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Deus (ex) macchina: The Legacy of Futurism's Obsession with Speed in 1960s Italy

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Il Futurismo si fonda sul completo rinnovamento della sensibilità umana avvenuto per effetto delle grandi scoperte scientifiche.¹

In “Distruzione di sintassi; Immaginazione senza fili; Parole in libertà” Marinetti echoes his call to arms that formally began with the “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo” in 1909. Marinetti’s loud, attention grabbing, and at times violent agenda were to have a lasting impact on Italy. Not only does Marinetti’s ideology reecho throughout Futurism’s thirty-year lifespan, it reechoes throughout twentieth-century Italy. It is this lasting legacy, the marks that Marinetti left on Italy’s cultural subconscious, that I will examine in this paper. The cultural moment is the early Sixties, the height of Italy’s *boom economico* and a time of tremendous social shifts in Italy. This paper will look at two specific examples in which Marinetti’s social and aesthetic agenda, particularly the *nuova religione-morale della velocità*, speed and the car as vital reinvigorating life forces.² These obsessions were reflected and refocused half a century later, in sometimes subtly and sometimes surprisingly blatant ways. I will address, principally, Dino Risi’s 1962 film *Il sorpasso*, and Emilio Isgrò’s 1964 *Poesia Volkswagen*, two works from the height of the Boom.

While the dash towards modernity began with the Futurists, the articulation of many of their ideas and projects would come to fruition in the Boom years. Leslie Paul Thiele writes that, “[b]reaking the chains of tradition, the Futurists assumed, would progressively liberate humankind, allowing it to claim its birthright as master of its world.”³ Futurism would not last to see this ideal realized, but parts of their agenda return continually, and especially in the post-war period. The growing social and psychological tensions in the face of technology in

the Boom era were similarly manifest at least a half century earlier, with the first (and late) industrial revolution in Italy. Internal migration and the concomitant social tension had already begun in the first decade of the twentieth-century, and the bourgeoisie was already established, but much smaller than it was to become during the Boom.

The *commedia all'italiana*, or Comedy Italian Style, is a collection of often sardonic and bitter comedies from the late Fifties to early Seventies that turns its critical gaze on the socio-economic revolution under way in Italy during the *boom economico*. It is commonly said that the *commedia all'italiana* is the *specchio del paese* and that it represents the obsessions, crises, and neuroses that were part and parcel of the Boom and its aftermath.⁴ The films are deeply indebted to contemporary life and to the biographical and ideological characteristics of the directors and screenwriters responsible for them.

Following in Marinetti's footsteps, the directors and screenwriters of the *commedia all'italiana* and the *poeti visivi* considered the use of art (be it painting, theatre, film, or music) as a means to advance a social agenda and a socially critical discourse. Indeed, this was one of art's most important functions; it was the artist and poet's duty to use one's artistic endeavors to forward social activism, to expose the fault lines in society and to overcome them.⁵ Both groups seized the potential of artistic expression as a catalyst for social change; however, results differ significantly from the earlier Futurist and Fascist periods to the later Boom period. Fully cognizant of these social shifts, many of the Sixties' neo-avant-garde movements cast a critical eye on the social changes that were occurring, not because of nostalgia or because they felt that the old order was superior, but because Italy was undergoing a rapid and radical shift immediately following the severe socio-psychological crisis that was World War II.

During the Boom years, new cultural myths were created around consumerism and things. The car was one of the most iconic Futurist symbols of vitality and world-changing technological advancement. It represented the potent revolution of the anarchic Futurist over the staid, stagnant bourgeois status quo. The Futurists created a myth of a new world order around technology and speed. After the war, the Marinettian obsession for the car and for technology was re-proposed via the consumerist ethos, which in turn was being fueled by the democratization of economic power. The car was the symbol of the economic *arriviste*, and became a status symbol to be acquired instead of a symbol of virility

and renewal, as it had been for the Futurists. The explosion of the culture of consumption in Italy ran parallel to the explosion of the petty bourgeoisie's growth in size. The influx of money for reconstruction and of consumer goods from the United States contributed significantly to an overall realignment of cultural values. The cultural power and influence of the Church was also diminishing and being replaced by the cult of consumption.⁶ The anxiety over consumer goods was a manifestation of the need to exert control over the physical trappings of modern life, of technology and the pressure to succeed, consume and control. In short, the car, as a consumer, bourgeois obsession, had become sublimated into exactly the class of cultural phenomenon that the Futurists were protesting against. Yet, as I will argue, the Futurist ethos had worked its way into the collective subconscious and would reappear in the works of artists who would (and did) otherwise vehemently protest any association with Marinetti and his followers.

After the war and Futurism's decline, technology was no longer a transcendent phenomenon in which a person submersed himself; instead the imperious call of materialistic pleasure won out. The Boom era saw a vast proliferation of durable goods in Italy, of cars and refrigerators, of telephones and elevators. But the drive for technology had changed. Through consumption it seemed possible to exert control over the mass proliferation of technology and the consumer products of mechanized industry, over one's social standing. A significant number of the films of the *commedia all'italiana* aimed their criticism at bourgeois society and the relentless pursuit of the middle class lifestyle with all of its consumer trappings. In a sense, the consumerist ethos was a function of technology and the need to exert control over its proliferation.⁷

The automobile was important as an indicator of social and economic success in both the prewar and postwar periods. Its importance has been demonstrated repeatedly, but thus far few attempts have been made to pursue the connections between Futurism and Boom era symbolism or the implications of these connections.⁸ Immediately upon its turn of the century introduction, Italy was swept away with mania for the automobile. Road races were all the rage, with the victors earning fame and notoriety. Despite the danger — there were often fatalities — the popularity of cars and of these road races only increased.⁹ While cars were important to pre-World War I Italy, wide access to ownership was a product of the Fifties. Yet the peculiarly Italian style of driving—the

socially complex obsession with speeding and passing other motorists—that emerges in the Sixties, has earlier roots in Futurism.¹⁰

When, by the early Sixties, the unsustainable rate of Boom growth had already begun to slow, the symbolism of the car became much more complex. Even by 1962, the year of *Il sorpasso*, there were enough cars on the road that it had begun to matter which car someone had, and how old it was. It was no longer enough to simply own an automobile. Enrico Giacobelli explains that Bruno's Aurelia Sport from *Il sorpasso* had already taken on an air of the *passé*. It was a car for people who were trying to be eternally young and virile, a car for the Peter Pan set.¹¹ The Aurelia Sport, then, is a perfect choice for Bruno, Vittorio Gassman's protagonist; he is an overgrown child, intent on his own pleasures, derived from speed and sex.

If the *commedia all'italiana* was wholly Italian in its nature, the film that is one of the foremost to emerge from the movement, *Il sorpasso*, is also Italian to its core.¹² *Il sorpasso* is, without a doubt, one of the most emblematic films of the *commedia all'italiana*, if not *the* emblematic film of the era.¹³ It perfectly encapsulated the spirit, desires, cultural currents and neuroses of the era. Claudia Salizzato and Vito Zagarrio go so far as to call *Il sorpasso* the “sola logica” that dominates the Italian story of the era.¹⁴

Il sorpasso shares a mythologizing and allegorizing drive with Marinetti's Futurism. The dialogue between the Futurist manifestos and *Il sorpasso* was significant, and both responded to many of the same cultural exigencies. Marinetti was bent on dismantling cultural mythologies and traditions, and creating a new allegory of speed and technology. He reveled in the thrill of his dangerous new lifestyle and new poetic conventions. *Il sorpasso* manages to encapsulate the essence of the anxieties and issues that continued to affect Italy (and not only Italy, though some of these anxieties are uniquely Italian in scope). A penetrating picture of Italy in the early 1960s, it is undeniable that *Il sorpasso* taps into the same vague sense of dread and need for control that Futurism did.¹⁵ They desperately sought a way to confront the problems as did the earlier Futurist Manifesto.

The most obvious correlation between *Il sorpasso* and Marinetti's “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo” is the macro structure of both texts. Both are built around a joyride in a car (both with open top) that ultimately ends in a near-fatal (the manifesto) or fatal (*Il sorpasso*) automobile accident, caused by reckless speeding and *passing* other

motorists. In the film, Bruno's accident is caused when he tries to pass a car in a dangerous cliff-side curve, while Marinetti's is caused by two bicyclists. Like Marinetti, Bruno is thrown from the car; it is Bruno's passenger, Roberto, for whom the accident is fatal. Earlier in the film, Bruno had his own incident with a bicyclist in which he claims that he never liked cycling because it was *antiestetico*, implying that cars are superior because they are aesthetically positive to Bruno (and through him the Boom society he represents) as were speed and progress. Even when Umberto Boccioni painted a large canvas of a cyclist in 1913, the *Dinamismo di un ciclista*, the cyclist is depicted using the same hard, mechanical and armor-like forms that likewise turned his 1913 soccer player in *Dinamismo di un footballer*, into more of a machine than a man. Futurism was the beginning of the machine aesthetic in Italy. Machines were new and technological. They had no place in the museums and sepulchers that Marinetti yearned to see cancelled out of existence.

The discussion that Bruno and Roberto have about the Etruscan tombs at the beginning of their trip is also evocative of the Futurist polemic. As they head north, towards Viarreggio, Roberto comments that they are passing a place where they could visit the tombs, to which Bruno responds with a wisecrack, "Ah sì, ma le tombe etrusche me ne attacca al culo!" making frank his disregard for them and for the past. This is certainly an echo of the Futurist disdain for the *passato illustre italiano*. In the often quoted passage of the "Fondazione e manifesto," Marinetti pleads for the destruction of museums, libraries and professors.¹⁶ These, too, are tombs — infecting society with death and decay. This scene ends with Roberto and Bruno's discussing music and poetry. Bruno again voices his disregard for things that are traditionally considered meaningful: "A me, la poesia, mica mi convince tanto. Mi piace la musica." He is referring here, not to classical music, or opera, but to popular music that he would hear in bars and highway stops, or on the beach. His views are similar to earlier Futurist attacks on tradition and *passatismo* regarding the overvaluing of museums and history.

The Etruscan tombs also bring forth the issue of death — not only the death of tradition, nostalgia, and history, all important themes in Futurism — but actual, physical death. This ties back into the contrast that is set up between Bruno and Roberto, and it guides the trajectories that their lives are following. Marinetti did not fear death. And neither did Bruno Cortona. Both lived their lives rushing into risk for the vital thrill it provided and for the rush of speeding on to the next new

stimulus. And by not fearing death, they denied its power over them and evaded its grasp. This also was a trait that Dino Risi, himself, shared with both Marinetti and his protagonist. Risi spends several pages of his autobiography, *I miei mostri*, explaining that he was not afraid of death; instead he was afraid of the ways in which he might die. As Valerio Caprara says of Risi: “Il vitalismo del regista milanese trova qui il suo punto di fusione ideale con l’implicito e paradossale esito, la morte.”¹⁷

From the beginning, the obsession with the automobile is essentially rooted in social aspirations and a reflexive relationship with symbolism.¹⁸ Not only was the automobile an instant status symbol, it was a carnal pleasure. The automobile took on the qualities and the place held by one’s lover. As Enrico Giacovelli says:

Poco per volta l’automobile diventa per il maschio nazionale quasi un’appendice di se stesso, un simbolo di virilità, come ben sa e fa sapere il Gassman del *Sorpasso*. . . Finché l’auto prende esplicitamente il posto della donna nei desideri dell’uomo. . .¹⁹

It is difficult to avoid seeing a connection with Futurism, when the automobile is described in these terms. In the “Fondazione e Manifesto,” Marinetti caresses the car; he says that an automobile is more beautiful than the Nike of Samothrace. Machines had already become sexual objects long before Risi repeats the process in his film.²⁰ In *Il sorpasso*, as Marinetti had already done, Bruno replaces the companionship of a living, breathing person with his car. He still pursues sex, but sex only, and he pursues it as a product to be consumed. He no longer needs the companionship of a woman—like the wife he is separated from—because he has his car. Cars (and technology of all kinds) were more than products of industry; they occupied a tense place between utility and desire. But at the same time, machines and technology were manifestly violent and physically violating.²¹ Technology was being absorbed in a new manifestation of the will to power.²² It is clear from the dented fenders that Bruno pilots his mechanical lover with reckless and hedonistic abandon, caring little for the danger he poses to himself or to anyone else. He fulfills Marinetti’s dream of a man immersed in modernity.

In this film Risi is exploring the real implications of a life lived at speed. Through the medium of the automobile he returns to Futurist

symbols to explore their implications in the post war period. As Enrico Crispolti says:

Futurismo ha infatti per primo proposto nella celebrazione della macchina. . . lo strumento tipico rivoluzionario della sensibilità contemporanea, associando indissolubilmente la macchina alla velocità.²³

If this is so, then Risi is absolutely channeling Futurism. It is not surprising that *Il sorpasso* was termed the “sola logica” of its age. *Il sorpasso*, as had the Futurist manifestos before it, communicated the essence of contemporary sensibilities. This is still undeniably true in Italy. Certainly one has but to step out into the streets of Rome to observe what amounts to the peculiarly Italian style of driving. The dominant motif of both Futurism and *Il sorpasso* is of life lived at high speed, the new prime directive, the thing that made life worth living. Marinetti and later Risi, both make claims to this effect:

La letteratura esaltò fino ad oggi l’immobilità pensosa, l’estasi e il sonno. Noi vogliamo esaltare il movimento aggressivo, l’insonnia febbrile, il passo di corsa, il salto mortale, lo schiaffo ed il pugno. . .

Noi vogliamo inneggiare all’uomo che tiene il volante, la cui asta ideale attraversa la terra, lanciata a corsa, essa pure, sul circuito della sua orbita. . .

Noi vogliamo distruggere i musei, le biblioteche, le accademie d’ogni specie, e combattere contro ogni viltà opportunistica o utilitaria.²⁴

Dino Risi, fifty years later, would say:

È inutile farsi illusioni, i classici che ci hanno fatto leggere a scuola sono quasi tutti noiosi, ecco perché inconsciamente finiamo per confondere la grandezza e l’arte con la noia. Per me, come per Voltaire, tutti i generi sono importanti, basta che non siano noiosi. Io ho sempre avuto due regole: evitare

la noia e divertirmi. Io cerco sempre il dettaglio che mi fa sorridere, anche nelle situazioni più tragiche!²⁵

Both Marinetti and Risi express a deep disdain for the literary canon, and for “boring” history. And both celebrated the idea of living in the moment.

In *Il sorpasso* this obsession is shown via the contrast between Bruno’s character and Roberto’s. Bruno is the one having all the fun, living life at a breakneck pace, while Roberto is staid, dull. Roberto’s existence is circumscribed and delimited by his schoolbooks, by the legal codes that are sometimes centuries old, and Bruno, we may assume, never reads, save perhaps comic books or the sports news. In Marinetti and Risi’s view, Roberto is not living; he is merely existing in a state of *mobilità pensosa*. Until his fatal encounter with Bruno Cortona, Roberto was on a path toward becoming just the sort of professional, reading the “boring” classics that both Marinetti and Risi rail against. If Risi is to be believed, *Il sorpasso* is taken directly from his life, though there is some disagreement over who came up with the idea for this movie. Alberto Sordi claims that he and Rodolfo Sonogo were responsible for conceiving the film and that the movie was supposed to be an encounter with the devil, but Risi claims that it was inspired by two road trips that he took with friends, one to have lunch in Lichtenstein, and the other for two days around Rome and southward.²⁶ So, not only has the director based the narrative on his experience, he seems to have added elements of his own personality to Bruno’s character. This almost manic search for stimulation is a response to the fear of the profound, paralyzing boredom that Roberto represents.

This will change, tragically, moments before Roberto’s death. In the final moments of the film, Roberto relinquishes control and caution. As he urges Bruno to drive ever faster and to surge past the other motorists on the winding, narrow cliff-side road, Roberto tells Bruno that the last two days (the two days in which the narrative takes place) were the two best days of his life. It is just when Roberto lets go of his punishing stasis, just when he frees himself to exult in his newly found vitality that he burns out and perishes as Bruno’s Aurelia Sport plunges off the cliff. Bruno, meanwhile, who has never shown any fear of (or even given any thought to) his fate, is saved when he is thrown from the car.

Roberto’s only possible end is death, given his attempt at leaving behind his roots in the Old World. Roberto, despite being

chronologically younger than Bruno, represents the old Italy. He is an old man in a young one's body. His sensibility is decidedly old-fashioned. This too is an echo of the Futurist ethos. They wanted to lay waste to and to excise the old and staid, in order to renew and replenish Italy. As Boccioni and others proclaim in the "Manifesto dei Pittori Futuristi:"

Per gli altri popoli, l'Italia è ancora una terra di morti, un'immensa Pompei biancheggiante di sepolcri. L'Italia invece rinasce, e al suo risorgimento politico segue il risorgimento intellettuale. Nel paese degli analfabeti vanno moltiplicandosi le scuole: nel paese del dolce far niente ruggono ormai officine innumerevoli: nel paese dell'estetica tradizionale spiccano oggi il volo ispirazioni sfolgoranti di novità.²⁷

Bruno represents a new direction for Italy. He is a new Marinetti, excising the "rot" represented by Roberto.

Upon Roberto's death, the death of the old Italy, there is little real sorrow. Bruno "barely knew him" as he tells the police officer who arrives on the scene of the accident. Bruno will go on tomorrow to get a new car and a new friend. In the end, Roberto was shown to be minimally important, to Bruno and to the film audiences. The spectators did not care about Roberto. They went to see Bruno; they loved him, despite the demoralizing ending to the film.²⁸ They did not want Roberto's conformist *passatismo*; they wanted to look toward a future, which was moving at breakneck speed. The relationship between the protagonists, as Peter Bondanella claims, "explore[s] the changing Italian values during the brief postwar Boom years."²⁹ And thus, Marinetti's fundamental desire to leave behind the stagnant decay of the past, comes to fruition via, ironically enough, middle class consumerism.

The film is invested in disseminating the myth of a new Italy. Marinetti was bent on dismantling cultural mythologies and traditions, creating a new mythology of speed and intoxicating pleasure. It was a way of coming to terms and of releasing pent up pressures. The filmic discourse is much the same, and as Valerio Caprara attests:

Il vero miracolo, però, è questo: tutto, del film, si è trasferito in repertorio mitologico — *locations*, attori, personaggi, battute, stagione, canzoni, ristoranti, locali, psicologie,

professioni e automobili — ma niente si è spappolato, niente si è imbalsamato, niente ha incrinato la sua unità. . . La sua forza è un'elasticità di tempi e modi che dalla stretta attualità passa alla totalità e viceversa, un taglio morale che non potrebbe essere più distante da qualsiasi moralismo.³⁰

Just as Caprara testifies to the moral force of *Il sorpasso*, while tacitly acknowledging the dangers of the Boom, the film shows little real concern for them. It is as if the social problems that the Boom creates are deemed unworthy of any critical examination.

At the same time that Futurism is manifesting its lasting influence in Risi's film, the poets of *poesia visiva* take back up the reins of experimental poetry after neorealist literature loses its affective power in the late Fifties. Using the techniques of the *parolibere* invented by Marinetti, poets such as Luciano Ori, Adriano Spatola and Emilio Isgrò continue to experiment with poetic form and content, moving ever closer to the complete sublimation of poetry into painting and collage.³¹ They pick and choose from avant-garde poetic styles and innovations, keeping those that serve to illuminate the new social and artistic conditions of the Sixties, and discarding those that they view as outdated and exhausted. Despite a marked disdain for the Futurists, whom these poets associated indissolubly with Fascism, they made extensive use of Futurist techniques.³² Marinetti was the first to use mathematical symbols and the first to attempt the complete obliteration of syntax and grammatical logic. Taking these conditions into account as well as the societal conditions already discussed at the beginning of this paper, and in the context of *Il sorpasso*, I will now address Emilio Isgrò's 1964 *Poesia Volkswagen*, showing it as another proof of Futurism's lasting influence and its particular manifestation in this historical moment.

The *Poesia Volkswagen* (Fig. 1) takes its Futurist inspiration and mutates it, as did Risi, to suit the exigencies of its time. It is radically simplified from Futurist examples, like Carrà's *Festa patriottica* (Fig. 2) or Marinetti's Futurist novel *Zang Tumb Tumb*. It is a Futurist *poesia parolibere* that has been reduced to the bare essentials.

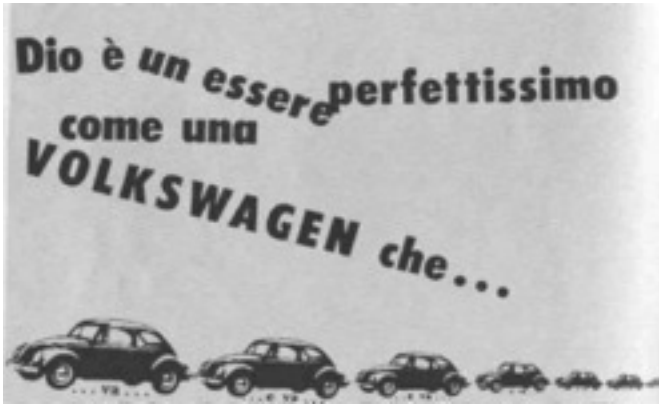


Figure 1: Emilio Isgrò, *Poesia Volkswagen*, 1964, Private Collection



Figure 2: Carlo Carrà, *Manifesto Interventista (Festa patriottica)*, 1914, Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice.

There are few words, and the images are clear and impactful. With a minimum of formal elements, Isgrò expresses a complex ideology. He himself says:

Le “tecniche di scrittura e composizione,” le “invenzioni geniali” tanto adorate dalla *intelligentsia* radical-borghese, non servono più a nulla. Se crolla l’universo della poesia, noi non piangiamo, perché non abbiamo mai chiesto troppo

alla poesia, ma solo il minimo indispensabile per sopravvivere. L'era dell'avanguardismo storico è finita per sempre, addio Bellezza, addio Mistero. . . la liberazione dell'arte può essere "anche" una metafora, la metafora della liberazione dell'uomo.³³

While Isgrò criticizes the historic avant-garde, it is clear that the echoes of Futurist ideology are many. In the first place, Marinetti, too, sought to bring the downfall of the poetic universe, though his invective was directed toward Academism and Classicism.³⁴ It is also ironic that Isgrò calls the art of the *avanguardia* "beautiful" and "mysterious," given that the criticism of the *avanguardia* by its contemporary naysayers was exactly centered on how ugly and lacking it was in contacts with the universal and mysterious. Like Marinetti, Isgrò also hurls his insults at the middle class. And also like Marinetti, Isgrò grants art a unique and supreme importance to humanity. Poetry and art are the minimum requirements for the survival of Man. Both believed that art could liberate mankind from the fetters of tradition. And Isgrò has done it using the visual language, and the iconic images of Futurism: *parolibere*, illogical analogy and the car.

It is important to bear in mind the format that Isgrò has chosen for the *Poesia Volkswagen*. He has chosen to use a poster format, which implies wide distribution and ease of visibility. This is the same system the Futurists used to disseminate their manifestos because posters and flyers allowed them to reach the widest audience possible. In another example of extreme irony, Isgrò says, at one point, that his poetry is not meant for the masses, yet the *Poesia Volkswagen* was, for *poesia visiva*, a fairly diffuse image that used the language of the masses to critique the culture of mass consumption.³⁵

The text of *Poesia Volkswagen* operates on several levels. On the most superficial level, it already drives the reader to reflect on the absurd. The text reads, "Dio è un essere prefettissimo come una Volkswagen che va. . . e va. . . e va. . . e va. . ." An analogy that places God in the same playing field as a Volkswagen is highly ironic, but this is not merely a sacrilegious joke: it is a complicated and socially critical commentary. To compare God to a car, particularly this very quotidian one, is a comment on the fact that when confronted by secular and consumerist modernity, the omnipotence of the God-figure diminishes. God is repositioned within the quotidian instead of over and above it. God no longer has supreme

power over the man that owns a Volkswagen because the Volkswagen is just as powerful as God. The poem is clearly referencing consumerism and Boom society, and the fact that the consumerist ethos and quotidian banality were replacing the central role that religion had played in Italian society. Religious practice, experienced a major reduction in frequency and importance during the Boom years.

Through a superficially vacuous and non-sensical analogy, Isgrò criticizes the dominant mytho-cultural constructions of the era that were in conflict with one another, that is, traditional society and values on one hand and the American style of consumption that was working its way into Italian society, on the other. God, according to Judeo-Christian tradition is a perfect being, whose nature man, as an imperfect being, is not capable of understanding nor of mimicking. But by placing God in opposition to a car—a man made mechanical object, Isgrò placed Him into a frame of reference that became comprehensible and quantifiable. By bringing the Godhead down to humanity's own level, Isgrò was pursuing the same agenda as the Futurists. They too criticized organized religion and its stagnant, baroque traditions. The analogy also reveals the truth of religion as Isgrò saw it; in his reality the quotidian and ridiculous are the only truths. Here, religion is presented as both of those things.

Technically and stylistically, the *Poesia Volkswagen* also falls into the category of Futurism's usually illogical, "direct analogies." The relationship between the parts of the phrase are made up of a direct analogy of first terms, and the aesthetic arrangement on the page is neither random nor incidental. As a direct analogy, in the Marinettian sense the poem forces an opening onto a different logical system.³⁶ It is an analogy between two nouns that otherwise have no bearing on one another, an analogy that expresses "l'amore profondo che collega le cose distanti. . . che abbraccia la vita della materia."³⁷ In this system, the two principle ideas presented are that "Dio è l'unico essere perfetto, la sua esistenza è eterna" (Christian doctrine) and "Una Volkswagen è una macchina perfetta che va e va e va per sempre" (implied subtext of the statement). The combined phrase "Dio è un essere perfettissimo come una Volkswagen che va e va e va e va. . ." uses two completely disparate iterations of "eterno" and "perfetto" to then create a direct, but impossible relationship. It is also not the Volkswagen that is compared to God's perfection; it is God that is compared to the Volkswagen's. This places the Volkswagen in the principal and superior position. It is God that is

living up to the standards of the car, not the car to God's. The illogical analogy of the *Poesia Volkswagen* is also a Futurist construct.

The position of the elements on the page adds another level of significance to the phrase, reinforcing the commentary on the consumer mythos. The words are crooked on the page, run into each other, and point every which way. The arrangement resembles a multi-car pile-up. The words, positioned on angles, instead of parallel as they would normally be, run up against each other. It is a metaphorical representation of religious and secular life that have been smashed onto the cement pylon of modernity. Everything is a jumbled, disorderly mess. Compositionally, the fact that the Volkswagen "va. . . e va. . . e va. . ." combined with the image of the car that surges from the right margin to the left creates a sense of movement, as if the car is actually approaching the viewer from the distance. The perfectly straight line that the car takes is in stark contrast to the disordered words, creating a sense of disjointedness and discomfort. The words, which in a standard composition are usually in straight lines from left to right, are shifted out of alignment, yet the image of the car is in perfect geometric recession. The squashed words indicate movement that has stopped. The displacement interrupts the reader's view and arrests the motion, yet through repetitive images, the car gives the idea of constant motion in space. This of course, recalls Futurist works such as the Giacomo Balla's 1912 *Cane al guinzaglio* or the *Velocità d'automobile*, also from 1912. So the phrase claims that God and the Volkswagen go and go and go forever, and do so like the ideal machine, which runs forever, without friction and without externally applied force or fuel, as does the image of the car. Yet the position of the words on the page suggests otherwise.

So, whether Isgro would acknowledge the links to Futurism or not, or whether Risi would have or would not have, in the case of both *Il sorpasso* and the *Poesia Volkswagen*, the debts to Futurism are undeniable. These are but two examples of artistic endeavors that show how deeply Futurism was embedded into the Italian conscience. In the social and economic tensions that lay beneath the shiny surface of Sixties, post-war Italy, the inventive and polemical methods of response that had been invented in Italy's pre-war crisis returned to deal with the still unresolved conflict.

Notes

1. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Distruzione della sintassi; Immaginazione senza fili; Parole in libertà," in Luciano De Maria, ed., *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti e il futurismo* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2000), 99-110.
2. F.T. Marinetti, "La nuova religione-morale della velocità," in *ibid.*, 130-138.
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