

The automobile in motion

Studies on futurism and futurists

Summary

Futurism, one of the most original and creative, but also most controversial avant-garde movements continues to prompt contradictory evaluations and arouse disputes regarding interpretation. Concealed within itself is hitherto unrecognized intellectual and artistic potential. This monograph treats futurism as intellectual art. Along with cubism and neo-impressionism, futurism was not so much an aesthetic proposition as a cognitive one, which would mean it was an analysis of perception, movement, corporeality and social laws. Anatol Stern and Aleksander Wat, the authors of the first Polish manifesto, were well aware of this, writing in bold letters: "art is science". More strongly than its contemporary approaches futurism became part of the current, parallel scientific diagnosis. It was also a theoretical exploration, identifying and solving problems that science dealt with when this current of thought entered the history of aesthetics and literature. This book addressed the need to present futuristic theory.

Its methodological basis is subjective criticism, understood in the spirit of Georges Poulet and the Geneva School. The consequence of this is that the sub-title of this book – Studies of futurism and futurists – is more important than the final word, emphasising the subjective character of the observations and reconstructions performed. The monograph is about the particular experiences of particular individuals, whom the author seeks to understand in their choices, victories and defeats, and in their spiritual activity. Hence, these studies of futurism conducted by futurists about futurists creating futurism.

The second question is one of microanthropology, which is shown through the word 'microhistory'. This determines the choice of fields of interest, which might be a minor polemic; the newspaper, understood as a cultural fact; the tram, a specific means of transport with greater significance than just the transport-related or philosophical-aesthetic concept of words in freedom. Futurists had their own fields of anthropological microactivity, which the author attempts to describe. The most serious and ambitious of these was the attempt to create a new theory and philosophy, which ultimately did not become the cognitive system it was assumed it would; in fact, the opposite was true and these systems (for the plural form is required here) are the sum total of theoretical shreds, unfinished pages and fragments. Futuristic fragmentation is at the same time the most genuine manifestation of life, revealing itself in its randomness; these fragments, as Gilles Deleuze wrote when analysing the discourse

of Walt Whitman, one of the precursors of futurism, “must be conquered by a special act based on writing”. This book is composed of such fragments and studies. In the light of microhistorical research and futuristic concepts (such as words in freedom or art in a moment) thwarting the metaphysical Whole – this solution seems to be a necessity. At the same time, further studies (the way the author respects the futuristic typography should be noted and appreciated) enter into dialogue with each other, presenting futuristic experience, which is a sequence of discontinued moments.

The author’s intention is not so much to describe but to respond to the facts assembled. This is why the next important research context is narrativism, its conviction that narrative, created by the arbitrarily determined beginning and ending of a story, does not need to respect strict chronology. It might seem that in view of the material compiled and from the methodological point of view the narrative perspective is the most appropriate way of presenting the futurist consciousness and identity, and also the best way of expressing subjective criticism.

In subsequent parts significant anthropological tales are presented, constructing futuristic ‘microhistories’ from the subjective perspective. In this world futurists wrangled, attempted to analyse the world scientifically, and constructed their own aesthetic design project. These disputes, studies and projects are consequently the material for this book.

The first chapter is dedicated to the origins of Polish futurism in the light of European (and especially Italian) accomplishments, and opens with an analysis of the surviving first line of Aleksander Wat and Anatol Stern’s lost manifesto. This provides an introduction to the most significant achievements of Polish futurism and gives an answer to the question of who has the honourable title of first Polish futurist. The author reflects upon the rarely questioned novelty of futurism not only to defend the thesis of this movement’s ‘ultranovelty’, but also to prove its pioneering nature for scientific and artistic trends currently developing. Of equal importance is the interpretation of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto, in which the mythical imagination manifests itself in a surprising way.

Probably, the most important sphere in which the futurists were active the newspaper, and the second chapter is devoted to this subject. The author analyses the ‘newspaper self-consciousness’ of the creators of New Art. Futurist printed matter is presented in several forms to create the story of ‘artists written down in columns’. This is complemented by a bibliography of futurist papers.

Chapter Three analyses the urban space or rather the symbol-synthesis of the tram, which is immersed in this space. This serves as an example to show the scientific inclinations of the futurists. We also observe interesting interpretations of works related to trams.

In the next part of the book, the author uses the metaphor of historico-literary investigation which has recently enjoyed popularity, and analyses the corroborating and circumstantial evidence allowing us to come closer to an-

swering the question of why Bruno Jasioński metaphorically 'burned Paris'. The author surprises the reader with his discoveries, recalling texts that are now absent from current reading matter and research experience.

The image of futurism presented so far is complemented by a description of the dispute between Antoni Słonimski and Aleksander Wat (and also Józef Wittlin). Their polemics show that despite the domination of aesthetics, futurism was also a socially engaged movement.

In the subchapters that follow the theoretical futurist project is analysed. First, Leon Chwistek, whose ideas, extremely interesting and relevant, though highly incoherent, are presented in a general way. This Kraków philosopher established that 'Great and original art can only develop on the basis of new theory'. At the same time, like others who followed him he transcended the boundaries of his time, paving the way for numerous future discoveries in the humanities.

Subsequent parts of the book reconstruct forgotten projects by Stefan Kordian Gacki and Stanisław Brucz. Each avant-gardist put forward original poetics, theory and philosophy for the literary work, which at the time constituted a real alternative to discursive ideas of the Kraków avant-garde and retain their relevance to the present day.

The theoretical part of the book closes with a chapter on Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, where the concept of words in freedom is presented. This chapter is augmented by a translation of the Technical manifesto of futurist literature. An analysis of Polish words in freedom enables the reader to recall Edmund Miller, absent in the experience of literary studies, and inquire as to the 'futurism' of Stanisław Lec, who was, in a sense, the last Polish futurist.

The book contains an extended appendix – futuristic strays. It also contains a translation of the Russian futurist manifesto *The West and Us*), as various 'strays' of the title; verse by B. Jasioński and A. Stern discovered in the press but not yet reprinted, unknown texts by J. Jankowski, forgotten translations of Jasioński and hitherto unknown one-offs.

This book seeks to present futurism as it was sensed by the futurists. It seeks to do so through narrative, to anchor this experience in everyday life, convey scientific futurism researching perception and movement. In the words of Anatol Stern, this futurism anticipates 'art that will be born tomorrow'; it is the first manifestation of a return to the question (preceding surrealism); it is what Odo Marquard calls antifiction. This book seeks to be the boot placed once again in the buttonhole.

Translated by Rob Pagett