The technological and industrial acceleration seen in Europe at the end of the 19th century began to change the patterns of daily life permanently. Transport and cars were prominent in this transformation. Car manufacturing started in Germany and France at this time, and the Fiat S.p.A. Company began operations in Italy in 1899. The massive technological change transformed people’s mobility and the speed of travel. It would also dramatically modify the face of conflict.

All these changes added a new dimension to perceptions of the everyday world, such as the previously unknown blurring of views from speeding machines and views from the air. Photography enabled new ways of recording physical movement, which was investigated by early photographers such as Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) and the American painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) (1). The Italian artistic movement that identified itself as Futurism focused on the emotions associated with the “new face” of the world and their artistic expression (2, 3).

In contrast to such earlier movements as Impressionism, which were largely defined by their work, the essence of Futurism was the verbal manifestos that defined the style of the movement.

Futurism was defined by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) in “The Futurist Manifesto,” published in the Parisian paper Le Figaro on February 20, 1909 (4). Marinetti was not an artist but a symbolist poet. The artistic core of the movement was its fascination with movement, machines, technology, and science: “We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed,” the manifesto said (4). Futurism went far beyond art, however. Marinetti’s rhetoric was uncompromising and deliberately inflammatory in its aggressiveness against past and contemporary Italian culture. He postulated the destruction of libraries and museums. The manifesto glorified violence and upheaval. The last 2 points of the manifesto supported nationalism and war. Its prowar rant reminds one of the initial scenes of prowar enthusiasm in the film based on Erich Maria Remarque’s book All Quiet on the Western Front (5). There was a pathetic lack of imagination regarding the consequences of a large-scale technological war. Many of the “revolutionary” pronouncements made in the early stage of Futurism turned out to be a somewhat bizarre kind of aggressive theater, but they later became more serious. Marinetti assisted Mussolini in founding the fascist movement in 1919 (they parted ways in 1920) (6). Several other Futurists also became associated with fascism.

Before this turn toward fascism, however, the artists Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini aligned themselves with Marinetti, signing the separate “Manifesto of Futurist Painters” in 1910 (7). It was similarly rebellious, emphasizing a fight with the art rooted in the Roman past and with the “vicious existence of museums” (7). Again, there was a passion for machines and technology. One of the conclusions of the manifesto addressed science, with characteristic awe: “[W]e support the glory of the day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious Science” (7).

There were some interesting pronouncements among the rhetoric, such as the saying that “living art draws its life from the surrounding environment” (7) and the desire to fight “slovenly and facile commercialism.”

Technical inspiration for Futurist painting came from Paris. In the early stages, the painters became enthused with Divisionism and later with Cubism (with Gino Severini being its major proponent), but they came to regard the latter as too static. Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) became the key artistic figure in the movement (8). He was born in Reggio Calabria in South Italy and came in 1871 to study in Rome under Giacomo Balla, the champion of the Divisionist technique. Boccioni visited Paris in 1906 and later worked in Milan.

In the third manifesto, entitled “The Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto,” also published in 1910, Boccioni confirmed the centrality of dynamism and simultaneity for Futurist art (9). He wrote about the unity of objects and the surrounding environment, which he called the “interpenetration” of objects. He continued to be enthusiastic about sci-
“Victorious science has nowadays disowned its past in order the better to serve the material needs of our time; we would that art, disowning its past, were able to serve at last the intellectual needs that are within us” (9).

In 1912–1913, Boccioni turned to sculpture. His work entitled *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (Fig. 1), created in 1913, emphasizes the relationship between the object and its environment. The figure’s flowing form emphasizes its “interpenetration” with the environment. Apparently—and somehow surprisingly—the lack of arms is a homage to the Hellenistic sculpture *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, also known as the *Nike of Samothrace* (10). The contemporaneity of Boccioni’s forms is astonishing and would not be out of place in today’s science fiction.

All in all, the Futurists focused in their art on the new reality of the technological world. They created some remarkable images, and Futurism did become part of the vocabulary of the technological age. Their achievements were motivated by naive, scientifically uninformed, and sometimes politically sinister rhetoric, and they revealed a woeful lack of imagination regarding the consequences of the misuses of technology. Several Futurists, including Boccioni, died in the First World War. This misjudgment of history and technology in human terms is also their legacy—a reminder and a warning.
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