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Futurism, Symbolism and Bergson

Futurism presented itself as a repudiation of Symbolism. Yet, as we have seen, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's thought was deeply imbued with Symbolist ideas. And Marinetti was not alone among the Futurists in having been deeply influenced by Symbolist thought. The early Boccioni drew many of his early ideas on painting directly from Gaetano Previati (1852-1920) and, even the ideas he worked out later in life drew much (even if indirectly) from that source. Previati is often classified among the Italian Divisionists, and like Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, he devoted notable efforts to developing a systematic, scientific understanding of colour and light and to deliberating on technical issues concerning painting. Nonetheless, it is not the "Divisionist" character of Previati's work that had the greatest influence on the Futurists—rather it was his Symbolist-inspired belief that painting should devote itself to capturing a higher reality known only by exalted forms of consciousness. Such religious or metaphysical beliefs Previati shared with other Italian Divisionist painters: Giovanni Segantini (1858-99) was a pantheist who proposed that painters should adopt an ascetic way of life so that they might be privy to higher spiritual and artistic truths. The "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" declared, "we conclude that painting cannot exist today without Divisionism"; it is the spiritual side of Italian Divisionism that they emphasized with this comment, for like Symbolism, Futurism is an art movement given to depicting higher forms of reality, where the interrelations amongst all things is evident. This is especially clear in the Futurists' interest in the work of Medardo Rosso (1858 -1928), a sculptor who was the victim of appalling critical and curatorial neglect. Rosso took particular interest in sculpture's interaction with its environment; he wrote to a friend, Edmond Claris, "In nature there are no limits, and there cannot be in a work of art. It should capture the atmosphere that surrounds the figures, the colour that animates it, the perspective that fixes it in position. When I do a portrait I cannot limit myself to the lines of the head since this head belongs to a body and exists in an environment that influences it: it is part of a whole that I cannot suppress." The declaration that the Futurists made in their "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting," that "[t]o paint a human figure you must not paint it; you must render the whole of its surrounding atmosphere. . . . Our bodies penetrate the sofas upon which we sit, and the sofas penetrate our bodies" arose from a similar, Symbolist conception of reality. "The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" even goes so far as affirm that "The sixteen people around you in a rolling motor bus are in turn and at the same time one, ten, four, three; they are motionless and they change places; they come and go, bound into the street, are suddenly swallowed up by the sunshine, then come back and sit before you, like *persistent symbols of universal vibration*." (emphasis mine)—a Futurist articulation of vibratory modernism, that cluster of vanguard movements that maintained links to the hieratic conceptions of Symbolism. The Futurist's interest, so characteristic of the time, in the power of movement to disintegrate form (evident as much even in Marey's scientific chronophotography as in Muybridge's catalogue of obsessions) connect with their Divisionist heritage and their interest in Medardo Rosso's radical wax sculptures, in which forms undergo radical transformations and become fluid: all convey their interest in a undefined unity beyond particular forms. The principal difference that separates the Futurists from the Symbolists is not that the Futurists abjured the Symbolist interest in spiritual reality, but that the Symbolists acknowledged the experience of the disintegration of particular forms involves the loss of a violence as particular beings lose their definiteness and their individuality, and that which consumes their individuality comes to the fore. By the same token, one of the differences that separate the Cubists and the Futurists was

that the Cubists (rather like Arnold Schönberg with his methods of based on permutations of a tone row) attempted to formulate a new, counter-stability to era's impulse to destabilize everything: thus they emphasized architectonic feature and plastic construction. The Futurists, by way of contrast, emphasized states of mind and lines-of-force.

Ardengo Soffici organized, on behalf of the *La Voce* group, the first Impressionist exhibition in Italy, held at the Lyceum Club in Florence in April 1910. Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla pointed out that Ardengo Soffici's articles on Impressionism, published in *La Voce* in 1909, influenced the emerging Futurist cause. In one of these articles they would have read

The movements of a figure must not stop with its contour. . . . The intensity of the play of values and the protrusions of lines of the work should impel it into space, spreading out into infinity the way an electric wave emitted by a well-constructed machine flies out to rejoin the eternal force of the universe.

The idea that all phenomena possess only relative natures, and that this relativity is the consequence of their essences' being dynamic, is a key to Futurist thinking. The Futurists might have extended the idea, and furnished it with a more modern cast, but its provenance in theories of perception the Impressionists embraced and in the aesthetico-metaphysical ideas of the Symbolists (many of them derived from the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Bergson). Soffici helped the Futurist understand better the philosophical depths of Impressionist and Symbolist art and art-theory and provided them with a model for modifying theoretical principles derived from the Impressionists and Symbolists (and, equally, from Schopenhauer and Bergson) to suit the present.

Universal Dynamism and Perception

Symbolism and Impressionism were not the only source of the Futurists interest in the relativity of natures—in the idea that objects and the environment interpenetrate one another; the interest derives also from a source that the Futurists and the Symbolists share, viz., Henri Bergson. The Futurists' proposals regarding reform of the cinema are tied to their ideas on perception.

On April 11, 1910, two months after the first manifesto on painting, the Futurists published in *Poesia* a second manifesto on painting, the famous "*La pittura Futurista, manifesto tecnico*" ("Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto"). This manifesto, signed by the painters Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, offered more definite propositions than the first manifesto did. The core concept for the entire manifesto is that of "universal dynamism." We have already cited a brief passage from the manifesto on that topic. Here is a more expansive statement:

The gesture which we would reproduce on the canvas shall no longer be a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the dynamic sensation itself [made eternal]. . . .

Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. . . .

A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears. On account of the persistence of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves. . . . Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular!. . . The motor-bus rushes into the houses which it passes. . . Painters have shown us the objects

and the people placed before us. We shall henceforward put the spectator in the centre of the picture.

The authors of the passage were forging a unified system of thought from their Symbolist commitments, their Bergsonian convictions, and some scientific ideas about the relation between mind and matter. They deployed the notion of universal dynamism to refute any belief in the usefulness in capturing the appearance of any single movement. This was what the chronophotographer E. J. Marey had done, and his methods evidently failed to capture the essence of movement (for reasons that Daniel Kahnweiler pointed out). Bergson, too, had criticized the underlying idea of chronophotography, for, he asserted, its efforts result in analyzing motion into discrete steps that cannot be re-integrated into a continuous flow. To capture that would require methods that would convey the impact of the dynamics—this explains their claim, that they wished to reproduce on the canvas not a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism, but simply dynamic sensation itself. Undergirding such assertions is the Symbolist belief in the identity, in the realm of ultimate reality (*i.e.*, the dynamic realm), of consciousness and reality—the belief that there the sensation of dynamism is dynamism itself, in its very essence.

For Boccioni, for example, Marey was an abysmal failure, because his scientific approach rendered him incapable of recognizing the (anti-scientific) truths Bergson's philosophy offered. Fuelled by such an anti-scientific animus (which the Futurists' enthusiasm for the technologies of speed required them leave rather nubilous), what the manifesto presents finally is an approach to apprehending universal dynamism that is only little different from that of the Symbolists.

In order to conceive and understand the novel beauties of a Futurist picture, the soul must be purified [or “become again pure”]; the eye must be freed from its veil of atavism and culture, so that it may at last look upon Nature [truth, higher reality] and not upon the museum [artifice, derivative reality] as the one and only standard.

As soon as ever this result has been obtained, it will be readily admitted that brown tints have never coursed beneath our skin; it will be discovered that yellow shines forth in our flesh, that red blazes, and that green, blue and violet dance upon it with untold charms, voluptuous and caressing.

How is it possible still to see the human face pink, now that our life, redoubled by noctambulism, has multiplied our perceptions as colourists? The human face is yellow, red, green, blue, violet. The pallor of a woman gazing in a jeweller's window is more intensely iridescent than the prismatic fires of the jewels that fascinate her like a lark. . . .

Your eyes, accustomed to semi-darkness, will soon open to more radiant visions of light. The shadows which we shall paint shall be more luminous than the high-lights of our predecessors, and our pictures, next to those of the museums, will shine light blinding daylight compared with deepest night.

Bergson's manner of working out the central conception of his philosophical system, his conception of time, influenced the Futurist's ideas on universal dynamism despite their progressive Hegelian/Marxist thesis that history proceeds through conflict, the Futurists adopted Bergson's ideas on continuity—that there exists real continuity in time and a real of continuity in movement. The belief in continuity in movement was the basis for their interest in paths of action. Carrà (in *Bozzetto per i Funerali dell'Anarchico Galli or The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*, 1911) and Balla (in *Linee fondamentali + successioni dinamiche* or *Lines of directions +*

dynamic successions, 1912) and *Velocità Astratta + Rumore (Abstract Speed and Sound, 1913)* used pathos of action to propose a different conception of movement than that embodied in Mary's chronophotography. Boccioni made the same point with his famous sculpture *Forme Uniche nella continuità dello spazio (Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913)*.

A mystical/Symbolist conception of reality lies right at the core of the manifesto: the passage quoted asserts a radical Heracliteanism that challenges the commonsense conception of the identity of an object. The Futurists rejected our belief that self-contained objects, some of which move, and some of which do not, make up reality. Futurists averred that what actually has ontological and metaphysical priority is movement (or energy). This primary metaphysical reality is formed into paths. A reifying tendency of mind prompts us to picture an agent which performs the action traced out by each of the paths. The strength of this tendency leads us to assume that the object has metaphysical priority and that action is something an agent performs; in fact, however, the truth is just the reverse: action (force) is first and the agent is something that we use to help us collect various simultaneous movements into groups. Expanding on this radical insight, the "Manifesto Tecnico della Pittura Futurista" ("Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting") argues that objects (collections of forces) have different boundaries than we usually think them to have: thus, the body and the environment to which it belongs constitute a single, seamless whole: the body and the sofa on which it rests form a single system of interacting energies.

This interpretation of the passage provides a basis for understanding the differences between the technical practices of the Futurists and those of the Cubists. The Cubists attempted to present objects in their full solidity and so they depicted them as a mosaic of interacting braces. With these means, they never gave away the least part of the object's solid, existence; indeed the Cubists followed Cézanne in using multiple perspectives to increase the apparent mass and solidity of the objects their paintings represented. The Futurists, on the other hand, eliminated any sense of volume and mass, and presented instead a trace of swift passage. While the Cubists adjoined facets to create a solid geometry of interacting masses, the Futurists presented velocity.

So, while Picasso and Braque used set forms whose volumetric characteristics were already understood, the Futurists contrived for each piece new strategies for conveying the corporeal effect the impact of force has. This is the grounds for a major difference that separated the Cubists and the Futurists: while the Cubists were deeply concerned with the architectonics of painting, which led to the tight, solid integration of forms that are typical in their work (and especially in the work of the so-called "gallery Cubists," Braque and Picasso), the Futurists were interested in the dissolving of objects, to allow that vibratory realm of pure energy to emerge. That this vibratory realm has so many features of what we normally take to be the ideal realm made it possible for the Futurists to connect the intensities of this domain with states of mind, and to propose the essentially Romantic view that the experience of overcoming the distinction between subject and object is ecstatic. Objects and subjects alike lose their individuality and are subsumed in the whole—that is the gist of the Futurists' use of the Bergsonian concept of intuition.

The novel conception of the identity of objects compelled the Futurists to formulate a new epistemology, and this epistemology served as a primary motivation for their techniques and practices. Though the Futurists were contemporaries of the Cubists, and though both strove to bring forth an art of simultaneism (an art that would represent successive moments together on a single canvas, as though the speed with which they succeeded one another made them contemporaneous), the Futurists' ideas on perception had more in common with those of the Impressionists than with those of the Cubists. The colour theories of the Impressionists recognized that no object is isolated from environment—the light that one object reflects onto another affects the second object's appearance. Every object absorbs features from its

environment, even as it influences features of all other objects in its environment. OK CHECK CHECK CHECK CHECK Object and environment are fused in mutual interaction. The Futurists attempted to extend this principle by making action itself becomes the primary source of our knowledge.

Related ideas about the relative nature of all existents—according to which the being of each object is dependent on the being of all the others—appear in the theory and practice of Futurist sculpture. The key document on this topic is Umberto Boccioni's "Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista" ("Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture"). The paradigm of the false conception of the sculpture as an autonomous object, and of its subject as an isolated entity, is associated with representations of the nude. Boccioni was simply scathing on this topic: "Sculpture has not progressed because of the limits inherent within the accepted field of the academic concept of the nude. An art that must take all the clothes off a man or woman in order to produce any emotive effect is a dead art!" Boccioni's descriptions of how to redeem sculpture from its backwardness were downright mystical.

We must take the object which we wish to create and begin with its central core. In this way we shall uncover new laws and new forms which link it invisibly but mathematically to an EXTERNAL PLASTIC INFINITY and to an INTERNAL PLASTIC INFINITY. This new plastic art will then be a translation, in plaster, bronze, glass, wood or any other material, of those atmospheric planes which bind and intersect things. This vision, which I have called PHYSICAL TRANSCENDENTALISM . . . , could provide for the plastic arts those sympathetic effects and mysterious affinities which create formal and reciprocal influences between the different planes of an object.

Sculpture must, therefore, make objects live by showing their extensions in space as sensitive, systematic and plastic; no one still believes that an object finishes off where another begins or that there is anything around us—a bottle, a car, a house, a hotel, a street—which cannot be cut up and sectionalized by an arabesque of straight curves.

Boccioni here argues for the reality (or, at least, for the phenomenal reality) of the vectors that Futurist painting represented through its use of lines-of-Force and paths-of-action (dynamic successions). In the introduction to the catalogue for the Futurist exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in Paris, Boccioni and his co-authors outlined what is required to render dynamic sensation: the spectator must live in the centre of picture. This goal can be achieved by working with "lines-of-force." The Futurists believed this sort of interpenetration (this sort of mutual influence of object and environment) is not a subtle, almost virtual, effect like that Impressionist paintings show, of light bounced off one object subtly altering colour of neighbouring objects. For them, the influence was, rather, an actual physical force: "every object influences its neighbour . . . by a real competition of lines and by real conflicts of planes, following the emotional law which governs the picture."

Even though the Futurists' theory of perception drew on that of the Impressionist, the Italian artists argued that the French artists' conception of perceptual effect was insufficiently radical. The Impressionists were interested in the momentary play of light reflected from the surface of an object and in the instantaneous effects this bounced light had on the retina. The Futurists recognized, however, that retinal image does not decay instantaneously and that, consequently, the motion is not seen as an object occupying successively a series of distinct locations but as a blur that represents the motion's trajectory. They concluded that since everything is motion ("Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing . . ."), and since our perception is fundamentally of the trace of change, and it is dynamic reality, not

the static reality of the object, that perception grasps.

Futurism = Symbolism + Dynamism: The violence of the new replacing the old

In one of his vibrant prose-poems/manifestos, "Noi rinneghiamo I nostri maestri simbolisti ultimi amanti della luna," Marinetti condemned the "four intellectual poisons" that corrupt our thinking and acting.

- 1) the sickly, nostalgic poetry of distance and memory;
- 2) romantic sentimentality dripping with moonlight that is ascending toward an ideal and fatal Woman-Beauty;
- 3) obsession with lechery, with the adulterous triangle, the spice of incest and the seasoning of Christian sin;
- 4) the profound passion for the past

and themania for antiquity and collecting.

Symbolism's quietist (read "passifying") tendency is evident in the opacity of the Symbolists' language, which encourages a languorous immersion in language's sensuous material, and in its use of repetition—in the echoes and reflections—that characterize its aural structures, which, by thwarting any sense of forward propulsion, draw mental (erotic) energies away from their primary object towards a fetishized realm of rare and beautiful language. Symbolist language thus evokes a static ideal of inhibited drive expression, an artificial paradise whose fundamental law is that desire must remain replete (that is, it must go unfulfilled)—a law so stringently enforced that the gaze turns inwards and takes as its object desire itself, desire forever arising anew and forever remaining replete/unsatisfied. Symbolist language thus becomes a paradise in which actual, transient sensory experience is repudiated, in favour of the ideal realm of imaginary, almost unchanging, pleasure.

Marinetti and other Futurists were adamant in their insistence that they had abjured the Symbolist aesthetic. Yet, I contend, Marinetti remained committed to most of the aesthetico-metaphysical principles that undergirded Symbolism. In this paper, I wish to present a capsule portrait of the Futurism that emerges when we take into account the true extent of the Symbolist influence.

In the "Manifesto tecnico dei pittori futuristi" Boccioni and his fellow Futurist painters proclaimed that "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies, since our sharpened and multiplied sensibilities have already grasped the obscure manifestations of mediums? Why should we continue to create works that don't take into account our growing visual powers which can yield results analogous to those of X rays?"

With this, Boccioni (likely the author of this section of the "Manifesto tecnico dei pittori futuristi") likens the heightened powers of intuition (by way of comparison with reason or analytical thought) to the powers of X-Rays, which lead one into the heart of the objects of the circumambient world. In *Stati d'Animo* Boccioni investigated how the intensity (that is, the energy) of Futurist colour and Futurist dynamics could transmit emotion through the phenomenon of interpenetration.

Many artists who flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century believed the fourth dimension was a higher reality and took a keen interest in possibility of apprehending higher dimensions. Boccioni was among them and on his trips to Paris he became aware of how many French painters, including the Cubists, were interested in the fourth dimension. So his critique of the Cubists expanded to comprise their particular interests in four-dimensional geometry. ".
"we do not render a fourth dimension that is measured and finite, but a continuous projection of the forces and forms intuited in their infinite unfolding. The unique dynamic form which we have proclaimed is no more than the suggestion of a form of motion that appears for an instant before vanishing into infinite and variable successiveness.

When the influence of Bergson on Boccioni and the Futurists is understood, we can see that the Futurists' idea of interpenetration is partly an attack on the metaphysics implicit in Cubism.

When our critics urge that the world around us shows not just motion but also repose, we reply that in the new painting it is conception that must dominate the visual, for the visual catches only fragmentary appearance and therefore subdivides it. Dynamism, instead, is a general principle of simultaneity and interpenetration; it dominates everything that, in movement, is appearance, detail, or shading.

He is even more explicit in a passage we have already quoted from—though now we

consider the larger context than we did previously.

We will not, I think, be able to capture this successiveness by multiplying legs, arms, or figures, as many have thought; but we will achieve it by capturing the unique form which renders continuity in space. That is the form-type which makes the object live within the universal. The timeworn concept of a clear distinction between bodies has given way to the more modern and Impressionist concept of subdivision, repetition, or mere sketching of images. Against these we urge the concept of dynamic continuity as unique form. And it is not by chance that I say “form” and not “line,” for the dynamic element is a sort of fourth dimension in painting and sculpture, which cannot thrive without a total affirmation of the three dimensions that determine volume: height, width, depth. I recall having read somewhere that Cubism, with its faceting of the object and the placing of its various parts on the flat surface of the canvas, was drawing close to a fourth dimension. . . . But such a procedure does no more than translate to the plane of the canvas those planes of the object which we can't see by virtue of its chance position and our everyday perspective. It is a rational procedure that consists in relativity, not in an intuitive absolute. In it, an integral notion of the object continues to survive, with its three concepts of height, width, and depth, and hence

I repeat, in relativity, in the finite dimensions of measurement. But if it is at all possible to get close to the concept of a fourth dimension with artistic intuition, it is we Futurists who are getting there first. With our unique form which renders continuity in space, we are creating a form that is a summation of the potential developments of the familiar three dimensions. Which is why we do not render a fourth dimension that is measured and finite, but a continuous projection of the forces and forms intuited in their infinite unfolding. The unique dynamic form which we have proclaimed is no more than the suggestion of a form of motion that appears for an instant before vanishing into infinite and variable successiveness.

In conclusion, we Futurists are seeking a method to create a more abstract and symbolic conception of reality, but we are not defining a fixed and absolute measure that creates dynamism.

The metaphysics of Futurism is a spiritual metaphysics. Just consider the lexis of the foregoing passage: through motion, the object lives in the universal, cubist faceting is “un procedimento razionale che vive nella relatività non in *un assoluto intuitivo*” . (It is a rational procedure that consists in relativity, not in *an intuitive absolute*, emphasis mine); “Perciò non una quarta dimensione *misurata e finita* noi possiamo dare, ma una continua proiezione delle forze e delle forme intuite nel loro infinito svolgersi” (Which is why we do not render a fourth dimension that is *measured and finite*, but a continuous projection of the forces and forms intuited in their infinite unfolding. emphasis in Boccioni's original).

Confirming this spiritual character of dynamic forms (forms of continuity in space) is a letter that Boccioni wrote to his friend Nino Barbantini from Paris in February 1912.

This synthesis — given the increasingly pronounced tendency of the human spirit to give the concrete by means of abstraction — can not be expressed except by means of objectively spiritualized factors.

This spiritualization will be given by pure mathematical values, from pure

geometric dimensions, in place of traditional reproduction has been conquered by mechanical means..

Boccioni's spiritual interests led him to describe the experience of absolute motion in surprisingly esoteric terms. "The plastic construction of the object, then, has to be concerned with the motion which an object has within itself, whether it be at rest or in movement. I've made this distinction between rest and movement so that I may make myself clear, although, in fact, there is no such thing as rest, only motion (rest being merely relative, a matter of appearance)." Boccioni wrote.

The plastic potential that resides in an object is its force, that is, its primordial psychology. This power, this primordial psychology, enables us to create in our paintings new subjects which do not aim at narrative or episodic representation; instead, it coordinates the plastic values of reality, a coordination which is purely architectural and remains free of all literary and sentimental influences.

In this initial state of motion, which I've explained as if it were a thing apart, although in fact it isn't, the object is not seen in its relative motion, but is conceived according to its living lines, which reveal how its motion would be broken down according to the tendencies of its forces. In this way we obtain a decomposition of the object, which is a method far removed from the intellectual schemas of the Cubists. Instead it presents an object's apparition, interpreting it through a sensation which is infinitely refined and superior to those of traditional art.

For us, this is absolute motion, what one might call the object's breathing or heartbeat. A hesitant, unconscious hint of this breathing can be discerned in Italian art from its beginnings. This is what plastic art is all about. When, rather recently, some of the Cubists began to concern themselves with these matters, they revealed what I have called their Gothicism, and, at the same time, again made obeisance to the plastic primacy of the Italians..

This celebration of primordial experience reflects Boccioni's convictions concerning the spiritual value of Futurist art. Throughout this article, academic methods are vilified as intellectual, dismissed as being the result of "static and nostalgic old emotions" Intuition is celebrated, because, Boccioni averred, through intuition Futurists are able to experience "le violente emozioni del moto e della velocità" that "ispir[ano] idee plastiche nuove." The Futurists, he therefore proclaimed, are the "primitives of a new and completely transformed sensibility (primitivi di una nuova sensibilità completamente trasformata) attuned to the dynamism of modern life; moreover, their intuition of the "eternal renewal of life" (eterno rinnovamento della vita) gives them a "superhuman energy" (energia sovrumana)."

Boccioni connected the experience of a dynamic reality to the ecstasy religious figures have experienced. In another letter to Nino Barbantini, this one from May 1911, Boccioni wrote

Again, however, do not hesitate to say that a painting of similar size, animated by a similarly pure intention, which is that of raising to the modern life a new vibrating altar of dynamics, as pure an exaltation as of those who were raised by religious contemplation of the divine mystery, a picture that attempts this this is infinitely superior to any more or less subjective reproduction of real life.

One can always arrive at rather skeptical conclusions concerning the mental constructions of the philosophers, but nevertheless when I think of one who takes some items and departs from thing, starting from first principles or

premises that are his inner light, his intuition, and with a pride verging on madness, with an iron law that is simply terrifying, attempts to construct a system, a world, whatever the end result may be of such a work fatally destined to be beaten down to naught in the course of time—I admire him! I admire him always and even if the whole lot of it leads only to the man's breaking his own neck! One needs to forgive an occasional error and occasional unsureness in a man who is trying to fly!.

Note again Boccioni's vocabulary: "contemplazione religiosa al mistero divino"; "*la sua luce interiore*, la sua intuizione e su questi con un orgoglio che delira, con una legge ferrea che incute terrore, tenta di costruire un sistema. . . ." (emphasis mine). This vocabulary goes well beyond that appropriate for conveying the exhilarating experience of speed—or, rather, it has taken that experience into realm of the transcendent.

That benchmark idea of esoteric thought, that ultimate reality is energy/vibration also appears in *Pittura scultura futuriste (dinamismo plastico)*. The passage just cited alludes to that belief, but the following passage makes the fact that Boccioni maintained that conviction startlingly evident.

Hertzian waves carry thousands of miles across oceans, and through deserts, the feverish pulse of the races. The microbe is pursued into the unfathomable depths of matter, studied in his habits, photographed and fixed in his infinitesimal individuality. The electrons in the atom, spinning in their tens of thousands, are separated from each other like the planets of the solar system -- how they orbit at a speed inconceivable to our minds, and the atom is already visible to our eyes and to the nostrils of our optical instruments [a nice synaesthetic trope there]. . . . The continents are cut, the oceans sounded, and some have descended into the throats of incandescent volcanos. . . . And we artists? We tarry over dividing nature into landscape, figure, etc.. ETC., to calibrate the perspective of a road, and tremble in terror of not being understood, not being applauded . . . and quake foolishly if we have to ravish a light, disrupt a form, or construct any work that depart from the traditional aesthetic laws!

For Boccioni, intuition was a rigorous experience that makes extreme demands on the soul.

For every new interpretation or creation, a new effort of intuition is necessary. It forces the artist into a state of terrible tension in order to be able to remain continuously in the interior of the object, living its sensibility and recreating its unity. These forces or directions appear in the form of an infinite number of incidents, which are so many inspirations, . . . the mysterious suggestions of lyrical deformation.

Like Bergson, Boccioni conceived of reality as flux. We ordinary misconstrue reality by conceiving it intellectually as the French painters, the Impressionists and the Cubists did. Intuition, that mental ability the Impressionist and Cubists could not engage, allowed one to identify with the truth that is reality-in-flux. Speed overcomes space and time, for the accelerated speeds of modern life are approaching the condition in which one can instantaneously be anywhere and everywhere at once. As in Ouspensky's work, which was so much admired by the Italian Futurists' Russian followers, time and space are illusory: all of reality is accessible from everywhere, without variation, and exists all-at-once. The accelerated

speeds of modern life, electricity, radio—and, course, the cinema, with its native words-in-freedom character—have cooperated to endow humans with new ability to experience the higher reality to which Ouspensky alluded, the higher reality that intuition divulges.

Once the implicit metaphysics underlying the Futurist's interest in speed and the interrelation among ideas of interpenetration, lines-of-force and continuity of space, that movement appears in different light than is cast by those who have treated primarily as a product of industrial development and wilfully overlooked its links to occult metaphysics of Symbolism. Once one begins to read the Futurists as heirs to the Symbolist traditions, one rapidly accumulates evidence of their heterodox interests. Understanding the Futurists' adherence to the extravagant metaphysics of Symbolism (their protests notwithstanding) even leads us to understand differently the polemical intent behind the name Marinetti took for the movement. Boccioni (and other Futurists) accepted the idea that was widespread in esoteric circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that the new age had accelerated the evolutionary process and a "new human" (then referred to as a "new man") was about to come forth. He lambasted sceptics, who

They deny that scientific discoveries have completely remade the fabric of our mental world, that there has been a radical change in our spirit and for the same reason that the changed conditions of existence as animal species have multiplied in form, structure and character with altered conditions of existence, so electricity and telegraphy, steam and aviation have deepened the gap in mental difference between ourselves and our grandfathers (now so much wider than between them and, for example, the century of Aristotle). And thus our conviction that our time initiates a new era naming us the primitives of a new and completely transformed sensibility

In consequence, this new condition of scientific relativity is responsible for our feelings about seeking the absolute. We painters (for I shall be speaking about painting) feel that we divine in this a psychic force that empowers the senses to perceive what has never been perceived before. We think that if everything tends toward Unity, man has so far perceived in unity only the miserable, blind, infantile decomposition of things! Science, as we see it, has driven us back into a marvelous higher barbarism which makes us hungry for reality. . .

The Futurists thought themselves to be primitives of this new sensibility partly because they deemed themselves to be the first of the "new men," i.e., the first to have developed the capacity for intuition that the whole new race of humans soon enough would possess. They also understood themselves as primitives of the new era for reasons we can understand most easily, perhaps, by their analogy with Marshall McLuhan ideas that the sensory forms of the new human would lead this new race towards a new tribalism. Here we enter upon the terrain where Futurism meets Fascism.