

# Witkiewicz & Futurism - The Crazy Locomotive



Stanisław I. Witkiewicz, self-portrait, before 1914

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*TRÉFALDI: As for me, I've nothing left to say. I have the feeling that all my thoughts have been snuffed out of my brain. I am only an extension of this throttle, as if my brains had been skewered and spitted on this iron lever. But it's much more than that; I've become the engine. I'm the one that's racing through space like a bull, ready to impale myself on the blade of my destiny. Yes, it's really a momentous occasion. They ought to put a sign up over our heads: "Do not touch, danger, high voltage!" If a normal person, standing on firm ground, touched me, he'd fall down dead as though struck by lightning. Is this the beginning of mechanized madness?*

*TRAVAILLAC: I'm amazed at your modesty, Karl: first you tell us you have nothing to say, then you talk your head off.*

*TRÉFALDI: I only exist as a moving image projected on a screen in the endless void. I think if the engine stopped suddenly, I'd die.*

*The Crazy Locomotive* (Szalona Lokomotywa) 1923, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, translated by Daniel Gerould & C.S. Durer

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## 1. A Mockery of Futurism

In his explicitly philosophical writings and in the philosophical outbursts with which his characters pepper his novels, the elitist, aristocratic and nostalgic side of Witkiewicz decries the mechanization and automatization of the modern world.

Witkiewicz fought for the Russian army during World War I and, after being severely wounded in July 1916, was in St. Petersburg convalescing during

1917, and so witnessed both the popular February Revolution and Bolshevik October Revolution firsthand. Even though he was elected commander of his battalion by his men after the February Revolution, his aristocratic background put his life in danger after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Witkiewicz seems to have been deeply traumatised by what he saw in Russia: he never spoke about it, but revolution and its collective, hysterical violence haunt and shape much of Witkiewicz' writings [1].

This simmering fear of revolution is coupled with acute philosophical horror of modernity. This is the basic template that Witkiewicz returns to obsessively: the collapse of Christian values (along with the high artistic culture and elitist political structures that they propped up) has stripped humanity down to its naked, machinic core: without Christian metaphysics, humans are raw biological automatons waiting to be devoured by the blind, mechanized beast of modernity, and easy psychological prey for various collectivizing political programs.

*The Crazy Locomotive*, a play which involves a locomotive engineer and a locomotive fireman hijacking their own train and driving it at full throttle towards the absolute (strictly as a metaphysical experiment, mind you) is the text in which Witkiewicz grapples most directly with the machine.

*Witkiewicz utilizes the mechanized techniques of the enemy to subvert and destroy mechanization. The machine, simultaneously exploited and attacked, is both the locomotive engine and the movie projector. The Crazy Locomotive is a superparody – of the worship of the machine and of the new arts of technology: futurism and cinema. By his ironic appropriation of their ideas and devices, Witkiewicz was able to create an anti-futuristic, anti-cinematic play that has all the metallic brilliance and frantic speed which he is mocking. Daniel Gerould, Introduction to The Crazy Locomotive*

It's not quite so simple, however. Witkiewicz is one of those writers to whom Blake's diagnosis of Milton can be applied: he wrote '*at liberty when of Devils & Hell... because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it*'. Like Milton, Witkiewicz is at his most tantalizing when he gives full rein to the very forces he (officially) deplures. When his mischievous artistic demons are in full control, Witkiewicz' texts overflow with brilliant insanity and relentless, acidic parody from which nothing is safe, and in which nothing is sacred, not the play itself, not theatre, and least of all the playwright's own persona, pretensions or philosophy. Witkiewicz the po-faced moralizer gives way to Witkiewicz the lucidly deranged artist.

A quick look at what Witkiewicz was parodying.

## **2. The Guillotine Steering Wheel & The Impaling Throttle**

[The Futurist Manifesto](#) is literary amphetamine: dodgy, dangerous and pulsing with adrenalin. The manifesto itself is preceded by poetically intense description of a brush with death in a car crash:

*We went up to the three snorting beasts, to lay amorous hands on their torrid breasts. I stretched out on my car like a corpse on its bier, but revived at once under the steering wheel, a guillotine blade*

*that threatened my stomach.*

*The raging broom of madness swept us out of ourselves and drove us through streets as rough and deep as the beds of torrents. Here and there, sick lamplight through window glass taught us to distrust the deceitful mathematics of our perishing eyes.*

*I cried, "The scent, the scent alone is enough for our beasts."*

*And like young lions we ran after Death, its dark pelt blotched with pale crosses as it escaped down the vast violet living and throbbing sky.*

*But we had no ideal Mistress raising her divine form to the clouds, nor any cruel Queen to whom to offer our bodies, twisted like Byzantine rings! There was nothing to make us wish for death, unless the wish to be free at last from the weight of our courage!*

*And on we raced, hurling watchdogs against doorsteps, curling them under our burning tires like collars under a flatiron. Death, domesticated, met me at every turn, gracefully holding out a paw, or once in a while hunkering down, making velvety caressing eyes at me from every puddle.*

*"Let's break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind! Let's give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd!"*

*The words were scarcely out of my mouth when I spun my car around with the frenzy of a dog trying to bite its tail, and there, suddenly, were two cyclists coming towards me, shaking their fists, wobbling like two equally convincing but nevertheless contradictory arguments. Their stupid dilemma was blocking my way—Damn! Ouch!... I stopped short and to my disgust rolled over into a ditch with my wheels in the air...*

The violence of Marinetti's 'steering wheel, a guillotine blade that threatened my stomach' is echoed and mutated by the 'throttle' in Witkiewicz' play. Tenser/Trefaldi's fate is bound up with the throttle, and the assemblage they form, is tracked by stage directions and character comments throughout the play:

*(When Tenser pushes the throttle down, the gestures he makes are exaggerated and impressive. All the while the locomotive chugs along faster and faster) Act I*

Later, as the locomotive picks up speed and the villains draw closer to their metaphysical aim, Tréfaldi becomes psychologically and neurologically impaled on the throttle:

*I am only an extension of this throttle, as if my brains had been skewered and spitted on this iron lever. (Act II)*

In the wreckage of the Epilogue, the throttle's violence reaches its peak, becoming the physical cause of death, thus finally realizing the threat to Marinetti's stomach:

*Don't you see, my good man, that all my guts are spilling out? I'm almost dead. The throttle went into my belly at least twelve inches.*

### **3. Philosophical Speed**

In the prelude to the Futurist Manifesto, speed enables the artist to dice with death in his car and drive towards the absurdity of the absolute; speed propels the artist away from the inertia of life towards death and the Unknown. In the Manifesto proper, Marinetti invokes speed as a newly created metaphysical quantity:

*4. We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath—a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.*

*8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.*

Mechanized speed liberates humanity from the ponderous restrictions and progress of nature. Humanity, caught up in the nervous excitement of modernity, is also surrounded and dwarfed by creatures of its own making:

*11. We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke; bridges that stride the rivers like giant gymnasts, flashing in the sun with a glitter of knives; adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd.*

The machines, larger, faster and hungrier than humanity, have done the impossible – annihilated time, space and gravity. In the face of such (apparently) liberating metaphysical potential, the past is seen as a macabre hindrance, a dead weight:

*Museums: cemeteries!... Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings. Museums: absurd abattoirs of painters and sculptors ferociously slaughtering each other with color-blows and line-blows, the length of the fought-over walls!...*

*... Do you, then, wish to waste all your best powers in this eternal and futile worship of the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, shrunken, beaten down?*

When unleashed, the mechanized beasts and the speed they create enable a complete break to be made: the drag of the past can be left behind, once and for all. In Italian Futurism the machine is set up as a model of perfection towards which the human should strive; it is an idolization or deification of the machine.

Witkiewicz' *The Crazy Locomotive* is a finely calibrated text: the gathering momentum of the locomotive is immanent to the actions and psychological states of the characters.

No sooner do the engineer and fireman get the engine up to speed than they begin philosophizing:

*Tenser: ... Ever since we got on the locomotive, everything's been going well. Except for the minor problem of the next station, we're alone on this iron beast, totally isolated from the rest of the world. We're not only rushing through space, we're intensely aware of it...*

*Nicholas: ... As I was firing up this beast (he hits the firebox with his fist), something vague and formless began to stir in my brain. But for me the meaning of our existence ultimately becomes shrouded in inner darkness. Only action, not contemplation, can make it clear to us...*

*Tenser: ... How can we carry this point of view of ours over into that other sphere which has grown flabby out of sheer inertia and yet at the same time observe everything from this locomotive hurtling through space? That's the problem...*

*Nicholas: ... Everything goes along smoothly here, but it's completely two-dimensional like the surface of a painting – everything stays in its place as if it were frozen, although it's actually moving. Funny, isn't it? ... So far we are evenly matched. Just think of it: at the very same moment in history, Existence in all its infinity and the two of us, alone, on this galloping monster adrift from all mankind. Even if you tried for a thousand years, you couldn't think up anything like that.*

Speed propels the railway workers through a succession of lucid decisions concerning their course of action – their thinking is bound up with action.

Unlike Beckett's Estragon and Vladimir, "*Witkiewicz' absurd duo are willful participants in a soul-shattering adventure... both the engineer and his fireman are actively pursuing a goal rather than waiting passively for something to happen.*" [2] Their first decision is to unmask themselves – they are actually both, unbeknown to each other, notorious murderers who are only posing as railway workers. (The fact that they have worked together for years in the engine without either suspecting that the other is a closet arch-criminal only goes to show how few concessions Witkiewicz made to plausibility and realism.) The second decision, the outcome of the duo's high-speed philosophizing, is to drive the train to the absolute of God's Judgment, as a kind of duel, to see who will get the girl – Julia – who, it just so happens, both are in love with.

Immediately after deciding on this course of action, Julia and Trefaldi's accomplice-wife suddenly crawl up into the engine as it transpires – surprise surprise – they had secretly got on the train. Julia, officially Nicholas-Travaillac's fiancée, is very turned on by the whole idea of crashing in a train along with two men who are besotted with her:

*JULIA: No... it's you... That's incredible! Trefaldi, the most notorious criminal in the world! Oh – how perfectly marvellous! I'm so happy! I've always dreamed of something really extraordinary happening to me, like in the movies!*

*TRAVAILLAC : Don't I count for something? And don't my crimes mean anything to you? You'd better be careful, Julia; I can kill His Highness and stop the train at any moment.*

*JULIA: (kissing Travaillac) I love you both. Now I'm really in love for the first time, and with both of you. At this very moment both of you are extraordinary. Something's being created right here and now, the way it was in the beginning before the world began.*

*TREFALDI: Here's a girl who's really worthy of us! We couldn't possibly abandon our plan, could we? We have to do it, Travaillac! We couldn't go on lying unless we did it. Isn't that so?*

Meanwhile, Abracadabra, Trefaldi's unfortunate wife, who is not quite so keen on being turned to mincemeat in the imminent crash, is at first gagged and tied, and then disposed of for making a nuisance of herself:

*TREFALDI: We're coming to the station! I can't let go of the throttle. Throw that trash out – it's got no soul. We're not going to let that disgusting old bag spoil these precious moments with her filthy talk! (Travaillac and Julia throw Erna Abracadabra out from the left side).*

*TRAVAILLAC: (leans out to see if everything went successfully) She's smashed to pieces against a pump! Here's the station.*

At the end of act two, Minna, who is part of a party that has broken into the engine in order to put a stop to the criminals' dastardly plan, falls in love with

Travaillac at the moment of impact:

*MINNA: No, you're mine! Mine! We'll die together! There'll be nothing left of us but glue!*

In Witkiewicz' breakneck two-Act play, speed smoothly and ineluctably summons up basic instincts. The sex and death drives kept under check by the inertia of survival-oriented civilisation rear their heads as the train heads towards impact:

*The characters abound in energy that parallel the driving force of the engine; as the locomotive speeds up, it releases the deepest and darkest forces of normally hidden within the subconscious recesses of their personalities and permits them to break through into frenzied action. Minna's uncontrollable passion for Travaillac and Julia's ecstasy in being in love with both Trefaldi and Travaillac are other manifestations of the same subliminal urges; like the frantic speed and the feverish talk, sexual attraction is an irrational, elemental plunge beyond all the bounds of society and the normal laws of conduct. [3]*

#### **4. Fascist Futurism**

The Italian Futurists are infamous for having given fascism a helping hand.

Marinetti in the [Founding Manifesto of Futurism \(1909\)](#):

*9. We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.*

And in [War, the World's Only Hygiene \(1915\)](#):

*For us today, Italy has the shape and power of a fine Dreadnought battleship with its squadron of torpedo-boat islands. Proud to feel that the marital fervor throughout the Nation is equal to ours, we urge the Italian government, Futurist at last, to magnify all the national ambitions, disdaining the stupid accusations of piracy, and proclaim the birth of Panitalianism.*

*Futurist poets, painters, sculptors, and musicians of Italy! As long as the war lasts let us set aside our verse, our brushes, scalpels, and orchestras! The red holidays of genius have begun! There is nothing for us to admire today but the dreadful symphonies of the shrapnels and the mad sculptures that our inspired artillery molds among the masses of the enemy.*

Italian Futurism, under Marinetti's leadership, was an artistic-political movement that embraced the transcendent potential of technology and humanity's most brutal instincts in equal measure. The Italian Futurists were not guilty of having a blind faith in technological progress, a faith betrayed by the darkest instincts of Homo sapiens: on the contrary, they affirmed those instincts from the outset; by celebrating primate-patriarchal violence and

glorifying tribal-patriotic war they condemned futurism to a regressive, nihilistic line of abolition.

[for details of Marinetti's involvement in Italian Fascism: [Futurism & Politics](#), by Bob Osborn]

## 5. Polish Futurism

Futurism was not bound to put its money on the fascist, nationalist, war-mongering horse. Futurism followed very different trajectories outside Italy, in Russia and Poland.

Polish Futurism followed the Italian Futurists' rejection of the past, but leaned very much to the left, placed much more emphasis on the social function of art, and, in contrast to Marinetti's 'scorn for woman', made a conscious effort to be 'pro-woman'. The Polish Futurists refused to glorify war and violence (not surprisingly, given that Poland bore the brunt of the Eastern Front in World War I) and produced an utterly new conception of the machine.



[Bruno Jasioński](#)

Heavily influenced by the Russian futurist [Mayakovsky](#), Polish Futurism announced its existence in 1921, with [Bruno Jasioński's "Manifesto concerning the Immediate Futurization of Life"](#):

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

*A good machine is a model and the highest work of art, by virtue of its combination of economy, functionality and dynamism. Morse's electric telegraph is 1000 times greater as an artistic masterpiece than Byron's "Don Juan". Among architectural, plastic and technical works of art we distinguish WOMAN as a perfect reproductive machine. Woman is an inestimable strength whose exceptional powers have not been fully realized. We demand complete equal rights for woman in all the fields of private and public life. Above all, equal rights in*

*erotic and family relationships....*

*... We highlight the erotic moment as one of the most fundamental functions of life in general. It is one of the basic and important sources joy in life, on condition that it is straightforward, clear and sunny.*

*Sexual tragedies á la Przybyszewski are distasteful and only go to prove the spinelessness and impotence of contemporary manhood. We call on women, healthier and physically stronger, to take the lead in this field...*

The Polish Futurists put their hopes in the 'new people' that World War I 'threw up to the surface':

*We, the futurists, are the first to reach out to the 'new people' with the hand of friendship/brotherhood. They will be that healthy, reviving sap which will refresh the old, degenerate race of yesterday, that painful but necessary vaccine that inoculated the whole decaying and stinking pre-war Europe with huge cataclysmic events.*

In 1923, when Jasieński reflected on and assessed the Futurist movements, he contrasted Polish Futurism with its Italian and Russian forebears: while the Italians idolised and worshipped machines, seeing them as perfect organisms, superior to the human, and while the Russians viewed the machine as a servant of the proletariat, having a purely economic function, the Polish Futurists (or at least their mouthpiece Jasieński) viewed the human itself as a material machine - the machinery of industrialisation was an externalisation and extension of human biological machinery. The object is not to idolise or enslave machines, but to rebuild the human psychologically, to make it comes to terms with the fact it is a machine and help it respond to the rapidly changing environment that its increasingly autonomous externalised machinery is creating:

*In his ceaseless expansion and externalisation, Man must create ever more forms of perception, i.e. constantly restructure himself in relation to new riddles which are springing up around him, which he has to stand up to. One of these riddles is the machine. **The machine is not Man's product – is is His superstructure, his new organ, essential to him at this stage of development. The relationship between Man and the machine is the relationship of an organism to a new organ.**[Jasieński's emphasis] It is the slave of Man only to the extent that his own hand is a slave, both being subject to orders from the same brain headquarters. Contemporary man would be crippled if he were deprived of one or the other.*

*The task of contemporary art is to bring this most basic moment for the modern understanding of culture to collective consciousness, making it its blood and unconscious/incomprehensible feeling. Art can*

*do this not through eulogizing machines (which is a topic no more valuable than thousands others), not through bringing real machines into art (which many artistic methods could do), but through the construction of its own, new organism on the basis of machine laws: economy, functionality and dynamism. For this reason, despite the fact Polish Futurism has focused far less on the machine as a topic than Italian Futurism, it has accomplished far more along these lines.*  
[from [Polish Futurism, Balance Sheet](#) (1923)]

In the twenties Jasieński's applied this conception of continual redesign to his own writing, refusing to let it get shackled to previous production. He viewed manifestos as signalling the end of a movement rather than the beginning, which is why, in 1923, just two years after writing the initial manifestos for Polish Futurism, Jasieński declared that he was no longer a Futurist:

*A movement captured in formulae is already a dead movement, a barrier that it is necessary to go beyond. People are living, as are those who do not create according to their manifesto.*

Polish Futurism cut and pasted points, ideas and attitudes from Italian and Russian Futurisms to produce a new, mutant brand of Futurism adapted to the context of postwar Poland. The Polish Futurists actually made adaptation one of the defining characteristics of their program.

Jasieński calculated that the average worker has between 5 and 15 minutes to spare for art each day. The response to this is to create art in specially prepared capsules that contain nothing that is not absolutely essential and which, crucially, do not waste the time of the masses:

*A work of art is an extract. When dissolved in the glass of everyday life it should tinge the whole day with its colour...Before putting their work into print, an artist is obliged to squeeze out every last drop of excess water. Any artist who does not obey this resolution will be held responsible before society just like ordinary thieves and charged with theft of time.* [Manifesto Concerning Futuristic Poetry](#) (1921)

The job of the futurist artist is not to be aloof and create eternal works of art, or art for arts sake, but rather to join the masses and work like them, turning out fleeting works of art adapted to the fluctuations of daily life: "*The ultimate value of a work of art is somewhere between 24 hours and a month.*"



Cover for *Song of Hunger* (1922)

However, Futurism in Poland did not become the popular movement it prescribed as being necessary for Poland – it never got beyond provocative happenings and publications. Unlike Italian Futurism, which had a deep and lengthy relationship with fascist politics, and unlike Russian Futurism, which had to be brought into line by the dour realist aesthetics of Lenin and Stalin's regime, Polish Futurism was basically an ineffectual literary affair that fizzled out and was finished off by its proponents before they went their own separate (but mostly communist) ways.

Jasieński contrasted manifestos with life – manifestos are the death of a movement and the enemies of creativity. But this is precisely what makes manifestos so powerful and dangerous. Like genomes, manifestos are a set of efficient, non-living instructions, with an eerie capacity to shape life and program alliances and destinies. As externalised, autonomous textual machinery, manifestos can haunt their authors.

Italian and Polish Futurism both affirmed and attached themselves to collectivizing and mechanizing social formations, so it was perhaps inevitable that Italian Futurism would throw its lot in with fascism (which organized the collective around brutal nationalism) and that the Polish Futurists would be swallowed up by communism (which viciously collectivized in the name of the proletariat). This is a round about way of suggesting that it is no accident that, after exalting the working masses in the early twenties, most of the Polish Futurists would eventually find themselves in Stalin's treacherous hands in the thirties.



*Bruno Jasieński, by Witkiewicz 1921*

## 6. Last Stop Death

*BEAN: Yes – they really are lunatics! This madness is contagious, it's becoming universal. Unless somebody does something, we're lost...*

*GUSTER: Yes, but not one of us has a gun! How could anyone have foreseen this! Such a respectable company! And now we're getting closer and closer to death every second! Death on all sides – it's enough to drive you out of your mind!... It's shocking that at this stage of civilisation our lives are in the hands of such people. I just can't believe I'm here on this locomotive....*

### *ACT II, The Crazy Locomotive*

Just before *The Crazy Locomotive* 'bursts into fragments' and most of the passengers are 'squashed into a jelly and chopped up like cabbage', a group of terrified passengers, gendarmes and thugs crawl up into the engine and try to prevent Trefaldi and Travaillac from crashing the train and killing them all.

Both the villains' philosophizing and the passengers' rescue attempt descend into cinematic slapstick chaos – the male would-be rescuers are overcome by cowardice, incompetence and the seduction of gadgets ("The link in the Heisenger von Waldeck System. A beautiful gadget – in my day we didn't have anything like it."), while Minna who succeeds where the men fail, by giving Trefaldi a couple of good whacks over the head with a shovel, succumbs to the charms of her other would be killer, Travaillac, seconds before impact.

As a futuristic machine, the crazy locomotive is very much under human control – Trefaldi has his hand on the throttle until the thug becomes

mesmerised by it at the end – the question is more whether humans are in control of themselves in the presence of the machine. Trefaldi and Travaillac are quite lucid about their nihilistic, metaphysical endeavour and comment on the effects the engine and its parts are having on their consciousness and desire. The engine stokes their diabolical thinking as much as they stoke the engine.

Yet while these two reach their murderous philosophical conclusions with ruthless indifference to the lives of other passengers, the passengers turn out to be powerless to stop them. Turbulence Guster complains that their lives are in the hands of lunatics but lacks the nerve to intervene. The passengers spend more time talking to the dastardly duo than they spend doing anything. Julia and Minna compete for the affections of Travaillac.

*GUSTER: For God's sake, Conductor, let's not waste time arguing! We're not at the theatre watching a play! You've got to help us somehow. After all, I know you personally.*

*CONDUCTOR: I don't have any idea what to do. I don't even know where the steering wheel is! All I can do is punch tickets or check whether they've already been punched. Specialization is the great curse of our age, wouldn't you agree.*

Witkiewicz' response to Futurism is to show how easily the machine can be hijacked and made to serve nihilistic agendas and how easily human beings can be propelled towards the kind of libidinally hyper-charged carnage, insanity and death that engulf the Epilogue of the play. *"The madness is contagious..."*

With Witkiewicz, at the end of the day it all comes down to metaphysics – Trefaldi and Travaillac have a powerful, contagious metaphysics which they impose on the rest of the train, and whilst they do so, the passengers are distracted by pulp fictional versions of the very narrative they themselves are in:

*TRAVAILLAC: ... But just think: here we are talking about all this, and back there, in one of the car on the trains someone's reading about the very same thing, a story just like ours, in a murder mystery from the lending library. Funny, isn't it!*

The Polish Futurists put their faith in the masses and sought to provide artistic sustenance for them in the form of capsule-extracts (a forerunner for Witkiewicz' Murti Bing pills), seemingly unaware that the collective and the machinic superstructure can be manipulated by determined individuals with crazy ideas and plunged into a line of abolition.

*Minna: It's all a hoax, a hideous joke! It's due to the influence of modern art!*

The acidic self-referentiality and self-mockery that burn holes in Witkiewicz' play acknowledge that theatre now has little control over the direction the crazy locomotive of modernity is taking, as the masses are now fed and

narcotized with film and pulp fiction.

Witkiewicz was totally at odds with the Polish Futurists' ambitious (and unrealistic) desire to provide 15 minute literature-pills that would help the masses as they toiled through their busy day.

For Witkiewicz, the fundamental purpose of art was to provoke metaphysical shock, and it is to this end that his hyper-kinetic parody and relentless, ruthless mockery is deployed. The theatre is inevitably doomed in its attempt to compete with cinema, but it can hold up a hilarious mirror before shattering it to smithereens.

Notes:

[1] The Witkiewicz Reader, Daniel Gerould pp75-78

[2] Introduction to The Crazy Locomotive, Daniel Gerould & C.S, Durer, Applause 1989

[3] *ibid.*



Multiple self-portrait in mirrors, St. Petersburg 1915-17, The Collection of E. Franczak & S. Okołowicz



Stephen June 2006