Toomb*, *Zang Toumb Toumb*, and *Zang Tumb Tuuum*. This book of poems includes "The Battle of Adrianople" (1912), "Battle Weight + Smell" (1912), and "Bombardment" (1913), among others. Other notable free-word printed works on the subject of war include "After the Marne, Joffre toured the front by car" (1915) and "At night lying in bed, she rereads the letter from her gunner at the front" (1919), both reprinted in Italian and English in Marinetti, *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, ed. Luce Marinetti, trans. Elizabeth R. Napier and Barbara R. Studholme (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). Also see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "On *Zang Tumb Tuuum*" in Greene, *Italian Futurism*, 156–58.

²⁷ Emilio Gentile succinctly described this position as "the conquest of modernity." See Gentile, "The Conquest of Modernity: From Modernist Nationalism to Fascism" in *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

²⁸ Assorted visual works capture less aggressive phenomena such as cosmic relationality (Gino Severini's *Spherical Expansion of Light* series), chromatic patterning (Giacomo Balla's *Iridescent Interpenetration* works), and atmospheric conditions around objects and figures (Umberto Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space* sculpture and his *Dynamism of a Human Body* series).



Fig. 9. Orlando Italo Griselli, *Portrait of F. T. Marinetti*, 1914, oil on canvas, 22.4 x 28.4 in. (57 x 72 cm), Minerva Auctions, Rome.

Unlike the caricatural portraits of Marinetti, which assume the force of visual commands, a distinctive, but enigmatic portrait from 1914 (fig. 9) by the Italian artist Orlando Italo Griselli envisions an alternate set of psychosocial associations. Living in Moscow at the time, Griselli created this strange image titled *Portrait of F. T. Marinetti* during Marinetti's three-week visit to Russia for conferences related to the Italian translation from French of *Zang Tumb Tumb*. While the painting's title implies portraiture, a loose configuration of minimal human features can be only vaguely discerned in the upper right quadrant: a solitary eye floats across a nebulous brown pool adjacent to the outline of a nose joining a mustache. Below these features, a bright orange area explodes in what could be a mouth emitting brown and orange projectiles. Around this makeshift head, circular force-lines suggest expansive motion or increased intensity, or both.²⁹ Alongside making this cryptic likeness, Griselli documented in writing some of the particulars related to Marinetti's visit to Russia, for instance that the Futurist twice lectured on semantic novelty in his poems and their lack of traditional syntactic structures, both innovations that, as Griselli noted, had already featured prominently in Russian Futurist poetry.³⁰ He also described working on this particular portrait with the sitter present:

In the days that he [Marinetti] stayed, I painted a canvas inspired by what he said [at the conferences], speaking in very good French and reminding me of our conversations in Italy, a portrait made of bizarre lines intersected by eyes and

²⁹ This influential idea to make visible forces emanate from his head was repeated in later portraits, including the chromatically intense image by Czech artist Růžena Zátková in 1915 and later, the manipulated, black-and-white photograph by Italian Elio Luxardo from around 1930. Jennifer Griffiths discussed the former image at the conference "Theosophy in the Arts" (Columbia University, New York, October 9–10, 2015), and the latter will be mentioned later in this text (see Fig. 10).

³⁰ Patrizio Brucciano, *Griselli nelle avanguardie (1911–1923)* (Florence: Edizioni Nerbini, 2010), 28, 30–32.

mouth placed here and there on the canvas [. . .] and he was excited as he used to get, praising me, thinking I was converted to his ideas.³¹

In defiance of traditional visual conventions, Griselli adopted an experimental approach that applied to painting his understanding of Futurist poetic principles, a style of painting that, in practice, entailed probing a distended mode of likeness, for which the rudimentary facial features have been surrounded by imprecise, at times muddy, strokes. When Marinetti returned to Italy, this portrait was in his care, and it appeared a few months later (in April–May 1914) for an international exhibition of Futurist paintings at Galleria Sprovieri in Rome, thereby supplying crucial evidence to support the organizing premise of that show: Futurism’s expanding international influence.

In addition to facial elements and force emanations, Griselli’s portrait of Marinetti contains a crude division separating the brighter upper left of the canvas from the darker lower right. As interpreted by the painter’s reference to the poet’s public lectures, this diagonal light-dark division may depict a well-lit stage (upper left) and an audience in a theater (lower right), though it could likewise signify an elemental separation between sky and land. In both cases, the image assumes an elevated perspective relative to a face occupying an intermediate zone between spatially separated domains. This tonal duality of light and dark may also operate as a diagram for psychic forces, conscious and unconscious, in which the somewhat more rational, comprehensible lines in the upper left are balanced by murkier, unpredictable forces in the lower right. Occupying a nebulous place between naive lack of refinement and grim revelation, this image manages to register—even if subconsciously—an unsettling, disembodied presence imbued with an open aggressiveness akin to terror.

Even as Marinetti regularly plumbed psychic depths in texts and performances with references to danger, hostility, and death, it is remarkable how few depictions of this Futurist person/persona allude to this darker psychosocial terrain. Instead of capturing, or even hinting at, such connotations, the artists often depicted Marinetti using caricatural simplicity, clear-cut contours, and luminescent colors. Griselli, as an acute observer from outside the movement and from a foreign country, departed significantly from what became the more optimistic gloss on his public personality. This alternate face of Marinetti—attended by confusing forms, unclear relations, and indistinct forces—fits uncomfortably within the standard repertoire of Futurist imagery. Precisely for this reason, this artwork affords a valuable glimpse outside of the more symbolically legible, if caricatural, formulations. Although an aversion to this sort of psychic material may have been rooted in the Futurist’s willingness to dispense with interiority (as evidenced by the death of the literary “I”), the disruptive modalities Marinetti embraced fit a program of counter-repression, especially the free-form events in theatrical settings. The avoidance of negative personal traits could suggest duplicity within Futurism between social disruption and attention-seeking heroism. Yet, the hypermasculine figure of Marinetti instinctually and forcefully combined both tendencies—by creating disorder relative to a well-ordered past and by restoring order to the disordered present.

If Futurism’s art-action presaged in certain respects the emergence and success of an aggressively nationalistic politics, this sociohistorical transition in early twentieth-century Italy loosely corresponded with a conceptual shift in the structure of visual and textual works themselves—from an emphasis on chaotic activities associated with a rebellious spirit (anarchistic, socialist, or otherwise) to one rooted in a unifying, masculine order. While Futurist

³¹ Ibid., 31; translation by the author.

scholars have chronicled the authoritarian qualities of the movement, evidenced by Marinetti's ideas of national and racial development and purgative violence,³² it is also clear that these qualities counteracted and redirected competing tendencies within his oeuvre and within the movement—such as other, non-nationalistic modes of mass agency, including an urban, anonymous subject suited to an international context through communications and transportation networks.³³ Marinetti's violent masculinity came to symbolize a modernist Italy committed to military and industrial forces. In effect, whether consciously or not, Marinetti's portraitists helped forge a visual syntax of male power by narrating visually how a fragmented, anonymous urban subjectivity, without clear governance, was succeeded by a domineering, singular male figure. Through this nearly unanimous over-identification with Marinetti's vociferous public persona, the principle of art-action went from being a catalyst for sociocultural disruption and historical reinvention to becoming a precursor to the demonstrative, vituperative politics of Italian Fascism.³⁴ The visual and auditory logic of representing the Futurist leader formulated and made publically available certain masculine qualities of personality that generated mass appeal and compelled action within the political sphere. The Italian avant-gardist practices related to perceptual and moral shock were conceptually consistent with an authoritarian social and political program, prompting art and literary historian Jeffrey Schnapp to acknowledge “futurism's inaugural role as one of the founders of a genuinely fascist subjectivity.”³⁵



Fig. 10. Elio Luxardo, *Marinetti Futurista*, ca. 1930, black and white photograph, 8.8 x 11.2 in. (22.5 x 28.5 cm), Minerva Auctions, Rome.

³² A few of the foremost examples include Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1996) and Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity* (2003). A more recent overview can be found in Andrew Lyttleton, “Futurism, Politics, and Society” in Greene, *Italian Futurism*, 58–76.

³³ For discussion of anonymous urban agency in the work of Futurist Umberto Boccioni, see my article “Mobilizing Desire in Boccioni's ‘Small Dress Shoe + Urine,’” *Getty Research Journal* 6 (2014): 185–94.

³⁴ Emilio Gentile has astutely observed in *The Struggle for Modernity* (44): “Futurism and fascism are both [. . .] manifestations of political modernism that belong to a common cultural terrain.” What Gentile terms “the conquest of modernity” was a common aspiration for both Futurism and Fascism—which means they shared “the aspiration to have the capacity and the power to master the process of modernization.” World events within and outside of Italy also dictated many of the sociohistorical conditions for Futurism's reception as well as Fascism's emergence in the post-WWI period, including the eventual outcome of the war and the conditions of the peace accord; the cult of the fallen soldier; the occupation of Fiume; and a shortage of industrial bank funding for Italian manufacturing. Such overarching contextual factors reinforced the perceived commonalities among their radical cultural and political projects.

³⁵ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Forwarding Address,” *Stanford Italian Review* 8, no. 1–2 (1992; special issue “Fascism and Culture,” ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Barbara Spackman); 57.

Both Marinetti and Mussolini adopted a similar modern (and modernist) creed that power resides as much in the mass dissemination of images and sounds as in more overtly disciplinary or coercive measures. The portraits of each man became a means to ensure a wide measure of recognition within the public sphere, beyond the direct effects of their rhetorical talents. A photographic image of Marinetti (fig. 10) by Elio Luxardo circa 1930 supplies multiple, superimposed exposures of the sitter combined with a pattern of circular emanations illustrating how the force of his voice (and personality) invades the surrounding space. Photographic multiplicity—as a visual reverberation—here transcodes sonic amplification according to a mode of technologically enabled portraiture.³⁶ This idea that mechanical rhythms formally and technically extend the modern man recurs in a decorative object by Renato Giuseppe Bertelli from 1932 (fig. 11), in which Mussolini’s profile has been imprinted around its circumference, such that the leader’s outline is visible from any viewing angle along the edge of the form. Originally made to decorate the Fascist Party headquarters, this portrait (approved by Mussolini) would eventually be manufactured for large-scale distribution in various metals, painted wood, terracotta, porcelain, and the tin-glazed pottery called maiolica.³⁷ While Bertelli no doubt sought to represent the leader as the omniscient, if also paternalistic, protector of each citizen of the Fascist state, this unsettling extension of the static, state portrait suggests an indefatigable, technically enhanced vigilance, which functions inadvertently as an analog for state surveillance. As if activated by an acute paranoia, the figure rotates constantly away from any viewer to see who might be approaching. As with Luxardo’s photograph, this sculpture melds individualizing male qualities (the fixed profile) with more regularized vectors of mechanized motion. Using technical means, these hypermasculine, modernist images do not settle for an inertly traditional symbolism of power, but rather initiate temporal and conceptual features of visual surprise. So that even as these solitary figures came to govern and direct the disruptive social and political elements, the vectors of their personalities threaten to violate the rules of recognizability.



Fig. 11. Renato Bertelli, *Continuous Profile of Il Duce*, 1932, bronzed terracotta, 11 3/4 in. x 9 in. diameter (28.7 x 22.9 cm.), Wolfsonian-FIU, Miami Beach.

³⁶ In Marinetti’s text “Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine,” the modern (male) subject affirms an ambition to impose oneself by force of will (and against Nature) by developing an intimate relation to varied technical means—vehicular, communicatory, and militaristic. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 85–88.

³⁷ A period notecard printed by Emanuele Turin (Turin, Italy) advertises large editions of the Bertelli object in various materials. See Enrico Sturani, *Le cartoline per il Duce* (Turin: Edizioni del Capricorno, 2003), 105.

The visual correspondences between certain portraits of Marinetti and Mussolini revolve around moderately unhinged or inhuman qualities associated with aggressive masculinity, as well as with the modes of power imposed and reaffirmed by violent force. The Futurist artist Thayaht (born Ernesto Michahelles) created portraits of both of these prominent figures, and together offer another useful comparison: his portrait of Marinetti from 1935 shares features with his 1929 portrait of Mussolini titled *Dux*. The facial features of each have been geometrically (and drastically) simplified into emblems of an emergent, machinic persona. Whereas Il Duce's Art Deco simplicity connotes a determined resolve that, intentionally or not, conveys insensitivity (through its lack of sensory apparatuses), a helmeted Marinetti throws back his head—perhaps most reminiscent of the Cangiullo brothers' alien creature—as if to release a guttural modernist shriek precipitated by overwhelming socioeconomic or political forces. The latter's configuration of rudimentary visual elements yields a template of aggressive vocalization; to continue to be heard, even within the cacophonous modern environment, implies relevancy. By contrast, the insensate Duce mutely affirms his dominant stature within Italy's visual culture—as a hard shell containing potentially volatile materials. In both portraits, geometrical simplicity conveys a type of insensitivity that translates into visual power—their semi-anonymous, male shapes can be efficiently circulated within and easily recognized by a mass audience. Demonstrated by Thayaht's and others' images, the Futurist and Fascist figures both adopted a similar populist attitude toward the large-scale production and widespread dissemination of their images and sounds—effectively deploying semi-deified personalities to assert a wider sociopolitical agenda and to adeptly guide the constantly reverberating messages.

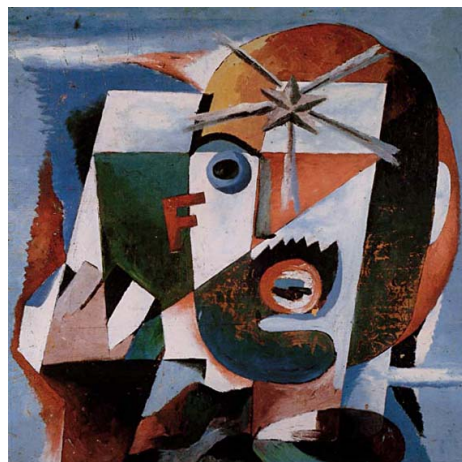


Fig. 12. Sante Monachesi, *Portrait of F. T. Marinetti*, 1939, private collection, Rome.



Fig. 13. F. T. Marinetti, circa 1930s, black and white photograph, Marinetti Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. © Artists Rights Society (ARS).

In a late portrait of Marinetti by Sante Monachesi (fig. 12) from 1939, the motivations of Futurist and Fascist programs have been so closely aligned as to be nearly indistinguishable amid the semiabstracted, reductive shapes manifesting visual playfulness alongside a heroic, masculine persona. The round, bald head of the Futurist leader—with a five-point star shining from the center of his forehead—bears a single button eye along with an emblematic open mouth, while a clenched fist gestures emphatically as if suspended in a climactic moment of oratory. Situated within a spiritualist subgenre of late Futurist paintings,³⁸ the image's complicated visual space derives from numerous crude, geometrical elements superimposed onto a template for Italian identity and male vocalization: this triad of burning eye, open throat, and clenched fist overtly conflates Marinetti with Mussolini. These semi-individualizing characteristics, partially obscured by an Italian pennant, make this portrait read as a somewhat generalized, male patriotic figure that could easily refer to Mussolini, if not for the letter “F” stamped atop the overlapping layers of the face/flag composite. Elsewhere, another multiple-exposure photograph from the 1930s shows Marinetti speaking in front of a portrait of Mussolini (fig. 13). The confluence between these domineering figures is underscored by repetition: the visually echoed pairing plays the vocalicity of one against the muteness of the other. The Futurist template for hypermasculine oratory, which symbolized irrepressible strength, would reverberate through interwar Italian mass politics.

The fact that these two men emerged onto and then receded from the national scene at around the same time may be simply a historical coincidence—effects of Italy's fitful engagement with democratic ideas amid large-scale industrial and financial modernization in the early twentieth century—but their shared ideological tendencies and similar verbal styles developed out of the same radical and nationalistic context. Without chronicling their parallel trajectories, which has been ably accomplished by other scholars,³⁹ the two men notoriously joined forces temporarily in their ill-fated Futurist-Fascist political party (1918–20), and

³⁸ Art historian Christine Poggi discusses this spiritualist tendency in interwar Futurist painting in chapter 7, “Return of the Repressed,” of her book *Inventing Futurism*, 232–65.

³⁹ The political context of Italian Futurism is intensively explored in Günter Berghaus's *Futurism and Politics*. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi investigates the visual and performative modes of hypermasculinity in the life and career of Mussolini in Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

continued to measure themselves in relation to each other until their deaths, which occurred within three miles of each other along the shore of Lake Como, less than five months apart.⁴⁰ But, their assimilation into the visual paradigm of hypermasculinity arrived only after the forces of social disorder (as found in the early portraits by Carrà, Griselli, and Prampolini) were sufficiently tamed and superseded by 1922 with a more domineering, individualistic mode of figuration (as in the later works by Bot, Depero, Longesi, and Monachesi). The historical moment of the unhinged, commanding male presence had been progressively prepared by successive, simultaneous disruptions to a more traditional paradigm of rational, masculine diplomacy.

Another approach to the legacy of Marinetti and to his portraits would be to recall that, in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art" essay, it had been presumed by the author that fine art and spectatorship changed historically with respect to accelerating capitalist conditions, including the development of an automated, filmic perception.⁴¹ In the final section of that ambitious text, Benjamin singles out Marinetti for having recognized the inherent destructiveness of modern socioeconomic forces. Famously, Benjamin described Futurist-inspired Fascism as "an aestheticization of politics," which highlights the emergence of a spectacularly demonstrative modern political attitude.⁴² However, present-day critical references to this "aestheticization" comment often overshadow Benjamin's underlying formulation: due to mass reproducibility, habitual forms of mass culture replaced aesthetic contemplation, while the forces of mass destruction and the devaluation of human lives entered the modern scene as an inescapable complement to mass production. In light of this unwavering (and pessimistic) interpretation of modern capitalist society, Benjamin praises Marinetti for revealing this situation as clearly as any dialectician (viz. historical materialist critic). In effect, according to Benjamin, the Futurist leader was a tragicomic prognosticator of increasingly militarized (and effectively policed) living conditions. His disruptive, patriarchal personality—effectuated as a sadistic torrent on those drawn to or caught up in his agitated performances—enacted a truth about mass political and economic power: alongside the project of renewal, it mandated ongoing destruction.

Finding a rightful place next to Benjamin's interpretation of Marinetti's life and work, some of the most effective portraits of the Futurist leader depict a proto-authoritarian subject who espoused rebellious disruptions, but who was highly dependent on the privileged, mass-mediated role of the individual male speaker, positioned at the center of the national scene, amid an international network of media personalities. Likewise, Marinetti's method of intensified vocalizations fits into a modern syntax of male power in which the voice transcodes the performative and demonstrative character—gesturing toward agitated political agents while assuming the force of military command.⁴³ The solitary male figure of Marinetti as a visual allegory for demagogic, nationalistic dominance emerged against the radical Futurist reformulation of modern subjectivity according to linguistic fragmentation and conceptual dispersal. If Marinetti's assault on higher-level language had temporarily overwhelmed and challenged the conceptual framework of linguistic rationality or governability, the majority of

⁴⁰ Marinetti died in Bellagio, Italy, on December 2, 1944, and Mussolini died across Lake Como in Mezzegro, Italy, on April 28, 1945.

⁴¹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 101–33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴³ Georges Bataille explains the militaristic imperative as psychosocial force that unifies rebellious elements and transforms them into an instrument of authoritarianism. See Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," trans. Carl Lovitt, *New German Critique* 16 (Winter 1979): 64–87.

portraits of him from 1922 onward signaled an order restored. They came to enshrine a dominant male persona within the cultural and political landscape of twentieth-century Italy.

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