

Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature

May 11, 1912

Sitting on the gas tank of an airplane, my stomach warmed by the pilot's head, I sensed the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A pressing need to liberate words, to drag them out of their prison in the Latin period! Like all imbeciles, this period naturally has a canny head, a stomach, two legs, and two flat feet, but it will never have two wings. Just enough to walk, to take a short run and then stop short, panting!

This is what the whirling propeller told me, when I flew two hundred meters above the mighty chimney pots of Milan. And the propeller added:

1. One must destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born.
2. One should use infinitives, because they adapt themselves elastically to nouns and don't subordinate them to the writer's *I* that observes or imagines. Alone, the infinitive can provide a sense of the continuity of life and the elasticity of the intuition that perceives it.
3. One must abolish the adjective, to allow the naked noun to preserve its essential color. The adjective, tending of itself toward the shadows, is incompatible with our dynamic vision, because it supposes a pause, a meditation.
4. One must abolish the adverb, old belt buckle that holds two words together. The adverb preserves a tedious unity of tone within a phrase.
5. Every noun should have its double; that is, the noun should be followed, with no conjunction, by the noun to which it is related by

analogy. Example: man-torpedo-boat, woman-gulf, crowd-surf, piazza-funnel, door-faucet.

Just as aerial speed has multiplied our knowledge of the world, the perception of analogy becomes ever more natural for man. One must suppress the *like*, the *as*, the *so*, the *similar to*. Still better, one should deliberately confound the object with the image that it evokes, foreshortening the image to a single essential word.

6. Abolish even the punctuation. After adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions have been suppressed, punctuation is naturally annulled, in the varying continuity of a *living* style that creates itself without the foolish pauses made by commas and periods. To accentuate certain movements and indicate their directions, mathematical symbols will be used: + - × := and the musical symbols.

7. Up to now writers have been restricted to immediate analogies. For instance, they have compared an animal to a man or to another animal, which is almost the same as a kind of photography. (They have compared, for example, a fox terrier to a very small thoroughbred. Others, more advanced, might compare that same trembling fox terrier to a little Morse Code machine. I, on the other hand, compare it to gurgling water. In this there is an *ever-vaster gradation of analogies*, there are ever-deeper and more solid affinities, however remote.)

Analogy is nothing more than the deep love that assembles distant, seemingly diverse and hostile things. An orchestral style, at once polychromatic, polyphonic, and polymorphous, can embrace the life of matter only by means of the most extensive analogies.

When, in my *Battle of Tripoli*, I compared a trench bristling with bayonets to an orchestra, a machine gun to a fatal woman, I intuitively introduced a large part of the universe into a short episode of African battle.

Images are not flowers to be chosen and picked with parsimony, as Voltaire said. They are the very lifeblood of poetry. Poetry should be an uninterrupted sequence of new images, or it is mere anemia and greensickness.

The broader their affinities, the longer will images keep their power to amaze. One must—people say—spare the reader's capacity for wonder. Nonsense! Let us rather worry about the fatal corrosion of time that not only destroys the expressive value of a masterpiece but also its power to amaze. Too often stimulated, have our old ears per-

haps not already destroyed Beethoven and Wagner? We must therefore eliminate from our language everything it contains in the way of stereotyped images, faded metaphors; and that means almost everything.

8. There are no categories of images, noble or gross or vulgar, eccentric or natural. The intuition that grasps them has no preferences or *partis pris*. Therefore the analogical style is absolute master of all matter and its intense life.

9. To render the successive motions of an object, one must render the *chain of analogies* that it evokes, each condensed and concentrated into one essential word.

Here is an expressive example of a chain of analogies still masked and weighed down by traditional syntax:

Ah yes! you, little machine gun, are a fascinating woman, and sinister, and divine, at the driving wheel of an invisible hundred horsepower, roaring and exploding with impatience. Oh! soon you will leap into the circuit of death, to a shattering somersault or to victory! . . . Do you want me to make you some madrigals full of grace and color? As you wish, *signora*. . . To me you resemble a lawyer before the bar, whose tireless eloquent tongue strikes his circle of listeners to the heart, moving them profoundly. . . At this moment you are an omnipotent trepan that cuts rings around the too hard skull of this stubborn night. . . And you are also a rolling mill, an electric lathe, and what else? A great blowtorch that sears, chisels, and slowly melts the metal points of the last stars! . . . [*Battle of Tripoli*]

In some cases one must join the images two by two, like those chained iron balls that level a whole grove of trees in their flight.

To catch and gather whatever is most fugitive and ungraspable in matter, one must shape *strict nets of images or analogies*, to be cast into the mysterious sea of phenomena. Except for the traditional festoons of its form, the following passage from my *Mafarka the Futurist* is an example of such a strict net of images:

All the bitter sweetness of past youth mounted in his throat, as the cheerful cries of boys rose from the schoolyard toward their teachers leaning on the parapets of the terraces from which ships could be seen taking flight. . . .

And here are two more nets of images:

Around the well of Bumeliana, beneath the thick olive trees, three camels squatting comfortably on the sand were gargling with content-

ment, like old stone gutters, mixing the *chaḳ-chaḳ* of their spitting with the steady beat of the steam pump that supplies water to the city. Cries and Futurist dissonances, in the deep orchestra of the trenches with their winding depths and noisy cellars, as the bayonets pass and repass, violin bows that the sunset's ruddy baton inflames with enthusiasm. . . .

It is the sunset-conductor whose wide sweep gathers the scattered flutes of tree-bound birds, the grieving harps of insects, the creak of branches, and the crunch of stones. It is he who suddenly stops the mess-tin kettledrums and the rifles' clash, to let the muted instruments sing out above the orchestra, all the golden stars, upright, open-armed, across the footlights of the sky. And here is the *grande dame* of the play. . . . Prodigiously bare, it is indeed the desert who displays her immense bosom in its liquefied curves, all glowing in rosy lacquer beneath the mighty night's cascading jewels. [*Battle of Tripoli*]

II. Destroy the *I* in literature: that is, all psychology. The man side-tracked by the library and the museum, subjected to a logic and wisdom of fear, is of absolutely no interest. We must therefore drive him from literature and finally put matter in his place, matter whose essence must be grasped by strokes of intuition, the kind of thing that the physicists and chemists can never do.

To capture the breath, the sensibility, and the instincts of metals, stones, wood, and so on, through the medium of free objects and whimsical motors. To substitute for human psychology, now exhausted, the lyric obsession with matter.

Be careful not to force human feelings onto matter. Instead, divine its different governing impulses, its forces of compression, dilation, cohesion, and disaggregation, its crowds of massed molecules and whirling electrons. We are not interested in offering dramas of humanized matter. The solidity of a strip of steel interests us for itself; that is, the incomprehensible and nonhuman alliance of its molecules or its electrons that oppose, for instance, the penetration of a howitzer. The warmth of a piece of iron or wood is in our opinion more impassioned than the smile or tears of a woman.

We want to make literature out of the life of a motor, a new instinctive animal whose general instincts we will know when we have learned the instincts of the different forces that make it up.

For a Futurist poet, nothing is more interesting than the action of a mechanical piano's keyboard. The cinema offers us the dance of an

object that divides and recomposes without human intervention. It also offers us the backward sweep of a diver whose feet leave the ocean and bounce violently back on the diving board. Finally, it shows us a man driving at two hundred miles an hour. These are likewise movements of matter, outside the laws of intelligence and therefore of a more significant essence.

Three elements hitherto overlooked in literature must be introduced:

1. Sound (manifestation of the dynamism of objects).
2. Weight (objects' faculty of flight).
3. Smell (objects' faculty of dispersing themselves).

To force oneself, for example, to render the landscape of smells that a dog perceives. To listen to motors and to reproduce their conversations.

Material has always been contemplated by a cold, distracted *I*, too preoccupied with itself, full of preconceived wisdom and human obsessions.

Man tends to foul matter with his youthful joy or elderly sorrows; matter has an admirable continuity of impulse toward greater warmth, greater movement, a greater subdivision of itself. Matter is neither sad nor gay. Its essence is courage, will power, and absolute force. It belongs entirely to the intuitive poet who can free himself from traditional, heavy, limited syntax that is stuck in the ground, armless and wingless, being merely intelligent. Only the unsyntactical poet who unlinks his words can penetrate the essence of matter and destroy the dumb hostility that separates it from us.

The Latin period that has served us up to now was a pretentious gesture with which the myopic and overweening imagination forced itself to master the multiform and mysterious life of matter. The Latin period, consequently, was born dead.

Deep intuitions of life joined to one another, word for word according to their illogical birth, will give us the general lines of an *intuitive psychology of matter*. This was revealed to me when I was flying in an airplane. As I looked at objects from a new point of view, no longer head on or from behind, but straight down, foreshortened, that is, I was able to break apart the old shackles of logic and the plumb lines of the ancient way of thinking.

All you Futurist poets who have loved and followed me up to now have, like me, been frenzied makers of images and courageous explorers of analogies. But your strict nets of metaphor are too disgracefully weighed down by the plumb line of logic. I advise you to lighten them,

in order that your immensified gesture may speed them farther, cast them over a vaster ocean.

Together we will invent what I call *the imagination without strings* [*l'immaginazione senza fili*]. Someday we will achieve a yet more essential art, when we dare to suppress all the first terms of our analogies and render no more than an uninterrupted sequence of second terms. To achieve this we must renounce being understood. It is not necessary to be understood. Moreover we did without it when we were expressing fragments of the Futurist sensibility by means of traditional and intellectual syntax.

Syntax was a kind of abstract cipher that poets used to inform the crowd about the color, musicality, plasticity, and architecture of the universe. Syntax was a kind of interpreter or monotonous cicerone. This intermediary must be suppressed, in order that literature may enter directly into the universe and become one body with it.

They shout at us, "Your literature won't be beautiful! Where is your verbal symphony, your harmonious swaying back and forth, your tranquilizing cadences?" Their loss we take for granted! And how lucky! We make use, instead, of every ugly sound, every expressive cry from the violent life that surrounds us. We bravely create the "ugly" in literature, and everywhere we murder solemnity. Come! Don't put on these grand priestly airs when you listen to me! Each day we must spit on the *Altar of Art*. We are entering the unbounded domain of free intuition. After free verse, here finally are *words-in-freedom*.

In this there is nothing absolute or systematic. Genius has impetuous gusts and muddy torrents. Sometimes it imposes analytic and explanatory longueurs. No one can suddenly renovate his own sensibility. Dead cells are mixed with the living. Art is a need to destroy and scatter oneself, a great watering can of heroism that drowns the world. Microbes—don't forget—are essential to the health of the intestines and stomach. There is also a microbe essential to the vitality of *art*, *this extension of the forest of our veins*, that pours out, beyond the body, into the infinity of space and time.

Futurist poets! I have taught you to hate libraries and museums, to prepare you to *hate the intelligence*, reawakening in you divine intuition, the characteristic gift of the Latin races. Through intuition we will conquer the seemingly unconquerable hostility that separates out human flesh from the metal of motors.