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Procreation and Cooperation. On Futurist Reproduction Postulates

The article constitutes an attempt at analysing futurist pronatalist discourse, on the basis of the manifestos and artistic praxis of the Futurists. The reproduction postulates, prevalent in the works of the Polish Futurists and usually placed in the context of vitalism, characteristic of the 1920s, are shown from a biopolitical perspective, emphasizing the intersection of the biological with the political and social horizons. The author attempts to trace especially the political entanglements of the “population project” of the Polish Futurists, which turns out to be marked by numerous paradoxes, situating itself between the pronatalist rhetoric typical of nationalist discourse (on the one hand, the discourse promoted by F.T. Marinetti, and on the other, the one formulated in Poland directly after regaining independence) and thinking in terms of a community which starts from the material functions of the body. In this second context, the reproduction postulates are not only an attack on bourgeois morality, but are closely connected with the futurist critique of all social institutions and the state apparatus with its biopolitical dispositions.

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“Get you to bed, that your belly grow!”¹
Aleksander Wat

In the endless dispute “reason or the heart,” among the Polish Futurists it is the belly that wins. “The world’s a vast and milky lump indeed, / possessed of infinitely many guts,” writes Aleksander Wat in 1921 in his poem “Begetting” (“Płodzenie,” 1921, Wat 1997, 285); while, in another place, he observes, “your bellies have swollen like balloons!” (Ibid., 284). Wat’s view chimes well with a remark made by Anatol Stern in 1919: “bellies are heavily laden with foetus.” This is the same Stern who managed to fit the sun in a belly (in the title of one of his poems: “The Sun in a Belly” [“Słońce w brzuchu,” 1919, A 201]). In “Dream Women” (“Kobiety wyśnzione”), instead of Venus, Stern praises “a big-bellied maid.” Whereas, in “Nymphs” (“Nimfy,” 1924, A 213) he draws the following picture: “The broad, borne, holds him by the hand / and calls / ha ha that hut has a fat gut”; and, later, “She points her finger at the flowered hill – / she is not ill at all – of her round tum / a small and chubby bub will promptly come / which from her tits will need to drink its fill.” In the poetry of still another Polish Futurist, Bruno Jasiński, we can find the following succinct anecdote: “ – A young girl she did go to town / – Um-pa-pa, Um-pa-pa-pa-pa / – Came back with her belly grown” (“The City”/ “Miasto,” 1921, A 147). Faced with a procreational collective mobilization, it is necessary to implement special solutions: “In cosmic spaces, / among birthing stars, / let’s put up hospitals and birthing homes” (“Płodzenie,” 1921, Wat 1997, 285)².

Undoubtedly, everything “breeds and begets here” (Wat 1997, 284). The above enumeration is just a small sample of excessively proliferated ideas, images and metaphors of procreation. The Polish Futurists, not caring about neo-Malthusian warnings and eugenic ideas, express a dream about a real demographic explosion. “Get you to bed, that your belly grow!” – Wat appeals to his readers in “Begetting” (Wat 1997, 285); and, in “Fertility” (“Płodność”), he repeats his call on a cosmic scale:

1 The fragments of the futurist poems cited in this article were translated by Jakob Ziguras. Unless otherwise specified, all the cited works, translated here, come from the following edition: *Antologia futuryzmu i Nowej Sztuki*. 1978. Red. H. Zaworska, Z. Jarosiński. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich. They are marked with “A” and the page number in brackets. I would like to thank especially Agata Wilczek for her invaluable help in translation of this article and Jakob Ziguras for the translation of the poems, careful reading and accurate advice.

2 Although these considerations relate to the reproductive imagery of a belly, it functions in futurist poems very often also as a figure of hunger or a powerful, vitalistic desire.

“May earth in bunches of quadrillion children bloom [...] that the cosmos swarm with human beings” (Wat 1997, 286). Stern, in the poem “A Woman” (“Kobieta”), formulates his own appeal: “Come quickly – let us build a corporeal tower, / on which, instead of stones, you will be giving me children!” (Pójdź prędzej – wieżę wzniesmy cielesną, / na którą mi, miast kamieni, będziesz dawać dzieci!”). And Tytus Czyżewski, in “Transcendental Panopticon” (“Transcendentalne Panopticum”, 1922, A 121) calls: “let us beget ourselves, be born, electrified.” This, provisionally called, “reproduction postulate” is at the same time one of the foundations of the futurist social critique, based on the rejection of all the rules of bourgeois reproductive morality. Thus, when the Futurists in various ways (both in their manifestos and poetic praxis) promote involvement in reproductive work for the sake of offspring production, regeneration, health and life maintenance, they try to undermine – in their own opinion – the traditional model of the family and the bourgeois gender contract. However, it is a kind of a “blind spot” in the futurist view.

Yet, was it the goal of futurist art to become a kind of institution providing an alternative to the state, biopolitical activity concerning the social implementation of the procreational ideal? Although the concept of the artistic modelling of procreational processes may sound a bit absurd, nevertheless, the idea of biopolitical, pronatalist social intervention that sometimes appears in futurist art cannot be denied. On no account is a brand-new futurist world synonymous with a technological utopia: the futurist project is by no means based mainly on machines; rather, it is based on bodies. After all, the new political economy proposed by the Futurists is to be the new politics and economy of bodies, being at the same time a planned blow to bourgeois morality and the very organisation of sexuality (Foucault 2007, 95). In fact, it misses the target and fails. However, the idea of founding the whole project on the materiality of the body seems to be a natural – though not frequently described – consequence of the dismantling aims of the avant-garde. While mounting an attack on ossified institutions and structures of power, the Futurists seek life, potential and positive values, not on the level of political, social and cultural forms, but on this very level of bodies. It is in bodies that they find a potential point of departure for the formation of new, productive bonds and political relations. Hence, their call to reproduction is intended to be a political postulate, based on the specific material reality of the body. Surprisingly, it is in the return to this reality that a possibility of conceiving new forms of community opens up. On the one hand – which is characteristic of the whole move-

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ment – these forms are based on sexual exclusion³; on the other, they reveal its unexpected face.⁴ But the question about the origins of this reproduction postulate and the whole population project of the futurist avant-garde prompts at least a couple of answers.

Where is life?

Although in the field of historical literary calques Futurism functions together with machinism, technological progress and the power of civilisation, “life” or “life itself” is one of the futurist key words. Nonetheless, we deal here with an ambivalent understanding of life. On the one hand, it undeniably forms a part of vitalism, a belief typical of that historical moment and founded on the hypothesis that phenomena of life contain non-material, non-physical and non-chemical vital forces. On the other hand, the Futurists do indeed firmly deny to the concept of life any metaphysical character, thinking in the same way as the materialists, who reject all forms of the vitalist hypothesis. They are rather suspicious of the enigmatic potential of creative life, the mystical elements of creationist optimism. And although, apparently, life in their views seems to be a superfluous, cosmic force, experienced as eternal abundance, it will more often find for itself a specific form. Undeniably, it is procreational figures that can serve as such forms: for the Futurists, life is not everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It is in a sexual act, in begetting, birthing, the exchange of body fluids, physiological processes and their effects; it is in a body, but most importantly, in a belly.

“And they praise You, / With your belly above broad loins / Woman!” (Tuwim). Although this “ode” to a belly sounds very similar to the futurist apologies quoted above, its author is Julian Tuwim, who makes

3 This problem was widely discussed in women’s replies to Marinetti’s texts and in futurist women’s manifestos, such as those of Valentine de Saint-Point, Mina Loy, Rosa Rosá or Enif Angiolini-Robert. This issue requires further discussion.

4 Lucia Re describes the complexity of this problem in the context of Italian futurism: “It is [...] rather misleading and historically narrow to associate Italian futurism *tout court* with the misogynistic violence of its origins, for in its long and complex history futurism’s relationship with women and its construction of the feminine” went through several different phases, although the discourse concerning gender and the relations between sexes remained a fundamental ground on which futurism insistently displayed its ‘difference’ and staked its importance as an avant-garde movement” (Re 2009, 800).

a woman, “a big-bellied mare,” “a wonderful mother,” or “a swollen female,” the main character of his famous dithyramb “Spring” (“Wiosna”) (published in the volume *The Dancing Socrates* from 1918, but written in 1915). “Spring” is just one of plentiful examples showing how, in the literature of the mid-war period, the procreational potential promoted by the Futurists, as well as woman reduced to a reproductive role, are entangled in a dense web of intertexts. In this regard, the futurist ideas situate themselves between the Skamandrite’s vitalism, with its images of life energy – often personified as a glorified primeval mother, or perhaps rather “a primal belly” (“prabrzuch”) (Ritz 2002, 157) – and Peiper’s sex antagonism, which leads to the exclusion of women from the processes of civilization (Ritz 2002, 165).

Commentators usually interpreted the explosion of reproductive energy in the work of the Polish Futurists as a reference to primitivism – a trend which linked together all the European movements, the Dionysian element widely disseminated in the culture of the beginning of the century or vitalism, typical of the poetry of the 1920s, inspired by the philosophies of Henry Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche⁵. Still, these explanations do not exhaust all possibilities. For there would be no significant difference, from this vitalist perspective, between the poetry of the Skamandrites and that of the Futurists: between Tuwim’s “Spring” (“Wiosna”) and Wat’s “Begetting” (“Płodzenie”), between Wierzyński’s “Spring and Wine” (“Wiosna i wino”) and Jasiński’s “Shoe in a Buttonhole” (“But w butonierce”). Yet, it seems that the difference is considerable. Admittedly, the characteristic motifs of spring euphoria, ecstasy or apotheosis of the present, which link the early Skamandrites’ and Futurists’ texts, were often pointed out. On the one hand, “the same stream of images emerges, regardless of theoretical programmes” (Dellaperrière 2004, 94); on the other, what was a core issue for the Skamandrites, for the Futurists constituted rather a point of departure. In the place of the Skamandrites’ vitalism and sensual approach to life, in the poetry of the Futurists appears materialism (Ibidem).

An interesting perspective seems to be offered by Adam Ważyk, who, in *The Peculiar History of the Avant-garde (Dziwna historia awangardy)*, at the beginning of the part entitled – significantly enough – “The Revenge of Matter” wrote: “In poetry, Futurism praised matter, and it was its fundamental feature” (Ważyk 1982, 340). Futurist materialism

5 Grzegorz Gazda pays attention to the fact that the studies of Italian Futurism appear in the Polish press together with the translations of Bergson’s works (Gazda 1974, 62).

was to have a “philosophical,” “elemental” and rather “naive” character (in fact, not differently from vitalism and organicism), presenting a view of “man as a non-spiritual being” and, thus, finding its negative point of reference in the cult of spirit of the Young Poland period. Ważyk supported his arguments with glaring examples: “Instead of cosmic forces in man – electrons and animal atavism (Czyżewski); instead of soul – the miracle of the human body (Stern); instead of metaphysical hunger – a hungry stomach (Stern, Wat); instead of lust, that is erotic fatalism – joyous fertility (Wat); instead of masks of culture – the savage’s instincts (Stern) and, of course, cannibalism (Jasiński) – a proposition as real, as probable as the one believing that Little Red Riding Hood will devour us all” (Ważyk 1982, 340).

However, the most important question is the following: where can the rethinking of futurist reproduction postulates, not from a vitalist perspective but from a material one, lead to? Ubiquitous in futurist poetry, the images of the cult of fertility – usually presented through the lens of vitalism – were to constitute the emanation of *élan vital*, which was the source of the development of the world of things, the guarantor of the survival of the species and of creative evolution. Yet, futurist fertility definitely cannot be enclosed within the frameworks of Bergson’s creative energy and the vitalist hypothesis; the forces of fertility are almost always related to reproduction shown in a purely materialistic way. What is most interesting, however, is the fact that it is not biological and physicochemical processes that unmask and, at the same time, destroy the mystery of *élan vital*. Procreation, in the futurist artistic projects, is presented neither in a vitalist nor in a strictly biological perspective – this is not what this juxtaposition of alternatives looks like; but the metaphors of fertility, sexual potency and reproduction are inextricably bound up with what I would call a futurist population project, emerging at the intersection of life – understood both vitalistically and materialistically – and social and political utopia. Evan Mauro writes about the “politicisation of life” – fundamental for the avant-garde, especially for Futurism – which “was designed as an alternative criterion of value to liberal capitalism’s regime of accumulation” (Mauro 2013, 120). If, as Michel Foucault claims, in the term of “population”, juridical-legal regulations of the population are closely linked with control of the body (Foucault 2010, 20-27), the biological horizon is intertwined with political and social ones. In this sense, the futurist concept of life inevitably goes beyond the rigid boundaries of the vitalist framework of interpretation. It rather provokes one to make an attempt – essential for neo-materialist reflection – to rethink the opposition between the

biological and the social, that situates in the biopolitical perspective. Indeed, this anagrammatic closeness of procreation and cooperation must have impregnated the futurist imagination!

The division of reproductive labour

Although the Polish Futurists firmly declared: “Marinetti is foreign to us,”⁶ admitting only a superficial familiarity with the work of their Italian predecessors and rather accentuating their fascination with Mayakovsky and the Russian avant-garde; yet, both their pronatalist rhetoric and the chosen line of presenting sex relations – characteristic of strong, male, heterosexual subjects⁷ – had its source in Marinetti’s manifestos, no matter how their main ideas reached Poland and whether they were used and transformed, whether consciously or not. Hence, when Stern and Wat write that “the value of a woman lies in her fertility” and Jasiński specifies: “Among architectural, artistic and technical works we distinguish THE WOMAN – as an ideal reproductive machine,” they repeat the most famous ideas of the misogynistic rhetoric of Italian Futurism. In fact, such claims of futurist “body politics” uncover and expose the typical idea of male exploitation of the female body in capitalism. As Silvia Federici shows, “the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor” (Federici 2004, 15).

Clara Orban, like many others, claims that “procreation or at least continued multiplication of the species, was central to Marinetti’s vision” (Orban 1995, 56–57). This is, of course, a part of the male-centric cultural paradigm, based on patriarchal symbolic violence. It is true that Marinetti states that a woman, with her reproductive potential, does not belong to a man, a husband, or a family; yet, she does not belong

6 The complex problem of the Marinetti’s impact on Polish avant-garde movements was precisely described in Przemysław Strożek’s monograph *Marinetti i futuryzm w Polsce 1909–1939. Obecność – kontakty – wydarzenia* (Strożek 2012).

7 “Futurism emerged from the ‘crisis of masculinity,’ as a response to the anxieties concerning social transformations at the beginning of the 20th century” – writes Kasper Pfeifer, in the opening to his detailed analysis of the futurist models of masculinity (Pfeifer 2018).

to herself either and does not have power to dispose of her own body. She belongs to the future, being an essential element of the racial expansion project, and reduced to a biological function (Ibidem).

What transpires here, however, is a male vision of reproductive work: either shared by both sexes or heroically taken over by men. All this occurs among the images of men giving birth with which the poetry of Italian as well as Polish or Russian Futurists is replete. A good illustration may be provided by Aleksander Wat's "Fertility" ("Płodzenie"):

On May 7, 1921
In Warsaw, at Green Square
A man was giving birth at dusk,
Screaming in a voice, mellow and wild;

everything breeds and begets [...]
A man, a woman and that neuter

7 maja 1921 roku
W Warszawie, na placu Zielonym,
Mężczyzna rodził o zmroku,
Krzycząc głosem matowym, dziczonym;

wszystko rodzi i płodzi [...]
Mężczyzna, kobieta i ten nijaki

It is not hard to explain, however, wherein the root of these types of images lies. In a similar way, the Futurists are aware of their mental experiments aimed at seeking new methods of reproduction, which separate fertilization from the sexual act, and foetal development and childbirth from the female body. Yet, once again, these have nothing in common with an emancipatory vision, exempting women from their reproductive obligation. These model images of male procreative self-sufficiency, are expressed either in the visions of machines taking over a reproductive role or in the representations of men possessing reproductive powers, in the visions of hermaphroditism, often based on a fantastical concept of parthenogenesis.

The most vivid expression of this male idea of sexual self-sufficiency can be found in the idea of romantic love, which stands in strong opposition to monogamous models (Rainey 2009a, 7) and the traditional concept of sexual differentiation. Marinetti's novel *Mafarka the Futurist*, "written immediately before the first Futurist manifesto, constitutes Futurism's imaginative centre and enacts its fantastical parthenogenesis:

Gazourmah, the metallic man-airplane, is conceived without the help of the ‘maleficent vulva,’ and is thus endowed with superhuman life and hyperconsciousness by the ecstatic self-sacrificing kiss of his father Mafarka” (Wittman 2009, 413). Mafarka’s motto sounds very clear: “Man’s spirit is an unused ovary... We shall fertilize it.” Thus, he introduces a classic patriarchal antinomy of a male spirit and a female matter. Yet, Marinetti tries to go beyond “this old dichotomy and sexual differentiation by spiritualizing matter through the creation of a mutant futurist being” (Re, 50). As a result, the ground is laid for a vision of a world without women, a world of men and machines, in which – as Clara Orban aptly sums up – “even the enemy has a role to play, but woman has none” (Orban 1995, 56). Marinetti’s mental efforts are aimed at creating a world in which the procreative function will be transferred. Hence, he builds images of the machines generating beings or men possessing reproductive powers⁸. According to many female researchers, in addition to interpretations of a social and political character, these fantasies would probably cover a characteristic fear of femininity, connected with a fear of losing masculine individuality and autonomy and, most importantly, a fear of sexual and reproductive dependence on a female body.

Politically entangled fertility

Although, on many occasions, Marinetti tried to propagate a social promotion of women, in fact, he always used arguments focused on their reproductive destiny. Even his support for divorces had no emancipatory meaning. In *Manifesto of the Italian Futurist Party*, he spoke for “Easy divorce. Gradual devaluation of marriage for the gradual increase in free love and creation of children of the state” (Marinetti 2009, 248). The futurist imperative for building a new world entails the collapse of the traditional idea of the family and marriage, which Marinetti regarded as one of the essential manifestations of the system of social repression. Surprisingly enough, on his way to the destruction of the institution of the family, as well as the whole bourgeois order and division of

8 The thought experiments concerning men giving birth will – interestingly enough – become a leitmotif among the avant-garde artists of the beginning of the 20th century. As one more example, let us mention a satire on the emancipatory ideas and population projects of those times, namely: Guillaume Apollinaire’s pre-surrealist burlesque entitled *Les mamelles de Tirésias* from 1917.

roles, Marinetti nevertheless perceived feminists as his most important allies (Re 2019, 51).

This futurist dismantling of the family implies the necessity to direct reflection to the level of the population. It looks as if, in their biopolitical vision, a significant part of which undeniably concerned the plans to destroy the family, the Futurists followed a path similar to the one described later by Foucault, who claimed that, in the history of culture, “the perspective of population, the reality of phenomena specific to population, makes it possible to eliminate the model of the family” (Foucault 2007, 140). Taking the perspective of population, as related to the phenomena occurring on a larger scale and irreducible to the framework of the family (Ibidem) or the local context, seems to be naturally bound up with the total project of the “futurization of life”. Its range was to have a universal character, by establishing a close link with the campaign for collective involvement in reproductive work.

Marinetti’s ambiguous political orientation, and his changeable views and alliances, were subject to a plenitude of interpretations in the international studies on the avant-garde. The complexity of the political issues of Italian Futurism was most widely examined by Günter Berghaus, who, already in the subtitle of his book *Futurism and Politics*, stretched the horizon of his interpretation between rebellion and fascism, and in the course of his analyses showed the history of the movement from the perspective of the influences of anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, revolutionary socialism, Italian irredentism, nationalism, the intended accessions to both the Left and the Right, up to the final support of Italian fascism (Berghaus, 1996). Even when all these contradictions were taken into account, what was still pointed out many times were the close connections between the sexual politics of Marinetti’s project and pronatalist rhetoric, characteristic of nationalist discourses and the discourse used later by Mussolini (Orban 1995, Gentile 2003, Re 2016).

In any analysis of the biopolitical aspects of the project conceived by the Polish Futurists, what remains absolutely fundamental is the historical moment at which they enter the literary scene. In the atmosphere of post-independence optimism, the postulates repeated after the Italian and Russian Futurists sound completely distinct. Polish public opinion, after 1918, is dominated by such issues as: population processes in postwar Europe, disturbances and transformations in the demographic structure, the balance of the sexes becoming upset, and a fall in the birth rate during the war and postwar compensative efforts, resulting in a high – one of the highest in Europe – birth rate until the end of the 1930s. A general national euphoria based on the idea of building

the state favoured this phenomenon as well. Thus, the historically and socially-conditioned phenomenon merges with the national postulate that the number of Polish people should grow (Kałwa 1999, 123), which has its three key dimensions: religious, economic and national. This exceptional interest in “maintaining a high reproductive rate among the proletariat” is shared by “the Catholic Church, capitalists and the state, which had aspirations to build a military power” (Kałwa 1999, 125). This tangle of motivations was grasped by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński in his famous essay “Women’s Hell” (“Piekło kobiet”) from 1929: “Capitalism gladly sees the excessive supply of workers, which lowers their price and throws them on the mercy of capital; militarism – *der Kaizer braucht Soldaten* – is faithful to the traditions of Frederick II, who regarded his subjects as his own “large zoo”; all this endows the commandment “Reproduce!” with patriotic, civic and social appearances” (Boy-Żeleński 1933, 83). In an atmosphere of increasing nationalism, the right-wing narrative formulating reproduction postulates saw a decrease in reproduction – understood as an opposition to the “duty of begetting Poles” – as tantamount to the weakening of the nation (Marcinkowska-Gawin 1997, 143). Hence, when Boy formulates his famous postulate about the “demobilisation of wombs,” he exposes the irreducible historical relationship between population politics and reflection in the categories of nationalism and militarism⁹.

Far from the subversive potential and the anarchism declared by the Futurists – and, in fact, remaining in the sphere of declarations – thinking in the categories of nationalism and enthusiasm for the newly-created state, constantly manifest themselves. For instance, when Czyżewski or Jasiński develop numerous organicist metaphors, perceiving a nation “as a physiologically living creature,” which “must form its own strong organism and its most suitable contemporary life” (Jasiński 1978, 40). One can thus ask if the reproduction postulates, and the whole population project in the work of the Polish Futurists, really reveal their paradoxical relationship with conservative pronatalist discourse.

9 The real critique of pronatalist rhetoric will gain widespread popularity only later, in the public debate on birth control, which will commence in Poland at the end of the 1920s. Conservative and Catholic circles will stand then in opposition to the supporters of neo-Malthusianism—as those who were in favour of the idea of birth control were collectively called.

Big-bellied city and countryside

As an indispensable part of the futurist utopia project, a great festival of fertility, would be, however, first and foremost connected with the critique of bourgeois culture and an attempt to transgress the language, forms and social relations created by capitalist economy. In the introduction to "The Land on the Left" ("Ziemia na lewo"), Stern and Jasiński outline a clear alternative: "Poets, choose: a living room of bourgeois culture lined with exotic, crumpled cushions of sentiment, or a naked street shaken with labour pains" (Jasiński, Stern 1978, 73–74). Futurism is to be a cultural and biological rebirth. The representatives of the movement understand this in a somehow straightforward way: without birth, there will be no rebirth; thus, they problematized the relationship between the biological, the social and the political. A city, though sometimes also the countryside, constitutes a stage for this provocative spectacle of potency and impotency.

German Ritz proposed an interesting correlation between depictions of a city and gender issues, in the avant-garde projects of the 1920's. Ritz placed a futurist city on the map of the interwar period somewhere between Peiper's city and the Skamandrite's palimpsestic one, consisting of a civilizational, modern surface and a mythical, romantic depth (Ritz 2002, 156). The most significant point of reference for this line of argument can be Tuwim's "Spring," whose addressee is a Dionysian, orgiastic crowd. And, according to Ritz, a city is the real "area of the battle of the sexes," where the subject is constituted in relation to nature; in the formation of this relation the attitude to the Other, that is, to the other sex, is revealed. The avant-garde battle for a city (marked by femininity) would, in fact, constitute a representation of the male fight for domination and possession (Ritz 2002, 158).

In the analysis of Stern's poem "Nymphs," Ritz shows a transition from the objectification of a woman in her procreative task and her elevation in the myth of a foremother, up to the point at which a woman becomes once again a subject of language (Ritz 2002, 162). This moment is an outburst of female laughter, when words are, at the same time, subject to dadaistic disintegration and syllabic combination, as well as to onomatopoeic operations, in which phonemes imitating laughter ("ha ha") and particles ("ha ha that hut has a full gut") are linked together. In the word play, in the Polish original, laughter, belly and home form here a combination,¹⁰ which, in a way, refers to an old Polish

10 Beata Śniecikowska thoroughly analyzes the implications of the instru-

proverb addressed to a guest, welcoming and encouraging him or her to eat. On the one hand, it is an euphoric invitation to enjoy all the offered benefits and goodness, which – once again – reduces a woman to a belly, to a sexual and reproductive function; yet, on the other hand, it is a suddenly, surprisingly resonating voice – subversive, the simultaneous singing and laughing of a woman subject, which dismantles the male-centric paradigm and male language, “independently organizes *morphe*, creates carriers of meaning, and thus initiates the process of semiosis” (Ritz 2002, 162). Hence, the ludic sing-song manages to break the avant-garde construct of inventiveness, invariably perceived as a male one.

What disturbs this construct is a female, ludic linguistic invention. The civilised countryside becomes a textual space of the event, which “loosens the historical anchoring of the symbolic order, determined in cultural (civilisation) terms, so the participants of the battle of sexes can constitute it anew in a ludic way” (Ritz 2002, 163). Ritz expands his thesis in relation to other poems written by Stern, in which a man of the city is a prisoner of the order of the sexes, and only in primitivist comebacks, a secondary naturalness, on a ludic or folk plane, can he form anew his/her sexual relations. This ludic vitalism has a considerably more important role to play than it has usually been given.

Nonetheless, it can easily be noticed that this rhetoric of male conquest – referring to the city and resulting from the tensions occurring in the battle of the sexes – crumbles in numerous images of infertility/impotency or wrong investments of procreational potential, which, in fact, very frequently become metaphors of the city itself: a city that is still non-modern by the futurist standards. Thus, for instance, Aleksander Wat begs fertility to come “in our cities, yellowed as eunuchs” (Wat 1997, 285), calling on the futurist restorers: “let’s crawl from cities, as from shrivelled husks, / cities where barrenness already strikes the gong,” and conjuring up visions of a future revival on the scale of the biblical Flood: “We’ll flood with tar cities of history, / And set you on the peak, fertility!” (Wat 1997, 287).

Thus does futurist sexual politics stretch the city between three negatively valued, inappropriate forms of investing reproductive potential. Firstly, the family: associated with a conservative view of procreation, which is rooted in the principles of bourgeois morality, against which the Futurists fight so hard. Secondly, prostitution: a sign of economic

mentation in Stern’s poem, showing how the text is connected with the idea of primitivism (Śniecikowska 2008, 419-423).

violence, shown as a waste of life energy and serving as a symbol of patriarchal, bourgeois corruption. In the third “dark” point on the city map, we encounter a negative character: an impotent or an onanist, accused of wasting reproductive potential. Each of these elements appears to be hostile to futurist revolutionary goals.

A similar critique is undertaken by Jasiński in his poem “The City,” in which he shows the city as a real biopolitical metropolis. The author of “The Land on the Left,” builds an analogy between three elements: a factory, a city and a body – placing them together in a cycle where industrial production corresponds to sexual reproduction; yet, at the same time, in the operation modes of the same machine, enormous reproductive potential is constantly wasted:

“Dark. Silent. Black.
None will make a sound, awaken.
It works, it works, at night
THE CITY—FACTORY OF MEN.” (A 147)

“In brothels, hotels [...]
In a thousand throngs with the rhythm of blood
Works a gigantic Dynamo.
Upon kilometres of straw the City lounges –
A vast, brewing henhouse” (A 147)

„Ciemno. Cicho. Czarno.
Nikt się nie ozwie, nie zbudzi.
Pracuje, pracuje w nocy
MIASTO – FABRYKA LUDZI” (A 147)

„Po burdelach, hotelach [...]
Tysiącem tłoków w rytmie krwi
Pracuje gigantyczne Dynamo.
Na kilometry sienników rozparło się Miasto –
Wielki, parzący się kurnik” (A 147)

In his vision, the poet transforms the industrial city into a biopolitical one, in which a factory is no longer separated by a wall from the urban space, and thus shifts the boundaries between the private and the public. Production and procreation take place within the area of the whole city, as in a biopolitical metropolis – as it is described by Negri and Hardt – which turns into a space of reproducing hierarchy and exclusion,

practising male dominance and sexual violence towards women. The impersonal metropolis itself – called by Jasiński “a factory of men” or “a gigantic Dynamo” – wields here “a silent economic control that is as vicious and brutal as any other form of violence (Hardt and Negri 2009, 280).

In the futurist manifestos, it is tiredness and exhaustion that serve as synonyms of bourgeois culture; the avant-garde reaction to them must be energetic and violent. Hence, they must respond to the principle of capitalist accumulation, the bourgeois ethics of saving and growing wealthy, with the uneconomical frenzy of spending, multiplying and begetting. They promote wasteful spending of potential; yet, not in order to lose but in order to multiply. It is neither the economy of wasting nor of reasonable accumulation; it is the frenzy of uncontrolled and dangerous multiplication. This politics of reproduction shown in the language of sexual economy makes it possible to easily determine the adversaries of the avant-garde. These will be: a frugal burgher, who procreates according to the conservative marriage pattern and a decadent, who – depending on the context – is personified either by an impotent or an onanist,¹¹ but definitely most often as a poet.

Jasiński repeatedly returns to these themes, making a poet-decadent-impotent one of the antiheroes of his manifesto *To the Polish Nation* (Jasiński 1978, 14) and, in another place, demonstrating the anti-futurist features of onanism, best suited to characterize all the passeisms: “Cubism, Expressionism, Primitivism, Dadaism have outdone all the ‘isms.’ What is left as a not yet exploited artistic trend is onanism. We suggest it as a collective name for all our opponents. As a form of justification we emphasize the fundamental elements of anti-futurist art: asexuality, inability to impregnate the crowds with their art, calm and passeistic masturbation in the darkness of melancholic studios” (Jasiński 1978, 17).

A poetic transformation of this theme can be found in the endings of the two poems by Aleksander Wat cited below:

“Only the poet, oblivious of the law of fertility,
hunts his own shadows, slouching low.
Don’t heed my verses, O naïve brood!

11 “Insults such as ‘eunuch,’ ‘castrate,’ or the insinuations about the adversaries’ alleged impotency, functioned in the language of the Italian Futurists as tried-and-tested invectives, with which their opponents were plied” – writes Kasper Pfeifer, in his thorough analysis of the futurist models of masculinity (Pfeifer 2018).

Get you to bed, that your belly grow!
In that enormous, swollen, wondrous clod,
sits and howls the real *futurus*" (Wat 1997, 285)

"Jedynie poeta, niepomny prawa płodności,
Garbiąc się, łowi swe własne cienie.
Nie słuchajcie moich wierszy, o naiwni ludzie!
Idźcie do łóżek, aby brzuch wam urósł!
W tej olbrzymiej, wzdętej i cudownej grudzie
Siedzi i ryczy prawdziwy *futurus*!"

Thus do we read in "Begetting," and in (the almost twin-like, as befits the cult of multiplication) "Fertility":

And when in wastes my hours, barren, boom —
heavy, pulsing, and like shot run low —
like a bell, swollen up with blood and sperm,
I call you with the virile roar of buffalo (Wat 1997, 287)

I gdy godziny me w pustkach bezpłodnie grmią
Ciężkie, pulsujące i wyczerpane jak ołów,
Jak dzwon nalany spermą i krwią
Wołam cię płodności porykiem bawołów

Both of Wat's poems finish with a view of infertility, whose "carrier" is a poet-impotent, a view which turns the classic, metapoetic rhetorical tropes inside out. Instead of praising his creative power, the poet is presented as "oblivious to the laws of fertility". He has no talent and word at his disposal, but only "blood and sperm." Instead of calling upon a muse for help, he is calling upon fertility – not with a rhyme but with the roar of buffalo; while the reader is called upon not to listen but instead to beget, not to passive reading but to reproductive activity. Thus, the desirable product of poetic efforts is not a poem but "that enormous, swollen, wondrous clod" – a pregnant belly, from which a voice of future, a howl of the real *futurus*, is heard.

Immunization and communization

The paradoxical entanglements and involvements of the futuristic social and political criticism outlined above should be considered its weakest

point, which makes it impossible to create a coherent vision of the society of the future. However, it surprisingly becomes possible, if we change the perspective and start not with the explicit criticism but from the concept of life.

In 1923, Bruno Jasiński wrote, “the Polish organism, unprepared by a vaccine, caught a bug of modernity. The fight of the organism with the bug has started, the fight for life or death – the hasty, frenzied production of one’s own antitoxins. [...] this period of fight and painful transformation of the organism will go down in the history of modern culture under the name of Polish Futurism” (Jasiński 1978, 53). By means of this precise, organic, immunological and at the same time martial metaphor, Jasiński reveals the connection between a virulent modernity and the social organism attacked by it. The stimulation of its immunological mechanism results in the call for an immunological response, which would be the avant-garde: born in pain and fever, standing – as a defence mechanism – on the side of life. Jasiński formulates the immunological argument in the context of the diagnosis of a suddenly emerging external threat to social identity, namely, modernity. In the view of the poet, however, immunization does not have the nature of a reactive attempt aimed to preserve identity and protect subjectivity: the process of antitoxin production initiates the painful transformation of the whole organism.

This paradox might suggest that what we deal with in the futurist project is a peculiar dialectics of immunization and communization. Immunization is a fundamental process constituting an organism by making it immune or resistant, and connected with separating it from the external environment, by enclosing and sealing – both its corporeal and subjective – boundaries. For Roberto Esposito, immunization becomes a form of biopolitical demarcation of the boundaries between I and non-I, a movement aimed at the protection of individual life, at individual safety, at the preservation of identity (Esposito 2013, 58). Communization is quite the contrary. Both terms derive from the same root: *munus*, which means a “gift” given in a community (Esposito 2013, 14, 55, 59).¹² Hence, the dialectics of immunization and communization is the dialectics of enclosure and opening – of that which is “proper,” one’s own, and that which is “common,” of giving and refusing to participate in the circuit of social circulation (Esposito 2013, 59).

This paradox might suggest that what we deal with in the futurist project is a peculiar dialectics of immunization and communization.

¹² Mikołaj Ratajczak analyzes, in detail, this etymological trail in the article: *Poza paradygmat immunizacji: biopolityka w filozoficznym projekcie Roberta Esposito* (Ratajczak 2011).

Undoubtedly, the futurist reproduction postulate seems like an ecstatic explosion of communal life. In the centre of Futurism there stands an affirmative politics of life, which – by means of art – promotes new forms of collective coexistence, breaking by means of an immunological independence from the dimension of community, from *communitas*. At the same time, it means situating oneself against property right, in its basic form connected with the body and fundamental for formulating the concept of subjective identity. It can be said that a Futurist does not want to own anything, even his or her body.

A figure perfectly antithetical to the above outlined ideal would be an onanist, appearing in so many futurist manifestos and poems, including the most famous – “The Pissoids” (*Pissuary*) by Stern (Majerski 2001, 78) – as the one who refuses to participate in the euphoria of procreation, in other words, an optimistic vision of creating the new life of a new community. It is mainly he who comes under fierce criticism from the futurist population project.

Taking the perspective of the dialectics of immunization and communization, allows for a slightly different arrangement of other futurist aporias. Undoubtedly, these aporias include the tension between thinking in national categories and cosmopolitanism, related to the total project of a supranational community which does not lay claim to any identity. This is one side. On the other, however, what is also unravelled here is one of the reasons why the Polish Futurists do not become Dadaists – in such a case, they would have to completely turn all the institutional forms inside out. And this is what they cannot do; on the rising tide of the post-independence euphoria they save the state as a new creation. Hence, the images of begetting and birthing frequently seem to ally themselves with nationalist, pronatalist rhetoric. Yet, the Polish Futurists become entangled in a peculiar paradox, as they decide at the same time to speak out against isolationist ideas of biopolitics, ignoring social relations and political borders. For they are real cosmopolites, who conceive a horizontal community against all hierarchies and borders.

Moreover, the communizing angle enables us to see one of the possible solutions to the paradoxical connection between the fascination with primitivism and the ludic, and technological utopia. The communizing ideal and dream about community make it possible to establish a link between the futurist understanding of the past and of the present – thanks to the aporia underlying the very concept of community, which is always and at the same time a matter of the past and the future. On the one hand, its – primeval and lost – ideal is situated in the past. On the other, the Futurists perceive community as one which is still to come;

it is a matter of the future and of future collective work. The Futurists want to unite, not on the basis of universally binding social and political laws but according to different rules, against social hierarchies, political divisions, economic exchanges. In this sense, thinking in terms of community or the collective is the most significant element of the futurist hostility towards politics and society.

The Polish Futurists seem not to think about subjects in terms of stable, sterile, sealed borders; on the contrary, they expose the boundaries of the subject to numerous disturbances, openings, exchanges and transfers – exactly against the modern tendency to the immunological sealing of a corporeal layer (Pacewicz 2017). Thus, Aleksander Wat's description of the world as “a vast and milky lump indeed,/ possessed of infinitely many guts,/ a starry-breasted mare with milk to feed/ stones, plants, beasts, humans, spirits,” may best convey a dream of liberating oneself from “the destructive and self-destructive logic of *immunitas*” (Esposito 2013, 64) and as an attempt to return to thinking about its opposite, “the open and plural form of *communitas*” (Esposito 2013, 64), which would imply the exposure to all the risk connected with the unsealing of the protective barriers of body and subject. It is just as if the real futurist revolution started from the body and the material functions of corporeality, in which unregulated and uncontrolled exchanges with the world and within a community lead to a great orgy of bodies.

Within this sphere, birthing and begetting are neither a matter of family, nor of institution, nor of state, but become a matter of collective life. Thus, they stand not only against culture, society, morality, religious rules and the family, but against the whole political apparatus with its biopolitical dispositions. The futurist anti-bourgeois claims fail in many fields, allying with conservative discourse or overlooking paradoxes and weaknesses, resulting from a narrow understanding of social, political, economic and gender categories. The communizing angle make it possible to see the potential of futurist thinking in terms of community or the collective and opens the path of completely different, alternative understanding of their political project, starting from the concept of life and body with unsealed borders.

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Tytuł: Prokreacja i kooperacja. O futurystycznych postulatach reprodukcyjnych

Abstrakt: Artykuł stanowi próbę analizy futurystycznego dyskursu pronatalistycznego na podstawie manifestów programowych oraz artystycznych realizacji. Postulaty

reprodukcyjne, na szeroką skalę obecne w wystąpieniach polskich futurystów, sytuowane zwykle w obszarze typowego dla lat dwudziestych witalizmu, ukazane zostają w perspektywie biopolitycznej, eksponującej miejsce przecięcia tego, co biologiczne z horyzontem politycznym i społecznym. Autorka próbuje prześledzić zwłaszcza polityczne uwikłania „projektu populacyjnego” polskich futurystów, który wykazuje liczne paradoksy, sytuując się pomiędzy pronatalistyczną retoryką właściwą nacjonalistycznym dyskursom (z jednej strony, tym propagowanym przez F.T. Marinettiego, z drugiej natomiast, konstruowanym w Polsce bezpośrednio po odzyskaniu niepodległości), a myśleniem w kategoriach wspólnoty, rozpoczynającej się od materialnych funkcji ciała. W tym drugim kontekście, reprodukcyjne postulaty są nie tylko atakiem na burżuazyjną moralność, ale ściśle wiążą się z futurystyczną krytyką wszelkich instytucji społecznych i aparatu państwa z jego biopolitycznymi dyspozycjami.

Słowa kluczowe: futuryzm, reprodukcja, populacja, immunizacja, komunizacja.