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Günter Berghaus, ed. "Women Artists and Futurism." Special Issue, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, Volume 5. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015. Pp. xii + 676. $182.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Luca Somigli, University of Toronto

Of the many controversial slogans and apodictic assertions contained in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's 1909 "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," few have endured as a continuous source of heated debate and polemic as has the famous call for "le mépris de la femme," already targeted by the earliest critics of the movement. Traditionally seen as a cardinal component of an aggressive rhetoric that would find its ultimate fulfillment in fascism, the question of this "scorn for women"—along with the equally controversial exaltation of war as "the sole cleanser of the world"—contributed in no small part to keeping Futurism on the margins of modernist studies until quite recently.[1] At the same time, over the last twenty-five years—one might take Lucia Re's influential 1989 essay "Futurism and Feminism" as the watershed—a closer engagement both with male Futurists' writings on women and with the works by women writers and artists who aligned themselves with the movement has helped to provide a more complex and nuanced picture of the situation, at least for *Italian* Futurism.[2] (Barbara Meazzi offers a useful and thorough overview of the scholarship on women and Italian Futurism in her contribution to the volume under review.)

This issue of the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, edited by the journal's director, Günter Berghaus, aims at expanding the range of this enquiry to consider the influence of Futurism on women artists, writers, and intellectuals across Europe and beyond. As Berghaus remarks in his introduction, that influence should not be measured only in terms of the relative adherence or response to the aesthetic and social orthodoxy formulated in the many manifestoes of the movement, but also by considering the role played in the artists' formation by a much looser understanding of Futurism based on the "scattered information" and the "more or less denigrating, satirical or scandal-mongering articles" provided by mainstream newspaper and periodicals, for which Futurism quickly became a synonym of "Modernism gone mad" (ix). For several of the women considered in this volume, the antitraditionalist ethos of Futurism, for all its strident bellicosity, could become an instrument through which they could articulate an alternative to the values of patriarchal bourgeois society defended by the mainstream press and

institutions that heaped their ridicule on Marinetti and his movement. At the same time, their peripheral role within the heated polemical battles of competing avant-garde groups often allowed women an exceptional freedom to develop their own aesthetics, although the originality of their contribution still goes largely underrecognized.

Selena Daly provides a particularly interesting example of the liberating role played by a loosely defined Futurism in her essay on the Irish painter Mary Swanzy, traditionally associated with Cubism. Swanzy was exposed to Futurism initially through press reports in Ireland, and then first-hand in Italy, where she lived between 1913 and 1915. Like many fellow Protestant women artists, Daly found in the Continental avant-garde a fruitful alternative not only to aesthetic academicism, but also to the nationalist demands of the Gaelic Revival movement, dominated by Catholic male artists and intellectuals. Similarly, for the Argentinian painter Norah Borges, sister of the writer Jorge Luis, a "flirt" with Futurism, as with other European avant-gardes such as Expressionism and Cubism, was a step on the way to the formation of a personal, eclectic style that would become the expression of *Ultraismo* in the figurative arts. In his contribution on Borges, Eamon McCarthy emphasizes the crucial role played by her marginality within the Argentinian intellectual milieu in which she was formed. As Borges herself recalled in a 1992 interview, young women of her generation did not frequent the cafés where the avant-garde gathered or participate in its debates, and yet it was precisely this position as an "insider-outsider" that allowed her the autonomy to experiment without being beholden to aesthetic orthodoxies.

By the same token, if figures such as Kate Lechmere, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Dorothy Shakespear, the subjects of Katy Deepwell's essay, have remained until recently little more than footnotes in the history of Vorticism, that may well be because so much of the later history of modernism and the avant-garde has been concerned with sorting out those orthodoxies. Against the Vorticist-centered narratives through which the careers of these women artists have been framed, Deepwell calls for a shattering of that frame, so that their work can be studied on its own merits. Her concluding words—"Maybe it is necessary to move away from seeing these women in a 'state of exception' and think about their presence as a regular and normal part of the Edwardian art world"—are applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to several other artists examined in the volume (42). Writing on Saunders and Dismorr, Miranda Hickman considers a different kind of "reframing," namely that made possible precisely by their alignment with Vorticism. By appropriating the movement's masculinist posture of cool detachment—which the male Vorticists used strategically to differentiate themselves from a Futurism they "coded as 'feminine' or 'effeminate'"(52)—the two women could also reposition themselves in relation to a broader cultural discourse that considered femininity and professionalism in the arts as incompatible.

Most contributions take the form of an intellectual biography, often providing a snapshot of the "Futurist moment" of a particular writer or artist. In her essay on Valentine de Saint-Point—arguably the best-known Futurist woman writer and, notably, the only woman to figure in the early "organizational charts" of the movement that Marinetti was fond of appending to his publications—Silvia Contarini calls for a reading of her Futurist manifestoes that considers both what Saint-Point contributed to Futurism as a woman and, conversely, how Futurism influenced "her reflections on womanhood" (92). The confrontation with Futurism allowed Saint-Point to formulate her critique of the contemporary feminist movement, which she saw as too concerned with the demand for individual rights and therefore complicit in "the preservation of institutional order" (100). Contarini sees in Saint-Point's Futurist manifestoes an early (and at times confused) attempt to theorize gender as a fluid construct and to vindicate "the power of desire and the awareness of one's body beyond sexual belonging" (106).

There are moments, reading this volume, when one almost sees the tracings of an alternative (yet another?) map of modernism, one that has its central nodes in occultism, women artists and intellectuals, and Italy: it was, for instance, in the "Philosophical Library" of Florence, founded by the American Theosophist Julia Scott in 1903, that the Lithuanian-born, German-speaking, and Russian-educated Eva Kühn met the young philosopher Giovanni Papini, who introduced

her to Florentine avant-garde circles. Kühn moved to Italy after marrying the Italian journalist and future anti-Fascist Giovanni Amendola, who shared her interest in Theosophy. Fascinated by Marinetti, she assumed as her pseudonym the name of Magamal, the brother of the protagonist of Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste*. Donatella Di Leo situates Kühn's Futurist works, published for the most part in periodicals of the movement, in the context of her intellectual biography, rightly emphasizing the originality of her inflection in spiritualist terms of Futurist themes such as human control of matter. Occultism was also important for the Austrian writer Edyth von Haynau, better known as Rosa Rosà, the pseudonym with which she signed her Futurist works written in Italian. While her visionary and politically charged writings—in particular her novel *Una donna con tre anime* (1918)—have already been the subject of a certain amount of scholarship, Lisa Hanstein's essay adds an important component to our understanding of von Haynau's intellectual trajectory by focusing on her formation in fin-de-siècle Vienna and, in particular, in Spiritist and Theosophic circles, in which women were able to assume the kind of leadership roles denied to them in the academic institutions of the imperial capital. In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of early-twentieth-century Rome, where von Haynau moved after marrying the writer Ulrico Arnaldi in 1908, her interest in occultism dovetailed with that of several members of the Futurist movement, from the painter Giacomo Balla to many of the contributors to *L'Italia futurista*. Both in von Haynau's visual and literary works, Futurism came to provide a vocabulary through which she could translate her belief in the multiplicity of the subject, derived from her study of occult sciences, into an instrument for the liberation of women from the demands of bourgeois society. Between 1915 and 1916, the Bohemian artist Růžena Zátková also moved in the Futurist and spiritualist circles of Rome, attending séances with the likes of Balla. In her contribution, Alena Pomajzlová points to the similarities between the Futurist conception of a dynamic universe and Zátková's conception of psychic life. Moving towards an increasingly nonfigurative style, she found in abstraction "a possibility to break through the surface of human consciousness and to depict the world of the invisible" (147). Her powerful, heavily textured works of the early 1920s (she died in 1923) turn Futurist technique toward the representation of the dynamism and rhythm of nature and the spiritual world.

The essays on Russian Futurist artists reveal interesting points of convergence between the Italian and the Russian versions of the movement, despite their much-proclaimed differences. Writing on the painter Olga Rozanova, Christina Lodder discusses her use of techniques derived from Italian Futurism to express the convulsive and exhilarating speed of technological modernity. In Rozanova's view, Futurism made possible a fusion of the subjective and the objective, a means of conveying, as she put it, "the total reality of the object via the prism of pure subjectivity" (210). Like many of her compatriots, however, Rozanova took a syncretic approach to modern art, fusing Futurism with Cubism and Russian Neoprimitivism into what Ilya Zdanevich called "everythingness" (vsechestvo). One of the main proponents of "everythingness" was the painter Natalia Goncharova, who along with Rozanova and Maria Siniakova, is the subject of Natalia Budanova's contribution. Writing on the artistic response to World War One, Budanova points to the shared militarism underlying the rhetoric of Russian and Italian Futurism well before the outbreak of the war. If anything, the actual conflict led to a realignment of the iconoclastic avant-garde toward the cultural and political establishment it had previously rejected. Budanova also looks at the paradoxical impact of the war on women artists, who, on the one hand, found new opportunities in the weakening of rigid boundaries of gender roles fostered by the involvement of women in the war effort, and, on the other, saw a strengthening in avant-garde circles of "a patriarchal authority that they had relinquished in peace-time" (184).

Surely the most unexpected convergence in the entire volume is that between the personalities and aesthetics of Marinetti and Gertrude Stein proposed by Allison E. Carey. Their commonalities, Carey writes, "are striking: both were brilliant self-promoters and experimenters with form, both were committed to an aestheticization of everyday life (especially food and mechanical objects)" (367). Carey convincingly argues that their shared love of automobiles

and speed is an aspect of their struggle with time, of their attempt to "escap[e] the past and achiev[e] a 'continuous present' or a 'continuous becoming'" (369). This absolutely fascinating and persuasive essay also suggests that there are still areas of modernist scholarship in which received ideas and the declarations of its protagonists—as in the case of Stein's often-quoted antipathy for Marinetti—impede a more complete understanding of the broader cultural dynamics behind their projects. And speaking of new directions for research, Meazzi, in the bibliographical essay mentioned above, indicates a number of areas in which work on Futurism and women still needs to be done, including the study of the international networks connecting women writers, artists, and intellectuals, the relationship between Italian and Russian Futurists, and the reconstruction of the careers of individual women linked to the movement. The present volume goes a long way towards beginning to address these issues, and will be a crucial work of reference for some time to come.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not note the remarkable production value of the book. Profusely illustrated, the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*—nominally a periodical—also comes with the kind of scholarly apparatus that one wishes would be standard in any scholarly publication, including a seventy-page index divided by names, subjects, and places that makes a miscellaneous volume of this kind a breeze (and a pleasure) to navigate.

Notes

1. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," *F. T. Marinetti. Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 14.

2. Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'italianistica* 7 (1989): 253–272.

Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form. Hillary Chute. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. 376. $35.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Eric Bulson, Claremont Graduate University

Comics no longer needs apologists for its status as an art form. In fact, we are living in the age of the so-called graphic novel, that hotly contested term, and the comics world is now running full tilt with titles for all ages. What's happened in the meantime is the growth of comics criticism, which is a strange thing, indeed, caught as it is between those individuals who are interested in superheroes and pop culture and the others intent on unpacking its formal complexity and semiotic uncertainty. No one needs to defend comics any longer from charges of immorality or immaturity, and in academia the field of "comics studies" is already here. The trick, however, is getting criticism sophisticated enough to reveal the strange, beautiful, messy worlds that develop once you put together images and words to tell a story.

Hillary Chute's *Disaster Drawn* is a bold step in the right direction, and one with the imprimatur of Harvard University Press no less. Following fast on the heels of her landmark study, *Graphic Women: Life, Narrative, and Contemporary Culture* (2010) Chute has decided to focus more specifically on what is, in reality, comics' ongoing fascination with violence. And here we are not talking about superhero "POWS" or "KA-BAMS." Chute wants to understand why the medium itself is so well suited for the task of representing real historical atrocities that include the bombing of Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and the genocide in Bosnia. The image on the cover taken from Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* makes this point perfectly. A line of soldiers is in the