

*The Polish Cyborg. A Reflection on the Relationship between  
Man and Machine in Early Polish Modernism*

One of the commonplaces about Polish Futurism that scholars like to repeat is that of its ambivalent relationship to modernity. It may sometimes be difficult to understand that the representatives of the first Polish avant-garde movement were not necessarily blind enthusiasts of machine civilization. The reasons for this ambivalence have been partly analysed<sup>1</sup>, but we still lack a comprehensive study and my contribution will not fill the gap either. One reason may have been the experience of the war – the first of many technological wars to come. After WWI, literature was forced to take a critical look at the experience of modernity, also by reflecting on the relationship between man and machine. This critical confrontation with modern civilization, the day after the war ended, involved almost all national European cultures, in various different ways. Poland, which had regained independence after 123 years of foreign colonization and slavery, was an extremely backward and undeveloped country, ill prepared to face the challenges of modernity. Since it had not actually experienced any real fascination with the opportunities provided by technology before the war, when the country was still divided into three parts belonging to different States and at different degrees of development, so after the war it was at once attracted by and afraid of the processes of modernization. In particular, some representatives of the Polish futurist movement, who had received part of their education in Russia, may well have been influenced by their Russian counterparts. Russian Futurism was oriented toward a primordial past of protolanguage and primitive images and, until Majakovskij, scarcely interested in problems of modernity.

My paper aims to present the salient theoretical reflections and literary visions concerning the cyborg and the man-machine in the Polish avant-garde milieu of the early Twenties. They are worth remembering, not only because of their limited accessibility to the non-Polish speaking public, but also because they have not lost their relevance.

*The Polish Cyborg – a Utopian Approach*

Indeed, for early avant-garde theorists, the theme of the machine becomes a sort of synecdoche of modernity, the litmus paper which shows the attitude of the artist toward it. In a seminal essay by Tadeusz Peiper, published in July 1922 in «Zwrotnica», the journal of the so called Cracow Avant-garde, with the alliterating title *Miasto, Masa, Maszyna* (Metropolis, Mass, Machine), the machine is considered to be one of the three chief components of modern life. Even if in this extensive text – one of the paramount theoretical pronouncements of interwar

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<sup>1</sup> H. ZAWORSKA, *O Nową Sztukę. Polskie programy artystyczne lat 1917-1922*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1963, pp. 212-226; G. GAZDA, *Futuryzm w Polsce*, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1974, pp. 89-100; K. WYKA, *Czyżewski poeta*, in: IDEM, *Rzecz wyobraźni*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1977, pp. 17-22.

Polish avant-garde – we could scarcely find anything which could even remotely anticipate the topics of the present issue, it is interesting to quote it here. Indeed, it casts some light on the animated discussion between the leaders of the two different wings of Polish avant-garde (Peiper and Jasiński), as we will see later, and on the common premises of their different views. The utopianism of Peiper's proposal probably deserves a separate consideration. As indicated by the title, the essay focuses on the three major moments of modern life: the city, the masses and the machine. In the third part, which deals with the problematic relationship between man and machine, Peiper poses the question of why machines have so far remained extraneous to man – why they have not been assimilated like the tools whose beauty was evident to the eyes of primitive man (he brings the example of the ornamentally engraved obsidian blades or arrowheads he saw once in Copenhagen's Ethnography museum). Peiper ascribes this "foreignness" to the division of work: the manufacturer of the machine (or of its parts) is not the same worker who will eventually use it. So, he sees no close relationship between the construction of the machine and its function. As a consequence, machines have not only remained foreign to modern man, but even appear ugly to him. This passage of Peiper's argumentation shows a very close relationship with the first theoretical essay by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (later Le Corbusier), published together with his colleague Amédée Ozenfant in 1918 and entitled *Après le cubisme*<sup>2</sup>, the manifesto of French purism. Le Corbusier (to whom the passage has to be ascribed) derives this situation from modern Taylorism, nevertheless he does not understand it in a negative way:

Autrefois, chaque homme créant son œuvre de toutes pièces s'y attachait et l'aimait comme sa créature; il aimait son travail. Aujourd'hui, il faut le reconnaître, le travail en série imposé par la machine voile plus ou moins à l'ouvrier l'aboutissement de ses efforts. Pourtant, grâce au programme rigoureux de l'usine moderne, les produits fabriqués sont d'une telle perfection qu'ils donnent aux équipes ouvrières une fierté collective. L'ouvrier qui n'a exécuté qu'une pièce détachée saisit alors l'intérêt de son labeur; les machines couvrant le sol des usines lui font percevoir la puissance, la clarté et le rendent solidaire d'une œuvre de perfection à laquelle son simple esprit n'aurait osé aspirer. Cette fierté collective remplace l'antique esprit de l'artisan en l'élevant à des idées plus générales. Cette transformation nous paraît un progrès; elle est l'un des facteurs importants de la vie moderne<sup>3</sup>.

The closeness of argumentation is not a coincidence. Peiper was familiar with *L'Esprit Nouveau*, he published an issue in «Zwrotnica» about Jeanneret and Ozenfant<sup>4</sup>, although the role and inspiration of French purism in his early reflection still has to be examined<sup>5</sup>. In Peiper's opinion, the reasons for this negative approach to machines are similar to those which prevent modern men from seeing the beauty of the modern city<sup>6</sup>. Peiper writes expressly of a conflict with inherited ideas.

The machine was a new thing and produced new things. It developed by rules which were immanent to its essence, it constantly changed the surrounding world, but the human psyche changed more

<sup>2</sup> CH.-E. JEANNERET GRIS, A. OZEFANT, *Après le cubisme*, édition des commentaires, Paris 1918.

<sup>3</sup> IDEM, *Après le Cubisme*, Paris, Altamira, 1999, pp. 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> T. PEIPER, *Ozenfant i Jeanneret*, in «Zwrotnica», lipiec 1922, pp. 39-43, reprinted in: IDEM, *O wszystkim i jeszcze o czymś artykuły, eseje, wywiady (1918-1939)*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1974, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> About the relationships between French and Polish avant-gardes see: M. DELAPERRIÈRE, *La poésie polonaise face à l'avant-garde française: fascinations et réticences*, in «Revue de littérature comparée», 307, 2003, pp. 355-368.

<sup>6</sup> See: E. RANOCCHI, *Tadeusz Peiper i idea miasta jako dzieło sztuki*, on print.

slowly, so it followed the machine with the steps of an old paralytic<sup>7</sup>.

The second reason for this refusal was the social connotation of the machine which was supposed to be one of the means for exploiting the proletarian class.

This negative approach was not to last forever. Several factors concurred in changing man's approach to the modern tool. The most relevant among them is the emergence of a new – so to speak – psychical situation. Machines annoyed man for as long as their impact on human life was limited. They were no longer considered a nuisance, when they began to transform the whole of human life. For as long as they ruled only partially, they were treated like tolerated intruders; when they took over, they became objects of worship, like monarchs<sup>8</sup>.

That “new psychical situation”, as it is called, was a quite obvious and popular topic, especially in Italian futurist theoretical literature, namely, that of the close relationship between the unprecedented development of technology and industry and culture (ethics, aesthetics, vision of the world). One can find similar statements by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni or Ardengo Soffici dealing with the consequences which the acceleration of means of transport and the development of what we call the media today have in our perception of the world, what Italian futurists called “sensibility”<sup>9</sup>. Peiper even enumerated them, like Marinetti did in one of his seminal manifestos of 1913<sup>10</sup>: “the railway, the tram, the autobus, the telegraph, the telephone, electric light etc.”<sup>11</sup>. Only when its benefits started to spread all over the world, did

<sup>7</sup> “Maszyna była rzeczą nową i tworzyła rzeczy nowe. Rozwijala się na podstawie praw immanentnych swojej istocie, zmieniała nieustannie świat otaczający, a psychika ludzka, zmieniająca się powoli, podążała za nią krokiem paralitycznego starca.” T. PEIPER, *Miasto, Masa, Maszyna*, in: IDEM, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. by S. Jaworski, Ossolineum 1979, p. 29

<sup>8</sup> Ten negatywny stosunek do maszyny nie mógł trwać wiecznie. Wiele okoliczności wpłynęło na zmianę stosunku człowieka do nowoczesnego narzędzia. Najważniejszą z nich wydaje mi się wyłonienie się nowej sytuacji – że tak powiem, psychicznej. **Maszyna raziła człowieka, jak długo wpływami swoimi obejmowała tylko część życia ludzkiego; przestała go razić, kiedy całkowicie przekształciła życie ludzkie.** Jak długo panowała tylko częściowo, była tolerowanym intruzem; kiedy zapanowała całkowicie, stała się adorowanym suwerenem.” IVI, p. 30 [bold of the author].

<sup>9</sup> F. T. MARINETTI, *Distruzione della sintassi Immaginazione senza fili Parole in libertà*, in: IDEM, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, a cura di L. De Maria, Mondadori, Milano 2005, pp. 65-66.; U. BOCCIONI, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, a cura di Z. Birolli, Abscondita, Milano 2006, pp. 19-25; A. SOFFICI, *Primi principi di un'estetica futurista*, in: M. DRUDI GAMBILLO, T. FIORI, *Archivi del futurismo*, intr. G.C. Argan, vol. I, De Luca editore, Roma 1958, p. 582. About the concept of “sensibility” see: S. MILAN, *The Futurist Sensibility: An Anti-philosophy for the Age of Technology*, in: *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2011, pp. 63-76.

<sup>10</sup> “Il Futurismo si fonda sul completo rinnovamento della sensibilità umana avvenuto per effetto delle grandi scoperte scientifiche. Coloro che usano oggi del telegrafo, del telefono e del grammofono, del treno, della bicicletta, della motocicletta, dell'automobile, del transatlantico, del dirigibile, dell'aeroplano, del cinematografo, del grande quotidiano (sintesi di una giornata del mondo) non pensano che queste diverse forme di comunicazione, di trasporto e d'informazione esercitano sulla loro psiche una decisiva influenza.” [Futurism is based on the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries made by science. Anyone who today uses the telegraph, the telephone, and the gramophone, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the airship, the airplane, the film theater, the great daily newspaper (which synthesizes the daily events of the whole world), fails to recognize that these different forms of communication, of transport and information, have a far-reaching effect on their psyche], F. T. MARINETTI, *Distruzione della sintassi*, cit., p. 30. [English Translation: *Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words in Freedom*, in: IDEM, *Critical Writings*, ed. by G. Berghaus, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2006, p. 120.]

<sup>11</sup> “[...] kolej żelazna, tramwaj elektryczny, autobus, telegraf, telefon, światło elektryczne etc.” T. PEIPER, *Miasto, Masa, Maszyna*, IVI, p. 30-31.

the machine begin to be perceived as a blessing. If in the past the mediator between tool and man was production, now the mediator between machine and man is going to be consumption. Then the machine was introduced into the domain of art. Peiper describes two different approaches to the machine: the futurist and the purist one. A year before «Zwrotnica»'s October 1923 edition, to which we will come back below, entirely dedicated to Futurism, Peiper characterizes here the futurist approach to the machine already as fetishist. Just as in the later essay about Italian Futurism, published in the aforementioned October issue of 1923, he would write:

For Marinetti the motor is a deity. It is a sort of Egyptian Apis, a sort of divine beast independent from man, squandering barrels of graces, hence captivating idolatrous adoration.

This attitude is false. The machine is the continuation of man. It is the slave of man. We control it as we control our hand or the knife we hold in it. We have no reason to cense it with the scent of sacred incense. We ask only one question: what does the machine give to man for his life and art and what can man still get from the machine for his life and art. For this reason, Marinetti's shift from the adoration of the motor to the adoration of matter inevitably seems shallow to us. What is interesting for us in the motor is not matter, but man – powerful man who invented it and happy man who enjoys it<sup>12</sup>.

The second approach is that of the purist movement of Jeanneret and Ozenfant. The purists, according to Peiper, see in the machine “a product of perfect beauty which art ought to take as the aim of its efforts”<sup>13</sup>. We recognize here the echo of an idea which appeared earlier in two of Jasiński's futurist manifestos. In the *Manifesto to the Polish Nation: a Manifesto Concerning the Immediate Futurization of Life* (Cracow 1921) Jasiński had written:

**Technology is as much an art as are painting, sculpture or architecture.**

**A good machine is the model for and the culmination of a work of art by virtue of the perfect combination of economy, expediency and dynamics. The telegraphic apparatus of Morse is a 1000 times more of a masterpiece than Byron's Don Juan<sup>14</sup>.**

The ectypal topic of the machine which is better than .... (clearly borrowed from Marinetti's

<sup>12</sup> “Dla Marinettiego motor jest bóstwem. Jest jakiś egipski Apis, jakaś boska bestia, niezależna od człowieka, szafująca beczkami łask i dlatego właśnie zniewalająca do bałwochwalczej adoracji. Stanowisko fałszywe. Maszyna jest dalszym ciągiem człowieka. Jest sługą człowieka. Panujemy nad nią, jak nad naszym ramieniem lub nad nożem, który trzymamy w dłoni. Nie mamy żadnego powodu chuchać w nią wonią świątynnych kadzidel. Pytamy jedynie: co maszyna daje człowiekowi dla życia i sztuki i co człowiek może z niej jeszcze dla życia i sztuki wydobyć. I dlatego także powierzchownym musi nam się wydać przejście Marinettiego od adoracji motoru do adoracji materii. W motorze interesują nas nie materia, lecz człowiek. Potężny człowiek, który go wymyślił i szczęśliwy człowiek, który z niego korzysta.” T. PEIPER, *Futuryzm*, in: IDEM, cit., pp. 109-110. (Translation mine).

<sup>13</sup> T. PEIPER, *Miasto, Masa, Maszyna*, in: IDEM, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> “Tehnika jest tak samo sztuką jak malarstwo, żeźba i arhitektura. Dobra maszyna jest wzorem i szczytem dzela sztuki pszez doskonale połączenie ekonomiczności, celowości i dynamiki. Aparat telegraficzny Morsego jest 1000 razy większym arcydzłem sztuki niż Don Juan Byrona.” B. JASIŃSKI, *Do Narodu Polskiego. Mañifest w sprawie natybmiaostowej futuryzacji życia*, in: *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i Nowej Sztuki*, red. Z. Jarosiński, H. Zaworska, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warszawa-Krakow-Gdańsk 1978, p. 13 (bold and graphic layout of the author). English translation by Klara Kemp Welch in: *Between Worlds. A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, ed. by Timothy O. Benson and Ęva Forgács, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 2002, p. 189.

Foundation Manifesto of Futurism, the second term is any synecdoche of the past) ought not to divert our attention from the substantially different role reserved here for the machine compared to that of Italian Futurism. We may understand it better by quoting a fragment from another manifesto of the same year:

**We consider a work of art to be a fait accompli, concrete and physical. Its form is conditioned by strictly internal need. As such, it answers for itself with the whole complex of the forces creating it, thanks to which it is in this way and not another – i.e. under internal pressure, that its individual parts are coordinated in relation to one another and to the whole. We call this mutual relationship composition. We call an excellent composition, i.e. one which is economical and firm – with a minimum of material to a maximum of dynamics achieved – a Futurist composition<sup>15</sup>.**

It is true that in this second quote we have no direct reference to machines, but the idea that, to be perfect, a work of art has to be based on the well-pondered balance of its parts, on their mutual relation and on the relation to the whole, is directly modelled on the idea of the machine, as it is presented in the former quote. It is also evident that, in Jasiński's conception, the idea of machine is closer to that of the purists (following Peiper's description), who longed for a work of art as a machine à émouvoir, than to that of the Italian futurists. So, the machine starts its career as a regulative idea, as it does in the same years and later on in Le Corbusier's work and in the aesthetics of constructivism. To be good, a work of art, of architecture, a piece of urban space has to function like a machine. We will find this regulative idea (among many others) in the urbanistic conception of Szymon Syrkus<sup>16</sup> (who was influenced by Le Corbusier and later involved with CIAM) and (in the Soviet Union) of Nicolai A. Miljutin<sup>17</sup>.

Then, according to Peiper, both approaches are inadequate. In the futurist approach:

[...] the machine is introduced into the world of art like a divine being, independently of its artistic values; in the second case it is introduced into art as a powerful master worthy of being imitated. In the first case, it is the consumer of the machine, who is not yet an artist, who expresses himself. In the second case it is the producer of the machine, who cannot be the artist, who is emphasized. In both cases the aesthetic question of the machine has been posed inappropriately. If the machine were merely a deity, it would still not deserve the attention of art. If it were supreme beauty,

<sup>15</sup> "Dzieło sztuki uważamy za zecz dokonaną, konkretną I fizyczną. Kształt jego uwarunkowany jest ściśle wewnętrzną potszebą. Jako takie odpowiada ono za siebie całym kompleksem sił go składających, zawdżęczając kturym tak, a nie inaczej – t. j. z wewnętrznym pszymusem skoordynowane są jego poszczególne części w stosunku do siebie i do całości. Ten wzajemny stosunek nazywamy kompozycją. Kompozycję doskonałą, t. j. ekonomiczną i żelazną – minimum materiału pszy maximum osiągniętej dynamiki – nazywamy kompozycją futurystyczną." IVI, pp. 18-19 (bold of the author). English translation by K. Kemp Welch in: *Between Worlds*, cit., pp. 191-192. Recently, an interesting interpretation of this passage has been proposed, aiming at emphasizing the connection in Jasiński's text between the aesthetic of economy of a work of art and the necessity of economy of time in today's civilization. See: M. KŁOSIŃSKI, *Ekonomia i polityka w polskiej poezji lat dwudziestych*, in: *Papież awangardy. Tadeusz Peiper w Hiszpanii. Polsce i Europie*, red. P. Rypson, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warszawa 2015, pp. 396-419.

<sup>16</sup> In 1926 the Polish architect wrote: "Dzięki standaryzacji i centralizacji wielkiego przemysłu możemy mieć: Mebel-maszynę / Mieszkanie-maszynę / Miasto-maszynę." (Thanks to the standardization and centralization of heavy industry we can have furniture-machines, / flat-machines / city-machines, translation mine). SZ. SYRKUS, *Preliminarz architektury*, «Praesens» 1, 1926, p. 8. See further in the present text.

<sup>17</sup> Miljutin in his fundamental theoretical work Sotsgorod indeed compares the soviet city to a factory, not to a machine, but it is just another variant of the same idea.

it would not need art. [...]

Neither a deity, nor a master. It's a slave! It ought to become the slave of art. It ought to serve the aims emerging from inside art itself, from inside its essence. It is not a question of worshipping or imitating the machine, but of exploiting it<sup>18</sup>.

Peiper understands this exploitation in a very concrete way. Up until now – he writes – only the world of the tenth muse (cinema) was based completely on the machine. One can imagine, how the use of the machine in other fields of art could change and renovate it: sculpture, theatre, music, even poetry could be regenerated by the possibilities given by it. In his argumentation Peiper evokes Majakovskij's subjugating attitude toward the machine that Jasiński would quote a year later in his essay, but he transposes it from politics into the domain of art by a shift which is highly characteristic of his socialist orientation. Peiper, unlike Jasiński, the leader of Polish futurists, believes not in revolution, but in reform. He is the heir of an alternative tradition of Polish political thought, in Polish historiography known as "work at the grass roots", which has its ideal beginning in the Enlightenment and then an important continuation in the age of positivism. Peiper believed that art could exert a positive influence on the evolution of society. His utopia was an aesthetic one, opposed to that of the futurists which increasingly drifted to social revolution.

Unlike Italian Futurism, Polish Futurism lasted only a few years; historiographers are not unanimous in establishing its extremes, but generally they assume the year 1919 as the beginning and 1923 as the end. That year, in October, as we already mentioned, «Zwrotnica» came out with an entire issue devoted to a critical review of Futurism. Marinetti himself wrote a short letter in French to the editors of «Zwrotnica», published together with the other texts. Besides Peiper's essay about Italian Futurism, there was an extensive essay by Bruno Jasiński, leader of the Polish futurists; it was considered the funeral speech of Polish Futurism, as the author himself declared that he was no longer a futurist. However, what is interesting for us here is not a matter of the history of literature, but the fact that even in this text, which was supposed to be the final pronouncement on the position of Polish Futurism in relation to its predecessors, the theme of the machine was given a central place. It is the approach to the machine which makes the difference between Polish Futurism and its predecessors.

Jasiński opened with the following statement:

There is no doubt that the huge and rapid growth of forms of technology and industry has laid the foundations and forms the backbone of our society in this particular moment in time. It has generated new ethics, new aesthetics and a new reality. The introduction of machines as indispensable, complementary elements of our lives necessarily involved radically reshaping our psyche, creating our own equivalents in the same way as introducing a foreign body into a living

<sup>18</sup> "W pierwszym wypadku maszynę wprowadza się w świat sztuki jako istotę boską, niezależnie od jej wartości artystycznych; w drugim wypadku wprowadza się ją w sztukę jako mistrza zniewalającego do naśladowania. W pierwszym wypadku wyraża się konsument maszyny, który jeszcze nie jest artystą; w drugim wypadku wskazuje się na producenta maszyny, którym nie może być artysta. W obu wypadkach estetyczne zagadnienie maszyny postawiono niewłaściwie. Gdyby maszyna była tylko bóstwem, nie zasługiwałaby jeszcze na względy sztuki; gdyby była najdoskonalszym pięknem, nie potrzeba byłoby sztuki. [...] Ani bóstwo, ani mistrz. Sługa! Maszyna powinna stać się sługą sztuki. Powinna służyć celom, które wylaniają się z wnętrza samej sztuki, z jej własnej istoty. Nie o uwielbienie lub naśladowanie maszyny chodzi, lecz o jej wyzyskanie." T. PEIPER, *Miasto, Masa, Maszyna*, cit., pp. 31-32 (translation mine).

organism forces it to secrete special antibodies which turn antigens into bodies capable of being assimilated or excreted. If a human or a social organism does not produce enough of this energy, what ensues is intoxication, infection by the foreign body.

To produce those psychical antibodies, in other terms, to create forms which could subordinate machines to man – that is the very task of contemporary art<sup>19</sup>.

Here we are talking once again about the change in sensibility due to the unprecedented growth of technical civilization which we already found in Peiper's essay. Jasiński does not mention transport or the media, but in general, technology and industry, anyway, what is important is that the advent of the machine has created "new ethics, new aesthetics and a new reality", and has changed the human psyche (Peiper, we remember, wrote of "a new psychical situation"). Even more interesting is 1. that modernity is compared to a virus (elsewhere he refers to "the bacillus of modernity"); 2. that this virus is the machine, an artificial body which can trigger a process of rejection in the human body, lest the latter is able to produce "antibodies". It is up to art to enable it to secrete those antibodies.

The whole conceptual apparatus of cyborg literature is already in place here (although Jasiński, of course, does not have this word at his disposal yet): the hybridization of man and machine, the fusion of an organic body and an artificial one, the potential inherent in crossing the boundaries between one and the other, which inevitably carries the risk of rejection. The birth of Futurism, writes Jasiński, was the realization that the task of art was to create those psychical antibodies, i.e. new forms which could subordinate machines to human beings. This is followed by the most significant passage from the point of view of argumentation, wherein Jasiński outlines three different reactions to the introduction of machines. We can easily recognize Peiper's structure here, but with a different distribution of content and arguments. The order is significant: What we read is a narration, a sort of Hegelian triad in which Polish Futurism is, of course, assigned the place of synthesis. Again it is the relationship to the machine which makes the difference.

First comes Italian Futurism, whose followers glorified the machine. By means of a brilliant anthropological analysis, Jasiński quickly dismisses this idea: worship is the reaction of primitive man to the unknown element<sup>20</sup>. At the next stage adoration changes into rebellion. The second stage is that of Russian Futurism. Its reaction – we read – was ambivalent from the beginning. Jasiński quotes two passages from two plays by Majakovskij: *Vladimir Majakovskij. A tragedy* and *Mystery-Bouffe* respectively. Between love and hatred of things, represented by the first quotation, the definitive answer of Russian Futurism is to be found in the second quotation from *Mystery-Bouffe*.

<sup>19</sup> "Gigantyczny i szybki rozrost form techniki i przemysłu jest niewątpliwie najbardziej istotną podstawą i kręgosłupem momentu współczesnego. Wytworzył on nową etykę, nową estetykę i nową rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie maszyny w życie człowieka jako elementu niecodziennego, dopełniającego, musiało pociągnąć za sobą przebudowanie gruntowne jego psychiki, wytworzenie własnych równoważników podobnie jak wprowadzenie do organizmu żywego – obcego ciała zmusza organizm do wydzielania specjalnych przeciwciał, które zmieniają dopiero antygeny w ciała zdolne do przyswajania lub możliwe do wydalania. Jeżeli organizm ludzki czy społeczny energii tej w dostatecznej ilości nie wytworzy, następuje intoksykacja." B. JASIŃSKI, *Futuryzm polski (bilans)*, in: *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, cit., pp. 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> 1923 is also the year the Manifesto of the Mechanic Art was published (*L'arte meccanica – Manifesto futurista*), signed by Prampolini, Pannaggi and Paladini. The distance between Polish and Italian futurism has never been so huge.

In present-day awareness this answer, borrowed from socialism, assigns machines to the place which in capitalist society is reserved for workers<sup>21</sup> [...] Russian Futurism saw the machine as a product and a servant of man. Its relation to machines was reduced to the merely economic relation of the worker to his employer<sup>22</sup>.

This apparently simple statement hides a number of questions. First, it presupposes the Marxist interpretation of Hegel's master – slave dialectics, but it goes a step further: the machine is supposed to be the means to escape from this dialectic. In a classless society, machines could help prevent workers from being alienated. At the same time (I anticipate here a motif that I shall develop later), by assigning the place of workers to the machine we remain within a model which is not neutral. Machines start to look like slaves and enter man's guilty conscience. They will come back as robots, tailor's dummies or theriomorphic machines in a number of dystopian fictions, one of which shall be the object of the next section.

But let's get back to Jasiński. So what was the answer of Polish Futurism?

The machine is not a product of man – it is his superstructure, his new organ, indispensable to him at the present phase of development. The relationship of man to machine is the relationship of an organism to its new organ. It is the slave of man only insofar as it is his own hands, which obey the instructions of the same brain headquarters. To divest him of both means to disable him<sup>23</sup>.

Once again we recognize the Marxist philosophy jargon (*superstructure*, *Überbau*, *nadbudowa*) which is not surprising at this stage, as with this essay Jasiński concludes his experience of Futurism. A few years later he moved to the Soviet Union, where his creative output was required to comply with the canons of socialist realism. During one of Stalin's purges, he was accused of being a Polish spy<sup>24</sup> and was interned in a gulag, where he eventually died. Fetishizing machines (here Jasiński does agree with Peiper) is not a way for art to introduce the machine into collective consciousness, neither is it "introducing the real machine into art". The latter had been Peiper's proposal. The recipe of Polish Futurism is different: art should create "new organisms of its own according to the rules of the machine: economy, functionality and dynamics" – a position which coherently reassumes similar pronouncements we already quoted above and situates Jasiński again in close relation to the "purist" approach<sup>25</sup>.

At this point Jasiński draws a surprising parallel between Polish Futurism and the Renaissance:

<sup>21</sup> "Odpowiedź ta, zaczerpnięta od socjalizmu, wyznacza maszynie w świadomości współczesnej miejsce, jaki robotnikowi wyznacza w swym obrębie społeczeństwo kapitalistyczne". B. JASIEŃSKI, *Futuryzm polski*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> "Futuryzm rosyjski ujmował maszynę jako produkt i służbę człowieka. Stosunek jej do człowieka sprowadzał do czysto ekonomicznego stosunku robotnika do swego pracodawcy". *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> "Maszyna nie jest produktem człowieka – jest jego nadbudową, jego nowym organem, niezbędnym mu na obecnym szczeblu rozwoju. Stosunek człowieka do maszyny jest stosunkiem organizmu do swego nowego organu. Jest ona niewolnikiem człowieka o tyle tylko, o ile niewolnikiem jego jest jego własna ręka, podlegająca rozkazom jednej i tej samej centrali mózgowej. Pozbawienie tak jednej, jak i drugiej przyprawiłoby człowieka współczesnego o kalectwo". *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> For the most up-to-date biography of Jasiński see: K. JAWORSKI, *Dandys. Słowo o Brunonie Jasińskim*, ISKRY, Warszawa 2009.

<sup>25</sup> That Jasiński's view was perceived as the position of the whole group is testified by the answer Stern gave to Irzykowski's accusation of disengagement. See: A. STERN, *Maszyna jako ideal sztuki dzisiejszej a przesady estetyczne*, in «Głos Polski», 196, 1924, p. 4.



The Renaissance first taught people to see the beauty of their own body. It elevated the human body from the status of “matter”, the case of the immaterial “spirit”, to that of an equal organ.

[...] Polish Futurism taught contemporary man to see the beauty of his own augmented body in the objective forms of civilization<sup>26</sup>.

In contemporary idiom we could summarize Jasiński's reflections by saying that the future of man is the cyborg. Of course, when I use this word I refer not only to the first definition of Clynes and Kline<sup>27</sup>, but also to the philosophical and anthropological conception of Donna Haraway<sup>28</sup>. At the basis of Haraway's conception of cyborg is the breakdown of boundaries between human and animal, animal-human and machine, and the physical and non-physical. The latter is the breakdown which we identify with cybernetics, the one we most commonly focus on, but the philosophical potential of this idea has also turned out to be useful when applied to the past, as is evident in, for example, Allison Muri's essay about the Enlightenment cyborg<sup>29</sup>. We must leave open the question to what degree Jasiński could have been aware that the idea of the multiplied man (today we would say “augmented”) was already present in Marinetti's theoretical oeuvre, chiefly in his text *L'uomo moltiplicato e il regno della macchina* [The multiplied man and the reign of the machine, 1915], from which Marinetti drew extensively in the letter sent to the editors of «Zwrotnica». Some sentences of the letter are almost literal quotes from that manifesto. It is, however, also true that without some prior knowledge of that text, the real content of the letter may remain unclear. For the leader of Italian Futurism, the mechanization of individual life (hence, the mechanization of men and the humanization of machines) and the idea of the cyborg were distinct, but not contradictory aspects of the same vision. The idea of the multiplied man was a direct consequence of the conviction that the human race was doomed to extinction and to be substituted by a new race, namely a fusion of man and machine<sup>30</sup>. So, on closer examination, the difference between Marinetti and Jasiński is not in the idea of the cyborg, but in its ethical implications. Marinetti's multiplied man, even if sometimes opposed to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, still had many features in common with his predecessor, especially in a vision of ethics markedly contrary to the Christian and Western humanist tradition. For Jasiński the idea of the cyborg is not contrary to humanism, indeed, it is a new stage of the aesthetic education of man after the Renaissance. It has to be understood as the Polish recipe for the sustainable development of contemporary civilization, equally distant both from the Italian fetishism of machines and from Russian utilitarianism (still, at the time of writing, Jasiński already considered that recipe to be

<sup>26</sup> “Renesans pierwszy nauczył człowieka widzieć piękno swego własnego ciała. Podniósł ciało ludzkie z roli ‘materii’, futerału dla niematerialnego ‘ducha’, do roli współrzednego organu. [...] Futuryzm polski nauczył człowieka współczesnego widzieć w przedmiotowych formach cywilizacji piękno swego własnego wzbogaconego ciała.” B. JASIEŃSKI, *Futuryzm polski*, cit., p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> M. E. CLYNES AND N. S. KLINE, *Cyborgs and Space*, in «Astronautics», September 1960, pp. 26-27, 74-75. Reprinted in: *The Cyborg Handbook*, red. Ch. Hables Gray, Routledge, New York 1995, pp. 29-34.

<sup>28</sup> D.J. HARAWAY, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, in: EADEM, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York 1991.

<sup>29</sup> A. MURI, *The Enlightenment Cyborg. A History of Communications and Control in the Human Machine, 1660-1830*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto Buffalo London 2007.

<sup>30</sup> About the philosophical implication of Marinetti's conception of the multiplied man in the context of Neo-Lamarckism and occultistic suggestions see: B. HJARTARSON, *Visionen des Neuen. Eine diskurshistorische Analyse des frühen avantgardistischen Manifests*, Winter Verlag, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 239-242; 328-341.

out-of-date).

Perhaps an echo of Jasiński's words is still to be found three years later in the seminal essay by Szymon Syrkus which opens the first issue of «Praesens», the review of the Polish constructivists, published in 1926. We find here condensed the topics of the new civilization creating a new sensibility, technology as a means of transcending human boundaries and the cyborg as augmented man:

In the materialistic inventions, art and philosophy acquire enormous power letting them penetrate the secrets of nature. We can define modern human creativity as the most economic instrument of work in the realization of the audacious and modernist aims of nature. With its mysterious generosity, already at the beginning of human work, the fullness of life, far from narrow utilitarianism, comes close to the boundaries exceeding human capability, stimulates and extends it. [...]

A peculiar rhythm is created, unknown until now, a disinterested composition and the pathos of calculus, glaring evidence of LIFE. The present man, thanks to the new inventions, has been made similar to a serial standardized apparatus: to help his eyes he has glasses, binoculars, microscopes, telescopes; to help his ears – radio and telephone; to help his hands – cranes and buckets; to help his arms – the propellers of an aircraft; to help his legs – cars. Such a man must live differently and must live in different interiors than the man of the past centuries, than the man of the two decades before the war<sup>31</sup>.

### *The Polish Cyborg – a Dystopian Approach*

At the very beginning of his essay, Polish Futurism. A Balance, Jasiński writes that:

As a matter of fact, I have already written a history of Polish futurism. The public and the critics have overlooked it because it is labelled as a “novel” and bears the odd title of “Izolda Morgan’s legs”<sup>32</sup>.

This is a very mysterious statement, it is not clear how to understand it, but if this novel is to be read as the real history of Polish Futurism, we are struck while reading by the fact that it contains none of the utopian vision of the future that we would legitimately expect, if only because of the name of the movement. Instead, we find a gloomy and obsessive vision of a world intoxicated by man-hating machines, afraid that man will take the initiative and destroy them. This is indeed what the protagonist does in one of the final scenes of the novella, a sort of polemical answer to Marinetti's love of machines. The process of assimilating machines and producing enough energy

<sup>31</sup> “Sztuka i filozofia zyskują w materialistycznych wynalazkach ogromną potęgę, która pozwala im wydrzeć tajemnice przyrody. Dzisiejszą twórczość ludzką określić możemy jako najekonomiczniejszy środek pracy w realizowaniu śmiałych i modernistycznych zamierzeń przyrody. A przy jej tajemniczej szczodrości już u samych początków pracy człowieka pełnia życia, daleka od wąskiego utylityzmu, dochodzi do granic, przerastających ludzką możliwość ujęcia, pobudza je więc i rozszerza. [...] Stwarza się swoisty, a dotąd nieznan rytm, kompozycja bezinteresowna i patos rachunku — bijące w oczy dowody ŻYCIA. Człowiek dzisiejszy, który dzięki nowym wynalazkom upodobniony jest do serijnego standaryzowanego aparatu, który oczom ku pomocy ma okulary, lornety, mikroskopy, teleskopy; uszom — radio i telefon; rękóm — dźwigary i żórawie; ramionóm — śmigła aeroplanu; nogóm — samochody — taki człowiek musi żyć inaczej i musi mieszkać w innych pomieszczeniach, niż człowiek wieków minionych, niż człowiek przedwojennego dwudziestolecia”. SZ. SYRKUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> “Właściwie historia futurizmu została już przeze mnie napisana. Publiczność i krytyka przeoczyły ją, ponieważ nosi na sobie etykietkę ‘powieść’ i niesamowity tytuł Nogi Izoldy Morgan”. B. JASIŃSKI, *Futuryzm polski*, *cit.*, p. 49 (translation mine).

to avoid “intoxication” has failed.

As I already wrote, far from solving the problem of the machine’s position towards man, the master – slave dialectic applied to machines arouses atavistic myths and figures of the Western tradition such as that of the Golem or the sorcerer’s apprentice. Traces of animistic fear of the inanimate and a guilty conscience transferred from the slave to the machine generate the modern motif of the rebellion of machines. And because behind the machines there was always the memory of slaves, it was possible to give this motif an additional political subtext. The first modernist literary work and perhaps still the most popular one, which put this modern myth on the stage, is of course Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (1920). In Polish modernist literature, however, there is another work for which we cannot exclude Čapek’s inspiration, a completely forgotten novel of the completely forgotten writer Jerzy Sosnkowski. The novel is entitled *A Car, You and Me. Love of Machines* and was published in 1925. The futurist association suggested by the subtitle is, of course, intentional. The novel has to be read as a sort of narrative pamphlet against a Futurism which is not so much the Italian or the Polish one, but a sort of *pars pro toto* of modernity. The author reproaches Futurism for having sacrificed feelings to reason and rationality. It is not enough that the reproach does not fit Polish Futurism, but it does not even fit the Italian one. He seems not to have understood the amount of irrationality which distinguished both Italian and Polish Futurism. It is not the place here to speculate about what he could know about Italian Futurism based on the few translations available in Polish in the Twenties<sup>33</sup>. Neither it is so important to establish to what degree he understood it. Futurism in Sosnkowski is a sort of metonymy for modernity, defined as rational, cynical and pragmatic. This unusual coming-of-age and road trip novel is set in Poland, although the name of the country is not mentioned, the main protagonist, Pol, a young engineer, travels in his car with a young actress Iza, whom he has invited to join him for the pure pleasure of her company. Thus, the car becomes an opportunity and a pretext for starting a relationship; it is also an icon, the most famous icon of modernity, and therefore a clear reference to the very founding act of the futurist mythology marked by Marinetti’s manifesto. Pol, being an architect, as Sosnkowski himself was, is the personification of rationality and intellect, while Iza is that of the heart and emotions. They visit a town in which there are electrification installations and there is a lot of equipment lying about. In a sort of early post-industrial landscape, which we may see as a vision of the end of modernity, they make a tour around the old inoperative power station which is situated on a cliff and is filled with machines withdrawn from circulation. The power station itself is a figure of modernity (we cannot help mentioning Antonio di Sant’Elia’s famous study for a power station of 1914 from his cycle *La città nuova*)<sup>34</sup>. Pol goes out onto a dilapidated balcony which then collapses, rendering him unconscious. The local fishermen lay him down on a blanket in a room with a disturbing anthropomorphic dynamo-machine. The most interesting passage of the novel is chapter 8, wherein the protagonist, lying in a fever, has a nightmare: the machines come alive and take over the world. There are already more machines than men – humankind is doomed to extinction. Of course, the new race that shall inherit the earth is not the superior, mechanical type of man, whose advent Marinetti was preconizing, but

<sup>33</sup> For the utmost up-to-date reference about the reception of Italian futurism in Poland see: P. STROŻEK, *Marinetti i futurizm w Polsce. Obecność, kontakty, wydarzenia*, Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Sosnkowski, himself an architect and engineer, was most probably acquainted with Sant’Elia’s work, as testified by his short story *Mad Cathedral*, wherein we find traces of Sant’Elia’s *Manifesto of Architecture*. See: E. RANOCCHI, *Szalona katedra*, in «Autoportret», 4 [47], 2014, pp. 62-67.

a terrifying species of gigantic theriomorphous machines. So far as I know, this is perhaps one of the first modernist visions in which the boundaries between animal and machine are to break down. The black character of the novel, Lebelt, who personifies the hypertrophy of reason, takes the word in the dream:

Simply, we were putting our mind into the machine. The machine, the machine! It was everyone's slogan and faith! And even those who subconsciously kept their souls – the artists – even those were hypnotized by the machine! O, Marinetti, Picasso, Matisse – they have greatly contributed to our disaster. We created the machines then, we, the scholars and engineers, put reason into them, and the artists the soul. Until finally – do you understand it, Mr. Pol? They did it! They handed their reason over, they breathed their reason, will and soul into cold machines. On the other hand, they themselves started resembling machines! They, if I may say so, have interchanged. And this is how the machines became alive! The machines started to have a will, one day they started to rule. They became organisms endowed with the same qualities as human beings. Only their bones are so far made of iron and steel, and their blood – of water, oil, petrol. In the fever of creation we didn't notice that the machines we were creating started resembling animals. Please, try to recall the appearance of the most recent machines. Weren't they similar to huge insects, or didn't they resemble the skeletons of some dead monsters? Wasn't an airplane like a bird, wasn't a submarine like a fish, wasn't a paddle steamer just like a big duck? And the train was similar to a legendary dragon, a radio station – to a horrible beetle, a telegraphic network – to a spider's web etc. Yes, the machines became alive and declared war on us – a war in which we cannot participate because we cannot fight them with our bare hands. To rely on their mercy – utopia! They have no feelings! They know no emotions. They are “mechanical animals” – intelligent and cunning<sup>35</sup>.

The opposition between man and machine in Sosnkowski's novel is decidedly more sharp and static than in Čapek's piece, also because the machines in Pol's dreams are described as huge animals. Nevertheless, they retain certain key features in common with them, such as sexual desire.

In his novel Sosnkowski, like Čapek, drew one of the first visions of an organized death civilization, as if he had a foreboding of where the consequent realization of Marinetti's postulates could lead: the combination of the most perfect organization, being the fruit of highly developed reason, with the lack of something which at the time was called feelings and today we would rather call empathy. To this we should add the psychic constitution of the servant, being one of the chief

<sup>35</sup> “Po prostu rozum swój wkładaliśmy w maszyny. Maszyna, maszyna! Oto, co było hasłem i wiarą wszystkich! I ci nawet, co jeszcze ducha podświadomie w sobie utrzymali – artyści – i ci zostali zahypnotyzowani przez maszynę! Och, Marinetti, Picasso, Matisse – przyczynili się oni niemało do naszego nieszczęścia. Tworzyliśmy więc maszyny, kładliśmy w nie rozum, my, uczeni i inżynierowie, a artyści ducha. Aż wreszcie, pan to rozumie, panie Polu? Włożyli! Oddali, tchnęli rozum, wolę, duszę w zimne maszyny. Na odwrót, sami upodobnili się do nich! Zaszła, że się tak wyrażę, zmiana miejsc. I oto maszyny ożyły! Maszyny poczęły mieć wolę, poczęły rządzić się pewnego pięknego dnia same. Stały się organizmami, obdarzonymi temi samymi właściwościami, co ludzie. Tylko kości ich dotąd są z żelaza i stali, a ich krew – to woda, oliwa, benzyna. Nie widzieliśmy w gorączce tworzenia, że maszyny przez nas robione upodabniają się do zwierząt. Proszę sobie przypomnieć wygląd ostatnich machin. Czy nie były podobne do ogromnych robaków, czy nie przypominały szkieletów jakichś zmarłych potworów? Czy aeroplan to nie był ptak, czy łódź podwodna nie była rybą, czy okręt kołowy nie był wielką kaczką? A pociąg był podobny do legendarnego smoka, stacja radio do potwornego żuka, sieci telegraficzne do sieci pająka i tak dalej. Tak, maszyny ożyły, i wypowiedziały nam walkę, walkę, której przyjąć nie możemy, bo nie sposób walczyć z nimi gołymi rękami. Liczy na ich litość – utopia – przecież one nie mają uczucia! One uczucia nie znają. Są to “mechaniczne zwierzęta” inteligentne i sprytne”. J. SOSNKOWSKI, *Auto, Ty i Ja (Miłość maszyn)*, Wydawnictwo Biblioteki Dziel Wyborowych, Warszawa 1925, pp. 105-106.

features of the machine and the very reason behind its hatred of men, as the relationship between machine and man reproduces the one between the slave and his master. It is no coincidence that Čapek's vision of a robotic civilization also had political implications, as it would have for Wiener (*R.U.R.* was read as an allusion to a communist revolution: "there's nothing more terrible than giving everyone Heaven on Earth!")<sup>36</sup>.

Sosnkowski also interprets the close relation between the degeneration of machines and the degeneration of man as a consequence of futurist ideology. What Sosnkowski's novel explicitly refers to as futurist ideology is interpreted as a hypertrophy of reason released from sentiment and emotions. Extreme functionalism was to lead humanity to a catastrophe. Perhaps the most striking image of this mechanized world, reminiscent of early modern representations of a well-governed state as a mechanism, e.g. a clock<sup>37</sup>, is the description of the road full of machines:

The road was completely choked with wandering machines. There was formal congestion. The incessant stream of monsters crawled in two directions without stopping for a moment. The middle of the road was left empty to allow overtaking. Here you could see precisely the excellent, machine-like organization and an amazing precision of movement calculation. The colossi passed each other with a millimeter's distance between them and they never collided with one another despite the high speed of some machines. On the sides you could see industrial machines crawling slowly and smoothly, while cars, locomobiles, locomotives, motorcycles and tractors sped along in the middle of the road. You could hear the monotonous drone of traffic – huge as the roaring waves of many stormy seas, but it was regular and rhythmical – I would say – depicting phonetically the dynamics of this mechanical river. The machines' bodies had different shapes and all of them resembled the antediluvian monsters of various races and species.

They all stuck to the road persistently, as if the route was prescribed through the intellect and the law of reason. Even the airplanes, which whizzed through the air and acquired the shapes of massive bats, followed the air route precisely. [...] The spirit of the invincible organization and force was hovering over the cloud. It was an avalanche which was impossible to resist, an avalanche roaring like one thousand waterfalls, like millions of stones rolling down – and its voice weighed us down, it depressed us, it pressed on the brain like a painful weight resonating in the head with the echo of disturbing blows, hurting the eyes.

It is strange that this devilish movement gave an impression of emptiness. The moving mass gave off the feeling of cold and the lack of life.

Methodicalness was rolling down the road. The life of nature possesses many kinds of movement and uncoordinated, unexpected vibrations, but that place was oozing with routine, regularity, and lifelessness. This combination of lifelessness and movement was truly disturbing.

Involuntarily, our imagination made us think of a galvanized corpse<sup>38</sup>.

This nightmare vision shows that, when transposed to machines, the idea of a powerful self-regulating system becomes uneasy. In both cases (Čapek and Sosnkowski) the question is

<sup>36</sup> "Nic není strašnějšího než dát lidem ráj na zemi!". K. ČAPEK, *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots*, Artur, Praha 2008, p. 43 (English translation by David Wylie, The University of Adelaide, 2016, available from: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/capek/karel/rur/index.html>).

<sup>37</sup> See: O. MAYR, *Authority, Liberty & Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe*, The John Hopkins University Press, London & Baltimore 1986.

<sup>38</sup> "Droga całkowicie zapchana była wędrującymi maszynami. Panował formalny tłok. Nicustanny wąż potworów pełzał w dwu kierunkach, nie przerywając się ani na chwilę. Środek drogi zostawiony był do wyminięcia. Widać tu było dokładnie znakomitą, maszynową organizację i niesłychaną precyzyjność w obliczeniu ruchów. Kolosy mijaly się o milimetr, o włos, nie zawadzając o siebie nawzajem, mimo wielkiej szybkości, z którą posuwały się niektóre z nich. Po bokach równomiernie pełzły

whether such an intelligent system should be allowed to own itself (so to be potentially treated as a moral subject). It is already the question about the boundaries between human and non-human, even if yet not expressed in the later terms of cybernetics. In order to discredit what is already perceived as a disturbing self-regulating system, machines are described as precise and methodical, but also as not alive (hence the comparison with a galvanized corpse). What we are confronted with is the image of a machine that Wiener would call “rigid”, the opposite of a good machine which ought to be not only a computing machine, but also a control machine, a machine with an automatic feedback control apparatus. The scene quoted could also depict a state of increasing entropy, according to Wiener’s understanding of it, “a universe in which all distributions are in their most probable state and in which universal homogeneity prevails”<sup>39</sup>. “The dominance of machines presupposes a society in the last stages of increasing entropy, where probability is negligible and where the statistical differences among individuals are nil”<sup>40</sup>. This quote from Wiener’s *Cybernetics* fits Čapek’s robots well, represented as lacking in individuality: the first generation robots all have the same features. Only when “suffering” (because “feeling”), do the robots reveal a personality. Violence turns out to be a direct consequence of this lack of feeling.

In fact Sosnkowski too, like Čapek, seems to suggest another possibility: an intelligent machine (in the novel represented by the main character’s car) which empathetically understands and realizes what the man is thinking and feeling.

Pol was astonished that the car perfectly felt his intentions, it really understood him. He had the impression as if a supernatural intellect were driving the machine, in a mysterious way establishing contact with his thoughts, reading them, before he could express them in movements and executing them more quickly and efficiently than if things went the usual way<sup>41</sup>.

Feelings, according to Wiener, are not “merely a useless epiphenomenon of nervous actions”<sup>42</sup>, but can play a significant role in learning. A feeling machine is one which is capable

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wolno maszyny przemysłowe, środkiem mknęły auta, lokomobile, lokomotywy, motocykle, traktory. Panował jednostajny szum, potężny niby ryk fal wielu wzburzonych mórz, ale regularny, rytmiczny, – rzekłbym, – ilustrujący fonetycznie dynamikę tej mechanicznej rzeki. Ciała maszyn miały przeróżne kształty, wszystkie zbliżone do poczwar przedpotopowych różnych ras i rodzin. Trzymało się to wszystko uporczywie drogi, jako przepisane rozumem i ustawą racji, szlaku. Nawet acroplany z poświstem przesywające powietrze, otulone w formy olbrzymich nietoperzy, ściśle trzymały się powietrznej linii, idealnie odpowiadającej biegowi trasy. [...] Unosił się nad nią duch niezmierzonych organizacji i siły. Była to lawina, której próżnym byłoby chcieć stawić opór, lawina hucząca jak tysiąc wodospadów, jak miliony zsypywanych fur kamieni, – a głos ten przygniał, przygnębiał, kładł się na mózg jak bolesny ciężar, odzywając się w głowie echem uderzeń dokuczliwych, pod naporem których bolały oczy. Rzecz dziwna, że szatański ruch – sprawiał wrażenie pustki. Oschłością jakąś wiało od ciągnących mas, nie było w tem życia. Drogą toczyła się metodyczność. Życie przyrody posiada cały szereg ruchów i drgnień nieskoordynowanych, niespodzianych, – stamtąd ziało szematem i regularnością, – ziało martwością. To zespolenie martwoty z ruchem było nad wyraz przykre. Mimo woli nasuwało się wyobraźni pojęcie zgalwanizowanego trupa.” J. SOSNKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 121-123.

<sup>39</sup> N.K. HAYLES, *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999, p. 103.

<sup>40</sup> N. WIENER, *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*, 2nd edn., Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1954, p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> “Ku zdziwieniu Pola auto jednak doskonale wyczuwało jego intencje, rozumiało go po prostu. Pol miał wrażenie, że jakiś nadprzyrodzony rozum, kierujący machiną, nawiązywał tajemniczy kontakt z jego myślami, odczytywał, zanim człowiek zdążył sprecyzować je w ruchach wykonawczych i spełniał prędzej i sprawniej, niż gdyby rzeczy szły zwykłym trybem.” J. SOSNKOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>42</sup> N. WIENER, *The Human Use*, *cit.*, p. 72.

of feedback, so which can learn. Pol's car and Čapek's second generation robots are, from this perspective, cybernetic machines. The paradox lies in the fact that what was meant to be a solution for the danger of machines taking over the human world is in fact the anticipation of the cyborg – that is a machine so connected with man through a feedback relation that it makes the boundaries between them permeable.

Both texts precede the age of cybernetic anxiety – that is, they still operate with a solid vision of the liberal self, of what is supposed to be a human being and what a machine. Indeed, from this very contraposition there originates the drama and the subject of both works – the uncanny appearance of the machine is due to the fact that it merely resembles a human being, while not being human, because of its lack of empathy. If we take a closer look at this problem, however, we will discover that certain premises are already in place. In both works the opposition between the machine and the human being is not a binary one, on the contrary it evolves into a more nuanced vision, where beside bad, inflexible machines without feelings and feeling humans there intervenes a third one: the good feeling / learning machine. This one is not represented as uncanny anymore. So from the gruesome dystopian vision of mankind doomed to extinction there emerges a utopia: it is again the vision of the cyborgisation of man. And this utopia, with all its affirmativeness, is deeply entrenched in the time in which it arose – that of early modernism.

### *The Polish Man a Machine*

As I already mentioned, the master-slave dialectic applied to machines could have a political subtext in which the machine stood for the working class. This is especially evident in Aleksej Tolstoj's remake of Čapek's *R.U.R.* and this is also the case of a late play by Jasiński, entitled *The Mannequins' Ball* (1931)<sup>43</sup>. To be precise, in the play the place of the machine is taken by tailor's dummies which are in addition a metaphor of the working class. The author of the play is not the futurist Jasiński, but his last reincarnation, the communist Jasiński. With this text we have shifted slightly further from the theme of the machine, as in a strict sense the mannequin is not of course a machine, but only a simulacrum of man, even if not without some mechanical elements. The motif of the mannequin was introduced into painting by Giorgio De Chirico before the war already and then became distinctive of Italian *metafisica* from which it spread all over Europe, especially in the surrealist milieu<sup>44</sup>. Its close relationship to the robot (neither are generated in a natural way and have replaceable limbs) is particularly evident in the figurative arts, where sometimes it is difficult to distinguish one from another. The mannequin is just another visual incarnation of the artificial man. Jasiński's play is a quite late token of the popularity of this theme in Stalinist Russia. It is useful to recall it here not only because of its high literary quality (this is not socialist realism yet) and of the motif of the rebellion of things against man, but also because in this new incarnation of the comedy of errors, masterfully exploiting the motif of the mix up of roles, we find the positions being reversed: the mannequins see themselves as models and men as failed imitations:

<sup>43</sup> See: P. BUONCRISTIANO, *Un cuore meccanico. Bambole e automi nella letteratura russa moderna*, Carocci, Roma 2011, pp. 230-238.

<sup>44</sup> About the prehistory of the motive and its (possible) filiation from Apollinaire see: W. BOHN, *Apollinaire and De Chirico: the Making of the Mannequins*, in «Comparative Literature», 27/2, 1975, pp. 153-165.

I don't believe there's anything to be learned from humans. I've seen more than enough of all those dandies who frequent our workshops. They're all only worthless copies made in our image! I feel like bursting out laughing when I look at those twisted monstrosities. [...] They desperately want the clothes that suit us to perfection to look equally good on them. And so they're irritated when everything that fits us like a glove puckers and wrinkles on them. These freaks force the apprentices to slave away at night and use cotton padding for what they naturally lack, vainly attempting to make their figures look like ours. I simply can't understand why our clothes should be given to them? No matter what you do, on them everything will always look ghastly<sup>45</sup>.

This introduces the final theme with which I would like to end my statement, that of the man a machine, a model of representation of the human body dating back at least to the 18th century<sup>46</sup>. To rethink the human body in terms of a machine represents the other side of the research into creating artificial life. The relation between man and machine has always been a biunique one: the human body has always constituted the model of a well-functioning machine, while the machine has been a conceptual grid, a framework helping to understand (or imagine) how the human body works, this – of course – up to the present day, when we see a real renaissance of the man a machine idea with all the ethical, epistemological and philosophical problems this idea entails.

It is precisely the uneasiness we feel when we think of our body in terms of a machine that we find in one of the most popular poems by Tytus Czyżewski. Czyżewski was both a painter and a poet, moving always at the border between literature and figurative arts.

It is precisely the uneasiness we feel when we think of our body in terms of a machine that we find in one of the most popular poems by Tytus Czyżewski. Czyżewski was both a painter and a poet, moving always at the border between literature and figurative arts<sup>47</sup>. A testimony to his skills is also the poem *Hymn to the Machine of my Body* of 1920. This poem draws on the metaphor of the machine applied to the human body in a way which recalls Tobias Cohn's *House of the Body* (from Ma'aseh Toviyah, 1707) or – in more recent times the famous Fritz Kahn's *Man as Industrial Palace*. The painter Czyżewski, however, writes his picture with words, apparently in the spirit of the avant-garde, in fact revitalizing the tradition of visual poetry (of course there is no contradiction therein, as Apollinaire taught). The spatial disposition of the words referring to the different organs as if to mechanical elements<sup>48</sup> reproduces in an iconic way the basically

<sup>45</sup> “Nie wierzę, aby się można było czegoś nauczyć od ludzi. Napatrzyłem się trochę tym przyjeżdżającym do nas snobom. Przecież to tylko nędzne nasze kopie. Śmiać mi się chce, kiedy patrzę na tych pokręconych idiotów. [...] Chcą za wszelką cenę, aby garnitury leżały na nich tak idealnie jak na nas. I jak grymaszą, ile pretensji, że garnitury, które na nas leżą jak ulal, na nich marszczą się i garbią. Te homunkulusy każą krawcom spędzać bezsenne noce i wypychać watą to, czego im brak, byle tylko upodobnić się do nas. Nie pojmuję doprawdy, po co im właściwie oddają nasze ubrania? I tak będą w nich wyglądali jak półtora nieszczęścia.” B. JASIEŃSKI, *Bal manekinów*, Jirafa Roja, Warszawa 2006, p. 24 (English translation: *The Mannequins' Ball*, translated by Daniel Gerould, Routledge, London & New York 2000, p. 11).

<sup>46</sup> The main reference is of course the work of the French philosopher and physician Julien Offray de La Mettrie *L'homme machine* (1747).

<sup>47</sup> B. ŚNIECIKOWSKA, *Tekst i obraz w twórczości Tytusa Czyżewskiego – o artystycznej „unii personalnej”*, in: EADEM, *Słowo – obraz – dźwięk. Literatura i sztuki wizualne w koncepcjach polskiej awangardy 1918-1939*, Universitas, Kraków 2005, pp. 35-172; A. SOCZYŃSKA, *Tytus Czyżewski. Malarz, poeta, Neriton*, Warszawa 2006; A. SMAGA, *Formizm w poezji Tytusa Czyżewskiego*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Still, Czyżewski's operation was not completely unprecedented in Polish futurist poetry, since already 1914 the Baptist of the movement, Jerzy Jankowski, in his poem *Splon lotnika* [The Burning Aviator] used a close metaphor: “Listen the pulse



symmetrical structure of the body. So the metaphors of mechanical provenance join the iconic representation of the body creating an indivisible whole.

The body as a machine has changed into something alien and disturbing, at the same time endowed with power, so that the poet addresses to it the prayers he used to address to God. This prayer is literally the liturgical Kyrie eleison, "Lord, have mercy". The place of God has been substituted by the body, an extremely frail and unpredictable mechanism. The new deity is no less frightening and disturbing than the old ones.

# HYMN TO THE MACHINE OF MY BODY

blood                      pepsin                      blood

stomach                      heart                      blood

pulsate                      beat                      concentrated

coils                      of my                      gut

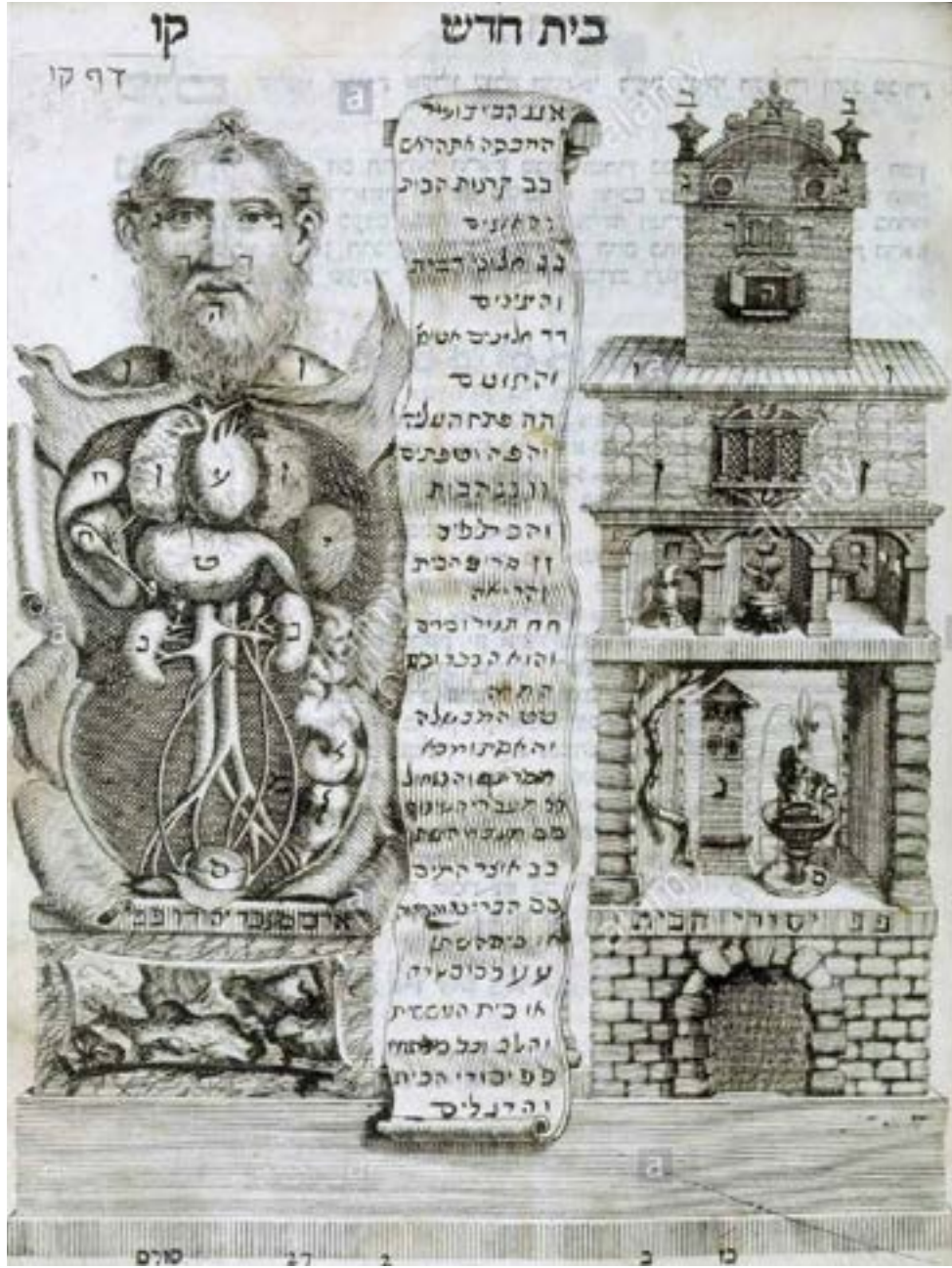
**brain**

cables to my veins  
kinky wire duct  
to my heart  
accumulator  
have mercy of me  
**my heart**  
dynamo-heart  
electric lungs  
magnetic diaphragm

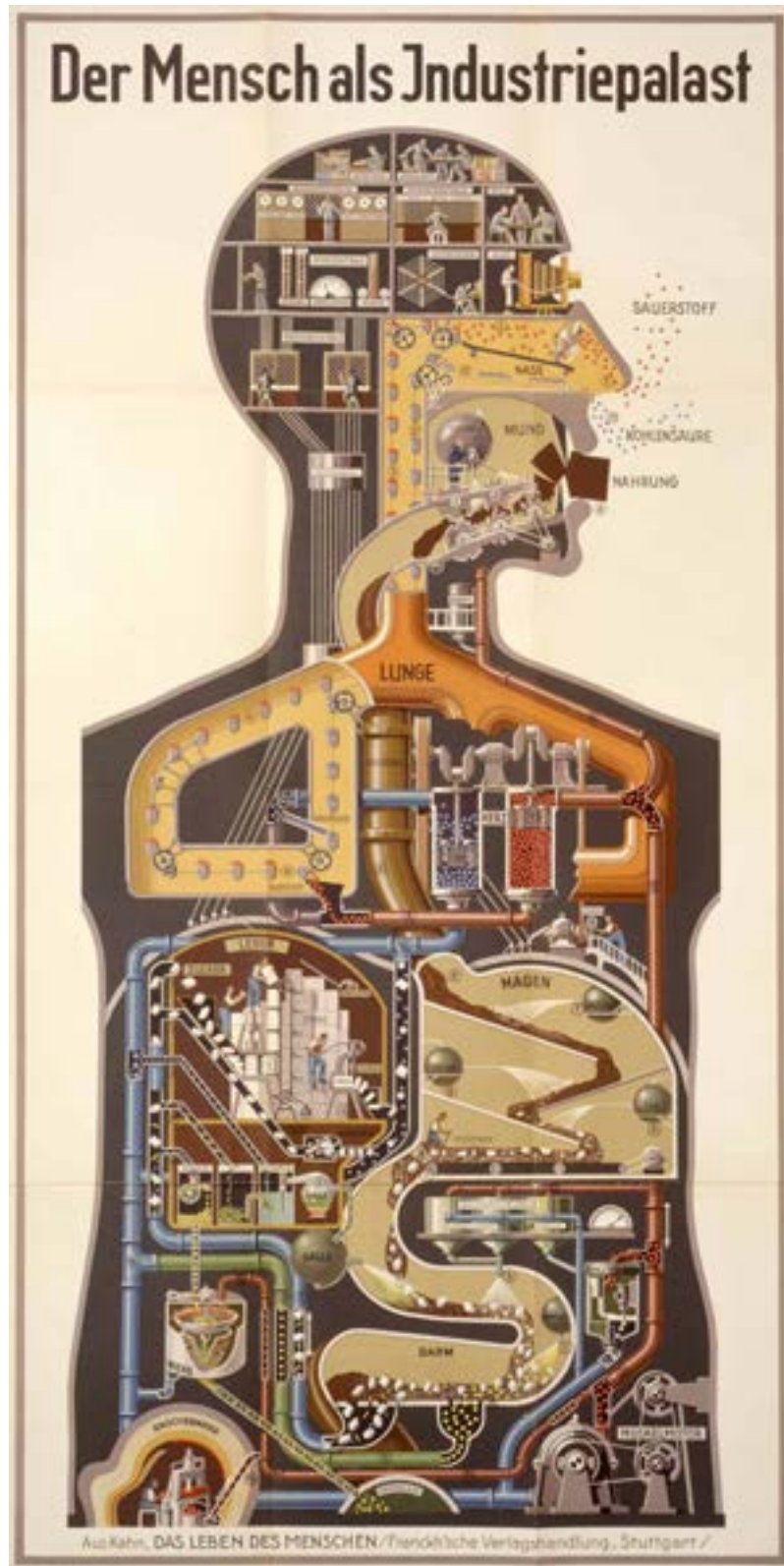
one two three  
beats my heart at one  
electric heart one

conveyor belt  
of my **gut**  
two two two  
have mercy of me  
one two

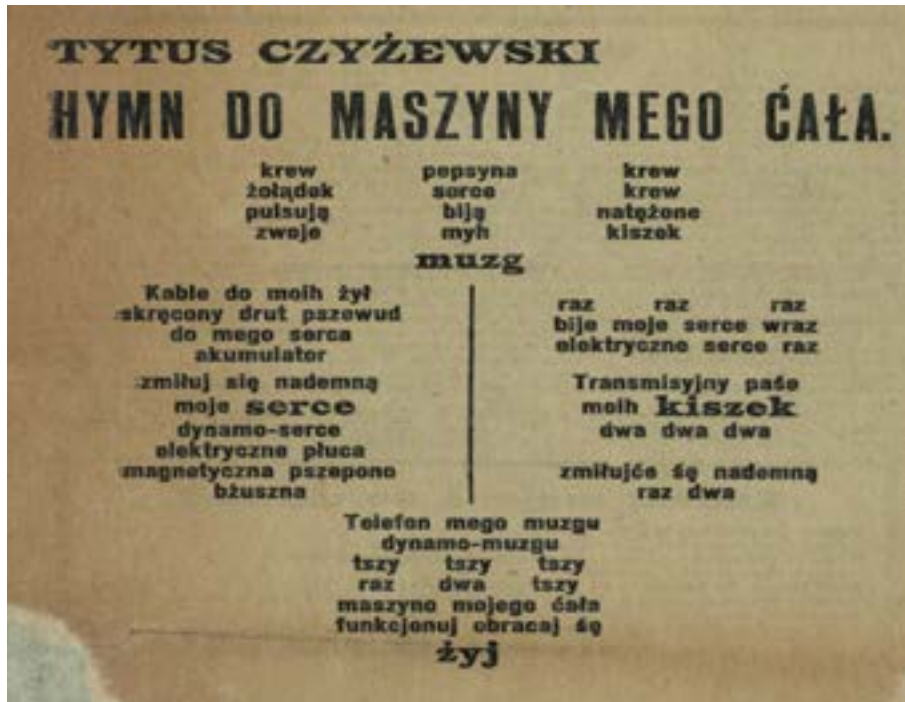
telephone of my brain  
dynamo-brain  
three three three  
one two three  
machine of my body  
function spin  
**live**



TOVIYAH KATS (TOBIAS COHN), *Ma'a'seb Toviyah*, Venice 1708. Woodcut. Houghton Library, Harvard University.



FRITZ KAHN, *Der Mensch als Industriepalast* (*Man as Industrial Palace*), Stuttgart 1926. Chromolithograph. National Library of Medicine.



TYTUS CZYŻEWSKI, *Hymn do maszyny mego ciała*, from *Jednodniówka futurystów*, June 1921, p. 3

## Abstract

EMILIANO RANOCCHI

*The Polish Cyborg. A Reflection on the Relationship between Man and Machine in Early Polish Modernism*

Far from being enthusiastic “modernolatory” of Italian futurism, Polish futurism demonstrates an attitude of ambivalence toward modernity. This is particularly evident in the Polish approach to that very synecdoche of modernity which is the machine. In his essay of 1923, the leader of the group, Bruno Jasiński, compares the fetishistic cult of the machine, which characterizes the Italian approach, with the utilitarian one of the Russians, exemplified by a quote from Majakovskij. To these two propositions, as a sort of Hegelian synthesis, he adds a Polish one consisting in the conception of the machine as a prosthesis, a continuation of the human body. Thereby he introduces an idea later known as “cyborg”. The category of cyborg is also useful to understand the work of another today almost forgotten Polish writer of the Twenties, Jerzy Sosnkowski. He was the author of a short novel, *A Car; You and Me (Love of Machines)*, in which a whole chapter concerns the chief character’s dystopian nightmare wherein machines take control over the world. The third section of the essay deals with the idea of man a machine – an old, 18th century conception, which became actual anew in the 20th century and whose traces we can find among others in a well-known poem by Tytus Czyżewski. Thirty years before N. Wiener, Polish modernists seem to have sensed the social, political and anthropological implications of the mechanization of work.

**Keywords:** Machine, Futurism, Cyborg, Poland, Utopia

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