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Gender, Science, and the Modern Woman: Futurism's Strange Concoctions of Femininity

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"I nostri nervi disprezzano la donna," writes F.T. Marinetti in *Uccidiamo il chiaro della luna!*, "poiché noi temiamo che braccia supplici si intreccino alle nostre ginocchia la mattina della partenza!"¹ Marinetti's intriguing exclamation, appearing in similar forms in several fundamental Futurist texts, proffers, in a single declaration, a complex nexus of gender and sex relations, politics, and aesthetics, denouncing at once woman, the moon and all of their allegorical, philosophical, and aesthetic associates: cyclical time, along with tangential notions of creation and death, and, more importantly, a female symbolic traditionally linked to love, reproduction, and beauty. Symbolic woman, here and in other Futurist manifestos, poetry, and prose is denigrated for her indelible materiality, inertia, and immobility. Marinetti and his disciples lead a metaphorical campaign against the feminine throughout the Futurist literary production, connecting the heroic Futurism of the prewar period to the second Futurism after 1918. The explicit misogyny inscribed in Marinetti's early work and throughout the subsequent Futurist movement, however, results as one of Futurism's greatest enigmas: while Futurism forcefully vilified all things feminine, the artistic, intellectual, and inherently political movement provided a unique opportunity for the modern woman to re-evaluate her own social, symbolic roles in the abandonment of a sexualized, corporeal female form, and redefine her intellectual and creative capacities, which had been traditionally relegated to the maternal.

Of interest in this study is the effect Futurism's "paradoxical feminism," marked by the abandonment of some and reappropriation of other conventionally feminine qualities and aesthetics, had on women's creative expression.² Departing from Marinetti's earlier literature and Valentine de Saint-Point's identification of the Futurist woman, I will examine the complex relationships drawn between material reality,

(pro)creation, time, and aesthetics in the pursuit of a utopic Futurist universe that consistently decries the feminine symbolic expressly rooted in the female body. The purpose of this project is to critically analyze Futurism's rewriting of conventional concepts of time, "nature," and (pro)creation, their influence on corporeal aesthetics and the subsequent effect on the literary identities of contemporary woman by examining scientific discourse and its inscription in some Futurist texts. After briefly outlining the development of Futurist corporeal aesthetics, and relative notions of time, space, and discourse, I will focus my analysis on Enif Robert's *Un ventre di donna* (1918) and Rosa Rosà's *Una donna con tre anime* (1918), examining woman's symbolic roles in relation to scientific discourse, intellectual progress, and modernization, in an expression of women's alterity within and against Marinetti's avant-garde movement.

Since the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," first published in *Le Figaro* in 1909, and in a number of Marinetti's early publications, the father of Futurism sets a framework for new conceptions of time, age, and procreation, and most importantly, the Futurist man's immunity to such biological barriers. Marinetti's initial campaign in the movement's introductory manifesto, glorifying war, militarism, patriotism, the "beautiful ideas" for which a man sacrifices his life, and finally, a contempt for woman, is some indication of the aesthetics that would follow; however it is in Marinetti's first novel, *Mafarka, le futuriste* (1909, 1910), in which Marinetti transcends symbolism to create an artistic movement of his own, that the author figuratively disparages the female symbolic of reproduction. The birth of Mafarka's son, Gazurmah, is the emblematic, artistic representation of a potential future without "defective" femininities. Mafarka bestows life upon his son, created strictly by his father's will ["frutto della mia volontà"],³ with a kiss,⁴ precluding the possibility of female/feminine contaminants: [. . .] "così, bello e puro di tutti i difetti che provengono dalla [vulva] malefica e predispongono alla decrepitezza e alla morte! . . . Sì! tu sei immortale, figlio mio, eroe senza sonno!" (209). In Mafarka's defamation of the maternal, Marinetti reveals an implicit connection between female reproduction and life and death cycles, declaring his son immortal and exalting his creation beyond the biological:

Ti ho creato così con tutta la forza della mia disperazione,
poiché l'intensità dell'energia creatrice si misura dalla

grandezza della disperazione che la genera. È così che la mia volontà, impadronendosi in una volta di tutta la mia anima, la fecondò e la liberò dal suo germe. (217)

The Futurist man's (pro)creation transcends that of a biological union, based as it is on the powerful will, desperation, and desire of the creator.

A theoretical basis for Marinetti's transformation of biological processes is provided in his 1910 pamphlet, *L'uomo moltiplicato e il Regno della macchina*, in which Marinetti explicitly outlines his reformulation of reproductive practices and the multiplication (as opposed to "birth") of the Futurist man. In his promulgation of a new, Futurist ethos, Marinetti espouses the importance of man's exteriorization of will, "[per] preparare la formazione del tipo non umano e meccanico dell'uomo moltiplicato."⁵ Futurist multiplication not only liberates the male sex from its female counterpart in the reproductive act, but also provides for a form of birth or re-birth that, in turn, immunizes man from the effects of time and space. In other words, multiplication allows him to dominate natural occurrences: "Il giorno in cui sarà possibile all'uomo di esteriorizzare la sua volontà in modo che essa si prolunghi fuori di lui come un immenso braccio invisibile il Sogno e il Desiderio, che oggi sono vane parole, regneranno sovrani sullo Spazio e sul tempo domati."⁶ In mastering birth, Marinetti is also able to rein in death, rendering the biologically apathetic "fruit of his will" immortal. Marinetti's Nietzschean attempt to overcome man in the perfection, by will alone, of human faculties dictates a new formula for the modern man (unaffected by principles of the past) and accomplishes yet another avant-garde act. As Simona Cigliana states:

[Anche] in questo senso, il Futurismo si sentirà impegnato in una azione di avanguardia: nel tendere a promuovere e a realizzare, il più concretamente possibile, uno stadio ulteriore dell'evoluzione, fiducioso nella "possibilità di un numero incalcolabile di trasformazioni umane."⁷

In this light, Futurist dynamism (which can be viewed as multiplication or infinite transformation), propagating speed and simultaneity, presents a new way to triumph over the effects of time and space, conquering the material and creating a dynamic body that does not have origin or end.⁸ By conflating biological and philosophical binaries of life and death,

Marinetti, the symbolic, new Futurist man, is afforded unprecedented control over time and space.⁹

Futurism's intricate inversion of reproductive practices, lead by Marinetti, presents a series of problems for conceptions of gender and female identity. First, the abandonment of the maternal and, subsequently, the material, in an attempt to dominate natural life cycles as well as integrate binary principles (rather than investigate interstitial relationships), all but eliminates a historical female identity predicated on the woman as mother and nurturer. Subsequently, Marinetti pioneers a campaign against the cult of Woman–Beauty as artistically valid or interesting, particularly in *L'uomo moltiplicato e il Regno della macchina* which explicitly denounces artistic notions of “Donna–Bellezza.” Though denigrating the tenets of traditional beauty, founded within the aesthetic qualities of the female form, Marinetti retains the material in his avant-garde art; however, for Marinetti and the Futurists, it is not the exaltation of organic forms that creates beauty, but rather their destruction. In its symbolic representations of war, soldiers, scars, and mutilation, heroic Futurism glorifies physical desecration as a new aesthetic which is yet to be fully acknowledged and appreciated. Within Marinetti's “estetica del brutto” (“aesthetic of the ugly”), biological bodies are deemed beautiful only through war and mutilation; it is in their devastation that physical forms transcend material existence to achieve spiritual vitality. This new aesthetic presents a barrier to Futurist woman: unable to partake in war and physical combat, the literal and metaphorical passage from material to dynamic is blocked.¹⁰ In light of these aesthetic reconstructions, women, should they choose to participate in the avant-garde, are faced with redefining and rewriting their individual and collective identities. Paradoxically, the Futurist woman's dilemma does not discourage the woman–artist or woman–author from participating in new formulations of modernity, but facilitates her transition: woman, both as political agent and as author, is presented with an opportunity to shed archaic, repressive identities and reinvestigate her contribution to the future.

Valentine de Saint-Point, actress, poet, dancer, and Futurist, is one of the first to respond to Futurism's *disprezzo della donna* in her 1912 *Manifesto della Donna futurista* and the subsequent *Manifesto della Lussuria* (1913). While de Saint-Point's contribution to the Futurist debate on gender, politics, and identity introduces intriguingly modern conceptions of gender and sex, the distinctions she draws between *donna* and *femmina*, *madre* and *amante* further complicate the *problema femminile*

inherent to Futurist discourse. In her first manifesto identifying the *donna futurista*, de Saint-Point proposes that the differentiation between man and woman is a superficial one, delineating complementary gender qualities that combine to formulate a complete person, regardless of sex:

È ASSURDO DIVIDERE L'UMANITÀ IN DONNE E UOMINI; essa è composta soltanto di FEMMINILITÀ e di MASCOLINITÀ.

Ogni superuomo, ogni eroe, per quanto sia epico, ogni genio per quanto sia possente, è l'espressione prodigiosa di una razza e di un'epoca solo perché è composto, ad un tempo, di elementi femminili e di elementi maschili, di femminilità e di mascolinità: cioè un essere completo.¹¹

Though feminist interpretations of literature by Futurism's women have often lamented the inability of women writers to overcome an overtly male-dominated ideology, de Saint-Point, and others, in an exploration of new possibilities of identity for the modern woman, exposes proto-feminist tendencies: here, in her separation of gender and sex, de Saint-Point suggests woman's capabilities beyond her sex and beyond the limitations of her assignment (through her sex) to a weaker gender.¹² The question of gender and sex becomes more abstract in de Saint-Point's distinction between *femmina* and *donna*, which is ultimately revealed as a distinction between *donna* and *amante*, or rather between biological female and woman. A woman, "la donna futurista," like all heroes, must possess the qualities inherent to both genders, that is, virile virtues in addition to her feminine ones. The woman who merits the disdain of the Futurists is the woman who has allowed herself to be overwhelmingly dominated by her femininity, a trait that is not necessarily representative of her nature or instinct: "[. . .] per istinto, la donna non è saggia, non è pacifista, non è buona. [. . .] Il suo intuito, la sua immaginazione, sono ad un tempo la sua forza e la sua debolezza" (33). In response to this assessment, de Saint-Point calls for Futurist women to reclaim their true instincts in order to realize their own potential:

DONNE, RIDIVENTATE SUBLIMEMENTE INGIUSTE, COME TUTTE LE FORZE DELLA NATURA!

Liberate da ogni controllo, ritrovato il vostro istinto, voi riprenderete posto fra gli Elementi, opponendo la fatalità alla cosciente volontà dell'uomo. (34-35)

Saint-Point not only calls for women to distinguish between womanhood and femininity, but also redefines female nature as a force to be reckoned with rather than instinctually maternal and passive. In forgoing a culturally-imposed femininity, woman is able to reclaim the power of her instincts, reacquainting her with true forces of what seems a dual nature. This perception of female disposition is radically different from conventional parallels between mother and nature and female-being/being-female as essentially linked to reproduction.

In liberating woman's creative position from the mere biological and in equating her vital, energetic potential to that of man in both *Il manifesto della Donna futurista* and *Il manifesto della Lussuria*, de Saint-Point highlights several fundamental concepts in the construction of the Futurist woman, including a predisposition toward sexual hybridity or androgyny that allows for the condemnation of traditional, cultural femininities without dismissing womankind as a whole and potential emancipation from corporeal limitations in the ongoing Futurist struggle.¹³ Both elements resurface in the writing of Enif Robert and Rosa Rosà.¹⁴ In *Un ventre di donna*, Robert contemplates her problematic femininity as it is increasingly threatened by an upcoming hysterectomy. The author refigures her corporeal, psychological, and artistic identities, viewing her medical mutilation as a form of transformation that encourages her to discover avant-garde, aesthetic truths. Rosà highlights similar themes in her short novel, *Una donna con tre anime*, privileging instead the metaphysical transformation of contemporary woman and creating a utopic vision of the woman of the future. Although the two texts differ structurally and thematically, both were authored in the same year (1918) and offer an insightful critique of the institution of Science as universally objective knowledge, instead making evident the limitations of linear thought and the implications of biologically-informed gender assignments. In this sense, the avant-garde act of both writers is two-fold: on the one hand, they create experimental and artistic texts that incorporate Futurist practices; while on the other they anticipate later Feminist inquiries into sexual difference, gender theory, and the ability of each category to inform creative and intellectual operations.

Enif Robert, noted actress and writer, authored *Un ventre di donna* in 1918—a hybrid, autobiographical novel that weaves together diverse literary forms, including diary, epistolary, and short-story, while recounting the author’s experience with uterine disease and a problematic hysterectomy. While the novel deals explicitly with the surgical deformation of the female body, and thus issues of maternity in an articulation of feminine identity, it also reveals a dynamic and multi-dimensional reformulation of modern woman and the woman-artist. As in the texts of de Saint-Point, the narrative adopts, at times, a conventional Futurist tone and aesthetic, equating the narrator’s proto *lotta femminile* to the contemporary trench warfare of World War I and alluding to a perceived androgyny. At several points throughout the diary entries, the narrator (who I will also refer to as “Enif” for clarification) contends with her lack of a traditionally feminine identity, calling her sentiments “hardly female.” Her anxiety concerning her own sex seems to be confirmed by the numerous doctors and specialists she encounters throughout the text, declaring her primary problem to be having too virile a mind in a female body.¹⁵ Enif’s already weak feminine identity seems to be further threatened by the pending hysterectomy that, with the physical removal of her primary female reproductive organs, undermines her symbolic identity as woman founded within patriarchal parameters. It is, however, through the surgical removal of her sexual organs and her experience with medicine that Enif is able to release herself from stifling social perceptions and to redefine her status as woman.

In *Un ventre di donna*, the narrator undergoes three transformations in relation to Science: what begins as an almost erotic fascination and Atheist faith in Science is quickly transformed into a profound mistrust of a highly reductive, industrial medical practice that butchers rather than heals. In light of a series of failed medical operations, Robert refigures the surgical victimization of the narrator and the diagnostic accusations of gynecologists into an emblematic struggle against gruesome scientific practices, fought on the carnal terrain of her own body. The narrator’s altered perspective begins to take shape in the eighth chapter of the novel, entitled: “Il ventre della terra ha un’immensa ferita chirurgica di trincee” (The womb of the land has an immense surgical wound of trenches). The title and content of the chapter allegorically connect Enif’s battle against Science with the vicious battles of trench warfare, both representative of violent, carnal sacrifice. Marinetti validates Enif’s struggle in a letter, affirming:

[Ciò] che accade al vostro ventre è profondamente simbolico. Infatti, il vostro ventre somiglia a quello della terra, che ha oggi un'immensa ferita chirurgica di trincee. L'ossessione che attira e concentra i vostri sguardi sulle labbra della vostra ferita è identica alla nostra. (113)

Marinetti's association between the surgical wound and the trenches of World War I embraces a somewhat traditional analogy between the earth and the maternal body as quintessentially material entities while subverting female weakness into militaristic prowess. The wound, as figurative trench, is designated as a "neutral space" ("terreno intermedio") in which Enif is able to access the same vital energy that propels men in war, despite sex and gender restrictions.

The eighth chapter, the first of many to be virtually co-authored by Marinetti in a dialogic exchange of letters, coincides with a shift in literary form from journal entries to a mix of epistolary, short story, and *parole in libertà* (poetic "words in freedom"). The hybridity of the text, also delineated as a "neutral space," recalls Robert's earlier allusions to sexual hybridity and thus access to an unnatural virility. In this sense, the Futurist ethos of Robert's writing seems to parallel the earlier writing of de Saint-Point in an advocacy of gender neutrality that allows woman to breach new territory by shedding archaic, symbolic identities. Corporeal emancipation or liberation from the maternal assumes profound implications in Robert's text, however, as literal and figurative collide in the execution of the hysterectomy. A close reading of *Un ventre di donna* reveals a more dynamic examination of the narrator's own identity in terms of woman's potential. Recurring examples of what is implicitly regarded in the text as female hysteria, further implicated by its etymological and historical link to the practice of hysterectomy, suggest that it is the author's inability to passively subject herself to the authority of doctors and other advisers that prompts a new creativity upon the loss of her potential for *procreativity*. Rebellion is engrained in the fabric of her flesh: she constantly refers to her "carne ribelle" ("rebellious flesh") that systematically rejects invasive medical treatment. Yet, it is in this rebellion that Enif identifies an untapped creative potential and challenges the authority of patrilineal discourse through her attack on Science. In response to her doctors' repeated lamentations over the hysterics of women and their reliance on beauty and sentimentality, Enif contends that it is scientific discourse that lacks explanations rather than woman's

character: “[I] medici sapranno forse, dico *forse*, il suo meccanismo uterino, ma sfugge loro completamente il problema psichico della donna, che ritengo abbia importanza somma sul fattore fisico. Dunque, non noi siamo *un pasticcio*, ma voi altri, incapaci di spiegare. . .” (104) [original italics]. The author’s implicit indictment of scientific practices brings to light the limitations of linear technologies: the exclamation seems to call for broader understandings of Science, art, and psychology that mutually inform each other to create more expansive knowledge. Women, as Robert points out, occupy a unique position that allows them to understand both the mechanics of the body as well as the psychological factors that inform its functions. Again, the author’s depiction of the artist or author, “capace di spiegare,” calls for a unique form of analytical hybridity that transforms the apparent ugliness of female hysteria into an aesthetic, intellectual practice. In the introduction to the novel, the author says as much in her description of an ill friend whose disease was misinterpreted by doctors as passive suffering and feminine delicacy. Robert diagnoses a more “interesting illness,” asserting: “[Quel] povero sistema nervoso vibrante sensibile, scosso di continuo da fremiti elettrici, com’era. . . estetico! Quanto il bel viso pallido, quanto la bella persona sdraiata in posa pittoresca di sofferente. . . intellettuale!” (xiv). Contrary to the opinions of doctors and scientists, the author identifies her friend’s suffering, both physical and psychological, as an aesthetic object to be recognized in a new practice of writing by women; a practice that illustrates woman’s “everyday reality” in honest, complex descriptions of an often ugly female experience (xiii).

Although Robert’s text subscribes to the Futurist practice of *anti-grazioso* (anti-aesthetic), her approach differs from that of Marinetti in seeking not to denigrate the feminine to the realm of anti-poetic, but rather to subvert the role of woman in creative practices. It is in this light that Robert explains her fascination with Futurism: “Spiego con ardore la mia passione del nuovo. Le mie impressioni sul Futurismo, come caotica forma d’avanguardia che va organizzandosi nella formazione di sensibilità *diverse e nuove*” (46) [original italics]. Even in following Marinetti’s “cura del desiderio” (the curing capacity of sheer will) Robert discovers diverse applications of Futurist will. Unlike Marinetti, who in *Mafarka* succeeds in sublimating reproductive capacities through his will alone, Robert redirects woman’s creative capacities beyond the biological: “Voglio desiderare, desiderare, desiderare! Intensificare il desiderio fino allo spasimo, concentrarlo su uno scopo da raggiungere.

Quale scopo? Eccolo: il più assurdo, il più difficile, il più lontano, quello di diventare. . . una scrittrice futurista!” (134). The avant-garde practice inspires the author to explore new creative practices by examining her body from an alternate perspective: no longer the aesthetic object of beauty, woman can become the flesh of literature through textual (pro) creation.

Rosa Rosà, talented author and illustrator, also challenges the role of woman in social and literary practices by consistently questioning traditionally feminine identities. A constant contributor to the Florentine newspaper, *L'Italia futurista*, Rosà first confronts the duality of woman's identity in “Le donne cambiano finalmente” in 1917:

La donna-oggetto. La donna-negligeable. La donna illogica, inconsistente, irresponsabile. La donna stupidità — la donna bambola, con contorno di vizio e salsa di amoralità. Consecutiva constatazione della sua inferiorità spregevole. Oppure: la donna - indipendente, affrancata, brutta, intelligente, acre, sgradevole perché non desidera di piacere. Consecutiva accusa di ermafroditismo, perversione di istinti, incapacità sentimentali, egoismo, ecc., ecc.
Insomma: chi mi può dire come bisogna essere?¹⁶

Rosà's reactions to women's predicament anticipate later feminist theorists who, like de Saint-Point's distinction between sex and gender, seek to isolate woman-object or woman as representation from woman as political agent in discourses on sexual difference.¹⁷ The author's sophisticated recrimination of traditional feminine gender categories illustrates an anxiety, or frustration, surrounding woman's existence and self-identification. Again, feminist notions of woman, not as one but as many, surface in response to social, cultural, and representational delineations of what it means to be a woman in modern society. Rosà, however, concludes “Le donne cambiano finalmente” on a somewhat optimistic note predicting novelties yet to come for women in search of modern identities, cryptically warning men:

[Le] donne avvertono gli uomini [che] esse stanno per acquistare una novità: un metacentro ASTRATTO, incontestabile, inaccessibile alle seduzioni le più esperte, -- inaccessibile ai consumatori dei tonici uso ‘Fernet’

Stanno per acquistare la coscienza di un libero 'Io' immortale, che non si dà a nessuno e a nulla. (114)

Rosà's "donna cambiata" stands to gain an aspect of female identity that is reserved to woman alone: an abstract metacenter that parallels de Saint-Point's unknown and fulfills the Marinettian scope of immortality through its inability to be consumed by man.

This aspect of women's identity bordering on the occult reappears in Rosà's satiric short novel, *Una donna con tre anime*. The novel problematizes both orthodox and modern interpretations of female experience and expression by presenting alternative notions of intelligence (contrary to the authority of contemporary scientific discourse), undermining the value of the Futurist ethos of velocity (specifically in its relation to the unfolding of chronological time), and proposing a future model of woman that upsets social, cultural, intellectual, and political hierarchies. With a nod to the Marinettian man's dynamic multiplication, Rosà's plain protagonist, Giorgina, undergoes a series of liberating transformations in "una visione utopico-futurista di metamorfosi della donna in un essere sensuale e intellettuale non più subordinato ma libero di esprimere se stesso attraverso un linguaggio radicalmente nuovo."¹⁸ Facilitating Rosà's "new language" and representing a radically different depiction of woman, one that stands against increasingly Fascist gender ideologies and competes with social pillars of sex, science, art, and intellect, is precisely this unattainable epicenter of female identity that challenges the Darwinian categorization of woman into human, or male-dominated, understanding.

Una donna con tre anime, published in 1918 at the peak of "The Great War" (1915-1918), simultaneously scrutinizes the unfolding of chronological time and the Futurist myth of speed, which during the wartime years was only exacerbated by rapid globalization and industrialization.¹⁹ As Lucia Re asserts:

World War One [. . .] coincided [. . .] with the first collective experience of globalization. Rapid communication made space itself contract and condense; the entire earth and even the universe appeared within immediate reach, mapped, controlled, under surveillance, and seizable by the strongest and most willful. [. . .] [The] accelerated rhythm of destruction and mass production of armaments that characterized

the first modern war, contributed to bolster the myth of speed as the quintessence of modernity, and the ultimate weapon of contemporary man and “masculine” nations.²⁰

As Re aptly points out, time, as experienced during the mass destruction and rapid modernization of the wartime years, accelerated to compliment a virile, male-oriented ethos of speed and domination. Women’s experience of time during World War I, however, contrasted the increased velocity of masculine force and slowed down as women experienced the absence of their men at home. This domestic deceleration of time parallels what Julia Kristeva would later call “women’s time”—a cyclical notion of time that revolves around seasonal change and the cycles of nature, “gestation and nurturing in the home and the private sphere”—linking woman’s identity to a feminine essence articulated in an *écriture féminine*.²¹ This mode of literature, authored by women in an attempt to reclaim their own female nature, stands in direct opposition to Futurist notions of speed, dynamism, and simultaneity, and is precisely the kind of delicate femininities that both de Saint-Point and Robert vehemently oppose in their writing.

In her novel, Rosà contemplates these different notions of time and its contribution to creative and cultural identities making it a central feature of the plot.²² Rosà concludes *Una donna con tre anime* with what she refers to as “materialized abstractions of time” (“astrazioni materializzate del tempo”) that are able to upset objective scientific law while also presenting a unique perspective on the future of woman’s identity. The author manipulates time, pushing it forward and slowing it down, in order to challenge both literary standards of chronological, narrative time and Marinettian velocity as the necessary antecedent to the creation of a Futurist “superman.” The author’s “abstractions of time” also facilitate her articulation of a hypothetical, utopic heroine, who, as the author contends, is a vision of women’s future but who creates unrest within a patriarchal, neo-Fascist social and literary context. Rosà purposefully accelerates and decelerates the narrative events, suggesting that there are truths to be discovered (even in a destructive, virile, Futurist fashion) through deceleration; for example, the freezing of the butterfly—an explicit response to and reversal of caloric Futurist speed—and the suddenness of Giorgina’s transformation brought about by a still period of quiet contemplation (“immobilità fisica e psichica”), or the spontaneity of all her metamorphoses, for that matter. Contrary to

the Marinettian Futurist hero that seeks to exist outside of time through simultaneity and constant multiplication, the novel's new "Futurist" heroine, Giorgina experiences her dynamism, or the perfection of her being, in time and through its manipulation, during moments of "slowness." In fact, it is the passage of time, and the occurrence of change, that will allow her eventual existence.

Rosà's treatment of space and time, marked by the intense modernization and the evolution of scientific practices (as noted previously in Marinetti's appreciation of Einstein's theories of relativity and bodies in motion) and similar to Robert's *Un ventre di donna*, calls into question developing notions of Science and scientific discourse as a benchmark for intellectual and creative advancement, in recognizing alternative female capabilities. While Robert uses medicine and its figurative destruction of the female reproductive body as a process that reveals new potential in women's creative practices, Rosà presents abstract, esoteric explanations and discourses questioning Science and the authority of rationality. Rosà's treatment of Science highlights the ambiguities between Marinetti's desire for domination and his dependence on traditionally female attributes of intuition and emotion in *Una donna con tre anime* by creating two realms that symbolically clash with one another — one, represented by the explicitly female experience of the protagonist, Giorgina, the petite-bourgeois housewife; and, the other, by the careful experiments and explanations of the scientists, Ix, Igrecia, and Ipsilon. Competing narrative structures and linguistic registers comically collide in Rosà's novel to create tension and highlight difference, not only as it pertains to the knowing of the world, but how that knowing is characterized by ideological, social, and sexual difference. Conflict between the two alternative approaches to knowledge arise on different occasions throughout the novel: as the scientists try to provide an explanation for the unexplainable events of their friend and colleague, Ipsilon, in the second transformation of Giorgina at the market, and finally, at the end of the synthetic novel when the scientist's succeed in assigning a scientific explanation to the strange events of the previous few days. Striking in these passages is Rosà's parodic treatment of science, scientific discourse, and scientists. The scientists are presented ironically in the second section of the narrative, introduced by the superlative "celebre," in celebration of their intellectual capacity, only to be confronted with an affront to scientific superiority—an "implausible" occurrence. Again, in Giorgina's address at the market, Rosà implicitly contradicts the

authority of scientific discourse with irony. Giorgina noticeably shifts to a scientific register (unfit for housewives and fruit and vegetable vendors) only to espouse nonsensical theories.

Rosà's attempt at undoing science as a tool for establishing hierarchies of intellect culminates in the summary of explanations at the novel's end. Fitting Giorgina's metamorphoses into their scientific grid, Ipsilon, Igrecia, and Ix are finally able to provide an explanation for the unusual occurrences in the city, defined as "*astrazioni materializzate del tempo*:" time, having inexplicably slowed-down, launched fragmented future events backward. Considering Giorgina's case specifically, scientists deduce that these are fragmentary pieces of the future woman, and in response, subject Giorgina to intense and prolonged electro-magnetic shock treatments. Here, Rosà presents not only the possibility of woman's future self-realization, but explicitly indicts Science as the primary obstacle to the development of female intellect. In *Una donna con tre anime*, the satirical conflict between Science—represented as a universal ambition to know the world, to supercede the material, temporal domain in the creation of reliable knowledge—and the unexplained dialogues with alternative conceptions of the Futurist endeavor. Rosà's contemplations of Science, irrationality, and the occult adopts Futurist tendencies outlined by Bruno Corra (and others) in his 1915 synthetic novel *Sam Dunn è morto* and in the subsequent manifesto on Futurist Science—"La scienza futurista (antitedesca — avventurosa — sicurezzofoba — ebra d'ignoto). Manifesto"—appearing in the pages of *L'Italia futurista* in 1916 and again in *Roma futurista* in March 1920, without the approval of Marinetti. Futurist science renounces the scholarly, banal approaches of academia to the pursuit of knowledge, outlining a single goal for scientific practice: "ingigantire sempre più l'ignoto precisando e frastagliando la zona di realtà che ci è meno sconosciuta" in the creation of "una scienza futurista audacemente esploratrice, sensibilissima, vibratile, influenzata da intuizioni lontanissime, frammentaria, contraria."²³ Bruno Corra, Arnaldo Ginna, R. Chiti, Settimelli, Mario Carli, Oscar Mara, and Nannetti, *futuriste*, determine that the supreme end of Futurist science would be "di non farci capire più niente: rivolgere la faccia dell'umanità verso il mistero totale."²⁴

The infinite mystery resulting from experimental Futurist science (which, in turn results as a somewhat controversial rival to Marinetti's mastery of human capabilities) aligns with Rosà's remarkable innovation for female identity: the abstract, unknown, and unconquerable. In

her novel, which relates quite explicitly to minor “futurisms” in the examination of the occult and the exaltation of the unknown, recalls de Saint-Point’s tirade against Feminism and its political repercussions:

[Si] lasci da canto il Femminismo. Il Femminismo è un errore politico. Il Femminismo è un errore cerebrale della donna, un errore che il suo istinto riconoscerà.

NON BISOGNA DARE ALLA DONNA
NESSUNO DEI DIRITTI RECLAMATI DAL
FEMMINISMO. L'ACCORDAR LORO QUESTI
DIRITTI NON PRODURREBBE ALCUNO
DEI DISORDINI AUGURATI DAI FUTURISTI,
MA DETERMINEREBBE, ANZI, UN ECCESSO
D'ORDINE.²⁵

De Saint-Point, in an inherently polemical statement, criticizes Feminism for its propensity to assimilate; to destroy the struggle from which women gain strength as other in an “excess of order.” Rosà, abolishing through her female protagonist and the recurrence of metaphysical phenomena in *Una donna con tre anime*, implicates a similar concept in her formulation of modern woman as an alternative Futurist hero(ine). Forgoing the reliability and authority of universal knowledge and privileging the unexplainable, Rosà speaks against Science as domination of Nature and of woman, reserving for future woman the abstract, unknown, and inaccessible.

Though their texts vary in theme and structure, both Robert and Rosà, following in the wake of de Saint-Point, highlight alternative female creative and cultural identities that stand against traditional gender categorizations and conventional feminine behaviors. Science, in both texts, serves as a framework used to isolate and quantify female identities and feminine roles. Scientific discourse, as cited by feminist scholars, serves as a traditionally masculine discourse that stands in direct opposition to the irrational, natural, and corporeal ideologies assigned to the feminine. Evelyn Fox Keller, in her pivotal study of the “science-gender system,” poses the question of how competing ideologies of gender and science inform each other in their mutual construction. Her study investigates the social and political ideologies reflected in apparent scientific neutrality as well as the popular mythology surrounding Science and its status as supreme knowledge,

more specifically, the concepts that cast objectivity, reason, and mind as male, and subjectivity, feeling, and emotion as female. Fox Keller's insight and the inscription of gender on scientific discourse retrospectively shed light on Futurism's paradoxes: on the one hand, Futurism subscribes to Platonic and Baconian scientific theories that seek immunity to temporal and material realities, embracing a universal quality that attempts to dominate Nature and irrationality; on the other hand, Marinetti's dictum commands that the Futurist man rely on intuition in pursuit of supreme exteriorization—a process that will ultimately lead to his mastery over life and death through constant multiplication. Robert and Rosà, in setting their female protagonists against purportedly universal, scientific constructions allows each author to appreciate the plurality of woman's intellect, identified in her ability to understand multiple analytical dimensions. In this sense, woman, characterized by infinite and unquantifiable identities, is able to construct a uniquely female dynamism that contends with the Futurist man's constant multiplication and inspires new creative practices while also preserving alterity.

Notes

1. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Uccidiamo il chiaro della luna," in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano de Maria (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2005), 14-26; 15.

2. I have adopted this term from Lucia Re, who uses it in her analysis of Futurism, war, and a discourse of the body in "Futurism, Seduction, and the Strange Sublimity of War," *Italian Studies* 59 (2004): 83-111.

3. F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka, il futurista* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003), 206. All subsequent parenthetical citations are from this edition.

4. The homosexual and homosocial underpinnings of this narrative event are explored by Barbara Spackman in *Mafarka and Son: Marinetti's Homophobic Economics*, *Modernism/modernity* 1, no. 3 (1994): 89.

5. *L'uomo moltiplicato e il Regno della macchina* first appeared as a pamphlet in 1910, under the Direzione del Movimento Futurista in Milan. Subsequently it was published in Marinetti's *Guerra, sola igiene del mondo* (Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, 1915), 95-100. Here I am citing from *Futuriste. Letteratura. Arte. Vita*, ed. Giancarlo Carpi (Rome: Castelveccchi, 2009), 41-44.

6. *Ibid.*, 42.

7. Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico: Contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002), 190.

8. “[II] dinamismo assoluto’ vagheggiato dai futuristi, che assumerà forme diversificate, esprimendosi come ‘simultaneità di ambiente,’ pittura degli ‘stati d’animo’ e delle forme in movimento, ‘vibrazione,’ ‘compenetrazione di ambienti e di tempi diversi,’ [. . .] che sono altre forme di superamento della materiale, di smaterializzazione e dunque di ascesa verso quel dominio dello spazio e del tempo che si connota esotericamente come ubiquità ed eternale contemporaneità.” Cigliana, *Futurismo*, 185.

9. It is important to note, also, that Marinetti’s mechanization of life has its foundation in the scientific discoveries of Albert Einstein who published “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” in 1905 and whose theories are echoed in Marinetti’s *La nuova religione-morale della velocità*.

10. Giving one’s body for one’s country prompts ultimate glorification in death—man’s spirit is exalted upon his body’s destruction. Hegel included a theory of man’s freedom as the result of risking his life for ideals of honor and freedom. See, in particular, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, ed. Arnold V. Miller and J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

11. This and subsequent citations are taken from Claudia Salaris, ed., *Le futuriste: Donne e letteratura d’avanguardia in Italia (1900 - 1944)* (Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982), 31-36; 31-32.

12. The exception with respect to feminist interpretations of female Futurists is Lucia Re, who consistently highlights the feminist potential of Futurist women’s writing (see, for example “Futurism and Fascism, 1914-1945,” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 190-204, in which Re argues that texts by Futurist women seek to dispel Fascist constructions of femininity.

13. See Salaris, “La donna futurista,” in *La storia del futurismo*, (Rome: Riuniti, 1985), 52-56.

14. Named Edyth von Haynau-Arnaldi, born in Vienna in 1884. See Salaris’ brief biography in *Le futuriste*, 264.

15. Enif Robert, *Un ventre di donna* (Milano: Cooperativa Grafica degli Operai, 1919), 97. All subsequent parenthetical citations come from this edition.

16. Salaris, *Le futuriste*, 114-16; 114.

17. One of many is Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), which investigates woman’s representation in film.

18. Lucia Re, “Scrittura della metamorfosi e metamorfosi della scrittura: Rosa Rosà e il futurismo,” *Chroniques italiennes* 39/40 (1994): 312.

19. See Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University, 1986).

20. Lucia Re, "Maria Ginanni vs. F.T. Marinetti: Women, Speed, and War in Futurist Italy," *Annali d'Italianistica: A Century of Futurism, 1909 to 2009* 27 (2009): 111-112.

21. For more on the concept of "Women's time," see *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 12.

22. Rosa Rosà, *Una donna con tre anime* (Milano: Facchi Editore, 1919). All subsequent references are to this edition.

23. "La scienza futurista (antitedesca — avventurosa — sicurezzofoba — ebbra d'ignoto). Manifesto," *Roma futurista*, March 7, 1920.

24. Ibid.

25. Salaris, *Le futuriste*, 34.