

International Yearbook of Futurism Studies



Edited by
Günter Berghaus

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Günter Berghaus

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Table of Contents

Günter Berghaus

Editorial — IX

Günter Berghaus, Dalila Colucci and Tim Klähn

Volume Editors' Preface — XV

Section 1: **Futurism Studies**

1 **Italy**

Pasquale Fameli

Futurism in Italian Verbo-Visual Poetry after the Second World War — 5

Duccio Dogheria

Bang Tumb Tuuum! The Influence of Futurism on Italian Avant-garde Comic Strips — 39

Raffaello Palumbo Mosca

Even the Great Marinetti Got It Wrong: Giovanni Tuzet's Logical Neo-Futurism — 69

2 **Russia**

Tim Klähn

Gennady Aygi and Russian Futurism — 97

Valentina Parisi

Serge Segay, Rea Nikonova and Italy: Between Futurism and Mail Art — 135

Mikhail Pavlovets

Konstantin K. Kuzminsky as a Neo-Futurist — 167

3 Asia and Latin America

Sun-yung Park

The Post-utopian Avant-garde Poetics of the Korean ‘Futurist’ Min-jeong Kim — 197

Claudio Palomares-Salas and Ángel Díaz Miranda

The Infrarealist Movement and its Futurist Roots — 227

Odile Cisneros

Russian Futurism and Brazilian Avant-garde Poetry: Incorporation, Translation, Convergence — 253

4 Music, Sculpture and Architecture

Esther Schmitz-Gundlach

Back to the Future of *The Art of Noises*: The After-Life of Futurism in Twentieth-Century Music — 285

Tenley Bick

Postcolonial Retro-Futurism: Alessandro Ceresoli’s *Linea Tagliero* Prototypes — 315

5 Artist Statements

Artur R. Sztukalski and Guillaume Touissant

Transfuturism Manifesto — 349

Giovanni Fontana

From Words-in-Freedom to Epigenetic Poetry: Evolutions in Futurist Recitation and Performance — 353

Marcella Giulia Lorenzi

The Future of Futurism in Digital Photography — 367

Lindsay Brandon Hunter

The Infinite Wrench: An Ensemble Member Reflects on the Theatre Company ‘The Neo-Futurists’ During and After Greg Allen’s Tenure — 377

Section 2: **Reports**

Günter Berghaus

EAM2022 in Lisbon: The Global Expansion of Futurism in the 1910s and 1920s — 399

Leandro Pasini

Futurism and the Brazilian Week of Modern Art (1922): Some Thoughts Prompted by the *Centenário da Semana de 22* — 407

Simona Cigliana

Anton Giulio Bragaglia: The Archive of a Visionary — 425

Lisa Hanstein

Rosa Rosà / Edith Araldi / Edyth von Haynau (1884–1978): A Woman Photographer and Her Futurist Inspiration — 437

Section 3: **Critical responses to new publications**

Deirdre O'Grady

The Crisis of Humanism, the Search for a New Man and the Historical Avant-garde — 447

Lucia Re

Looking at the Lives of Avant-garde Women: The Collector as Scholar and Feminist — 453

Adrian R. Duran

Exhibiting Italian Art in the United States: From Futurism to Arte Povera — 463

Section 4: **Bibliography**

Günter Berghaus

A Bibliography of Publications on Futurism, 2020–2023 — 471

Section 5: **Back Matter**

List of Illustrations and Provenance Descriptions — 495

Notes on Contributors — 501

Name Index — 509

Subject Index — 541

Geographical Index — 569

Pasquale Fameli

Futurism in Italian Verbo-Visual Poetry after the Second World War

Abstract: This essay explores the ever-changing panorama of verbo-visual poetry after the Second World War in Italy, tracing back its manifold, divergent and articulated forms – spanning Concrete, Visual, Symbiotic or Epistaltic Poetry – to Futurist theories and practices. By reconstructing the complicated political and cultural debate that delayed a proper assessment of Marinetti's movement – due to its ambiguous association with Fascism in the 1920s to 40s – and following the few critical voices in Italy during the second half of the twentieth century (Masnata, Barilli, Ballerini) that fostered an essential scholarly change of course, I aim to contextualize the debt of Italian poetic neo-avant-garde(s) to Futurism. Showing how Italy was at the forefront of an international artistic turmoil that sought to affect a visual and material transformation of the poetic experience, the analysis focusses on the creative and theoretical works of a number of poets and artists, who played a significant rôle in the critical revision and practical prosecution of Futurism from the mid-1960s onwards and promoted the rediscovery and further development of *paroliberismo*: namely, Carlo Belloli (1922–2003), Arrigo Lora Totino (1928–2016), Maurizio Nannucci (1939-), Mimmo Rotella (1918–2006), Lamberto Pignotti (1926-), Stelio Maria Martini (1934–2016) and Paolo Albani (1946-). Examining the unique physical and formal characteristics of their outcomes in the framework of the Italian cultural climate of the time, all the while highlighting their instances of continuity with the earlier Italian avant-garde, the ultimate aim of the essay is to re-evaluate a series of little-studied, albeit fundamental experiences for a complete and systematic reclaiming of a (Neo)Futurist aesthetics.

Keywords: Verbo-visual Poetry; Words-in-Freedom and Free-Word Tables; poetry recitation; poetry and fine arts; sound poetry; Italian neo-avant-gardes; Carlo Belloli; Arrigo Lora Totino; Maurizio Nannucci; Mimmo Rotella; Lamberto Pignotti; Stelio Maria Martini; Paolo Albani

Introduction: from Futurism to the neo-avant-garde (and back)

In most Western countries, the period after the Second World War was informed by the gradual re-introduction, in a normalizing fashion, of ideas and aesthetic solutions anticipated by the historical avant-gardes in every field of artistic creativity and experimentation. Fostered by the new possibilities of modern technology that exploded in the nineteenth century,¹ the most daring avant-garde experiments, however, frequently eluded any systematic approach. So much so, that their groundbreaking practices in the field of poetry and art have often been misunderstood as naive and childish outcomes of obstinate innovation. The so-called ‘neo-avant-garde’² emerged during the 1960s and provided a more coherent, meditative and anti-heroic attitude in the world of art and literature, transforming the artistic possibilities of detachment and opposition into more articulated systems also in the field of poetry.³ While the historical avant-garde had begun a cultural battle that aimed at a total social and political revolution, the neo-avant-garde focussed mainly on the *formal* aspect of expressive media.⁴ Its revival, however, never consisted of slavish repetitions or sterile mannerisms. The activity of neo-avant-garde artists was fuelled by a critical rehabilitation of those original operating logics within a new material framework, marked by the introduction of mass-market strategies into cultural processes, as had been foreseen by their predecessors.⁵ It is no coincidence that one of the first and most important scholars of mass culture, Marshall McLuhan, declared, in the mid-1960s, that avant-garde art is “precise advance knowledge of how to cope with the psychic and social consequences of the next technology” and that “in experimental art, men are given the exact specifications of coming violence to their own psyches from their own counter-irritants or technology.”⁶

1 Still helpful to understand the scope of this revolution is Kern: *The Culture of Time and Space*.

2 In this essay, I am distinguishing between the ‘neo-avant-garde’ as a generic term for a variety of art movements (Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, Conceptual Art, Visual Poetry, Fluxus, Happenings, Minimalism, Body Art, etc.) and the Italian *neoavanguardia*, a literary movement which coincides with the Gruppo 63, formed in Italy in 1963 and oriented towards radical experimentations with language. For further information on the Gruppo 63, see Barilli and Guglielmi: *Gruppo 63: Critica e teoria*.

3 As pointed out by Barilli: “Marinetti e il nuovo sperimentalismo”, p. 89.

4 See Sanguineti: “Avanguardia e sperimentalismo”, p. 67.

5 Calvesi’s *Avanguardia di massa* is still fundamental to understanding these processes.

6 McLuhan: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, p. 66.

More than any other avant-garde movement, Italian Futurism demonstrated awareness of these issues. On various occasions, critics have highlighted the affinities between Marinetti and McLuhan's visions,⁷ both based on the formative rôle that technological inventions exert on perception, constantly reconfiguring our experience and our patterns of behaviour. The Futurist aesthetic revolution was built on the use of multiple means and languages to achieve simultaneity of sensory stimulations. As such, the notion of 'intermedia' as formulated by Dick Higgins in 1966, in agreement with McLuhan's theories,⁸ can find its very roots in Futurist poetics. American Pop-Art painter and sculptor George Segal pointed out the international scope of this legacy as follows:

In 1958–59, Kaprow and I stayed up until two or three in the morning arguing aesthetics. Kaprow was brilliant in conveying the Avant-garde ideas of Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism, especially Futurism. For example, Marinetti's "radio broadcasts" were of great interest to us. The combination of words and sound made by noises produced by whatever objects clearly were a rich source for John Cage. It seems it was only the Italian futurists' embrace of Mussolini that gave them a bad reputation. The aesthetic that has to do with living in modern cities, I think, is still worth exploring.⁹

These words demonstrate the utmost attention paid by the new international avant-garde to radical Futurist inventions, in a period in which Italian culture looked at them with suspicion.

Once again a 'Conquest of the Stars': A slow rehabilitation

The association of some leading members of Futurism with Fascism burdened the movement for a very long time. As suggested by Segal, the ideological stigma which resulted from this limited the reception of Futurism's most daring inventions in the post-war period. Although it is possible to trace numerous signs of its critical rediscovery in Italy well before the 1960s,¹⁰ its full reaffirmation has been long and

7 See Calvesi: *Il futurismo*, p. 2; De Maria: "Marinetti poeta e ideologo", p. XXIII; Barilli: "Marinetti e il nuovo sperimentalismo", p. 94 and Agnese: "Prima Marinetti, poi McLuhan."

8 See Emerson: *Reading Writing Interfaces*, pp. 88–89.

9 Bertozzi: "An Interview with George Segal", pp. 27–28.

10 See, in this regard, Berghaus: "The Postwar Reception of Futurism: Repression or Recuperation?" and "The Historiography of Italian Futurism".

complex, not only amongst conservative intellectuals, but also among the members of the most prominent neo-avant-garde literary group in Italy, known as the Gruppo 63. Indeed, one of the harshest condemnations came from one of its key members, the left-wing poet, writer and critic Edoardo Sanguineti. In an essay of 1966, he traced back Marinetti's aesthetics to the despotic and egocentric theories of Mario Morasso, rooting his "aesthetic apology of the machine, speed, industry [...] in an attitude of violent undemocratic hatred."¹¹ Two years later, Sanguineti wrote a review of Luciano De Maria's pivotal book *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (Futurist Theory and Invention, 1968), arguing that industrial war was for Marinetti the "the truth of the world" and its aesthetic defence "the central node" of his "thought and of the entire cultural politics of fascism (or fascisms)."¹² Sanguineti's views on Futurism are largely outdated today, but they had significant impact in Italy at the time. He rejected De Maria's polemological interpretation of Marinetti's idea of war,¹³ and his ideological arguments had serious repercussions on its reception of the movement. As many other ex-Futurists, Pino Masnata¹⁴ openly complained about this kind of misunderstanding, carried out by the Italian *neoavant-guardia*:

11 "[...] l'apologia estetica della macchina, della velocità, dell'industria [...] in un atteggiamento di violento odio antidemocratico". Sanguineti: "L'estetica della velocità", p. 143. This and all subsequent translations from Italian in this essay are mine, unless otherwise noted.

12 "[...] la verità del mondo [...] il nodo centrale di Marinetti e di tutta la politica culturale del fascismo (o dei 'fascismi')." Sanguineti: "La guerra futurista", p. 43.

13 Drawing on the influences of Nietzsche's philosophy and the Darwinian *struggle for life*, De Maria uses a neologism that literally refers to the "study of war" (from the ancient Greek *polemos* = "war" and *logos* = "study"): "Il pensiero di Marinetti è intimamente, profondamente polemologico: la guerra si identifica con una legge fondamentale della vita. Umanità e necessità di lottare divengono sinonimi. [...] Per Marinetti la guerra, se da una parte è legge profonda della vita, dall'altra nella sua manifestazione concreta, è festa, nel senso etnologico lumeggiato da Roger Callois, esuberanza vitale, dispendio giocondo di energie, igiene non in senso preventivo, ma attivo e liberatorio. Assistiamo, nella visione futurista della guerra, a un'imponente estetizzazione del fenomeno bellico. Di più, diremmo che nell'ideologia futurista la guerra assume una coloritura erotico-estetica." De Maria: "Marinetti poeta e ideologo", pp. XLIV-XLV. For more up-to-date reflections on the topic, see also Berghaus: "Violence, War, Revolution: Marinetti's Concept of a Futurist Cleanser for the World" and Di Stefano: "The Futurists and the Aesthetics of War". Sanguineti's own positions, however, evolved in time, as can be seen in "La parola futurista" (1998), which contains much more temperate judgements than his essays from the 1960s.

14 Masnata was an exponent of the second phase of Futurism and co-authored with Marinetti the manifesto *La radia* (The Radio, 1933). For more information on Masnata, see Modena: Pino Masnata: *Vita di un futurista* and Margaret Fisher's Introduction to *Radia: Pino Masnata's Gloss of the 1933 Futurist Radio Manifesto*.

Young people who refer to themselves as the Italian *neoavanguardia* or *Gruppo 63* begin with a flood of words and commonplaces. They regularly talk about the superficial nature of Futurism, clearly demonstrating that they know nothing about it. [...] Maybe it's not their fault. They are young and books about Futurism are hard to come by. [...] I am pleased that they are still asking what the language of poetry is. New explorers and scouts are emerging from the Italian poets who have strengthened their force by climbing the lower slopes. [...] What I am saying is: "Be aware that you will find in Futurism all the launching pads for your flights. You will find Giuseppe Guglielmi's expressive audacities. You will find (in the poetry of technicalities¹⁵) the language of Elio Pagliarani's physics lessons [...]. You will find in the Free-Word Tables and in the lines to be read synchronically the premises for Renato Pedio's multiple pattern poetry [...], whose experimentation is undoubtedly still alive and interesting."¹⁶

The publication, in 1970, of an issue of *Il Verri* entirely dedicated to Futurism was critical for a reconsideration of Marinetti's movement, at least in Italy. The publication had been called for by Luciano Anceschi – founder and director of the journal – as an attempt to re-evaluate the Italian avant-garde beyond the old and reductive schemes. In his essay for *Il Verri*, Renato Barilli lamented the lack of recognition for Marinetti's contribution to literary experimentalism, but also noted the limits imposed by an inner disjunction in Marinetti's activity: on the one hand a theoretical audacity and on the other a literary production still marked by dishevelled rebelliousness and expressionistic resentments typical of the Scapigliatura movement.¹⁷ Marinetti's poetic production still remained attached to traditional genres even in the most advanced moments of literary production. Barilli therefore advocated the need to rethink his lesson from the perspective of the visual arts, giving him credit for having initiated a "sensorial revolution" aimed at the

15 Marinetti published in 1940 a *Poema non umano dei tecnicismi* (The Nonhuman Poem of Technicalities).

16 "I giovani che si autodefiniscono la 'neo-avanguardia' italiana o il 'gruppo 63' partono con un fiume di parole e di luoghi comuni. Il solito è quello della superficialità del futurismo di cui dimostrano chiaramente di non conoscere nulla. [...] Forse non è colpa loro. Sono giovani e i libri del futurismo sono introvabili. [...] Sono lieto che rimettano ancora in discussione ciò che è il linguaggio della poesia. Nuove pattuglie esploranti sorgono dai poeti italiani che si erano fortificati su le prime alture. [...] E dico: 'Guardate che nel futurismo troverete predisposte tutte le piste di lancio per i vostri voli. Troverete le audacie espressive di Giuseppe Guglielmi. Troverete (nella poesia dei tecnicismi) il linguaggio della lezione di fisica di Elio Pagliarani [...]. Troverete nelle tavole parolibere e nelle righe da leggere sincronicamente le premesse per la poesia a schema multiplo di Renato Pedio [...] il cui esperimento è indubbiamente vivo e interessante'". Masnata: *Poesia viva: Storia e teoria*, p. 211.

17 Scapigliatura refers to an artistic movement that developed in Italy after the Risorgimento (1815–71) and included poets, writers, musicians, painters and sculptors. The term 'scapigliato' literally means 'unkempt' or 'dishevelled'.

convergence between different arts, and at the achievement of a dynamic conception of space that would support creative exchanges between art and life.

Indeed, it was only with the Futurist exploration of synaesthesia – which had gained a central rôle as early as Romanticism and had been extensively explored by the Symbolists – that a concrete interaction between different sensorial stimuli can be observed. The Futurist revolution, in particular, was built on a novel anthropological concept that identified other intermediate areas of sensitivity and thus went beyond the conventional division of the perceptive apparatus into five sensory spheres. Marinetti believed that only the continuous interplay between tactile, acoustic and olfactory stimuli, caused by the use of manifold technological means, could dismantle the instituted boundaries of genres. This, he felt, would finally tear down Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's separation between the arts of space (painting and sculpture) and the arts of time (poetry and music),¹⁸ and reveal new forms of engagement between word, sound, image and form.¹⁹



Fig. 1a: An example of a poem in *parole in libertà* style: the beginning of Marinetti's *Dune* from *Lacerba* 2:4 (15 February 1914), p. 51. **Fig. 1b:** An example of a *tavola parolibera*: *Une assemblée tumultueuse: Sensibilité numérique* (A Tumultuous Assembly: Numerical Sensibility) published in F.T. Marinetti: *Les Mots en liberté futuristes* (1919).

The most significant contributions to this sensorial revolution were undoubtedly Marinetti's *parole in libertà* (Words-in-Freedom, see Fig. 1a) and, even more, the *tavole parolibere* (Free-Word Tables, see Fig. 1b), which animate the word with

¹⁸ See Barilli: "Marinetti e il nuovo sperimentalismo", pp. 93–94.

¹⁹ Ever since Horace stated in his *Ars poetica* that "ut pictura poesis" (Let the poem be like a picture), the 'paragone debate' has been a central element in European aesthetics. On this 'rivalry of the arts' see Hecht: "The 'paragone' Debate: Ten Illustrations and a Comment."

new material and gestural dynamics: linguistic signs are subjected to forces of compression, dilation or dis-aggregation that overturn their symbolic function, converting them into iconic projections or physical phenomena, according to what Fausto Curi has defined as “a stylistic of matter”.²⁰ This is also the source of the sound-performative character of the Free-Word Tables, which is not limited to the presence of onomatopoeias or noise evocations, but is based on the “phonic relevance” produced by the typographic processing.²¹ This dynamic is triggered by the transformative capacity that the space of the Free-Word Tables exercises on its constituent elements; but there is also a gestural quality that induces a ‘geometric’ or ‘topographical’ form of recitation that draws on cones, spirals or ellipses projected into space. The determining character of Marinetti’s tables ultimately lies in the coexistence of different codes of communication:²² they offer a unique opportunity to highlight the word as sound or gesture, not only through the dissolution of syntactic bonds, but also thanks to the physical arrangement of graphemes, capable of evoking the movements of the body and the animation of matter.

While Futurist typographic solutions circulated across Europe and had great international influence,²³ the recognition of *paroliberismo* as a great literary achievement was hampered in Italy by a series of deprecating judgement. The first and most naïve attacks came from writers contemporary to Marinetti’s movement, for example Gian Pietro Lucini, who complained of a radical disconnection between language and reality;²⁴ or Giovanni Papini, who compared Words-in-Freedom with “formal strangeness”.²⁵ In the following years, *paroliberismo* suffered from a low public profile that can be attributed to Marinetti himself. The two anthologies of Futurist poetry, *I poeti futuristi* (The Futurist Poets, 1912) and *I nuovi poeti futuristi* (New Futurist Poets, 1925), for instance, contained only poems in traditional verse-form, with many of them still rooted in Late-Symbolist and Crepuscular aesthetics. Technical difficulties in the reproduction of daring graphic and topographical works also had a negative effect on Words-in-Freedom. Although Marinetti declared his desire to reserve his publishing house Edizioni futuriste di “Poesia” only for “purely Futurist works that, due to their forcefulness and radicalism of thought and their topographical difficulties, cannot be published else-

20 Curi: “Una stilistica della materia.”

21 See Polacci: “Guardare, declamare, leggere.”

22 See Pignotti and Stefanelli: *Scrittura verbovisiva e sinestetica*, p. 35.

23 On the success story of Futurist typography, see Toschi: “Futurism and the Birth of a Modern European Typography.”

24 See Lucini: “Come ho sorpassato il futurismo”, p. 273.

25 Papini: “Futurismo e Marinettismo”, p. 285.

where,²⁶ his editorial activity was much more conservative than expected and limited to what could be easily assembled and typeset.²⁷ In the decades that followed, conservative critics declared the Futurist Words-in-Freedom to be a sterile and marginal phenomenon, thus limiting its appreciation even further.²⁸ Sanguineti's critique in the mid-1960s ultimately condemned *paroliberismo* and Futurist recitation in Italy because, in his view, both were reflections of Marinetti's imperialist warmongering, totally incompatible with the ideological stance of the *neoavanguardia*.

The rehabilitation of Futurism only set in with scholars such as Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Crispolti, Mario Verdone and others who, in the 1970s, made it possible to gradually re-evaluate the movement's contribution to modern art and literature. The first signs of this change of direction, however, emerged in the United States where, since the late 1940s, several exhibitions encouraged audiences to have a fresh look at the contribution which Futurism made to the historical avant-garde.²⁹ An important show in the field of poetry was *Italian Visual Poetry 1912–1972*, organized by Luigi Ballerini at the Finch College Museum (25–28 April 1973). Its fascinating catalogue was distributed by George Wittenborn, an influential publisher and book dealer who was also responsible for the revival of Dada poetry and painting at the time and whose bookshop on Madison Avenue served as an unofficial yet crucial platform for the transatlantic reception of the European historical avant-garde in the USA. Ballerini's efforts succeeded in reviving interest in Futurism (and Futurist poetry, in particular), in Italy too. His exhibition in New York was brought over to the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin in the autumn of 1973, with the slightly different title *Scrittura visuale in Italia 1912–1972*. It presented a new critical approach that benefited from two major

26 “[...] a quelle opere assolutamente futuriste che per la violenza e l'estremismo del pensiero e per le difficoltà tipografiche non possono essere pubblicate dagli altri editori.” Marinetti: “Firmamento” di Armando Mazza”, p. 31.

27 See, in this regard, Van den Bossche: “Mots en liberté? Testualità e formati editoriali nel libro futurista.”

28 See Flora: *Dal romanticismo al futurismo*; Falqui: *Il futurismo. Il novecentismo*; and Jacoppi: *Poesia futurista italiana*.

29 Amongst these exhibitions, one needs to mention *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, organized by James Thrall Soby and Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1949 (featuring many Futurist paintings); *Futurism and Later Italian Art* at Palm Beach: The Society of the Four Arts, 9 February – 4 March 1951; *Futurism: Balla, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Severini* in New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 22 March – 1 May 1954; *The Futurists: Balla. Severini, 1912–1918* in New York: Rose Fried Gallery, 25 January – 26 February 1954; *Futurism* in New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 31 May – 5 September 1961; Detroit: Institute of Arts, 18 October – 19 December 1961; Los Angeles: County Museum, 14 January – 19 February 1962.

changes in Italian neo-avant-garde poetry: on the one hand, the blossoming of diverse verbal-visual approaches, and on the other, the evolution of printing technologies capable of overcoming the practical difficulties that Marinetti's typesetters had to contend with. In the introductory text to the New York exhibition catalogue, Ballerini identified Futurism as the progenitor of all forms of Visual Writing developed after World War II. Analysing the first three tables of Marinetti's *Les Mots en liberté* (1919), he highlighted in particular the placement of verbal symbols into "a wider circulation of typographical signs", surpassing altogether "the idea of a privileged verbal language."³⁰ The pivotal difference of these Tables, with respect to the initial poetic experimentations of 1912, lies precisely in the use of graphemes as objects and in the autonomy of the typographic elaboration, which is no longer limited to illustrating or graphically emphasizing meanings, but rather establishes a meta-verbal discourse based on the material function of the sign in the "simultaneity of perception".³¹

Luciano Caruso and Stelio Maria Martini's more systematic work moved a stage beyond Ballerini's exhibition. Both of them visual poets themselves, they published in 1975–77 an impressive two-volume anthology entitled *Tavole parolibere futuriste, 1912–1944* (Futurist Free-Word Tables, 1912–1944); organized exhibitions in Florence (*Scrittura visuale e poesia sonora futurista* [Futurist Visual Writing and Sound Poetry], 1977) and Venice (*Tavole parolibere e tipografia futurista* [Free-Word Tables and Futurist Typography], 1977), and issued anastatic reprints of many Futurist texts, thus recovering the main corpus of experimental Futurist poetry. More importantly, they offered a historical reassessment of the relationship between Futurism and Fascism. Caruso and Martini demonstrated the "totale inutilizzazione" (absolute lack of usefulness)³² of Futurism to the régime, highlighting Marinetti's attempt to heal the Platonic wall that separated words and things by reintroducing the expansive forces of matter into the circuit of language:

"Their [i. e., the Futurists'] lyricism was based on 'the lyrical obsession for matter' which [...] destroyed the illusory centrality of the self in literature and banned its psychology, in favour of the introduction of subjectivity directly into matter and not projecting it onto a Platonic screen."³³

³⁰ Ballerini: *Italian Visual Poetry 1912–1972*, p. 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³² Caruso and Martini: "La 'fuga in avanti' del futurismo", p. 6.

³³ "Il loro lirismo era 'l'ossessione lirica della materia' che [...] distruggeva l'illusoria centralità dell'io nella letteratura e ne bandiva la psicologia, a vantaggio dell'immissione della soggettività direttamente nella materia e non su di un platonico schermo." Caruso and Martini: "Le tavole parolibere, ovvero La 'rivoluzione culturale' dei futuristi" pp. 49–50.

Indeed, the Free-Word Tables abolish the symbolic function of writing, condensing all the cosmic forces that stimulate our perception.³⁴ By recognizing the *tavole parolibere* as the first audacious attempt to mend the wound generated between words and matter, Caruso and Martini hence absolved them from the accusations first advanced by Lucini.

Passing on the torch: From Carlo Belloli to Arrigo Lora Totino

The critical rehabilitation of Italian Futurism began in the early 1970s and consolidated over time through exhibitions, publications and specialized studies. This re-assessment made it possible to reposition Futurist *paroliberismo* at the origins of some of the most significant verbal-visual phenomena of the post-war period. However, it is yet to be ascertained in which ways and to what extent we can trace any direct connection between historical Futurist poetry and neo-avant-garde poetry in the years preceding this re-evaluation. The limited knowledge of Futurist literature available to Italian writers in the 1950s led to irregular developments, mostly attributable to the creative inclinations of specific authors. Although sporadic and embryonic, the ways in which the Futurist lesson impacted onto Italian verbal-visual works of the second half of the twentieth century was nevertheless more articulated than one might think. Marinetti's Words-in-Freedom initiated a "typographical revolution"³⁵ aimed at the total deconstruction of all structural and material conventions of the printed page and the book. This revolution soon triggered an interest amongst many designers, publishers and printers, who subsequently laid the foundations for today's forms of visual communication.³⁶ As Giovanni Lista emphasized, *paroliberismo* was a project open to continuous elaboration and provoked new working methods based on two premises: the interaction between verbal and visual codes, and the implosion of the factual elements of writing.³⁷ This redefinition not only of poetry, but of the entire system of communication developed into a variety of directions, sometimes even in contradiction to the initial interest in Futurist dynamism and onomatopoeic *rumorismo*. When comparing the inner developments of the Futurist movement with the contributions of those who embraced its heritage in their own autonomous and particular ways,

³⁴ For further explorations on this topic, see Fameli: "L'avanguardia presa in parola."

³⁵ Marinetti: "Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom", p. 128.

³⁶ See Salaris: *La rivoluzione tipografica*, pp. 5–12.

³⁷ Lista: "Dal paroliberismo al libro-oggetto", p. 293.

we find solutions that at times radicalized single graphic, phonic or gestural components or enhanced their circulation by means of up-to-date technological strategies.

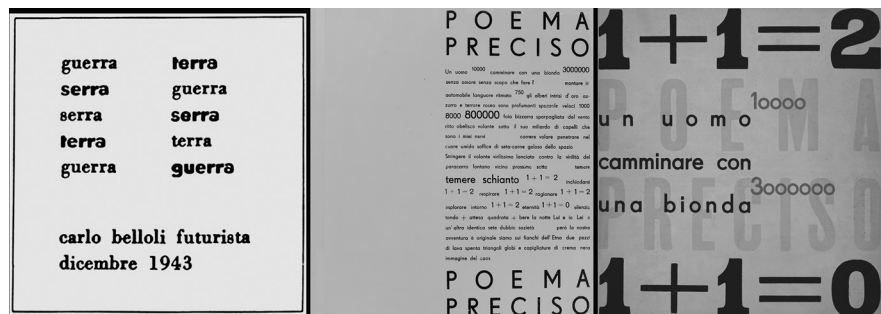


Fig. 2a: Carlo Belloli: *Guerra Terra* (War Earth), from *Parole per la guerra* (Words for the War). Milano: Edizioni di Futuristi in Armi, 1944, p. 9. **Fig. 2b:** F.T. Marinetti: *Poema preciso* (An Accurate Poem), from Tullio D’Albisola and F.T. Marinetti: *Parole in libertà futuriste olfattive tattili* (Words-in-Freedom: Futurist, Olfactory, Tactile and Thermic). Roma: Edizioni futuriste di “Poesia”; Savona: Lito-latta, 1932. pp. 12r and 12v.

An important figure in this transition was Carlo Belloli (1922–2003), an exponent of the last generation of Futurist poets, whose Visual Poetry was based on modular relationships between poetry and space. This can already be seen in one of his earliest works, *Guerra Terra* (War Earth), dated December 1943 (see Fig. 2a). This composition is made of two columns of nouns chosen for their assonance: the permutation of the initial consonant generates a multiplicity of spatial connections that allow the text to be read in multiple directions. Matteo D’Ambrosio relates Belloli’s model to the *Poema preciso* (An Accurate Poem), conceived by Marinetti in 1932 (see Fig. 2b) and based on diagrammatic or contrasting oppositions created from a severely reduced lexical range.³⁸ Belloli hence updated the style of poetic-visual research in the light of the principles of a ‘mechanical’ aesthetics that had been taken up by the Futurist movement during the 1920s.

While it was Marinetti himself who called Belloli’s poetry “the future of Futurism”,³⁹ numerous critics also maintain that Belloli was a precursor of the phenomenon of Concrete Poetry, which emerged in the early 1950s in Switzerland and Bra-

³⁸ See D’Ambrosio: “Di come Carlo Belloli, partendo dal ‘poema preciso’ marinettiano, divenne un precursore della poesia concreta.”

³⁹ “Belloli ha intuito il futuro del futurismo.” Marinetti: “Testi-poemi murali di Carlo Belloli”, p. 280.

It was the Turinese poet Arrigo Lora Totino (1928–2016) who first introduced Belloli into this debate and included him in his anthology of Concrete Poetry, *Modulo* (1966). His personal relationship with the slightly older poet had a significant influence on the direction of his research, as can be seen in his *Verbotecture: Architetture di parole nello spazio della pagina* (Verbotectures: Word Architectures in the Space of a Page), begun in the second half of the 1960s,⁴³ as well as in his *Corpi di poesia* (Bodies of Poetry), made of Plexiglas from 1967 onward (see Fig. 3a). The latter series recall a homonymous cycle of works created by Belloli in 1951 using the very same material.⁴⁴ In 1959, Belloli's theorization of Audiovisual Poetry – intended as a “unified relationship of word, sound and visuality”⁴⁵ – inspired a particular interest in the relationship between sign and sound in Lora Totino.

This was already apparent in his early writings on the notion of concretism in poetry. In a text that appeared in *Modulo*, “Ragioni di una scelta per un'antologia della poesia concreta” (Selection Criteria for an Anthology of Concrete Poetry), the author dwells on the “optophonetic” values of Concrete texts and identifies a series of “legitimate precedents”, including Marinetti's Words-in Freedom, Velimir Khlebnikov's *zaum'* (transrational) poetry and Luigi Russolo's *rumorismo*. The text concludes with a reference to Belloli's *Texte poème poème texte* (1961) (see Fig. 3b), stating that it offers “an indication to act [...] in an attempt to rationalize a chosen matter in its state of shapeless freedom.”⁴⁶ It is thanks to this polarization between freedom and rationality that Lora Totino was able to freely associate modular solutions with more dynamic and deconstructed approaches, accepting Mike Weaver's thesis about the oscillation of Concrete Poetry between Constructivism and Expressionism.⁴⁷

Lora Totino's interest in the sonic dimension of poetry became more intense as his theoretical and historical investigation of Concretism expanded. In 1969, he curated, together with Dietrich Mahlow, *Poesia concreta: Indirizzi visuali e fonetici* (Concrete Poetry: Visual and Phonetic Directions), at the Venice Biennale. In an essay written for the catalogue, Lora Totino focusses on two Futurist manifestos

43 Regarding Lora Totino's verbal-visual production in this period, see Spignoli: “Arrigo Lora Totino ‘architetto di parole’: Dalle verbotecture ai cromofonemi.”

44 See Lora Totino: “Nuovi corpi di poesia.” Belloli's influence on Lora Totino can also be seen in an untitled text prepared for the catalogue of the exhibition *Omaggio a Carlo Belloli* (Homage to Carlo Belloli), organized by the Turinese artist at Studio Santandrea in Milan in 1977.

45 Solt: *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, p. 38.

46 “[...] un'indicazione ad agire [...] nello sforzo di razionalizzare una materia scelta nel suo stato di informe libertà”. Lora Totino: “Ragioni di una scelta per un'antologia della poesia concreta”, p. 23.

47 See Weaver: “Concrete Poetry.” Lora Totino mentions this essay at the beginning of one of his last and most mature critical contributions on Concrete Poetry, “Poesia concreta.”

of 1916: Marinetti's *La declamazione dinamica e sinottica* (Dynamic, Multichanneled Recitation) and Fortunato Depero's *L'onomalingua* (Onomalanguage), highlighting that "the poetic function is a system of listening where the poet lives permanently as one of the most perfect biological resonators. [...] The syllable, when stripped of all meaning, can give rise to a new poetic projection, due to its nature as a timbral noise."⁴⁸

The influence of Marinetti's ideas came to the fore with particular strength in the *Poesia liquida* (Liquid Poetry, 1968), a form of sound poetry that involves the modulation of verses and words through a horn full of water built by Pietro Fogliati and named *Idromegafono* (Hydromegaphone). This was a concretization of Marinetti's call to "liquefy" the voice in the manifesto *Dynamic, Multichanneled Recitation*,⁴⁹ as the resistance of the water to the phonic vibrations emitted by the poet dilutes the lexical articulations into shapeless gurgles. The *Testi da tuffare* (Lyrics to Dive Into, 1968), written by Lora Totino for these liquid recitations, alternate Words-in-Freedom with ironic and playful verbalizations similar to those in Depero's experimental *Onomalingua*:

vverbo liquido	lliquid verb
testo pesce	text fish
pesc pesc	fis fis
pesco parole d'acqua	I fish words of water
parole d'olio petrolio aglio	words of oil petroleum garlic
grasso grosso	fat big
gorgoglio...	gurgling...

Lora Totino's interest in Futurism was not just determined by his relationship with Belloli, but also by the artistic environment of Turin in the early 1960s. A metropolitan and industrial city, Turin looked to Futurism as a model for the design of a positive urban utopia that could overcome the contradictions of subjectivity that had characterized the immediate post-war period.⁵⁰ Besides the influence of Pinot Gallizio – a friend of the Futurist artist Farfa, who drew a great deal of inspiration from Futurism's theories, passing them along to Asger Jorn⁵¹ – the Futurist exhibitions held in the city were of great importance in shaping Lora Totino's

48 "La funzione poetica è un sistema di ascolto ove il poeta vive in permanenza come un risuonatore biologico dei più perfezionati. [...] la sillaba, se spogliata d'ogni significazione, può dare origine a una nuova proiezione poetica, per la sua natura di rumore timbrico". Lora Totino: "Poesia da ascoltare", s.p.

49 Marinetti: "Dynamic, Multichanneled Recitation", p. 195.

50 Pola: "Dialoghi tra spazio e tempo: Il sistema dell'avanguardia", pp. 132–133.

51 Lista: "L'eredità futurista", p. 717.

milieu. The Municipal Gallery, for instance, showed *Aspetti del secondo futurismo torinese* (Aspects of Second-Wave Futurism in Turin, 1962) and a retrospective on Giacomo Balla (1963); these were followed by numerous exhibitions dedicated to individual Futurist artists organized by the galleries La Bussola, Martano, Narciso, Notizie and Il Punto, all of which also promoted extra-pictorial researches. These stimuli re-emerge in many of Lora Totino's subsequent works, such as the *Cromofonemi iridescenti* (Iridescent Chromophonemes, 1967), *Poesia ginnica* (Gymnastic Poetry, 1974), *Fotodinamiche simultanee* (Simultaneous Photodynamics, 1976) and *Pappapoemi* (Eat Poetry 1981). At the same time, the artist continued his reevaluation of the historical avant-garde, which led him, amongst other things, to performing texts by Marinetti and Depero in numerous venues and on the anthology of sound poetry *Futura*, published by Cramps Records in 1978.

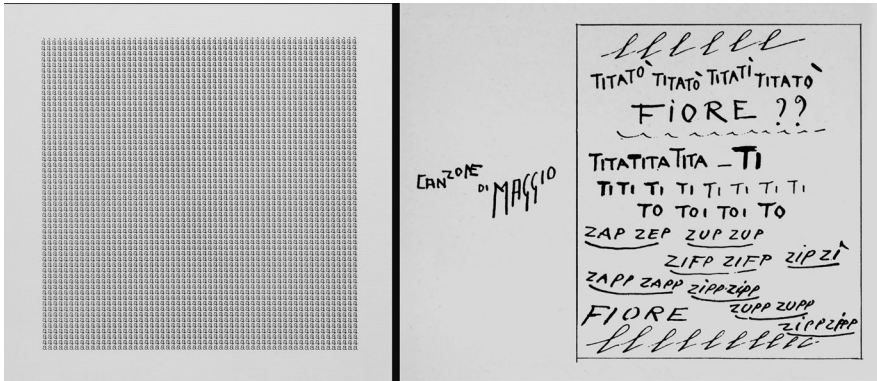


Fig. 4a: Maurizio Nannucci: *Dattilogramma* (Typescript, 1965). **Fig. 4b:** Giacomo Balla: *Canzone di maggio* (May Song, 1915).

‘Visual’ permeations in Maurizio Nannucci’s poetic research

The artistic debut of the Florentine artist Maurizio Nannucci (1939-) was also connected to Concretism: the scholarship he won at the Ulm School thanks to Pio Manzù and his attending the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee for two semesters between 1960 and 1961, brought him into contact with the work of Gomringer and other members of the Concrete Poetry movement. His first *Dattilogrammi* (Typescripts; see Fig. 4a) date back to 1964: these are linear and minimal graphic textures created with an Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter, which had been designed by Marcello Nizzoli, who was once a member of the Futurist group

Nuove Tendenze (New Tendencies). In July 1967, Nannucci met Belloli at the Trieste group exhibition *Segni nello spazio* (Signs in Space), which saw the participation of the former as an artist and the latter as the author of one of the critical essays included in the catalogue. Two other opportunities for collaboration followed: in February 1968, the Centro Ricerche Estetiche F-Uno group, featuring Lanfranco Baldi, Auro Lecci, Paolo Masi and Nannucci, showed their works at Studio 2B in Bergamo, with a catalogue introduced by Belloli; in 1969, he again presented Nannucci's *Dattilogrammi*, this time in a book issued by Exempla, a publishing house founded in Florence by the artist himself. In 1967, Nannucci created his first 'writings' by means of neon tubes hung up in gallery spaces. These first environmental writings derived from the experience of Concretism,⁵² but had the indexical and tautological character of coeval Conceptual Art. Works such as *Red Line* or *Corner* (1968) reduced phrases to purely deictic and assertive utterances. A turning point was reached in 1969 with *The Missing Poem*, where the word regains its evocative power, once again taking on an explicitly poetic and literary value. The artist explained:

In my mind's eye I see the various ambients, the walls of the room in which I'm installing the work, like blank white pages in a book. My intention is to link the various installations so that they form a kind of continuous discourse flowing from one page to another, even though each individual work is ultimately a self-sufficient entity.⁵³

It is no coincidence that this evolution took place precisely during a period when Nannucci had his most intense engagement with Belloli. In the catalogue text for the exhibition *Poesia concreta: Indirizzi visuali e fonetici* (Concrete Poetry: Visual and Phonetic Directions; Biennale di Venezia, 25 September – 10 October 1969), where Nannucci also exhibited his work, Belloli insisted on the environmental potential of his Visual Poetry, stating that "the visual poem suitable to be hung on a wall [...] extends the library through an immediate and continuous use of a different degree of readability. It requires a fully optical-psychological participation and

52 "For me, neon was above all writing [...] it made it possible to bring light to words and texts that I had made in the early 1960s with the typewriter in the *dattilogrammi* and other linear texts where I used colour." [Per me il neon è soprattutto scrivere [...] è la possibilità di dare luce a parole e testi che nei primi anni Sessanta avevo steso con la macchina da scrivere nelle pagine dei dattilogrammi e di altri testi lineari in cui facevo uso del colore]. Nannucci quoted in Grazioli: "Maurizio Nannucci", p. 58.

53 Friedel: "A Conversation with Maurizio Nannucci", p. 197.

leads to a differentiated visual perception.”⁵⁴ With the creation of *Poemi stradali* (Street Poems), based on the use of advertising techniques, Visual Poetry then moves “from the internal to the external space, from the home to the street.”⁵⁵ It should also be noted that, for Belloli, “the street poem participates in the external space of architecture and creates an unusual, yet characteristic animation of anonymous urban spaces.”⁵⁶ This tendency of poetry exhibited in conventional outdoor locations to modify communal spaces⁵⁷ is exactly what interested Nannucci from 1969 onwards. He continuously increased the size of his neon constructions, both indoors and outdoors, clearly inspired by his Futurist predecessors:

If we want to look for a historical antecedent for Nannucci’s mindset, we must go back to the Futurist approach inspired by inventors such as Marconi, brimming with waves and energies, following the entire path that extends from Antonio Sant’Elia’s *Propaganda luminosa* to the final sparks when still, in the middle of the Second World War, the unlimited possibilities of expanding the signification of writing in space were reaffirmed, and when a final manifesto predicted “futuristic conurbations where luminous notice boards march over our heads and drive the reader towards other squares-pages”.⁵⁸

Although Marinetti was amongst the most convinced supporters of the aesthetic potential of the “avvisi luminosi”,⁵⁹ Nannucci rather seems to apply here one of

54 “Il poema visuale a situabilità parietale [...] estende la biblioteca al ricorso immediato e continuo di un diverso grado di leggibilità a partecipazione più compiutamente ottico-psicologica e a percezione visiva differenziata.” Belloli: “Poesia visuale: Affermazione di una tendenza”, p. 24.

55 “[...] dallo spazio interno a quello esterno, dalla casa alla strada.” Belloli: “Poesia visuale: Affermazione di una tendenza”, p. 24.

56 “Il poema stradale partecipa dello spazio esterno dell’architettura e determina una inconsueta animazione, caratterizzante, dell’anonimato urbano.” Belloli: “Poesia visuale: Affermazione di una tendenza”, p. 24.

57 See Spignoli: *La parola si fa spazio*, p. 81.

58 “Se vogliamo cercare un antecedente storico all’impostazione mentale di Nannucci bisogna risalire piuttosto al clima di quel futurismo “marconiano”, tutto pervaso da onde ed energie, lungo tutta la parabola che va dalla Propaganda Luminosa di Antonio Sant’Elia fino alle ultime scintille, quando ancora, in piena Seconda Guerra Mondiale, si ribadivano le possibilità illimitate di espansione e significazione della scrittura nello spazio, vaticinando, nell’ultimo manifesto, ‘urbanismi futuristici [sic.] i cui avvisi luminosi marcianti in alto spingono il lettore verso altre piazze-pagine’”. Mugnaini: “Maurizio Nannucci.” The quote within the quote is a slightly imperfect reference to the 1942 manifesto *L’arte tipografica di guerra e dopoguerra* (The Art of Typography During and After the War), written by Marinetti together with Alfredo Trimarco, Luigi Scrivo and Piero Bellanova, and published in the journal *Graphicus* 32:5 (May 1942), a special issue on Futurism where they talk about “urbanismi futuristi i cui avvisi luminosi marcianti in alto spingono il lettore verso altre piazze-pagine altri libri altre azioni altri voli sopramarini e stratosferici.”

59 Marinetti: “Gli avvisi luminosi” e “Contro gli spegnitori di Milano”.

the solutions suggested by the Futurist Escodamè (Michele Leskovic), who suggested in *Immensificare la poesia* (Intensify Poetry, 1933) to “hand over to poets the facades of our houses, our new architectures, so that they replace typefaces with letters of light bulbs and neon tubes.”⁶⁰ Nannucci relies precisely upon a process of poetic magnification and intensification, given that imaginative phrases arouse a “sense of incommensurability”⁶¹ by interconnecting the experience of reading and viewing.

New abstract verbalizations: Mimmo Rotella’s *Epistaltismo*

In the years when Belloli was planning “the future of Futurism” in physical-visual terms, the Calabrian artist Mimmo Rotella (1918–2006) was re-elaborating its phonetic-performative aspects in the form of *Epistaltismo*, a type of sound poetry that focussed on the condensation of onomatopoeias and abstract verbalizations, influenced by jazz. The term ‘epistaltic’ is a neologism coined by the artist for its evocative power. The origin of the term remains unclear, but Enzo Minarelli speculates that it derived from the adjective ‘diastaltic’, used by the Greek philosopher Aristoxenus to describe exhortative music that propels the listener into action.⁶² If we then consider that *épos* means ‘word’, the term ‘epistaltic’ could indicate an incitement to treat verbs as action, which is precisely what Rotella sought to achieve with this kind of performative poetry.

The *Manifesto dell’epistaltismo*, written in Paris in 1949, was in line with the ideas of Lettrism, a French poetic movement that aimed at breaking down words into letters and reassembling them into meaningless sound structures. Created by Isidore Isou in 1946, it also had distinct Futurist roots.⁶³ Rotella probably received his first Futurist inspirations in Naples, where he met Emilio Notte and Eugenio Viti,⁶⁴ both close to Cangiullo, and later in Rome, where Prampolini was energetically engaged in promoting avant-garde culture through the Art Club, an association of artists he had founded with Pericle Fazzini, Luigi Montanarini

60 “[...] bisogna dare loro [= ai poeti] le facciate delle nostre case, delle nostre nuove architetture; sostituendo ai caratteri tipografici le lettere di lampadine e tubi neon.” Escodamè: “Immensificare la poesia”, p. 490.

61 Tazzi: “Maurizio Nannucci”, p. 104.

62 Minarelli: *La voce regina: Poesia sonora in pubblico*, p. 70.

63 See Ferrua: “Sur quelques analogies entre le futurisme et le lettrisme” and Gerber: “Futurismo und Lettrisme: Grenzüberschreitende Stadtexte der Avant-garde.”

64 Rotella: *L’ora della lucertola*, p. 18.

and others, and where Rotella exhibited in March 1949.⁶⁵ We shall also consider the influence of the – by then elderly – Giacomo Balla, who had created phonetic texts with a structure similar to that of Epistaltic poems in the ‘heroic’ phase of Futurism.

It was Rotella himself who identified Futurism as part of the historical precedents for Epistaltism, leaving handwritten notes on a 1956 typescript of the manifesto, now held in the Archives of the Mimmo Rotella Foundation in Milan. The Dadaists Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitters are the first to be named here, with a partially erroneous reference to the soirée of 30 March 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich.⁶⁶ Futurism is acknowledged immediately after, alongside the date of 1914 and a mention of Marinetti, completed by a reference to the *zaum*’ poetry of Aleksei Kruchenykh. This mention of the Russian Futurist appears to be a later addition to the list, as it is inserted in blue pencil in the space between two lines written in pen. Presumably this means that Rotella only at a later stage became aware of the Russian Futurists. The document is furthermore of interest because of its allusions to artists connected to the musical world, such as Edgar Varèse, Pierre Boulez, Pierre Schaeffer and his *musique concrète*. It also contains some information on the earliest channels of circulation for Rotella’s invention. His notes mention a recording of Epistaltic poems at the request of the American poet Archibald MacLeish for Harvard University in 1952; an interview with the radio station WDAF in Kansas City and footage for the Italian RAI television programmes *Arrivi e partenze* (Arrivals and Departures, 1954), *Permette una domanda?* (May I Ask a Question?, 1956), as well as for *La settimana INCOM* (The Weekly Newsreel) of 4 March 1955.

Some other archival documents are useful for retracing the relationship between Epistalticism and Futurism, for example *Appunti per un breve documentario* (Notes for a Short Documentary, 1955), a page filled with notes for the INCOM newsreel, where we can read: “Today we live in the middle of noises so [...] we must be taught how to listen to them. The language of art today must be inspired by sounds and noises.”⁶⁷ The tone and content of this statement recall similar con-

65 Celant: *Mimmo Rotella*, p. 34. The Futurist legacy of the Art Club has been discussed by Gabriele Simongini in “La nuova Italia dell’Art Club 1945–1964” and “La ‘scomoda’ libertà dell’Art Club”.

66 Schwitters was not actually present at that evening and only began to devote himself to phonetic poetry in 1919. On 30 March 1916, the simultaneous poem *L’Amiral cherche une maison à louer* (The Admiral is Looking for a House to Rent) and *Chant nègre I & II* (Negro Song I & II) were performed for the first time by Huelsenbeck, Tzara, Janco and Ball.

67 “Oggi noi viviamo in mezzo ai rumori perciò [...] dobbiamo essere educati a saperli ascoltare – il linguaggio d’arte oggi deve ispirarsi a suoni e rumori”. Reproduced in Celant: *Mimmo Rotella*, p. 285. INCOM (Industria Corti Metraggi) was founded in 1938 by Sandro Pallavicini to produce

siderations by Luigi Russolo in his brochure *L'arte dei rumori* (The Art of Noises, 1916): “Every manifestation of life is accompanied by noise. Noise is therefore familiar to our ears and has the power of immediately recalling life itself. [...] We are therefore convinced that by selecting, coordinating and controlling all noises we shall enrich humankind with new and unexpected pleasure.”⁶⁸ And in the last chapter he explains: “The ear does not understand the confused and fragmentary noises of life. Therefore, the ear must feel them dominated, enslaved, completely mastered, defeated and forced to become an element of art.”⁶⁹

In an interview with the American ABC radio show *New Sounds for You* on 15 March 1956, Rotella declared that the musical technique adopted for his compositions involves alternating opaque and vibrating sounds to achieve at the same time contrast and harmony. Here, too, the influence of Russolo’s poetics is evident: “We want to tune these extraordinarily diverse sounds, regulating them harmonically and rhythmically. Tuning noises does not mean removing from them all irregularities of tempo and intensity, which characterize their movements and vibrations, but rather giving gradation or pitch to the vibrations that are strongest and most predominant.”⁷⁰

Amongst the musical score-poems held at the Rotella Foundation there is an incomplete, undated transcript of two Dada compositions: Ball’s *Gadji beri bimba* (1916) and Schwitters’s *Ursonate* (1923–32). It is not possible to identify Rotella’s sources in detail, but his performance of Christian Morgenstern’s *Fisches Nachtgesang* (Night Song of a Fish, 1905) during the filming of *La settimana INCOM* in 1955 is indicative of his reasonably accurate knowledge of German experimental works. The score for the undated poem *Ventimila anni avanti Cristo* (Twenty Thousand Years Before Christ), on the other hand, contains a couple of childish pictograms and some symbols of the Greek alphabet alongside onomatopoeias and abstract verbalizations. This gives us the possibility to juxtapose Epistalticism and Lettrism.

propaganda documentaries and later continued to be one of the most popular sources of information and current affairs in Italy.

68 “Ogni manifestazione della nostra vita è accompagnata dal rumore. Il rumore è quindi familiare al nostro orecchio, ed ha il potere di richiamarci immediatamente alla vita stessa. [...] Siamo certi dunque che scegliendo, coordinando e dominando tutti i rumori, noi arricchiremo gli uomini di una nuova voluttà insospettata.” Russolo: *L'arte dei rumori*, pp. 14–15.

69 “L’orecchio non si raccapezza fra i rumori confusi e frammentari della vita. Bisogna dunque che l’orecchio li senta dominati, asserviti, padroneggiati completamente, vinti e costretti a divenire elementi d’arte”. Russolo: *L'arte dei rumori*, p. 91.

70 “Noi vogliamo intonare e regolare armonicamente e ritmicamente questi svariatissimi rumori. Intonare i rumori non vuol dire togliere ad essi tutti i movimenti e le vibrazioni irregolari di tempo e d’intensità, ma bensì dare un grado o tono, alla più forte e predominante di queste vibrazioni.” Russolo: *L'arte dei rumori*, p. 14.

In a chart created in 1947, Isou had assigned nineteen noises commonly produced by the phonatory system – aspirations, wheezing, glottal stops and so on – to an equal number of letters from the Greek alphabet, so as to be able to insert them into his scores and make their declamation possible.⁷¹

Still, there are many reasons for identifying Futurism as the primary precedent for Epistalticism. Rotella's decision to draw up a systematic manifesto set out in a series of points, together with the detailed list of instructions to be followed in the creative processes, provides a clear connection with the early Italian avant-garde. Many of the ideas expressed in the manifesto are then reconnected to those of Futurist poetry: the identification of the word with sound; the urgent need to break down the 'dividing wall' between music and poetry; the escape from the articulations of a codified language; or the conception of voice as an "inexhaustible source of natural musical instruments."⁷² These elements were all already present in both Marinetti's *Dynamic, Multichannelled Recitation* and Depero's *Onomalingua*, as well as entailed in the most advanced Dada evenings at the Cabaret Voltaire.⁷³ However, point 4 of the manifesto offers the clearest confirmation of the hypothesis of a privileged relationship with Futurism. Here, the author affirms that Epistaltic poetry frees words from their ordinary function "to turn them into tracer rockets hurled against the decrepit buildings of syntax and vocabulary."⁷⁴ This is a sentence that in all respects takes up the rhetoric of Marinetti's founding manifesto: for the explosive image of words as rockets, the derogatory image of syntax as a dilapidated building, the Promethean value attributed to

71 See Curtay: *La Poésie lettriste*, pp. 42–43.

72 "fonte inesauribile di strumenti musicali naturali". Rotella: *Manifesto dell'epistaltismo*.

73 Opened on 5 February 1916, the Cabaret Voltaire soon relinquished its originally conventional programme – featuring traditional recitation of old-fashioned poetry and folk songs – in favour of truly avant-garde performances, strongly indebted to Futurism. It was Huelsenbeck who first overturned the original trend, reciting poems supposedly derived from Africa (one of which was significantly entitled *Mafarka*) at the end of February. Soon after, Tzara developed his own *chants nègres* and, on 29 March 1916, he performed the simultaneous poem *L'Amiral cherche une maison a louer* (The Admiral is Looking for a House to Rent) together with Janco and Huelsenbeck. A "truly Futurist style of declamation", however, "was only introduced to the Cabaret by Alberto Spain. We know that on 12 May 1917 he recited Meriano's *Gemma* and on 14 April 1917 he performed Marinetti's *Bombardamento di Adrianopoli*, which he had seen Marinetti declaim on several occasions." Berghaus: "Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism: Some Cross-Fertilizations Among the Historical Avant-garde", p. 289. On the Futurist influence on Dada, see also Berghaus: "Futurism and the Genesis of Dada: Contacts, Contrasts and Continuities"; Lista: "La scena futurista e l'avanguardia storica", pp. XIX-XX; and Bozzi: *Dada da capo*, pp. 88–90. Francesco Cangiullo's contribution "Addiooo" to the single issue of the magazine *Cabaret Voltaire* (May 1916) should also be recalled.

74 "[...] per farne dei razzi traccianti contro gli edifici decrepiti della sintassi e del vocabolario". Rotella: *Manifesto dell'epistaltismo*.

the poetic enterprise, and the emphatic and combative tone of the statement as a whole.

There is a consistent recurrence of onomatopoeias and abstract verbalizations in Epistaltic poems, which are organized according to interruptions, syncopation and diversions of tone, confirming the direct return to the ideas of Marinetti. The structure of Rotella's declamation tables, however, moves away from *parolibero* and reverts to the handwritten scores of Giacomo Balla's simultaneous compositions such as *Macchina tipografica – Onomatopea rumorista* (The Printing Machine: Noise-Making Onomatopoeia Typewriter, 1914), *Paesaggio + temporale* (Landscape + Storm, 1915) or *Canzone di maggio* (May Song, 1915; see Fig. 4b). These verbal arrangements are linear, sometimes with elastic dilations caused by the act of writing itself. Not subjected to the same technological limitations as his predecessors, Rotella could record his recitations on magnetic tape and publish them in the magazine *OU*, founded and directed by Henri Chopin in 1964 as a continuation of *Cinquième Saison*.

In his performances, the artist alternated onomatopoeias and abstract verbalizations with jingles, laughter and blowing raspberries that reinforce the comic effect of the recitation, similar to *Piedigrotta*, performed by Cangiullo at the Sprovieri Gallery in Rome in 1914.⁷⁵ In Rotella's performances, in any case, phonetic rhythms combine with portmanteau words and haplological compounds produced according to a process of disassembly and reassembly of terms taken from the dictionary, a technique that recalls the additions and stratifications found in the artistic practice of *décollage*.⁷⁶ These verbal inventions show evident morphological affinities with various terms of the Italian language, so much so that they could be compared to the practice of *grammelot*. And yet, a logical precedent of this solution could be found, once again, in one of Balla's works, namely *Discussione di due critici sudanesi intorno al futurismo* (Discussion between Two Sudanese Critics on Futurism, 1914), which relied on the imitation of phonic and morphological values commonly found in pseudo-African languages. A similar approach was also

⁷⁵ As noted by Marinetti in "Dynamic, Multichanneled Recitation."

⁷⁶ The art of *décollage* was invented by Wolf Vostell in his Happenings in Paris in 1954. These first "dé-coll/age" paintings made up of layers of unstuck and decomposed posters were the *result* of an action, from which he later developed *The Theatre Takes Place on the Street*. This Happening on Rue de Tour de Vanves instructed the performers to read the texts on the posters, tear down layers of them to create new texts and to interpret through their gestures the elements that could be recognized on the posters. Thereby, the participants were able to go beyond the level of contemplating a work of art (e.g. a *décollage*) and to reflect critically on themselves and their relationship to reality by participating in a change of their environment. See Sandford: *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 310–388.

taken by Ball two years later, but Rotella's experiments remain closer to Futurist ideas for the more pressing rhythm of the declamation and the clearer interruptions between the sections, whose sudden variations of tone aim at the simultaneous expression of contrasting emotional states.

The influence of Words-in-Freedom on Lamberto Pignotti's collages

In a 1974 article, Pietro Favari noted a parallel between two periods of social, economic and political evolution in Italy that impacted on the visual interest of Italian poets. The first was the Giolittian era, when Futurists adapted artistic expression to the emerging industrial civilization;⁷⁷ the second corresponds to the 'economic miracle' of the early 1960s, when poets, "drawing on the experiences of Futurism, reintroduced a kind of poetry that takes account of the iconic value of communication."⁷⁸ The connection suggested by Favari is fully confirmed by Lamberto Pignotti (1926-), founder of the Gruppo 70 in Florence,⁷⁹ who remarked, in the early 1980s, that his *Poesia visiva* resembled Futurist Free-Word Tables.⁸⁰ His encounter with Futurism dates back to 1944, the year of Marinetti's death, when Pignotti was looking through magazines at the National Library in Florence. Apart from Futurist poetry and manifestos, he discovered Prampolini's *Arte polimaterica: Verso un'arte collettiva?* (Polymaterial Art: A Step Towards Collective Art?), published that very year. This resulted in his first experiments with graphic collages for a series of self-produced magazines.⁸¹ Pignotti's interest continued for decades and was reinforced by his curiosity for synaesthesia,⁸² which may explain his numerous tributes to Balla, Boccioni, Depero, Marinetti and Prampolini in works such as *Francobolli* (Stamps, 1973–75).

Collage largo (Large Collage) is the name that Pignotti gave to his technique of fusing words and images, almost as reflection of Marinetti's warning: "Words freed from punctuation will radiate out toward one another; their diverse magnetisms

77 Favari: "Strumenti verbali e iconici nella scrittura poetica italiana", p. 7.

78 "Ricollegandosi alle esperienze del futurismo, si ripropone una poesia che tenga conto del valore iconico della comunicazione." Favari: "Strumenti verbali e iconici nella scrittura poetica italiana", p. 11.

79 For further information on Gruppo 70, see Spignoli: *La poesia in immagine / L'immagine in poesia: Gruppo 70. Firenze 1963–2013*.

80 Pignotti: "Paroliberismo. Modelli di scrittura verbo-visiva futurista negli anni Dieci", p. 17.

81 See Cerritelli: "Lamberto Pignotti: Omaggio al futurismo", p. 7.

82 See Pignotti: *I sensi delle arti*.

will intersect, in proportion to the continuing dynamism of thought.”⁸³ The Futurist influence also emerged in the early stages of his theoretical elaboration of *Poesia visiva*, for example in an essay on literature and industry published in *Il menabò* in 1962. There, Pignotti wrote a phrase that is highly revealing of the neo-avant-garde cooling down the Promethean momentum of the historical avant-garde. Regarding the need to update poetry and bring it in line with technological developments, he declared: “We don’t need to make the stars retire so that we can embrace spaceships. We need to preserve the ability to talk about the moon even when we have regular transport service to take us to our planets.”⁸⁴ The statement seems to placate the Futurist desire to kill off the moonlight,⁸⁵ and instead re-admits the stars and moon to the list of possible subjects for contemporary poetry, as long as the style of poetry – a technological or technologically updated one – makes something new out of an old theme. At the same time, Pignotti was fully aware of the normalizing rôle of the neo-avant-gardes in contemporary culture. At the *Convegno internazionale di artisti, critici e studiosi d’arte* (International Conference of Artists, Critics and Art Scholars) held in Rimini in September 1964, he declared that “the great turning point of the avant-garde comes when it moves from a concept of art for initiates alone to a concept of art for the masses.”⁸⁶

The Futurists already saw a need to adapt art and poetry to the technological developments in everyday life.⁸⁷ Pignotti’s speech at a conference on *Arte e tecnologia* (Art and Technology) in Florence, organized by the Gruppo 70 in June 1964, drew on Marinetti’s rhetoric when he distinguished technological art from avant-garde art: “We prefer the living to the dead, we prefer brothers to fathers. To the yellowed pages of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, we prefer the smell of the printer’s ink on the pages that convey the morning news.”⁸⁸ Old and new is not a contradiction but rather a ‘homoeopathic’ process in which the radicalism of the avant-garde is diluted in the media of mass communication.

⁸³ Marinetti: “Answers to Objections”, p. 117.

⁸⁴ “Non si tratterà di mandare in pensione le stelle per assumere le astronavi. Bisognerà saper parlare della luna anche quando sarà istituito col nostro satellite un regolare servizio di linea.” Pignotti: “L’industria che non si vede”, p. 60.

⁸⁵ See Marinetti: *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna! / Tuons le clair de lune* (Let’s Kill Off the Moonlight, 1909) and *Noi rinneghiamo i nostri maestri simbolisti, ultimi amanti della luna* (We Renounce our Symbolist Masters, the Last of All Lovers of the Moonlight, 1911).

⁸⁶ “La grande svolta dell’avanguardia è quella che da una concezione per soli iniziati porta a una concezione di massa dell’arte.” Pignotti: “Tecnica e ideologia”, p. 78.

⁸⁷ As described by Spignoli: *La parola si fa spazio*, pp. 148–149.

⁸⁸ “Ai morti preferiamo i vivi, ai padri preferiamo i fratelli. Alle pagine ingiallite dell’avanguardia primonovecentesca preferiamo le pagine ancora odorose d’inchiostro tipografico con le notizie del mattino.” Pignotti: “La suggestione di Gordon Flash”, p. 107.

Since technological art tackles the problems and ways of mass society, it is natural that it is conscious of the limited means of diffusion of art until now. [...] This is why we emphatically suggest that poetry should be transmitted by the loudspeakers in stadia at half-time during championship matches or that paintings should be exhibited on billboards along the highways.⁸⁹

Pignotti's utopian proposal seems to resonate with Marinetti's idea of a poem that moves from the page to the wall and from the wall "towards the town-squares of tomorrow",⁹⁰ and with the theory of 'urban poetry' formulated by Belloli.⁹¹ While the techniques and methods may change, the need to understand poetry as a means of social development remains the same for Pignotti. This is demonstrated by the numerous poetic actions organized by Gruppo 70 in Italian streets and squares, designed once again to achieve the all-encompassing integration of poetry into everyday life, as promoted by the Futurists.

The (paroliberist) *Schemi* by Stelio Maria Martini

The Futurist origins of Pignotti's *Collage largo* suggest a re-reading in this light of *Schemi* (Schemes, 1962), a visual masterpiece of the Neapolitan poet Stelio Maria Martini (1934–2016), who has already been mentioned as one of the main proponents of the critical rehabilitation of Futurist Visual Poetry. This peculiar *livre d'artiste* – characterized by the montage of linguistic and photographic fragments taken from gossip magazines, old writings, photographic scraps and religious icons – aims at recovering existential and sentimental values buried in the debris of the collective imagination. Compared to the bipartition of art and mass culture outlined by Favari, Martini's work occupies an intermediate position, as it uses material taken from advertising and magazines not in order to decode (or simply decompose) mass media languages, but to broaden the semantic potential of writing through the combination of irregular materials. Martini notes that it was the painter Mario Persico who initiated him into the practice of verbal-visual collage.⁹² Persico was a pupil of Emilio Notte, a Futurist close to Cangiullo, and this is prob-

89 "Essendo quella tecnologica un'arte che assume i problemi e i modi della società di massa, è naturale che essa avverta la limitatezza dei veicoli di diffusione fin qui impiegati dall'arte. [...] Per questo proponiamo emblematicamente che la poesia venga trasmessa dagli altoparlanti degli stadi nell'intervallo delle partite di campionato o che le mostre di pittura vengano trasferite lungo le autostrade." Pignotti: "La suggestione di Gordon Flash", pp. 107–108.

90 "verso le piazze di domani." Marinetti: "Testi-poemi murali di Carlo Belloli", p. 280.

91 Spignoli: *La parola si fa spazio*, p. 145.

92 Giugliano: *Ciò che mostra il tempo*, p. 39.

ably how Martini first came to take an unprejudiced look at Futurist poetry. The ideas he received from Words-in Freedom and Free-Word Tables, in particular, helped him visualize the perceptual experience of polysemic spaces rich with multisensory values. As Dalila Colucci observes in a study entirely dedicated to the work:

Martini's material semantics draws plenty from Futurist total aesthetics [...]. His collages capitalize on the model of the Free-Word Tables, exceeding their experimental juxtaposition of signifiers by way of the incorporation of other elements than the typographical ones, but also due to the philosophical implications of his idea of visuality, key to unprecedented poetic and intellectual faculties to be performed within the metamorphic modern world, increasingly bound to synesthetic exchanges.⁹³

In his preface to *Schemi*, Martini informs us that, apart from printing words on paper, he also considered incorporating other media, both temporal and spatial: "If I had been able to do it in an equally practical way, I would have not hesitated to add auditory elements such as the sounds of instruments, accidental noises or human voices, etc., or elements in relief, mobile, olfactory, etc."⁹⁴ Martini's approach to visual writing reflects various aspects of Marinetti's thinking, starting from the idea that any "increase in the pace of life" requires a "balancing act between the physical, intellectual, and emotional upon the tightrope of speed, stretched between two opposite magnetic poles."⁹⁵ Indeed, Martini's collage-poem is based on a circular logic that accepts contradictions as elements of life itself.⁹⁶ Marinetti maintained that supporting "the absolute freedom of images or analogies" allows the poet to penetrate "into the essence of matter,"⁹⁷ just as for Martini the use of images as words demonstrates "the unpredictable power of reception and assimilation (and the adjustability) of sensibility itself and an enrichment of the poetic faculties in their own right."⁹⁸

93 Colucci: "Stelio Maria Martini, 'Schemi', and the Po(i)etics of Collage", pp. 27–28.

94 "[...] se appena l'avessi potuto in maniera altrettanto pratica, non avrei esitato ad aggiungere elementi uditivi quali suoni di strumenti, accidentali o voci umane, ecc., elementi in rilievo, mobili, olfattivi, ecc." Martini: *Schemi*, s.p..

95 Marinetti: "Destruction of Syntax – Untrammeled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom", p. 122.

96 Colucci: "Stelio Maria Martini", p. 28.

97 Marinetti: "Destruction of Syntax – Untrammeled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom", p. 125.

98 "[...] l'imprevedibile potere di ricezione ed assimilazione (e l'orientabilità) della sensibilità stessa e un arricchimento delle stesse facoltà poetiche." Martini: *Schemi*, s.p..

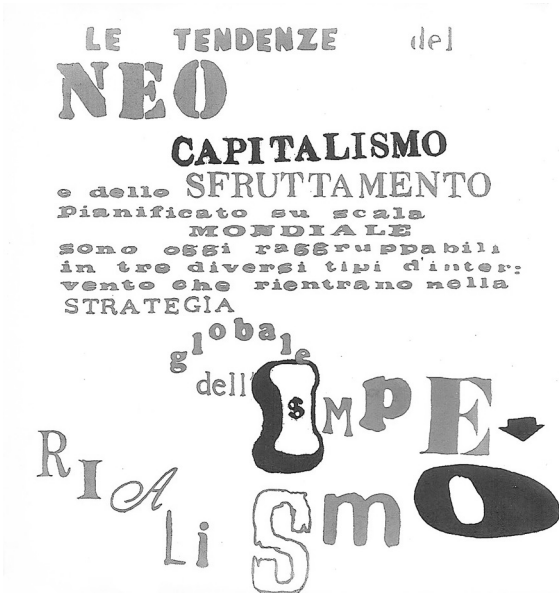


Fig. 5: A page from Paolo Albani: *Manifesto del Neo-Futurismo* (1967).

Note per il Manifesto del Neo-Futurismo by Paolo Albani

Any study of the legacy of Futurism in Italian verbal-visual poetry in the post-war period must consider the *Note per il Manifesto del Neo-Futurismo* (Notes for the Manifesto of Neo-Futurism) compiled by Paolo Albani (1946-), with drawings by Paolo della Bella (1944-). It is a small, square-format, twenty-page volume, printed in one hundred and fifty copies by Berlinghiero Buonarroti of the Gruppo Stanza in Compiobbi (near Fiesole) and published by the Feltrinelli Bookshop in Florence in 1967 (see Fig. 5). Albani's approach to Futurism dates back to the period he was a university student in Florence and met Eugenio Miccini, Lamberto Pignotti and Luciano Caruso. In the opening of his *Notes for the Manifesto* we read that "NEO Futurism was born to BURN DOWN the haystacks of the habit of BOREDOM of absorption in the SYSTEM" and "to tear out the backbone of ADVERTISING",⁹⁹ a

99 "IL NEO futurismo è nato per INCENDIARE i pagliai della consuetudine della NOIA dell'assorbimento nel SISTEMA [...] per squarciare l'ossatura della PUBBLICITÀ." "IL NEO futurismo è nato

theme dear to Gruppo 70. Albani also declared that he wanted to detach both from the “new surrogates for protest that amuse the ruling class” and from the “NEW avant-gardes, SICK with aestheticism”.¹⁰⁰

Albani's statement is symptomatic of the disagreements that could be found in the Italian neo-avant-garde. According to Caruso, there existed three main currents: an ‘official’ or ‘worldly’ part, compromised by its ties with the publishing market and the academic world; a ‘clandestine’ part that separated aesthetic action from political commitment; and a ‘genuinely alternative’ (Caruso actually uses the term ‘off’) part, which included Caruso himself.¹⁰¹ Albani also fits into this third part as he combines the incendiary quality of Aldo Palazzeschi's poetry with the revolutionary dynamics typical of the 1968 rebellion. Alongside the powerful drawings by Paolo della Bella, Albani's manifesto features reproductions of a number of sketches by Vladimir Mayakovsky concerning the Bolshevik revolution. This serves to underline Albani's ideological position regarding the need to align the artistic to the political revolution.¹⁰² The fact that the publication of the *Notes* took place only five days after the killing of Che Guevara is indicative of this, too. Compared to the generally detached attitude of the neo-avant-garde, Albani's Neo-Futurism rekindled the Promethean fervour of the historical avant-garde, but with a re-defined ideological orientation.

Albani rejected the institutionalization of the neo-avant-garde. To underline this fact, he used a manual screen-printing technique, closer to old artisanal techniques than industrial production methods. In this esoeditorial (that is, independent) approach, he combined the typographic experimentation of Italian Futurism with the use of lithography, probably the most advanced technology of the 1910s, widely used in Russian Futurism.¹⁰³ His work – which can be seen as an intermediate form between the genre of the programmatic manifesto typical of Futurism and Visual Poetry – thus fits into a long tradition and tries to resolve the separation between theory and practice in the early avant-garde. Indeed, Albani applied some of the compositional principles of Words-in Freedom to the manifesto form,

per INCENDIARE i pagliai della consuetudine della NOIA dell'assorbimento nel SISTEMA [...] per squarciare l'ossatura della PUBBLICITÀ.” Paolo Albani: *Manifesto del Neo-Futurismo*.

100 “[...] nuovi surrogati della protesta che divertono la classe dominante [...] NUOVE avanguardie MALATE di estetismo” “[...] nuovi surrogati della protesta che divertono la classe dominante [...] NUOVE avanguardie MALATE di estetismo.” Paolo Albani: *Manifesto del Neo-Futurismo*.

101 Caruso: “Contributi per una storia dei gruppi culturali a Napoli (1958–70)”, p. 162.

102 See Echaurren & Salaris: *Controcultura in Italia 1967–1977: Viaggio nell'underground*, pp. 65–66.

103 See, for instance, the six lithographed poetry books authored by Aleksei Kruchenykh in collaboration with Larionov, Goncharova and others, produced between October 1912 and February 1913. Janecek: “Kruchenykh contra Gutenberg.”

where we can observe the abolition of punctuation and the alternation of different fonts and characters, although the use of capital letters is limited to the highlighting of verbs and keywords. Also recurrent is the alternation of upper- and lower-case letters or of different graphic styles, in order to intensify the rhythmic nature of the text.

Reinterpreting the genre of the manifesto allowed Albani to reduce subjectivity and to reconsider the poetic operation in programmatic terms. The information provided to readers is arranged on each page like verses from a de-structured linear poem (e.g. Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*); while some short Words-in-Freedom brighten up the reading, and geometric figures and other iconic fragments multiply the levels of interpretation. Consequently, there is an interplay of attractions between words and images. Freed from diacritical constraints, the message expands into the space of the page by means of graphic and chromatic magnetisms, still following Marinetti's "continuing dynamism of thought."¹⁰⁴

Conclusions

As we have seen, the innovations of Futurist paroliberism entered the imagination of Italian artists and poets after 1945, despite the movement's fluctuating critical fortunes and initially problematic relationship with the neo-avant-garde. Carlo Belloli was an important intermediary who reconnected Futurist poetic experimentalism with the innovations in Concrete Poetry. His lesson was taken up by Arrigo Lora Totino who, beginning with Concretism, extended the verbo-visual and poetic-performative possibilities of Futurism by means of new inventions. It was again a relationship with Belloli that suggested to Maurizio Nannucci the possibility of expanding poetry on an environmental scale through the use of neon. In other ways, Mimmo Rotella took up both paroliberism and Futurist noise art to approach and overcome the solutions of French Lettrism. Through the study of Futurist theory, Lamberto Pignotti then elaborated forms of Visual Poetry capable of spreading into social spaces. If Stelio Maria Martini re-modelled the Futurist Free-Word Tables to obtain synaesthetic images, Paolo Albani ultimately re-invented the form of the manifesto as suggested by Futurism. Italian verbo-visual poetry of the second half of the twentieth century thus showed itself to be firmly rooted in Futurist theory and practice. It finally fulfilled the long-ignored need for a complete and systematic reclaiming of a historical heritage and gave rise to a Neo-Futurist aesthetics.

¹⁰⁴ Marinetti: "Answers to Objections", p. 117.

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