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In the Intersection of the Angles of a Table, There is More Truth Than in All the Tangle of Muscles: Futurism as Anti-Humanist Critique

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The recent celebrations of the centenary of the publication of the Futurist manifesto led to a renewed discussion of the ideas and artworks of the Italian artists' group. Jacques Rancière related the Futurist ethos with the modernist project of liberating art from representation. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, in his post-Futurist manifesto, also identified a historical irony at play in the emptying out of Futurism's promise: a liberated mechanical humanity did indeed materialize, in a global economic system premised on financial servitude to the future via debt. However, these models continue to assess Futurism against an unchallenged humanism, finding it either supporting ideals of freedom and human rights despite itself, or else lacking in these areas. But Futurism is potentially more relevant than ever not in spite of its anti-humanist agenda, precisely because of it. Tom McCarthy annexes not Futurist art but Futurist writing to an emerging object oriented ontology that seeks to challenge the primacy of the human. If Futurism is to be repurposed as a critical concept, it can only do so by countering the humanist myth the liberal subject that underlies the current cultural and political hegemony of neo-liberalism.

The recent celebrations of a hundred years since the publication of the Futurist manifesto in 2009 led to a renewed discussion of the ideas and artworks of the Italian artists' group. A host of conferences and retrospective exhibitions at major museums in Europe and the U.S. reaffirmed the institutional position of the movement and suggested new readings of Futurist art that challenged the status of Futurist painting as a second rate cubism and attempted to rescue it from the fascist, misogynist connotations that have tainted it. Speaking at the Tate Britain conference, *Futurism and the Avant Garde*, David Cottington sought to challenge the idea that the Futurists encountered Cubism in Paris but "misunderstand its reflexive elements", merely adding "a kind of stylistic rhetoric to Cubism which is not about exploring multiple perspectives". Cottington claimed that:

in a kind of dominant model of modernist historiography, through the second half of the twentieth century, until fairly recently, Futurism was regarded as a really interesting movement but not having made it pictorially.[1]

However, by situating the paintings within a specifically Italian art historical context, taking in the relationship between Futurism and not only Cubism but also Divisionism, he endeavoured to demonstrate that painters like Boccioni were not simply imitating Cubism badly, but actually adapting elements of Parisian painting techniques to their own national circumstances. At the same conference, Matthew Gale, curator of the Tate Modern's *Futurism* exhibition, proposed that the inclusion of documentation dealing with the choreography of Valentine de Saint Point was aimed at opening up the question of the tension between the undeniable "macho misogyny" of Marinetti's promoting "scorn for women" and his publication of de Saint Point's "Manifesto of Futurist Women".[2] Just as

Marinetti ended up softening his hard line on women in later manifestos and even marrying, after a century of exile from the progressive narrative of the avant garde, Futurism finally seemed to be finding its place within the canon.

At the same time, several writers took the occasion to construct a critical analysis of the legacy of Futurism and its relationship to contemporary art and political theory. Jacques Rancière related the Futurist ethos with the modernist project of liberating art from representation.[3] The Futurists wanted to find a new language to collapse the boundaries of everyday life and its representation in images, to create a poetry that would sound like the engine of a motorcycle or an airplane. But they not only failed to implement this utopian ideal, they also ended up ironically contributing to the historical narrative of the salvation of the image. Taking its place in the museum alongside a host of artistic movements that similarly attacked the image – expressionism, constructivism, minimalism, etc. – Futurism is simply another chapter in the story of images being destroyed and resurrected as the basis for a new art *ad infinitum*. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, in his post-Futurist manifesto, has also identified a historical irony at play in the emptying out of Futurism's promise: a liberated mechanical humanity did indeed materialize, in a global economic system premised on financial servitude to the future via debt.[4] Instead of the mechanized masses put forward by Futurism, Bifo advocates a network of individual atoms; in lieu of the enslavement of the social body to the speed and heaviness of mechanical technology, he suggests slowness and the lightness of immaterial, digital technology. However, like the art historical rehabilitation of Futurism, these models continue to assess Futurism against an unchallenged humanism, finding it either supporting ideals of freedom and human rights despite itself, or else lacking in these areas. Only one speaker at the Tate conference – novelist Tom McCarthy – was in favour of re-evaluating Futurism as potentially more relevant than ever not in spite of its anti-humanist agenda, but precisely because of it.[5] McCarthy annexes not Futurist art but Futurist writing to an emerging object oriented ontology that seeks to challenge the primacy of the human. It is his suggestion of using Futurism to interrogate humanism that we would like to develop further in the present essay, for if Futurism is to be repurposed as a critical concept, it can only do so by countering the humanist myth the liberal subject that underlies the current cultural and political hegemony of neo-liberalism.

The century that passed since the publication of Marinetti's manifesto left the futurist spirit wounded and unable to rise from the gutter into which their particular brand of modernism was derailed. Futurism's disastrous relationship with Mussolini's fascism, their chauvinistic patriotism as well as their gung-ho battle cries are often cited as the source of the disenchantment of art with the ideas of Futurism after the war. As the historian Alan Woods writes,

Fascist art - like totalitarian art in general - can never be great art. In order to flourish art, literature, music and science need the fullest freedom to develop, to experiment and to make mistakes […] The art of the futurists, which in its initial phase showed great promise and vitality, under the fascist regime degenerated into mere propaganda and another arm of the corporate state.[6]

The Futurists' glorification of war, violence and their eventual alliance with the dogma of 'blood and land' nationalism seemed out of place after the brutalities of the Second World War.

But Futurism was also defeated on another front. In the 1909 manifesto, Marinetti still sang of “the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons” and “greedy railway stations that devour smoke plumed serpents”; in the decades after the Second World War, this technological euphoria became untenable.[7] Fueled by the post war manufacturing boom and the knowledge gained through military research, technological devices that were previously inaccessible to most became affordable domestic commodities and gradually lost their allure. In 1964, Herbert Marcuse could warn “against all technological fetishism”.[8] For Marcuse the “idea of the future omnipotence of technological man” would not result in the anarchic liberation of the individual from institutional power imagined by Marinetti in the manifesto, but rather in greater dependence and weakness.[9] Technology might be able to eliminate certain tasks that chain the working classes to the assembly lines of the factories, but it also increases mystification and limits one’s ability to directly influence the lived environment. A greater ecological awareness and the energy crisis of the 1970s contributed further to a growing suspicion towards the idea that technological advances are linked to greater freedom. It became clear that Marinetti’s “beauty of speed” was supported by global industrial giants and that the anonymous and autonomous sphere of the individual in the “great crowds excited by work, by pleasure and by riot” is managed and produced by old hegemonic social forces.[10] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer elaborated on the link between consumption of technology and hegemonic power in their chapter on the culture industry from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> The technical contrast between the few production centers and the large number of widely dispersed consumption points is said to demand organisation and planning by management. Furthermore, it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers’ needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself.[11]

For Adorno and Horkheimer the vast majority of cultural and artistic activity following the rapid modernization of technologies in the twentieth century was no more than propaganda in support of the continued dominance of the capitalist heavy industries over all forms of life.

Since the 1960s, the aesthetic attachment of artists to technology has changed in another direction. The futurists imagined a world full of mechanical technologies, industrial manufacturing and petroleum-based energy in which the masses would live and work in great, animated cities. But the gradual move of manufacturing to third world countries as well as the rising importance of computerized information technologies meant that western cities changed their nature. Instead of Marinetti’s streets where crowds, “panting with scorn and anguish, and exasperated by our proud daring, will to kill us”, city centres went through rapid de-population (between 1950 and 2010 the city of Detroit for example lost more than half of its residents) and de-urbanization.[12] Cities became cultural and economic nodes connecting sprawling suburbs through which information, people and capital flow on a global scale. Art reacted to these changes by moving away from the object and a proliferation of dematerialized practices.[13] Conceptual art, minimalism, video

and digital art and performance art represented a move away from the fetish of the mechanical object and replaced the quasi public spaces of the road, the city square and the factory with the private, the domestic and the virtual.

But perhaps the most serious challenge to the futurist idea came on the political-ideological terrain. Marinetti's manifesto is a clear expression of the period's anti-liberal sentiments, which were shared by proto-Fascists and anarchists alike. His admiration of the crowd goes against the liberal individual whose particular rights are supported by rational debates and negotiations in a parliamentary democratic framework. Against this rationality and respect of particular rights, Marinetti praises passion, violence, cruelty and injustice. Marinetti's manifesto is a call to arms against the civilizing institutions of the liberal state, its libraries, museums and academies, where the liberal ideals of enlightenment, good citizenship and respectability are reproduced. Although liberalism came out of the Second World War triumphant and the United Stated gained dominance over the western world, since the 1970s, radical critique from inside liberalism itself has transformed the political landscape and made some of Marinetti's attacks redundant. Eager to minimize the role of state in the reproduction of its citizens' ability to be free agents in a competitive free market, neo-liberalism recuperated museums, libraries and the education system into the free market. Rather than being maintained by the state, these systems of knowledge were privatized and turned into competitive forces. The production and commodification of knowledge itself was promoted as a major industry to replace declining manufacturing. The latest phase of this period of neo-liberal radicalism has recently begun with the election win by the Conservative party in the UK in 2010 and the intensification of the dismantling of state institutions, a desperate last attempt to resuscitate the neo-liberal project after the global economic crisis of the last few years. The civil institutions that Marinetti wanted to destroy in the name of the anarchic spirit of art are now under attack from the state itself. In an ironic realization of Marrineti's vision, the place of culture as a civilizing process, was taken by a contemporary model in which globalized art production overcomes time and space through the sheer speed and intensity of the global market, flowing through cultural capitals, biennials and art fairs.

This link between the critique of the avant garde and neo liberalism has been explored at length in Luc Boltanski's and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Here the authors demonstrate the way in which what they term the 'artistic critique' of capitalism has demanded the introduction of more creativity into the relations governing work and exchange in contemporary society. Parallel to a 'social critique' that was more focused on issues of poverty and exploitation, artistic critique elaborated "demands for liberation and authenticity".[14] This critique can be traced back to the invention of a 'bohemian lifestyle' to counter the standardization of the bourgeois capitalist order of the nineteenth century, "affecting not only everyday objects, but also artworks (the cultural mercantilism of the bourgeoisie) and human beings".[15] Artistic critique celebrates "the freedom of artists" and "their rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics", and finds its epitome in the figure of the dandy and "the aristocratic libertinism of the artistic avant garde".[16] It is also very much in keeping with the aspirations of Marinetti's failed foray into politics with his Futurist party, whose programme involved guarantying "all citizens an equal start in life, allowing the development of personality by the unleashing competitive spirit of individuals in an atmosphere of total freedom".[17] Boltanski and Chiapello consider that this critique has been successfully addressed in some respects through an increased emphasis on

creativity in the workplace. Instead of merely mediated decisions from above, workers wanted not only increased flexibility at work, but also to participate in designing their roles. This demand was, at least to an extent, answered, and through the logic of recuperation transformed the system that it criticized.

Thus, the futurist project has survived the twentieth century, but the realization of the early modernist utopia in a lived reality has resulted in an ironic dialectic. The Futurists' critique of established power and traditional social structures was fully implemented in the later part of the twentieth century, not as the spirit of a new collectivity they dreamt of, but as a new dogma, a new phase of capitalist exploitation. Marinetti's love of the artificial contributed to the creation of a new 'nature' – the unregulated forces of the market in which flexible individuals compete. This irony can be seen clearly looking back to Valentine de Saint-Point's "Futurist Manifesto of Lust". De Saint-Point's manifesto rails against sentimental romantic love, modesty and the conventional family unit and calls for a dedication to desire:

We must stop despising Desire, this attraction at once delicate and brutal between two bodies, of whatever sex, two bodies that want each other, striving for unity. We must stop despising Desire, disguising it in the pitiful clothes of old and sterile sentimentality.[18]

The sexual liberation promised in this text was all too successful in eradicating the family unit, as divorce rates and single parent family rates remain high in the developed world. Ultimately, this promise resulted not in greater human happiness but in the transformation of desire into another sphere managed by forces of the market through Viagra, pornography or dating websites.

The ironic failure (and simultaneous success) of the avant-garde ideals of the Futurists was exploited in the work of J.G. Ballard from the 1960s and until his death in 2009. Inspired by the literature of the Futurists from which he often quoted, Ballard's writing is perhaps the best illustration of the perverse mutation of these cultural ideas over the later part of the twentieth century. Like Marinetti and the Futurists, Ballard saw the nexus man-machine as the defining feature of the last century and was interested in particular in the influence of the automobile over social, sexual and psychological practices. The Futurists did not limit their exploration of the impact of new technologies only to poetic and visual expression but were also interested in the everyday. Alongside the manifestos they published on the classical arts of poetry, painting, sculpture, music and architecture, they attempted to find new ways of engaging with the mundane and wrote about fashion, cooking and new mass media such as cinema and radio. This intention to break out of the world of art and to identify Futurism in the space outside the museum is beautifully expressed in Giacomo Balla's (1918) short manifesto "The Futurist Universe":

Any store in a modern town, with its elegant windows all displaying useful and pleasing objects, is much more aesthetically enjoyable than all those passéist exhibitions which have been so lauded everywhere...The clever and gay modeling of ladies' dancing-shoes, the bizarre ingenuity of multi-colored parasols. Furs, traveling bags, china - these things are all a much more rewarding sight than the grimy little pictures nailed on the grey wall of the passéist painter's studio.[19]

Clearly anticipating the pop art movement of the late 1950s (in Britain) and the 1960s (in the United States), Balla recognized the urgent and energetic sensibility of modernism in the consumerist space of the street away from the institutions of art and their careful curating of the past.

Similarly, Ballard's novels rejected the literary convention of treating the technological mostly in the framework of science fiction epics that take place in the future and on extraterrestrial planets. Mirroring Marinetti's assertion that a new dawn was already rising over Europe, Ballard looked at the present and the near future as a post catastrophic location, where the miraculous was already present. He declared that the "only truly alien planet is Earth", and the catastrophe he recognized at the heart of the everyday was precisely the tremendous transformation brought about by the forces of modernism, the same forces celebrated by the Futurists.[20] But whereas the Futurists imagined a new breed of humans who, like Marinetti and his Futurist comrades, "already live in the absolute, since we have created eternal, omnipresent speed", Ballard's subjects were fragmentary, their shattered psyches scattered like debris over the post-catastrophic landscape.[21] His protagonists were submerged in the artificial non-places that they inhabited, passively enjoying the decomposition of the landscape, the confusion of technological space and inner space. If the Futurists saw technology as exhilarating and liberating, offering the possibility of salvation that lifts one beyond and above the confines of space, time, morality and liberal institutions, Ballard was more interested in the subversive potential of normative techno-rituals. He explored the psycho-sexual deviance of the dead moments of traffic jams, holiday resorts, airport terminals and shopping malls. For Marinetti and Balla, revolt and poetry were synonymous with the streets of the modern city. Ballard's subjects lived in a suburban world full of semi-private enclosures: a gated community, a self-sufficient high rise, a traffic island, a private hospital. For Ballard, the political and cultural importance of places can only be measured by their distance to the airport:

For the past 35 years I have lived in the Thames Valley town of Shepperton, a suburb not of London but of London Airport. The catchment area of Heathrow extends for at least 10 miles to its south and west, a zone of motorway intersections, dual carriageways, science parks, marinas and industrial estates, watched by police CCTV speed-check cameras, a landscape which most people affect to loathe but which I regard as the most advanced and admirable in the British Isles, and paradigm of the best that the future offers us.[22]

London, in comparison, despite being perhaps the only true global city apart form Moscow, is for Ballard old fashioned and inadequate for a true modernity: its 19th century architecture and separation to centres, districts and neighbourhoods are still of an antiquated project of class distinction that recedes to the background in the anonymity of the suburb.

This relationship between the aspirations of art and the everyday is precisely where Jacques Rancière identifies futurism's project and its subsequent failure. Rancière describes the period of the high avant-garde (1880s to 1920s) as the transitional moment between different regimes of images. In the older regime images, or the visible, held a stable relationship with text, or the 'sayable': images were supported by a narrative and operated against it by interpreting, making visible or hiding parts of it. But the artists of the

avant-garde wished to liberate the image from its representational dependency on the preceding narrative. Rancière identifies two strategies through which this detachment of the image was conceived. The first "proposes an art entirely separate from the social commerce of imagery", of newspapers and other forms of representational imagery.[23] The second, which Rancière identifies with the Futurists, strives to eliminate the space between high art and life in order "to abolish the mediation of the image".[24] If, as suggested by Luigi Russolo in "The Art of Noises", we should listen to random machine noises on the street as musical compositions, the space between art and life would disappear and with it the role of art as representing a narrative, a life, external to itself.[25]

Both these strategies ended,

When the authorities to whom the sacrifice of images was offered made it clear that they wanted nothing to do with constructor-artists, that they themselves were taking care of construction, and required of artists nothing but precisely images.[26]

Their failure bracketed these attacks on the image as a historical phase and thus turned the work produced in an attempt to defeat the space between the narrative and the image into only one possible style in the historical narrative of the struggles of the image. The failure of the Futurist programme opened again a space for critique that looked to cancel the gap between the lived space of the city and its imagistic representation. A little less than half a century after the first manifesto of Futurism, the Lettrist Ivan Chtcheglov wrote:

We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun. Between the legs of the women walking by, the dadaists imagined a monkey wrench and the surrealists a crystal cup. That's lost. We know how to read every promise in faces — the latest stage of morphology. The poetry of the billboards lasted twenty years. We are bored in the city, we really have to strain to still discover mysteries on the sidewalk billboards, the latest state of humor and poetry.[27]

The Futurist city became a place where modernist archetypes, glorious promises of the end of history, became historical ruins.

In 2009, in the midst of the centennial celebrations of the publication of Marinetti's manifesto, the Italian philosopher Franco 'Bifo' Berardi published a reply to Marinetti in the shape of a "Post-Futurist Manifesto". Answering each point of Marinetti's original 1909 text, Bifo summarized many of the challenges to the futurist project to emerge over the century that had passed. He replaced Marinetti's singing of "the love of danger" with the song of "the danger of love"; instead of war, he proposes sleep; instead of "courage, audacity and revolt", he prefers "irony, tenderness and rebellion".[28] But, most importantly, Bifo focuses his critique on Marinetti's admiration of the masses, united in their urban anonymity. For Bifo, multitudes – networked crowds of individuals who emerge as a mass only momentarily – are the new political subject to replace the mechanized and unified masses of Marinetti, fashioned after the Greek phalanx:

We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of autonomy. Each to her own rhythm; nobody must be constrained to march on a uniform pace.[29]

Bifo also rejects the dualistic separation of man and machine found in Futurist literature. Through immaterial, networked technologies, workers are no longer enslaved to the mechanical production line, and in their work now they produce technical knowledge, intellectual content and their own subjectivities at the same time.

In fact, Marinetti's concept of speed exceeds the cumbersome technologies of war and transportation mocked by Bifo. In his "Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without strings —Words-in-Freedom", Marinetti defines speed not only as the technological conquest of space but also as something subtler, a more direct form of language that needs no structural support from empty connectors:

Between poet and audience the same rapport exists as between two old friends. They can make themselves understood with half a word, a gesture, a glance. So the poet's imagination must weave together distant things with no connecting strings, by means of essential free words.[30]

Speed, in fact, is the meeting point between ideas and objects, where words collapse into action and concepts immediately become things: words, sounds and meanings are fused together in an anti-semiotic gesture. This is reminiscent of Kurt Schwitters' "i (a manifesto)", which calls to eliminate the space between conceptualization and realization of the work. "[A]voiding waste through friction", writes Schwitters, "i supposes the distance equal to zero, = o. Concept, material and work of art are the same thing".[31] Schwitters and Marinetti both see quickness of movement and thought as a revolutionary force. However, whilst a lot closer to the virtual lightness described by Bifo, this vision is also very close to the 'just in time' production protocols of post-Fordist manufacturing, where products are only manufactured as orders come in, closing the gap between conceptualization and realization more efficiently than either Schwitters or Marinetti could have hoped for.

What critical value, then, can we still rescue from the ceaseless attacks on the Futurist canon and the slow decline of their technological vision in an immaterial, globalized, suburban Europe, which has refused to yield down to their vision of the nation as an armoured body made up of mechanized humans and heavy machinery? Can we look beyond the dialectics of the avant-garde that led to the antithetical rejection of their ideals and their simultaneous incorporation into the neo-liberal statue quo? As the technological utopia of the Futurists was betrayed by the changing industrial landscape, a shift in social attitudes that left much of their critique irrelevant, their radicalism seems firmly tied to a particular historical regime that is bygone. But, what, in more generic terms, could we still take from the Futurists' unique brand of modernism that is useful in resisting the hyper or post-modern forces of capitalism in this new phase of exploitation based on post-Fordist principles?

The answers to these questions are concealed in the relationship between liberalism and its critique, as well as that between the avant-garde and neo-liberal radicalism. Neo-liberalism continued with the Futurist programme of the dismantling of the state and institutions of international regulation. It was also enthusiastic about the Futurist demand to expropriate knowledge and its centres of production and consumption (the libraries, museums and universities) that are supported by governments and to open them up to the purifying forces of deregulation. In the same way, if knowledge production was to be opened to the (theoretically) competitive and anarchic space of commerce, neo-liberal

thought wanted to liberate other aspects of life from under the civilizing mechanisms of the state and, like the Futurists, to promote a state of constant war between economic forces, not in the name of a particular cause or with a pragmatic aim in mind, but as an existential state of being. It is almost possible to see Gordon Gekko's famous "Greed is Good" speech from Oliver Stone's film *Wall Street*as a modernist manifesto:

I am not a destroyer of companies. I am a liberator of them! The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind.[32]

But neo-liberal radicalism is also different from Futurism in one crucial aspect. As an internal critique of liberal-democracy, it has to hold dear the ideal of the personal sphere of freedom and a belief in an atomized, individuated human being who precedes, and also stands above, civil society. In Margaret Thatcher's lecture on the free society at the conservative party conference, she emphasized the importance of the individual 'human being' to her vision of society:

Some Socialists seem to believe that people should be numbers in a State computer. We believe they should be individuals. We are all unequal. No one, thank heavens, is like anyone else, however much the Socialists may pretend otherwise. We believe that everyone has the right to be unequal but to us every human being is equally important.[33]

Matthew Poole has taken up this relationship between humanism, liberalism and capitalism in his introduction to the *Anti-Humanist Curating* symposium held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London:

What Liberalism, Humanism, and Capitalism share, in the production of their ideological figures, is that their operations and the relations they produce are all predicated upon, and always fall short in the actualisation of the ideal form of their central organising figures, or we might say 'principles' or 'driving images'. […] In Liberalism the placeholder is 'political freedom of the individual'. In Humanism the placeholder is 'the freedom of the human to define its humanity'. In Capitalism the placeholder is 'the freedom of choice within the marketplace'. So, in Liberalism it is 'political freedom', in Humanism 'ethical freedom', and in Capitalism 'economic freedom'. […] Freedom is the 'full' emptiness of the sovereignty of the private bourgeois individual human subject.[34]

By contrast, as Tom McCarthy (2009) states, Futurism rejects this prioritization of human beings as free subjects:

For Marinetti, [war is] not a means for a state to acquire power or for one ideology to confront another, but rather a trigger for the breaching of the limits of that stolid humanist and bourgeois bastion the *self*.[35] McCarthy focuses his analysis not on Marinetti's famous first manifesto, but on "Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without strings—Words-in-Freedom" (1913), written four years later. Here, Marinetti – perhaps prophesying the advent of the text message – attempts to outline the parameters for a new language, freed of connectors, adjectives and punctuation and adequate to the speed of new technologies:

Marinetti's warlike early twentieth century technologics anticipates – or perhaps clears the way for, lays out the parameters of – a type of literature that won't emerge until half a century later.[36]

But he also does more than propose a stream of consciousness style poetry of "unchained lyricism".[37] Marinetti asks us to "embrace the life of matter":

Instead of humanizing animals, vegetables, and minerals (an outmoded system) we will be able to animalize, vegetize, mineralize, electrify, or liquefy our style, making it live the life of material.[38]

In this he seems to foreshadow not only the literary trends referenced by McCarthy (who sees in *Ulysses* a realization of many of Marinetti's demands), but also current philosophical thinking about objects and our relationship to them. McCarthy cites Heidegger as sharing Marinetti's "sense that being in the world is *contingent*", but the materialism of the new Futurist language has even more in common with recent writing associated with the philosophy of speculative realism and object oriented ontology.[39]

The idea that looking at the world from a human or even humanizing perspective is outdated has been forcefully taken up by philosophers like Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman, who insist on the importance of recognizing that there is a world 'out there' independent of our perception of it. Philosophy, despite being a human preoccupation, should not limit itself to a discussion of that which falls within the remit of the human, because objects have interactions with each other that precede us, take place in our absence and will succeed us after the finitude of our death. Harman writes that "the materialist is free to concede that we over-abstract whenever we think of matter, while still holding that there is an unyielding physical stuff that is the true reality, deeper than any relational system".[40] For Meillassoux, it is crucial to demonstrate that the real can be logically described without relying on the senses:

The fact that I can't imagine the non-existence of subjectivity, since to imagine is to exist as a subject, does not prove it is impossible: I can't imagine what it is like to be dead, since to imagine it means we are still alive, but, unfortunately, this fact does not prove that death is impossible. The limits of my imagination are not the index of my immortality.[41]

Commenting on the role of language in framing Meillassoux's argument, Amanda Beech (2010) suggests that its ability to deliver access to the true reality of physical stuff initially appears to be at odds with the demand to abandon the human as a framing context for any discussion of reality, since language is itself a human construct:

Meillasoux's logic is built on a literal approach to language, where facts are facts. Facts are taken seriously to the point that they exceed the subject who claims it. This literalism allows us to identify another form of adequation where reason operates as a form of action and force. Here, language succeeds in transcending the limits of the human and is not refigured back onto it.[42]

However, she ultimately finds the collapsing of the boundaries between the imagination at work, the reasoning mind and the facticity of reality productive in describing an anti-humanist art practice.

because we cannot tie this indistinction between reason and the imagination back to a coherent subjectivity that thinks it, since facts are unrelated to human will, we do not idealise either the subject as a thinking being, nor the thinking that is thought by it. […] This is a question of meaning without us, and the reconditioning of an understanding of language interpretation as being always already tied to our mind and body - as if art was a personal message to us and a general message about us.[43]

To an extent, Marinetti's (1913) attempt to connect the "Death of the literary I" with "Molecular life and material" is more successful in attaining this notion of anti-humanist art than the speculative realists.[44] He makes no claims to scientific reason, but despite this, or perhaps because of it, he asserts the need to go beyond sense perception so that the materiality hinted at by microscopic technology can be accounted for without the hindrance of the limitations of the human:

My technical manifesto opposed the obsessive I that up to now the poets have described, sung, analyzed, and vomited up. To rid ourselves of this obsessive I, we must abandon the habit of humanizing nature by attributing human passions and preoccupations to animals, plants, water, stone, and clouds. Instead we should express the infinite smallness that surrounds us, the imperceptible, the invisible, the agitation of atoms, the Brownian movements, all the passionate hypotheses and all the domains explored by the high-powered microscope. To explain: I want to introduce the infinite molecular life into poetry not as a scientific document but as an intuitive element. It should mix, in the work of art, with the infinitely great spectacles and dramas, because this fusion constitutes the integral synthesis of life.[45]

Since Marinetti's project is the founding of a new poetic language, free of the duties of representation and capable of capturing the contingent chaos of the physical world of inanimate objects and technological artifacts, he operates with full awareness of the ultimately human aesthetic sensibility that he proposes. But Marinetti wants to go a step further. Words detach themselves from a subjectivity or a speaker (the 'I') and become objects in their own right, not as human relational tools to support communication between two individuals, but perhaps something closer to Marx's concept of the general intellect – the collective ability to have language as the condition of social cooperation from which a notion of separateness or individualism emerges. Marinetti shows in this text that he understands the connection between the liberal subject and the anthropomorphic imagination. It is here that a politics can be rescued from his project that does not inevitably end up with fascism. As McCarthy writes of this passage, "Man, properly conceived, doesn't even *begin* until he's 'multiplied' (a favourite term of Marinetti's)".[46] While the political consequences of speculative realism remain ambiguous (in conversation with Mark Fisher (2010), Harman is far more critical of the Left than of the neo-liberal civilization he claims to find "less stale" than Fisher does), Marinetti's opposition to the "obsessive I" can be co-opted in the service of a critique of neo-liberal humanism as much as it can be tied to the fascist programme of the organic society.[47]

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^ 26. Jacques Rancière, The Future of the Image, p. 21.

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