



## A Transition From Futurism To Retro-Futurism: it's Relevance in Contemporary World Sandal Bhardwaj The English and Foreign Languages University

Sandal Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor of Italian, Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad - 500007

### ABSTRACT

*In Italy, with the advent of World War I, the group of certain thinkers celebrated violence and industrial development. Their aim was to renew the modern consciousness. The movement named as Futurism and the Futurists tend to seize the beauty of speed, movement, and industrial development with the aim to glorify modernity and to rescue Italy from the burden of its past. Enthusiasm towards space age, car culture and atomic age bequeathed some fantastic ideas in the late 20th century. Retro Futurism is the revival of Futurism that refers to the depictions of how the future would look like beyond the year 2000.*

**KEYWORDS :** War, Industrialization, Universal Dynamism, Technology, Internet

On July 28, 1914, erupted unprecedented World War-I, that mushroomed the prevailing of the saner voices which existed earlier even. For instance, in Italy, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) described the war as the most beautiful aesthetic spectacle of his life. He thus codified what shortly came to be known as Futurism.

A group of young and rebellious Italian writers and artists accompanied Marinetti to celebrate industrialization. They endeavoured to overthrow the national past of Italy and the traces of ancient Renaissance and Baroque art with hostile, progressive, velocity and modernising cult of the nation, whose global reach was continuously determined by violence and industrial development. They believed that onset of "Machine Age" would result a better new world order. "Publishing manifestos was a highlighting feature of Futurism..." (Apollonio: 1973). The Futurists tend to transfigure every genre of art including painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic design, industrial design, interior design, urban design, theatre, film, fashion, textiles, literature, music, architecture and even gastronomy.

Futurism as a literary movement made its official debut with F.T. Marinetti's poetry parole in libertà with which Futurists managed to create a new language free of syntax, punctuation, and metrics that allowed free and immediate expression. Marinetti's novel, 'Mafarka the Futurist' seems to be the cogent illustration of male birth fantasies, where the protagonist Mafarka is giving birth to a child. "Mafarka's ambiguous relationship towards his 'product' Gazourmah, the machine man who is half human, half aeroplane, suggests that the Futurists' technophilia – destined to produce more perfect and "new" super humans..." (Zitzlsperger 2013: 130).

The commitment towards "universal dynamism", the key feature of Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting, is highly vivid in Futurist paintings. Some of the main proponents of the movement, viz. Marinetti, Carlo Carra and Giacomo Balla said, "The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed moment in universal dynamism... all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing..." (Ottinger 2008:23). The last one of them went to the extent of naming his daughter as Elica — the Propeller.



**Figure 1**

Balla's Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (Figure 1) exemplifies the Futurists' demand of constant movement. The painting portrays a dog's legs, tail and leash and the feet of the woman walking with it. The blur of a movement illustrates the precept that, "On account of the

persistency of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations". (Ross, S.D 1984: 657).



**Figure 2**

Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (Figure 2) is a sculptural illustration of Boccioni's Futurist idea of striding three dimensions.

The desire to leave the past behind for the sake of the future generations, the Manifesto of Futurist Architecture went so far as to recommend that "architecture be constructed of degradable materials ... degrading architecture effectively makes each generation responsible for the construction of their own towns and cities" (Apollonio 1958:170). Each subsequent generation was expected to build their own city rather than inheriting the architecture of the past.

The Futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia's scheme influenced later generations of architects and artists. The city replaced the landscapes to project modern life: city as fast paced machine. Light and shape, curves and encrustations had been manipulated to reveal the essential lines. To a certain extent this sort of construction is taking place today, with budgetary concerns prompting the construction of limited use, temporary buildings with expected occupancy spans of 40 years or less.

The period of 1920-1940 has been the testimony of several Futurist edifices, including public buildings such as railway stations, maritime resorts and post offices. Examples of Futurist buildings still in use today are Trento's railway station, built by Angiolo Mazzoni, and the Santa Maria Novella station in Florence. The Florence station was designed in 1932 by the Gruppo Toscano (Tuscan Group) of architects. Fiat Lingotto Factory in Turin (See Figure 3) is an outstanding archetype of its kind.



**Figure 3**

The period after World War II witnessed the decline of Futurism with the death of its leader Marinetti, but the enthusiasm towards space age, car culture and atomic age bequeathed some fantastic ideas in the late 20th century and became a galvanizing force to re-cultivate this tendency in a new high standard form. This was the era of the evolution of Neo-Futurism as a modernizing cult during 60s and 70s, which was away from the cynical ideas of Futurism like the destruction of the past and the glory of the war. Futurism as a coherent and organized artistic movement is now regarded solely as an extinct. However this fresh ideology left an important influence to outline movements in paintings and abstract arts with rhythmic, pulsating qualities. This gave rise to a cognate technology in modern western cultures which found expression in modern commercial cinema and the art of animation. It's by now in vain to imagine the contemporary art and culture without the practice of new visual technology, in particular chrono-photography, a predecessor of animation and cinema that allowed the movement of an object to be depicted beyond a sequence of frames.

The movement began picking up steam in the mid-1980s now with the recent neologism 'Retro-Futurism', coined by Llyod Dunn in 1983. If "Futurism is sometimes called a 'science' bent on anticipating what will come, Retro-Futurism is the remembering of that anticipation". (Latham 2014: 434). An early use of the term was in the title of T.R. Hinchcliffe's Pelican book *Retro-futurism* - Penguin, 1967.

The notion of nostalgia for the future present in Retro-Futurism that had never taken place and the discontent towards the present, made retro-Futurists look back into the past for the ideas lost behind. Distinguished by a mélange of old-fashioned "retro" styles with futuristic technology Retro-Futurism explores the themes with the empowering effects of technology and speed: the vision for space colonies, space tourism, robotic servants, flying machines and so on.

Though there is an attempt to flee from such skeptical philosophical notion emboldened by the speedy and constant awakening of industrialization that in resulted World War II, contemporary high tech architecture in point of fact is the fusion of its themes, designs, patterns that are key features of this fatalism.

Not too long ago, the illustrations were drawn by hand using chalks, pencil colors, paints, and pens. Calligraphy was performed by artists using fountain pens with a large variety of nibs and colored inks. In contemporary world all these efforts are substituted with amazing tools such as 3ds Max, Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, or even Corel Draw. "The internet...provides the terrain on which sentimental attachments, vernacular knowledge, and a multitude of other relationships to the material culture of the past are magnified and given coherence". (Stein, D: 2015)

The melancholy and glamour of the phantasmagoric creations have survived not only in architecture, but can be viewed in the worlds of fashion, design, music, literature, theatre, video games and most vividly in cinema: from Hollywood films *Terminator* or Ridley Scott science fiction *Blade Runner* that serves as a platform to evoke the architectural designs and patterns of Sant'Elia to Bollywood films *Ra-One*, *Robot*, *Krish 3* to name some.

Repercussions of Marinetti's philosophy like his "dreamt-of metallization of the human body", found place also in Japanese cartoons such as Anime and Manga, *Doraemon*, *Shin Shan* etc.

Looking at the past and the future is the norm of the season which becomes evident also from the fashion weeks at New York, Paris, Milan, Mumbai and New Delhi. Vintage, nostalgic, classic, retro, futuristic trends from, 20s, 60, 80s, are now iconic demands of designers.

How does one get around a retro futuristic city, anyway? The illusion of super power India's future takes shape not only in fashion design, but also in the actions like India's future smart cities. Envisioned "yet non-existent utopian city of Dholera planned in Gujarat... resembling Shanghai, double the size of Mumbai, running on renewable energy, classified as a 'special investment region', no crowds, pollution or excessive noise..." (Kuldova,T: 2014).



**Figure 4**

Without highlighting much on Indian politics, I would like to bring the attention of our readers on the last but not the least, the logo of Make in India (Figure 4). The logo encapsulates the silhouette of a lion on the prowl made entirely of cogs, symbolizing manufacturing, strength and is one of the authentic illustrations of Retro-Futurism. The symbol of Ashok charkha replicated in a modern dimension of cogs and machinery epitomized the spirit of the movement and national pride.

Since the beginning of the use of computer to the birth of test tube babies, the period since the evolution of Retro-Futurism is witnessing the amelioration in applied sciences. Machines have enabled designers to overcome the traditional constraints of thought and set the grounds for a higher level of programmatic complexity with numerous aesthetic, functional and performative implications.

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## Illustrations

Fig.1: Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912, Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 43 1/4" (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo)

Fig 2: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913: cast 1931. Bronze, 111.2 x 88.5 x 40 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Fig 3: "Fiat Lingotto Factory" of Turin, with its test track on the roof, was recognized in 1934 as the first futurist innovation in architecture

Fig 4: "**Make in India**" The lion step is a logo for 25 sectors that are looking to attract companies to India.