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## << 2 >> "The Futurist Cinema" (1916)



F. T. Marinetti. Photo by Coletti.

*"We shall set in motion the words-in-freedom that smash the boundaries of literature as they march towards painting, music, noise-art, and throw a marvelous bridge between the word and the real object."*

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<< The Italian Futurists set out to attack the heart of high culture. Denouncing archaic artistic and social structures was key to the Futurist sensibility. The movement was born in Paris with the publication of the first Futurist manifesto in *Le Figaro*, a popular daily newspaper, in 1909. Its author, the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, chose the Parisian public as the target for his manifesto of "incendiary violence," calling for an end to all art that refused to embrace the social transformation brought by technology in the new century.

It was in cinema that Marinetti and his colleagues saw the potential for a form of expression that reflected the speed and energy of the times. Cinema may still have been considered a novelty entertainment, but the Futurists treated it as a legitimate art form. In this essay, they contrast the flexibility of film against the linearity, rigidity, and canonical aura of the book. Cinema, they declared, could be the most dynamic of human expressions because of its ability to synthesize all of the traditional arts, unleashing a form that was totally new. The Futurist cinema would free words from the fixed pages of the book and "smash the boundaries of literature," while it would enable painting to "break out of the limits of the frame." Such an enterprise called for the integration of technology into the arts: the mechanical tools of filmmaking, the Futurists claimed, would produce the "simultaneity and interpenetration of different times and places," foreshadowing later developments in nonlinear narrative found in interactive media. >>

The book, a wholly passéist means of preserving and communicating thought, has for a long time been fated to disappear like cathedrals, towers, crenellated walls, museums, and the pacifist ideal. The book, static companion of the sedentary, the nostalgic, the neutralist, cannot entertain or exalt the new Futurist generations intoxicated with revolutionary and bellicose dynamism.

The conflagration is steadily enlivening the European sensibility. Our great hygienic war, which should satisfy *all* our national aspirations, centuples the renewing power of the Italian race. The Futurist cinema, which we are preparing, a joyful deformation of the universe, an alogical, fleeting synthesis of life in the world, will become the best school for boys: a school of joy, of speed, of force, of courage, and heroism. The Futurist cinema will sharpen, develop the sensibility, will quicken the creative imagination, will give the intelligence a prodigious sense of simultaneity and omnipresence. The Futurist cinema will thus cooperate in the general renewal, taking the place of the literary review (always pedantic) and the

drama (always predictable), and killing the book (always tedious and oppressive). The necessities of propaganda will force us to publish a book once in a while. But we prefer to express ourselves through the cinema, through great tables of words-in-freedom and mobile illuminated signs.

With our manifesto "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre," with the victorious tours of the theatre companies of Gualtiero Tumiati, Ettore Berti, Annibale Ninchi, Luigi Zoncada, with the two volumes of *Futurist Synthetic Theatre* containing eighty theatrical syntheses, we have begun the revolution in the Italian prose theatre. An earlier Futurist manifesto had rehabilitated, glorified, and perfected the Variety Theatre. It is logical therefore for us to carry our vivifying energies into a new theatrical zone: the *cinema*.

At first look the cinema, born only a few years ago, may seem to be Futurist already, lacking a past and free from traditions. Actually, by appearing in the guise of *theatre without words*, it has inherited all the most traditional sweepings of the literary theatre. Consequently, everything we have said and done about the stage applies to the cinema. Our action is legitimate and necessary in so far as the cinema up to now *has been and tends to remain profoundly passéist*, whereas we see in it the possibility of an eminently Futurist art and *the expressive medium most adapted to the complex sensibility of a Futurist artist*.

Except for interesting films of travel, hunting, wars, and so on, the film-makers have done no more than inflict on us the most backward-looking dramas, great and small. The same scenario whose brevity and variety may make it seem advanced is, in most cases, nothing but the most trite and pious *analysis*. Therefore all the immense *artistic* possibilities of the cinema still rest entirely in the future.

The cinema is an autonomous art. The cinema must therefore never copy the stage. The cinema, being essentially visual, must above all fulfill the evolution of painting, detach itself from reality, from photography, from the graceful and solemn. It must become antigraceful, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, free-wording.

ONE MUST FREE THE CINEMA AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM in order to make it the ideal instrument *of a new art*, immensely vaster and lighter than all the existing arts. We are convinced that only in this way can one reach that *polyexpressiveness* towards which all the most modern artistic researches are moving. Today the *Futurist cinema* creates precisely the POLYEXPRESSIVE SYMPHONY that just a year ago we announced in our manifesto "Weights, Measures, and Prices of Artistic Genius." The most varied elements will enter into the Futurist film as expressive means: from the slice of life to the streak of colour, from the conventional line to words-in-freedom, from chromatic and plastic music to the music of objects. In

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other words it will be painting, architecture, sculpture, words-in-freedom, music of colours, lines, and forms, a jumble of objects and reality thrown together at random. We shall offer new inspirations for the researches of painters, which will tend to break out of the limits of the frame. We shall set in motion the words-in-freedom that smash the boundaries of literature as they march towards painting, music, noise-art, and throw a marvellous bridge between the word and the real object.

Our films will be:

1. **Cinematic analogies** that use reality directly as one of the two elements of the analogy. Example: If we should want to express the anguished state of one of our protagonists, instead of describing it in its various phases of suffering, we would give an equivalent impression with the sight of a jagged and cavernous mountain.

The mountains, seas, woods, cities, crowds, armies, squadrons, aeroplanes, will often be our formidable expressive words: **THE UNIVERSE WILL BE OUR VOCABULARY.** Example: We want to give a sensation of strange cheerfulness: we show a chair cover flying comically around an enormous coat stand until they decide to join. We want to give the sensation of anger: we fracture the angry man into a whirlwind of little yellow balls. We want to give the anguish of a hero who has lost his faith and lapsed into a dead neutral scepticism: we show the hero in the act of making an inspired speech to a great crowd; suddenly we bring on Giovanni Giolitti who treasonably stuffs a thick forkful of macaroni into the hero's mouth, drowning his winged words in tomato sauce.

We shall add colour to the dialogue by swiftly, simultaneously showing every image that passes through the actors' brains. Example: representing a man who will say to his woman: "You're as lovely as a gazelle," we shall show the gazelle. Example: if a character says, "I contemplate your fresh and luminous smile as a traveller after a long rough trip contemplates the sea from high on a mountain," we shall show traveller, sea, mountain.

This is how we shall make our characters as understandable *as if they talked.*

2. **Cinematic poems, speeches, and poetry.** We shall make all of their component images pass across the screen.

Example: "Canto dell'amore" [Song of Love] by Giosuè Carducci:

In their German strongholds perched  
Like falcons meditating the hunt

We shall show the strongholds, the falcons in ambush.

From the churches that raise long marble  
arms to heaven, in prayer to God  
From the convents between villages and towns  
crouching darkly to the sound of bells  
like cuckoos among far-spaced trees  
singing boredoms and unexpected joys . . .

We shall show churches that little by little are changed into imploring  
women, God beaming down from on high, the convents, the cuckoos, and  
so on.

Example: "Sogno d'Estate" [Summer's Dream] by Giosuè Carducci:

Among your ever-sounding strains of battle, Homer, I am conquered by  
the warm hour: I bow my head in sleep on Scamander's bank, but my  
heart flees to the Tyrrhenian Sea.

We shall show Carducci wandering amid the tumult of the Achaians, deftly  
avoiding the galloping horses, paying his respects to Homer, going for a  
drink with Ajax to the inn, The Red Scamander, and at the third glass of  
wine his heart, whose palpitations we ought to see, pops out of his jacket  
like a huge red balloon and flies over the Gulf of Rapallo. This is how we  
make films out of the most secret movements of genius.

Thus we shall ridicule the works of the passéist poets, transforming to  
the great benefit of the public the most nostalgically monotonous weepy  
poetry into violent, exciting, and highly exhilarating spectacles.

3. **Cinematic simultaneity and interpenetration** of different times and places. We shall project two or three different visual episodes at the same time, one next to the other.
4. **Cinematic musical researches** (dissonances, harmonies, symphonies of gestures, events, colours, lines, etc.).
5. **Dramatized states of mind on film.**
6. **Daily exercises in freeing ourselves from mere photographed logic.**
7. **Filmed dramas of objects.** (Objects animated, humanized, baffled, dressed up, impassioned, civilized, dancing—objects removed from their normal surroundings and put into an abnormal state that, by contrast, throws into relief their amazing construction and nonhuman life.)

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8. **Show windows of filmed ideas, events, types, objects, etc.**
9. **Congresses, flirts, fights and marriages of funny faces, mimicry, etc.**  
Example: a big nose that silences a thousand congressional fingers by ringing an ear, while two policemen's moustaches arrest a tooth.
10. **Filmed unreal reconstructions of the human body.**
11. **Filmed dramas of disproportion** (a thirsty man who pulls out a tiny drinking straw that lengthens umbilically as far as a lake and dries it up *instantly*).
12. **Potential dramas and strategic plans of filmed feelings.**
13. **Linear, plastic, chromatic equivalences, etc.**, of men, women, events, thoughts, music, feelings, weights, smells, noises (with white lines on black we shall show the inner, physical rhythm of a husband who discovers his wife in adultery and chases the lover—rhythm of soul and rhythm of legs).
14. **Filmed words-in-freedom in movement** (synoptic tables of lyric values—dramas of humanized or animated letters—orthographic dramas—typographical dramas—geometric dramas—numeric sensibility, etc.).  
Painting + sculpture + plastic dynamism + words-in-freedom + composed noises [*intonarumori*] + architecture + synthetic theatre = Futurist cinema.

THIS IS HOW WE DECOMPOSE AND RECOMPOSE THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO OUR MARVELLOUS WHIMS, to centuple the powers of the Italian creative genius and its absolute pre-eminence in the world.

11 SEPTEMBER 1916

—TRANSLATED BY R. W. FLINT