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S F I G A R O

L'amore—ossessione romantica e voluttà—non è altro che un'invenzione dei poeti, i quali la regalarono all'umanità. . . . È saranno i poeti che all'umanità lo ritoglieranno. . . .

Filippo Tomaso Marinetti

L'uomo le inventa per l'illusione di dominio, di superiorità, per l'istinto aggressivo di conquistare sempre qualcuno o qualcosa: la donna lascia credere che ciò sia vero perché quasi sempre le fa comodo adoperare la propria debolezza apparente come un'arma fra le sue più valide. Enif Robert

Despite the obvious misogyny (“il disprezzo della donna”) ingrained in the agenda of the 1909 *Manifesto del futurismo*, Enif Robert, as other (albeit few) women writers, not only engaged in a discourse with Futurism, but sought out a space amongst “i poeti che all'umanità lo ritoglieranno.”<sup>1</sup> After some debate on the issue, Marinetti qualified “il disprezzo della donna” as a “contempt” for woman as the icon of decadence, which he attributed to the *fin-de-siècle* writers (specifically Gabriele D'Annunzio). Marinetti and Robert converge in their “contempt” for the unhygienic/decadent positioning of woman as the “femme fatale,” the bourgeois wife and the nurturing mother (mammismo). As a result, both Robert and Marinetti glorify virility and aggressiveness. However, the two Futurists' contempt of the un-hygienic diverges in respect to Marinetti's fear of the engulfment of not only “uomo-torpediniera,” but also the “follarisacca” in the “donna-golfo.” Robert reacts not to a fear of the “vagina dentata,” but to the socially conditioned “debolezza” and imprisonment of women. Thus, for Robert denaturalizes the pre-existing phallocratic or dominant mode of representation, exposing “l'illusione di dominio.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Marinetti's “Contro l'amore e il parlamentarismo” considers this “inferiorità” of “women” to be the effect of “questa [schiavitù che] avessero subito, attraverso una lunga serie di generazioni,” he does not advocate the

liberation of women, but the reduction of women to the “funzione conservatrice della specie.” Marinetti substitutes the threatening fatal, amorous woman with the more animalistic natural woman who is once again objectified (domesticated) as the vessel of man’s reproductive capacity—a mere bodily extension of the male productive powers. Embracing the Futurists’ rejection of the socially debased woman, yet opposing the reduction of woman to a reproductive role, Robert’s self-situating as a “*donna futurista*” corresponds directly to a desire for gender repositioning: a radical transformation which must unmask bourgeois sexual politics as “*l’illusione di dominio.*” Robert calls for a demystification of gender roles, and for allowing women to prove their intellectual virility to equal that of man. Robert’s experimental novel *Un ventre di donna* expresses her repudiation of the subordinate employment of women as the vessel of man’s seed by thematizing the eradication of female fecundity (the unmaking of the womb), disclosing a stronger desire for equality—an attempt to prove that women can be “*anche vive, coraggiose, forti, VIRILI, INTELLIGENTI, a fianco del loro maschio.*”<sup>3</sup> However, inclusion in the futurist movement entails a collapse of sexual difference and a movement toward what Luce Irigaray calls “sameness.”

Robert does not assume the role historically assigned to the feminine, nor does she accept the one assigned by Marinetti and company. However, her direct feminine challenge to these historical conditions paradoxically leads to the demand to speak as a (masculine) “subject.” Robert does not provide a disruption of masculine (phallographic) discourse, but rather a validation of that very discourse by attempting to become part of it. Hence Robert rejects the mimicry of female roles only for another mimetic role—this time under the guise of a man. As Susan Suleiman explains, it is not enough to simply assume a subject position and “take over a stock of images established by the male imaginary . . . in order to innovate she has to invent her own position as subject and elaborate her own set of images.”<sup>4</sup> Although Robert does “write the body”—using her own body as a textual reference—this writing of the body becomes a destructive process aimed at the purging of what she considers the un-hygienic (womb) which will then allow her to be cured and become equal to man—emasculated via the process of writing. More importantly, she eliminates the barring symbol of nature and fecundity which poses a threat to the paranoid futurist movement.

Enif Robert’s *Un ventre di donna*, her only published fictional work (1919), as Claudia Slaris explains: “vuole essere un esempio di come la donna può descrivere se stessa adottando un stile sintetico-realistico, e propone un modello di eroina vitalistico-ottimista.”<sup>5</sup> However, this “modello di eroina” as well as Robert’s “descrizione di se stessa” parrots (or pirates) the destructive and aggressive “fervore, coraggio e la forza assoluta” outlined in “Il Manifesto del Futurismo,” which was designed to exalt a masculine productivity at the expense

of female (re)productivity. This process of “futurization” [sic] entails a radical negation of otherness (sexual difference), not only morphologically, but also anatomically. Thus, for Robert, in order for women to liberate themselves from the chains of the old “illusione di dominio” they must transcend the limitations of the female body and social conditioning to reach a hermaphroditic, superior state of productivity, which does not just simply re-produce, but actively produces a new consciousness for women.

*Un ventre di donna*, formalistically constructed as a collage of diary and epistolary narrative styles, represents a fusion of the private or individual consciousness with a dialogic and diagnostic adaptation of futurism. The diary-styled writing documents the discontent of a thirty-year-old bourgeois woman, her struggle with abdominal cancer and her intellectual battle against the maladies of bourgeois society. As a private form of writing, Robert’s diary traces and visualizes her own understanding of the epistemological rupture from the decadence of the *fin-de-siècle* to the “movimento futurista”—a transcendence of what Marinetti called the “fontana malata” to a “coscienze molteplici e simultanee in uno stesso individuo.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, like Marinetti, Robert turns in the (diseased) idealistic and statuesque “bello della Vittoria di Samotracia,” for the velocity and explosiveness of the automobile, the “passione, arte e idealismo dello sport.”<sup>7</sup> In correspondence with the epistemological rupture, the text thematically splits in half: while Robert delegates half of the text to the destruction of the infectious, “dead forms” of the old order, the other half, especially the ending, presents the emergence of the heroine in the “new order.” Physical and mental pain become the bridge in this evolution, leading the heroine away from death into a new (future) life—“passione e arte.”

The epistolary-styled narration mirrors this textual splitting by presenting two distinct dialogues: the first, an imaginary exchange with Elenora Duse, who represents the antithetical model of the D’Annunzian woman which Robert ultimately rejects; and the second, a real exchange of letters with Marinetti, (then fighting in the trenches of World War I), provides both a prescriptive cure for the heroine’s condition and an epistemological serum for her to consume. The text, as the body of the heroine herself, displays the personalization and internalization of the suffering and pain caused by the social and physical confines of “bourgeois” culture and the physically degenerated form of womanhood (symbolized by the uterus). At the same time, this physical suffering transforms itself into a metaphorical struggle against a series of social conventions: “la lotta contro una medicina che la ignora, la guerra al moralismo piccolo borghese, la comparasa, in luogo della figure della madre sentimentale, del mito vital-efficientistico della fecondazione.”<sup>8</sup> Although the body is the locus of this battle, it is the purging or ejection of these forms of “debolezza” which leads to the

remaking of the heroine as a “futurista,” not in body, but in spirit. By privileging the spirit or mind over the body, Robert detaches herself from the limitations of the feminine body, rendering the female body as a surface of social inscriptions which must be painfully carved out in order not only to prove endurance, but also to transcend “femininity” altogether.

This mind/body split is foregrounded not only in the “body” of the text, but also in the placement of the authorial voice. *Un ventre di donna*, although primarily written by Robert with the exception of a series of letters by Marinetti, is co-signed by Marinetti. In addition, the framing of the text as an object privileges Marinetti’s signature, which appears first apparently giving the text more validity and authority, yet it simultaneously confuses the position of the authorial voice. While the appearance of Marinetti’s signature provides an authorization of the text, it is his “Name” which becomes the symbol of mastery, displacing Robert’s original position as author. Furthermore, not only does Robert use Marinetti’s “Name,” but she posits him as the authority (master, doctor, healer, guide) of the Futurist discourse in which she engages. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Robert re-establishes a hierarchy, (where man speaks and woman mimics), advancing a strategy of invisibility in relation to the authoritative voice of her own text, precisely because she has assimilated to a masculine model, which undermines her position as “subject” within her own discourse. The problem of “l’illusione di dominio,” instead of being undermined by the Futurist movement, re-emerges as a more extreme and aggressive domination of the masculine imaginary over the female body and mind. *Un ventre di donna*, as Robert herself, becomes a mouthpiece, an instrument through which Futurism speaks and experiments on the female body and mind. Rather than speaking in a position of mastery, it speaks through a series of inscriptions. The objectification of the body as a reference to the (dis)placed self indirectly amounts to the mimicking of a subordinate role—the female as receptacle, a receptacle of not only the bourgeois morbus, but also a receptacle of/for Futurist indoctrinations (at the expense of sexual difference). However, as Luce Irigaray explains:

The “receptacle” receives the marks of everything, understands and includes everything—except itself. . . . The receptacle can reproduce everything, mime everything, except itself, it is the womb of mimicry.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, as a receptacle of Futurist critique and (re-)education, Robert ironically inverts her original intention (becoming one and the same as man) to that of an analysis of the maladies of Futurism.

Although Robert acknowledges a certain violence of representation in the

image of woman invented by the *fin-de-siècle* poets, she does not launch an attack against the process of representation itself, but takes the images (the products themselves) as the focus for her critique. As a consequence, instead of dismantling the apparatus of representation Robert dismembers the female body—the object of representation—leaving the feminine in the realm of fragmentation and suffering. By remaining within a strictly phallographic discourse, Robert reveals the “lack” of a feminine-gendered speaking subject, a lack of self-definition and discourse space. Without symbolic placement or feminine discourse, “La donna lascia credere che ciò sia vero perché quasi sempre le fa più comodo adoperare la propria debolezza apparente come un’arma fra le sue più valide.” Adriana Cavarero explains that within the phallographic or symbolic discourse:

Woman is not the subject of her language, her language is not hers. She therefore speaks and represents herself in a language not her own, that is through the categories of the other [in this case in reference to the phallus], she thinks herself as thought by the other. . . Discourse carries the sign of its subject, the speaking subject who in discourse speaks **himself** and speaks a world starting from **himself**.<sup>10</sup>

Thus sexual difference masks an erasure of the discourse of the other (in this case the feminine). It is precisely this masquerade of sexual difference which Robert collapses in her drive for that which Irigaray calls “Sameness”—the desire to articulate herself as one (a masculine speaking subject). However, in this unmasking of the masculine economy of representation (a violence enacted on a silenced other), Robert does not appropriate the site of sexual difference and hence exploitation (the female body), but exposes it as an open wound, an absence, a lack, a silence. Robert mimics the violence of representation, directed at her own sex and body.

Although *Un ventre di donna* does not lend itself too easily to the agenda of modern feminism, it poses and foregrounds many problems plaguing feminists today, such as the question of female subjectivity (authorial voice) and the question of writing the body—whether it is possible to write without speaking as a masculine subject and whether it is possible to write the body without violating the body in some profound way. I will discuss Robert’s *Un ventre di donna* in relation to the agenda of Futurism, since it not only appropriates Futurist discourse and stance in regard to women, but is formed as an intra/intertextual discourse with Marinetti. Therefore, instead of attempting to incorporate Robert into feminist discourse, I read *Un ventre di donna* as an ironic text which exposes a series of contradictions, neuroses, male-paranoias and ultimately a schizophrenic polemical practice, present not only in Robert’s

writing, but also embedded within Futurist discourse itself. Although I may be treating Robert's intentions unjustly by reading the text as an ironic mimicry of a predominantly masculinist and misogynist Avant-garde movement, I feel it is more beneficial to pursue the aspect of mimicry where I can interpret the internalization of misogyny which amounts to a rigorous self-critique bordering on self-hatred and self-mutilation as a symptom of the desire for "Sameness," rather than a necessary step in the process of women's liberation. That is not to say that Robert's critique of the status of women is not valid as a necessary process of exposing the logic of othering—the act of representing and hence reducing others (in this case women) to universal mythic categories. The problem lies in the conversion of a self-critique into a self-hatred, the rendering of the feminine as the un-hygienic wound. Therefore, I will divide my analysis of the text in accordance with its structural and thematic splitting: the unmaking of wom(b)an, and the making of the "donna futurista," wom( )an, where the body as woman is left in the realm of pain and "il vuoto assoluto."

*Un ventre di donna* reflects the conflicting desires and aspirations of Futurism, which articulate a sadistic destruction of the amorous and consuming "fatale femme" [sic] and equally fatal mother, displacing the desire for woman (as a sexual object) to the (masochistic) machine and the image of the mother from the anatomical nurturing body to the metaphysical mystic or "fuliggini celesti," un "Materno fossato quasi pieno di un'acqua fangosa."<sup>11</sup> While the stripping of the real woman from these (bourgeois) mythic models of representation merely returns woman to another set of myths (sending the form of woman into a metaphysical abstraction), this dialectic of symbolic images contains within it a subversive potential—demythification of universalizing mythic categories in the dominant institutions of bourgeois culture. However, the aim of Futurism is not to liberate women from the "prostituzione legale" and the "mascherata di ipocrisia" of the family; instead it is a liberation of the male from an infectious feminization of society.<sup>12</sup>

Robert clearly agrees with the Futurists, that the moralistic and "fatale" woman (such as Elenora Duse) symbolizes death in life. Robert distances herself from these "cadaveri vestiti di pellicce calde" by allying herself with the Futurists in their call for a radical and violent negation of the seuctive power of the vampiric woman.<sup>13</sup> However, for her this negation is not a radical separation of the sexes (as the Futurists demand), but a dialectical transcendence from a constituted identity (a demeaning stereotype) to a more superior identity (a desire for masculine power), in order to liberate women from their stereotypical role as "le donne che divorano il sesso dei prigionieri italiani" (170). Robert vehemently critiques those women who accommodate themselves to "la propria debolezza"—a pre-established role, inherently "weak" since it is not self-created, but

reproduced. For Robert, as for the Futurists, seduction is a secondary power—a passive power that traps and consumes “unadulterated” masculine power is active, pene-trating, cutting—come “la rosa spada del sole che schermeggia per la prima volta.” Futurism adopts a Sadian model, equating the mother/woman with secondary nature—soft molecules which are subject to the laws of creation, conservation, reproduction, and death. Hence the mother/feminine symbolizes the antithesis of masculine potency. Gilles Deleuze explains that within the logic of sadism the father by contrast, “represents intrinsically primary nature, which is beyond all constituted order and is made up of wild lacerating molecules that carry disorder and anarchy.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, at the same time the father acts on the severity of his agency, he destroys order, law and the institution of the family, marking the end of procreation and the commencement of the Sadian automation. Within the Deleuzian understanding of the Sadian economy, it follows that men belong to nature only via “social conservatism,” and are subject to sadistic violence only insofar as they depart from their “essential” anarchic nature (becoming part of what Robert calls the “cretinismo maschile e di pudori”), while women become the sadistic victims *par excellence*, since they are victimized for upholding their “true nature.” However, the Futurists distinguish between the essential (anatomical) and the normative (morphological) formations of identity: Valentine Saint-Point argues, “È ASSURDO DIVIDERE L’UMANITÀ IN DONNE E UOMINI; essa è composta soltanto di FEMMINILITÀ e di MASCOLINITÀ.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that the Futurists believe women are made and not born, i.e. gender is not an innate feature (as sex maybe), but a socio-cultural construction, and precisely for that reason is oppressive to women, the Futurists do not explode the pre-existing content of essentialist ideology, but authorize the patriarchal hegemony, in yet a more extreme, “pure” manifestation. While the Futurists attempt to deconstruct the mechanisms of othering/engendering of the sexes, they collapse sexual difference into the economy of the same—paradoxically validating the traditionally established “essential” qualities of man. Rather than exploring the fluidity of difference, Futurism calls for the negation of the poetics of the body and a promotion of its regimentation and mechanization.

Along with the debased power of seduction which primarily preys off the desires of the flesh, Robert rejects the libidinal drives of the female body as deficient, passive, self-embracing rather than “lacerating,” as transferring desire to the realm of self-expression: “spiego con ardore la mia passione del nuovo. Le mie impressioni sul Futurismo come caotica forma d’avanguardia” (93). Instead of reproducing herself as the seductive woman who is also devoured by the prisons of bourgeois institutions—the “prostituzione legale” of the family, parliament or a victim of (mis)representation—Robert explores the “passione



via arte” which she attributes to the Futurists, a passion that is inextricably tied to anarchic actions, a passion (a pure agency) that cannot accumulate, possess or consume, but one that must risk (if not demand) its own destruction. This Futuristic passion reacts against an infinite continuity (as passivism) with a (dehumanized) desire for infinite destruction, based on the principle that one cannot possess what is lost.<sup>16</sup> Destruction becomes the only valid expenditure of energy; a violence that does not distinguish itself along political lines, but defines itself as a binary opposite of the passive yet **consuming** feminine.

For Robert these objectless passions and desires are expressed through a “caotica forma d'avanguardia,” a chaos designed to revolutionize the old (romantic or nostalgic) order which left her trapped in “il vuoto assoluto,” where as “una vedova e bella a venticinque anni avrei dovuto **subire la legge impostami dalla società** e specialmente dalle mie amiche rimaritarmi” (3, emphasis mine). However, this process of de-objectification of desire is prefaced with physical pain. It is only through a sadistic economy of destruction or “laceration” that the Futurists move beyond the possessive order and accumulative desires; however, Robert reflects this process as an internalization of this sadistic economy, where pain becomes the only means of interrupting the placement of women within the bourgeois code of social behavior. Futurism’s movement away from the communal (the emotional and the objectification of the perceptual) world leaves (especially) woman, who has no discursive historical reference, with no other referent but the human body—being acted upon, inscribed on. Thus, without emasculating herself—adopting phallogocentric discourse—Robert would be left in the silence of pain, with no objects of her own.

Robert does not embrace the ideal of the mechanization of the male body as much as the move to strip away the “old” regimes which imprison the female within her body. However, Robert does not advocate the liberation of the female body nor the mechanization of the female body (which would merely replace her to the “funzione conservatrice della specie”), rather she focuses on chaos as a violent disruption of the bourgeois regimes, where the female body itself becomes a necessary sacrifice for liberation. Yet, what Robert seeks to “liberate” remains ambiguous—the body of the heroine is “liberated” only by the elimination of her reproductive capacity. Freedom from the animalistic condition of woman is defined by an escape into the imaginary (via mind and spirit); however, the only means of liberating the esoteric energies of the mind is through language, a symbolic language that is already laden with a history of phallogocentric coating (meaning).

Robert’s heroine rebels against this social positioning of woman within the realm of marriage—as a submission to the laws of private property. Instead of allowing herself to be remarried she finds “il corpo di un’uomo simpatico

intelligente che oggi si chiama lui,” a nameless man who also functions as a father to her son. Although she later names him (Gulio), she refuses to enunciate “family” names which would allude to the patrilineal history as a system of ownership and subordination of women. Robert represents her heroine as an independent woman with a “spirito scontento, ironico, scatta via” (4). In addition to the denial of the name which would incorporate her within a system of patrilineage Robert rejects the name of the father—the faith in the Word of God which inhibits a freedom of action and will:

Dio?? Chi è Dio, Dov'è? Il conforto supranaturale non ha per me alcuna importanza . . . la vuota immagine del Dio barbuto venerato dalla gente ignorante e la idea astratta di un Dio invisibile creatore del mondo. . . . (60)

For Robert Christianity as the faith in God symbolizes another prison of the imagination; faith reinforces the weakness and ignorance of the masses, who are more comfortable holding on to their own static beliefs and positions rather than acting on their own imagination and wills. Hence Robert's adaptation of Futurist discourse reveals more than a simple mimicry of phallogocentric discourse, since the Law itself is considered a secondary (feminine?) delegated power dependent on a supreme principle of Good or morality. By rejecting the moral foundations of the Law, Robert reduces, as do the Futurists, the Law to a repression of desire and the will to power. Therefore, Robert opens a discourse on the seemingly closed circuit of morality, which merely tends toward the repetition of a state of equilibrium based on a need to believe in objects (specifically phallic) that are already solidly determined. Although Futurism itself is based on masculine parameters, it views upholding the Law as an acceptance of silence, death as a condition of remaining subject to phallogocentric discourse and its institutions. This perception of morality as death reduces the Good (on which bourgeois institutions are “hypocritically” based) to nothingness. Ironically, instead of pursuing a critique of phallogocentric discourse, Robert adopts a more extreme version of that very discourse (unmasked aggression) as a means of militarizing the feminine.

It is the desire to speak that becomes the act of passion (the act of violence or in Robert's case a violation of the feminine as it was constituted by a male tradition) which necessitates the destruction of the institutions which maintain bourgeois (feminine?) hegemony (via “la legge”) and challenges the narratives which legitimize this hegemony. Gramsci similarly expressed an enthusiasm for Futurism's vivacious will to “tear asunder” the hegemonic power which forces “submission to the laws through which it orchestrates social positioning”:

I Futuristi hanno svolto questo compito nel campo della cultura Borghese . . . hanno distrutto . . . senza preoccuparsi—se le nuove creazioni, prodotte dalla

loro attività fossero nel complesso un'opera superiore . . . hanno avuto fiducia in se stessi, nella foga della energie giovani.<sup>17</sup>

Although Robert was not concerned with drawing on Futurism as a model for a possible proletariat entrance into the arts, both Robert and Gramsci agree that Futurism provides a space for marginal groups such as women and the proletariat not only because of its radical opposition to bourgeois institutions, but also because of its ability to integrate (a predominately male) high culture with a low culture (a possible inclusion of the economic and sexual other). The “foga della energie giovani” or the “forma caotica” promises a certain implosion of the bourgeois system, by challenging the pre-ordained “decency” and “normalcy” of bourgeois traditions and institutions—a challenge of faith. However, Gramsci, distanced himself politically from the Avant-garde, which remained attached to bourgeois society precisely because it needed money. He did not praise Futurism for its social platform, but as an agent of delegitimization of the laws of the superstructure. However, it is this attachment not only to the economic system, but also to the superstructure itself (specifically its patriarchal aspects), that problematizes the process of deconstructing the dominant (economic, moral and ideological) system. As Walter Benjamin explains: “War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property.”<sup>18</sup> While Futurism rejects the bourgeois system of values (including property ownership under the laws of capitalism), morals and “democratic” institutions which are perceived as robbing the people of their real existence and giving the masses a false sense of pride, it mimics the mechanical system of production, displacing macro-political power onto gendered power relations. Thus the Futurists encode their own war against the bourgeois modes of enculturation with all of its repressive institutions as a rejection of the “feminization” of society. Violence and aggression not only become an aesthetic ideal, but a constant process, a permanent revolution rather than an organized political movement.

Although Marinetti disregards any feminist “equal rights” movement as purely a submission to further inoctrinations of the pre-existing system of moral order, he regards feminism as a means to imploding those very institutions of law and order. For Marinetti, not only would women’s infiltration into the parliament and law-making institutions cause the destruction of the nuclear family (primarily of *mammismo*), but it would prove to be an “animalizzazione totale della politica,” and ultimately lead to the death of “parlamentarismo.” Therefore, while women would be participating in the illusion of government representation, “un governo composto di donne o sostenuto dalle donne ci trascinnerebbe fatalmente, per vie di pacifismo e di viltà tolstoiana, ad un trionfo

del clericalismo e dell'ipocrisia moralista."<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically Marinetti relies on the traditional myths of essentialism, yet he recognizes their historical and socio-cultural specificity. His philosophical critique of the feminist agenda (which most likely he borrowed from Valentine de Saint-Point) reflects this paradox by displaying primarily a misogynist interpretation of the female sex; however, Marinetti had an advanced understanding of the ideological implications of equality of the sexes within a predominately patriarchal culture. As Teresa de Lauretis explains, feminism's fight for women's equality with men is misdirected since equality is "an ideological attempt to subject women even further, to prevent the expression of their own sense of existence, and to foreclose the road to woman's liberation."<sup>20</sup> Equality becomes what Irigaray calls a masquerade, which, unlike the play of mimicry, contains no intentional irony—a polemical gesture aimed at the condemnation of the patriarchy and its power structures. It is an unconscious mimicry which masks a re-submission to the domination of the patriarchy. Thus, there are no equal rights under laws and institutions which protect private property, whether that property is defined as capital or the possession of a husband or wife. Justice as well as the equal representation put forward by the parliamentary system and the ideology of the state apparatus become a farce not only in the platonic sense, but also in respect to the high ideals on which the hegemonic (patriarchal) system legitimizes its authority. Therefore, in order to achieve freedom from the hypocrisy of the bourgeois system—from the "prostituzione legale" and the "illusione di dominio"—the Futurists do not support the idea of historical necessity, but an epistemological rupture from the continuum of historical (and I would argue patriarchal) thought.

The paradox in this Futurist unmaking of organized politics and political/moral discourse is that woman is simultaneously perceived as a prisoner of that very discourse while she is also absent from that discourse—she is consistently being spoken for, yet she is inaudible or inexpressible. According to De Lauretis "woman is displayed as a spectacle [in Robert "un ventre," "un utero sofferente," "un materno fossato," "cadaveri vestiti di pellicce calde," etc.] and yet unrepresented, a being whose existence specifically is simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled [where] the body itself becomes an object of manipulation to 'la fredda esplorazione professionale.'" *Un ventre di donna* reveals this paradoxical situation when the heroine claims: "non credevo che il mio potere violato da una mano tecnica [which belongs to the doctor she names Jack lo sventratore], dovesse tanto soffrire . . . la più inaspetta sensazione erotica" (26). While she declares "scienza impotente che sei il peggior bacillo che infesti il mondo" (160), she is fascinated by the "tools" which are used to dismember her body, as well as the "tools" of Futurist poetics prescribed by Marinetti, because these "tools" symbolize a source of power—to which she is forced to

submit. Thus, the body (feminine terrain) is the locus of pain and the voice is the locus of power (masculine). However, she is excluded from the language of medicine (or scientific discourse) by doctors who find her incapable not only of understanding the maladies of her own body, but incapable of emotionally accepting the gravity of her situation. Thus, her body becomes a "spectacle" which is manipulated as an object, made knowable by scientific experimentation, yet "unrepresented"—she is denied entrance into a discourse on her own body. Scientific discourse as science itself becomes a weapon used against her, instead of a tool of recitation. Within medical or scientific discourse the heroine becomes an unreliable narrator of her own bodily events. Here Robert reveals science, not only as a violation (if not a rape) of the patient who has no choice other than to suffer the consequences ("carne bruciata," in "silenzio caldo" / "silenzio freddo"), but as a silencing of the patient's expression of sentient content. By bypassing the voice of the patient, Jack lo sventratore also bypasses the bodily event, as a painful experience. Hence, he not only "rips" out her "natural" power of reproduction, but denies her any entrance into a dialogue with a medical practice performed on her body. Without an understanding of the procedures enacted on her body she is left only with her sensory facilities and with the experience of pain, completely helpless in relation to the "fredda esplorazione professionale": "sente il freddo della lama che affonda nella carne floscia . . . sente un getto di pus caldo sul ventre ghiacciato" (82). The heroine identifies only with the delicacy of the flesh which is subjected not only to the uncontrollable infection ("getti di pus"), but the penetration of science—the intrusion of the blade, the inspection which makes the unknown knowable, and finally the violation of that flesh by the hand of Jack lo sventratore who carves out her womb. The unmaking of the heroine's womb deconstructs the institution of medicine's masquerade of aid or healing, since the doctor is at once made the actual agent of the pain (violation) and the demonstration of the effects of pain on the human body. In addition, the symbolic dismembering of the heroine reflects not only the decapitation of her sentient experiences, but also the violence of representation which dissects (makes knowable) and assigns identities the other (in this case dehumanizing the wom(b)an).

The more the heroine demands access to the knowledge of her own physical condition the more she is ignored and driven to anger; the heroine retaliates by calling the doctors "assassini, i macellai sveglia . . . la mia carne è mia!" (81, emphasis mine). However, these outbursts are interpreted by the doctors as "vigliaccheria." Therefore, at the same time that she is reduced to the sentient language of the body, it is the perceptible and emotional qualities which are left to the unseen and unheard—invisible geography—while the body itself is objectified, manipulated and dismembered (silenced). Robert not only emphasizes

the lack of control of the heroine/patient in regard to the doctors or “assassini,” but the body itself becomes an uncontrollable force turned against her: “ma trovato diffusissimo il male necessita di **asportare tutto**, profonde sutore dell’utero, che **cominciava ad intaccarsi**” (69, emphasis mine).

Ironically this simultaneous negation of the female body and decapitation of woman (an exclusion of women from a dialogue with phallogocentric discourse) is precisely one of the aims of Futurism. In his article “Contro il matrimonio” Marinetti calls for a radical separation of the sexes designed to protect men from “la piccola femmina come piccoli cicisbei o piccoli stupidi.”<sup>21</sup> Although Marinetti claims “bisogna metterle [le donne] a posto,” he replaces the dangerous seductive women with woman as a waste product: “**nel letto di un tubercolotico**, sotto la lingua di un vecchio, sotto i pugni di un nevrastenico, **fra le pagine di un dizionario** come una foglia secca, **in una tomba**, in una cassaforte o in una cloaca, ma bisogna metterle a posto.”<sup>22</sup> Although Marinetti postulates that the root of the problem emerges from a tradition of mis-education of women, he does not propose re-education of women (to equal that of man), but calls for the distancing of the real women who carry the baggage of social conditioning. Hélène Cixous argues that this dynamic positioning of the absent woman/other supports itself on the desire to “keep women in their place”:

. . . to keep women in their place of mystery . . . to keep her at a distance. [Where] she is always not quite there . . . but no one knows where she is. She is silence. Silence is the mark of hysteria; she is aphonic . . . [she is] decapitated.<sup>23</sup>

Cixous sees woman decapitated by the same patriarchal system which bases its (Oedipal) “Law” on a threat of castration: while men submit to the “Law” with a fear of castration, women’s tongues are cut off and “what talks isn’t heard because it’s the body that talks, and man doesn’t hear the body.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, he possesses the impotent power of giving fixed (dead) identities, while she (“la donna fa credere che ciò sia vero perché quasi sempre le fa comodo adoperare la propria debolezza apparente come un’arma fra le sue più valide”) remains inaudible, yet always already represented by the other—a dum(b)ping ground for a “stock of images” to which man sought to define himself in opposition.

Similarly Robert agrees to the silencing (if not dismembering) of the female body—as a disempowerment of the seductive body, a body which imprisons the imaginative power (masculinity) of women. However, this silencing is directed to acculturation of the real woman in the role of the “feminine,” and specifically the socio-historical positioning of women within traditional institutions as reflected through mass culture. Robert (as the Futurists) primarily reacts to the “feminization” of mass culture as an agent of cultural indoctrination, rejecting

the *fin-de-siècle* model of woman as well as the contemporary women's writing (letteratura rosa): "Sarebbe dunque l'ora di smettere il tono civettuolo e inconcludente che é caratteristico della letteratura muliebre d'oggi, e di cominciare con energia l'enunciazione . . . della anime nostre" (ix), and the body that "porta via i germi della maldicenza, sottile abilità donnesca, paziente ricamo femminile in cui ogni traforo é un tranello" (158). By de-activating this "tranello donnesco" Robert attempts to impregnate women with the primary power of language. The access to symbolic language, however does not female imaginary, but adopts masculine parameters. According to Julia Kristeva the aping of the phallic model or "saming" leaves woman to think of herself as impregnated by the Word, where "she should live and think of herself as a male homosexual."<sup>25</sup> Robert reveals the ambiguous placement of woman within this homosexual economy which causes her heroine to confuse the desire to be a man—"io penso che sarei stata un poco pittore e un poco poeta, se fossi nata uomo; l'amore non mi basta; mi sento veramente in questo momento, poco donna" (4)—with the desire for man as pure spirit—"un'altra realtà, un'altra gioia, un capriccio senza forma, un altro uomo, senza corpo e senza voce, un tipo astratto" (4), yet she dismisses this desire as "una pazzia." It is the denunciation of the feminine body and all of its associated "images" (specifically the power of fecundity symbolized by the womb) which displaces the Futurist women's sexual identity, where they become asexual (bodies without organs), guardians of the patriarchal (symbolic) order, even in its most misogynistic and sadistic forms. This "displacement" of women essentially amounts to their removal of the threatening woman—the woman who possesses the uncontrollable power of both life (as "il materno fossato") and death (as the *femme fatale*). From Kristeva's point of view, Robert's self-alignment with the symbolic Word of man positions her as one of "the Electras, militants in the cause of the father, frigid with exaltation—they are dramatic figures emerging at the point where the social consensus corners any woman who wants to escape her condition: 'nuns', 'revolutionaries', even 'feminists'?"<sup>26</sup> However, in the case of Futurism these "militant daughters," become accomplices in the sadistic war against the mother/other, which ironically forces them to deny their own physical existence. Within this "homosexual" economy the daughter becomes an accomplice to the patriarchy expressing her sadistic desires to negate the material and biological nature of the mother. Although Deleuze does not account for the circumstances in which women develop a desire to become part of the sadistic order, he postulates that the only point of entrance for women within the sadistic system is in her "elevation to an incestuous accomplice of the father."<sup>27</sup>

In order for Robert to become an "accomplice" to Futurism she associates with the masculine obsession of gendered violence, which becomes more of a

threat to herself as woman than to her male counterparts, since not only do men possess control over the productions of mass culture, but she must internalize this gendered violence as a self-mutilation (masochistically). Robert responds to this sexual anxiety—fear of the uncontrollable female potency, and of the castrating female—by relinquishing all the “symbolic” powers associated with women, and those physical apparatuses which pose a threat to male potency.

Robert does not search for a place for the female body, nor does she explore the female body. For her the body is a “cadaver in warm fur,” it is an open wound which if it cannot be erased it must at least be endured; she re-places the body from the site/function of the breeding ground to that of the infection, and as a consequence, lays it in the hospital bed—immobile and unrepresentable. Her adaptation of the fear of the uncontrollable generative mother repels her from the body and leads her toward a respect for the body of the other, her fellow man, her brother. This sadistic process of negating the mother is mirrored in Robert’s unmaking of her heroine’s body as a necessary sacrifice of her own feminine and motherly qualities. The surgical removal of the womb leaves the female body as a vacuum, a void containing only negativity and death. In a letter to the heroine, Marinetti draws an analogy between her dismembered “ventre” (as the site of origination of man) and that of the “ventre” of the trenches which contain the dismemberment of the male body (the serialization of society via war, the final destination of man):

Il vostro ventre è profondamente simbolico. Infatti il vostro ventre somiglia a quello della terra, che ha oggi un’immensa ferita chirurgica di trincee . . . la vostra ferita è identica alla nostra, il terreno che ci divide dal nemico. (113)

Marinetti encodes this sacrifice of fecundity as a sympathetic patriotic act—it is the destruction or sterilization of not only the site of reproduction, but the product of the reproductive process itself, the implosion of “il golfo carnale.” Although the heroine generates new symbolic analogies as a “celestial belly,” it is a belly that, instead of generating, consumes. This again replaces the body as vacuum, privileging the creativity of the imagination over that of the body—mind/spirit over body. Georges Bataille explains that “the body [within a sadistic economy] becomes a thing, vile, slavish, servile, just like a stone or a piece of wood, only the spirit with its intimate and subjective truth cannot be reduced to a thing.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is the sacred housed in a profane body, which Robert attempts to liberate. Although Robert’s ultimate goal is equality of the sexes, at least in respect to the education and modeling of women after the male imaginary, *Un ventre di donna* articulates woman as a suffering wound (womb), also revealing the irony and schizophrenia of a woman who cannot escape the profane bar of sexual difference. Within the imaginary the heroine’s stomach can be stretched out on



the battle field (placed in the celestial mud); however, her desire for sameness appears as an empty hope, returning her once again to the space of a lack, a wound: "Che schifo essere un utero sofferente, mentre tutti gli uomini si battono e pensano che non ho nemmeno il coraggio di supportare le iniezioni" (26). The heroine's desire for inclusion in phallogentric discourse and garrulous agencies is counteracted by her revelation of the birthing process itself—she reflects "ecco la mia creatura, nata da me, voluta da me, portata da me, nel mio ventre" (4).

Robert never resolves this dichotomy of the pleasure of giving birth (generative power) and that of sacrificing the body in order to prove herself not only equal to man's ability to withstand pain (as in the case of the men in the trenches), but also eliminating the threat of female generative power (womb envy, which is also displaced onto seduction). Although Robert models the womb after the Futurist conception of the city—that must be destroyed in order to be rebuilt for each generation—, this loss, lack or wound is not welcomed without remorse. By stripping away the pre-established feminine powers the heroine places herself in an ambiguous space—a body without organs which contains the imagination and ideology of the Futurist man, but is not quite one. Thus, this space becomes a non-space, a void ("il vuoto assoluto"), where the heroine can be neither completely male, nor female, her place is one of silence and pain from which a self-hatred emerges, reflected in her intricate detailing of not only the maladies of her body, but also the surgical process itself. Not only does the heroine express a resentment for being "un utero sofferente," that cannot fight amongst men, but also a resentment for no longer being a woman:

Non mi lasci dunque nemmeno ridere, odioso nemico rifugiato là dove dovrebbe solo palpitare un largo fiore fecondo? Tu mordi i miei figli quelli che aspetterei formarsi e vivere sotto il getto raggiante della creazione. Tu distruggi il mio fervore materno, e mi dilanii. (201)

Robert demonstrates a slippage in the masquerade (the attempt to ape the phallic model) as the revenge of the body that not only cannot be masculinized, but also no longer contains the (albeit "secondary") power of reproduction. Although *Un ventre di donna* presents an alternative discourse for women's writing—an exploration of the imaginary via Futurism—the heroine returns to the discourse of the body, yet this time a wounded body (and a wounded spirit), a body (and an imaginary sensitivity) in pain—"mi rende la fede nella mia carne, salda fede che la scienza stessa tentava di togliermi" (84).

Ironically, Robert uses physical pain as a vehicle of transcendence, a substitute for the death of the mother (female anatomy) only to be reborn in phallogentric discourse. However, as Elaine Scarry explains, pain, as death, is the most intensive negation, the purest expression of anti-human annihilation

where “all the contents of consciousness are destroyed”:

Pain disintegrates perception—contents of consciousness are obliterated during those moments, the name of one’s child, the memory of a friend’s face are all absent . . . the created world of thought and feeling, all the psychological and mental content that constructs both one’s self and one’s world, and that which gives rise to, and is in turn made possible by language exist.<sup>29</sup>

Instead of transcending the body, Robert emphasizes woman’s carnal engulfment. Even if she believes this eradication of the womb to be a purification, she concludes *Un ventre di donna* focusing on the “fibre rosse della mia carne più pura,” directing her “spirito aggressivo” towards her own desire for “una povera vendetta” she holds against the fecundity of other women’s “ventre isterico”—“Voglio denudare la bruna nervosità di questa fragile donnina dagli occhi grandi troppo spesso spalancati sul mare” (209). Hence, Robert’s initial militant desire to negate (“mammismo” and the seductive women) transposes into resentment of women (as a male homosexual, a womb envy) once she is re-placed in the text as a body without organs. Although the dismembering of her anatomy allows her to distance herself from the “second sex,” and enter into a discourse with Marinetti, she remains (placed) in the hospital bed—accentuating the painful process of women entering into a male dominated movement/discourse. According to Scarry, as the body breaks down, “the voice becomes the final source of self extension . . . so long as one is speaking the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, and occupies a space much larger than the body.”<sup>30</sup> This becomes Robert’s only means of survival. Ironically, this self-extension via the imaginary (that which is diametrically opposed to the entrapment in the sensory body) is prescribed by Marinetti. Yet this projection of the self outside of the body once again returns to a phallogocentric splitting of the mind and the body—a semantic distance between the maker (the mind) and the receiver (the body or the other) which secures for the self a position of mastery. In addition, the very belief that the voice or the imaginary extends the self assumes a mind-body split of which Robert proves herself to be incapable, since even her Futurist writing eventually returns to the body.

Contrary to Marinetti’s analogical interpretation the womb as a wound of a nation, the heroine embarks on her own exploration of Futurist writing, based on her sentient experiences of pain and sense of loss. However, she goes no further than to demonstrate the violence of representing the feminine within Futurist phallogocentric discourse—and the impossibility of creating a feminine subjectivity within that discourse. Through a process of mimicry, Robert expresses the desire for equality, which essentially means becoming a man, yet she also reveals the inescapability of the female body, by returning to even an

empty womb—de-naturalizing only herself in the process.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>F. T. Marinetti, "Fondazione e manifesto del futurismo" and "Contro l'amore e il parlamentarismo", 1910, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano de Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968) 10-11, 293.

<sup>2</sup>Enif Robert, "Come si seducono le donne," *L'Italia futurista* 2.36 (31 December 1917), rpt. in *Le futuriste*, by Claudia Salaris (Milan: Edizioni delle Donne, 1982) 111.

<sup>3</sup>Enif Robert, "Una parola serena", *L'Italia futurista* 2.30, (7 October 1917), rpt. in *Le futuriste* 108.

<sup>4</sup>Susan Rubin Sulciman, *Subversive Intent: Gender Politics and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990) 26.

<sup>5</sup>Claudia Salaris, "futuriste: donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia (Milan: Edizioni delle Donne, 1982) 61.

<sup>6</sup>Salaris 61.

<sup>7</sup>Marinetti, "Distruzione della sintassi - Immaginazione senza fili - Parole in libertà" (11 May 1913), *Teoria e invenzione futurista* 66.

<sup>8</sup>Marinetti, "Distruzione della sintassi" 68.

<sup>9</sup>Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 98.

<sup>10</sup>Adriana Cavarero, "Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," *Diotima*, rpt. in *Sexual Difference*, ed. and trans. Teresa De Lauretis (Bloomington: Milan Women's Bookstore Collective-Indiana UP, ) 47.

<sup>11</sup>Marinetti, "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo" 7.

<sup>12</sup>Marinetti, "Contro il matrimonio," *Democrazia futurista*, *Teoria e invenzione futurista* 369.

<sup>13</sup>Enif Robert and F. T. Marinetti, *Un ventre di donna* (Milan: Facchi, 1919) 157-58. All further references to this text will be noted parenthetically within the body of the paper.

<sup>14</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (Cambridge: Zone-MIT P, 1989) 59. Original French published in 1967.

<sup>15</sup>Valentine De Saint-Point, "Manifesto della donna futurista," rpt. in *Le futuriste* 31.

<sup>16</sup>Fernando Pessoa, *Always Astonished*, trans. Edwin Honig (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988) 78. Ferdinando Pessoa explains that Futurism seeks in relativity, "that is, in what it calls physical transcendentalism, the creative reason of impressions, but it seeks only their physical outer, superficial and empirical reason, and not their

metaphysical, intimate, deep abyssic one.”

<sup>17</sup>Antonio Gramsci, “Marinetti rivoluzionario?”, *L'ordine nuovo* (5 Jan. 1921), rpt. in *Scritti politici*, ed. Paolo Spriano, 1st ed. (Rome: Riuniti, 1967) 396. Note that the article was not signed.

<sup>18</sup>Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry John (New York: Schochen Books, 1968) 241.

<sup>19</sup>Marinetti, “Contro l’amore e il parlamentarismo” 296.

<sup>20</sup>Teresa De Lauretis, “The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S. and Britain,” *Differences* 1.3 (Summer 1989): 17.

<sup>21</sup>Marinetti, “Contro il matrimonio,” *Democrazia futurista, Teoria e invenzione futurista* 370.

<sup>22</sup>Marinetti, “Contro il matrimonio” 370-71, emphasis mine.

<sup>23</sup>Hélène Cixous, “Castration or Decapitation?”, *Out There*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. MinhHa and Cornel West, New Museum of Contemporary Art Ser. (Cambridge: MIT P, 1990) 352-53.

<sup>24</sup>Cixous 353.

<sup>25</sup>Julia Kristeva, “About Chinese Women,” *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 147.

<sup>26</sup>Kristeva 152.

<sup>27</sup>Kristeva 152.

<sup>28</sup>Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986) 158.

<sup>29</sup>Elaine Scarry [William T. Fitts], *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 18.

<sup>30</sup>Scarry 33.