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GEOMETRIC AND MECHANICAL SPLENDOR AND THE NUMERICAL SENSIBILITY

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We are hastening the grotesque funeral of passéist Beauty (romantic, symbolist, and decadent) whose essential elements were memory, nostalgia, the fog of legend produced by remoteness in time, the exotic fascination produced by remoteness in space, the picturesque, the imprecise, rusticity, wild solitude, multicolored disorder, twilight shadows, corrosion, weariness, the soiled traces of the years, the crumbling of ruins, mold, the taste of decay, pessimism, phthisis, suicide, the blandishments of pain, the aesthetics of failure, the adoration of death.

A new beauty is born today from the chaos of the new contradictory sensibilities that we Futurists will substitute for the former beauty, and that I call Geometric and Mechanical Splendor.

Its essential elements are: hygienic forgetfulness, hope, desire, controlled- force, speed, light, will power, order, discipline, method; a feeling for the great city; the aggressive optimism that results from the cult of muscles and sport; the imagination without strings, ubiquity, laconism, and the simultaneity that derives from tourism, business, and journalism; the passion for success, the keenest instinct for setting records, the enthusiastic imitation of electricity and the machine; essential concision and synthesis; the happy precision of gears and well-oiled thoughts; the concurrence of energies as they converge into a single victorious trajectory.

My Futurist senses perceived this splendor for the first time on the bridge of a dreadnought. The ship's speed, its trajectories of fire from the height of the quarterdeck in the cool ventilation of warlike probabilities, the strange vitality of orders sent down from the admiral and suddenly become autonomous, human no longer, in the whims, impatiences, and illnesses of steel and copper. All of this radiated geometric and mechanical splendor. I listened to the lyric initiative of electricity flowing through the sheaths of the quadruple turret guns, descending through sheathed pipes to the magazine, drawing the turret guns out to their breeches, out to their final flights. Up sights, aim, lift, fire, automatic recoil, the projectile's very personal path, hit, smash, smell of rotten eggs, mephitic gases, rust, ammonia, and so on. This new drama full of Futurist surprise and geometric splendor is a thousand times more interesting to us than human psychology with its very limited combinations.

Sometimes the great human collectivities, tides of faces and howling arms, can make us feel a slight emotion. To them we prefer the great solidarity of preoccupied motors, arrayed and eager. Nothing is more beautiful than a great humming central electric station that holds the hydraulic pressure of a mountain chain and the electric power of a vast horizon, synthesized in marble distribution panels bristling with dials, keyboards, and shining commutators. These panels are our only models for the writing of poetry. For precursors we have gymnasts and highwire artists who, in their evolutions, their rests, and the cadences of their musculature, realize the sparkling perfection of precise gears, and the geometric splendor that we want to achieve in poetry with words- in- freedom.

1) We systematically destroy the literary I in order to scatter it into the universal vibration and reach the point of expressing the infinitely small and the vibration of molecules, E.g.: lightning movement of

molecules in the hole made by a howitzer (last part of "Fort Cheittam-Tepe" in my "Zang tumb tumb"). Thus the poetry of cosmic forces supplants the poetry of the human.

The traditional narrative proportions (romantic, sentimental, and Christian) are abolished, according to which a battle wound would have a greatly exaggerated importance in respect to the instruments of destruction, the strategic positions, and atmospheric conditions. In my poem "Zang tumb tumb" I describe the shooting of a Bulgarian traitor with a few words- in- freedom, but I prolong a discussion between two Turkish generals about the line of fire and the enemy cannon. In fact I observed in the battery of Suni at Sidi-Messri, in October, 1911, how the shining, aggressive flight of a cannonball, red hot in the sun and speeded by fire, makes the sight of flayed and dying human flesh almost negligible.

2) Many times I have demonstrated how the noun, enfeebled by multiple contacts or the weight of Parnassian and decadent adjectives, regains its absolute value and its expressive force when it is denuded and set apart. Among naked nouns I distinguish the elementary noun and the motion-synthesis noun (or node of nouns). This distinction is not absolute and it comes from almost ungraspable intuitions. According to an elastic and comprehensive analogy, I see every noun as a vehicle or belt set in motion by the verb in the infinitive.

3) Except for needed contrast or a change of rhythm, the different moods and tenses of the verb should be abolished, because they make the verb into a stagecoach's loose wheel adapting itself to rough country roads, but unable to turn swiftly on a smooth road. The infinitive verb, on the other hand, is the very movement of the new lyricism, having the fluency of a train's wheel or an airplane's propeller.

The different moods and tenses of the verb express a prudent and reassuring pessimism, a clenched, episodic, accidental egotism, a high and low of force and tiredness, of desire and delusion, of pauses, in other words, in the trajectory of hope and will. The infinitive verb expresses optimism itself, the absolute generosity of the folly of Becoming. When I say "to run," what is that verb's subject? Everyone and everything; that is, the universal irradiation of life that runs and of which we are a conscious particle. E.g.: the finale of "Salone d'albergo" by the free-wordist Folgore. The infinitive is the passion of the "I" that abandons itself to the becoming of "all," the heroic disinterested continuity of the joy and effort of acting. Infinitive verb = the divinity of action.

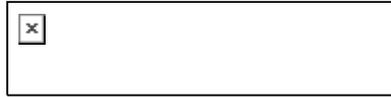
4) By means of one or more adjectives isolated between parentheses or set next to words- in- freedom behind a perpendicular line (in clefs) one can give the different atmospheres of the story and the tones that govern it. These adjective- atmospheres or adjectivetones cannot be substituted for by nouns. They are intuitive convictions difficult to explain. I nevertheless believe that by isolating for example, the noun "ferocity" (or putting it in brackets, describing a slaughter), one will create a mental state of ferocity, firmly enclosed within a clean profile. Whereas, if I put between parentheses or brackets the adjective "ferocious," I make it into an adjective- atmosphere or adjective-tone that will envelop the whole description of the slaughter without arresting the current of the words- in-freedom.

5) Despite the most skillful deformations, the syntactic sentence always contains a scientific and photographic perspective absolutely contrary to the rights of emotion. With words- in- freedom this photographic perspective is destroyed and one arrives naturally at the multiform emotional perspective. (E.g.: Man + mountain + valley of the free-wordist Boccioni).

6) Sometimes we make synoptic tables of lyric values with our words- in-freedom, which allow us as we read to follow many currents of intertwined or parallel sensations at the same 'lime. These synoptic tables should not be a goal but a means of increasing the expressive force of the lyricism. One must therefore avoid any pictorial preoccupations, taking no satisfaction in a play of lines nor in curious typographic disproportions.

Everything in words- in- freedom that does not contribute toward the expression of the fugitive,

mysterious Futurist sensibility with the newest geometric- mechanical splendor must be resolutely banned. The free-wordist Cangiullo, in "Fumatori" (Smokers) Ila, had the happy thought of rendering the long and monotonous reveries and self-expansion of the boredom-smoke of a long train trip with this designed analogy:



The words- in- freedom, in this continuous effort to express with the greatest force and profundity, naturally transform themselves into self- illustrations, by means of free, expressive orthography and typography, the synoptic tables of lyric values and designed analogies, - (E.g.: The military balloon I designed typographically in my "Zang tumb tumb.") As soon as this greater expression is reached, the words- in- freedom return to their normal flow, The synoptic tables of values are in addition the basis of criticism in words- in- freedom. (F.g.: "Balance 1910-1914" by the free-wordist Carrà.)

7) Free expressive orthography and typography also serve to express the facial mimicry and the gesticulation of the narrator.

Thus the words-in- freedom manage to make use of (rendering it completely) that part of communicative exuberance and epidermic geniality that is one of the characteristics of the southern races. This energy of accent, voice, and mimicry that has shown up hitherto only in moving tenors and brilliant talkers finds its natural expression in the disproportions of typographic characters that reproduce the facial grimaces and the chiseling, sculptural force of gestures, In this way words- in- freedom become the lyric and transfigured prolongation of our animal magnetism.

8) Our growing love for matter, the will to penetrate it and know its vibrations, the physical sympathy that links us to motors, push us to the use of onomatopoeia.

Since noise is the result of rubbing or striking rapidly moving solids, liquids, or gases, onomatopoeia, which reproduces noise, is necessarily one of the most dynamic elements of poetry. As such, onomatopoeia can replace the infinitive verb, especially if it is set against one or more other onomatopoeias. (E.g.: the onomatopoeia "tatata" of the machine guns, set against the "Hooraaaah" of the Turks at the end of the chapter "Ponte" in my "Zang tumb tumb.")

The brevity of the onomatopoeias in this case permits the most skillful combination of different rhythms, These would lose a part of their velocity if expressed more abstractly, with greater development, that is, without the help of the onomatopoeias. There are different kinds of onomatopoeias:

a) Direct, imitative, elementary, realistic onomatopoeia, which serves to enrich lyricism with brute reality, which keeps it from becoming too abstract or artistic. (E.g.: "ratta-tat-tat," gunfire.) In my "Contraband of War" in "Zang tumb tumb," the strident onomatopoeia 'Issiiiiii' gives the whistle of a towboat on the river Meuse and is followed by the veiled onomatopoeia 'Iffiiiiii fffiiiiii,' echo from the opposite bank. The two onomatopoeias saved me from needing to describe the width of the river, which is defined by the contrast between the two consonants 'Is' and 'If.'

b) Indirect, complex, and analogical onomatopoeia. E.g.: in my poem "Dunes" the onomatopoeia "dum-dum-dum-dum" expresses "the circling sound of the African sun and the orange weight of the sun, creating a rapport between sensations of weight, heat, color, smell and noise. Another example: the onomatopoeia 'Istridionla stridionla stridionlaire' that repeats itself in the first canto of my epic poem "The Conquest of the Stars" forms an analogy between the clashing of great swords and

the furious action of the waves, just before a great battle of stormy waters.

c) Abstract onomatopoeia, noisy, unconscious expression of the most complex and mysterious motions of our sensibility. (F.g.: in my poem "Dunes," the abstract onomatopoeia "l'rn rn rn" corresponds to no natural or mechanical sound, but expresses a state of mind.)

d) Psychic onomatopoeic harmony, that is, the fusion of two or three abstract onomatopoeias.

9) My love of precision and essential brevity has naturally given me a taste for numbers, which live and breathe on the paper like living beings in our new numerical sensibility. E.g.: instead of saying, like the ordinary traditional writer, "A vast and deep boom of bells" (an imprecise, hence inefficient, denotation), or else, like an intelligent peasant, "This bell can be heard from such and such a village" (a more precise and efficient denotation), I grasp the force of the reverberation with intuitive precision and determine its extent, saying: "Bell boom breadth 20 square kilometers." In this way I give the whole vibrating horizon and a number of distant beings stretching their ears to the same bell sound. I escape imprecision and dullness, and I take hold of reality with an act of will that subjects and deforms the very vibration of the metal in an original manner.

The mathematical signs + - x serve to achieve marvelous syntheses and share, with their abstract simplicity of anonymous gears, in expressing the geometric and mechanical splendor. For example, it would have needed at least an entire page of description to render this vast and complex battle horizon, had I not found this definitive lyric equation: "horizon - sharp bore of the sun + 5 triangular shadows (1 kilometer wide) + 3 lozenges of rosy light + 5 fragments of hills + 30 columns of smoke - 23 flames."

I make use of "x" to indicate interrogative pauses in my thought. I thereby eliminate the question mark, which too arbitrarily localizes its atmosphere of doubt on a single point of awareness. With the mathematical 'x' the doubting suspension suddenly spreads itself over the entire agglomeration of words- in- freedom.

Always intuitively, I introduce numbers that have no direct significance or value between the words- in- freedom, but that (addressing themselves phonically and optically to the numerical sensibility) express the various transcendental intensities of matter and the indestructible correspondences of sensibility.

I create true theorems or lyric equations, introducing numbers chosen intuitively and placed in the very middle of a word, with a certain quantity of + - x =; I give the thickenesses, the relief, the volume of the thing the words should express. The placement + - + - + x serves to render, for example, the changes and acceleration of an automobile's speed. The placement serves to render the clustering of equal sensations. (E.g.: fecal odor of dysentery + the honeyed stench of plague sweats + smell of ammonia, etc., in "Train full of sick soldiers" in my "Zang tumb tumb").

Thus for the "ciel antérieur où fleurit la beauté" of Mallarmé we substitute geometric and mechanical splendor and the numerical sensibility of words- in- freedom.



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