

Aleksandar H. Zistakis

ELECTRIC METABOLISM

Oh, how I envy people that'll be born a hundred years from now, on my beautiful peninsula, completely renewed, shaken up and strained by new electric forces! This obsessive vision of future tears my spirit apart.

F. T. Marinetti

Announcing the program of all later Avantgardes, Marinetti wrote as early as in 1909, that "Art has to be violence, cruelty and injustice." Since then, art has become questionable, that is, critical, problematic, negative and destructive in every possible sense. Art which is only art, which does not cross over the borders of the aesthetic, is not and cannot be art any more. It always has to be something more and something else than itself in order to be art at all. Art is always some kind of excess and self-transgression, and it always results in regression, ingression and involution into the artistic itself. It has to be excessive in that which is its own in order to be able to reach itself. It always has to overstep itself, to go over itself if it doesn't want to fall under itself and its proper level. In this particular case, going over oneself means going against oneself. Art becomes "violence, cruelty and injustice" primarily to itself. Falling onto itself is the condition of its survival in Modernity, and only its abolishment enables and founds its survival.

Therefore, art has to be non-art, or radical anti-art, in order to be what it is. Its radical anti-aestheticism is the only real guarantee for its artisanship. The paradox of art lies in the fact that it confirms itself only in radical opposition to art, that only then and thus something like a work of art appears. Every work of art, if it really is a work of art, represents a radical uprising, a rebellion against every other work. True work of art is always something radically other than art in general and something completely different from the existing and acknowledged conceptions of a work. The characteristically artistic transgression consists precisely in this radical otherness.

But, this doesn't apply only to art and the artefacts. Everything organic also consists in such otherness. Organic as such is nothing but a transgression of the inorganic. An organism emerges through a certain metabolical reaction, and itself is a metabolical reaction. Metabol., metaballein, or (which is quite similar, if not the same) metapherein, is exactly that throwing and carrying-over, by which there emerges something alive and life itself. The living thing comes to existence only as a metabolic (metaphoric) reaction and creation, life is an excess and transgression of the inorganic, of the non-living. The continuity of beings is conceivable and possible as a universe only in that sense. More precisely, only thus is birth, as a passage from the inorganic (dead) into the organic (alive), made possible. Metabolism is, therefore, the metaphor of the border between life and death, the metaphor of their connection and separation. As such, then, metabolism overlaps, intermingles and converges with art. For art, if it wants to be that, has to "deal" with life and death, it has to have both life and death, it has to realize them and show them in their difference and unity.

Because it has to be life and death, art has to deal with itself as a metaphor of life and death. If it is to be what it is, art must be regressive and involuntional transgression of the inorganic, the cold and the dead. In other words, as an excess and transgression, art has to be a metabolism.

But, what is metabolism? It is, we are told, a process of exchange between matter and energy, in which matter turns into energy, and vice versa. Therefore, metabolism is a process, more precisely, a procedure. As such, metabolism is the model of every possible happening, every event. For, everything is integrated into a process of some kind and has a certain procedure of becoming, existing and disappearing. Thus, art, as well as politics, sex, nutrition, thinking, experience, feeling, war, peace, good, evil, production, reproduction, are all some kind(s) of metabolism(s), and they all mutually and simultaneously identify and melt down in the metabolical model.

Futurists were the first to realize this. For them, "the suffering of a man is as interesting as the suffering of an electric lamp." This statement of Boccioni, Carra and other authors of the Futurist Painters' Manifesto, is completely in accordance with the first metabolical recognitions about art, which aimed at reducing the organic to its original meaning of a transgression of the inorganic, and at showing its inorganic core and essence. Above all, there was the inorganic, mechanical, in fact electric, being of man. "One

should prepare the close and inevitable identification of man with the motor, and thus enable and perfect constant exchange of perceptions, rhythms, instincts and metal disciplines, which are being absolutely ignored by the majority, and sensed only by the most lucid spirits (...) one should realize that we aim at creating a type of man, in whom, the poisons that weaken our life energies and our powerful physiological electricity, such as moral sorrow, goodness, tenderness and love, will be annihilated" (Marinetti).

Electricity plays major role in that annihilation; primarily because the whole process and technology of production and consummation of electricity (most notably, electric current as an inorganic mechanical reaction) is the real and faithful reproduction, the model of the organic. Since it is a completely technical product, a complete and obvious construction, electricity points directly at inorganic nature of the organic, that is, it destroys the primacy of the organic in art. Electricity is the weapon and the goal of the loud and violent war which the Avantgarde wages against art: "Eyes and other organs are not just sensory receptors any more, but real electric batteries... finally, we assist in the first electric war" (Marinetti).

The exemplary case of metabolical paradigm, of the passage from the inorganic into the organic and back, is nutrition. As we know, the inorganic matters that we take with our food are very important. We couldn't live without inorganic substances, such as vitamins, salts, minerals,... let us not forget metals!

The most important metal in food is, they say, iron. Substantial lack of iron can be lethal. In milder cases, it causes anaemia, the symptoms of which are general weakness, dizzy spells, poor concentration, reduced working power... In a word, iron insufficiency causes lack of energy. Without iron and other metals and minerals our body's capacity for working is reduced. The less inorganic matters we have inside ourselves, the less energy we have. Our body functions as a power station, that needs fuel and inner circulation, circulation of matter(s), in order to produce energy, which we then use to produce the materials for feeding that power station--and so on, ad infinitum, that is, in circles.

The law of preserving matter and energy, which fully applies here, has a circular structure. It exists as circulation and exchange, i.e. as a circulation of exchange. Our metabolism is its basic political economy, just like political economy is in fact an economy of metabolism, metabolical economy. In both these cases everything stays the same. Even though the arrangement of items and their quantities change at every moment, the input and the output are identical and the total value is always the same. From a global point of view, the difference is utterly irrelevant, even non-existent. And that was exactly the trump card of historical Avantgardes in their efforts to deconstruct the ideology of an organic work of art.

Today, though, almost "a hundred years" from then, on this and other "beautiful peninsulas," the situation looks quite reverse. The inorganic, mechanical and technical, are being constructed after the model of the organic and organism. Inorganic nature of the organic needs no explanation any more. But, there is a need to investigate the return of the organic in the inorganic. The organic work of art, organism in general, and man as an organic individual, have long ago been recognized and turned into simple transgressions of the inorganic (which, therefore, are no transgressions at all). Today, therefore, there is a need for an opposite, "retro" procedure, which would remind us of the inseparability of the organic from the inorganic; that is, of the organic core of the work of art, through its reinstatement as a transgression of the inorganic. Today, once again, we need to bring the organic back on the scene and finish the loop from an opposite starting point.

One should, therefore, bear in mind that metabolism, the mutual passage and exchange between matter and energy, is the basis and the model not only of the so-called organic work of art, but of the organic as such. For, in and by itself, it reveals the truth that energy is matter, and that matter is nothing but energy.

Metabolism is the model of work of art. As self-transgression or throwing-over (meta-ballein), the work is the embodied metabolism. Of course, as such embodiment it negates itself as a work. Also, as such, it is no embodiment at all. The embodiment of metabolism is absurd, paradoxical, impossible. But, it is not less paradoxical than the "productive" character of the work. Futurist painters pointed exactly at that in their Manifesto, by saying that they want to reproduce "the gesture [which] won't be the fixed moment of universal dynamism. It will simply be the dynamic sensation itself." But, as it turned out, it is impossible to discern that "dynamic sensation" for itself, since it doesn't have its own solid dimension and medium outside the material in and on which it appears. The necessity of metabolism is the necessity of the work. The work's energy necessarily depends on the material from which it emerges and in which it turns, because it becomes and remains visible as such (as energy) only in its bordering with that material. In fact, in and

through its own dynamics, the work shows and maintains both moments in their strenuous interdependence. What's more, it exhausts itself in that interdependence, it is an interdependence and mutuality of matter and energy--just like metabolism. The work of art is the model of metabolism. It shows, it embodies the moment of passage, the change itself. It realizes one's leap out of the other, thus embodying and bringing out, producing (hervorbringen as Heidegger would say) the whole metabolism, the whole of its process.

One of the crucial consequences of every metabolism is the insight that the difference between matter and energy is just a pseudo-difference. This insight gets clearer with acceleration of the exchange process. Like in inflation: not before long, one realizes that inflation doesn't exist, that it's just an illusion. For, as soon as the circulation reaches certain critical point and exceeds certain speed, the thing itself (the real mass of money and capital, the real amount of energy, etc.) seems to freeze and fix itself. Excessive movement is then taken for what it really is: total stillness and immobility.

But, paradoxically, only metabolism establishes the difference between matter and energy by pointing at their unity. Such is the case with electricity. Electricity is a movement, pure movement, which is, in the last instance, freed from its medium. Conductors do not negate, but confirm this fact. Namely, it might look as if electricity doesn't exist purely and "in itself," that it at least depends on its conductor/carrier, and thus doesn't exist without and outside some medium. But, in fact, the conductor is the one that doesn't exist. That is to say: it doesn't exist in itself. The conductor is electricity itself, which, in its amazingly quick movement, stops, freezes and congeals itself into its conductor.

From whichever side we look at it, there exists only the process of establishing transgression as regression and involution. Whether the conductor turns into electricity or electricity into the conductor, there is always one and the same process or procedure: metabolism, which--taken in the only right way, that is, on the whole--always amounts to mutual melting, overlapping and identifying of matter and energy. In the beginning and at the end, in the basis and in the consequences of this process, there necessarily lies a unity, if not the identity. The difference is perceptible only at the margins, on the edges (of matter, energy, of the process itself). We are aware of the difference only if we marginally connect to the process. But, just like every real knowledge, this one is also short, momentary and lethal. The moment of recognition is an electric shock, an electrocution.

Hence, we must not approach electricity only half way, not with one foot on the ground, because then it kills us. It kills us because we are still too far away, or because we are still not close enough (transgression and regression/ingression, thus, work on all levels, in all the places and spots of the process); that is, because we remain at a place and in the moment of transformation (grounding), at the point of metabol, or metaphor, where energy turns into matter or matter into energy, at the place of that huge electric shock, of the shock of change and passage, the liminal shock thanks to which metabolism happens so easily and continually.

We experience electric shock whenever we disturb metabolism, whenever we interrupt it by inserting ourselves into its procedure, by inserting that unplanned Self, which has no place in electric circuit. Therefore, either we shall keep away from electricity, at the distance which doesn't disturb its metabolism, or we shall get close enough to unite and identify with it, to turn it into our own electricity.

There is no third solution here. The third solution can only be death. Metabolical economy, taken from its margins and on them, becomes a diabolic economy; and our lasting problem in everything we come across and deal with is exactly that of being at the right distance. So, if you are not able to estimate the distance correctly, and tend to be either too close or too far from electric metabolism, don't touch the work of Zoran Todorovič, it's lethal!