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Futurist Fury to Punk Fanzines

The Futurist movement was born in Italy during the first decade of the 20th century amidst a technological revolution that was changing the nature of Western European society. Italy had been in a weakened state for several decades before the birth of Futurism. It was unified as a nation-state only in 1863 and was under developed economically in comparison with France, Germany and Great Britain. Rapid industrialization was occurring and along with it, social unrest in the form of strikes and riots. Anarchists brought terror and riots to the streets, and with them posters and leaflets. The bomb and the pamphlet were weapons used by the anarchist, syndicalist and communist in an attempt to overthrow the old order. Radical intellectuals and artists were exploring the problems of popular culture and the need for unification; it was among these contemplations at the turn of the century that Art began to weave itself into the fabric of social and political revolution. Futurism is generally considered to be the first modern artistic movement that attempted to reach the masses and to create a social and political movement within the 'avant-garde.' The founder, Fillipo Marinetti, was a highly esteemed poet whose fierce energy and direction supported Futurism in becoming a phenomenon that would shape the history of 20th century art and culture.

Futurism emerged in 1909 with Marinetti's publishing of the 'First Futurist Manifesto.' The tone was considered outrageous and fanatical by most, yet its passion for shaking a deadened society was undeniably attractive for many. A group of artists formed around this first manifesto and quickly began to express a multitude of aggressive ideas through Futurist literature, performance and visual art. Seven years later, Switzerland would see the birth of

Dada, another highly influential avant-garde movement. In contrast to the pre- and pro-war Futurists, the Dadaists were reacting against the war and against anything and anyone who supported it- including the Futurists. Despite this major difference between the two groups, the Dadaists were undeniably influenced by the Futurists in numerous ways. The typographic freedoms introduced by the Futurists as well as their stances on performance were clearly an influence on Dada, and were reflected in the Dadaists' manifestos (Perloff, 111). Approximately sixty years later, the birth of the Punk Rock and its ultimate legacy would echo much of these two movements. The culture surrounding the birth of punk in New York was predominantly a sub-culture of rebellious, poetic musicians and their fans. In the U.K., the economy was poor, kids were angry and out of work, and the Sex Pistols happened; fueling the beginnings of the British scene. Punk rock began as a rebellious revolution in rock and roll, but quickly became a movement, complete with anarchist sentiments, radical social ideals and an emphasis on personal expression. Like the Futurists and Dadaists, the punks included performance, poetry, music and literature as foundational pieces of their movement (O'Hara, 33). Though Dada is generally recognized as the predecessor to 'punk', there is clearly a Futurist-like passion in the punk's aim to build and express their movement and to educate fellow punks on what is 'punk' and what is not. The rebellious and violent attitudes encouraged by Marinetti's Futurist movement in 1909 can be seen in the momentum of the punk movement, and have been documented since 1977 with the emergence of the first punk fanzine.

Marinetti's political beginnings were steeped in anarchism, and this foundational stance of non-conformity would run through Futurism until its end in the mid forties. Marinetti's formal education was in law where he was most influenced by G. Sorel, a revolutionary Syndicalist; a group that grew out of Socialism and had anarchist sentiments. His studies in law did not last past school and he quickly dedicated himself completely to his passion for poetry. He spent the decade before the birth of Futurism travelling between Italy and Paris, and deeply involved in the revolutionary literary, artistic, and political circles. After several years of accomplished and highly recognized writing he became a part of the Symbolist group of poets. Anarchist sentiments and radical political viewpoints were widespread among the Symbolists (Berghaus, 33). Marinetti was more than a sympathizer of political revolutionaries; he actively

involved himself in anarchist and syndicalist circles in Milan and Paris. In these circles, anarchism represented a wide-ranging cultural rebellion, a critique of bourgeois values, state power and traditional institutions. For this reason it was widely diffused in the milieu of avant-garde artists who were attempting to combine political with artistic radicalism. Marinetti was one of the many 'revolutionary' artists and writers who were active in these circles. The foundation of the Futurist movement was formed during these years and was built on a strong platform of non-conformity and rebellion in art, politics and society. The revolutionary energy was infused into every aspect of their program, from literature to painting to performance. However, it was Marinetti's mastery of the 'word' through poetry and its many manifestations that would lead to the success and growth of Futurism, and would specifically influence subsequent movements in art, design, music and politics.

The Futurist's manifestos were the first of the 20th century to create a total movement with their ideas on art, politics and many other areas of life. Marinetti's manifesto on 'Words-in-Freedom' and typography radically influenced the course of graphic design in the 20th century, as well as the standard on how 'words' should or shouldn't be expressed (Bartram,7). His fierce energy and directed passion set the tone for the many movements and manifestos that would follow. From Dada to the Lettrists, to the Situationists, and finally to the punk movement in the 70s, Marinetti's influence can be traced (Home, 3). The punk's production and independent distribution of their fanzines bears a strong resemblance to the power Marinetti shared almost 70 years before with his manifestos; both created a total movement, incorporating ideas on a variety of subjects; as well as widely and independently distributing their ideas to promote the growth of their movements.

The connection of punk rock to the avant-garde art movements has been traced to the art school influences of Jamie Reid, Malcom McLaren, members of the Clash and Adam and the Ants. These early punks were exposed to the influence of Dada and Futurism along with the more contemporary movements of the Lettrists and Situationists (Home, 80). The majority of

punks were unaware of these classical influences, yet they expressed the very freedom their predecessors would have wanted them to have. The trail to punk from Futurism begins with Dada and the Futurist influence on Dada typography and performance. The same intensity with which Marinetti provoked the world was attempted by Isidore Isou and his creation of the Lettrist Movement in 1946. Isou, like Marinetti, was a poet, an extremist, and very political with anarchist leanings; in addition, he promoted and distributed his ideas through manifestos and other literature (Home, 12). Breakaway groups from the Lettrists eventually fused and formed the Situationist International in 1957 (Home, 26). Echoing Futurism, the S.I. began with a “declaration of war against the old society”, their writing “a form of noise” (Marcus, 355). The Situationists were inspired by the Dada Cabaret, and both are reflections of the Variety and Synthetic Theater manifestos written by the Futurists in 1913 and 1915. The link between the S.I. and the punks came through McLaren and Reid and their affiliation with a group called King Mob, formed by an ex-S.I. member (Marcus, 438). McLaren and Reid eventually comprised the making of the Sex Pistols, whose posters display art and design influences from the Futurism and Dada. Thus, the trail from Futurism to Punk Rock is relatively easy to see in these relationships. Furthermore, a close examination of punk fanzines shows the striking influences of Futurism and Dada in punk typography, art and graphic design.

The Futurist’s poetics created a controversial and widespread movement through countless manifestos and numerous public spectacles intended to incite passion, violence and outrage. The group introduced the use of the manifesto as a public means to advertise its artistic philosophy and also as a controversial weapon against the academic and conservative world. Within their manifestos, the written word was set free from the bounds of all restrictions that had come before. The Punk culture that emerged in the 70s contained this poetic freedom that Marinetti and his followers worked laboriously to promote and encourage. The fanzine production in punk culture that began in ’77, with ‘Sniffin’ Glue’, is arguably the main element that supported and documented the growth of this sub-culture and its many opinions and practices. A comparison of the Futurist manifesto production and distribution with the Fanzines created by punks illustrates the thread of Futurist dynamism that continued into ‘Punk Rock’. Both publications were independently distributed, not for profit, and were intended to build the

movement through radical and aggressive art, ideas and music. Punk's direct and most associated linkage to Dada is undeniable; however, it is the link to Futurism that gave Punk the intense energy and precision to thrive in a culture mired in death and destruction.

“We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness. Courage, audacity and revolt will be the essential elements of our poetry.” F.T. Marinetti: Futurist Manifesto 1909.

These very words encouraged many artists and revolutionaries of the 20th century, and even numerous punks whom had never heard of Marinetti. Dada was the first to follow Futurism, completely opposite in many aspects, yet unavoidably influenced by its predecessor. The Dadaists were inspired by the Futurists despite political differences. One of the most influential aspects on Dada was the ‘Destruction of Syntax, Radio Imagination, Words-In-Freedom’ Manifesto written by Marinetti in 1913. His ‘Typographical Revolution’ was contained within, and dramatically influenced not only Dada, but all of Graphic Design in the 20th century (Bartram, 7). Figure’s five and six are from ‘Words-In-Freedom’ and show the wild display of typography promoted by Marinetti. Figures nine and ten show Dada posters by Van Doesburg and Hausmann, displaying the influence of Futurist design on the movement. Marinetti’s ‘Words-In-Freedom’ encouraged anyone to write despite their education and it expressed his passion for words as means to experience life and its ‘rush of steam-emotion’(Marinetti). He begins the manifesto: **“Casting aside all stupid definitions and confusing professorial verbalisms, I declare that lyricism is the rarely found faculty of intoxicating oneself with life and with oneself”**(Marinetti). The Futurist manifestos on words and literature screamed for an abandon of all restriction on expressing oneself with words, whether written, spoken or performed. In typography they were the first to disregard all order and necessity of legibility or understanding, while calling for the use of numerous fonts and colors- not aiming at harmony, but at increasing ‘the expressive force of words’ (Marinetti). Marinetti’s poetic passion for life combined with his love and unabashed proclamation for the power of the ‘word’ was infused into his typography and literature, and undoubtedly still influences radical thinkers and designers to this day.

Punk was a movement complete with poetic passion, disgust for authority, and reverence for speed and power in its music and lyrics. Marinetti's fervor is not far behind any punk song or fanzine spitting at conformity and capitalism. The anarchist spirit upon which Futurism was built and expressed was the fundamental political viewpoint adopted by punks. Futurism's Nationalist and Fascist ties were but one aspect of their politics, as Marinetti himself never officially aligned with any political camp, and members of the movement were predominantly Anarchist, Socialist, and Marxist (Berghaus, 34). Punk was unavoidably driven by its anarchist politics, despite the fact that most punks were initially uneducated in this arena. The common themes that emerged in punk from its beginnings in U.K. and the U.S. were: rebellion, anger towards the establishment, revolution, discord, and personal expression-despite all consequences. In *Fury's Hour*, Warren Kinsella writes, "**Punk is not merely a music... It's a way of thinking, one that urges us to take action and not just give up on the future. By demonstrating that anger is energy, and that we have the power to do just about anything ourselves, punk is like a cosmic collision that creates a noisy, colorful, alternative universe crammed with new bands, new politics, new looks, new ways of expressing oneself-new ways of being oneself.**" Much of Marinetti's writing would support this idea of freely expressing oneself in order to live life fully.

The production and distribution of Punk fanzines was the main way the movement expressed and built itself beyond the stage. The zines were comprised of reviews, artwork, and punk philosophies (O'Hara, 67). Punk fanzines were also an experimental movement in graphic design. In the beginning the zines were hastily and chaotically thrown together- using no grid, and predominantly handwriting instead of type, demonstrating the freedom possible in design liberated from the restraints of standard composition. The Do-It-Yourself philosophy of Punk was promoted and described through the zines. The D.I.Y. philosophy is fundamental to the activism found in the punk rock scene, and continues to this day. The activism found in much of the punk scene was seeded through its fanzine production, which increased as the movement matured and bands and fans took on more of the anarchist political intentions. Like the Futurist movement, the Punk movement was 'total' in that it expressed not only ideas about music, but also art, politics, philosophies, and food.

Sniffin' Glue was officially the first punk fanzine, emerging in the U.K. in 1977. Despite the fact that the zine was somewhat illiterate, sexist, and wholly amateur; it was the first to chronicle the movement and successfully inspired countless others to create their own punk bands and fanzines (Kinsella, 49). Solely built on passion, determination, and the D.I.Y. ethic, punks essentially created an 'alternative media' that still flourishes to this day (Kinsella, 54). In comparison, Marinetti was a master of media promotion, publishing countless manifestos, books, and pamphlets that successfully promoted Futurism and gained followers in many countries. He was the sole publisher of the entire movement and was never interested in gaining profit, only in promoting his project. Though Marinetti was independently wealthy, it could be presumed that if he had been broke (like the punks) his sheer determination and passion would have created something very similar.

Typographical freedom, anarchist sentiments and fierce Futurist-like intensity were reflected in the zines. One glance at a photo of a screaming punk on a fanzine page conveyed the poetic expression contained in their songs and philosophies. Figures one, two, and three display the Futurist-like fury and aggression, as well as the typographic freedoms encouraged by Marinetti. These photos of angry, passionate poet/punks echo the second point in the Futurist Manifesto: "**Courage, audacity and revolt will be the essential elements of our poetry**"; and as Marinetti would have agreed, anyone with passion can be a poet (Marinetti). In addition, Dada's influence was widespread among punk art and graphic expression, specifically in the stenciled, cut and paste lettering and montage/collage; first popularized by the Sex Pistols artist, Jamie Reid. Figure 11 shows a poster by Reid, illustrating the influence of Dada and Futurism on the artist. Comparisons of Dada's 'future-less' mentality have been made to Punk Rock's slogan 'No Future' (Marcus, 24). While this comparison isn't wholly inaccurate, there was undoubtedly a direction that the punks took, eventually with serious momentum. The documentation of punk's future is found in every punk fanzine ever produced. Once the anarcho-punks emerged in the late 70s in the U.K., their fierce activism and political stances made it clear that punk had a purpose and a mission. The most influential of the anarcho-punks was the band Crass, formed in 1977 in England. Crass promoted anarchism as a political ideology and created a total movement, educating fellow anarcho-punks on ways of living,

eating, and rejecting the mainstream. They promoted their movement through their music, poetry, collage art and protests (O'Hara, 86). In figure 12, a Crass poster illustrates the same stenciled lettering and abrasive tone used by the Futurists, as seen in two Futurist book covers in figures seven and eight; and though the punks were anti-war, both groups were passionate and used their fierce anger to promote themselves through visual art and design. If Dada was the seed of dissolution and disgust in Punk Rock, Futurism can be seen as the seed of passion and momentum. Both Dada and Futurism were intent on giving the individual creative freedom, despite any shackle of artistic or social conditioning. Punk was, in a similar way, encouraging other punks to free themselves from any artistic or social limitations and to express their disdain for conformity through the poetic lens of punk rock music and ideals.

“To start with, I’ll tell you what I think Punk isn’t- it isn’t a fashion, a certain style of dress, a passing ‘phase’ of knee-jerk rebellion against your parents, the latest ‘cool’ trend or even a particular form of style or music, really- it is an idea that guides and motivates your life. The Punk community that exists, exists to support and realize that idea through music, art, fanzines and other expressions of personal creativity. And what is this idea? Think for yourself, be yourself, don’t just take what society gives you, create your own rules, live your own life.” (Mark Anderson, Positive Force handout, 1985) Positive Force is an activist group that formed in Nevada in 1984 around the band 7 Seconds and eventually other anarcho-punk bands such as Fugazi and Nation of Ulysses, all of which were majorly influenced by Crass (O'Hara, 87).

In the decades that followed Futurism, the movement became a paradigm for many of the most influential and catalyzing avant-garde movements. As the first half of the 20th century experienced a high-speed machine emergence, horrific wars and radical revolutions in art and society; the second half was attempting to avoid the mistakes of past while making sense of what had come before. Rebellion and revolution continued while much of the popular culture in Western Europe and the United States chose to fall in line and seemingly ‘fall asleep’. It was against this ‘death’ or boredom or numbness that the radical thinkers, protesters, artists and punks fought against. Through their poetic lyrics, literature, art and performance, Punks

expressed themselves against a society that had seemed to fail them. Just as Marinetti's poetic displays were harsh and misunderstood, punk expression has always been raw and hard to stomach by anyone who doesn't understand their mission. Figure four displays a flyer for a punk show, with the main band calling itself 'Futurist Manifesto'; Marinetti is obviously not far behind in influence for this band and its flyer. It is the power of the word, whether written or spoken that transforms peoples' ideas into collective movements of shared ideals and visions. In 1909, F.T. Marinetti called to all artists and thinkers; he declared a need for freedom of expression in all areas of life, but most importantly for freedom in our words. Marinetti's legacy lives on in every writer or designer that ignores the rules in typography, and in every punk who says and writes exactly how he feels, no matter how ugly or offensive it may be.

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Figure links:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/7908705.stm figure 1

http://www.wussu.com/zines/images/guiltyofwhat_2.jpg angry punk with Mohawk 2

http://c1.ac-images.myspacecdn.com/images02/141/1_d8c5df84cd374994918163d4cae9f30c.jpg

diagonal writing, screaming girl 3

<http://jameswoodward.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/futurist.jpg?w=383&h=500> punk poster
for a band called 'futurist manifesto' 4

<http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/images/words1.jpg> words in freedom 5

<http://rhizome.org/artbase/22272/localweb/images/alphab13.gif> destruction of syntax, 'The
Futurist Words in Freedom' 6

<http://www.colophon.com/gallery/futurism/11.html> futurist music book cover 7

<http://www.colophon.com/gallery/futurism/19.html> futurist book cover 8

<http://blogs.artinfo.com/resources/modernartnotes/images/vanDoesburgDada.jpg> dada poster 9

http://paperstreetsupplies.com/wp-content/uploads/RaoulHausmann_001.jpg dada poster 10

<http://imagecache2.allposters.com/images/SIGPOD/SEP-A040.jpg> Jamie Reid poster 11

<http://gilgrachison.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/crass-stencil-polemic-2.jpg?w=287&h=398>
crass poster 12

