UCLA
Carte Italiane

Title
Futurism's African (A)temporalities

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9nj8s8mx

Journal
Carte Italiane, 2(6)

ISSN
0737-9412

Author
McKever, Rosalind S

Publication Date
2010-10-20

DOI
10.5070/C926011388

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Futurism's African (A)temporalities

Rosalind McKever
Kingston University

According to the anthropologist Marc Augé, a society's way of symbolically treating space constitutes the given from which any individual born into that society's experience is constructed; surely the same import applies to the symbolic treatment of time.[1] This, in addition to Peter Osborne's notion that the comprehension of modernity as a period of time should not be separated from the experience of time within that period, support the importance my research attributes to the understanding of temporalities when addressing Futurism's relationship with the past.[2] This paper marks a widening of the spatio-temporal borders of this research from the Italian past of the Roman Empire, Renaissance and Risorgimento to the colonial present in what Gabriele d'Annunzio termed Italy's "quarta sponda," the fourth shore, Africa.

In the genesis of this paper a conversation with a South African friend threw up an interesting phrase: "Africa Time." It refers to the slow pace at which things are done due to a relaxed attitude and inefficient systems. This phrase is a clear parallel to the notion of "Italian Time" that I was told about before my first visit to Italy. On the level of quantitative scientific clock time, Italy may only share a time zone with about a third of the African continent, but with regards to a subjective temporality they may share a lot more. These phrases, although not necessarily derogatory, are exterior perspectives; white South African and British respectively, indicating an awareness of, or preference for, a space of a different, more efficient, time. I have no choice, however, but to write this paper from a time and space other than that of early twentieth-century Italy. In my time and space Africa is not a homogenous "heart of darkness;" the words "primitive," "barbarous," and "savage" all require quotation marks; and for those with a liberal education, racist evolutionist theories are considered, in short, "primitive." But that is Africa for us now; what was it for them — the Italian Futurists — then?

In 1909 when Futurism was launched, the continent across the Mediterranean Sea was not alien; by the 1890s Italy had gained the

territories of Eritrea and Somaliland in the Horn of Africa. The Italian government invoked Roman Empire and Risorgimento traditions to present its colonialism as a civilizing mission and to draw parallels between the landing of troops at the important Red Sea port of Massawa and the landing of the Mille at Marsala.[3] In reality it was an attempt to catch up with the scramble for Africa and unite Italy's fractured population against a common enemy. Expansionism was popular with the Nationalists and those in the South dreaming of a land of plenty, but unpopular with the North unwilling to bear the expense. The defeat at Adowa in 1896, the first time a native army had defeated a colonial power, humiliated Italy on the international stage. It did however offer some unification of the population against those responsible in the military and government and, after some years of colonialism being firmly off the agenda, it boosted the desire to re-establish Italian dominance manifested in the 1911 Italo-Turkish war as a recapturing of the formerly Roman Libya. Italy's colonial activities expanded through the Fascist period, but ended abruptly with the Treaty of Paris in 1947; there has been minimal post-colonial discourse since Italy perceived its own colonial identity as more tolerant and humane than the other powers'.[4]

Beyond the field of politics and war, awareness of Africa among the Italian population was possible through illustrated articles on Africa in periodicals read by the middle classes and school textbooks which referred to Africa and Italy's involvement with the continent.[5] Italian anthropology of this period was mainly concerned with physiology rather than societies, but this does not and did not make it irrelevant to colonial discourse. In 1897 Giuseppe Sergi proposed that Mediterraneans had the same origins as, and were a subset of, the Hamites (descendents of Ham, the second son of Noah), the indigenous people of North and East Africa.[6] This Hamitic hypothesis made four points relevant to this paper: it ancestrally linked those in Italy to those on the fourth shore; it suggested that the area of Africa that Italy was colonizing was not the "inferior" black Africa, but the area inhabited by the "superior" Hamites (thus reducing the embarrassment of Adowa); it justified colonialism by stating that Europeans were helping Africa progress, as the Hamites had done before; and it made Africa the cradle of all superior civilizations.[7]

Turning to the cultural outputs of early Futurism's brush with Africa, it is clear that individual artists had different perspectives, which John J. White has brought together under the umbrella term "Futurist primitivism." For Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, it was more than just a

brush; he was born and brought up in Alexandria, and returned to the continent in a range of guises: as a war correspondent in Libya; as part of Fascist colonization; and nostalgically in later life. Alexandria was very cosmopolitan, however, and not typical of the North African coastline where his 1909 novel *Mafarka the Futurist*, set in the fictional Tel-el-Kabir, and the 1911 poem "Battle of Tripoli" were based. It should also be noted that Italy's previous and subsequent colonialism had taken place in East Africa, rather than Marinetti's North Africa. The personal aspect of Marinetti's Africa has been amplified with regard to *Mafarka*. Daniella La Penna, following Giusi Baldessone and Alice Yaeger Kaplan, discusses the novel psychoanalytically, drawing parallels between the characters and plot and Marinetti's own life; his love for his mother, his guilt over his brother's death and his creative desires.[8]

The story focuses on Mafarka-el-Bar, a warrior who, after bringing down the old order of his uncle Boubassa, goes about ruling his people belligerently until the death of his brother inspires him to create a son, without the aid of a woman. He creates Gazourmah, mechanical and immortal, who after being animated by Mafarka's kiss, kills his father. In the descriptions of the characters in the novel, particularly their skin tones, Marinetti makes clear that Mafarka is an Arab, while those he is defeating in battle and ruling over are black African. Mafarka is described as having a terra-cotta face, bronzed shoulders and calling (as Marinetti's narrator explains): "'Allah! Allah! Allah!' It was the signal to rest given by the Commander-in-Chief to the great Arab army." Those Mafarka defeated and ruled over are described as an "ocean of bitumen" and "countless black corpses strewn on the plains," while Mafarka calls them "my beloved negroes, my future subjects."[9] Such a distinction recalls the anthropological thesis noted earlier that associated Arabic Hamites with Mediterraneans. The personal psychoanalytical hypothesis that Mafarka is a transposed Marinetti is enhanced by this idea; Marinetti, the son of a Mediterranean working in Africa, is associating himself with an Arab (Hamite) ruling Africa.

The use of an African setting is not unique to Marinetti in Italian literature.[10] Giovanni Pascoli wrote of colonialism in Africa as an annexation of new soil, as a continuation of the national earth and as a solution to Italy's emigration problem. By contrast d'Annunzio saw Libya as something that had been subtracted from Italy many years ago that was now being recovered; he also saw Africa as a regenerating land. For Marinetti, Africa is consecrated as a mythological territory

where the metamorphosis of man and his environment unfolds in the institution of a new era. The themes of rebirth are associated with the feminine, Africa as mother — the seminal example of which is Marinetti's reference to the "blessed black breast" of his Sudanese nurse in the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" — but also Africa as father,[11] "a model for the futurist creation of a new Europe through the reshaping of the largely imaginary spaces of Africa."[12] 'Imaginary' is not used here to suggest the non-reality of Africa, but to stress that Marinetti's Africa was a construct created in his imagination. The use of a mythological, rather than historical, Africa is evident in the lack of colonial trappings found in *Mafarka*.[13] Africa does not only provide Marinetti with a backdrop. His "Manifesto of Futurist Literature" shows a desire to do away with the unnecessary trimmings of language — syntax, conjugated verbs, adverbs and punctuation - to make it more expressive. The "primitivization" of formal properties to enhance expression was akin to the activities of French painters in the first decade of the twentieth-century.

Perhaps due to Italy's belated foray into colonialism, compared to France, the Futurists were the first generation of Italian artists to engage with the non-Western tribal motifs seen in the work of their French contemporaries, the Cubists, and their predecessors, particularly the Fauves, and of course, Paul Gauguin. Both Umberto Boccioni and Carlo Carrà adopted the stylized shapes of African masks, particularly the "slice of brie nose." The Italians' differences with the French primitivists, however, led to discrepancies between their theory and practice. As Ezio Bassani identifies, Boccioni and Carrà had their own ideas about primitivism. The former saw Gauguin's journey to Tahiti and the presence of Central African "fetishes" in Parisian studios as a historical inevitability in the destiny of our European sensibility.[14] On the other hand, Carrà saw it as an error made by those looking for ready-made inspiration, mistakenly thinking that the needs of modern aesthetics could be fulfilled by African aesthetics.[15] Boccioni, whose awareness of Cubist primitivism can be assured by his close following of Picasso, began to show this influence in the painting *Antigrazioso* 1912, and in one of his last works *Ritratto della Signora Busoni* 1916, as well as in many sketches in the years between. In his writings Boccioni was very specific about the nature of his primitivism and barbarism (we will return to the distinction between these two words): "Science has brought us to a higher barbarism;"[16] "We futurists are of a higher barbarism and we

have in us the ferocity and the ecstasy for the trespassing conquests that we feel prepare our ambitious rapaciousness;"[17] and "Our primitivism must not have any analogy with the ancients. Ours is the pure extremity of *complexity*, the ancient is the stammering of a *simplicity*."[18]

Carrà was openly adverse to the Cubist interest in the primitive and after his 1900 visit to the ethnographic displays in the Musée du Trocadero, claimed that they had not interested him;[19] he wanted to get to the essential consciousness of man but without falling into the traps of primitivism and archaism.[20] His 1915 painting *Composition*, however, with its blankly staring mask, and a number of ink portraits of Boccioni (1913), Russolo (1913) and Remy de Gourmont (1914), from the collections of Paris' artistic milieu, have been compellingly compared to masks of African origin, specifically from Gabon and the People's Republic of Congo (that is West and Central Africa), which Carrà may well have seen on his visits.[21] Bassani, furthermore, suggests that it was the influence of the French primitivists Picasso, Derain, and Cézanne, that led Carrà to his interest in Giotto and Masaccio, and the solidity of Italian forms, so key to his later metaphysical work. Notably, before artists of the late nineteenth-century began to use non-Western subjects and techniques, the term "primitive" in art history referred to the early Renaissance artists - Cimabue, Giotto and Masaccio - who ushered in a new era in painting. Rather than primitive being a term for those who are retrospective, it was used for those who were initiating something new, something not seen before.

Given that we now have two definitions of primitivism, we require a brief clarification of terms. For our purposes references to primitivism are referring to the early twentieth-century European artistic fashion for drawing on non-Western influences (unless explicitly stated otherwise). For Boccioni, his references to primitives in his 1907 diary appear to refer to the pre-Renaissance artists, while in his Futurist writings (that is from 1910 until his death) he used both the terms "primitivism" and "barbarism," seemingly with reference to the contemporary artistic fashion.[22] Carrà also uses both senses of the word, referring to both Henri Rousseau and pre-Renaissance artists (Giotto and Paolo Uccello in his 1916 *La Voce* articles on them) as primitive.[23] In general terms, however, what is the primitive and how does it relate to the barbarous? These terms are certainly cognate, and are often used interchangeably, but the slight difference has temporal implications. As Johannes Fabian states, the primitive is "essentially a temporal concept;" it denotes

before-ness, usually before civilization.[24] The barbarous, however, has no distinct temporal significance; it is usually conceived as contemporary to, but diametrically opposed to civilization. Civilization and barbarism are defined in opposition to each other, by the ability of the former and inability of the latter with regards to language (originally Greek) and the reasoning and moral responsibility needed to exercise political freedom.[25] The primitive insinuates that change will occur, the primitive does not stay primitive — it evolves — while the barbarous is indefinitely barbarous. Barbarism is regarded as a potentiality for both primitive and civilized people.[26]

Futurism's relationship with Africa is usually described with the term primitivism, as this is an established art historical term with regards to modern art's interest in the non-Western, but it can also be discussed in terms of barbarism. Folke Edwards' 1986 conference paper on barbarism, Darwinism and Futurism, serves to remind us that there is a Futurist Barbarism as well as a Futurist Primitivism; Futurist Barbarism is based on belligerence and negation of humanistic and Christian idealism, while related to the interest in Africa, it is by no means dependent on it.[27] Barbarism's freedom from temporal confines means that the modern can also be barbarous. As White writes:

> Technology was barbaric because it entirely ignored the ideals of beauty the aesthetic codes which had been handed down through the centuries and which constituted the cultural heritage of Europe — and because it only paid attention to productivity, profit and efficiency. Mass culture, finally, was barbaric because it was vulgar and tasteless and ignorant of the normative privileges of the cultural elite.[28]

This is how Folke distinguishes the Futurist modern barbarity of science and technology from the primitive barbarity of Rousseau, which had inspired Picasso and the Fauvists and Expressionists. In Boccioni's statement that "science has brought us to a higher barbarism," barbarism and primitivism could not be exchanged as the primitive is necessarily prescientific. Nor would such an exchange function for "our primitivism must not have any analogy with the ancients," as while ancient and primitive are both temporal others, permitting analogy, the diametric opposition of the citizens of ancient Greece and the barbarians is well-known. In other cases the interchangeability of the two words prevents

us from disentangling them entirely, but as we continue, we should not overlook the fact that the primitive is temporally other to civilization while the barbarous is spatially other.

White sees primitivism as an essential component of Futurism and distinguishes Futurist Primitivism as "in no way to be confused with that espoused by any other coterie;"[29] "not backward-looking to the same degree (if at all), but seeks to create a new sensibility appropriate to its own culture, especially those elements of the modern world which point towards the future."[30] In this sense the Futurists are not dissimilar to the Italian primitive artists of the Renaissance. If we were to nuance Futurist Primitivism by what it is not (appropriately for primitivism as a classic example of the Other), then Marinettian Primitivism would emphasise its anti-intellectualism and Boccionian Primitivism would emphasise its anti-archaic stance. While they both share these attributes, Marinetti's literature can be described as archaic, and Boccioni's idea of science having brought us to a higher barbarism seems paradoxical to the anti-intellectual message.[31] Our third protagonist, Carrà, is more difficult to categorize, given his open opposition to primitivism, he is anti-primitivism, anti-intellectualism and anti-archaism. What this paper aims to do is to reintegrate these aspects of Futurism through the notion of temporalities and relate this back to the Italian tradition.

The exhibition "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1984, and responses to it, led to substantial discourse on the temporality of primitivism in relation to that of the modern. The formal comparisons between Western modern art and primitive or tribal (read non-Western) objects caused a backlash in the fields of art history and anthropology at a time when anthropology was becoming more historical in its approaches, and history was moving closer to anthropology. The crux of the issue here is the Western idea that the primitive is timeless. This links directly to Futurism as in the introduction of the 1998 English translation of *Mafarka*, it is claimed that "Marinetti [. . .] set his novel in a timeless present."[32] This point is reiterated by Kai Mikkonen in reference to Marinetti's whole African oeuvre: "Marinetti's Africa is a combination of different kinds of non-European spaces set in a timeless present."[33] Timeless in this sense refers to a lack of reference to clock or calendar time; in *Mafarka* there are no times or dates, days are charted by the rising and setting sun, not by numerals on a clock.

As mentioned above, Marinetti's Africa was a mythological, rather than an historical, space, the only indications that the story could be unfolding in modern times are the occasional references to machine guns and tinned food. In the MOMA exhibition, while the modern art labels stated the *anno domini* year they were produced, the "tribal'" objects, as James Clifford describes it, are relegated to "either a vanishing past or an ahistorical, conceptual present."[34] This tense, the anthropological or ethnographic present is, in the words of Sally Price, "a device that abstracts cultural expression from the flow of historical time and hence collapses whole generations into a composite figure alleged to represent his fellows past and present."[35] This practice results from African cultures not having written records in the Western sense, and ergo no history. According to Jacques Darriulat: "Africa has no written records, it has no memory [. . .] Africa and Oceania have no history. The story of primitive art is written in the present tense."[36] Temporality and historicality are linked by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's suggestion that Lévi-Strauss's rapidly transforming hot societies have history and slow moving cold societies do not.[37] Jan Vansina, however, has sought to abolish what he terms the "zero-time fiction" by using oral tradition, art and other such cultural institutions as historical "documents" for non-literate cultures.[38] Modernity can also be seen to deny the contemporaneity of the primitive, as opposed to Postmodernity when, according to Terry Smith, everyone is contemporary: "During the period of modernity's dominance, the downside of what used to be called cultural imperialism was a kind of ethnic cleansing carried out by the displacement of unmodern peoples into past, slower or frozen time."[39] The idea that African traditional art was coeval with prehistoric art is summed up in Leon Underwood's assertion that African traditional art was "without centuries and decades, in terms of evolution."[40]

The positioning of African traditional art outside the present is not limited to only external perspectives. The Nigerian-born African art specialist E. Odita Okechukwa's article on the subject states: "Chronologically, African traditional art is art of the past as opposed to the present, although its basic elements may continue in the present in a changed or modified form. This art has its own pattern of development and its own history, despite the fact that there are some basic traits shared as common to the human experience which influence this art and the art of many cultures."[41] Hal Foster saw the displays in MOMA as "setting the primitive/tribal adrift from specific referents and coordinates,"

that is adrift from the scientific time of clocks and calendars absent in *Mafarka*.[42] If clock/calendar time is missing, and contemporaneity is denied, then we are clearly considering time as something other than the linear progression of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years, which is identified with modernity, the age of the global temporal rationalization through time zones, and the West, in that the linear model of time as a sequence of specific events which befall a chosen people is from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, in *The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic* Marinetti says: "We have almost abolished the concept of space and notably diminished the concept of time. We are thus preparing the ubiquity of multiplied man. We will thus arrive at the abolition of the year, the day and the hour."[43] Rather than addressing a chronology we are looking at the quality of a certain period, what Johannes Fabian calls typological time; rather than measuring time by points on a linear scale, typological time is charted by socioculturally meaningful events, and thus gives us distinctions like traditional vs. modern.[44] We can also consider this with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, that is, the place in literature where time thickens and becomes visible. Lévi-Strauss's slow moving cold society and Terry Smith's slower or frozen time, not to mention pagan cyclical time, all recall Bakhtin's analysis of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, whose provincial setting has a cyclical time, in which there is no advancing historical movements, "a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space;" notably he considers this time to be "philistine," thus opposing it to the intellectual.[45]

To unite all non-Western cultures under the overarching terms primitive or tribal is evidently as incorrect as it is reductive, but it is just as reductive to color all Western cultural output of the modern age as modernist; for the most part, in fact, it was not. Modernism, with a small *m*, did of course have its Newtonian equal and opposite reaction. This could not be the Other of Primitivism; it was anti-modernism, which T.J. Jackson Lears defines as "the recoil from an 'overcivilised' modern experience to more intense forms of physical or spiritual existence."[46] Jackson Lears considers clock time a key component of this modern experience; he thus reads pre-modern cultures as timeless and sees anti-modernism as a search for an inert timelessness outside of history.[47] Kim Sawchuck defines an anti-modernist temporality as imagining "a rhythm of pacing of life not governed by a clock set in a single location."[48] The desire to escape over-civilized modernity is equated with the desire to

enter a different temporality, one that in terms of scientific clock time is an atemporality.

In order to distinguish time from history, and nuance the Futurists' repudiation of the past as more directed towards the cult of the past, or history, rather than the past itself, we can utilize postmodern ideas of history to stress that the past is made up of events occurring previously in time, while history is an interpretation of these events in narrative form. Furthermore, if we consider the ideas of time contemporary to the Futurists, it emerges that experiences of temporalities at the turn of the century were diverse, and so ideas of the past were also heterogeneous.[49] The Futurist relationship to the past is, as a result, heterogeneous. The main distinction in this period was between scientific and personal ideas of time, or in Bergsonian terms, quantitative and qualitative. The former refers to the Newtonian mathematical time of a succession of identical nows, represented by a ticking clock. This rationality of time was particularly evident around the turn of the century in the rationalization of local time, governed by solar time and the town hall clock, into the world time zones we are so accustomed to today. Conversely, personal intuitive time is temporality as we experience it, what Bergson calls *durée*. This form of time is experienced, not measured, continuous not divisible and includes the past within it. Einstein's theory of relativity gave scientific support to the idea that time is not divisible and experienced differently depending on your exact location, hence making every person's conception of time different. As some of the Futurists were intrigued by the division of time and speed, brought about by new technology, and others were more concerned with this flowing *durée*, and they discerned different levels of opposition to different eras within the past, their blanket animosity to the past can be more accurately read as being directed towards the history, that is, the transposition of the past into narrative, history's fossilization of action. Therefore, if we consider Africa's lack of written historical records to render it ahistorical in the Western sense, we can see Futurist interest in Africa as an escape from history and from a rational temporality. The Futurists aspired to the supposedly negative primitive tropes of irrationality, uncivilizedness and intuition in rebellion against the continual reliance on Italy's past as the birthplace of civilization and the Roman Empire and Renaissance as embodiments of rationality, history and intelligence. Africa was outside this tradition in space, and more importantly in time. No African nations had been represented at the 1884 International Meridian Conference

in Washington D.C. Furthermore, the evolutionist ideas around at the turn of the century considered a displacement in space equivalent to a displacement in time and thus positioned primitive cultures as the children of the family of man; they are yet to be educated by civilization and to grow/evolve into western man. The 1910 Encyclopaedia Britannica explains: "The Negro is essentially the child of the moment; and his memory, both tribal and individual is very short."[50] For Freud, in *Totem and Taboo,* the primitive mental life is "a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development," however Freud does not deny contemporariness as he considers prehistoric man to be our contemporary through primitive peoples.[51] In this way, primitive peoples are considered to be before the rationalization of time and writing of history, as these are both considered marks of civilization, the former for its scientific taming of the irrational into something uniform, called for by, and fulfilled through, technology, and the latter for its documenting in language the great deeds of the Western civilization.

In *Pittura Scultura Futuriste*, Boccioni explains: "We Italians need the barbarous to renew ourselves, we Italians more than any other population, since our past is the greatest in the world and because of that the most formidable for our life! Our race has always dominated and it is always renewed by barbaric contact."[52] This, along with his notion of a "higher barbarism" mentioned earlier, resonates with the previously discussed Hamitic hypothesis; drawing on Ancient Rome as the cradle of civilization has not renewed Italy, so perhaps contact with the Hamitic cradle will be more successful. Africa is the barbarous contemporary to civilized Italy, hence the appropriateness of Boccioni's use of barbarism rather than primitivism here. Boccioni's desire to distinguish between his primitivism and the ancient resonates with Hayden White's distinction between primitivism and archaism, in which the former idealizes those "as yet unbroken to civilizational discipline," considering men the same throughout time and space, only made evil by social restraints, while archaism idealizes "real or legendary *remote ancestors*," either wild or civilized and aims to reconstruct a golden age before corruption when men were better.[53] While many in Italy were harking back to the remote past glories of the Roman Empire and Renaissance through this archaism — the nationalist rhetoric of reclaiming formerly Roman Libya can be thought of as a symptom of this — the Futurists were clearly in favor of throwing off societal burdens to expose the primitive lost world latently present in modern man. If the Futurists were promoting being

un-civilized for the sake of it, this would be barbarism, but given their rhetoric of progress and obsession with the future, we can say that this is primitivism as rebirth.

In short, the Futurists were trying to escape a civilized-intellectual-historical-diachronic-scientific temporality by engaging with a primitive/barbarous-intuitive-ahistorical-synchronic subjective temporality. As Marianna Torgovnick insightfully states: "[The] primitive does what we ask it to do."[54] For Montaigne, "each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice."[55] It is the opposite of us. This malleability allows the Futurists to use it for what it is needed for — Marinetti has a setting outside overcivilized Italy for his barbaric stories; Boccioni has a source of regeneration that cannot be ancient or archaic as it is outside history; and Carrà has a formal influence filtered through his French contemporaries (despite his contestations).

In the sense of traditions, it is here clear that in their attempt to escape the Italian tradition of civilization, the Futurists entered the French tradition of painting the primitive. Although only manifest for recent generations, it was certainly a tradition in that it had been passed down from Gauguin to the Fauves to the Cubists. It is inherently related to the linear teleological progress of art history, the passing on of customs from one generation, or more accurately, one individual artist-genius, to the next. On the other hand, if one is presented with a tribal object, it is more likely that you would deem it "traditional." As we have heard, however, Western approaches to tribal cultures run all their generations together. If African culture is considered synchronic, then how is the handing down of a tradition possible? Tradition is re-defined and put to the service of art history as identified by Hal Foster's critique of MOMAism: "This retrospective reading of the primitive role tends not only to assimilate the primitive other *to* tradition but to recuperate the modernist break *with* tradition, all in the interest of progressive history."[56]

While it seems that by engaging with primitivism, the Futurists have sidestepped their own tradition, we are yet to nuance Italian tradition, in the way that we have for Africa, modernism, barbarism and primitivism. In his *New Science* of 1725, Vico portrays the savage as a natural poet, "the source of the imaginative faculties still present in modern civilized man."[57] He is concerned with the "barbarism of reflection" ("a form of corruption of human nature and hence of society") and one of the remedies he proposed to this is "a return to the barbarism of poetic man and a recurrence of the whole cycle."[58] As Hayden

White describes it, as man becomes increasingly aware of the purely human origins of the institutions he is supposed to honor, he becomes driven to pursue private pleasures at the expense of the public good.[59] This description parallels the decadent society and corrupt politics of the Giolittian era that the Futurists are keen to cast off. The "second barbarism" of this stage is "more barbarous than primitive savagery, inasmuch as it is unrestricted by the fear and ignorance which drove men to impose restrictions upon their desires in primitive times."[60] Furthermore: "Vico maintained that the original barbarism of the savage state was less inhuman than the sophisticated barbarism of the technically advanced but morally corrupt civilizations in their late stages."[61] Futurism's connection with Africa can be seen as ensuring that Boccioni's "higher barbarism" encompasses this original poetic barbarism, rather than being the corrupt second barbarism. Moreover, Vico is suggesting a cyclical, rather than linear, temporality, in which a return to barbarism could be considered a step forward. With each rotation of the cycle of the stages of gods, heroes and men, the culture progressing incrementally and so there is an undercurrent of progress in Vico's return to barbarism.

Another possible link occurs with Vico's concept of *Ingenium*, or mother wit, which he considers the proper faculty of knowledge, and attributes as particular to the Latins and their Italian descendents. Defined as "the creative power through which man is capable of recognising likenesses and making them himself," not only does *Ingenium* resonate with Marinetti and Gino Severini's interest in analogies as literary and painterly tools, but it recalls the Bergsonian intuition which the Futurists valued over intellectualism.[62] Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" demands that Futurist poets hate intelligence and aims to reawaken in them "divine intuition, the characteristic gift of the Latin races."[63] The return to barbarism as a throwing-off of the intellectual shackles of civilization is also a return to *Ingenium*. Futurism's primitivism/barbarism is therefore not solely to do with Africa — it is very much Latin-Italian, although the Hamitic hypothesis would of course connect the indigenous people of North Africa to the Mediterranean Latin races.

By using Futurism's and Africa's temporalities to reconcile the Futurist interest in Africa, considered as primitive, with the rest of the movement's future-oriented rhetoric, we have observed the importance of Africa for the notion of re-birth; it is part of both Marinetti's Futurist rebirth as he gulped down the "nourishing sludge" of the maternal "fair

factory drain" that reminded him of "the blessed black breast" of his Sudanese nurse, and the birth of the mechanical Gazourmah in Tel-el-Kabir. By drawing on Vico's model of society's cyclical stages we can see Futurist Primitivism as a forward motion. If the Futurists are to pull Italy out of its overcivilized politically corrupt present they must use their higher barbarism; their barbarism counters the historicality and rational temporality of civilization with the ahistoricality and atemporality of Africa. As a primitive land, it offers a model for a place "before;" as a barbarous land, it offers a place "other than," rational clock time and the fossilized volumes of history for the Futurists to emulate. Although the ethnographic present may give Africa a timeless quality, in 1909 it was chronologically contemporary to European modernity — a typological time that it was yet to experience. That "yet" should be qualified, however, with the Okwui Enwezor differentiation of Africa's modernity as the "aftermodern" — as the specifically African character of modernity can only emerge after modernity.[64] Enwezor's argument is influenced by Dipesh Chakrabarty's heterotemporal history of modernity, in which modernities are particular to their location and so there is no single, universal historical experience of modernity being rolled-out across the world.[65] This heterotemporal structure can be applied to the history of primitivism and helps to discern the particularly Italian nature of modern art's engagement with Africa.

Boccioni saw the African masks in Parisian studios as the invasion of a barbaric race into a declining people. The Futurists thought of themselves in a similar manner to those masks. By combining the higher barbarism of their own time, with the African primitivism which existed outside the Western conception of rational historical time, they could invade their own country and bring about the turn of the Vichian cycle. The Hamitic hypothesis and Boccioni's concern for Italians requiring contact with barbaric races to progress make Africa the ideal place for such a rebirth. While we can counter claims that contact with primitivism is *passatista* by demonstrating the barbarism of technology and the synchronic atemporality ascribed to Africa by the West, and use Vichian cyclical time to show this step-backward as a step-forward, we cannot escape the traditionality of engagement with Africa. Boccioni and Carrà entered the French tradition for painting the primitive while Marinetti's African inspired literature drew on both French and Italian precedents. Moreover, they were calling for a repeat of previous occurrences of renewing the Italian race through barbaric contact. The Futurists were

barbarians compared to the current civilization of decadent Giolittian Italy, but were "primitives of a new sensibility," bringing about the commencement of a new cycle, the rebirth of a new *superuomo*, and the creation of a new ahistorical, irrational, temporality inspired by that of Africa, just as the primitive (in its pre-twentieth-century sense) artists Cimabue, Giotto and Masaccio had ushered in the new era of the Renaissance, the start of the typological era which the Futurists were attempting to close so that they could start anew.

Early twentieth-century primitivism was considered by some to be a renaissance for western art. The Fauve artist Maurice Vlaminck, a pioneer of primitivist painting, bemoaned the anachronism of continual reliance on the African influence in French painting in 1951. "The so-called renaissance of modern art is nothing more than a bastard arrangement of Negro art. In order to recover their youth, the elect of our civilization who no longer have anything to say [. . .] have grasped greedily at the art of these alleged savages."[66] Vlaminck's tirade is more than reminiscent of the complaints made by Marinetti and others about the anachronism of Italian painting in the Futurist manifestos, but is Vlaminck attempting to close the cycle of which Futurism's brush with Africa and primitivism is a part? Due to its diachronic temporality of progressive history, the cycle of the fear of anachronism and search for innovation in the story of Western Art is continuous.

Notes

1. Marc Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 5.

2. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (New York: Verso, 1995), 1.

3. Alessandro Triulzi, "Adwa: From Monument to Document," in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 149.

4. Angelo Del Boca, "The Myths, Suppressions, Denials and Defaults of Italian Colonialism," in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonialism from Post-Unification to the Present,* ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17-36.

5. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, "Memories of Legacies of Italian Colonialism," in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 12.

6. "Con la demonazione di *stirpe mediterranea* io ho inteso di riunire una famiglia di popoli che abbraccia gli Egiziani antichi e i loro moderni rappresentari, le popolazioni dell'Africa settentrionale dalla Tripolitania al Marocco, alle Canarie, antichi Libi, oggi con diversi nomi, tutti i popoli antichi delle tre grandi penisole, Spagna, Italia, Grecia, quelli dell'Asia occidentale, Siria, molti gruppi di abitanti del Ma Nero, e poi anche quelle popolazioni che, stanccandosi dal Mediterraneo, si diffusero per l'Europa occidentale fino alla Gran Bretagna, e per la centrale e l'orientale fino a limiti poco determinati finora." Giuseppe Sergi, *Africa: Antropologia della Stirpe Camticia* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1897), 395.

7. Barbara Sòrgoni, "Italian Anthropology and the Africans: The Early Colonial Period," in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonialism from Post-Unification to the Present,* ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 62-80.

8. Daniela La Penna, "La trama e la struttura. Il narcisismo in *Mafarka Le Futuriste*," *The Italianist* 19 (1999): 133-163.

9. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*, trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), 6-17.

10. Giovanna Tomasello, *L'Africa tra mito e realtà: Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana* (Palermo: Sallerio, 2004).

11. Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 40.

12. Kai Mikkonen, "Artificial Africa in the European Avant-Garde: Marinetti and Tzara," *Europa! Europa?: The Avant-Garde and the Fate of the Continent*, ed. Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedict Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Orum, and Hubert van der Berg (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 398.

13. Cinzia Sartini-Blum, "Incorporating the Exotic: From Futurist Excess to Postmodern Impasse," in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonialism from Post-Unification to the Present,* ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 147.

14. "Il viaggio a Tahiti di Gauguin, la comparsa degli idoli e dei feticci del Centro-Africa negli *ateliers* dei nostri amici di Montmatre e Montparnasse, sono una fatalità storica nel campo della sensibilità europea, come nell'organismo di un popolo in decadenza l'invasione di una razza barbara!" Umberto Boccioni,

"Fondamento Plastico della Pittura e Scultura Futuriste," in *Pittura Scultura Futuriste*, ed. Zeno Birolli (Milano: Abscondita, 2006), 80-81.

15. "Il male aveva preso tutta l'Europa. Seguaci russi, polacchi, tedeschi degli artisti di Francia, ecc. ecc. Brutte copie di quelle confezionate a Parigi, gli stessi errori che si dovevano alla falsissima idea di potersi creare artificialmente una verginità e una sensibilità moderna andando nel lontano centro d'Africa a prendere belle fatte le ispirazioni e gli arcaici motivi per le loro costruzioni plastiche, le quali, non si sa perchè, dovevano poi per un fenomeno di suggestione culturale rispondere ai bisogni estetici della nostra sensibilità modernissima." Carlo Carrà, "Vita moderna e arte popolare," *Lacerba*, 1 giugno 1914, 167.

16. Umberto Boccioni, "Il Cerchio Non Si Chiude," *Lacerba*, 1 marzo 1914, reprinted in *Archivi del Futurismo*, vol.1, ed. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori (Roma: De Luca, 1958), 193.

17. Ibid., 193.

18. Lettera da Umberto Boccioni a Vico Baer, 21 giugno 1913, in *Archivi del Futurismo*, vol.2, ed. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori (Roma: De Luca, 1958), 49.

19. "[Il] Trocadero [. . .] mi parve piuttosto squallido e di scarso interesse." Carlo Carrà, *La mia vita*, ed. Massimo Carrà (Milano: Abscondita, 2002), 28.

20. Carlo Carrà, *La mia vita*, ed. Massimo Carrà (Milano: Abscondita, 2002), 124-25.

21. Ezio Bassani, "Italian Painting," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol. 2, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 407. The comparison between the Fang mask and Carrà's *Ritratto di Russolo* is also made in Alessandro Del Puppo, *Primitivismo* (Milano: Giunti, 2003), 25. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco dismisses Bassani's article finding the source of the primitive turn in Carrà's work the influence of Henri Rousseau. "The 'gentil' Rousseau [. . .] is in fact the true opposite pole to the "art nègre" then triumphant, to which Carrà's primitivism has been linked (see the recent questionable essay for the "Primitivism" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York)." Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Carlo Carrà: The Primitive Period: 1915-1919* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1987), 15. This paper will return to both the exhibition Bassani's essay in the catalogue for this exhibition and the relationship between Carrà and Rousseau.

22. "C'è nel ritratto un ritorno furioso ai primitivi e segna l'influenza del Bellini di Brera (La pietà), delle stampe di Dürer all'Ambrosiana, di Leonardo moltissimo e della gita a Monaco. Mi entusiasmano tutti gli artisti fino a Raffaello." Umberto Boccioni, *Diari*, ed. Gabriela di Milia (Milano: Abscondita, 2003), 53.

23. Carrà, *La mia vita*, 115. Carlo Carrà, "Parlata Su Giotto," *La Voce*, 31 Marzo 1916, 165. Carlo Carrà, "Paolo Uccello Costruttore," *La Voce*, 30 Settembre 1916, 375.

24. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 17.

25. For a definition of "barbarian," see the *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, ed. John Roberts (Oxford University Press, 2007).

26. Hayden White, *The Tropics of Discourse* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 179.

27. Folke Edwards, "Barbarism, Darwinism and Futurism" (paper presented at the conference *Convegno Internazionale, Futurismo e le avanguardie*, sale Apollinee, Teatro La Fenice, Venezia, 26-28 settembre 1986).

28. Ibid.

29. John J. White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 294.

30. Ibid., 316.

31. "Whether his setting is the past, the present, or the future, Marinetti manages to create a world that invariably radiates the same archaic quality." White, *Literary Futurism*, 333.

32. Carol Diethe, introduction to *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*, by Marinetti, trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), xvi.

33. Mikkonen, "Artificial Africa," 398.

34. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 201.

35. Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 57.

36. Jacques Darriulat, "African Art and Its Impact on the Western World," *Réalités* (English Edition) 273 (1973): 50.

37. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "Introduction: The Historicization of Anthropology," in *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches*, ed. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2-3.

38. Jan Vansina, "Cultures Through Time," in *A Handbook of Method in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. R. Naroll and R. Cohen (Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History Press, 1970), 165.

39. Terry Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporary Question," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

40. Leon Underwood, *Figures in Wood of West Africa* (London: Tiranti, 1951), 18.

41. E. Okechukwa Odita, "African Art: The Concept in European Literature," *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 2 (1977): 190.

42. Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art, Or White Skin Black Masks," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Washington: Bay Press, 1985), 187.

43. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic" (1911-1915), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 81.

44. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other,* 23.

45. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981), 247-48.

46. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), xv.

47. Kim Sawchuk, "Modernity, Nostalgia and the Standardization of Time," in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Placing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 156.

48. Ibid., 160.

49. On the standardization of time and different conceptions of the nature of the past see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

50. Encyclopaedia Britannica (1910), vol.1, 325. Quoted in Odita, "African Art," 191.

51. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1950), 1.

52. Boccioni, *Pittura Scultura Futuriste*, 81.

53. White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 170-71.

54. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8-9.

55. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals," in *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: H. Hamilton, 1958), 152-53.

56. Hal Foster, "'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," 193.

57. White, *Tropics of Discourse,* 174.

58. Leon Pompa, introduction to *The First New Science*, by Giambattista Vico, ed. Leon Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxxvi-xxxvii.

59. White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 201.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 174.

62. Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. by L.M. Palmer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 102.

63. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 89.

64. Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," *Altermodern: Tate Triennale*, ed. Nicholas Bourriaud (London: Tate, 2009), unpaginated.

65. Dipesh Chakarabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

66. "Art: Anachronisms in Paris," *Time*, October 8, 1951. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,859387,00.html (accessed January 9, 2010). As the *Time* article states, Vlaminck's comments were first published the previous week in the Paris weekly, Arts; I here quote from the English version in *Time* magazine. Quoted in Odita, "African Art," 196.