On “Old Futurism”
Daniel Litt

“We rebel against that spineless worshipping of old canvases, old statues and old bric-a-brac, against everything which is filthy and worm-ridden and corroded by time. We consider the habitual contempt for everything which is young, new and burning with life to be unjust and even criminal.” -- Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini, _Manifesto of Futurist Painters_

The futurists rejected the past; there are no futurists now, so it seems natural to revive the movement (albeit without its fascist and misogynist components). To acknowledge this debt, we will call it “Old Futurism,” and reject all of the past, including Futurism. Ignore that last sentence.

The poet should continue every trend to its fullest extent; in particular, the trend of reverence must be made absolute. The poet should offer his predecessors up as a burnt offering to themselves. Consider, for example, concrete poetry. Instead of writing this, the poet should simply take a photograph. Love poems must be replaced by love.

The methods of old futurism are those of the present (all methods are those of the present). Images in poetry must not, however, be accurate. If the poet wants accuracy, he should build a model. The poem should not make use of language as we know it; language has already been written. Invent words and mythology, use sound rather than meaning. A poem should not be laden with meaning, because meaning is the reader’s possession. Zibble on, young poets! While it may be undignified, zibble on!

The futurists were interested in machinery, speed, and violence. Speed is passé; let us move slowly and deliberately, without concern for ideals or truth. Revel in command! Do you have the authority to cause your reader to question his self-possession? Machinery is natural; let us look for something stranger. Violence is older than us; let things be for a while.

The futurists were radical and despicable; be despicable, for this is an easy way to arouse one’s readers. If they hate what you write, then you have been affective. Do not be straightforward, however.

Be brief. Leave things unsaid. Humble the reader.

Imagine you are someone else, and write their poetry. If you are not Yeats, and you write his poem about wild swans at Coole, then you might be discussing evolutionary biology or referencing Yeats’ poem about Leda (which Yeats would never do). Writing someone else’s poetry destroys them because they no longer are unique; while it serves no new purpose, it helps to kill the past. You are providing a service for future writers.
Old Futurists do not worry about the moral impact of their work. If our work starts a war and loses a generation, so much the better—we’ll just get to the next one faster. There is no need to exalt the reader, merely to change him. Raise the dead, or the unborn! Hurry change ahead. The most important part of Old Futurism is a return to roots, in order to destroy them. Let us reinvent language from its basic building blocks; let us unwire the human mind into something terrifyingly different.