

# The Dynamism of Boccioni

## *The Futurist Foundation of Artwork: Immersion into Potency and Energy*

### 1.1 A Brief Premise

The opening section (§ 1.2) of this first chapter may seem strange, as it is not immediately comprehensible, and the same may apply to its conclusion (§ 1.4). However, the central section (§ 1.3) is quite different and should read more easily, but it would not make any sense whatsoever without the “strangeness” of the opening and closing sections.

The discussion herein contained is intended as the opening to a thought-path, which aims to clarify, in the simplest and most profound way, the provenance of art, that is to say (as we shall see more distinctly in the second part of this volume), the realm, reigning before every art, that endows art with its *decus*, *decorum* and dignity, and, of course, its sooth. Only on this level, can we establish whether the analysis, which consists of a genitural diagnosis of the Futurist *foundation* of artwork, hits the mark, so to say.

### 1.2 Universal Dynamism

What is the sooth of this *founding*? “To found” does not simply mean to lay down the bases of an ideational, productive practice. Foundation, in Umberto Boccioni’s theory of art, consists in first envisaging *that* fundament (or constitutive ground), the only one perceivable as acceptable or conceivable, which enables art to *finally* attain its fundamental configuration, given that the term “art” in this context refers to a specific attitude of the human genius, that is, to the vital force that senses impressions instressed within, and in the mould of, states of mind, or, better yet, in frames of spirit.

But which fundament or ground are we referring to? Boccioni called it “universal dynamism”. In a note from 1910, we read:

Per quanto i miei amici mi chiamino “il filosofo della compagnia”, ciò mi lusinga poco, e non ci credo.<sup>69</sup>

69 Umberto Boccioni, *La gran madre: Pensieri sull'arte*, ed. F. Zollo (Pistoia: Via del Vento Edizioni, 2014), 18–19.

(... As much as my friends call me *il filosofo della compagnia*, that is “the philosopher”, it does not flatter me much, and I do not believe it.<sup>70</sup>)

Truth be told, his friends were absolutely right: in his own manner, Boccioni was a “philosopher” since as a sculptor and painter (unlike any of the others in his *compagnia*, that is, in his circle of friends) he conceived the fundament—the *very (scope of) being itself*—of art, of artwork and of the artist’s role.

But how can we explain this “universal dynamism”?

We must not read this expression from the perspective of our current vocabulary, which offers us the trite images of “everything flowing” and “everything moving”. The adjective “uni-versal” means: that which is the unique and sole “versant”, the unique direction, sense and fundament of everything, whereas “dynamism” should be understood in light of the word “dynamic”, in which the Greek term δύνάμις speaks, and which I must translate here as “potency” (or “power”). Thus, dynamism, in Boccioni’s experience (and without him being fully aware of it however), indicates the constitutive intrinsic motility and motion of potency; that is, its moving *towards* itself, its remaining within itself as potency, a potency-power perpetually “in potency”, or *in posse*, incessantly potential and powerful, a potency that wills (empowers) itself as such and that cannot will (empower) anything other than this self-willing (self-empowering): potency *to* (i.e. for the sake of) potency, according to the mode of will *to* will. (Potency is—*will[s to]* be—in *esse* insofar as it is—*will[s to]* be—in *posse*. In other words, “potency” is a *mot-d’ordre* for a scope of being, and yet means in itself: let all the power be effected for the sake of potentiation, let all the potential be given to out-powering.) Dynamism—or potency in (permanently-willed) potentiality, powerfulness in ever-empowered empowerableness—is, therefore, qualified as being *universal* because it is specifically sensed as the fundament of the beënt, as that unique grounding-“versant”, which, by dynamizing everything into *a* dynamic totality, gives the tone of *centre of force*, or the instress of *energetic object*, to every beënt of this totality. Of course, we can say this, if, in the word “energy” (έν-έργεια), we etymologically hear being-in-action or being-in-esse underlying the power of potency, and being the effect *and* ignition of potency simultaneously, to wit, έργον, the operation of dynamism itself—an operation which, *as potency’s act*, by substantiating itself as a dynamic-dynamizing body, always arouses, instigates and activates it, concreting it in one form or another. The energetic object is the *ens-in-actu*, the actual beënt, the corporeal self-actuating of universal dynamism (the omni-dynamizing fundament), in the mould of a

<sup>70</sup> All translations into English are mine, unless explicitly cited.

concretion-of-forces, which imposes upon humankind thinking through values as the only form of thinking. (Note, a value, as a format, *is*, insofar as it is the “act of dynamism”.)

Now let us ask: what is the “structure” of time within the potency sphere of universal dynamism? In which way does “time-dynamism” bide? What is the sense of time that suits universal dynamism? What will the word “time” *mean* when universal dynamism is finally recognised as the ineludible fundament? In order to respond to these queries, let us first note that the bidance of dynamism is such that whoever perceives it and assumes it, experiencing its potency-power as *the fundament of everything* (as a totality), will also necessarily be struck by the following threefold vision (which instantly assumes the appearance of undisputed evidence, of a dogma): 1. that the understanding of the world as the concretion of dynamism only becomes possible for man when the human genius and spirit have already lived and seen, attempted and undergone much for a long time; 2. that the whole of what has occurred (i.e. the past) is nothing compared to what is coming (i.e. the future), whose “null” instead appears to be rich in unheard-of dynamic possibilities; 3. that the emergence of dynamism—as the scope of being—marks a collapse in the value of the works of the very progeny that, for a long time, necessarily had to be ignorant of it (i.e. of dynamism). As a result, time *in* dynamism, or “dynamic time”, will be a self-timing (a timeward instressed temper, a “time-warp”) imposed by the potential of possibility, namely a product of the potentiality of what is to come: “a future effect”;<sup>71</sup> in other words, it will be that tempering *tempo* in which all is subtracted from the annihilation of transience and passing, of transcursion, to wit, the temperature that will no longer make anything appear as past, ceased or dead, but, on the contrary, as having occurred *in favour and in furtherance of* that which is unheard, and as permanently ready for the continual risks and stakes of dynamism, for the potentialities and the forces that are uninterruptedly put into action by its circuit; in this manner, every dynamic reality will remain alive in that which must fatally overcome it.

Dynamic time will occupy the highest position amongst the new values of the incipient age, and it cannot but consist, so to speak, in a particular form of “eternity”: not an *aevum* without end (the void synchronism of indeterminate pro-ceeding and retro-ceeding *ad infinitum*), but rather the playing field of *the eternal time-atom* (or *the everlasting juncture*) as a

71 The word “future” belongs to the same root (i.e. *\*bheh<sub>2</sub>u-*) of the Greek φύω (archaic Latin *fuō*), which means “to let be”, “to let surge”, “to let advene”, “to produce” (see §§ 18.1 and 19.1). For more on this rich IE root, see the entry “φύομαι” in Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 1597–8.

potency-moment, as a power-flash or a flashing energy-twinkling, which, by “en-futuring” itself at all times, “en-futures” everything all the time—the incessant-momentaneous energy for pure futuration, for absolute futurity. Indeed, the eternal time-atom is not the fixed point (fixedness) of atemporality, the fixity of the here-and-now within spacelessness, but rather the atom which forever becomes (i.e. returns as) an atom, the atom which, *in itself*, is a solid instress-temper *with itself*, the identically solid atom, to wit, the atom which is potentiated by itself and which, therefore, aims to persist, *to dure*; the atom which counts punctually on a per- and en-durance: *the gene-atom of pure duration*, the chronon of unconditional durativity. The latter, far from naturally being a mere span or period or “space of time”, is always a determined consolidation of the potentiality of potency, a calculated establishment of its—constantly willed—“futurableness”.<sup>72</sup> Dynamic time, being pure duration, is, therefore, the tempering “futurist” *tempo*, the intrinsically “en-futured time”, “time-unto-future”, time under “future-ever-in-act”, under “future’s action”; in a single word: “futureness-time” or, simply, *futurism*. Dynamism wills futurism as the instress and “grounding-*tempo*-temper” of its beñts, to wit, of energetic objects or dynamic bodies. (Note, incidentally, that the Latin adjective *aeternus* comes from the earlier *aevi-ternus*. This term originates from *aevum* [Greek αἰών] through the suffix *-ternus*, which is understood as conveying a sense of stability. *Aeternitas* [which is perhaps a coining by Cicero for the Greek αἰωνιότης] would, therefore, be duration stabilised within itself. The German *ewig*/*Ewigkeit* has the same meaning.)

### 1.3 The Morpho-Radio-Chromatic Model (Potency-Power, Energy, Space-Time)

Thus, if the term “futurism” sounded like a plausible technical-programmatic title for the artistic-cultural-political movement of early twentieth-century Italy (the “movement of all movements”, “the avant-garde of all avant-gardes”, some say), then this circumstance is due, albeit in an unexplained and hidden manner, to the sense of time, and even before that to that sense of worldhood

<sup>72</sup> *Pure duration* (or *absolute durativity*) is the explosive dilatation of the eternal time-atom that, for this reason, is called the “gene-atom”. It is the pure becoming of potency (pure dynamism). Pure durations are not comparable in terms of chronometric measurements (time understood in the sense of clock-time), but rather in terms of the *quantum* of potency-power that has been reached and obtained and preserved for its own (while-bidingly possible) increment.

that has just been elucidated, which, as they are destined to our different humankind, generate an epoch that I call “the age of technics”.

The author of the term “futurism” was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,<sup>73</sup> who, in the *Manifesto of Futurism* of 1909, writes:

Noi siamo sul promontorio estremo dei secoli! ... Perché dovremmo guardarci alle spalle, se vogliamo sfondare le misteriose porte dell'impossibile? Così il Tempo e lo Spazio morirono ieri. Noi viviamo già nell'assoluto, poiché abbiamo già creata *l'eterna velocità onnipresente*.

(We stand on the extreme promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, for we have already created *eternal, omnipresent speed* [or velocity].<sup>74</sup>)

The “extreme promontory of the centuries” is the epochal vertex “from which” man finally discerns universal dynamism by perceiving and realising the peremptoriness of its call towards “the Impossible”,<sup>75</sup> whereas “Time and Space”, which “died yesterday”, are temporality and spatiality as they had been instituted by their stale and trite concepts (to wit, the former as indistinct transgression, the latter as indifferent extension). Now, everything has changed. The era of dynamic time begins, the era of pure duration, of time-futureness, which is already in itself new space, new geometry: the spatial era of “eternal, omnipresent velocity” (which the Futurists “have created” in the sense that they have perceived and accepted it as the origin of the truth of their creating acts and creatorship). This expression is extremely incisive. It is, in reality, another name for the sense of being indicated as “universal dynamism” (i.e. the two formulas are substantially synonymous): in fact, the former explains the latter’s grounding-tone, to wit, the reciprocal interpenetration, or even

73 Which he perhaps borrowed from Gabriel Alomar, poet and Catalan nationalist, who published a pamphlet entitled *El Futurisme*, in 1904, which, based on the contents, was nevertheless quite different from the “founding” intentions of the Italian poet.

74 English translation in Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, trans. Robert Brain, R. W. Flint, J. C. Higgitt and Caroline Tisdall (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 19–24.

75 The Impossible is that which cannot be made by man specifically because it is that which makes man what he or she is, that which makes everything what it is, that which makes everything possible. Dynamism is, therefore, and above all, the call to recognise it as supreme impossibility.

the “fusion”, of time and space, by means of which they appear as controllable and governable factors, thus rendering an unheard-of sense of taking-place (also in the sense of having a spatial-temporal position) possible. This tone appears thanks to the insightful perception of velocity as a constitutive trait of dynamism itself. What, indeed, is *speed and velocity* if not that energetic state (or dynamic value) in which man’s genius can be inebriated with the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space, or, *here*,<sup>76</sup> with the eternal self-spatializing time-atom within the omni-present spatial point?<sup>77</sup> Is velocity not the ecstasy of pure duration? In other words, in lived celerity, time turns into space and space turns into time in the format of space-time, that is, of the “futurist chronotope” (even whilst space and time lose their respective ordinary traits<sup>78</sup>). Therefore, universal dynamism is nothing but the universe of velocity, which thus becomes, as Marinetti writes, “the first amongst the beauties”. Speed, the “eternal omnipresent” velocity, grants human beings the potency of living in the absolute; of living, that is, in the will that wills itself unconditionally—in brief, *of living and acting-“powering” in the regime of pure durations* (or even of absolute continuities).

The entry on “Futurism”, which Marinetti wrote for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* in 1932, begins with a listing of its “fundamental ideas”:

[FUTURISMO.—Movimento artistico-politico svecchiatore, novatore, velocizzatore, creato da F. T. Marinetti a Milano nel 1909. Le sue idee fondamentali furono così enunciate nei varî manifesti:]

Arte-Vita esplosiva. Italianità parossista. Antimuseo. Anticultura. Antiaccademia. Antilogica. Antigrazioso. Antisentimentale. Contro città morte. Modernolatria. Religione della novità originalità velocità. Inegalismo. Intuizione e incoscienza creative. Splendore geometrico. Estetica della macchina. Eroismo e pagliaccismo nell’arte e nella vita. Caffè-concerto, fisicofollia e serate futuriste. Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Sensibilità geometrica e numerica. Parole in libertà rumoriste. Tavole parolibere sinottiche colorate. Declamazione sinottica marciante. Solidificazione dell’impressionismo. Sintesi di forma-colore. Lo spettatore nel centro del quadro. Dinamismo plastico. Stati d’animo. Linee-forza. Trascendentalismo fisico. Pittura astratta

76 “Here” refers to the circumstance that the *velocity phenomenon* is described in light of the original phenomenon, namely in terms of universal dynamism as power to potency according to unconditional will.

77 To be tempor(al)ized in ubiquity. In speed, pure duration surges; everything becomes “only” duration. The duress of velocity-time.

78 Inebriating speed is the *fracture* (or fraction) of space-by-time ( $v = s/t$ ), this fracture being eternally set (“solidified”) in infrangibility (see § 4.1).

di suoni, rumori, odori, pesi e forze misteriose. Compenetrazione e simultaneità di tempo-spazio, lontano-vicino, esterno-interno, vissuto-sognato. Architettura pura (ferro-cemento). Imitazione della macchina. Luce elettrica decoratrice. Sintesi teatrali a sorpresa senza tecnica e senza psicologia. Simultaneità sceniche di gaio-triste, realtà-sogno. Dramma di oggetti. Scenodinamica. Danza parolibera meccanica del corpo moltiplicato. Danza aerea e teatro aereo. Arte dei rumori. Intonarumori. Rumorarmonî. Archi enarmonici. Pesi misure prezzi del genio creatore. Tattilismo e tavole tattili. Alla ricerca dei nuovi sensi. Parole in libertà e sintesi teatrali olfattive. Flora artificiale. Complesso plastico motorumorista. Vita simultanea. Protezione delle macchine. Declamazione politimbrica. Aeropittura. Aeropoesia. Cucina futurista. Fotografia futurista. Arte sacra futurista.

We can render the entry into English in the following manner:

[FUTURISM.—A political-artistic, rejuvenating, novating, speeding-up movement created by F. T. Marinetti in Milan in 1909. Its fundamental ideas were thus articulated in various manifestos:]

Explosive Life-Art. Paroxysmal Italian-ness. Anti-museum. Anti-culture. Anti-academy. Anti-logic. Anti-gracious. Anti-sentimental. Against dead cities. Modernolatry. Religion of novelty originality speed. Unequalism. Creating intuition and unconsciousness. Geometric splendour. Aesthetics of the machine. Heroism and clownism in art and life. Caffè-concert, physical-folly and Futurist evenings. Destruction of syntax. Wireless imagination. Geometric and numeric sensibility. Noisemaker words-in-freedom. Freewordsome synoptic coloured tables. Marching synoptic declamation. Solidification of impressionism. Synthesis of form-colour. The spectator at the centre of the painting. Plastic dynamism. States of mind [also “frames of spirit”]. Force-lines [lines-(of-)force]. Physical transcendentalism. Abstract painting of sounds, noises, smells, weights and mysterious forces. Interpenetration and simultaneity of time-space, far-near, external-internal, lived-dreamed. Pure architecture (iron-cement). Imitation of the machine. Decorative electric light. Surprise theatrical syntheses without technique and without psychology. Scenic simultaneities of gay-sad, reality-dream. Drama of objects. Scenodynamics. Freewordsome mechanical dance of the multiplied body. Aerial dance and aerial theater. Art of noises. Noises-intoning. Noise-harmonicness. Enharmonic arches. Weights measures prices of the creator genius. Tactilism and tactile tables. In search of new senses. Words-in-freedom and theatrical olfactory syntheses. Artificial flora. Plastic motor-noiser

band. Simultaneous life. Protection of the machines. Polytimbric declamation. Aeropainting. Aeropoetry. Futurist cuisine. Futurist photography. Futurist sacred art.

Each of these “ideas”, rightly defined as “fundamental”, are worthy of being closely analysed; in this manner, we could verify how they all, each in its own way, stem from dynamism, which, as eternal omnipresent velocity, is the matrix of time-space (of “geometric splendour”<sup>79</sup>) for the new humanity, that is, for the modern dynamic *πόλις* (which will consist in the implementation of the regime of pure durations [let us think of speed here]). Those ideas are, therefore, and above all, new *political values*: they intend to found the Futurist work of art in order to found the future of the city (i.e. of township).<sup>80</sup>

Certain expressions that were technically coined by the “philosopher” stand out and are rather conspicuous: *modernolatria* (modernolatriy), *solidificazione dell'impressionismo* (solidification of impressionism), *sintesi di forma-colore* (synthesis of form-colour); *lo spettatore al centro del quadro* (the spectator at the centre of the painting), *dinamismo plastico* (plastic dynamism), *stati d'animo* (states of mind; frames of spirit), *linee-forza* (*force-lines/lines-[of-]force*), *trascendentalismo fisico* (physical transcendentalism); *compenetrazione e simultaneità di tempo-spazio, lontano-vicino, esterno-interno, vissuto-sognato* (interpenetration and simultaneity of time-space, far-near, external-internal, lived-dreamed), *dramma di oggetti* (drama of objects).

These terms are some of the guiding concepts of the treatise that Boccioni composed in 1914, entitled *Pittura e scultura futuriste*. The work, composed of seventeen chapters written in a compact and no-frills style, traces the foundation of art by drawing from universal dynamism both the constitutive design (the model) of the work and the creating stance (the will to carry out plasmation) of the artist.

In what follows, I shall limit myself to a single hint, which will nevertheless touch upon the essential point, that is, the element, in itself enigmatic, which according to Boccioni makes the Futurist foundation necessary,<sup>81</sup> to wit, the *motif* of pictorial and sculptural works of art. Here the *motif*, the moving-motive, lies in *the appearance of the object in its energetic self-impressing upon the vital force of the subject, an impressing that would express (or extrinsicate) the subject's plastic frame of spirit (i.e. the form-recepting and as such form-“producing” emotion)*. To this objectual impression, which is indeed already a potential plasmatic motion in itself, the creation of the Futurist figure responds and

79 Of the regime of pure durations; new geometry and new metrics.

80 Here, “idea” means “value”.

81 Revealing, in a certain sense, its fatality. Futurism would thus be a destiny.

corresponds—and only in the thus constituted figure would the truth of the dynamic body (that truth which is concealed from the view of those who are uneducated, unacquainted and unaccustomed to dynamism) be *plastically* set to work. *Therefore, it is only within the work and thanks to the work of art itself that the concealed intrinsic—and yet always understood—energy of the object, the secret—and yet always-already perceived—dynamics of the body, becomes flagrant to the artist as well as to the spectator.*

We will now turn to the thoughts expounded in the sixth chapter of Boccioni's treatise. This part, entitled *Perché non siamo impressionisti* ("Why we are not Impressionists"), lends itself perfectly to the intents of our discussion as a guide on this path.

The chapter opens with a concise evaluation of the history of Western art, from the Greeks to the Futurists. Without entering into the specifics of Boccioni's scheme—that is, without examining his premises and the sense of the phasal development of the identified artistic epochs (Boccioni enumerates four of them: the Greek-Roman-Byzantine, the Christian, the Naturalist and the Futurist)—I shall now summarise his historical account: classical art would have ended with the Christian elaboration of the Italian Renaissance, which would have seen a critical turning point in the art of Michelangelo. From there onwards, a long phase would begin, which would find its acme in the Futurist exordium, although the true turning point towards the latter would arrive with Impressionism.

Thus, to understand the "Impressionist transition" and its historico-artistic phase, it is therefore necessary to identify the distinctive traits of its painting. According to Boccioni, Impressionist painting has essentially two features: one negative-regressive, the other positive-evolutive. Let us read directly from the treatise.

As regards the first feature, he writes:

Lo studio della natura non era (e non poteva essere) un mezzo che servisse alla scelta di elementi plastici per comporre una concezione plastica interna, un ponte per creare ... ma era lo scopo in sé! Il Quadro era già un qualsiasi studio frammentario di un qualsiasi oggetto o episodio di vita. Nel quadro impressionista affluivano mille tesori di amorosa e febbrile osservazione, ma esso lasciava sempre la penosa impressione di un relativo che rassomigliava a qualche cosa e che poteva continuare all'infinito, senza legge ...

(The study of nature was not (and could not be) a means for choosing the plastic elements that would be used to compose an inner plastic conception, a bridge leading to creation ... it was already the goal in itself! Any

sort of fragmentary study of any sort of object or episode from life already constituted the painting. An Impressionist painting was a treasure trove of a thousand little treasures of loving and feverish observation, but it always left the painful impression of something relative that resembled something else and that could go on forever, with no law ...<sup>82</sup>)

Regarding the second, on the other hand, he observes:

Con gli Impressionisti, le pietre, le piante, gli animali cominciano a cambiare forma e soprattutto colore. E, quello che è più importante, cominciano a perdere il loro valore sentimentale di immagine. Si crea così il *motivo* impressionista. Per quanto timidamente, le cose diventano già il nucleo di un ambiente circostante, e quest'ambiente è una vibrazione atmosferica che comincia a divenire plasmabile. Essi perdono, è vero, con ciò una dimensione: la profondità; ma hanno per sempre conquistato e creato un nuovo corpo: l'atmosfera. Per la prima volta un oggetto vive e si completa con l'ambiente dando e ricevendone le influenze. Per la prima volta si vede sulla guancia fino ad ora rosea, l'accidentalità verde del prato sul quale ci troviamo e sul nostro vestito il rosso del canapè sul quale siamo seduti. Occorreranno trent'anni prima che questa compenetrazione e simultaneità, limitata negl'Impressionisti al colore, si evolva anche alla compenetrazione e simultaneità delle forme, e questa evoluzione così logica e così chiara, susciterà lo scherno e l'ostilità feroci che il buon pubblico prodiga ai pittori futuristi.

(With the Impressionists, stones, plants and animals begin to change in form and, especially, in colour. And, most importantly, they begin to lose their sentimental value as images. This is how the Impressionist *motif* is created. However timidly, things have already become the nucleus of a surrounding environment, and this environment is an atmospheric vibration that begins to become mouldable [a plastic object]. It is true that, in this way, the Impressionists lose a dimension: depth; but they have conquered and created a new body forever: atmosphere. For the very first time, an object lives and completes itself with the environment, influencing it and being influenced by it. For the very first time, it is possible

82 Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste: Dinamismo plastico*, ed. Zeno Birilli (Milano: SE, 1997), 51; and Umberto Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture: Plastic Dynamism*, trans. Richard Shane Agin and Maria Elena Versari (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), 85–6.

to see on the [subject's] cheek, which had been rosy until that point, the green accidentality of the meadow where we find ourselves, and, for the first time, the red of the couch upon which we sit may be seen on our suit. Thirty years will need to pass before this interpenetration and simultaneity, which is limited to colour in the work of the Impressionists, also evolves into an interpenetration and simultaneity of forms and shapes, and this evolution, which is so logical and clear, will stir up the ferocious scorn and hostility that the good public lavishes on Futurist painters.)<sup>83</sup>

That said, it is now necessary to discern the differential traits (the “evolutive difference”) of Futurism in relation to Impressionism. What are the aims of their respective founders? What is their intent? And how must the Futurist work of art be conceived? Boccioni responds:

Quello che noi pittori e scultori futuristi vogliamo, invece, è un opposto che si fonda sulle loro basi [i.e. le basi degli Impressionisti]. È cioè la ripresa e la continuazione logica delle ricerche impressioniste prima della loro involuzione e decadenza.

(What we Futurist painters and sculptors want, instead, is the opposite—but it is an opposite that is grounded on their [i.e. the Impressionists'] bases, namely the resumption and logical continuation of the Impressionists' research before its degeneration and decadence.)<sup>84</sup>

The artist further clarifies that these “bases”, or rather *the base*,<sup>85</sup> consist in the *relationship between form (which concerns the intellect) and colour (which instead involves sensation) in reference to light*. This allows Boccioni to classify the Impressionist painters into two “methodological and technical” categories: those who work on colour (and, therefore, on sensation) at the expense of form (that is, at the expense of cognitive intellection), and those who work on form, thus subordinating colour to it. (The first category includes artists, such as Renoir and Monet; whereas Cézanne and van Gogh belong to the second.) In other words: sensation lacking intellect, or the prevalence of colour, on the one hand, versus intellect lacking sensation, or the prevalence of form, on the

83 Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, 51–2; and Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture*, 86 (with some modifications).

84 Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, 52–3; and Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture*, 87.

85 i.e. the fundament common to both the Impressionists and the Futurists, one that, according to Boccioni, determines their status as a “proximal genre”.

other. Therefore, according to Boccioni, the relationship between form, light and colour in Impressionist painting was not understood in its plastic fullness. From the perspective of universal dynamism, the Impressionists essentially appear as those who do not fully comprehend the value-based trait of colour and form, in that they ignore the following principle: *colour gives force to form, which, thus reinforced, potentiates colour*—in a circle which, when conducted to its culmen through the harmonic computation of lines, masses and tones *within the light*, generates the possibility for (and the potency of) the *true* figurative setting of the object into the artwork according to its (i.e. the object's) concrete dynamicity (see note 116, p. 79).

Therefore, it is here that the above-cited *opposite*, willed by Futurism, emerges—an opposite that has the trait of a plus-value (or surplus in value) in terms of modelling (or moulding): it is constituted by the form-light-colour relationship that is finally “lived” *as such*, that is, *in its unity*, or as *plastic-dynamic synthesis within luminosity*; the latter (i.e. light itself), being conceived as energy that irradiates bodies, and thus fixed in a “radial format”, is itself regarded as a plastic element, i.e. an element subject to plasmation (I will resume the issue of the “radial format” in § 2.3; see also the note 112, p. 76). *The appearance of the plasticity of light—its being computed as an object amongst objects, as a body amongst bodies—is the seal of this “opposite” towards which Futurist artists aim to achieve, to wit, the sigil of their willed (evolutive) difference with respect to Impressionism and the wide gulf which indeed appears to separate them from past art.* For our purposes, based on the previously adopted terms, I shall refer to this *opposite* using the formula “morpho-radio-chromatic modelling”; in short, the MRC model. (We should not be surprised by this mathematizing and geometrizing language since it is precisely the issue here: with the word “model”, we must think of the mathematical principle of plasmation, the pre-constituted geometric perspective of plastic will. “Our works of painting and sculpture ...”, writes Boccioni in a dense text on architecture, “... are calculated to make emotion spring from an inner architectonic construction and flee from visual accidents.”<sup>86</sup>)

And so, we are now able to comprehend the concept of Futurist artwork according to Boccioni: it will always be an actuation/operation (in painting, in sculpture) of the MRC model—that is, a modelling of the energetic object in a determined morpho-radio-chromatism, a modelling that *is* the very impression of the *subject* (a term that brings the artist and the spectator together). Here the copula “is” does not, however, refer to representing or reproducing; rather,

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86 English trans. from Ester Coen, *Umberto Boccioni* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 249.

and in accordance with the sense of dynamism *as per* the mode of pure durations, it refers to giving solidity, consolidating and solidifying (“eternalizing”<sup>87</sup>).

Thus, the Futurist work of art is *nothing other than the solidification of the energetic object's impression through the morpho-radio-chromatic modelling that is willed and imposed by dynamism*.

We will be able to understand this result more clearly once we take a closer examination of Boccioni's determination of the concept of “impression”.

As mentioned above, in Boccioni's view, (the phenomenon of) impression is the “in-print” (the “instressing-impressing stamp”) of the object's (the *motif's*) appearance upon the vital force of the subject, an in-print that is already potential plasmation in itself. In other words, it is the *lived* object, that is, the body extracted from its semblance of static substance (which is all mere “fleeting exterior fixity”) and obtained as “dynamic life-value”, as a “drama of forces” (we discover here a synonym for the term “energetic object”).<sup>88</sup> In other words, we can speak properly of *impression* when the object marks and involves the act of living; that is, when it generates a *sensation* within living itself, forcing it to become an act of constructing, a *construction*. In this sense, (the) true objectness (of a *lived* object) is a plexus: a plexus of *sensation* (owing to the appearance) + *construction* (owing to knowledge). So, in the logic of the Futurist foundation, it is clear that: 1. (constructive) knowledge regards the object as *a body in itself*, that is, an in-itself-structured thing according to the law of its own masses, of its force-lines and force-volumes; 2. the (perceptible, sensorial) appearance of the object consists in its being a *body outside of itself*, that is, an object in correlation with other objects and with the atmosphere that, in its own manner, defines and circumscribes the object in question.

Observing the impressiveness of the object more closely (i.e. its impressive force), with “the eye” of dynamism, we can easily conceive two of its constitutive energetic motilities. When the object is attained and accepted as a body *in itself*—that is, lived as something knowable—its component-constituent masses “energise themselves” in a *centripetal* direction: they move towards the centre whilst simultaneously remaining connected to the outside, to the exterior (con-central motion, central-decentring movement). This is *intrinsic motility* (or endo-dynamism). However, when the object is conceived and viewed as a body *outside itself*, that is, determined by the atmosphere and by

87 To eternalize means to solidify, to give duration. Why is duration eternity? It is “eternal” as the continual, repeated return of the object unto itself, as the continual reaffirmation of the object in its objectuality.

88 In the coined term “in-print” (from the noun “imprint”, “something impressed upon”), we must hear the Latin verb *imprimere* (*in*, “on”, “upon” + *premere*, “to press”, “to stamp”), where the traits of blow, hit and strike resound.

other objects in its environment, its masses “energise themselves” in a *centrifugal* direction: they move away from the centre whilst simultaneously remaining centralised and con-centred (ex-central motion, central-eccentric movement). This is *extrinsic motility* (or exo-dynamism). And once we have understood this, we can grasp the perfect Futurist definition of impression: the in-printing of the crossing and intersecting of its two motilities—and all this according to an “in-print time” that is sufficient so that this inter-crossing can play for the entirety of its potency-power, that is, in its pure duration. *Thus, impression necessarily possesses the structure of pure duration, of pure continuum.* Since impression consists in the plexus, or the complex, of “sensation + construction” as a function and by force of the crossing between the endo- and exo-dynamism of the object, impression itself must be understood as a *unique-united form in self-unfolding*<sup>89</sup>—which is also, always, a *unicum*, a singularity.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, objectual impression is not repeatable or mechanically replicable; rather, it is apt to return through a *vital élan*: it is in itself “returnsome” by (force of) potency, or through power. In fact, it only actualises itself if the dynamic force of the subject is always pre-enacted; in other words, if that receptive-plastic potential, which is fulfilled in the plastic frame of spirit, is predisposed and ensured.

*Objectual impression, insofar as it is a pure duration, is simultaneously the impulse towards the solidification of its structure—something like a “self-preservation instinct” of its own vital potentiality. In this way, the Futurist work of art is born: it is the work (or working, operation) of the morpho-radio-chromatic modelling of the energetic object in which (i.e. in modelling) the pure duration of the object’s impression is finally re-solidified in itself, and, therefore, eternalized (that is to say, subtracted and freed from the nonentity of the sequence-moment [i.e. time qua con-sequentialness] in the “zero” of the extension-point [i.e. the point as elemental of space-extent]).*<sup>91</sup>

All of the above allows us to finally explicate the fundamental trait of the Boccionian foundation of art—a trait which is already understood and indicated in the preceding discussion, but which emerges with some difficulty (due to a number of essential reasons I cannot discuss here). So instead, let us say it with a formula: *the Futurist work of art is an affirmation or an averment of the*

89 Think of the sculpture entitled *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* (“Unique [-United] Forms of Continuity in Space”).

90 Albeit in the modality, as Boccioni says, of “physical transcendentalism”.

91 In order to truly understand the sense of the above-mentioned modelling, it follows that we should be in the presence of one of Boccioni’s works, such as, for example, the paintings *Dinamismo di un ciclista* (Dynamism of a Cyclist) (1913) or *Elasticità* (Elasticity) (1912), or the above-mentioned sculpture *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* (1913).

*real through the morpho-radio-chromatic computation of its lyrical-plastic value.*<sup>92</sup> The latter—always following Boccioni's lead—is constituted by the sum of the two substantial value-forces of the object's in-printing: its constructive knowledge and its perceptible-sensorial appearance. The first is of a quantitative nature: it is the *quantum* of the object, its intrinsic value, its *specific gravity* (or *weight*); the second is of a qualitative nature: it is the placement of the object amongst other objects and in an atmospheric environment; its extrinsic value, its *specific expansion*. Every object in-prints itself as resultant of these two vector-values: "gravity/weight + expansion", to wit, "quantity + quality". Quantity is the knowledge of the centripetal feature of its masses; quality is the appearance, which consists in the centrifugal feature of the object's parts. Thus, a relation subsists between knowledge and appearance that the artist calls "plastic", and this is the first "thing" that the painter and sculptor must know: "Whoever does not understand and does not apply this, in painting and in sculpture", Boccioni writes, "is outside of the truth".

From this perspective, the art of the past would be outside of the truth, it would be in error—Impressionism included, of course. But, as we have seen, the erring of Impressionism would have been fecund in itself, because it would have made way for the exordium of Futurism. This exact "idea" is found in the final lines, once again, of the said chapter from Boccioni's treatise, but it is now sustained by an explicit reference to the above-mentioned "question of value"; the latter is, in fact, assumed as definitive proof of "why we are not Impressionists", and, therefore, as proof of the necessity for the Futurist foundation of art. Let us read the text. Hear it as an "epitome" of our entire present discourse:

... tornando agli elementi della struttura elementare dei corpi [le forze-valori del loro imprimersi], noi non neghiamo, come fa la teoria cubista, quelle che furono le conquiste degl'Impressionisti: *l'atmosfera, il moto e il lirismo*. Anzi noi abbiamo arricchito [potenziato] l'oggetto, perché, se gli Impressionisti, per creare questa atmosfera per una unità-oggetto del valore di 100, sottraggono 50 di solidità formale per aggiungervi altrettanto di atmosfera, noi creiamo invece una nuova unità oggetto del valore di 150. Perciò avremo: oggetto (100) + atmosfera (50) = oggetto-ambiente (150). Questa concezione profondamente realistica della struttura dei corpi ha creato in scultura e pittura il dinamismo, cioè

92 With the words "real(ity)" and "affirmation/avermment", I refer to the world attuned to universal dynamism, and to the giving firmness (to things) with and through potency, respectively.

la solidificazione dell'impressionismo senza amputare l'oggetto o isolarlo dal solo elemento che lo nutre: la vita, cioè il moto. Con ciò eviteremo di cadere in quello che la pittura è stata fino ad oggi: una enumerazione di oggetti intagliati sopra un fondo.

...

Noi concepiamo dunque l'oggetto come un nucleo (costruzione centripeta), dal quale partono le forze (linee-forme-forza) che lo definiscono nell'ambiente (costruzione centrifuga) e ne determinano il carattere essenziale. Noi creiamo con ciò una nuova concezione dell'oggetto: l'oggetto-ambiente, concepito come una nuova *unità indivisibile*. Dunque, se per gl'Impressionisti l'oggetto è un nucleo di *vibrazioni* che appaiono come colore, per noi Futuristi l'oggetto è inoltre un nucleo di *direzioni* che appaiono come forma. Nella caratteristica potenzialità di queste *direzioni*, noi troviamo lo *stato d'animo plastico*. È con questa nuovissima concezione dei moti della materia, espressi *non* come valori accidentali di interpretazione sentimentale e narrativa del vero, ma come equivalenti plastici della vita in sé, che noi giungiamo alla definizione dinamica dell'impressione, che è l'intuizione della vita.

I shall translate as follows:

In returning to the elements of the basic structure of bodies [the values of their in-printing], we don't deny, as Cubist theory does, the accomplishments of the Impressionists: *atmosphere, movement and lyricism*. On the contrary, we have enriched [potentiated] the object, for if the Impressionists, in order to create this atmosphere for an object-unit with a value of 100, subtracted 50 from formal solidity to add as much in atmosphere, we, instead, create a new object-unit with a value of 150. In this way, we have the object (100) + the atmosphere (50) = the environment-object (150). This profoundly realistic conception of the bodies' structure has created dynamism in painting and sculpture, to wit, the solidification of impressionism without cutting off or isolating the object from the only element that nourishes it: life; that is, movement. With this, we avoid falling into what painting has been until now: an enumeration of objects carved onto a background.

...

Therefore, we conceive the object as a nucleus (a centripetal construction), from which the forces (the form-force-lines) that define it in the environment (the centrifugal construction) and determine its essential character emanate. With this, we create a new conception of the object:

the environment-object, conceived as a new *indivisible unity*. Therefore, if the object is a nucleus of *vibrations* that appear as colour for the Impressionists, for us Futurists the object is also a nucleus of *directions* that appear as form. In the characteristic potentiality of these *directions*, we find the *plastic frame of spirit*. It is with this most novel concept of matter's movements, expressed not as the accidental values of sentimental and narrative interpretations of reality, but as the plastic equivalents of life itself, that we reach the dynamic definition of impression, which is the intuition of life.<sup>93</sup>

#### 1.4 Unacceptability (towards Cézanne and van Gogh)

There remains, however, the matter of an unresolved question; namely, it remains to be decided whether the interpretation of Impressionism put forth by Boccioni is acceptable and conceivable. Certainly, if it were *not*, then the very Futurist foundation of the work of art would certainly be revealed as doomed to “descend into” unacceptability since the project of the figure as morpho-radio-chromatic modelling specifically bases itself on this interpretation. However, its possible unacceptability would not be seen as a sign of foolishness or senselessness, as a symptom of failure, or as “circumstantial evidence” that Futurism is not a “true art”, but rather as a call to meditation that questions art in the towardness of its provenance.

On the other hand, what *does not seem* to be in question here is the *technical* plausibility of the Boccionian foundation. With the term “technical plausibility”, I do not intend the generic admissibility or rationality of rules applied in an ideational and compositional praxis, nor the effect of a person's painterly or sculptural expertise, but rather this: the self-entruing, self-avertment, of a productive-cognitive method (or procedure) constructed (on the strength of the oblivion of every call to self-awareness) upon operational assumptions—or, as I name them, formats—which can be retraced to ontological concepts that have been coined and perfected in the few great Western philosophies.<sup>94</sup>

So, the conjectured technical plausibility of the Futurist foundation would be of a peculiar rank. In fact, one could show how that foundation owes its constructability to the formatisation of the *two* ontological concepts with which the tradition of thought, initiated in ancient Greece, attains

93 Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, 58–9; and Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture*, 88–9. The italics are mine.

94 See the entry “format” in the Lexicon, elucidation #5.

its end:<sup>95</sup> above all, *the will to potency and power (der Wille zur Macht) as the scope of being of the beënt*, which is a concept destined to be formatted into “universal dynamism”; and, as a consequence, *the eternal return of the like (die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen) as the grounding-temporality of the whole of the beënt*, a concept that is “forma(ta)ble” in that which I have called “time-futureness” (as the acceptable name for “futurism”). These concepts were elaborated in that metaphysical stance on the strength of which philosophising had to assume the definitive trait of thinking through values; that is, in the philosophy of Nietzsche. (For reasons of space, I am forced to maintain this thesis without demonstrating it.<sup>96</sup>)

In this way, I may clarify my diagnosis of the Futurist foundation of art: without its advocates and actors being in a position of knowing or even suspecting as much, that foundation appears to have obtained its technical plausibility from the genesis—for our humankind—of that sense of being which was *philosophically* experienced as *Wille zur Macht*, that is, in the form of the end of metaphysics.<sup>97</sup> Futurism, therefore, would have been an exordium “in the shade” or “in the shelter” of an ending—an exordium which is “organised”, as we have seen, through three interrelated formats: potency-power, pure duration and value. This exordium would have contributed, in its own way, to triggering the complete technicisation of art. This technicisation, by becoming one with the definitive technicisation of science, determines the modes of our dwelling from top to bottom by predisposing its future constantly. I call this “becoming one” “technicity”, or even “doingness”, since it is a phenomenon in which “doing for (the sake of) doing” prevails over “knowing or thinking in

95 On the issue of “the end of philosophy”, see Martin Heidegger, ‘Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens’, in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 14, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2007), 69–89; see also Zaccaria, *L’inizio greco del pensiero*, 25–109, and De Gennaro, *Principles of Philosophy*, 60–82 and 356–65.

96 For a phenomenological elucidation of the Nietzsche’s metaphysics, see De Gennaro, *Principles of Philosophy*, 315–47. For a genitural analysis (*Auseinandersetzung*, “schismatic diremption”) of Nietzschean thinking, the classic reference is of course Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I/II*, Gesamtausgabe Bd 6.1/Bd 6.2, ed. Brigitte Schillbach (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996/1997); see in particular the essay-compendium entitled ‘Nietzsches Metaphysik’ in Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 231–300. (On the sense of the diction “schismatic diremption”, see note 176, p. 131.)

97 The adverb “philosophically” means here: “with the intent of founding the conceivability of *Wille zur Macht* in order to institute, in its potency sphere: 1. man’s being; 2. the being of the beënt and of truth; and 3. the sense of “measure”; see Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 118–24 (in particular, 120), 177–80, 210–15.

order to do”, or, if we consider that every “doing for doing” will only *facts* and *effects*, “factuation”.<sup>98</sup>

Is it, perhaps, that technical plausibility excludes acceptableness, and, indeed, concealedly generates unacceptability? How, then, should we think of technicity as factuation? And, even before this, how should we think about artistic acceptability and conceivableness, and about creating verity? Or, once more, and in a single phrase: how should we question art in the towardness of its provenance? And which routes must this interrogation follow so that it may become a founding (understood, here, as a bestowing, a grounding and an originating)?

These are the queries raised by the above-mentioned problem of Boccioni’s interpretation of Impressionism. I therefore offer—in conclusion—the starting point of its clarification, which will, once again, assume the form of a series of questions.

In brief: did the paintings of Pissarro and Cézanne, of Monet and van Gogh, actually involve “impression”? And was their painting really a *modelling*, which, as we have read, “could go on forever, with no law”? Does one then have any reason to believe that they came to create “a new body forever: atmosphere” in their *motif*? And, as a consequence, would the relationship between form and colour in a Pissarro or a Cézanne remain enveloped in a characteristic obscurity,<sup>99</sup> the relevance of which consisted in its being potentially developable into its opposite, that is, by means of morpho-radio-chromatic modelling? And finally: can we maintain, with good reason, that light was understood by these artists as an energy that irradiates bodies (i.e. the so-called objects)?

These queries seem ineludible and inevitable.

However, a fleeting observation by Cézanne, contained in a letter addressed to Pissarro from l’Estaque on 2 July 1876, could help us deal with them. The painter hints at the sense of *motif* and light *en plein air*, as well as at the relationship between colour and form, at the logic of the drawing, and, finally, at the problem of “truth in painting”, to wit, the problem of the provenance of art, independently of all actual or possible “foundations” of art itself. He writes (from painter to painter):

98 The neologism “factuation” translates the Heideggerian *Machenschaft* (consider also the related coined adj. “factuative”); see Martin Heidegger, *Besinnung*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 66, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997), 16–29.

99 ... which is perhaps only acceptable insofar as it constitutes a preparation for the Futurist exordium ...

Mais il y a des motifs qui demanderaient trois ou quatre mois de travail, qu'on pourrait trouver, car la végétation n'y change pas. Ce sont des oliviers et des pins qui gardent toujours leurs feuilles. Le soleil y est si effrayant qu'il me semble que les objets s'enlèvent en silhouette non pas seulement en blanc et noir, mais en bleu, en rouge, en brun, en violet. Je puis me tromper, mais il me semble que c'est l'antipode du modelé.<sup>100</sup>

"L'antipode du modelé" of which Cézanne becomes aware—and which he will call *modulation*—does not, in fact, appear to be the "Impressionist fragmentation" that Boccioni attributes to him, and which Boccioni himself wishes to oppose with the technique of morpho-radio-chromatism. (See the concept of "fragmentary study" above.) "Cézannian modulation" (i.e. Cézanne's painting) is certainly an "antipode", but it does not set itself in opposition to anything. Free *ab origine* from every computation, as well as from such things as "dynamisms", "energies" and "forces", "subjects" and "objects", "atmospheres" and "vibrations", it no longer senses light "in (the) light" of the radial format, and this occurs exactly whilst perceiving colour as the principle of appearance, declaring it—*only and solely for this reason*—as the first principle of pictorial *mise-en-forme*.

But this is another discussion entirely, in the sense that it is the presage of another (or *the other*) initiation of art, of an onset that is far from being attained, or even only presumed, and which, as a consequence and in its own way, awaits and attends (to) us beyond all future and always futurable "futurisms":<sup>101</sup>

Je suis trop vieux—notes Cézanne at the end of his life—je n'ai pas réalisé et je ne réaliserais pas maintenant. Je reste le primitif de la voie que j'ai découverte.<sup>102</sup>

(I am too old, I have not accomplished anything, and I will not accomplish now. I remain the primitive of the path I have perceived and uncovered.)

100 Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance*, ed. John Rewald (Paris: Grasset, 1978), 194; for the English edn, see Paul Cézanne, *Letters*, ed. John Rewald, trans. Marguerite Kay (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 146.

101 I will expound this matter further in the next chapter.

102 P. Micheal Doran (ed.), *Conversations avec Cézanne* (Paris: Macula, 1978), 73.

## The Light of Cézanne

### *Errantry into the Sun*

#### 2.1 Ardour

Paul Cézanne's painting *Le grand pin*—a work that brings out the fragrance of the colour green in an unforgettable way—may recall a passage from the first letter that the artist wrote to his friend Émile Zola on 9 April 1858:

Te souviens-tu du pin qui, sur le bord de l'Arc planté, avançait sa tête chevelue sur le gouffre qui s'étendait à ses pieds ? Ce pin qui protégeait nos corps par son feuillage de l'ardeur du soleil, ah ! puissent les dieux le préserver de l'atteinte funeste de la hache du bûcheron !<sup>103</sup>

(Do you remember that pine tree, planted on the banks of the Arc, that soared with its crowny top above the gaping abyss at its feet? That pine which, with its leaves, protected our bodies from the ardour of the sun—ah! may the gods preserve it from the funest assault of the logger's axe!)

The artist most certainly has nothing against lumberjacks. He simply recalls the difference between the eye-cast of the painter—for which the inscape of the pine is no mere indifferent, general concept, but rather the retracted origin of the uniqueness and singularity of one tree or another—and that of the common vision imposed by utility, according to which pine trees belong to the stock of so-called natural resources, and which shows *a priori* their trait of being transformable into timber and firewood. The logger's axe cannot perceive the richness understood as fragrance of the green colour in its contrast, on the one hand, with the ardour of the sun and the celestial azure, and, on the other, with the darkness of the terrestrial abyss—richness as the profusion and copiousness of the true. The axe only sees, as per its constitution, the potential of that which is useful, useable and employable, that is, “substance” and “profit”. Thus, the painter invokes the gods that they might save *the* pine tree—precisely *this one*—from the assault of value and return; that they might recon it, and make it appear *useless* to the loggers.

103 The passages cited in this chapter are all from Cézanne, *Correspondance*.