

## THE FOUNDING AND MANIFESTO OF FUTURISM

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We had stayed up<sup>1</sup> all night—my friends and I—beneath mosque lamps hanging from the ceiling. Their brass domes were filigreed, starred like our souls; just as, again like our souls, they were illuminated by the imprisoned brilliance of an electric heart. On the opulent oriental rugs, we had crushed our ancestral lethargy, arguing all the way to the final frontiers of logic and blackening reams of paper with delirious writings.

Our chests swelled with immense pride, for at that hour we alone were still awake and upright, like magnificent lighthouses or forward sentries facing an army of enemy stars that eyed us from their encampments in the sky. Alone with the stokers who bustle in front of the boilers' hellish fires in massive ships; alone with the black specters who rummage in the red-hot bellies of locomotives launched on insane journeys; alone with drunkards who flounder alongside the city walls, with the beating of uncertain wings.

Suddenly we jumped at the tremendous noise of the large double-decker trams which jolt along outside, shimmering with multicolored lights, like villages on holiday which the flooding Po suddenly strikes and uproots, dragging them all the way to the sea, over waterfalls and through gorges.

Then the silence grew more gloomy. But as we were listening to the attenuated murmur of prayers muttered by the old canal and the bones of ailing palaces creaking above their beards of damp moss, suddenly we heard the famished automobiles roaring beneath the windows.

"Let's go!" I said. "Let's go, my friends! Let's leave! At last mythology and the mystical ideal have been superseded. We are about to witness the birth of the Centaur, and soon we shall see the first Angels fly! . . . We have to shake the doors of life to test their hinges and bolts! . . . Let's leave! Look! There, on the earth, the earliest dawn! Nothing can match the splendor of the sun's red sword, skirmishing for the first time with our thousand-year-old shadows."

We drew close to the three snorting beasts, tenderly stroking their swollen breasts. I stretched out on my car like a corpse in its coffin, but revived at once under the steering wheel, a guillotine blade that menaced my stomach.

The furious sweep of madness drove us outside ourselves and through the

streets, deep and precipitous as the beds of spring torrents. Here and there a sickly lamplight, behind the glass of a window, taught us to despise the errant mathematics of our transitory eyes.

I screamed: "The scent, the scent alone is enough for our beasts!"

And like young lions we ran after Death, its black hide stained with pale crosses, running across the vast livid sky, alive and throbbing.

And yet we did not have an ideal Beloved who raised her sublime form all the way to the clouds, nor a cruel Queen to whom we could offer our corpses, twisted in the shape of Byzantine rings! Nothing to make us wish to die except our desire to free ourselves finally from the burden of our own courage!

And so we raced on, hurling watchdogs back against the doorways; they were flattened and curled beneath our scorching tires like shirt collars beneath a pressing iron. Death, domesticated, was overtaking me at every turn, gracefully holding out a paw, or sometimes stretching out on the ground with a noise like that of grating jawbones, casting me velvety and tender looks from every puddle.

"Let's break out of wisdom, as if out of a horrible shell; and let's fling ourselves, like fruits swollen with pride, into the wind's vast and contorted mouth! . . . Let's throw ourselves, like food, into the Unknown, not in desperation but to fill up the deep wells of the Absurd."

Scarcely had I said these words, when I spun my car around as frantically as a dog trying to bite its own tail, and there, suddenly, were two bicyclists right in front of me, cutting me off, as if trying to prove me wrong, wobbling like two lines of reasoning, equally persuasive and yet contradictory. Their stupid argument was being discussed right in my path . . . What a bore! Damn! . . . I stopped short, and to my disgust rolled over into a ditch, with my wheels in the air. . . .

Oh! Maternal ditch, nearly full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I gulped down your bracing slime, which reminded me of the sacred black breast of my Sudanese nurse.<sup>2</sup> . . . When I climbed out, a filthy and stinking rag, from underneath the capsized car, I felt my heart—deliciously—being slashed with the red-hot iron of joy!

A crowd of fishermen armed with hooks and naturalists stricken with gout formed a thronging circle around the prodigy. With patient and meticulous attention, they rigged up a derrick and enormous iron grapnels to fish out my car, stranded like a large shark. The car slowly emerged from the ditch, leaving behind in the depths its heavy chassis of good sense and its soft upholstery of comfort, like scales.

They thought it was dead, my beautiful shark, but one caress from me was enough to revive it, and there it was again, once more alive, running on its powerful fins.

And so, our faces covered with the good factory slime—a mix of metallic scum, useless sweat, heavenly soot—our arms bruised and bandaged, we, still fearless, have dictated our first intentions to all the *living* men of the earth:

#### THE MANIFESTO OF FUTURISM

1. We intend to sing to the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
2. Courage, boldness, and rebelliousness will be the essential elements of our poetry.
3. Up to now literature has exalted contemplative stillness, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt movement and aggression, feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the slap and the punch.
4. We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with a hood that glistens with large pipes resembling a serpent with explosive breath . . . a roaring automobile that seems to ride on grapeshot—that is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.<sup>3</sup>
5. We intend to hymn man at the steering wheel, the ideal axis of which intersects the earth, itself hurled ahead in its own race along the path of its orbit.
6. Henceforth poets must do their utmost, with ardor, splendor, and generosity, to increase the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.
7. There is no beauty that does not consist of struggle. No work that lacks an aggressive character can be considered a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent assault launched against unknown forces to reduce them to submission under man.
8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! . . . Why should we look back over our shoulders, when we intend to breach the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, for we have already created velocity which is eternal and omnipresent.
9. We intend to glorify war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman.
10. We intend to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort, and to fight against moralism, feminism, and every utilitarian or opportunistic cowardice.
11. We shall sing the great masses shaken with work, pleasure, or rebellion: we shall sing the multicolored and polyphonic tidal waves of revolution in the modern metropolis; shall sing the vibrating nocturnal fervor of factories and shipyards burning under violent electrical moons; bloated railroad stations that devour smoking serpents; factories hanging from the sky by the twisting threads of spiraling smoke; bridges like gigantic gymnasts who span rivers,

flashing at the sun with the gleam of a knife; adventurous steamships that scent the horizon, locomotives with their swollen chest, pawing the tracks like massive steel horses bridled with pipes, and the oscillating flight of airplanes, whose propeller flaps at the wind like a flag and seems to applaud like a delirious crowd.

It is from Italy that we are flinging this to the world, our manifesto of burning and overwhelming violence, with which we today establish "Futurism," for we intend to free this nation from its fetid cancer of professors, archaeologists, tour guides, and antiquarians.

For much too long Italy has been a flea market. We intend to liberate it from the countless museums that have covered it like so many cemeteries.

Museums: cemeteries! Identical, really, in the horrible promiscuity of so many bodies scarcely known to one another. Museums: public dormitories in which someone is put to sleep forever alongside others he hated or didn't know! Museums: absurd slaughterhouses for painters and sculptors who go on thrashing each other with blows of line and color along the disputed walls!

That once a year you might make a pilgrimage, much as one makes an annual visit to a graveyard . . . I'll grant you that. That once a year you can deposit a wreath of flowers in front of the *Mona Lisa*, I permit you that . . . But I cannot countenance the idea that our sorrows are daily shepherded on a tour through museums, or our weak courage, our pathological restlessness. Why would we wish to poison ourselves? Why wish to rot?

And what is there to see in an old painting beside the laborious distortion of the artist who tried to break through the insuperable barriers which blocked his desire to express fully his dream? . . . To admire an old painting is the same as pouring our sensibility into a funerary urn, instead of casting it forward into the distance in violent spurts of creation and action.

Do you wish to waste your best strength in this eternal and useless admiration of the past, an activity that will only leave you fatally spent, diminished, crushed?

I declare, in all truth, that a daily visit to museums, libraries, and academies (cemeteries of futile efforts, Calvaries of crucified dreams, record books of broken assaults! . . .) is as dangerous for artists as a prolonged guardianship under the thumb of one's family is for certain young talents intoxicated with their own genius and their ambitious aims. For the sickly, the ill, or the imprisoned—let them go and visit: the admirable past is perhaps a solace for their troubles, since the future is now closed to them. . . . But we intend to know nothing of it, nothing of the past—we strong and youthful *Futurists*!

And so, let the glad arsonists with charred fingers come! Here they are! Here they are! . . . Go ahead! Set fire to the shelves of the libraries! . . . Turn aside the

course of the canals to flood the museums! . . . Oh, the joy of seeing all the glorious old canvases floating adrift on the waters, shredded and discolored! . . . Seize your pickaxes, axes, and hammers, and tear down, pitilessly tear down the venerable cities!

The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade left to fulfill our task.<sup>4</sup> When we are forty, others who are younger and stronger will throw us into the wastebasket, like useless manuscripts. — We want it to happen!

They will come against us, our successors; they will come from far away, from every direction, dancing to the winged cadence of their first songs, extending predatory claws, sniffing doglike at doors of the academies for the good smell of our decaying minds, long since promised to the libraries' catacombs.

But we won't be there. . . . They will find us, at last—one wintry night—in an open field, beneath a sad roof drummed by monotonous rain, crouched beside our trembling airplanes and in the act of warming our hands by the dirty little fire made by the books we are writing today, flaming beneath the flight of our imaginings.

Panting with contempt and anxiety, they will storm around us, and all of them, exasperated by our lofty daring, will attempt to kill us, driven by a hatred all the more implacable because their hearts will be intoxicated with love and admiration for us.

In their eyes, strong and healthy Injustice will radiantly burst. — Art, in fact, can be nothing if not violence, cruelty, and injustice.

The oldest of us is thirty: and yet already we have cast away treasures, thousands of treasures of force, love, boldness, cunning, and raw will power; have thrown them away impatiently, furiously, heedlessly, without hesitation, without rest, screaming for our lives. Look at us! We are still not weary! Our hearts feel no tiredness because they are fed with fire, hatred, and speed! . . . Are you astounded? Of course you are, because you can't even recall having ever been alive! Standing erect on the summit of the world, yet once more we fling our challenge to the stars!

You raise objections? . . . Stop! Stop! We know them . . . We've understood! . . . The refined and mendacious mind tells us that we are the summation and continuation of our ancestors—maybe! Suppose it so! But what difference does it make? We don't want to listen! . . . Woe to anyone who repeats those infamous words to us!

Lift up your heads!

Standing erect on the summit of the world, yet once more we fling our challenge to the stars!<sup>5</sup>