



**Fortunato Depero and *Depero futurista* 1913–1927**

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Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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## **Abstract**

### **Fortunato Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927***

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This thesis examines *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, the so-called ‘bolted book’ created in 1927 by Futurist artist Fortunato Depero (1892-1960). Although Depero and his book have already been the subject of artistic re-evaluation, the literature relating to this work neglects a number of key aspects pertaining to the figure of the artist, still failing to provide a detailed account of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

In order to address these gaps, this study is divided into two distinct parts: the first, composed of chapters 2, 3 and 4, takes an analytical approach intended to give a detailed description of the book and its context. Chapter 2 examines the graphic and artistic context in order to understand the circumstances in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was published. Chapter 3 analyses Depero’s correspondence with the publisher Azari and the professional relationship between Depero and the Mercurio printing works, in order to understand the design methodologies adopted by Depero during the process of creating the book. In chapter 4, the analysis moves onto the book as an object, focusing on its content and formal features – its structure, layout and typefaces.

The second part of this research, comprising chapters 5, 6 and 7, uses *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an index from which to extrapolate areas of research related to Fortunato Depero, highlighting pages that refer to certain themes and presenting critical discussion of them. Chapter 5 analyses the political context in which the book was created and how it is inextricably linked with the institutions of the Italian Fascist regime. Given *Depero futurista 1913–1927*’s function as a self-promotional tool, chapter 6 examines Fortunato Depero’s interest in the field of advertising. Finally, chapter 7 reflects on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a particular kind of book object and the extent to which it can be considered a work of art in terms of the discourse on artists’ books.

# Fortunato Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

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## A note about translations, captions and references

All translations from Italian, German and French are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

When the subject of an illustration is not credited, it is by Fortunato Depero.

The majority of the archive materials referenced in this text are from the Archivio del '900 at MART - Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto. Here, the cataloguing uses alphanumeric shelf marks attached directly to the archive materials (or the files that contain them): the first three letters followed by a point, usually the first letters of the author's surname, indicate the name of the collection, in my case Dep.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by progressive numbers separated by points to distinguish the levels of description: series, Dep.3, sub-series, Dep.3.1, file, Dep.3.1.7, and document unit, Dep.3.1.7.1. The greater the level of description, the more numbers appear in the shelf mark. The eight series of the Depero archive are divided into: Documents and personal papers (Dep.1) which describe the events of his life; *Dizionario ideologico ed autobiografico* (Ideological and Autobiographical Dictionary - Dep.2);<sup>2</sup> Correspondence (Dep.3); Writings (Dep.4); Documentation for professional projects (Dep.5); Collections of graphic materials and documents (Dep.6) which include both documents relating to his publications and drafts of his works 'underlining the indissoluble association between the artistic sphere and the more strictly archival sphere of the legacy of the artist, who was the first one not to distinguish between the two';<sup>3</sup> Photographic material (Dep.7) used to document his artistic activities; Press materials (Dep.8) relating to press articles on his career and interests.<sup>4</sup>

Materials conserved in other institutions use their own cataloguing systems, for example the Getty Research Institute uses a singular progressive number for each archive unit.

In order to avoid repetition and make it easier to recognise the sources consulted and the institutions that conserve them, the thesis uses an abbreviated reference: for example, if the material comes from the Archivio del '900 this is denoted by the following wording in small capitals MART, followed by the cataloguing code Dep.X.X.X.X.X; if the material comes from the Getty Research Institute, the reference is simply GETTY and the shelf mark number.

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<sup>1</sup> The archive has numerous collections on other artists and is not only limited to the work of Depero.

<sup>2</sup> A project which Depero worked on in the 1950s but never completed. It consists of a series of notebooks 'probably written with the aim of publishing an encyclopaedia' on himself (see the description of Depero collection on MART website: <http://cim.mart.tn.it/cim/pages/archivio.jsp?aid=209> - accessed on August 5, 2019). In the last few books in particular Depero seems to regard the volumes not as hypothetical publications in themselves but rather as collections of documents designed to form part of his archive.

<sup>3</sup> Velardita, F., 'L'archivista e l'artista', p. 19. In Velardita, F. (ed.). 2008. *Fondo Fortunato Depero. Inventario*. Rovereto: Nicolodi editore.

<sup>4</sup> The archive also has materials that it does not conserve on site. This is why such documents have different codes to those above: Gal.Dep. (short for Depero Gallery, a remote site of the archive), for example, refers to six late-1950s documents relative to the realisation of Museo Depero, or PAT (acronym of the 'Provincia Autonoma di Trento') for works conserved at the premises of the Autonomous Province of Trento. When referenced, the latter use the cataloguing system under which they are conserved.



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2

**Figures 1.1 and 1.2** 1927. *Depero futurista 1913-1927*. Milan: Dinamo-Azari. Front and back cover. Size 32 × 24.2 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of CIMA - Center for Italian Modern Art and Designers & Books. Photograph by Adam Reich.

## 1 Introduction

Following a long period that had seen him involved in various professional collaborations since the early 1910s, Futurist artist Fortunato Depero (1892-1960) created a book in 1927 which sought both to foreground his multi-disciplinary output and to promote his artistic activity. The book was titled *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (figures 1.1-1.2), and has been described by graphic design historian Steven Heller as ‘his masterpiece, [...] the most memorable’ work of Depero’s career and one that, in time, would pique the interest of both academics and non-academics (Heller, 2017, 7-9).

This research seeks to describe and examine *Depero futurista 1913–1927* against recent historical and critical re-evaluations of the Futurist movement which, nevertheless, still fail to give a full and detailed account of this important work. Through an examination of the context in which the book was produced and its editorial and physical form, I was guided by the following questions:

- What is *Depero futurista 1913–1927*? How does it relate to the wider avant-garde in typographical modernism?
- How can *Depero futurista 1913–1927* become a research tool to shed light on aspects of Depero that are still unclear or unexplored?

In order to answer these overarching questions, the analysis will consider a set of preliminary research questions:

- Considering the historical context in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was published, what does it tell us about the relationship between the Futurist aesthetic, the work of Depero, and the Italian Fascist Party?
- Through its connection to the field of advertising, is it possible to describe *Depero futurista 1913–1927* in terms of an activity of commercial design as well as an artwork?
- To what degree can *Depero futurista 1913–1927* be regarded as an artwork in book form?

### 1.1 Current interest in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

Providing a precise definition of the *Depero futurista 1913–1927* book from an historical perspective is complex: even its title presents problems, due to the different ways in which various art historians have referred to or described it. Depero himself, on the presentation page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, describes his book in various ways, using a series of adjectives and superlatives: ‘the most groundbreaking art book of its time [...] It is an artistic object in itself, a typically Futurist work of art’ (Depero, 1927, 5). Bruno Passamani, for example, refers to it equally as ‘*Depero futurista*’, ‘libro imbullonato’ and ‘bullonato’ (two different but similar shades of meaning that can be

translated as ‘bolted book’ and ‘book with bolts’ - Passamani, 1981, 176). In the two reprints of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (1978 and 1987 by SPES Firenze), Luciano Caruso also repeatedly writes ‘libromacchina imbullonato’ (bolted machine-book, Caruso, 1987, 36). In 1927, when it was released the press christened the book ‘Atlante Depero’ (Depero’s Atlas) and ‘Depero’s Codex’ (De Gasperi, 1928, 39).

Particularly in recent times, Fortunato Depero and his *Depero futurista 1913–1927* have been the subject of close attention from different disciplinary perspectives, notably those of art and design. Evidence of this can be seen in the many projects relating to the artist that have occurred over the past years: for example, the recent retrospectives, *Depero futurista 1913–1950* at Fundación Juan March (Madrid, October 10, 2014 – January 18, 2015) and *Depero il mago* (Depero the Magician) at Fondazione Magnani Rocca (Parma, March 18 – July 2, 2017); and the crowdfunding project *The Bolted Book Facsimile: An Exact Copy of Depero futurista* (2017)<sup>1</sup>, which aimed to publish a third reprint of the book (following the reprints of 1978 and 1987).

This growing interest in Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* seems to stem from the fact that the book has always maintained a kind of notoriety, a factor that has ensured its place among key works of avant-garde publishing: amongst various comments and opinions on it, Marinetti, for example, stated (Marinetti, 1939, 78-79):<sup>2</sup>

This incredibly original Dinamo-Azari volume is of the utmost importance for the audacious, architectural conception of the book [...] and because Depero transmitted his genial, exuberant, Futurist fantasy in typographic form, translating the polemical, lyrical, and celebratory content of the texts into emotionally moving typographic form that preceded certain forms of rationalism and abstractionism

Its bolted binding is well known, and practitioners of art and design are almost certain to come across a photograph of the book at least once during their career,

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1 This was launched by Designers & Books together with the Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto (MART), who approached me for consultant advice on their application. As mentioned and as further demonstrated by the title of this crowdfunding project, in literature on Depero scholars and historians often refer to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as the ‘bolted book’, perhaps being influenced by the words of the publisher Fedele Azari on page 9: ‘This book is: MECHANICAL bolted like an engine’ (Azari in Depero, 1927, 9). Over the years commentators have come up with different variations of this nickname (*libro imbullonato*, *bullonato*, *libro-macchina* etc), if we can call it that, which have subsequently been used as alternative titles for *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Although Depero and Azari agreed on removing the dates from the covers (for more on this see section 3.1.2), the title page reports the time span to which the book refers and this is why, wherever possible, I have used *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, as this is the only title of bibliographical value. My use of this single title is intended to present a clear account of the work to the reader.

2 Here are some other superlative judgements: ‘[*Depero futurista* is] the highest peak ever reached by the historical avant-garde in the field of the book-object’ (Tanca, 1995, 14). ‘*Depero futurista* is one of the most important typographical and editorial icons of the twentieth century in Europe’ (Gatta, 2014, 212). ‘Depero’s collaboration with Azari was one of the most intense in his career, and the Bolted Book is its most important legacy’ (Zanoner, 2017, 20).

particularly in Italy where Futurism was born and is studied in literature and art history at school (figures 1.3 and 1.4).

## 1.2 An identified gap in historical knowledge

Considering this enduring interest, one would expect the book to have been studied scientifically and in depth. But the reality is quite the opposite: prior to recent studies, Futurist literature tended to include only passing mention of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, merely repeating its emphatic statements, with no work explaining and analysing it in any depth. This is perfectly exemplified by the *Futurism* exhibition at MoMA in New York (May–September 1961), which for the first time presented ‘the finest public collection of Futurist art’, concentrating only on the first phase of Futurism (Selz, 1961, 7):<sup>3</sup> Depero and his book are only mentioned briefly, although the cover of the exhibition catalogue consists of a photographic reproduction of a page from *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (figure 1.5).<sup>4</sup> As will be discussed, even if this exhibition came at a crucial time, the catalogue seems to use *Depero futurista 1913–1927* solely for decorative purposes without ever taking the work into proper consideration, merely mentioning it and relegating it to the less innovative second phase of the Avant Garde.

At the same time, although Depero certainly did not enjoy the same attention as pioneers of the Futurist movement like Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini, he did however manage to exhibit his work on a consistent basis.<sup>5</sup> From the late 1970s onwards, studies of Depero would lead to numerous exhibitions and related publications with rich content on Depero and his works, including *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. However, they still failed to include a very comprehensive analysis of this book. Furthermore, Caruso remarks: ‘from the second half of the twentieth century the book was subject to independent research and

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3 The preface of the catalogue reiterates the distinction between ‘First Futurism, as it is called in Italy’, i.e. the period between the first manifesto (1909) and the death of Boccioni (1916), regarded as the ‘creative and innovating’ period of the avant-garde, and the ‘politically associated “Second Futurism” of the 1920s and ‘30s’, to which Depero belongs. For more on the distinction between ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Futurism see also note 17 below on page 21 of the thesis (Selz, 1961, 7).

4 Depero is cited on the closing pages in the section ‘The closing years (1914–1915)’ (Taylor, 1961, 102 and 105).

5 For a complete list of Depero’s exhibitions see: <https://depero.it/en/exhibitions-3/>. In the period 1946–1969, Depero participated in over 40 personal and collective exhibitions both in Italy and abroad. These included personal exhibitions held in small private galleries (1949, 1951, 1962, 1965, 1966), important local exhibitions (in 1951 in Rovereto, in 1953 in Trento), and numerous appearances in itinerant collective exhibitions at international museums (e.g. 1959–60 and 1962–1963). Of particular note are the following retrospectives held after his death: *Prima retrospettiva Depero*, an exhibition at Galleria Toninelli in Milan curated by Guido Ballo (1962). The slim catalogue was a 16-page, black-and-white, staple-bound brochure containing a short introduction to the exhibition by the curator and the images of the artworks on display; the exhibition at Galleria Martano in 1969 and Bruno Passamani’s museum retrospective on Depero in 1970.

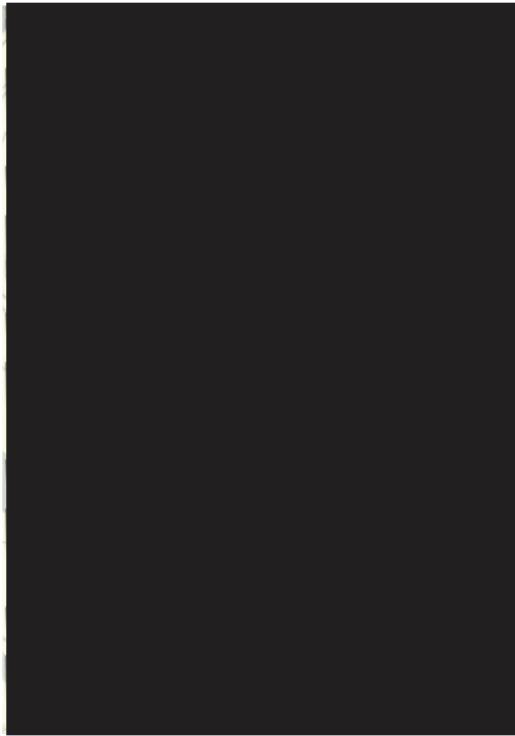


Figure 1.3



Figure 1.4



Figure 1.5

**Figures 1.3/1.4** *Storia del design grafico* by Daniele Baroni and Maurizio Vitta. Milan: Longanesi. Cover and an internal page about Fortunato Depero showing a photographic reproduction of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. This book is the only history of graphic design available in Italian and is used to study this subject in both Further and Higher educational contexts. On Depero Baroni and Vitta write: '[Depero was] certainly less professionally trained than Cassandre [...] Depero certainly cannot be regarded as an innovator in terms of graphics; Cassandre left a far more tangible mark' (Baroni and Vitta, 2003, 125-128).

**Figure 1.5** Taylor, J. C. (Ed.). 1961. *Futurism*. [Exhibition catalogue] 31 May – September 5 1961 at MoMA – The Museum of Modern Art, New York. New York: Doubleday & Company. The cover of the exhibition catalogue was designed by Charles Oscar utilising the 'Plastica d'oggi' manifesto (second part, page 57 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*).



“mistreatment” [*maltrattamenti*]’ (Caruso, 2002, 312-313).<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding his numerous exhibition opportunities, and despite the opening of the Depero Museum<sup>7</sup> and the MoMA exhibition in 1961, one has to wait until 1978 to find a thorough bibliographical account of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, when SPES published the first reprint and the first analysis of the book since its publication in 1927.

### 1.3 Inadequacies of initial narratives of Futurism and the emergence of new accounts

Critical accounts of Futurism were taking new directions when Joshua Taylor organised the exhibition *Futurism* at MoMA in 1961. This was the first monographic exhibition about Italian Futurism hosted at this institution, although it was not the first time that Futurist paintings were on display in this location.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, however, the show came at a crucial time for a renewed critical reception of the movement.<sup>9</sup> Immediately after the War, Futurism had undergone a period of

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6 Following the death of Depero's wife Rosetta Amadori in 1976, Depero's entire body of work was donated to the municipality of Rovereto and moved to the Galleria Museo Depero. Between 1979 and 1987, the year that MART - Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Rovereto and Trento and the Archivio del '900 were founded, Marina Pozzer and later Carlo Prosser archived the inventory, consisting of 7537 different items. The founding of MART, the cataloguing process and the bequest following the death of his wife gave new impetus to studies of Depero, starting with Passamani's 1970 exhibition and monograph of 1981; at the same time, however, in line with Caruso's aforementioned observation, they also resulted in a series of exhibitions and catalogues that made wide use of Depero's substantial body of work, leading to numerous publications packed with images but largely or completely devoid of text, or which, like the MoMA Futurism exhibition, used pages from *Depero futurista 1913–1927* without any critical discussion. Examples of this include: Scudiero, M. 1988. *Depero futurista e l'arte pubblicitaria*. Modena: Galleria Fonte D'Abisso Edizioni; Scudiero, M. 1998. *Depero futurista*. Rovereto: Edizioni La Grafica. Scudiero, M. and Magnetti D. 2004. *Depero futurista*. Milan: Electa.

7 As early as 1940 Depero outlined a presentation for a 'Permanent Depero Gallery' (9+6 pages, MART, Dep.3.1.33.31 and Dep.2.4.75). He achieved his aim in 1959, when he opened the Depero Permanent Gallery and Museum, whose sign also included the wording 'first Futurist museum in Italy' (Melotti, 1962, 13-14). The museum closed in October of the same year due to the worsening health problems of Depero. He was the creator and manager of the museum and would die the following year in 1960.

8 A short text about the early stages of Futurism was included in *Twentieth-century Italian art*, the first American postwar exhibition about Italian art. See: Thrall Soby, J. and Barr, 1949, 7-16. and Taylor, J. C. (ed.) *Futurism*. [Exhibition catalogue]. 31 May – 5 September 1961. New York: Doubleday & Company. On 12th February 2019, the CIMA held a conference in New York to discuss this MoMA exhibition. The exhibition was taken as case study of transnational exchange, and attempted to unpack the influence of Italian Art on international Modernism (See CIMA, 2019). Dr Laura Moure Cecchini's contribution was of particular relevance. Based on archival documents about Romeo Toninelli - the Italian industrialist who supported the organisation of the exhibition, she suggested that the curators' choice was driven by the idea for the exhibition to have no connection with the Fascist regime.

9 The curatorial structure of the exhibition was rooted in the modernist approach of the museum and in the mainstream of Italian art history, but it also demonstrated degrees of innovation. On the one hand, the show included artworks from a rather limited timeframe (1909-1916) and focused on more traditional forms of fine arts, especially paintings. On the other hand, the exhibition manifested the will to expand beyond a Boccioni-centric understanding of Futurism. Until then, Italian scholars and critics had given much attention to the work of Boccioni, considered key to the movement for his exceptional artistic pursuits, both in theory and in practice. The MoMA show focused on the Futurist production of five painters, namely Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), Carlo Carrà (1881-1966), Giacomo Balla (1871-1958), Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) and Gino Severini (1883-1966), the artists who had signed the *Manifesto dei pittori Futuristi* (Manifesto of Futurist painters) in 1910, a year after the publication and diffusion of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's first *Manifesto del Futurismo* in February 1909. Even though works following 1916 were excluded, the catalogue briefly mentioned the group's later developments in the 1920s and 1930s under the critical category of 'Second-Futurism' (Selz, 1961, 7). Nonetheless, MoMA's Futurism exhibition manifested the international interest in exploring the artistic contribution of the Italian avant-garde movement, which had been which had previously been neglected.

*damnatio memoriae*: art historians and historians, especially Italian, were reticent about investigating the movement because of its members' explicit involvement in Fascism, especially that of its founder Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (Perfetti, 2001, 33-51). Instead of questioning and investigating the complex relationship between art and politics directly, they preferred to temporarily set aside both the country's recent past and the artistic achievements of these artists.<sup>10</sup> Yet, this historical amnesia could not last long: the role of Futurism in the history of the international avant-garde clearly merited a revised account. Thus, new critical debates about Futurism began to appear in the late 1950s and were evident in this new exhibition.

The following are only but a few meaningful examples of a wide and diversified new interest in the topic: Maria Druidi Gambillo's and Teresa Fiori's *Archivi del Futurismo* (Futurism Archives, Rome: De Luca editore, 1958), the 1959 exhibition curated by Jacopo Recupero at Palazzo Venezia in Rome (*Il Futurismo*, Rome: De Luca editore), the Futurists' show at the Venice Biennale 1960, the inauguration of the *ISISUF Istituto internazionale di studi sul Futurismo* (International Institute of Futurist Studies, 1960), Raffaele Carrieri's monograph *Il Futurismo* (Milan: Milione, 1961), and Guido Ballo's course *Preistoria del Futurismo: corso monografico di storia dell'arte* (Prehistory of Futurism: Monographic Course in Art History, 1959-1960) at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (Belloni 2014, 348).

#### **1.4 The emergence of a critical shift**

A pivotal interpretative change had begun, and this resulted in a series of solid new historical accounts in the mid-1980s and in several seminal exhibitions in both public and private institutions. In the same years, a generation of historians and critics addressed with lucidity and rigour the relationship between Fascism and Futurism – a topic that will be explored in depth in chapter 5 of this thesis – starting with the conference organised by Renzo De Felice and held at the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli (De Felice, 1988). Key aspects of this shift in the art historical trajectory of Futurism will be briefly outlined here because they are the premise of

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<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Günter Berghaus forces us to reassess the popular belief that Futurism was forgotten in the post-war years, counting 650 publications and 57 exhibitions on Futurism in the period 1945-1959. Nevertheless, he agrees about some aspects: that in this period Futurism was disapproved of because of its relationship with Fascism, that for the same reason Futurist artists were denied the exhibitions they deserved, and that the number of Futurist studies grew significantly in the following decades (85% of existing literature on the theme was published after 1970). Rather than being deliberately forgotten about, Berghaus argues that this was due more to a lack of interest in Futurism with people's historic and artistic interests shifting towards neo-avant garde trends such as abstract expressionism, kineticism, pop art, etc. It should also be noted that the publications surveyed by Berghaus do not always assess and address the political connection between Futurism and Fascism. For a more in-depth analysis of these issues see Berghaus, 2012, 377-403; for the historiography and bibliography of Italian Futurism see Cammarota, 2006; Berghaus, 2018, 3-27 (from which the above synopsis is taken) and Berghaus, 2020.

the more recent studies on the topic. Furthermore, their relevance is central to the understanding of Depero's work and its reception, especially in relation to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. The aim here is to position this research against the wider body of existing literature on the topic.

Before analysing the nature of the critical shift that occurred after the War, however, we need to briefly note that it was partially connected to the different ways in which critics dealt with the political and ideological foundations of Futurism. On the one hand, some researchers tended to avoid the political involvement of the group whilst focusing on its artistic achievements. In the 1961 MoMA exhibition catalogue, for instance, we read:

The relationship between Cubism and Futurism, the impact of Futurism on Expressionism, and the sympathy between certain Futurist procedures and current endeavours are largely responsible for the growing interest in this movement, and the recent efforts to reassess its contribution as an artistic movement quite aside from its association with political and social events.

Selz, 1961, 7

On the other hand, as Angelo D'Orsi suggests in his book *Futurismo tra cultura e politica. Reazione o rivoluzione?*, a revisionist history of Futurism began to emerge through the re-examination of the first phase of the movement. In the 1959 symposium *Avanguardia e decadentismo*, the rediscovery of texts about Futurism written by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) – the inspiration for Italian left-wing intellectuals after the end of the war – allowed a more nuanced view of the movement: Gramsci's texts did not completely condemn the group, and noted its positive elements, such as its cultural internationalism, its revolutionary energy, and its positive reception among the working class.<sup>11</sup> As Francesco Perfetti suggests, however, it was Renzo De Felice's controversial biography of Benito Mussolini (1965) that fully

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<sup>11</sup> On this occasion, D'Orsi explains, art historian Mario De Micheli's quoted Gramsci's letter to Lev Trotsky to express a more nuanced judgement on Futurism and defend his introductory presentation at the conference *Avanguardia e decadentismo*, where his book *Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento* was launched (D'Orsi, 2009, 31). In a letter dated 8 September 1922, Gramsci replied to a letter by Trotsky, who had asked him about Marinetti's movement. Gramsci had himself been intrigued by the movement, since he had noticed the international, cosmopolitan appeal of the artistic and cultural proposals of Marinetti and his followers in 1913. Yet, as noted by Angelo D'Orsi, Gramsci was very critical of Marinetti and of the movement in his reply to the Russian revolutionary, especially of the ideological incongruence emerged after the end of the war. He pinpointed the importance of the First World War as a watershed in the history of Futurism, which had found itself in need to redefine its socio-political agenda after Italy's defeat and their postwar political failure. For an analysis of Gramsci's position on Futurism and how the philosopher's writings influenced the reassessment of the movement, see: D'Orsi, 2009, pp. 15–43. Chapter 5 will delve into this topic further.

opened the way to new interpretations and methodologies (Perfetti, 2001, 33-51).<sup>12</sup>

The art historian Enrico Crispolti (1935-2019) clearly outlines the critical shift in the introduction to his 1986 *Storia e critica del futurismo* (Crispolti, 1986, 5-21).<sup>13</sup> According to Crispolti, the change took five interrelated but different directions. First of all, and the premise on which the other four are based, Futurism was not a homogeneous movement with a focus on fine arts. It was instead a heterogeneous group with a distinctive (yet not unifying) intention. Crispolti referred to this as the ‘reconstruction of the universe’, an aim that had been formalised to some extent by Balla and Depero in their 1915 manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo* (Futurist reconstruction of the universe - Crispolti, 1986, 46-103). This reformation of the universe aimed at shaking the foundation of the contemporary bourgeois society and aspired to engage with all aspects of reality through the arts. Thus, Futurism came to be studied by art historians not only for its achievements in the fine arts only, but also for their contribution to all fields of communication and creativity.

#### 1.4.1 The implications of this critical shift

This first and fundamental shift of focus from style to intention resulted in an innovative openness to a wider field of investigation and to a better understanding of multiple creative practices, often rooted in experimental art engagements of the postwar period. This new direction is clearly manifested in the curatorial focus of a number of exhibitions since the 1980s, notably Crispolti’s exhibitions, *Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo* (Turin, Mole Antonelliana, 1980) and, more recently, *Futurismo 1909-1944* (2001) at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (Crispolti, 1980 and 2001). It is also evident in Pontus Hulten’s *Futurismo e futurismi* (Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 1986) and in Vivienne Greene’s *Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe* show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York city (2014). Fine art, architecture, design, cinema, photography, visual poetry, theatre and advertising were all featured in these exhibitions, among other

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<sup>12</sup> De Felice's monography about Mussolini was published in different volumes at different times, each of which triggered controversies and critical debates, especially in the mid 1970s, over his interpretation and non-Marxist approach to history, eventually leading to new research. These controversies reach the international academic arena through the works of Mark Smith, Michael Leeden and Borden W. Painter Jr. See: Leeden, 1976, 269-283, and Painter, 1990, 391-405.

<sup>13</sup> With Maurizio Calvesi (b.1927), Crispolti was one of the most active young art historians and art critic of the postwar years. Like Calvesi, Crispolti was deeply committed to art historical research while engaging with the most cutting-edge artistic experiences at a time when Italian artists were moving beyond the picture plane of traditional paintings to bridge the gap between art and life: the contemporary developments in the expanded field for the visual arts reflected and influenced the historiographical renovation and vice versa, as it appears in Calvesi’s book *Le due avanguardie. Dal futurismo alla pop art* (1966).

media.<sup>14</sup> In addition, this intersection of fine art and other disciplinary practices subsequently became the focus of specific studies. For instance, Futurist *serate*<sup>15</sup> (*soirées*) have been considered by American art historian Claire Bishop, as a premise for socially-engaged art practice (Bishop, 2012, 3 and 41-49). This focus is also evident in the theatre histories of Michael Kirby (in his *Futurist Performance*, 1971), Giovanni Antonucci (in *Lo spettacolo futurista in Italia*, 1974), Paolo Fossati (in *La realtà attrezzata: scena e spettacolo dei futuristi*, 1977), RoseLee Goldberg (in *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 1988), Giovanni Lista (in *Lo spettacolo futurista*, 1991) and Günter Berghaus (in *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*, 1998). Germano Celant presented the Futurists as initiators of environmental installations in the Biennale exhibition *Ambiente/arte* (Celant, 1978, 187-194). Furthermore, renewed interest in Futurist *Parole in libertà* (words-in-freedom), which presented visual arrangements of typographical characters on the printed page as poems, arose among visual artists and art historians at that time. Futurist books, such as Depero's 1927 *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, Tullio d'Albisola's *Parole in libertà futuriste* (written by Marinetti, 1932), and Bruno Munari's *L'anguria lirica* (written by d'Albisola, 1934), came to be understood as the most 'ingenious and important Futurist books in Italy' (Museum of Modern Art, 1992, n.p.). Further research on Futurist graphic design and advertising will be discussed in the second part of this thesis (chapter 6).<sup>16</sup>

The multiple Futurist practices analysed in recent studies have led to new points of focus: the work of Fortunato Depero being one of the them.<sup>17</sup> There has also been a broadening of the account of the Futurists' geographical focus through a dismantling of the traditional Milan- and Rome-centred understanding of the movement.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, new international networks of avant-garde artists

<sup>14</sup> On this topic, see the section 'Futurism in Different Artistic Media' (Sabatino, Fochessati, Strauven, Novero, Veroli, et al. 2018, pp. 69-296), which is subdivided according to the media explored.

<sup>15</sup> The *serate futuriste* were brief actions in a variety of media, which could include recitations of political statements and artistic manifestos, musical compositions, poetry, painting, staged performances with audiences of up to 5000 spectators in major theatres.

<sup>16</sup> See: Museum of Modern Art, 1992; Salaris, 1986 and Bartram, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> It was Enrico Crispolti himself that rehabilitated those artists who had been working creatively in the name of Futurist principles after the end of the war. Taking inspiration from a newspaper article by Luigi Carluccio ('Il secondo futurismo' - The Second Futurism. In *La gazzetta del popolo*. May 11, 1956), in 1958 Crispolti coined the term 'Secondo futurismo', a definition that was soon superseded in the light of the multimedia understanding of the movement (Crispolti, 1958, 34-51, White, 1990, 363-364 and Lista, 2012, 217). Not only Depero, but, Enrico Prampolini (1894-1956), Luigi Colombo (aka Fillia 1904-1936) and Gerardo Dottori (1884-1977), among others, began to be studied.

<sup>18</sup> Critics and historians started to mark new centres of Futurist production on the map of the country well beyond Milan, such as, to name a few, Turin, but also Venice, Verona and Padua (Bohn, 2004), Mantova, Perugia (where Gerardo Dottori was based), Reggio Calabria, Palermo and Messina (Masi and Sicoli, 2009), and smaller town centres, such as Altare, near Savona (Anonym, 2009). For an overview of the localisation of Futurism, see: Toni, A. C. (ed.). 1986. *I luoghi del futurismo (1909-1944)*. Conference proceedings. Macerata, 30 October 1982. Rome: Multigrafica editore. For a synthetic bibliography on the topic see: Crispolti, E. 2001. *Futurismo 1909-1944*. Milan: Mazzotta. Pp. 604-605.

have been uncovered as well as the international appeal of the movement, which was a feature of Pontus Hulten's exhibition *Futurismo e futurismi*, and of the Tate Modern's 2009 exhibition on the relationship between Futurism, Cubism and Vorticism. This is also evident in the 2012 programme & show on the progression towards abstraction at MoMA.<sup>19</sup> A final important effect of the critical shift was the expanded temporal framework of the movement. Prior to this, attention had been given to the group's work between the founding manifesto (1909), and the death of two very important figures of the group: the painter Boccioni and the architect Antonio Sant'Elia (1888-1916), who both perished during the War. Since the 1960s, critics who endorse the new framework supported by Crispolti tend to reconsider Futurism over the period between 1909 and the death of Marinetti in 1944.

### 1.5 Bringing Depero's work to the forefront

In this wider context of the re-evaluation of Futurism, Depero's work has slowly found critical favour (Passamani, 1970, XIII), not least due to the support of Depero's most dedicated collector Gianni Mattioli. As the scholar Fabio Belloni has recently suggested:

In the early 1960s, however, this situation [disinterest in Depero's work] started to change. [...] Depero's work ended up at the hub of a slow but ongoing process of rehabilitation. From then on, the solo shows in public and private venues increased in number, to the point where nowadays it is difficult to keep tabs on them. There was a whole host of occasions promoted by Gianni Mattioli, who was the artist's friend and keenest collector, the only person on whom he could really rely from the early 1920s to the end of his days.

Belloni, 2014, 349

Accounts of Depero document how he was originally from Rovereto (born in 1892 in Fondo - Trento), a town today in Trentino-Alto Adige but at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is here that he opened his personal museum in 1959, after having travelled twice to work in New York City (1928–1929; 1947–1948). Despite his life spent in a peripheral area of the country, he joined the Futurist group at the end of 1914: he was included in the exhibition of the same year, *Esposizione libera futurista internazionale* (the Free International Futurist Exhibition at Galleria Sprovieri, April 1914), and welcomed into the studio of the

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<sup>19</sup> See: Coen, E., Gale, M., Lista, G., Marcadé, J-C., and D. Ottinger. 2009. *Futurism*. [Exhibition catalogue]. Milan: 5 Continents editions; Dickerman, L. 2012. *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925. How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. See also the exhibition website: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/inventingabstraction/>, accessed on 20 August 2018.

Futurist painter Giacomo Balla (1871-1958).<sup>20</sup> One year later, Depero and Balla were to sign the above-mentioned manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* together, a document that – as discussed above – was to become central in the more recent understanding of Futurism.

Despite Depero's early involvement in the movement and his relationship with other key members, the relative overlooking of his work was partly due to the complex history of the Futurist movement; but Passamani also suggests that Depero slipped into the grey area in between the first and the second Futurism, due to the interpretative categories provided by the Futurist manifestos for fine arts. Neither *Manifesto dei pittori futuristi* (Manifesto of the Futurist Painters, 1910), nor *Manifesto tecnico della pittura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting, 1910), nor *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture, 1912) accounted for unconventional and multimedia works such as Depero's (Passamani, 1970, XIV). Furthermore, Belloni suggests that his work did not respond to the rigid aesthetic categories supported by the art historians of idealist tradition who were responsible for rehabilitating Futurism after the war (Belloni, 2014, 349).

The initial revival of interest in Depero took two main directions: through the applied arts and through theatre, but new interest in his painterly production also arose. It is not surprising that, since the late 1960s, exhibitions and studies about Depero have attempted to reconsider his relationship with the Futurist painters and to delineate his original contribution to the movement.<sup>21</sup> This was the case in the solo exhibition at the Galleria Martano in Turin (Martano, 1969, 3-4), but also in following exhibitions that have attempted to reconstruct, analyse and promote the artist's work in its entirety. On the occasion of this 1969 exhibition in Turin, for instance, the curator considered the reconstruction of the artist's life and career, seeing archival research as a first necessary step to reassessing the work of the artist. The show consisted of a selection of 149 works drawn from the artist's prolific output and from his documents. Beside drawings and paintings, the exhibition presented works from his scenic productions, advertisement projects and wooden objects, thus reflecting his multi-media vocation.

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<sup>20</sup> For a chronology of Depero's life and work, see: Capa and Suárez-Infiesta, 2014, 437-440.

<sup>21</sup> Depero's relationship with Balla is essential, even before they signed *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* in 1915. Depero first met Balla in Rome in December 1913. 'He was my first real supporter/motivator.' Depero wrote about Balla in 1933: 'He had also taught Umberto Boccioni and many other artists. The first time I went to his study I was pale, insecure, anxious to learn, my eyes wide open ready to embrace the new world that this eminent and audacious painter would reveal to me' (In Passamani, 1970, 29). Balla's artistic research had an immense influence on Depero's early Futurist work, as demonstrated by his works exhibited at the *Esposizione libera futurista internazionale* at the Galleria Spaviani in 1914 (Passamani, 1970, 30-31).

Finally, considering the importance of self-promotion, ‘vital’ according to Depero, it is important to recognise the key role he himself played in publicising and raising the profile of his work (Depero, 1927, 51). In addition to the self-promotional tool that is *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Depero also came up with the idea of creating his own personal museum while he was still alive and recorded all of his artistic activities, both international and local in dimension, with maniacal attention to detail. Last but not least, he also signed an agreement with the Municipality of Rovereto obligating the local council to ‘gather together, in suitable fashion, all of the artist’s works and fulfil the task of publicising and promoting it’ (Depero, 1959, 12).<sup>22</sup> A commitment honoured in full and still pursued today through the constant exhibition activities promoted by Casa d’arte Futurista Depero and the MART – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto – and supervised by its curators (Nicoletta Boschiero and Gabriella Belli - the latter in charge until 2011) in order to investigate Depero’s overall production.<sup>23</sup> According to Berghaus: ‘No other Futurist painter has had his works so widely and regularly presented’ (Berghaus, 1996, 302). There is no doubt that Depero, thanks also to the support of the aforementioned institutions, had a deliberate and direct influence on the promotion and positioning of his *œuvre* – which now counts over 200 exhibitions and catalogues – in the annals of art history.

### **1.6 Re-evaluating *Depero futurista 1913–1927***

According to Steven Heller, although Depero’s work is ‘well documented through books and exhibitions [...] his legacy may have suffered from a case of myopic scholarship’ (Heller, 2017, 7). In fact, despite the widespread attention that Depero has enjoyed, various aspects of the artist remain unexplored and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* laments the lack of an in-depth study.

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* can be understood as both a unique artwork and as a promotional book. It is an atypical work of art (see chapter 7 for a more in-depth discussion of this topic) as it is a book rather than a sculpture or a painting, which might go some way towards explaining why it was initially overlooked by art

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<sup>22</sup> On the importance of self-promotion for Depero see chapter 6, in particular section 6.2.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, see: Ruffi, S. and Boschiero, N. 2017. *Depero il mago*. [Exhibition catalogue]. Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana; Fiz, A. and Boschiero, N. [eds.]. 2013. *Universo Depero*. [Exhibition catalogue]. Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana; La Pedrera. 2013. *Depero y la reconstrucción futurista del universo*. [Exhibition catalogue]. Barcelona: Fundació Catalunya-La Pedrera; Scudiero, M. 2009. *Depero l'uomo e l'artista*. Milan: Giunti; Belli, G. (ed.). 2004. *Depero futurista 1914-1948*. [Exhibition catalogue]. Rovereto: MART. At the same time, more circumscribed studies have been focusing on the specific categories of his artistic production, ranging from theatre to painting, sculpture, product design, advertising and graphic design. These latter studies will be considered further in each of the thematic chapters of this thesis, which illustrate how these categories of his production were represented in his book *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.



historians. The design of many of the pages of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* would have been unthinkable without the Futurist words-in-freedom and free-word tables which, rather than free-standing artistic-literary experiments, were part of a pan-European movement in the field of visual poetry. Depero's aesthetic embraced this broad panorama of innovations, resulting in the subsequent and more self-aware concept of the work of art in book form (on visual poetry and the artist's book see chapters 2 and 7 of this thesis respectively).

Heller argues that 'art historians generally prefer to shove advertising, product, and even textile design – anything that is tainted by commerce – into commercial art ghettos rather than examine their respective significance to an artist's serious oeuvre' (Heller, 2017, 7). In addition, *Depero futurista 1913-1927* was the product of the publishing practices of the avant-garde – the most fervid of which were the Futurists, Constructivists and Dadaists – which would lay the foundations for the development of graphic design and modern typography; however, the book was produced by an artist-cum-designer, so similarly it has received relatively little in terms of comprehensive inspection by design historians.

The approach suggested in this introduction, involving several disciplines that combine and influence each other, is the underlying theme of this thesis: a graphical and typographical study of a book published during the Fascist era – a promotional and commercial tool but also a Futurist work of art – carried out by an Italian graphic practitioner and scholar but written in English to reach as broad an audience as possible, which aims to more accurately define the role of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* in the history of design and established narratives of modern graphic design and typography. A study aimed at professionals, academics or simply design enthusiasts, who understand this discipline, and all of its facets, dimensions and associated topics, in its entirety.

Hence, from each of these perspectives mentioned above, the book deserves a re-evaluation.

### **1.7 Organisation of the thesis**

My analysis of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* examines it as both a work of art in the form of a book and as a tool for publicising and celebrating its author. The goal of this study is to address the gaps in the account of this book by analysing it in greater depth than any previous existing study and devising a research methodology that can fit its specific qualities. My research is therefore divided into two distinct parts, which reflect the approaches I have adopted in this study.

### 1.7.1 Context and object

In the first part, composed of chapters 2, 3 and 4, I aim to present an analysis of the book object and its context in art and design.

In chapter 2 I begin studying the artistic and graphical context, paying close attention to the forms of typography and publishing that developed around the time of the book's release, to understand the circumstances in which it was published. This is followed by chapter 3, which analyses Depero's correspondence with publisher Fedele Azari and the professional relationship between Depero and the Mercurio printing works, in order to understand the design methodologies adopted by Depero during the process of creating the book.

In chapter 4, my analysis moves onto the book as an object, focusing on its content and formal features – its structure, typefaces and layout – and on the typesetting and printing processes that led to its creation.

### 1.7.2 Indexical analysis and interpretation

The second part of my research is more speculative: I use *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a research index from which to extrapolate other related areas of focus, highlighting pages that refer to a certain topic and presenting my own critical discussion. By 'index' I mean a list of areas connected with *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and Depero which are referenced directly by the book's content. Through this, I aim to show how this book-work relates to existing historical and critical accounts of Depero's work; moreover, my aim here is to show how *Depero futurista 1913–1927* might act as a multi-faceted, contextual, and reflective device as well as an experimental, formal exercise of book design and production.<sup>24</sup>

The three chapters that make up the second part of the thesis demonstrate the use of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a research index, each focusing on a topic that derives from an analysis of the book. Chapter 5 analyses the (political) context in which it was created and how it is inextricably linked with the institutions of the Italian Fascist regime. Given *Depero futurista 1913–1927*'s function as a promotional tool, chapter 6 examines Fortunato Depero's dual interest in the field of advertising: on the one hand what he himself described as 'self-advertisement' – in other words selling himself – and on the other, genuine advertising. Finally, chapter 7 reflects on

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<sup>24</sup> Regarding the adopted methodology, Lorraine Daston and Antony Hudek provide an interesting account on the narrative potential of objects and their storytelling function: any object, if analysed in detail together with the surrounding context, noting its material and meaning, is able to tell a story, becoming a pretext for research and a narrative vector (see Daston, 2007, in particular Schaffer, 2004, 147-192 and Hudek, 2014).

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a particular kind of book and the extent to which it can be considered a work of art in its own right (Depero, 1927, 51).

In this way I am able to use the book as a research tool to focus on issues neglected by previous studies yet worthy of analysis – the aim being to form a better understanding of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and of Depero.



## **Part 1: Analysis of context and object**

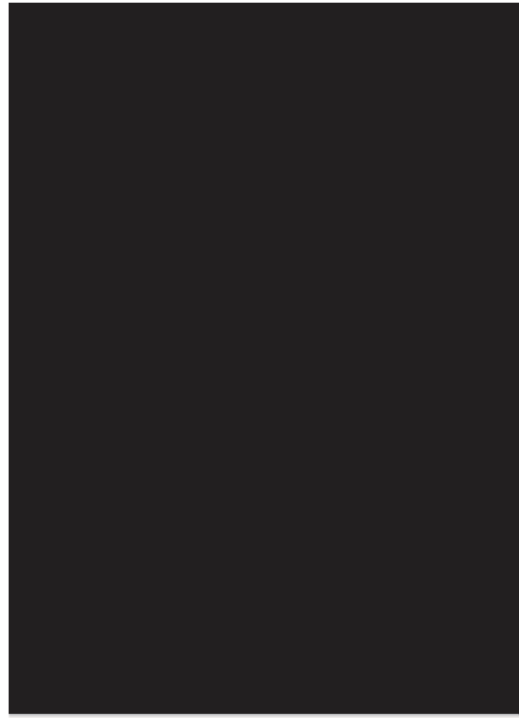


Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

**Figures 2.1 and 2.2** Mallarmé, S. 1914. *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance). Paris: Gallimard. Courtesy of Gallica, digital library of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

## 2 Graphic and artistic context

In this second chapter I examine the graphic and artistic context both at the time and prior to the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* in order to understand the circumstances in which the book was written. Although this chapter does not directly focus on Depero's work, the examination of the key figures and their publications enables us to trace the lineage of typographical design and publishing during the artistic avant-gardes, with particular attention to the role of the Futurist movement, highlighting the links with Depero and forming the necessary historical-artistic background required to study his *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

Depero's book was published in 1927 at the peak of an intense period of typographical and literary experimentation that had begun at the end of the nineteenth century: poets, designers and artists theorised about and explored the manipulation of both linguistic and graphic means to realise the potential of what Johanna Drucker calls the 'materiality' of writing, a concept according to which the written or printed word possesses its own form of expression (Drucker, 1994, 27-47).<sup>1</sup>

In the examples taken into consideration, we will see how typography, through the manipulation of verbal and visual form, i.e. words and their appearance, manages to communicate in a way that goes beyond the straightforward reading of the words on a page.

### 2.1 Stéphane Mallarmé's precedent

The first to explore the visual form of poetic language was symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. His *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance) anticipates the subsequent interest in typographically experimental poetry at the start of the twentieth century. Published for the first time in *Cosmopolis* magazine in 1897, the poem stood out for its unconventional textual non-linearity. For example, the title is distributed across multiple pages: 'Un coup de dés' ('A throw of the dice' - figure 2.1) is on the first page, 'jamais' ('never' - figure 2.2) is on the right-hand page of the following spread, 'n'abolira' ('will abolish') and 'le hasard' ('chance') are on pages 9 and 17 respectively;<sup>2</sup> the fragmented verses are arranged in a cascade on the double pages, the order and rhythm of the poem

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1 Drucker develops and applies to the field of typography Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory of the 'material' and 'sensory' capacity of the signifier, i.e. sound, or in this case form – the alphabetical signs – to refer to a specific concept (Saussure, 1959, 65-67). On this topic see *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in General Linguistics, 1916), a seminal text for the study of structural linguistics in which Saussure defines the sign as an entity consisting of the union between the 'signifier' (or 'sound-image') and the 'signified' (or 'concept') (Saussure, 2009 and 1959, 65-70, De Mauro, 1992).

2 The booklet does not have page numbers; for ease of reference I shall consider to the start of the poem as page 1.

are dictated by the blank areas and the spaces between the words and phrases. The lyrical style is typically Symbolist, characterised by a highbrow, cryptic language: there are lots of metaphors, for example ‘le maître’ – the helmsman of the ship caught up in a storm on page 6 – is in fact the poet (Mallarmé, 1914, 6).<sup>3</sup> The typography is mainly set in roman and italic, with changes in type-size used to emphasise specific verses, creating a typographical landmark in the field of poetry and literature at that time (Drucker, 1994, 50-51 and Guglielmi, 2002, 257-266).

Initially this text did not attract great attention, only coming to prominence when it was later reprinted in 1914 by Edmond Bonniot, Mallarmé’s son-in-law, as Futurist publishing reached fever pitch. Bonniot’s reprint, to which the short analysis above refers, was published in a pamphlet version for the *Nouvelle revue française* magazine according to the instructions originally jotted down by the poet. It differs from the first edition in terms of the greater space occupied by the poem, 22 pages in all as opposed to nine, and the use of just a single serif typeface instead of three different designs (set in various weights) of the 1897 edition. A note inserted in the 1914 preface reads: ‘the main innovation he [Mallarmé] has implemented in this final “state” of his work [...] appears to lie in the fact that the pages do not have a front and back but are read together, simply taking account of the ordinary descent of the lines [*en tenant compte simplement de la descente ordinaire des lignes*]’ (Gallimard, 1914, n.p.). Mallarmé’s desire to have a single canvas that transgresses the physical characteristics of a book, together with the typographical notes on his sketches (see figures 2.3 and 2.4), indicate an attempt to exploit the media and layout for their formal and aesthetic properties, and marry these to the poetic language of the text. We could also say that it is an example of the materiality and expressiveness of the (typographical) form to which Drucker refers, but also an attempt to go beyond the physical restrictions of the page.

On the book as a ‘metaphysical’ medium beyond its formal limits, Mallarmé wrote two essays: ‘Action Restricted’ (1886) and ‘The Book: a Spiritual Instrument’ (1885). In the first, the action in question is the act of writing and the object produced by this, the ‘[book], from which one is separated as the author, does not demand that any reader approach it. [...] The hidden meaning stirs, and lays out a choir of pages’ (Mallarmé, 1886 in Caws, 2002, 24); in the second text Mallarmé treats the book with divine reverence, always describing it as ‘The Book’ with initial capitals, remarking how it is ‘everything’ and how ‘all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book’ (Mallarmé, 1885 cited in Caws, 1982, 80).

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<sup>3</sup> Another famous example of Symbolist poetry and self-suppression is *Lettre du voyant* (Letter of the Seer, 1871) by Arthur Rimbaud: ‘JE est un autre’ (‘I is another’).





Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4

**Figures 2.3 and 2.4** Mallarmé, S. 1896-7. *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance). Autograph layout, courtesy of Sotheby's. The 1914 edition takes into account Mallarmé's original sketches. Note Mallarmé's comments in blue on the typographical layout of the poem: 'tout grandes capitales' (all uppercase) and 'italic plus fortes' (italic and bigger).

## 2.2 Futurism, Marinetti and Futurist publishing

We will now look at how the medium of the book played a key role also in the Futurist aesthetic, albeit with different aims and innovations to those adopted by the Symbolists. To understand the Futurist ideas introduced into the fields of literature and graphic design through a proclaimed ‘typographical revolution’ and *Parole in libertà* (words-in-freedom) requires an analysis of Futurist theoretical texts, most of which were written by Marinetti.

Numerous Futurist texts are dedicated to literature and typography in various types of publication (manifestos, newspaper articles, magazines, flyers and, above all, books), even if Marinetti had on several occasions expressed a desire to go beyond the limits of traditional literature and use faster and more modern forms of communication.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2.1 The Futurist manifestos

In the first *Manifesto del futurismo* (Manifesto of Futurism, 1909) Marinetti introduces the themes of dynamism that Futurist poetry aimed to express:<sup>5</sup>

1. We intend to sing to the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
2. Courage, boldness, and rebelliousness will be the essential elements of our poetry.
3. Up to now literature has exalted contemplative stillness, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt movement and aggression, feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the slap and the punch.

Marinetti, 1909, 1

At the same time as the publication of the first manifesto, Marinetti began publishing writings by Futurist artists and poets in his *Edizioni futuriste*

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4 From a flyer distributed on 11 January 1915 and then reprinted in the supplement of *Gli avvenimenti* (no. 11, 28 November, 1916): ‘Books and magazines are not what Italy needs if it wants to learn how to suddenly make up its mind, to drive itself forward, to support every effort and every conceivable misadventure. These interest and engage only a minority; they can be tedious, unwieldy and time consuming, they can’t help but curb the enthusiasm, dull the passion and poison the minds of hardworking people with doubts. The war, Futurism intensified, forces us to march, not to rot away in libraries and reading rooms’ (Marinetti, 1915 in 1968, 114). And also: ‘The book which is guilty of having made humanity myopic implies something heavy strangled stifled fossilized and frozen (only the great free-word tables shall live, the only poetry that needs to be seen)’ (*La radia*, Marinetti and Masnata in Marinetti, 1968, 204).

5 The *Manifesto del futurismo* is only partially taken into consideration because, as suggested by Lawrence Rainey, it discusses the founding of the movement and only later presents proclamations that are not relevant to the typographical and publishing context studied in this part of my thesis (Rainey, 2009, 44). Different versions of the first Futurist manifesto exist: it appeared in various newspapers (the most famous version being in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909), was disseminated as a press release, formed the preface to Cavacchioli’s *Le ranocchie turchine* (1909), and was printed and republished as a flier in numerous extended and abridged versions, so much so that it is difficult to maintain a precise chronological record. For a full bibliographical list of the all existing editions, see Cammarota, 2002; Lista, 2008, *Genes...*, 78-83; Coronelli, 2016 and 2019; new bibliographical studies on this and other Futurist manifestos are currently ongoing and soon to be published, see: Coronelli, 2020 and Berghaus, 2020. For an interesting typographical analysis of Futurist manifesto letterheads and their bibliography, see Versari, 2017. English translations of the Futurist manifestos in this section are from *Futurism: An Anthology* by Rainey, Poggi and Wittman (Yale University Press, 2009).

di “Poesia”<sup>6</sup>: *Revolerate* (Revolver Shots) by Gian Pietro Lucini in 1909, Aldo Palazzeschi’s *L’incendiario*<sup>7</sup> (The Incendiary) the following year, which Marinetti introduces with the text ‘Report on the Futurist Victory of Trieste’ followed by a large press review of Futurism; Corrado Govoni’s *Poesie elettriche* (Electric Poems) in 1911 and Luciano Folgore’s *Il canto dei Motori* (The Song of Motors) in 1912. With the exception of Gian Pietro Lucini, who withdrew from the movement in 1910, all of these together with other Futurists<sup>8</sup> and Marinetti himself would appear in the first anthology of Futurist poetry, *I poeti futuristi* (The Futurist Poets), published in August 1912.<sup>9</sup> The volume is introduced by the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*<sup>10</sup> (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature) and the related text *Risposta alle obiezioni* (A Response to Objections, August 11, 1912) which includes Marinetti’s words-in-freedom poem ‘Battaglia + peso + odore’ (Battle + Weight + Smell).

The manifesto introduced multiple literary innovations: the destruction of syntax using nouns ‘randomly’ (point 1), the use of verbs in the infinitive in order to adapt them to the noun and to not subjugate them to the I of the writer (2); the abolition of adjectives and adverbs as they are emblematic of static writing with a ‘tone unit’ (3-4);<sup>11</sup> every noun must be followed by another noun, with no conjunction between them, to which it is related by analogy (e.g. man-torpedo boat, 5); the elimination of punctuation in order to help the text flow, to be replaced by mathematical and musical symbols to emphasis specific passages (6); the

6 Marinetti founded the journal *Poesia* (Poetry) in 1905 in Milan. According to Claudia Salaris this was ‘an eclectic monthly that hosted Symbolists, Parnassians, decadents, neo-romantics, Modernists, the crepuscolari, and even authors writing in dialect’. Although the journal was suppressed between 1909 and 1910 (the last issue year 5 no. 7-8-9 of August–September–October 1909 was released as late as December 1909 and followed by the supplement *Il futurismo: supplemento alla rassegna internazionale “Poesia”*, published in February 1910), it was renamed as *Edizioni di Poesia* (Editions of Poetry) and continued to publish; in this period there were 13 publications, including *L’esilio* by Paolo Buzzi (1906), which were already issued under this name prior to 1910. In 1910 it was once again renamed as *Edizioni futuriste di “Poesia”* (Futurist Editions of “Poetry”, in which poetry is always written in double quotation marks). From this moment on it became the main Futurist publishing forum and ‘the book was the principal means for diffusing the movement’s poetics and propaganda’ (Salaris, 1990, 109). Marinetti adds: ‘We reserve the Futurist Editions of “Poetry” for those works that are absolutely Futurist in their violence and intellectual extremism and that cannot be published by others because of their typographical difficulties’ (Marinetti cited in Mazza, 1920, 11). Between 1920–21, the journal *Poesia* was revived and published in a second series by Mario Dessy in Milan, supporting and featuring modern poetry from different nations.

7 In an edition of 1000, it was the first publication to feature the definitive wording of the movement’s publishing house (*Edizioni futuriste di “Poesia”*).

8 Including: Libero Altomare, Mario Betuda, Paolo Buzzi, Enrico Cardile, Giuseppe Carrieri, Enrico Cavacchioli, Auro D’alba, Gesualdo Manzella Frontini and Armando Mazza.

9 According to Melania Gazzotti, 20000 copies of the volume were produced and it gathered together poems in free verse related to the Symbolism rather than following Marinetti’s typographical and literary innovations (Gazzotti, 2011, n.p.).

10 Dated 11 May 1912, the manifesto was initially distributed as a flyer in Italian and French, and later published in *La gazzetta di Biella* (12 October 1912). It was also published in German, in October 1912 (no. 133), in *Der Sturm*.

11 In these two points, Marinetti claims that adjectives imply a reading break, they are abolished in favour of nouns. He defines adverbs as an ‘old buckle that gives an annoying tone unit to the phrase’, i.e. a monotonous and static writing register (Marinetti, 1912, *Manifesto tecnico della...*).

abandonment of immediate analogies, or rather ‘to abolish whatever in language has become a stereotyped image, a faded metaphor, and that means nearly everything’ (Marinetti, 1912, ‘Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista’, pp. 14-15, point 7). ‘Destroy the “I” in literature: that is, all psychology. The sort of man who has been damaged by libraries and museums’ (Marinetti, 1912, ‘Manifesto tecnico della letteratura Futurista’, pp. 18-19, point 11).

Marinetti cites his *Mafarka le futuriste* (Mafarka the Futurist, 1909) as an example of the correct use of these literary rules and for the first time introduces the concept of ‘immaginazione senza fili’<sup>12</sup> (imagination without strings), an imagination freed of the ‘plumb lines’ or ‘strings of logic’, anticipating the title of his subsequent, seminal manifesto on literature and typography (Marinetti, 1912, ‘Manifesto tecnico...’, 21).

The text *Risposta alla obiezioni*<sup>13</sup> is a supplementary appendix to the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* and consists of a list of eight points through which Marinetti offers a response ‘to the sceptical questions and important objections which have been directed by the European press against it’, reiterating and clarifying without adding too much to the manifesto which it accompanies. With regard to the elimination of punctuation, an interesting theory is espoused in point 7: ‘a shorter or longer blank space will tell the reader what are the pauses or the brief naps of intuition’. For the first time Marinetti talks about the blank spaces of the page as compositional elements that are able to strengthen the expressiveness of words through the use of voids in addition to solids like images and text (Marinetti, 1912, *I poeti futuristi*, 23-28).

The text concludes by heralding the birth of a new literary style – ‘We are entering the boundless domains of free intuition. After free verse, here at last are words in freedom!’ – and by explaining how all of the ‘elastic intuitions’ pronounced in the manifesto were expressed during the writing of *Battaglia + peso + odore*, the first words-in-freedom composition by Marinetti which, despite not having any particular typographical features, implements the guidelines of the manifesto (note the use of onomatopoeia and mathematical symbols in figure 2.5).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Immaginazione senza fili’ – literally, imagination without string/wires – can also be translated as ‘wireless imagination’ or ‘radio imagination’ as retrieved from *Futurism: An Anthology*, according to which, this interpretation suggests ‘multiple connections’ (Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2009, see pp. 117 and 539). However, I prefer to use the literal translation of the Italian title, which can be found in other international instances, see: Sica, 2012, 155-160 and MoMA, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Like many other Futurist manifestos this was also distributed on the 11th (Marinetti’s lucky number) of August 1912 as a leaflet of the Direzione del movimento futurista (the Executive Committee of the Futurist Movement) entitled *Supplemento al Manifesto tecnico della letteratura Futurista* (Supplement to the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature), and was also later republished in *Der Sturm*, no. 150-151, March 1913.

<sup>14</sup> The words-in-freedom is a literary style introduced by Futurism in which the words have no syntactic-grammatical connections: words and texts are not organized into phrases and sentences, the punctuation is abolished. The rules of the words-in-freedom were presented by Marinetti in this manifesto and subsequently re-examined in *Distruzione della sintassi-immaginazione senza fili-parole in libertà*.



Figure 2.5

**Figure 2.5** Marinetti, F. T. 1912. 'Battaglia + peso + odore' (Battle + Weight + Smell). In *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature). 11 August 1912. 23.2 × 29.2 cm, 4 pages, n.p. Printing workshop 'Angelo Tavecchia' in Milan. Milan: Direzione del movimento futurista. Courtesy of L'Arengario. Initially distributed as a leaflet in Italian and French, parts of this manifesto were also republished in *L'intransigeant* (Paris, August 20, 1912) and in *Paris-journal*.

A year after the publication of the volume, the terms ‘imagination without strings’ and ‘words-in-freedom’ are key points of the homonymous manifesto *Distruzione della sintassi-immaginazione senza fili-parole in libertà* (Destruction of Syntax–Imagination Without Strings–Words-in-Freedom).<sup>15</sup> The first part of the manifesto is dedicated to ‘the Futurist sensibility’ in the poetic sphere, reiterating the themes most dear to the movement, the disdain for the obsolete and the quiet life and, conversely, the love for the industrial progress represented by machines, the metropolis, and a fast-moving dynamic life etc. The second part is dedicated to words-in-freedom. Here, rather than making a specific list, Marinetti takes an anecdotal approach that summarises the characteristics already listed point by point in the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*:

Now imagine that a friend of yours, gifted with this kind of lyrical faculty, should find himself in a zone of intense life (revolution, war, shipwreck, earthquake, etc.), and should come, immediately afterward, to recount his impressions. Do you know what your lyrical friend will do while he is still shocked?... He will begin by brutally destroying the syntax of his speech. He will not waste time in constructing periodic sentences. He could care less about punctuation or finding the right adjective. He disdains subtleties and shadings, and in haste he will assault your nerves with visual, auditory, olfactory sensations, just as their insistent pressure in him demands. The rush of steam-emotion will burst the steam-pipe of the sentence, the valves of punctuation, and the regular clamp of the adjective. Fistfuls of basic words without any conventional order. The narrator’s only preoccupation: to render all the vibrations of his “I.”

Marinetti, 1913, n.p.

This imaginary scenario serves to introduce the subsequent part on the ‘imagination without strings’, i.e. the imagination of the poet which ‘must weave together distant things without connecting threads, by means of essential words in freedom’ (Marinetti, 1913, n.p.). Marinetti continues by repeating the characteristics that poetry must have in order to achieve this imagination (verbs in the infinitive, onomatopoeia and mathematical symbols). These linguistic expedients are followed by a paragraph entitled ‘Typographical revolution’, which looks at formal textual strategies which necessarily include typography:

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<sup>15</sup> Manifesto initially distributed with the shortened title *L'immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà. Manifesto futurista* (The Imagination Without Strings and the Words-in-Freedom. Futurist Manifesto) in the form of a leaflet in Italian and French on 11 May 1913, published with subsequent additions in *Lacerba* no. 12 (pp. 121-124, 15 June 1913) and no. 22 (with another additional title ‘Dopo il verso libero le parole in libertà’ - ‘After Free Verse. Words-in-Freedom’, on 15 November 1913, pp. 251-254); in English in *Poetry and Drama* (no. 3, September 1913), announced by Marinetti in Paris during the *1ère Exposition de sculpture futuriste* (First Exhibition of Futurist Sculpture, June 20 – 16 July 1913), and finally reissued in its final and extended version in Marinetti’s book *Zang tumb tumb* (according to its frontispiece the actual bibliographic title of this book is *Zang tumb tuuum. Adrianopoli ottobre 1912. Parole in libertà - 1914*, even though Marinetti himself called to it as *Zang tumb tumb*).

I have initiated a typographical revolution directed against the bestial, nauseating sort of book that contains passéist poetry or verse à la D'Annunzio, handmade paper that imitates models of the seventeenth century, festooned with helmets, Minervas, Apollos, decorative capitals in red ink with loops and squiggles, vegetables, mythological ribbons from missals, epigraphs, and Roman numerals. The book must be the Futurist expression of Futurist thought. Not only that. My revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which is contrary to the flux and reflux, the leaps and bursts of style that run through the page itself. For that reason we will use, in the very same page, *three or four different colors of ink, and as many as twenty different typographical fonts if necessary*. For example: *italics* for a series of swift or similar sensations, boldface for violent onomatopoeias, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The typographical revolution and the multicolored variety in the letters will mean that I can double the expressive force of words.

I oppose the decorative and precious aesthetic of Mallarmé and his search for the exotic word, the unique and irreplaceable, elegant, suggestive, exquisite adjective. I have no wish to suggest an idea of sensation by means of passéist graces and affectations: I want to seize them brutally and fling them in the reader's face.

I also oppose Mallarmé's static ideal. The typographic revolution that I've proposed will enable me to imprint words (words already free, dynamic, torpedoing forward) every velocity of the stars, clouds, airplanes, trains, waves, explosives, drops of seafoam, molecules, and atoms. And so I shall realize the fourth principle contained in my 'First Manifesto of Futurism' (20 February 1909): 'We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed.'

In 1914<sup>17</sup>, a year on from the previous manifesto, the expressive potential of Futurist typography is once again the focal point of the theories of Marinetti,

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**16** It is important to point out that the first draft of the manifesto issued in May 1913 finished with this paragraph. The three subsequent paragraphs were only added later on in the *Lacerba* article 'After Free Verse. Words-in-Freedom' in which Marinetti repeats parts of the *Distruzione della sintassi-immaginazione senza fili-parole in libertà* manifesto with 'additions' and 'explanations' (Marinetti, 1913, 251). Reference works used when studying Futurism, like *Futurism: An anthology* by Laura Wittman, Lawrence Rainey and Christine Poggi, erroneously regard this edited version as the original draft of May 1913 (see Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2009, pp. 143-151). In these paragraphs it is also interesting to note how Marinetti tends to discredit the work of Mallarmé, almost as if he wants to underline the superiority and leadership of words-in-freedom to the forerunner of the Symbolist poet.

**17** 1914 was also an important year for Depero. From February to April he was a frequent visitor to Sprovieri in Rome, the reference gallery of the Futurism movement, coming into direct contact with the Futurists (although his first meeting with Marinetti dates to December 1913 during the Boccioni exhibition at the same gallery): on 29 March he participated in the dynamic poetry recital *Piedigrotta*, inspired by the Neapolitan festival of the same name and held in public (it would later become a book in 1916), organised by author Cangiullo together with Marinetti. In April he took part in *Il funerale del filosofo passatista*, a dramatisation of the funeral of Benedetto Croce 'who died of a broken heart, beaten senseless by the Futurists', a performance organised by Giacomo Balla, Francesco Cangiullo and Marinetti (*Lacerba*, 1914, 143); the latter invited him to take part in the *Esposizione libera futurista internazionale* (Free International Futurist Exhibition, Rome, 1914) where as well as other Futurists the exhibitors also included Wassily Kandinsky and Alexander Archipenko, among others. In May 1914 Depero returned to the Trentino to organise two personal shows, one at the Cassa di risparmio di Rovereto bank, the other in Trento. Both would close early due to the outbreak of the First World War on 28 July. In October Depero returned to Rome where, between December 1914 and January 1915, Balla told him he had received a letter of admission (MART, Dep.1.1.3) to the Futurist group of painters and sculptors (For a detailed biography see Capa and Suárez-Infiesta, 2014, 2014, 437-440.).

who in *Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica*<sup>18</sup> (Geometric and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility - figures 2.6 and 2.7) writes:

Sometimes we make **synoptic tables of lyric values** with words-in-freedom; these enable us, while reading, to follow many currents of intertwined or parallel sensations at the same time. These synoptic tables should not be an end in themselves, but a means of increasing the express force of lyricism. We must shun all concern with the pictorial, not indulging in a complacent play of lines or curious typographic disproportions.

Everything must be banned which doesn't contribute to expressing the evanescent and mysterious Futurist sensibility with all its new geometrical-mechanical splendour. The free-wordist Cangiullo, in 'Fumatori II'<sup>a</sup>, had the felicitous idea of conveying the long, monotonous reveries and self-expansion of the smoke-boredom during a long train journey by means of this **designed analogy:**

**TO SMOKE**

Words-in-freedom, in their continuous effort to express things with maximum force and greatest depth, naturally transform themselves into self-illustrations by means of free, expressive orthography and typography, synoptic tables of lyrical values, and designed analogies.

Marinetti, 1914, *Lo splendore*, 3

Marinetti uses bold type for emphasis in three passages of the text – synoptic tables, designed analogy and self-illustrations – which explain how Futurist typography successfully achieves its goal of becoming expressive. Referring to the same poem cited by Marinetti (Fumatori II<sup>a</sup> - Smoking Car, Second Class)<sup>19</sup>, 'synoptic value' means the ability of Futurist words to summarise: in this poem, Cangiullo does not explicitly describe the train journey of the four protagonists of the poem but uses a series of onomatopoeias to summarise it. By 'designed analogy' Marinetti means the typographical representation of a specific word: note how the verb 'to smoke - fumare' (figure 2.7) increases in size to mirror the smoke that rises. The same goes for the noun 'velocity' which reduces in size, communicating the sense of speed that the word aims to convey, therefore illustrating itself.

This specific passage from the manifesto influenced publications of the Futurist Editions of "Poetry", the covers of which typographically illustrated the meanings of the words. Examples include the words arranged at alternating baselines that Marinetti designed for *Cavalcando il sole* (Riding the Sun, 1914 - figure 2.8) by Enrico Cavacchioli, the words arranged in an arch in *Ponti sull'oceano* (Bridges Over

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<sup>18</sup> As with the previous manifestos, this was also initially distributed as a leaflet, on 11 March 1914 in French and on 18 March in Italian. In these versions, Marinetti once again included a closing sentence against Mallarmé: 'Thus for Mallarmé's "ciel antérieur où fleurit la beauté" [The earlier sky where beauty flourished] we substitute geometrical and mechanical splendour and the numerical sensibility of words-in-freedom. The first part of the manifesto, up to paragraph 7 included, was republished under the title 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendour' in *Lacerba* no. 6 (15 March 1914), while the remainder was published in *Lacerba* no. 7 (1 April 1914) under the title 'Onomatopoeia astratte e sensibilità numerica' (Abstract Onomatopoeia and Numerical Sensibility) and excluding the final sentence on Mallarmé.

<sup>19</sup> Published in *Lacerba*. Year 2. No. 1. 1 January 1914, pp. 10-11.





Figure 2.7



Figure 2.8

**Figures 2.6 and 2.7** Marinetti, F. T. 1914. *Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica* (Geometric and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility). 18 March 1914. 23 × 29 cm, 4 pages, n.p. Printing workshop 'Angelo Tavecchia' in Milan. Milan: Direzione del movimento futurista. Courtesy of L'Arengario.

**Figure 2.8** Cavacchioli, E. 1914. *Cavalcando il sole* (Riding the Sun). 16.2 × 18.4 cm, 212 pages. Printing workshop 'Angelo Tavecchia' in Milan. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Gonnelli - Florence.

the Ocean, 1914, designed by Antonio Sant’Elia - figure 2.9) by Luciano Folgore, or *Archi voltaici* (Voltaic Arcs, 1916 - figures 2.10 and 2.11) by Volt (pseudonym of Vincenzo Fani Ciotti), and the sharpened letters of *Baionette* (Bayonets) by Auro D’Alba (also known as Umberto Bottone, 1915 - figure 2.12). In these cases, where the letters graphically interpret the meaning, the legibility is unaffected; in other cases the typography, used as an illustration for decorative means, loses its traditional communicative purpose.<sup>20</sup> This is the case with *Parole in libertà: consonanti vocali numeri* (Words-in-Freedom: Consonants Vowels Numbers, 1915)<sup>21</sup>, a 4-page manifesto-pamphlet that collects essays by Govoni, Buzzi, Marinetti and Francesco Cangiullo. It includes ‘Montagne + vallate + strade x Joffre’ (Mountains + Valleys + Streets for Joffre, 1915), freeword table by Marinetti where the larger letters (M, V, W, S) are rotated and arranged in such a way as to represent the mountainous landscape of France, and around them, in smaller type, there are words and onomatopoeias (‘long live France’) which have no syntactic or semantic relationship but which help to express the meaning of the work. This is followed by ‘Le coriste’ (The Choristers, see figure 2.13), a tableau by Cangiullo where the explicative function of the text is completely missing in favour of a typographical-calligraphic representation of women, using the letter ‘v’, arranged in rows and in a circle – genuine illustrations made using letters. This anticipates his *Caffè concerto* (1919), a book representing a theatrical performance on pages of different colours with a cover-curtain followed by a reproduction of the entrance ticket and then, on the following pages, the programme and the various characters that will enliven the evening, all composed of letters and typographical symbols. Artworks and compositions of this type become a new hybrid combination of drawing and typography.<sup>22</sup>

However, Marinetti’s Edizioni Futuriste di “Poesia” were not the only examples of innovative Futurist books. Among these, certainly worthy of mention is *BİFŞZF+18. Simultaneità e chimismi lirici* (BİFŞZF+18. Simultaneity and Lyrical Chemistry, 1915 - published by Vallecchi in Florence), a collection of poems by

<sup>20</sup> A well-known example of no legible free-word table is ‘Une assemblée tumultueuse. Sensibilité numérique’ (A Tumultuous Assembly. Numerical Sensibility) published in *Les mots en liberté futuristes* (1919 - see fig. 4.8).

<sup>21</sup> Although it is made up purely of lyrical-typographical compositions with no theoretical statements, this can be regarded as the last manifesto by Marinetti on Futurist literature and typography published by the Executive Committee of the Futurist Movement prior to the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Only in 1939 would Marinetti finally return to the things he had written in the aforementioned manifestos, condensing them and adding parts when publishing the *Manifesto futurista del romanzo sintetico* (The Futurist Manifesto of Synthetic Novel), published in *Il giornale d’Italia* (25 December 1939), written together with Luigi Scivo and Piero Bellanova.

<sup>22</sup> For more on words-in-freedom see the exhaustive definition provided in *Literary Futurism. Aspect of the First Avant-Garde* (White, 1990, 367) and in *Il dizionario del futurismo* (Godoli, 2001, pp. 1136-1141); for more on their subsequent distinction into free-word tables see section 4.2 of this thesis.

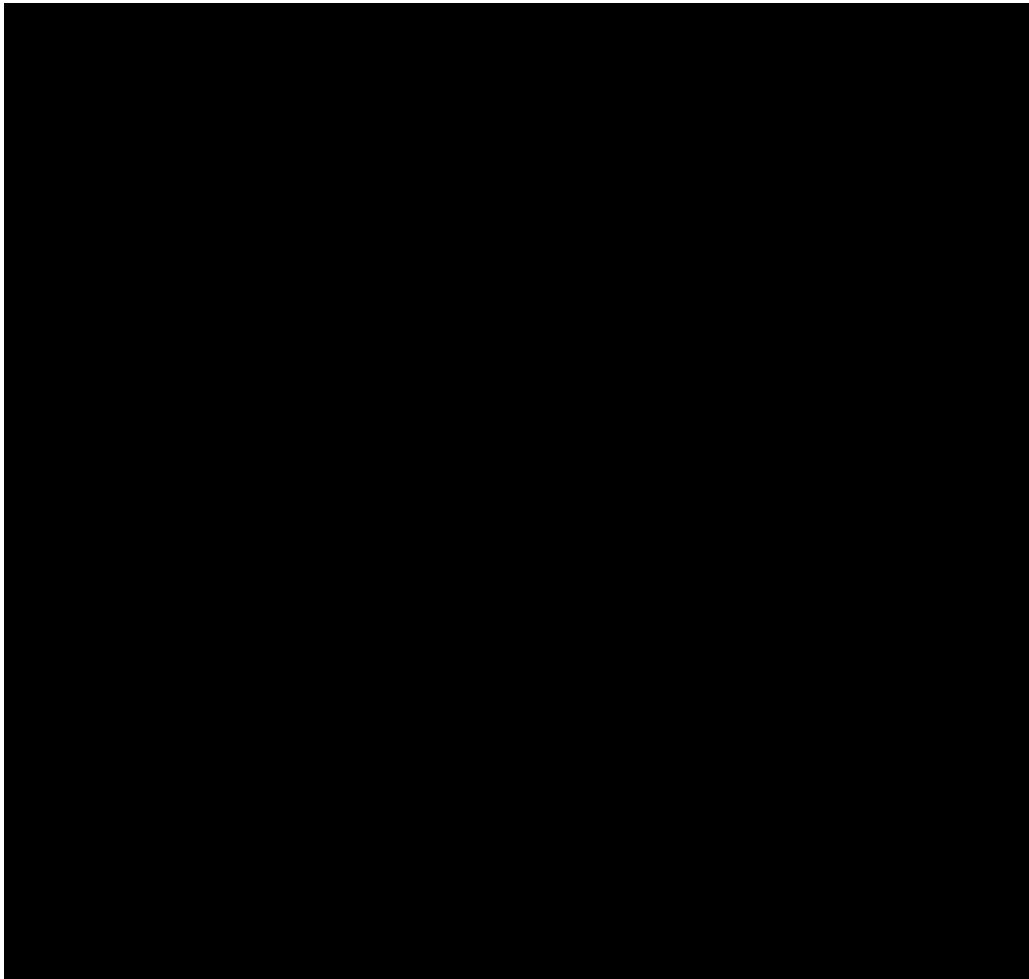


Figure 2.10

Figure 2.11

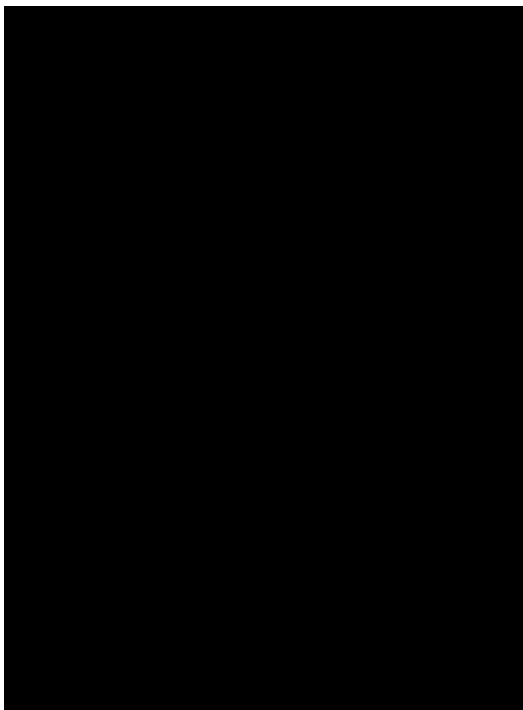


Figure 2.12

**Figure 2.9** Folgore, L. 1914. *Ponti sull'oceano. Versi liberi. Lirismo sintetico e parole in libertà 1912 - 1913 - 1914* (Bridges Over the Ocean. Free Verses. Synthetic Poetry and Words-in-Freedom 1912 - 1913 - 1914). Printing workshop Armani e Stein in Rome. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of L'Arengario.

**Figure 2.10** Volt (pseudonym of Vincenzo Fani-Ciotti). 1916. *Archi voltaici* (Voltaic Arcs). 53 pages. Printing workshop 'Angelo Taveggia' in Milan. Milan. Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Kassak muzeum, Budapest.

**Figure 2.11** Volt (pseudonym of Vincenzo Fani-Ciotti). 1916. 'Deretani di Case' (Houses backsides). In *Archi voltaici* (Voltaic Arcs). 45 x 60.5 cm. Printing workshop 'Angelo Taveggia' in Milan. Milan. Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Kassak muzeum, Budapest.

**Figure 2.12** D'Alba, A. (pseudonym of Umberto Bottone). 1915. *Baionette* (Bayonets). 16.5 x 22 cm, 140 pages. Printing workshop Armani e Stein in Rome. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of L'Arengario.

Ardengo Soffici<sup>23</sup> divided into two parts: ‘Simultaneity’, in which the typography of the components develops in a traditional way without any particular graphical elaborations; on the contrary, the poems that comprise the second part, ‘Lyrical Chemistry’, present numerous expressive typographical variations: the repetition and variation in the size of the words (see ‘silenzio - silence’ on page 75 of the book); the use of mathematical symbols (p. 99); different forms and sizes of type laid out in a non-linear way (pp. 76, 77, 80 and 93); impressive typographical compositions (pp. 97, 94, 105) and the insertion of advertising brands (like FIAT, TOT digestivo etc.) – reproduced using printing block – in the semantics of the verses in an attempt to maintain the sense of the phrases (pp. 89, 102, 103).

It was reprinted by Soffici in an extended version but a smaller size in 1919 and more recently on the initiative of Vallecchi in 2002. The first edition of Soffici’s book – designed by the artist using the collage technique – whose print run of 300 copies was almost completely destroyed by the Florence flood of 1966, making it an extremely rare book (figure 2.14). The title of the book should be read as ‘Bizzateffè più diciotto - an abundance plus eighteen’) which came to Soffici ‘from one of those bizarre combinations of types and typographical symbols sometimes created by the linotype on the lead row due to a momentary glitch in the machine’ (Soffici, 1955, 791). Like *Depero futurista 1913–1927, BIF&ZF+18. Simultaneità e chimismi lirici* ‘is considered one of the finest examples of avant-garde typographical experimentation’ (Jentsch, 1992, 327 and 111).

One unique case, which goes beyond semantics and typographical language, is that of Arturo Martini (1889–1947), sculptor and engraver associated with Futurism in the 1910s-1920s. In 1918 he produced *Contemplazioni* (figure 2.15), a book featuring no text, or rather, ‘the very first book ever of asemantic writings’ (Jentsch, 1992, 182). The pages consist of black and white illustrations, graphical variations of symbols and geometric forms created by Martini using the woodcut technique. Though the work has been the subject of multiple analyses (including Gatta, 2017; Stringa, 2011; Tavoni, 2017), interpretations – musical, mystical and philosophical – and reprints (in 1936, 1945, 1967, 2013), its meaning remains enigmatic and impossible to decipher with complete certainty.

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23 Ardengo Soffici, painter and poet, had an up and down relationship with Futurism: in 1911 he worked on *La Voce* (1908–1916), an important cultural magazine at that time in Italy, in which he voiced his disdain for Futurism on more than one occasion. In response to his criticisms, on 30 June Marinetti, Russolo, Carrà and Boccioni went to Florence where the latter publicly slapped Soffici, who was sitting in a bar with Giuseppe Prezolini and Medardo Rosso, triggering a clash that would be reignited on several occasions throughout the day until the Milan group left the city in the evening. The conflict was quelled in the afternoon by a policeman and later thanks to the mediation of Aldo Palazzeschi (on this topic, see Spagnoletti, 1971, 164-165). Later, Soffici would alternate periods of full support for Marinetti’s Futurism with episodes of unabashed criticism (see section 2.2.2.1 below).

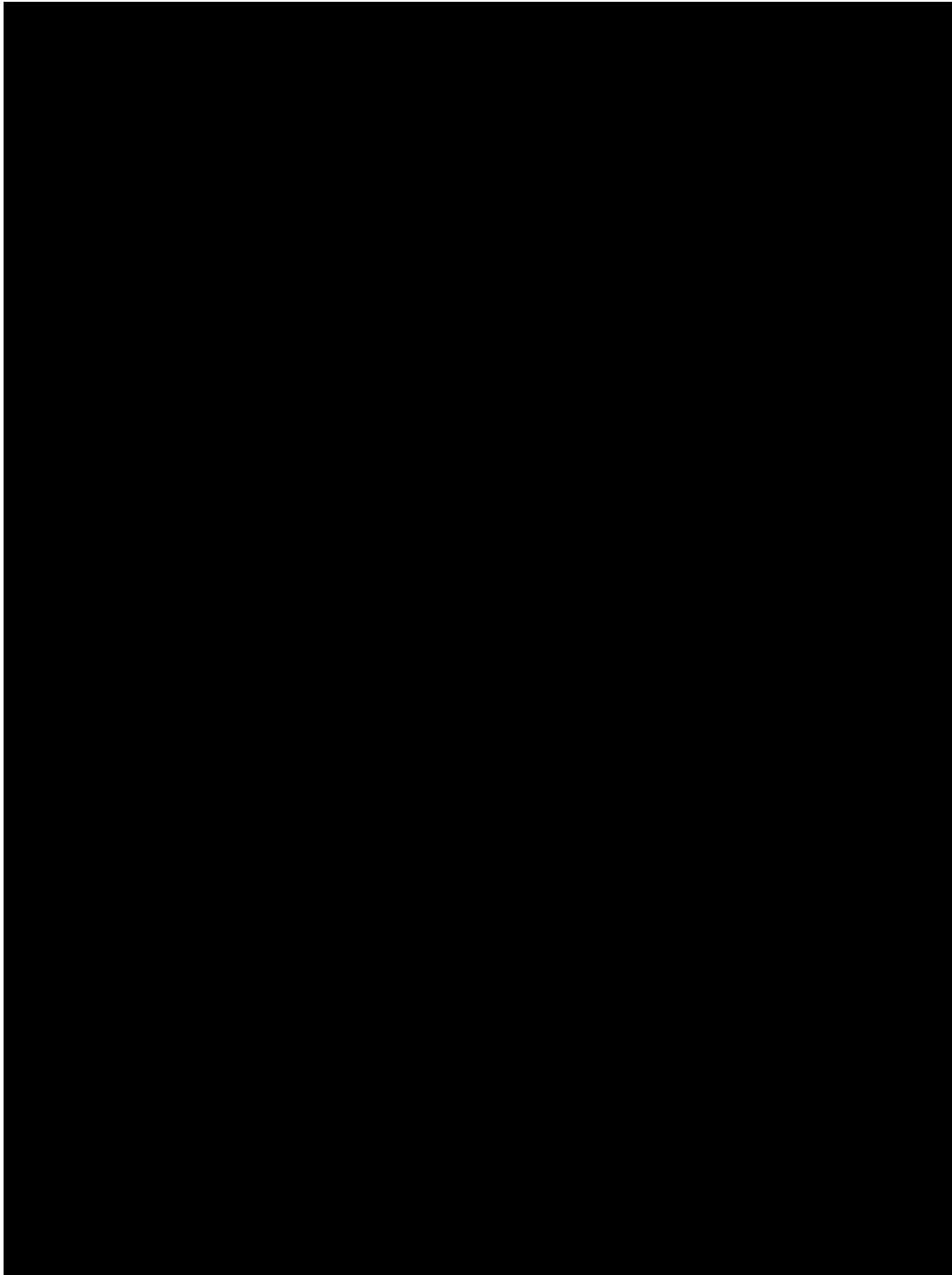


Figure 2.15

**Figure 2.13** Cangiullo, F. 1915. *Le coriste* (The Choristers). Courtesy of Fondazione Centro Studi sull'Arte Licia e Carlo Ludovico Raghianti.

**Figure 2.14** Soffici, A. 1915. *BİFŞZF+18. Simultaneità e chimismi lirici* (BİFŞZF+18. Simultaneity and Lyrical Chemistry). Florence: Vallecchi.

**Figure 2.15** Martini, A. 1918. *Contemplazioni* (Contemplations). Faenza: Tipografia Lega. Courtesy of Lugano Eventi.

With regard to the materiality mentioned at the start of this chapter, in the case of Futurism the expressive value stems from a series of different elements: the literary expedients of the words-in-freedom employed in the various manifestos (analogies, onomatopoeias and so on) join the typographical devices used (e.g.: ‘twenty different typographical fonts’), conflating to create the medium of the book. In addition, in some cases, the typographical expressiveness of Futurism extends beyond its physical appearance and form. For example, there are the pages printed on various papers, sometimes with fold-outs, in the Futurist Editions of “Poetry”, designed to transmit the meaning of the text in a synaesthetic way, involving multiple senses rather than just sight through reading. As such, they go beyond the slowness of the book medium, as underlined by Marinetti, and its physical form, previously envisioned in a more dreamlike way by Mallarmé.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2.2 Futurist magazines

Having analysed the manifestos (and some of the publications inspired by them), it is also worth taking a look at the Futurist magazines, as these play a key role in the prolific Futurist publishing system, communicating and spreading the fervid activity of the movement – embodied by many writings with non-standard typographical compositions – and, at the same time, driving the political and artistic-cultural debate within the Futurist movement.

Of the many Futurist magazines, I will examine those that enable me to more accurately define the publishing and typographical context that goes from the founding of Futurism to the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, selecting in particular the official publications of the movement and those in which we can see the traces of Depero, whether this be a textual or visual contribution.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to recognise straight away that Futurist magazines are complex phenomena to analyse for various reasons, the first being the fact that Italian Futurism was a nationwide movement and that the provinces were full of independent Futurist groups which, although they answered to the movement’s management in Milan (the Executive Committee of the Futurist Movement), carried forward their activities without necessarily having to inform Marinetti. We therefore find official magazines in Florence in Tuscany as well as in Sicily, and magazines

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<sup>24</sup> A few examples: ‘Carta sincrona’ freeword table included in *Zang tumb tuuum* and its title which winds around the object on the front and back covers, the aforementioned *Archi voltaici* by Volt (see figures 2.10 and 2.11), the four freeword-tables in *Les mots en liberté futuristes*, but also the different types of paper and pages 32–33 inserted in *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (figure 4.21).

<sup>25</sup> The Archivio Circe – the Catalogue of European Cultural Magazines of the Department of Literature and Philosophy of the University of Trento – counts more than 100 different Futurist magazines (see: <http://r.unitn.it/it/lett/circe>).

endorsed by Marinetti in Turin (*Stile futurista*), Milan, Rome (*Noi*), Bologna and Genoa, but also in Rovereto in the shape of Depero's *Dinamo futurista* in the 1930s.

The second reason is that Futurist magazines often contradict their main characteristic, i.e. their periodicity, with many being monographs published in a single edition or closing after just a couple of issues.<sup>26</sup> The main reason for this was because these magazines were often self-financed by the publisher/artist, who had to foot all costs (production and layout of content, printing and distribution), and these costs were even higher when the printed matter had typographical layouts that required non-standard forms of printing. Another reason for the premature closure of these publications was the lack of any real economic return in terms of sales, due to the independent magazine distribution and the scarce number of actual subscribers. This was the case with Marinetti, who covered the costs of the magazines he edited, and contributed his own money to produce the ones in which he was involved, always reserving himself part of the print run for promotional purposes.<sup>27</sup>

#### 2.2.2.1 *Lacerba*

After the temporary closure of the magazine *Poesia*, and its consequent transformation into a publishing house, there was no longer a reference magazine that could be used as a tool for promoting the Futurist ideology on a more immediate and continuous basis, compared with the slower publication timeframes of books. This gap was filled a few years later by *Lacerba*, founded on 1 January 1913 in Florence and edited by Tuscan Futurists Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici, both hailing from *La Voce* (see footnote 23 above). *Lacerba* would support both the political and artistic ideas of Futurism, publishing its most important manifestos and, above all, the typographical words-in-freedom compositions of the main Futurist authors.

The relationship between *Lacerba* and Futurism ended on 15 February 1914 with the article 'Il cerchio si chiude' (The Circle Closes) in which Papini criticised the direction in which Boccioni and Marinetti were taking the movement, and their alleged surrender to the straightforward representation of reality in the artistic field. On 1 March Boccioni responded to the article by publishing 'Il cerchio non si chiude!'

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<sup>26</sup> Examples include *La balza futurista*, which closed after just three editions; *Dinamo*, a magazine edited first by Emilio Settimelli and Mario Carli and later by Marinetti, which ceased to be published after the seventh issue; the single issue of *Arte futurista italiana 1909-1929* by Giuseppe Pippo Rizzo and the third, triple and final monograph issue of Depero's *Dinamo futurista* dedicated to Umberto Boccioni.

<sup>27</sup> The correspondence between Marinetti and Mario Carli conserved in the Carli-Dessy Fund of the Archivio del '900 includes payments made by Marinetti to the editorial offices and payments for copies reserved for him to be distributed free of charge to potentially interested parties, such as 30 copies of the second issue of *Roma futurista* and his purchase of 3000 copies for promotional purposes of magazine *Lacerba* (Carli, 26 September 1918, MART, Carli-Dessy 3.2.5.10 and Salaris, 1993, 35-45).

(The Circle Is Not Closing!), in which he rejected the criticisms levelled at him and Marinetti. Papini continued the argument with 'Cerchi aperti' (Open Circles) in which he asserted his critical freedom with regard to Futurism, refusing to dogmatically follow all of the rigid conditions established by the movement's founder. The article 'Il futurismo e "Lacerba"' (Futurism and "Lacerba") of 1 December 1914 closed the diatribe once and for all, Papini and Soffici reiterating their rejection of the 'authoritarian, centralised, formal and religious' form of Futurism espoused by Marinetti and arguing that they were the champions of real Futurism (Godoli, 2001, 625-628). In February Papini went further with the article 'Futurismo e marinettismo' (Futurism and Marinettism), separating the innovative Futurist artists, which included himself, from those that followed Marinetti; two months later, with Italy having joined the War, *Lacerba* ceased publication with the issue of 22 May 1915. Papini, who had always supported the war, celebrated with a triumphalist tone and assured readers that it would resume publishing after the war was over, but the magazine never returned to print.

Depero collaborated on *Lacerba* with his words-in-freedom and was an admirer of the magazine from its very first issue: 'I had no bread, I felt word-work-hungry, gaunt and emaciated... I saw *Lacerba*, I sniffed the scent of revolt [...] Read and re-read! [...] Joy, joy, joy, jewels, and all because of the new, new, NEW and great paper "*Lacerba*"... Violins, violins... No more grey room' (See Depero's letter, MART, Dep.4.2.1, 23 December 1913).

#### 2.2.2.2 *La balza futurista*

Two months after Papini's final article in *Lacerba*, Sicilian Futurists Guglielmo Jannelli, Luciano Nicastro and Vann'Antò (pseudonym of Giovanni Antonio Di Giacomo) founded *La balza futurista*. Although it only lasted three issues due to its lack of resonance and limited print run, Marinetti appointed it to the role of official Futurist magazine vacated by *Lacerba*, championing both the pro-war ideology on one hand and the Futurist style on the other. Many of the leading figures in the avant-garde contributed to the three issues: Balla, Boccioni, Marinetti of course, and Depero. The magazine was printed by the Piccitto printing works of Ragusa and introduced original forms of graphic design: for example, as well as the layouts of the words-in-freedom, there was also the idea of putting the masthead and contents on the final page. Shortly after Italy joined the war, the magazine's leading figures, Jannelli and Vann'Antò, left for the front leading to the premature and permanent closure of the magazine.



### 2.2.2.3 *L'Italia futurista*

A year later Bruno Corra (pseudonym of Bruno Ginanni Corradi, 1892-1976) and Emilio Settimelli founded *L'Italia futurista*, a magazine that would replace *La balza futurista* as the official magazine of the movement, taking the Sicilian publication as its role model (Settimelli, 1916, 1). It was published in Florence from June 1916 to 14 February 1918 on an irregular basis (sometimes fortnightly, sometimes weekly). Although its external layout was more similar to that of a newspaper than a magazine, it did publish the Futurist typographical compositions (figure 2.16). Like *Lacerba* it was also headquartered in Florence but the editors clearly distanced themselves from the anti-Marinetti position of Papini. In this regard Claudia Salaris adds: 'the publication brought together two souls: the technological and modernist spirit of the Marinettians and the cerebral and symbolist spirit of the newspaper's editorial team, prone to prioritising a form of cutting-edge, abstract-dreamlike-reflective poetic prose' (Salaris, 1992, *Storia del Futurismo*, p. 92). Even if the distinction between these two approaches is not immediately perceptible from the layout, its Marinettian influence can be seen in the ample space dedicated to words-in-freedom on the topics of machines and war: regarding machines, Depero would present his 'onomalinguistic' poem 'Tramwai' in *L'Italia futurista*, demonstrating an early indication of him following Marinetti's lead (Depero, 1916, 3); as to war, 'I giovani poeti e la guerra' (The Young Poets and the War) by Paolo Buzzi represented men in combat typographically (see *L'Italia futurista*, no. 11, 1916, 3). On the other hand, there are imaginary texts that epitomise the more abstract direction emphasised by Salaris, as exemplified by Futurists Remo Chiti and Rosa Rosà (pseudonym of Edyth von Haynau), the latter of whom would publish in *L'Italia futurista* parts of her novel *Una donna con tre anime* (A Woman With Three Souls, 1918)<sup>28</sup>.

### 2.2.2.4 *Noi*

At the height of the First World War, Bino Sanminiatielli and Enrico Prampolini founded the magazine *Noi* (We) in Rome in 1917. Following the first three issues published at irregular intervals (June 1917, February 1918, January 1919), a fourth and final issue was released in January 1920. Three years later, in April 1923, *Noi* returned to print with a brand new design and the following wording on the front cover: 'magazine published by Marinetti's Futurist movement' (figure 2.17).

Compared with the previous incarnation, and from a formal point of view, this new series dedicated less space to poetic/literary content to make room for images

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<sup>28</sup> A futuristic and sci-fi novel that tells the story of housewife Giorgina Rossi, anticipating the more emancipated role that women would play in the future compared with the 1910s.



Figure 2.16

**Figure 2.16** An internal page of *L'Italia futurista* presenting several different words-in-freedom compositions, at the top of the first column 'Tramwai' by Fortunato Depero. *L'Italia futurista*. Year 1, No. 4, July 25, 1916. Florence. Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Institut – Max-Planck-Institut in Florence. For more on Depero's onomalingua, see fig. 4.31 and section 4.3.2.9 of this thesis.

and photos, introduced two-column layouts, various papers, and a second printing ink for every cover (figure 2.18). In terms of content, on one hand Prampolini anticipated his subsequent conversion to Dadaism by supporting the movement; on the other, nationalist ideas and support for Fascism were announced as early as the opening article of the first issue of the new series, 'I diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani - manifesto al governo fascista' (The Artistic Rights Advocated by the Italian Futurists - A Manifesto to the Fascist Government) (Nazzaro, 2001, 793-794). This second and final series would conclude with the triple edition of 1925 dedicated to Balla, Depero and Prampolini (issue no. 10-11-12, see pp. 8-11).<sup>29</sup>

#### 2.2.2.5 *Dinamo*

Also in Rome, a year after the launch of *Noi*, Marinetti created *Dinamo*, edited by Emilio Settimelli, Mario Carli and Remo Chiti (from the fourth issue Marinetti would edit it himself). The contributors and editorial team came from *Roma futurista*, the 'newspaper of the Futurist political party' founded by Marinetti, Carli and Settimelli themselves (*Roma futurista*, 1918). Referring to the internal conflict within the Futurist movement (see *Lacerba*), the editorial of the first issue comments: '*Dinamo* will be the uncompromising organ of the Futurist artistic movement and the Futurist political party' and 'we will renounce and take to task those Futurists that have sapped energy and courage from Futurism, believing that they now have the right to attack it'. The magazine recognised only one single form of Futurism, the Marinettian and politically engaged version (*Dinamo*, 1919, 3).

From a graphical point of view, the magazine has a two-column layout embellished with illustrations and photos, which are followed by more complex typographical compositions for the words-in-freedom (figure 2.19). Depero would lend one of his sketches for the only illustrated cover (no. 3 of 1919 - figure 2.20) of the seven issues produced.

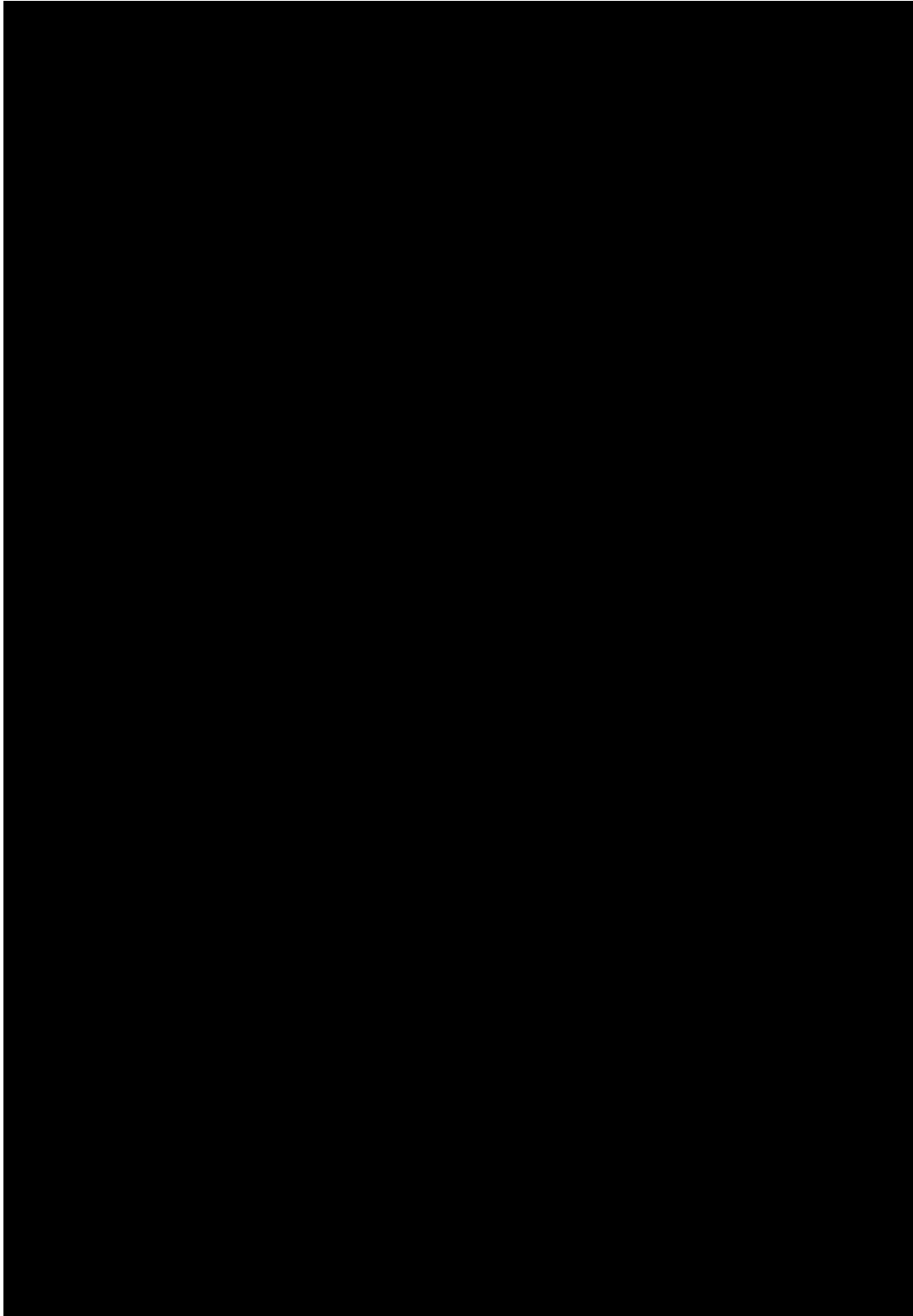
### 2.3 Other avant-gardes and typographical movements and their exponents

#### 2.3.1 Apollinaire and the calligrammes

One key figure in the area of literary and typographical experimentation in the early 1900s was Apollinaire (Guillaume de Kostrowitzky, 1880-1918). Although a staunch champion of Cubism, he had a fruitful yet tempestuous relationship with Marinetti

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<sup>29</sup> Depero's work was always featured in *Noi*'s new series: issue no. 1, 1923, p. 5; issue no. 2, 1923, on p. 8; double issue no. 3-4 of 1923 on pp. 4, 11 and 14; issue no. 3, 1923, on p. 6; quadruple issue no. 6-7-8-9 of 1924, see pp. 33, 34 and 48; and the above-mentioned no. 10-11-12.



**Figure 2.17** *Noi*. Year 1, No. 1, April 1923. Rome. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

**Figure 2.18** *Noi*. Year 1, No. 6-7-8-9, 1924. Rome. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

**Figure 2.19** *Dinamo*. Year 1, No. 2, March 1919. Rome. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

**Figure 2.20** *Dinamo*. Year 1, No. 3, April 1919. Rome. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

and Futurism.<sup>30</sup> In the summer of 1913 Apollinaire wrote *L'antitradizione futurista* (Futurist Antitradition), in which he asserts that Futurism 'is the engine of all trends', such as 'Impressionism Fauvism Cubism Expressionism [...] Plastic Dynamism Words-in-freedom' and reiterates its key concepts of abolishing punctuation and adjectives, using verbs in the infinitive and words-in-freedom, and the importance of the machine. Published by the Executive Committee of the Futurist Movement, it was a typical Futurist manifesto in terms of its layout and the strong tone Apollinaire adopts when saying 'shit' to the classical tradition of museums and academia, making reference to William Shakespeare, Dante Alighieri, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Aeschylus amongst others. This contrasts with the 'roses' dedicated to the exponents of Futurism (including Marinetti, Carlo Carrà, Boccioni) and the Avant-Gardes (Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, Kandinsky) (Apollinaire, 1913, *L'antitradizione*, pp. 1-3).<sup>31</sup>

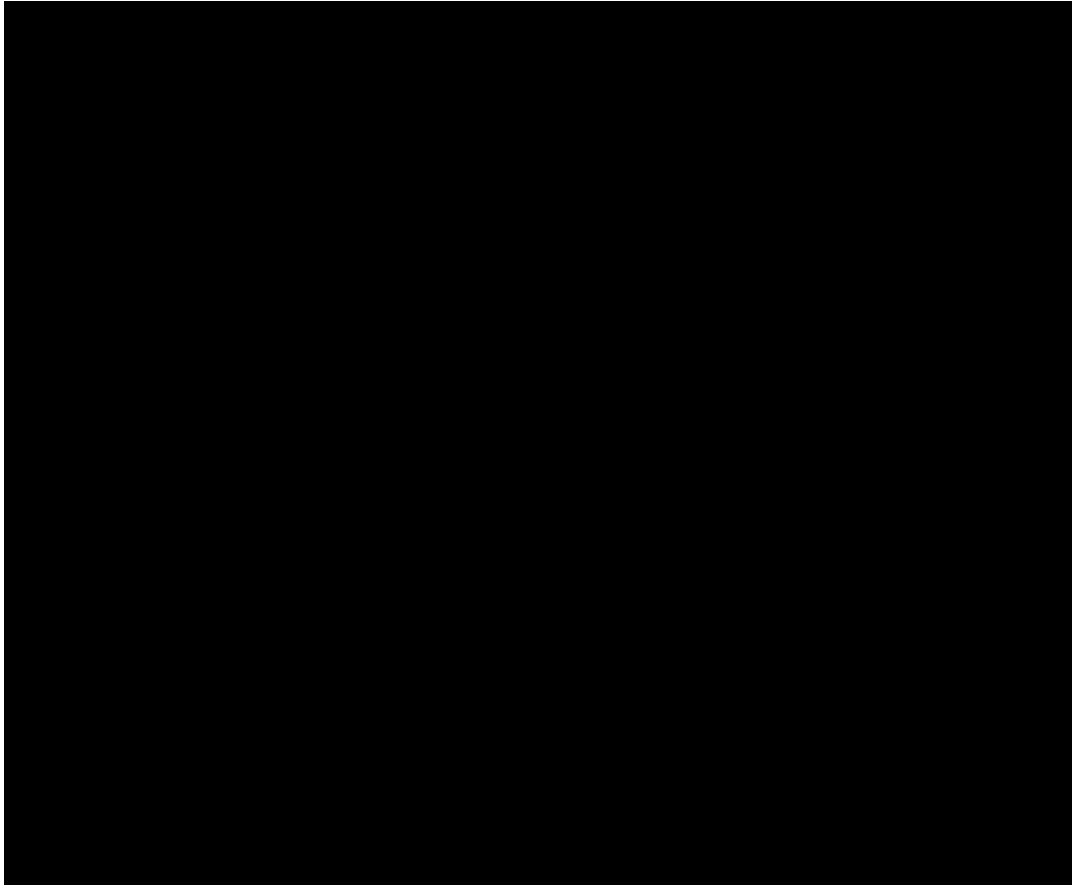
In 1918 Apollinaire published *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (Calligrammes. Poems of Peace and War 1913-1916 - figure 2.21), a collection of calligrams produced between 1913 and 1916, which included: 'Il pleut' (It's Raining), already published by *SIC (Sons, Idées, Couleurs - Sounds, Ideas, Colors magazine - no. 12, December 1916)*, a poem about rain composed of characters arranged vertically in a cascade effect from the top to the bottom of the page; 'La cravate et la montre' (The Tie and the Watch, *Les Soirées de Paris*, 1914 - figure 2.22) whose verses 'the painful tie that you wear and that adorns you, o civilised man—take it off if you really want to breathe' and 'the beauty of life exceeds the sadness of death' take the form of a tie and watch respectively (Apollinaire, 1918, *Calligrammes*, 50).<sup>32</sup> In contrast to these two examples, in 'Lettre-océan' (Ship-to-Ship Letter) Apollinaire dialogues with his brother Albert, who has set sail for Mexico, without giving a precise form to the verses but varying the characters and their size, arranging them in a fragmented way throughout the space. The poem is laid out on a double page<sup>33</sup>, at the centre of which is the acronym TSF (*transmission sans fil*, literally wireless transmission), another tribute to Futurism and Marinetti's

<sup>30</sup> See the controversy caused by Apollinaire's attribution of 'simultanéité' (simultaneity) to Cubism and French Orphism (Apollinaire, 1913, 'A travers le salon...', 1-4). Boccioni responded with the article 'I futuristi plagiati in Francia' (The Futurists Plagiarised in France) claiming that simultaneity was a Futurist concept: a condition that displays the various aspects of dynamism and which enables the Futurists to represent modern life and speed, communicating multiple sensations at the same time (Boccioni, 1913, 'I futuristi plagiati...', 66-68 and 1914, 175-176). For more on this concept see White, 1990, 364.

<sup>31</sup> First published in *Gil Blas* and then in *Lacerba*, in terms of innovation the content of the manifesto adds nothing to the previous ones, proving 'rather superficial' and best regarded as a 'a gesture of friendship towards Futurism' (Fauchereau, 1986, 415).

<sup>32</sup> 'La cravate douloureuse que tu portes et qui t'orne, o civilisé, Ote-la si tu veux respirer' and 'la beauté de la vie passe par la douleur de mourir'. For more on the interpretation of the poem see Heep, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> The poem occupies a double page in the first version published in *Les Soirées de Paris* (No. 25, 15 June 1914) and four pages in the *Calligrammes* collection (from pp. 38-41).



**Figure 2.21** Apollinaire, G. 1918. *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (Calligrammes. Poems of Peace and War 1913-1916). Paris: Mercvire de France. Courtesy of Perkins Library, Rare books - Duke University.

**Figure 2.22** Apollinaire, G. 1914. 'La cravate et la montre'. In *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (Calligrammes. Poems of Peace and War 1913-1916). Paris: Mercvire de France. Courtesy of Perkins Library, Rare books - Duke University.

*Distruzione della sintassi-immaginazione senza fili-parole in libertà* manifesto.<sup>34</sup>

With regard to his collection, Apollinaire said: ‘the Calligrammes are an idealisation of free verse poetry and typographical precision’ (Apollinaire cited by Butor, 1966, 7). And he added that ‘typographical artifices worked out with great audacity have the advantage of bringing to life visual lyricism which was almost unknown before our age. These artifices can still go much further and achieve a synthesis of the arts, of music, painting and literature’ (Apollinaire, 1918, ‘The New Spirit’, cited by Shattuck, 1971, 228).

According to Peter Dayan, Apollinaire planned to publish his collection of calligrams back in 1914 under the title *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* (And I, Too, Am a Painter - Dayan, 2011, 53). Although this was not possible due to the outbreak of the First World War, and considering that Apollinaire never actually painted pictures, the title tells us much about how the author regarded his calligrams: the verbal language (poetry) together with the visual form (typography) are able to transmit sensations in the same way as paintings; the poet Apollinaire is also a painter thanks to the expressiveness of the typographical composition and the text.

In Apollinaire’s work, the typography – always legible – is composed of forms that borrow from the vernacular culture and are immediately recognisable (as seen with the tie and watch, the rain, the heart in ‘Mon coeur and the Eiffel Tower in *2e canonier conducteur*’). This creates two forms of communication with the reader, the image/figurative aspect and the language aspect (Drucker, 1994, 159-168).

### 2.3.2 Russian Futurism

This short section provides an overview of Russian Futurism with the aim of analysing its experimentation with visual poetry, comparing it with that included in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, and examining the non-European context in which Depero’s book was published.<sup>35</sup>

There was lots of interest in Marinetti and Futurism in Russia right from the very start of the movement: on 18 January 1912, during an evening organised by the Komsomol<sup>36</sup>, Ilia Mikhailovich Zdanevich (1898-1971, also known as Iliadz)

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<sup>34</sup> The acronym TSF also appears on page 120 of *Zang tumb tumb* (Marinetti, 1914, *Zang*, 120).

<sup>35</sup> Russian Futurism was multifaceted and structured into numerous different groups which developed in different geographical areas, making it impossible to provide an exhaustive account of all its artists in this chapter, or even in this thesis. For example, as well as in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in 1918-1922 there was an explosion of Futurist book art in Georgia, where ‘the Russian Futurists worked together with their Georgian colleagues in Tbilisi in the pursuit of artistic research’ (Chikhradze, 2018). For more information on Georgian Modernism see also Chikhradze, 2009; for an excursus on Georgia’s prolific artistic and editorial output in the 1920s and 1930s, see Chepyzhov, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> The Communist Union of Youth in the Soviet Union, whose St. Petersburg magazine published the translation of the Futurist manifestos on 11 February 1912.

presented the manifestos of Italian Futurism at the Trotsky Theatre; in December 1912 David Burliuk together with Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Victor Khlebnikov, all members of Gileya (Hylaea), a group of Russian Futurist poets, published the manifesto *Poshchekhina obshchestvennomu vkusu* (A Slap in the Face of Public Taste), adopting Marinetti's principles of Futurism.

Of key importance for the spread of Futurism, typographical experimentation and *zaum* poetry<sup>37</sup> in Russia were the lectures that Marinetti gave in January-February 1914, even if they did not prove popular with Russian Futurists: Mayakovsky, Burliuk and Vasily Kamensky missed the meetings as they were busy on a poetry-reading tour in the south of the country while Benedikt Livshits and Khlebnikov were planning a well-publicised boycott of his lectures (something which did not actually happen in the end).<sup>38</sup> Kamensky, in particular, disliked Marinetti's poetic use of onomatopoeia, countering it with what he defined 'Zhelezobetonnye poemy' (Ferro-Concrete poetry)<sup>39</sup> as epitomised by his *Tango s korovami: Zhelezobetonnye poemy* (Tango With Cows: Ferro-Concrete Poems, 1914 - figures 2.23 and 2.24, see Markov, 1968, 51 and De Michelis, 2009).<sup>40</sup> Despite the aversion of Kamensky and the Russians to Marinetti, Ferro-Concrete poetry did not differ greatly from the Futurist style and historians agree that the work of Kamensky and the other Russian Futurists was significantly influenced by Marinetti's Futurism (Toschi, 2017, 'Lo spazio...', pp. 263-265 and Bury, 2018, 165-166).

Yet Russian Futurism was not simply shaped by the Italian school, they were two independent developments of the same avant-garde movement which produced similar results in completely different contexts. As regards formal similarities see, for example, Kamensky's use of typographic rules to separate the verses of his poem 'Konstantinopol' (Constantinople - figure 2.24). According to John White, it is 'Depero's "Tramvai"' that come closest to Kamensky's collage-like visual effect. Kamensky's "ferro-concrete" poems were, like so many Italian Futurist examples of the newly discovered *dipinto parolibero* [free-word painting], such a hybrid form that they were treated both as visual art and as poetry' (White, 1990, 139 - figure 4.33). Salaris agrees about the (physical) similarities between *Depero Futurista 1913-1927* and the *Transrational* book (1915) by Kruchenykh and Roman Aliagrov, drawing

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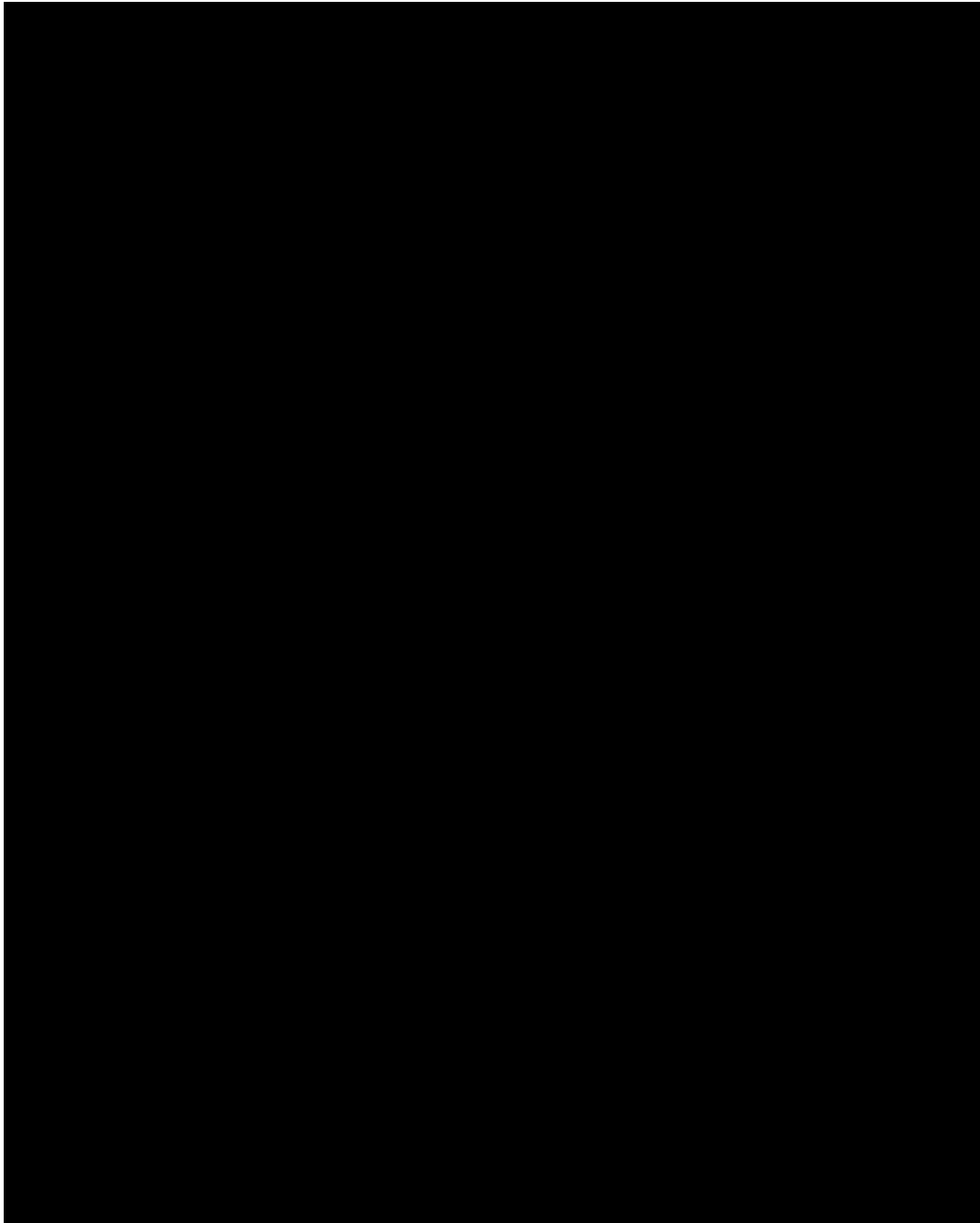
<sup>37</sup> *Zaum* are the linguistic experiments created by the Russian, pre-Soviet Futurist poets. According to Gerald Janecek, *zaum* can be defined as experimental poetic language characterized by indeterminacy in meaning (Janecek, 1996, 1-2).

<sup>38</sup> The diatribe between the Russian Futurists and Marinetti mainly stems from the fact that the latter regarded *zaum* as nothing more than a Russian variant of his words-in-freedom (Livshits, 2004, 147-155).

<sup>39</sup> Poetic style in which the reader can decide where on the page they wish to begin reading the poem. The words, mainly names and adjectives, permit free associations.

<sup>40</sup> For more on Marinetti's journey in Russia see also Lapsin, 2008. For a detailed reading of Kamensky's poem, see Janecek, 1984, 124-133.





**Figure 2.23** Kamensky, V. 1914. *Tango s korovami*:

*Zhelezobetonnye poemy* (Tango With Cows: Ferro-Concrete Poems). Moscow: Moskva : Izd. D.D. Burliuca, izdatelia 1-go zhurnala russkikh futuristov.

Letterpress printed on wallpaper in an edition of 300 copies. Poetry and cover by Vasily Kamensky, designed by David and Vladimir Burluk. Getty Research Library, special collection, GETTY, 2567-605.

**Figure 2.24** Kamensky, V. 1914. 'Konstantinopol' (Constantinople)

In *Tango s korovami: Zhelezobetonnye poemy* (Tango With Cows: Ferro-Concrete Poems). Moscow: Moskva : Izd. D.D. Burliuca, izdatelia 1-go zhurnala russkikh futuristov.

a parallel between the bolts of the former and the button applied to the cover of the latter (Salaris, 2003, 101-102).

The formal similarity and concurrence of the two works by Kamensky (of 1914) and Depero's 'Tramvai' (1916) suggests that the two Futurist schools of thought and their relative typographical experiments influenced each other in turn, almost imitating one another. A hypothesis borne out by the meetings between the Italians and the Russians: in 1916, Marinetti, Balla and Depero met Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov in Rome to discuss the theatrical projects commissioned to them by Sergei Diaghilev (on this topic, see MART, Dep.2.3.69; figures 4.29 and 4.30). After this meeting, Depero accused Larionov of plagiarism in his designs for the ballet *Histoires naturelles* (Natural Histories) – in particular the costumes for the characters of Turkey, Peacock, Lady with Fans, and Cricket – which, according to Llanos Gómez Menéndez, 'were remarkably similar to Depero's sketches for *Le Chant du rossignol*' (Menéndez, 2014, 284). On the other hand, a few years later, Depero visited the *XII esposizione internazionale d'arte in Venice* (1920), which featured works by Larionov, Goncharova and Archipenko; there, according to Giovanna Ginex, 'it is possible to see echoes of these artists' influence in Depero's subsequent work' (Ginex, 2014, 311).

In terms of content, on page 217, Depero states: 'with *onomalingua* it will be possible to talk and efficiently come to an agreement with the elements of the universe, with animals and with machines. *Onomalingua* is a poetic language of universal comprehension for which no translations will be required any more' (Depero, 1927, 217 - for more on Depero's *onomalingua* see figure 4.31 and section 4.3.2.9). This goal of universal communication seems to coincide with Kruchenykh's assertion in the conclusion of his 'Declaration of Transrational Language': 'Transrational works can provide a universal poetic language, born organically, and not artificially like Esperanto' (Kruchenykh, 1921, reprinted in Markov, 1968, 180). At the same time, while considering *zaum* and Depero's *onomalingua* to be 'analogous' both in terms of the common aspects mentioned in this section and their shared rejection of traditional syntax, White identifies a substantial difference in the intentions of the two forms of poetry: while Italian Futurism is confined, albeit with an experimental and onomatopoeic language, to the realm of reality (for example, Depero's poems feature imagery connected with machines or nature – see 4.3.2.12 – but nonetheless real), with its Russian counterpart, 'with writers like Kruchenykh and (sometimes) Zdanevich, the ultimate goal would appear to be total abstraction. [...] Radical *zaum*, in other words, pushes Futurism towards its frontier with Dada' (White, 1990, 262).

According to Bartram and Drucker, the most engaged with typography among the Russian avant-garde was Zdanevich: in 1916 he began work on his *aslaablIchia pitiOrka dEistf*, a series of five plays written in *zaum* (Bartram, 2006, 49-69 and Drucker, 1994, 169-192). Dating to 1923 is *lidantIU fAram* (Le-Dantyu as a Beacon, 1923 - figure 2.25), last and ‘perhaps the best known and most complex act of the series’, dedicated to Michail Le-Dantju, a friend who passed away in 1917 (Timonina, 2019, 75-89). Beginning with a study of the phonemic structure of the Russian language mixed with the transrational *zaum* language, Zdanevich characterises each person in the play phonetically: each play is introduced by a page that lists and explains the characters and their way of speaking. For example, in the first play entitled ‘Yanko’, The Holy Ghost speaks in a language composed entirely of consonants while the main character, Le-Dantyu, speaks with a particularly Russian sonority. Thereafter, each character is interpreted typographically through the use of bold type to emphasise some syllables/letters and indicate the intonational stress of the person. Zdanevich uses typography in an inventive way, each page numeral is different from the rest and the typographical compositions are made by mixing different typefaces, sometimes larger, or creating them using printers’ ornaments (borders and rules - see figure 2.26).

As early as 1921, Zdanevich was in Paris, where he spent the second half of his career, continuing his research into *zaum* and at the same time developing his interest in Dadaism; an example can be seen in the poster he created for Tristan Tzara’s *Soirée du coeur à barbe* (The Bearded Heart Evening - figure 2.27) event in 1923.<sup>41</sup> In this Zdanevich mixes typefaces of various sizes to create a composition in which the words seem to be formed of letters that have been isolated from each other, even if they remain completely legible.

For Drucker, this insistence on individualising the letters – ‘the smallest atomized units of the visual word’ – demonstrates ‘Zdanevich’s belief in the autonomy of written language and the value of its specificity’ (Drucker, 1994, 190-191).

### 2.3.3 Typographical Modernism and New Typography: from El Lissitzky to the Bauhaus and Jan Tschichold

In the same year as *lidantIU* was published, El Lissitzky, a Russian Constructivist

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<sup>41</sup> An event that brings to mind the magazine of the same name (*Le coeur à barbe*, 1922) published by Tzara in response to the criticisms raised by Surrealists Francis Picabia and André Breton about the future of the Dada movement. The programme for the evenings involved various types of performances, music by Erik Satie, projections by Man Ray and Hans Richter, and a reworking of the Tzara play *Le cœur à gaz* (The Gas Heart, 1921) with costumes by Sonia Delaunay (see Harding, 2013, 56-57).



**Figures 2.25 and 2.26** Zdanevich, I. (aka Iliazd). 1923. *Lidantiu faram* (Le-Dantyu as a Beacon). Paris: Éditions du 41°. Courtesy of University of Iowa - Special Collections Department (Dada Digital Collection).

**Figure 2.27** Zdanevich, I. 1923. *Soirée du Coeur à Barbe* (The Bearded Heart Evening).

with links to German Dada, published ‘Topographie der Typographie’ (Topography of Typography) in *Merz*<sup>42</sup> (no. 4, July 1923 - figure 2.28), an eight-point programme on typography according to which ‘the words on the printed surface are learned by sight, not by hearing’; concepts attain form through letters, with an ‘economy of expression’ approach, prioritising optics over phonetics. The designing of the book-space, through typography and photography, must correspond ‘to the strains and stresses of the content’ in order to graphically render a reality defined by Lissitzky as ‘supernatural’ (Lissitzky, 1923, 47 - Translation sourced from: Lissitzky-Küppers, 1968, 359).

Also in 1923, Lissitzky designed *Dlia golosa* (poems intended to be read out loud – literally, *For the Voice*, 1923 - figure 2.30), a collection of poems by Mayakovsky represented with typographical illustrations of both abstract and real subjects (see the hammer and sickle on page 26 - figure 2.31, or the ship on page 6) formed from letters and ornaments (mainly rules).

In 1927 Lissitzky would publish ‘Unser Buch’ in *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*, an essay in which he once again returns to the theme of typography, crediting Marinetti with beginning the modern typographical revolution and referring to passages taken from the ‘Typographical revolution’ paragraph of the *Distruzione della sintassi-immaginazione senza fili-parole in libertà* manifesto. For Lissitzky words are used to develop a kind of visual poetry in relation to the space of the page (Lissitzky, 1927, 172-178). Lissitzky’s typography and writings can be defined as typographical Modernism, and they laid the basis for the subsequent development of New Typography.<sup>43</sup>

A consideration of modern graphic design necessarily involves an examination of the texts of Jan Tschichold. He learnt about the theories of László Moholy-Nagy during the *Staatliches Bauhaus, Weimar, 1919-1923* exhibition (also in 1923), the catalogue of which includes a text by Moholy-Nagy entitled ‘Die neue Typographie’ (The New Typography, figure 2.32).<sup>44</sup> According to Christopher Burke, Tschichold

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<sup>42</sup> Dadaist magazine edited by Kurt Schwitters and published in Hanover in 21 issues between 1923-1932.

<sup>43</sup> The issue of Modernism in general and typography more specifically opens a broad discussion (on this topic see Harrison, 2003, 188-201). In *Modern Typography*, Kinross considers Futurism, Lissitzky and Tschichold himself as examples of modern typography but regards it as reductive to define this movement as ‘an incursion of artists blundering into the quiet preserves of book-printing and there violating the wisdom of tradition and convention’ or to ascribe it solely to the research of the Bauhaus, as there are traces of the modern in what is regarded as traditional typography and vice versa (Kinross, 1992, 18).

<sup>44</sup> This is a tool of communication and must be as clear and effective as possible; the print must correspond to the content following optical and psychic laws, and the print must use all reading directions (not just horizontal), characters, typefaces and colours. For Moholy-Nagy communication (‘the poster’) relies on two new possibilities: photography and its narrative potential, thanks to the technological innovations offered by printing (zincographic techniques and the mechanical production of photoprints), and the ‘contrasting-invasive’ use of typography (Moholy-Nagy, 1923, 141).

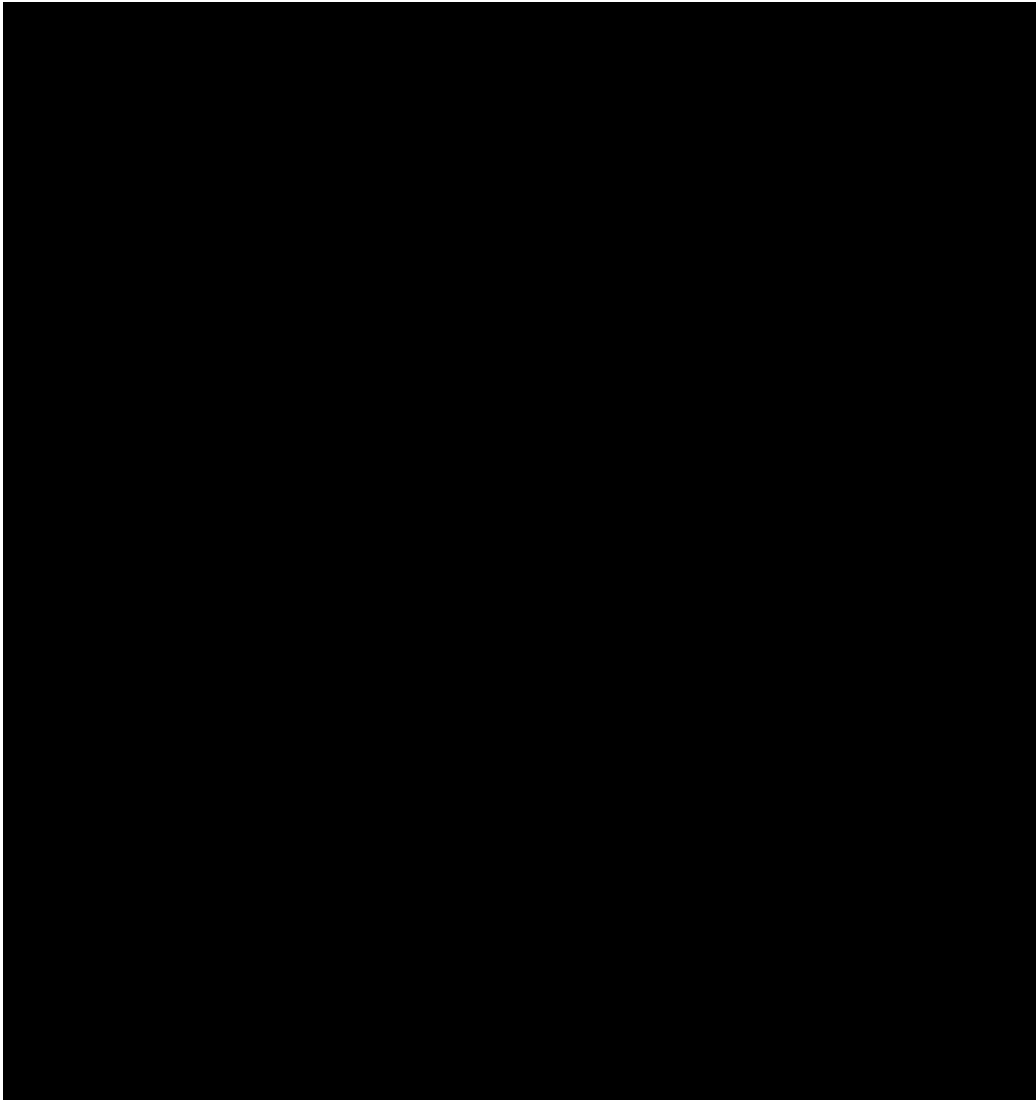


Figure 2.30

Figure 2.31

**Figure 2.28** Lissitzky, E. 1923. 'Topographie der Typographie' (Topography of Typography). In *Merz*. No. 4. July 1923. Hanover. Courtesy of University of Iowa - Special Collections Department (Dada Digital Collection).

**Figure 2.29** Lissitzky, E. 1928. *Chetyre (arifmeticheskikh) deystviya* - Four (arithmetic) actions. A typographical illustration by El Lissitzky. Here it is interesting to note the expressive use of typography with the letters animated and composed in such a way as to appear anthropomorphic – note how the same idea was developed in different periods (Constructivism as opposed to Futurism) and ways: composed on a printing machine with movable type in the case of Lissitzky, using the printing block of a hand-drawn illustration in the case of Depero (see figure 6.34), or with hand-written lettering in the case of Cangiullo (see figure 2.13 above).

**Figures 2.30 and 2.31** Mayakovsky, V. and Lissitzky, E. 1923. *Dlia golosa* (For the Voice). Moscow-Berlin: R.S.F.S.R. Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo (State Publishing House).



Figure 2.32

**Figure 2.32** Moholy-Nagy, L. 1923. 'Die neue Typographie'. In *Staatliches Bauhaus, Weimar, 1919-1923*. [exhibition catalogue] (15 August - 30 September 1923). Weimar-München: Bauhaus Verlag. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Kandinsky - Centre Georges Pompidou.

‘stated that he came back from the exhibition “in turmoil” (*aufgewühlt*) [...] It was most probably through László Moholy-Nagy that Tschichold began to learn about contemporary Russian art and design’ (Burke, 2007, 25). In particular, Tschichold was deeply influenced by Lissitzky and he contacted him in 1925, asking for key materials of avant-garde design in order to write a text about typography for a special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen* (Typographic News) journal.<sup>45</sup>

On the basis of Moholy-Nagy’s and Lissitzky’s work, Tschichold published ‘Elemental Typography’ (1925), a manifesto on the topic of typography with which he asserts that ‘the purpose of any piece of typography is communication. [This] must appear in the briefest, simplest, most urgent form’; that the page must assume a new and more effective optical value in terms of social communication where the negatives – the blank spaces, ‘*negativen (weissen) Formwerte*’ – are viewed as functional because they form a contrasting relationship with the ‘*positiven (farbigen) Formwerte*’, i.e. the printed parts. Tschichold excludes all types of decoration and supports the use of sanserif types, vertically and diagonally arranged texts, and DIN standard paper sizes (Tschichold, 1925, 198-200)<sup>46</sup>. In order to provide examples of the principles outlined in his list, Tschichold supplements the text with three images, *Dlia golosa* by Lissitzky and two adverts for fashion company Baruch designed by Max Burchartz.

In *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, page 231, Depero includes a table with names of European avant-garde periodicals and their editorial addresses. Perhaps this was a friendly gesture to like-minded colleagues, as well as an attempt to situate his book in this company. Notably, lacking from the list are *Merz* and *Typographische Mitteilungen*, and so it is not certain that Depero would have seen Lissitzky’s or Tschichold’s manifestos; but Central-European Constructivism is well represented by *Blok*, *Zenit*, *MA* and *Disk*, and it is likely that Depero was familiar with Czech and Polish avant-garde typography by figures such as Karel Teige and Henryk Berlewi.

A similar list of notable books and periodicals appears in Tschichold’s seminal book *Die neue Typographie. Ein Handbuch für zeitgemäss Schaffende*. (The New Typography. A Handbook for Modern Designers, 1928) but in this case lacking *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, which Tschichold was not aware of yet. In his book, Tschichold revisits and expands on the contents of ‘Elemental Typography’. At the

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<sup>45</sup> He got Lissitzky’s address from Moholy-Nagy and, while collecting material for his imminent publication ‘Elemental Typography’, Tschichold published another manifesto entitled ‘Die neue Typographie’ in a small cultural review called *Kulturschau*. For a more in-depth discussion about Tschichold’s work and on this topic, see Burke, 2007, in particular, pp. 29-41.

<sup>46</sup> See also Robin Kinross’ translation of Tschichold’s ‘Elemental typography’ (Kinross, 1992, 106-108).

beginning there is a historical-critical retrospective starting with what he describes as ‘*alte Typographie*’ (old typography), with references to Gutenberg, Manutius, Bodoni and Didot, and culminating with ‘the history of new typography’, which begins with the version of ‘Typographical revolution’ republished in *Les mots en liberté futuristes* by Marinetti, giving him the credit ‘for the change-over from ornamental to functional typography’ whose ‘types generate a hitherto unknown visual strength. For the first time typography here becomes a functional expression of its content. For the first time also an attempt was made in this book to create “visible-poetry,” instead of the old “audible-poetry”’ (Tschichold, 1995, 52-56).

Tschichold continues his historical analysis, mentioning what he regards as relevant texts and names, including Tristan Tzara (showing Zdanevich’s poster), the Dada publications of Kurt Schwitters (*Merz*), George Grosz and John Heartfield, ‘Die neue Typographie’ by Moholy-Nagy, and ‘Topographie der Typographie’ by Lissitzky (the latter reproduced in its entirety in the book). He then provides a description of New Typography, supplementing it with examples of the work of Piet Zwart and Max Burchartz, and lots of examples by El Lissitzky<sup>47</sup>.

Both Schwitters and Tschichold learned about the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: Schwitters, having seen it during a trip to Sicily, co-wrote a letter with Rudolf Dustmann to Depero in which he congratulated him and asked to meet him. It was Schwitters who showed the book to Tschichold, who in turn wrote a postcard to Depero in 1933 saying that he was aware of his work and asking for a copy of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* in exchange for one of his books. Treating him with reverence, as if he was a kind of pioneer of modern typography, Tschichold seems to ask Depero for study material just as he had done years before with Lissitzky in order to produce the special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen* on Constructivism. Here it is also interesting to note how Tschichold reiterates that the publications of Marinetti and of the Dadaists mark the beginning of modern typography (see figures 2.33, 2.34 and 2.35, MART, Dep.3.1.14.5 and MART, Dep.3.2.19.76).

According to Aldi, Futurism influenced the other European artistic avant-gardes and, reciprocally, Futurism of the 1920s (including Depero) was inspired by the work of Swiss and German graphic designers (Aldi, 2008, 41). Art historians concur that Depero was familiar with European graphic and artistic production; in fact, we know that Depero’s network extended well beyond the Italian border: in 1925 Depero met Theo van Doesburg, founder of De Stijl and avant-garde magazines like *Mécano*

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<sup>47</sup> On the relationship between Tschichold and Lissitzky see Toschi, 2017, *Dalla pagina...*, 140-148; on the discussion of modernist and New Typography see Kinross, 1992, in particular pp. 103-119).



(although we do not know what they said during their meeting; to this end see the chronology edited by Capa and Suárez-Infiesta, 2014, 440 and the network diagram of Ingram and Banerjee, 2012); according to p. 231 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, he was also aware of the avant-garde magazines and therefore their content – like the aforementioned *MA*, created by Lajos Kassak and published in Budapest from 1916, with which Moholy-Nagy became associated after returning from the First World War (see Burke, 2007, 33). Despite these connections between Depero and the exponents of typographical modernism, there is no proven link between Depero and Tschichold, nor with Lissitzky or Moholy-Nagy, pertaining to and concomitant with the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

For Carlo Vinti, the spread of New Typography and, at the same time, the birth of modern graphic design in Italy took place in the 1930s (Vinti, 2020, 54-55).<sup>48</sup> The typographical compositions of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* dating to 1927 and the advertisements that Depero would produce from the 1930s onwards seem to presage this event as they are characterised (exclusively) by functional typography with a clear and, at the same time, dynamic sense of order thanks to the diagonal layout of the texts and the full use of the page and its compositional potential (positive/negative spaces – for more on this see p. 132, all of chapter 6, in particular 6.1, and figures 6.69-6.70 in this thesis). On the basis of the analysis carried out in this part of the chapter and the fact that after almost 100 years, with no original documents, it is difficult to prove the existence of a relationship, I am quite confident about claiming that Depero contributed to the development of modernist graphic design and typography in the 1920s with his artwork and that this, in turn, was influenced by these same trends.

Although Futurism had ceased to be the avant-garde of reference some time previously, in 1939 *Campo Grafico* dedicated a triple and final issue of the

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<sup>48</sup> More specifically in 1933, following a series of concomitant events that were decisive for the development of Italian and international communications: the opening of Studio Boggeri, founded in Milan by Antonio Boggeri who, having worked at Alfieri & Lacroix (at the time the biggest printing works in Italy), took Bauhaus graphic design as the model for planning advertising campaigns for leading Italian companies (see Origoni, 1980, 54); the founding of *Campo grafico*, leading graphic design magazine in Italy and also inspired by Bauhaus, which published texts and artefacts of international resonance on the discipline; the Deutscher Werkbund pavilion curated by Paul Renner at the *V Triennale* which, despite Fascism and its policy of autarky, made it possible to showcase and see the work of many of the exponents of New Typography in the flesh; also dating to 1933 was the first translation of a text by Tschichold in Italy, when *Graphicus* magazine (another influential Italian graphic design publication) opened its February issue with an editorial entitled 'Della nuova tipografia' (On the New Typography) edited and signed by Giovanni T., Italianisation of Jan Tschichold (see Giovanni, T. 1933, 7-9). In reality it was an incomplete translation of the text that appeared in the periodicals *Arts et métiers graphiques* and *Commercial Art* and was conceived as the introduction to Tschichold's book *Eine Stunde Druckgestaltung*. The translation of the author's name was a consequence of the Fascist policy of Italianising names and the desire to conceal the author's origins from the magazine's readers (for more on this topic see Vinti, 2020, 53).

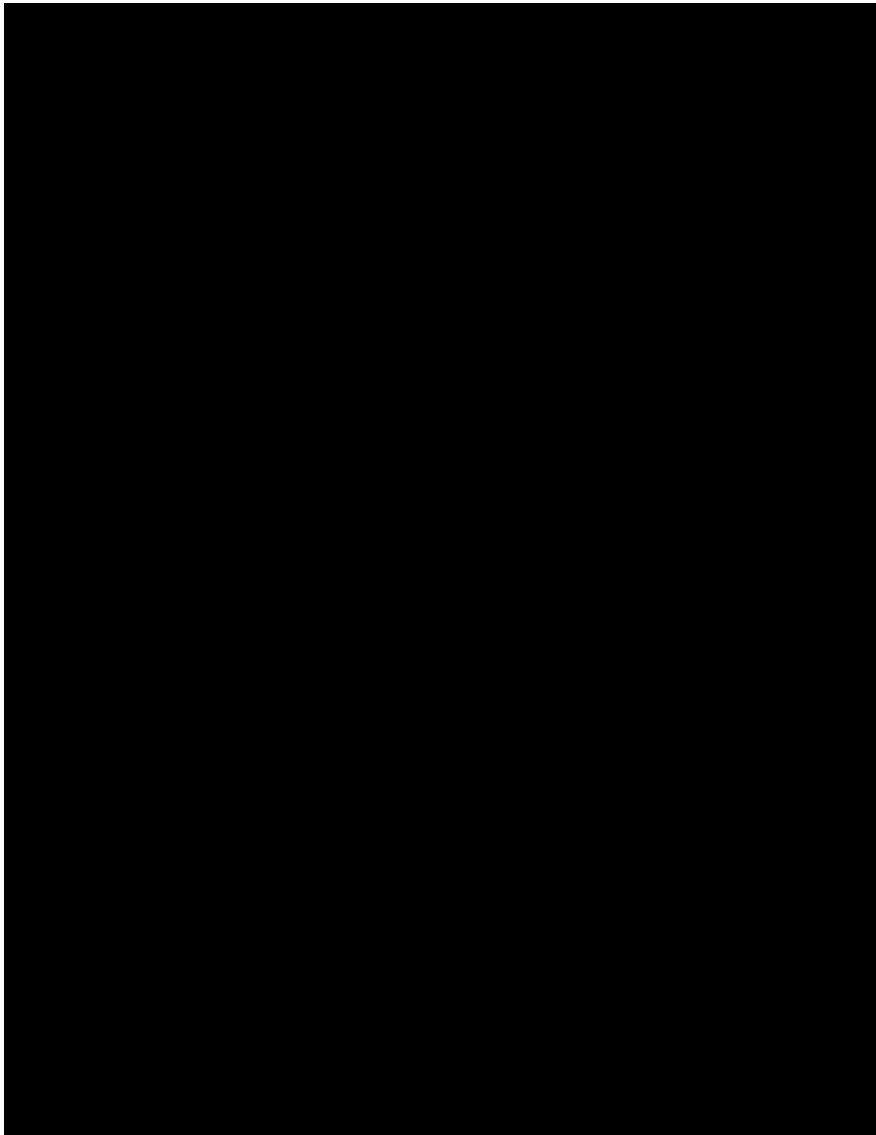


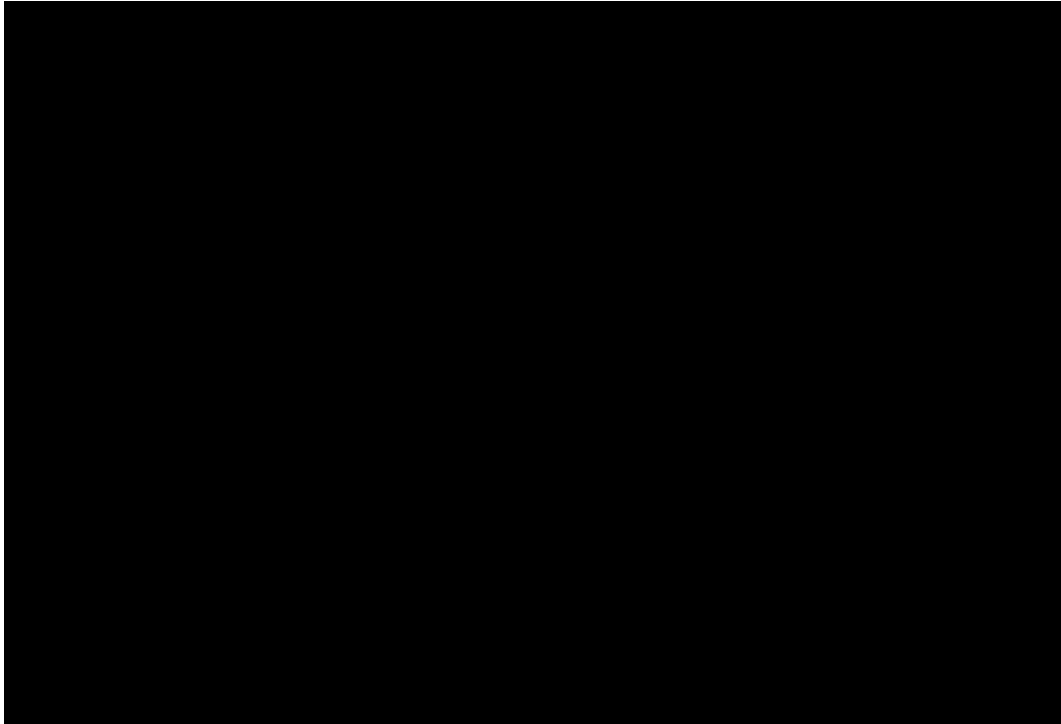
Figure 2.33

**Figure 2.33** Kurt Schwitters' and Rudolf Dustmann's letter to Depero. Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. MART, Dep.3.1.14.5.

Dear Mr. Depero  
Porto Empedocle 6.4.28

We have seen Your extraordinary book and we would be honoured to make your acquaintance. For this reason we ask if you will be in Rovereto on the 20th, 21-22th of April. Please reply to: Bari, Hotel Cavour, before 23.4. I would be delighted to meet you.

Kind regards  
Rudolf Dustmann and Kurt Schwitters



**Figures 2.34 and 2.35** Tschichold's postcard to Depero.  
10 October 1933. Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto.  
MART, Dep.3.2.19.76. In this we read:

to mr depero futurist rovereto  
trentino italia  
dear mr depero,

it has been a long while since my friend schwitters showed me your big typographic album. i have wanted to write to you for a long time. in the meantime, i've moved from munich, where I lost my teaching position, to switzerland. schwitters told me that maybe you would allow me to have this typographic work of yours (a thick book in landscape format). i would be very delighted about it. i have a big, if not the biggest collection in the field of modern typography, which begins with marinetti and the dadaists. i would agree to give you one of my books in exchange: 1) foto-auge (foto-eye), 2) eine stunde druckgestaltung (an hour of printing design), 3) typografische entwurfstechnik (typographical design technique). i work in the field of the new typography and i had a big influence on its development in germany and switzerland in the last 5 years i know many different works of yours from futurist magazines. soon, i will publish a small modern magazine and i will send this to you also. please write me soon again, with greetings (yours sincerely).

Jan Tschichold  
Riehen bei Basel, Switzerland  
9 Im Baumgarten  
10.11.33

magazine to Marinetti. In the introduction, editor Enrico Bona explained how he chose to produce this issue 'to justify, from a moral perspective, the enormous delay in the appearance in the graphic design world of this documentation on the absolute precedence that should be recognised and attributed to Italian Futurism and its leader, until now ignored, or almost, with regard to the revolutionary reinvention of graphical expression' (Bona, 1933, 59). Bona adds that 'by the admission of the leaders of these movements themselves' Futurism spawned various international avant-gardes, like Constructivism, Suprematism and De Stijl, mentioning Lajos Kassák, Van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian among others (Bona, 1933, 80). The texts on the pages develop independently of the supporting images, which present the works of Futurists like Marinetti, d'Albisola, Buzzi, Pino Masnata, Cangiullo and above all Depero. The work of the latter is the most widely illustrated and exemplified by many images from *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (pp. 78, 79, 98, 99 and 100), the caption reporting: 'Depero has shared [in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*] his ingenious Futurist creativity, translating into exciting typographical forms the lyrical polemic celebratory content of the texts, in some ways anticipating rationalism and abstract art' (Bona, 1939, 78 - see figures 2.36, 2.37 and 2.38).

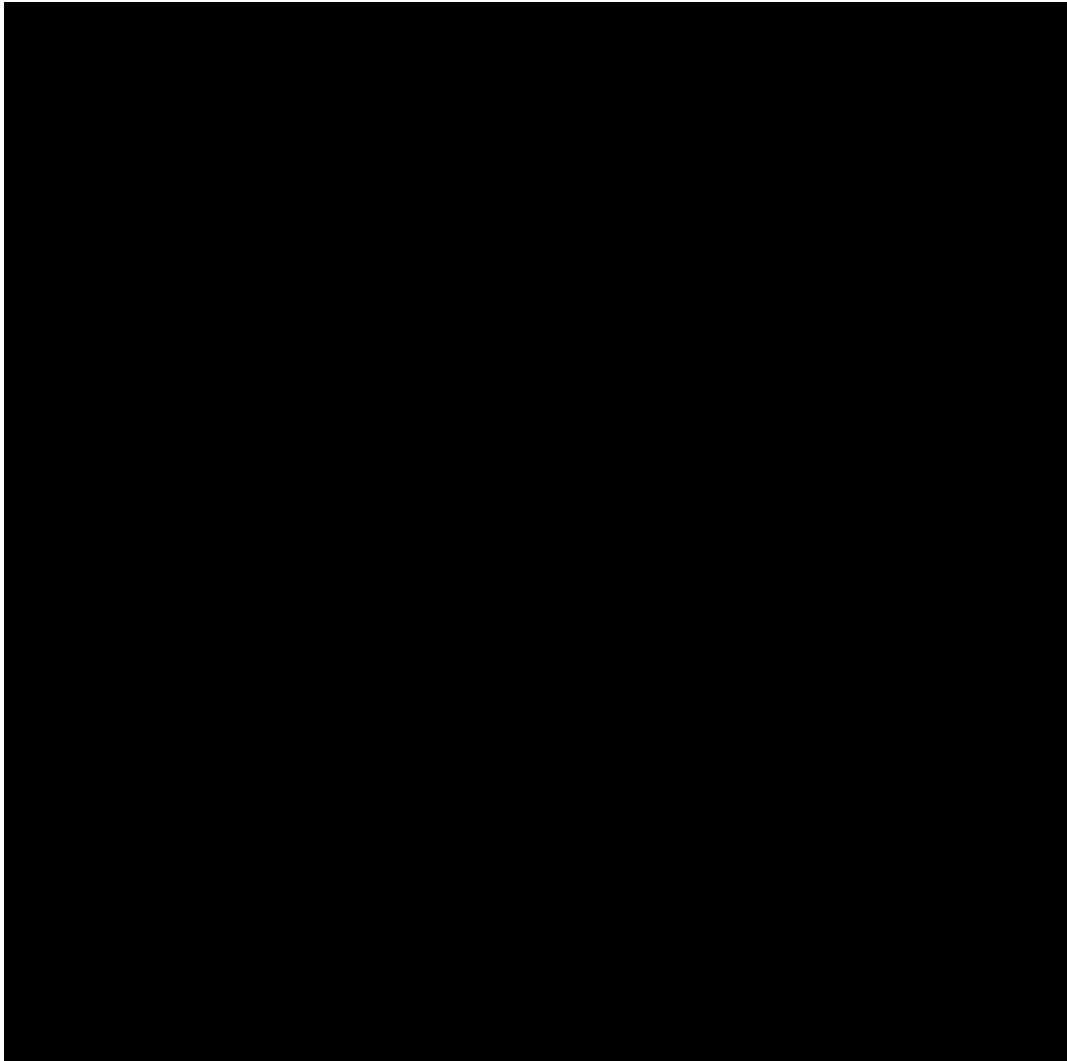


Figure 2.38

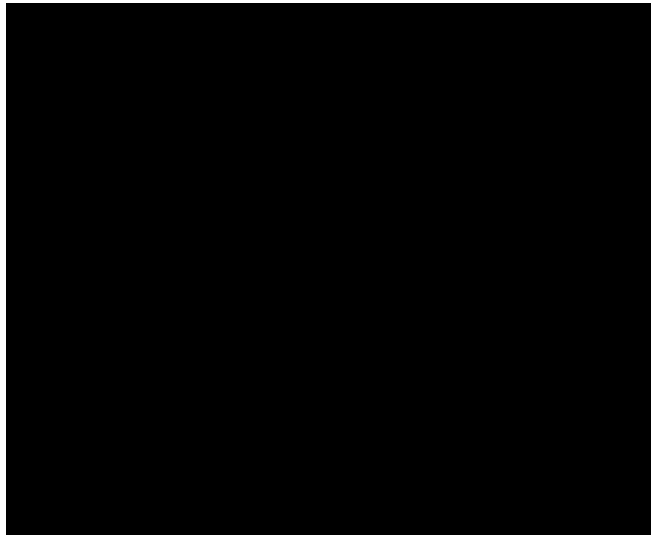
**Figures 2.36, 2.37 and 2.38** Bona, E. (ed.) 1939. *Campo Grafico. Aereoporto della rivoluzione futurista delle parole in libertà poesia pubblicitaria*. Year VII. Nos. 3-5. March-May 1939. Milan. Photo by Sandro Berra. Courtesy of Tipoteca Italiana, Cornuda.

The triple issue published as a tribute to Futurism, 30 years after the publication of its first manifesto, is regarded as less experimental, more politicised in terms of its content, and more costly than the previous issues. It includes contributions from Marinetti, Luigi Russolo, Cesare Andreoni, Guido Modiano and Bona himself, uses different types of paper, and contains Futurist-style advertisements specially designed for the issue. Sales of the magazine were not enough to compensate for the great expense that had gone into its production and with the outbreak of war also on the horizon the magazine ceased publication for good (Picasso, 2009, n.p.).

Enrico Bona was appointed editor and designer solely for this final issue; in the meantime, with the general climate worsening, many other contributors left Italy: Attilio Rossi (co-founder of the magazine with Carlo Dradi) in 1935, Alexander (known as 'Xanti') Schawinski in 1936, and Leo Lionni in 1939.

Figure 2.38 includes the following works by Depero: the cover of the final issue of *Dinamo*; page 61 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*; two advertisements from *Dinamo* magazine (for Cavazzani wines and the Mercurio print works) produced entirely from characters and typographic rules (see figures 6.69 and 6.70); page 89 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, the caption for which states: '1927, pay attention to the date to understand the aesthetic value of this page from "*Depero futurista*".

**Figure 3.1** This page features two photographs: the first one depicts Fedele Azari, 'the publisher of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*'. At the bottom, Depero and Azari, sitting in the cockpit of a biplane. The text reads: 'Azari and Depero leave for an artistic discussion at an altitude of 5000 metres'. The photographs reproduced in this page were taken on March 1922. For more pictures of Azari and Depero taken during this occasion, see Azari collection kept at the Getty Research Institute; for more on this page, see section 4.3.1.5.



Despite a (short) life notable for its intense and multifaceted artistic activities, little has been written about Fedele Azari: he was born on 8 February 1895 in Pallanza

(now Verbania), in Piedmont. In 1912 he moved to Turin to study law, meeting Marinetti here and joining the Futurist movement. Following the outbreak of war, in 1915 Azari signed up as a volunteer and in 1916 he became a pilot at the Busto Arsizio camp where he learned and honed aerial photography and patriotic propaganda techniques, dropping fliers while in flight. While flying over Milan in the spring of 1919 Azari launched his first manifesto (*Il Teatro aereo futurista*) in the form of fliers: an activity that saw Azari become a trailblazer for aeropainting, an artistic movement that promoted the plane and flight as a new form of aesthetic expression. In April 1921, together with Mario Gastaldi he founded the S.I.A.C. (Società Italiana di Aviazione Civile - Italian Society of Civil aviation), a company licensed to transport civilians for tourism purposes and to carry out propaganda and aerial photography flights.

In March 1922 Futurist Franco Rampa Rossi organised the *Esposizione Futurista Internazionale* in the halls of the Winter Club in Turin; here Azari met and became friends with Fortunato Depero, who would return to exhibit at the Winter Club a few months later. On this occasion, Azari would organise the launch of fliers publicising the exhibition, flying with Depero and Rampa Rossi. A grateful Depero created and presented Azari with the *Psychological portrait of the pilot Azari* (figures 5.30-5.31). The regular correspondence that ensued between the two men documents their personal and professional relationship, the latter of which became increasingly close to the point that Azari became Depero's exclusive agent through until 1930, managing important clients like Ginori, S. Pellegrino, Pirelli, etc. (see chapter 6 of the thesis).

In this period Azari abandoned the S.I.A.C. to dedicate himself increasingly actively to Futurism. Between late 1922 and early 1923 he founded Dinamo-Azari in Sant'Orsola street in Milan: art house and gallery, Futurist publishing house. In addition to Depero, Azari bought, sold and promoted the work of Bot (pseudonym of Osvaldo Barbieri), Farfa (Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini), d'Albisola and Prampolini. He organised exhibitions and, commissioned by Marinetti, curated the Futurist sections of important art shows (the *First Monza Biennial* in 1923 and the *International Exhibition* in Paris in 1925). He was appointed First Secretary General of the Movement and organiser in 1924 of the *First National Congress*. On this occasion Depero created the painting *Marinetti. Temporale Patriottico* which was given to Marinetti at the behest of Azari (who saw to the design of the frame in fig. 5.4).

1927 was perhaps the busiest year of Azari's life: beside *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (the only book actually published by the Dinamo-Azari publishing house), he curated the Futurist room at the *Third Monza Biennial*, again together with Depero, and he also published two manifestos (*Per una società di protezione delle macchine* - Towards a Society for the Protection of Machines and *Vita simultanea futurista* - Simultaneous Futurist Life), in addition to his aforementioned work as gallerist and agent. At the end of the year Azari was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Azari was one of the most avid collectors of the work of Boccioni. After Boccioni's death Azari got in contact with the artist's sister and came into possession of many of his works, also producing bronze casts of the plasterworks sculpted by Boccioni. Together with Marinetti, Azari began writing a monograph of Boccioni, *Umberto Boccioni opera completa*, which was completed in 1928, but never published. In 1929 he published, again with Marinetti, the *Primo dizionario Aereo Italiano* - the First Italian Aviation Dictionary - which aimed to Italianise technical aviation jargon, combating its abuse of foreign terminology. Between 1928 and 1929 he struggled desperately following a nervous breakdown. According to Collarile, in this final period of his life Azari was taking drugs (probably cocaine, Collarile, 2016, 26). Having planned to travel and move to New York with Depero, he spent the last days of his life to trying to join the artist there. Following a nervous breakdown, he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital on 16 January 1930 where, according to medical records, he died on 25 January from a heart attack. Collarile adds that the real cause of Azari's death may well have been concealed at the time, hypothesising the possibility of suicide or death by electroshock (see the recent conference held by Collarile on 28 September 2019 in Verbania during *LetterAltura*; in addition, Depero also dedicated a free-words sketch to Azari which includes the wording 'Azari = 1930 Bang!', which may allude to this sense of mystery surrounding his death, see Collarile, 2019, slide 37). I would like to thank Lucia Collarile for sharing her research with me, the only information published on Azari and the basis for this biographical profile of the publisher of *Depero Futurista 1913–1927*. For more on Azari's life: Collarile, 1992; 2016 and 2019.

### 3 Design and production, as deduced from Depero's correspondence in the Archivio del '900

This chapter examines the creation of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* by looking at the three main figures involved in the development process: the Mercurio printing works, publisher Fedele Azari and author Fortunato Depero. To do this I have analysed the correspondence between Fedele Azari and Depero and subsequently the relationship between Depero and Ferruccio Zamboni's Mercurio print works.

#### 3.1 Analysis of Azari and Depero's correspondence about *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

##### 3.1.1 Technical aspects of the book's production process

The correspondence between Azari and Depero is conserved at the Archivio del '900 and consists of 121 letters dating to between 1922 and 1929. According to Antonella D'Alessandri, this corpus can be divided into three sections: advertising commission letters with Azari as intermediary (considered in chapter 6), letters on the preparation of exhibitions, and finally 30 letters on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (D'Alessandri, 2005, 117).<sup>1</sup> The latter, analysed in this chapter, date from between February 1927 and July 1928 and suggest that Depero shared every aspect of the book with Azari.

From the first letter in chronological order we can deduce the size of the print run. Azari argues that a print run of 1000 is more than sufficient compared with the 2000 suggested by Depero:

If you think about it, 1000 copies is enough. Let's imagine we set aside 100 for reservations (there are currently 3), 100 for your current clients and friends, 50 for the newspapers and propaganda and 100 for sales to bookshops. That leaves 650 copies and believe me that is more than enough. It's pointless you writing

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1 The Archivio del '900 conserves only the letters received by Depero, meaning that all of the letters written by him are unavailable or lost. This is not a major issue as, by reading Azari's answers, it is possible to speculate as to what Depero had written to him. However, it is certainly a pity that we cannot perhaps see the design sketches that Depero may have enclosed in his letters addressed to Fedele Azari (this is deducible from several comments made by the latter on Depero's hypothetical draft). The correspondence on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was partially reproduced in Caruso, 1987, 7-34, and in Collarile, 1992, 121-144, while re-transcribed and gathered together in full by D'Alessandri in Antolini, R., D'Alessandri A. and M. Gazzotti, 2005, 131-155. To see the letters visit the homepage of the archive using the archive shelf mark in the 'segnatura' field ('reference code' in english): <http://cim.mart.tn.it/cim/pages/cim.jsp>. This study also analyses the letters conserved at the Research Library of the Getty Research Institute. The documents of the Archivio del '900 can only be consulted on-site while the Getty permits online consultation by researchers following requests relating to a specific shelf mark (I am grateful to Lois White, head of research services). It is important to underline that the letters sent by Azari to Depero were often inspired by the semantic-syntactic standards established by the various Futurist manifestos: from the elimination of punctuation (Azari uses a long hyphen as a full stop) and capitalised first letters to a predilection for the noun and the infinitive form of verbs. Mathematical symbols, such as the plus, minus, equals and parenthesis signs, are frequently used; in addition, the letters also repeatedly use the superlative, often in invented Italian. All of these written-visual expedients contributed to synaesthetically strengthening the language in typical words-in-freedom style. Literally translating and fully understanding these letters without highly advanced knowledge of the Italian language is therefore difficult.

to me saying that 1000 copies is too few if you can't provide reasonable figures on potential recipients of the book. We can do a reprint if we need more copies in the future.

16 February 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.6

In the same letter Azari complains about Depero's estimated cost per copy of 3,71 Lire, urging him to convince the printer not to go beyond 1,5 Lire, and anticipates the imminent arrival of a financial plan according to which the expenses will be equally divided between the two.<sup>2</sup> The plan in question is attached to a letter dated the following day that begins with Azari expressing relief over Depero's decision to back down over the print run: 'I received your letter – I am glad you agree on 1000 copies [...] Out of a total of 8000 Lire, 3000 will be paid on making the order (2000 Lire Azari 1000 Depero), 3000 Lire on delivery (2000 Lire Azari 1000 Depero) and 3-4 months later 2000 Depero', equally dividing the print run in 500 copies each (17 February 1927, GETTY, 860189).<sup>3</sup>

With the print run agreed on, Azari now concentrates on the format, suggesting to opt for a 28 × 24 cm size which, allowing for a four cm crease margin, would have produced a square format (24 × 24) for the page. Azari's letter is embellished with sketches of the book and indications about the margins to ensure that the text is not hidden by the bolt binding (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). His comments imply that Depero had suggested alternative formats: '4 centimetres if you choose your format' and 'anyway it is up to you, decide what you think is best' (24 February 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.7). Page format is not discussed in further letters, so, given that the final format of the book was different from that suggested by Azari (24 × 32 cm with the cover crease 4.5 cm from the spine), we can assume that the format was chosen by Depero.

Azari also makes suggestions for different types of paper to alternate in the book: his aversion to yellow paper is reiterated in several missives ('No yellowish paper. It is outdated' - 16 February 1927; and 'no yellow anywhere' - 24 February 1927).<sup>4</sup> From his comments we can deduce that Depero had attached various paper samples for Azari to view: 'the types of coloured paper are quite good with the exception of the green sample you sent me – if you are still in time get rid of it together with the

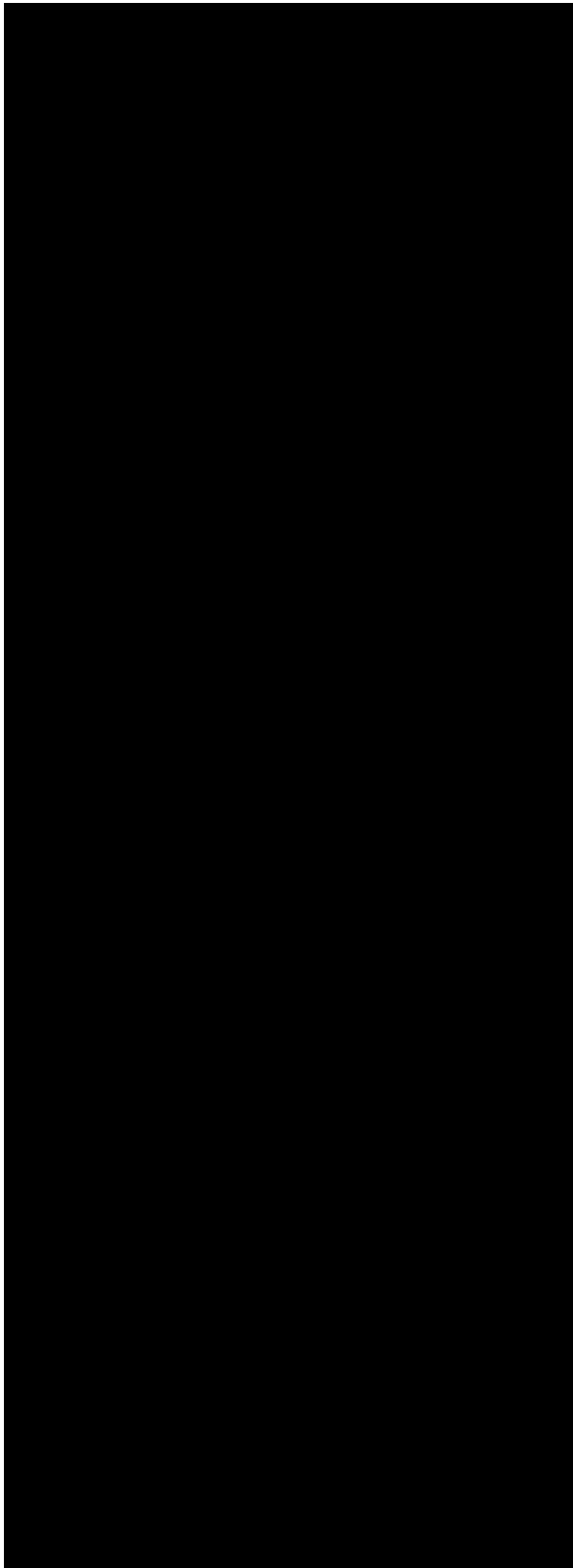
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<sup>2</sup> The copy price here probably refers to the cost of the work carried out by the printer, i.e. without considering the bolting, paper, folding and binding processes. The book would later be sold for 85 Lire (today 70€ circa) for a simple copy and 200 Lire (170€ circa) for the special metal copy mentioned below.

<sup>3</sup> The underlinings in the text are faithful to the original ones made by Azari. I tried to keep and reproduce them wherever possible. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Italy (ISTAT), the total of 8000 Lire would correspond today to around 6700 €, see: <https://www.infodata.ilssole24ore.com/2015/04/14/se-potessi-avere-calcola-il-potere-dacquistoin-lire-ed-euro-con-la-macchinadel-tempo/>.

<sup>4</sup> See MART, Dep.3.1.8.6 and Dep.3.1.8.7 By 'yellowish' Azari probably meant ivory or light yellow pulp-coloured paper. All of the copies of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* I have consulted have pages yellowed by the passing of time which were (presumably) white, of various types and warm and cold tones, at the time of publishing.





**Figures 3.2 and 3.3** Azari's letter to Depero. Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. 24 February 1927. Two pages. MART, Dep.3.1.8.7.

At the bottom of the letter we read an underlined sentence: '*decidi tu stesso come ti pare venga meglio*' ('decide what you think is best'). I kept intact the original underlinings made by Azari. This has been applied to all letters taken into consideration.

On the second page, right side of the letter, it is interesting to note Azari's suggestion on typography and layout of the book: 'In general I recommend using very large types for the text [...]alternating them so that the most dissimilar are close to each other

for instance:

one chapter	italic	big size
"	"	medium size
"	capital letters	big size
"	"	medium size
"	bold	big size
"	"	medium size
"	sans-serif	big size
"	"	medium size

and if there is a text short and concise text, print it in block letters or big sans serif (50 words for each page)'

On the right side of the second page, note Azari's indication to avoid text hidden by the bolt binding.

orange, they are banal and common shades – the others (4 in addition to white) are enough on their own, in fact perhaps it is better to avoid too much colour – what do you think?’ (13 March 1927 - MART, Dep.3.1.8.8). It appears that Depero did not listen to this suggestion as the two original copies kept at the Archivio del '900 have eight different types of pulp-coloured paper, including yellow, green and orange pages.<sup>5</sup>

For the nuts and bolts of the '*rilegatura Dinamo creazione Azari*' ('Dinamo binding Azari's creation' - this is what we read on the final cover between the two bolts; figure 1.1), Azari tried different types in terms of both material and cost: 'I have had sample bolts made [in] wood but I think I will end up using aluminium for the regular [copies] and steel for the luxury ones' (13 March 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.8). Azari asked Depero to provide '2 complete volumes extremely urgently with the same paper the book will have – and the exact measure [for] ordering' in order to test the bolt binding, and the choice of paper would subsequently depend on the trial result, considering its price in relation to its resistance to tearing (undated, 1927 - MART, Dep.3.1.8.21). In July Azari communicated to Depero that he had 'decided on construction at the "Bulloneria Bologna" company' (1 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.12). In another letter Azari enthusiastically reveals he has ordered 1800 bolts at 1,5 Lire each, a sufficient quantity to bind 900 copies: 'we will make the special steel copies afterwards = they are very expensive but there is no other option now – and they are very beautiful large very decorative'. The businessman is described as a 'friend' as Azari had managed to get the hardware manufacturers to sponsor the book, paying only for the material and not its processing in return for an advert on page 229 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (11 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.14).<sup>6</sup>

Looking at page 229 (figure 3.4) it would seem that a similar sponsorship deal involving materials and processing/manufacturing in exchange for advertising was made with three other businesses advertised here: Tensi, G. Monzani and Campari<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the white paper, glossy for the photo graphic plates (of which there is just one type) and uncoated for the texts (different types and grades of paper), there is also brown paper for the endpapers between the front and the back covers, which is also unprinted on pages 157 and 191 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*; orange paper (see pp. 5, 10 and 11); green (pp. 29 and 47), violet (pp. 49, 111 and 215), yellow (pp. 107, 183 and 47), blue (pp. 109, 153, 187 and 213), reddish-pink (p. 143) and tissue paper.

<sup>6</sup> We can infer from the letters that Depero also helped to source the bolts, seeking to make savings on the price: 'your bolt price is not dear – they are a bit small' (July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.17). In September Azari sent the text for the Bologna advert to Depero, recommending they embellish it with 'a drawing of a bolt or even better a sketch of a man like you do with chest made of a large sheet of metal with legs and arms bolted on – otherwise a bolted eye = decide what you think is best but this is the right thing to do [...] Bologna is very rich, a likely tapestry customer, we will go and see him together when the book is done', sensing the possibility of a future commission for the two partners (5 September 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.19).

<sup>7</sup> For the hypothetical agreements between Campari and Azari-Depero see chapter 6 of this thesis, in particular section 6.3.3.1 and note 21 on p. 210.



**Figure 3.4** This page features advertisements for four companies that contributed to the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: G. Bologna & C. (bolts factory), Tensi (paper factory), G. Monzani & C. (photo-mechanical workshop) and Davide Campari & C. (or simply Campari), drinks company, probably the most important of Depero's industrial-patrons, and a customer for whom he produced posters and advertisements in the 1920s (see chapter 6 of this thesis). Although Azari suggested inserting a Depero drawing for the Bologna bolt company, in the end the sponsors were acknowledged with typographical adverts.

As only one type of glossy paper is used in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, we can surmise that this (and in all likelihood also the other paper) was supplied by Tensi, a Milanese paper mill specialising in glossy photographic paper. Although there is no explicit reference to the agreement, the company is mentioned several times in the letters and Azari states that he could have made an agreement via Luigi Poli as the paper mill supplied paper to *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People) in return for advertising in the magazine (see MART, Dep.3.1.8.26 and Dep.3.1.8.14).<sup>8</sup> We can imagine that similar terms were also agreed with Monzani, about which Azari writes: 'pay the zincography account – we will sort it out whatever happens' (27 March 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.9).

In addition to the binding tests, it seems as if Azari also spent a lot of time identifying the most suitable cardboard for the cover: 'I continue to look for the right cardboard [...] super dense', one that would not break under the pressure of the nuts and bolts (19 March 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.21). Various tests with different types of cardboard (a violet-light-grey cardboard at 150 Lire per 100 kg and another very light grey for colour printing) were carried out between the end of March and late June when Azari informed Depero that he had ordered the 'chosen blue' at 421 Lire per 100 kg, to which a further 900 Lire for the die-cutting the holes for the bolts, and 1000 Lire for the trimming would be added (Azari, 1 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.12). These operations lasted until the second half of July with Azari writing on the 20th that he had die-cut 2000 covers so the cardboard would be ready for a possible reprint, and asking Depero to have the cover printed in different colours both inside the book and on loose light paper so it could be used as a promotional leaflet (20 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.15). On 26 July the pre-cut cardboard was sent to the Mercurio print works in Rovereto, and Azari states that it was in two different thicknesses, asking Depero to count how many copies of each type are bound. This was done to save on the cover price and because there was not enough cardboard of the same type for 2000 covers (26 July 1927, Dep.3.1.8.16).<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the financial aspect of the book, Azari always attaches tallies of the total cost and receipts for his payments and from his answers it seems that both

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Luigi Poli and *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*, see section 5.2.5 of this thesis. In another letter Azari writes succinctly: 'Tensi will accept at done deal/with the *fait accompli* we'll see' not specifying what he was supposed to be accepting but probably referring to an exchange of advertising for paper (July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.26).

<sup>9</sup> Although most copies of *Depero futurista* are numbered, some have additional numbers alongside the first sequence. Although we can not be sure, this distinction may have been made to indicate a print run with a different type of paper or reserved for a specific target or customer. For example, on this topic Azari writes to Depero: 'I have found four volumes numbered 634-6-8-0 among those collected [copies of *Depero futurista*] even though I was supposed to have the odd numbers – is this a mistake? The numbering is such a delicate issue and I would not want there to be any duplicates around – which numbers did Ginori's 120 have?' (1928, MART, Dep.3.1.8.5). Referring to 120 copies sold to Richard Ginori.

he and Depero complain about having insufficient funds to cover their expenses:

‘always a lack of dollars’ (11 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.14).<sup>10</sup>

As the publisher, Azari does not limit himself to monitoring the finances but also deems it necessary to reject some of the content proposed and inserted by Depero: ‘I am returning the Boccioni quotes – I have deleted a few expressions I believe could be misinterpreted – it is better to avoid complications – let’s try and simplify so we can hit the road’<sup>11</sup> (1 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.12) – and pressing him once more:

Please remove the phrase “it’s necessary etc... of a grand Futurist Italy” from the book, you know that if possible I am even more in agreement than you are – but I absolutely want to avoid any hassle or hitches even if these hypothetical hitches are unlikely to happen (I don’t believe so) therefore remove it if it is already printed, redo it or decorate it with some other wording, anything, because this solution seems quite foolish/a load of rubbish to me.

n.d. 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.30

From the latter extract we learn that Azari is worried about the Umberto Boccioni quotation on page 78 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (‘It’s necessary to hang, shoot, those who deviate from the idea of a grand Futurist Italy’ - Boccioni, 1913, ‘Contro la...’, 191, cited by Depero, 1927) as it could be seen to go against the cultural policy of Fascism which, according to D’Alessandri, ‘viewed the avant-garde spirit still being shown by late 1920s Futurism with ambiguous tolerance’ (D’Alessandri, 2005, 140).<sup>12</sup> Convinced that the phrase should be removed, Azari communicates to Depero that he wants to speak to Marinetti about it (August 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.23). From a subsequent letter in which Azari reiterates his opinion, we can infer that Depero does not seem to have approved its elimination:

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<sup>10</sup> Azari and Depero tried their luck playing lotto in a bid to help cover their costs. In an undated letter, the former reports that their bet produced winnings of 300 Lire (n.d. 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.32). In August 1928 the Mercurio print works requests a repayment plan from Depero, on the verge of leaving for America, relating to the outstanding sums they are owed for *Depero futurista 1913–1927* - a total of ‘a few thousand Lire’ and three expired promissory notes (Zamboni, 1 August 1928, MART, Dep.3.1.15.33). In May 1929 Depero pays for the two of three promissory notes that expired in 1928 via the Bank of Sicily in New York (see Depero, 24 January 1929, MART, Dep.5.53.3 and Zamboni, 23 May 1929, MART, Dep.3.1.17.17). In September 1929 the third and final promissory note relating to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was still unpaid (Zamboni, 15 September 1929, MART, Dep.3.1.19.6). The correspondence regarding the relationship between Depero and the Mercurio printing works kept at the Archivio del '900 is mainly formed of payment requests by the printers, so much so that in the 1930s Zamboni would hire lawyer Bettini of Rovereto to collect the accumulated printing debts relative to various jobs commissioned to Mercurio by Depero that had never been paid for. He would attempt to falsify a payment receipt but nevertheless the letters between Depero and Zamboni have a friendly tone indicative of their mutual respect (see the entire folder ‘Conteggi Zamboni, 1934-1938’ under the archive shelf mark MART, Dep.3.1.31). On this basis, in financial terms Depero did not appear to be in any way capable of funding the *Depero futurista 1913–1927* on his own. Thus, the publication of the book was only possible thanks to the economic support of Fedele Azari.

<sup>11</sup> The ‘road’ refers the trip to New York, viewed as Depero’s definitive consecration as an international artist and therefore also as a solution, also in financial terms, both for the artist and Azari as his agent.

<sup>12</sup> On this topic and the rift between Futurism and Fascism that stemmed from the First Futurist Congress held in Milan in 1924, see chapter 5 of this thesis.

The Boccioni phrase, I would say to remove the page (not in all copies)<sup>13</sup> – the book will not lose anything in meaning – the book taken to Rome can be of great impetus = demonstration of our financial efforts propaganda therefore help – or print purely in red = [equal to the] complete Mussolini quote with signature (that one.... we must not exploit the legacy of the past but etc...etc..) and a Marinetti quote // and that opinion in French “In art, there are only two types of people: revolutionaries and plagiarists”<sup>14</sup> – something like that – what do you think? One or two quotes with similar meaning as the Boccioni quote to make a link – tone down – if you don’t have the exact French transcription of the third quote (it would be better if you did, in fact put other quotations by other personalities in order to dampen down Boccioni’s one) [...] if it is OK I will telegraph you– otherwise I will suggest any necessary political edits via express mail

5 September 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.19

Despite the continued efforts made by Azari, the Boccioni quote was included in full by Depero alongside those of Mussolini and Marinetti (see figure 5.2). The extract from the letter and Depero’s behaviour make it clear just how important it was for him to include Boccioni’s phrase, perhaps because it embodies his complete and uncompromising devotion to Futurism. Through the words of Boccioni, whose aura within the movement was second only to founder Marinetti’s, Depero aims to reiterate the merits of Futurism in making Italy a great country. In this precise passage of the book, Depero’s demonstration of support for the Futurist movement risks causing a hypothetical conflict with the regime; in fact it is Azari that dampens Boccioni’s bold words with the expedient of inserting propagandistic quotes by Mussolini and Marinetti.<sup>15</sup>

Azari also asks Depero for ten copies, even unbound (‘I [Azari] will take care of punching the holes and binding’), to take to Rome as complimentary gifts for Arduino Colasanti<sup>16</sup>, Luigi Freddi<sup>17</sup> and Dino Grandi<sup>18</sup> in order to obtain ‘help’ (1 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.22). The special copies with metal cover were obviously reserved for Depero, Azari and Marinetti, and to be given away to important figures

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**13** The elimination of the page in some copies may probably refer to those given to exponents of Fascism.

**14** Although this quote is not included in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Azari here refers to Paul Gauguin, who spoke that sentence in *Le Soir* on 25th April 1895, which was also quoted by Boccioni: ‘Gauguin was right, in art, there are only two types of people: revolutionaries and plagiarists’ (see Guérin, 1996, 107).

**15** Azari suggests adding a ‘complete Mussolini quote’. Although we do not know exactly what Azari means by ‘complete’ – we know that the quotation would be printed without the wording ‘a Fascist art’ at the end. On this topic and on Depero’s political engagement see chapter 5 and the conclusions of the thesis.

**16** Art historian and general manager of antiquities and fine arts for the Public Education department in Rome. In a letter of 18 June 1928 he would thank Depero for sending him a copy of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* with dedication (Colasanti, 1928, MART, Dep.3.1.16.42)

**17** A *squadrista* who participated in the March on Rome, head of the National Fascist Party (PNF) press office and special correspondent to the US, he would later become director of film production of the Ministry of Popular Culture.

**18** Dino Grandi, undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry (Benito Mussolini) from 1925 to 1929, later Foreign Minister from September 1929 until 1932.

of the regime like Mussolini, his brother Arnaldo and Morgagni (9 January 1928, MART, Dep.3.1.8.5 and Azari, 26 July 1927, Dep.3.1.8.16).<sup>19</sup>

Azari made less of a contribution to the layout than to the binding, with Depero designing all of the pages. Azari congratulates Depero on the drafts he has sent him: 'I am enthusiastic about the typographical layout of the text of your essays – for the beautiful Marinetti presentation page take account of the margin' (n.d. 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.23).<sup>20</sup> In just one of the 30 letters does he offer suggestions on the layout of the pages, referring in brief to the assumptions of Marinetti's typographical revolution: 'In general I recommend using very large types for the text [...] alternating them so that the most dissimilar are close to each other' (24 February 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.7 - see figure 3.3).

### 3.1.2 The nature of Azari and Depero's collaboration

Azari becomes quite agitated with regard to all the pages that carry his name. For example, the cover of the book was a source of great concern for the publisher and he makes numerous comments on the drafts sent to him by Depero (figures 3.5 and 3.6):

Cover I don't think either of the two you sent me work – in the first layout the name is not clear from a distance – in the other you must never write the name Depero descending – as well as being bad luck (see marinetti)<sup>21</sup> it does not look good and gives it a limp falling appearance – I preferred the red version designed previously [...] 1913-1927 wording to remove especially from the cover because as of 1928 nobody will buy it anymore because it appears out of date [...]  
I look forward to receiving the cover, believe me that these are no good

11 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.14

As well as the suggestions and changes he proposes to Depero, he also contributes with sketches (figure 3.8):

Cover received – I do not like it– does not grab you either close up or from a distance – Depero style – it could have been done by anyone – so far the two I like most are = the very first one you did = with zig zag decorations = the one which, as I said before, would be better with the letters of the word Depero ascending which is mechanical and appropriate [...] either do one that is ultra-Deperian in style or redo one of these two (Probably end of) July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.17

Although we do not know what Depero might have written, on this occasion Azari's suggestions seem to be accepted: the chosen cover was described as 'mechanical'

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<sup>19</sup> Azari lists the people for whom the ten special copies should be reserved (see figure 3.5). A year after it was printed, Azari would reveal that the Museum of Trento reserved and purchased one of these, a copy that can still be seen today in the museum at Buonconsiglio Castle (see figure 7.19).

<sup>20</sup> With 'typographical essays' Azari may refer to the Wall manifesto section, while with 'Marinetti presentation' he makes reference to 'Depero glorified by Marinetti', pp. 29-33 of *Depero futurista*, see section 4.3.2.2.

<sup>21</sup> In his books (e.g. *Zang tumb tuuum* and *Les mots en liberté futuristes*), Marinetti's name on the cover is always set with ascending letters (see figures 4.5 and 4.7).



Figure 3.5



**Figure 3.5** Azari's Letter to Depero. 26 July 1927. Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. MART, Dep.3.1.8.16.

On the left side of this letter, see the note in which Azari wrote: 'I ordered 2000 bolts instead of 1800 so to have all copies with a unique type of finishing – the special copies will be only few – [curly brackets] 1 marinetti 1 mussolini 1 depero 1 azari 6 various [curly brackets] what do you think?'

**Figures 3.6 and 3.7** Collage (figure 3.6) and pencil sketch (figure 3.7) for *Depero futurista 1913–1927* cover, the latter might be the 'zig zag' cover proposal commented by Azari.

The two originals probably come from private collections, both pictures are from the exhibition catalogue Scudiero, M. 1988. *Depero futurista e l'arte pubblicitaria*. Modena: Galleria Fonte d'Abisso, pages 83 and 84, without citing the source.



with the letters of the title ascending and without the temporal period referred to by the book (1913–1927), which was only printed on the title page.

By sponsoring *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Azari wanted to ensure that he, as publisher, received his share of the limelight alongside Depero, trying to exploit what he believed would be Fortunato Depero's global reception as an artist, promoting himself in a new guise as Depero's gallerist, publicity agent, and art publisher: 'for the Dinamo part etc... On the cover I want it very clear so it serves as publicity for Dinamo and also our only address in Italy close by', which saw the name Dinamo with the address under the title on the cover and title page: 'Italian edition of Dinamo-Azari S. Orsola, 8 Milano - telephone 82520 New-York-Paris Berlin' (11 July 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.14);<sup>22</sup> and also: 'send me a draft of the DEPERO DINAMO cover [...] What do you think about reproducing this wording in large, perhaps upside down, on a page [Dinamo-Azari sketch follows]?' (30 June 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.24) – 'please make sure that the wording referring to me is large – I await drafts – repeat them inside where possible and if there is space – insist on this duality – do some printing block of Dinamo designs inside' (n.d. 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.27 - figures 3.8 and 3.9). This attitude results in a heated exchange of letters on the pair's collaboration. The discussion is supplemented by an equation with which Azari seeks to explain to Depero that the Dinamo publishing and art house must only be associated with his name because if it is mistakenly identified as a joint Depero and Azari company, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* would not be an equal collaboration (figures 3.11 and 3.12):

as I have told you several times I do not want to work on a collaboration with you if there is nothing that is exclusively mine – remember all of the reasoning made in this regard = Depero = your genius + Work done + your personal style + future endless possibilities etc....

Azari = all you know = "Dinamo" a thing exclusively mine – therefore on one side FortunatoDepero on the other side AzariDinamo

otherwise if Dinamo = (Azari + Depero) and Depero = Depero results Depero = Depero + ½ Dinamo Azari = ½ Dinamo i.e. Depero = 1 and ½ Azari = ½

is it clear?

it means then all our collaboration etc...

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I can imagine your face now after this small talk!!...

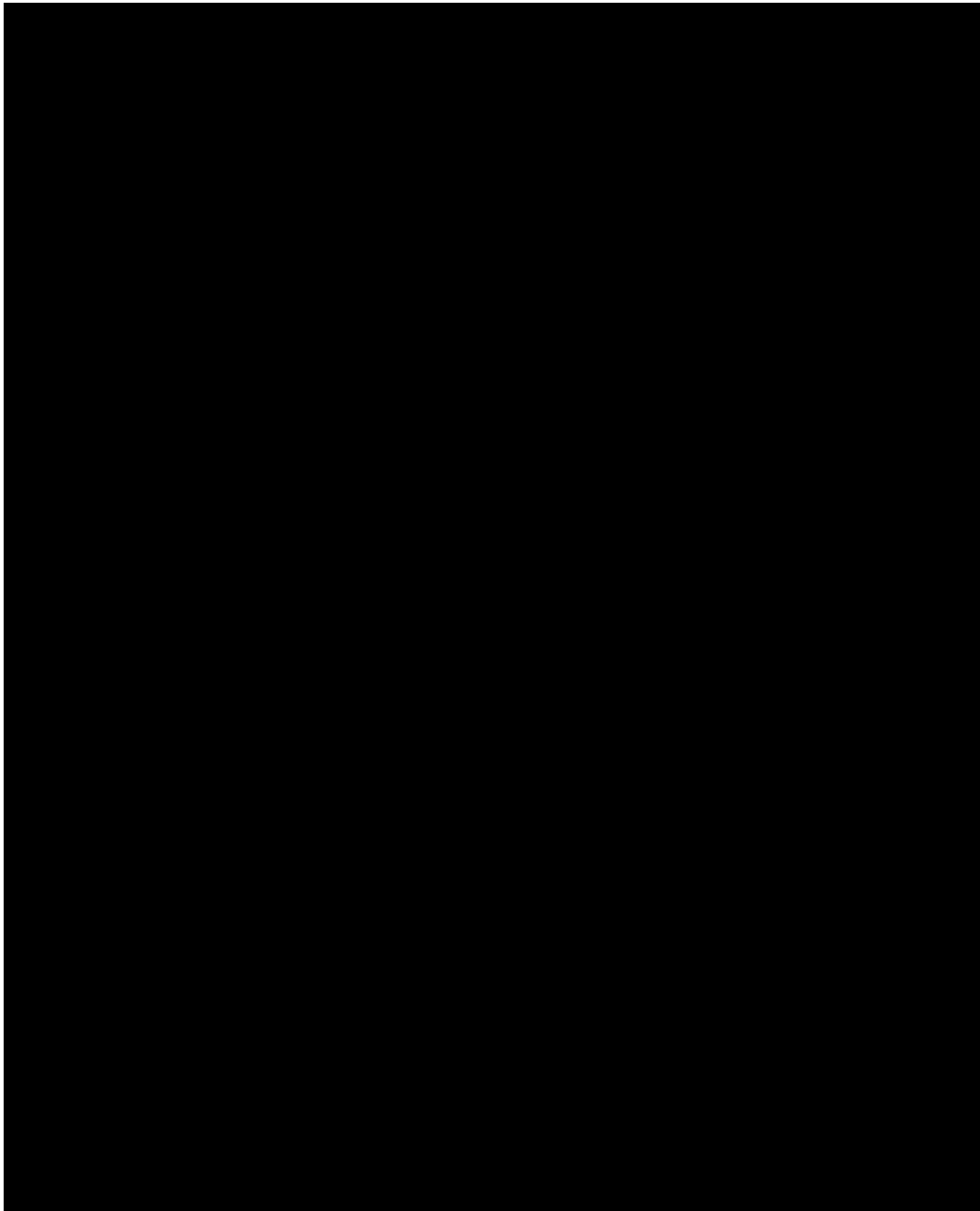
here's why - if they are not printed yet, I wish that Dinamo appears just with my name: **Depero || Dinamo Azari }**

I want to try and establish my name independently – even without reaching your level of international fame [...] so don't be angry and concede more Dinamo generously to me [sic]

probably the second half of July, 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.26

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<sup>22</sup> Azari repeats in various letters (MART, Dep.3.1.8.11, Dep.3.1.8.24 and Dep.3.1.8.27) that the Dinamo address in Milan must be the only Italian address of reference for him and Depero.



**Figures 3.8** Azari's sketch to Depero. 1927, Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. Four pages. MART, Dep.3.1.7.20.1/2/3/4.

Once again, Azari repeats suggestions on his name: 'for this part, use movable types, not printing block, one sans-serif for everything'. Azari wrote '*cliché*', which means printing block in French.

**Figures 3.9 and 3.10** Azari's Letter to Depero. n.d. 1927, Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. Two pages. MART, Dep.3.1.8.27.

On the first page, Azari writes: 'I recommend setting Dinamo Azari as big as in my sketch'. On the second, he reiterates: 'the layout you chose seems better to me but with ascending letters [...] the word Futurista is better under Depero and perhaps smaller – so it isn't confused with the wording related to me which must be larger – "DeperoFuturista" must not have any gaps because it is the title = for example, can you send me 100 copies of "DeperoFuturista" – yes, sure – please make sure that the wordings referring to me is large – await drafts – repeat them inside where possible and if there is space – insist on this duality – do some printing blocks of Dinamo designs inside'.

Depero's response, one of the few available to us, references and comments on some of Azari's assertions: 'Dear Azari – letter received – frankly speaking, I am not pissed off, at all, just a little surprised [...]  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Depero  $\frac{1}{2}$  Azari – Incorrect because Depero = Depero +  $\frac{1}{2}$  Dinamo Azari = Azari +  $\frac{1}{2}$  Dinamo } i.e. Depero  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Azari  $1\frac{1}{2}$  I am clearer than you my dear' – correcting Azari's equation – “our collaboration” and then underneath “my name independently” seems to be a contradiction to me!'. Requesting 'absolute clarity' from Azari, Depero firmly asserts that for him Dinamo is a joint collaboration between the pair ('Dinamo = AzariDepero'), and if Azari wanted Dinamo to be associated with his name only, Depero would be forced to withhold from him the exclusive rights to his art: 'going to New York with the name Dinamo-Azari [...] how would I appear? If we have to separate the two things: you Dinamo with your plans | [and therefore] the art house to me' (Depero, 28 July 1927, GETTY, 860189 - figures 3.13 and 3.14).

This letter is extremely important as it tells us that Dinamo is a collaboration between Depero and Azari with the former the artist and author, and the latter the exclusive agent for his art. We also infer that one of the aims of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was to launch Depero (with Azari as his agent) on the New York market. In fact, in May 1928 Azari went to New York with the goal of surveying the market and providing information on the imminent arrival of Depero in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Depero's answer appeared to bring the matter to a close: following this letter in late July there is no more mention of the ownership of Dinamo. On the cover of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, we find 'Depero' written in large letters and 'Dinamo-Azari' is repeated twice in smaller print in the corners of the page, with the publishing house only credited to Azari. On the title page 'Depero' appears once again in large type while the 'Azari' has been removed from Dinamo. This may mean that Azari accepted Depero's terms or alternatively that they came to a compromise of which we have no written evidence.

Even though the tone of the letters clearly indicates that Depero and Azari's relationship was not just professional but one of friendship; they both feel the need to claim ownership of their respective contributions to the book. On the one hand, Depero proposes to insert the wording '*creazione Depero*' (Depero creation) on

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<sup>23</sup> Azari would also help Depero and Rosetta to get their passports and visas for their trip to New York.



**Figures 3.11 and 3.12** Azari's letter to Depero. Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. 24 February 1927. Three pages. MART, Dep.3.1.8.26.1/2/3.

At the top right corner of the letter, it is interesting to note Azari's sketch for *Depero futurista 1913–1927* cover, suggesting to write the title with ascending letters.

On the second page, at the bottom right corner, there is another sketch drawn by Azari suggesting that the book price not to be printed on the book, rather inserted on price tag as in the 'luxury editions'. Depero did not listen to this suggestion and printed the price directly on the backcover. Next to the sketch, Azari once again repeats: 'I recommend to stick Dinamo into every possible corner of the book'.

Figure 3.12

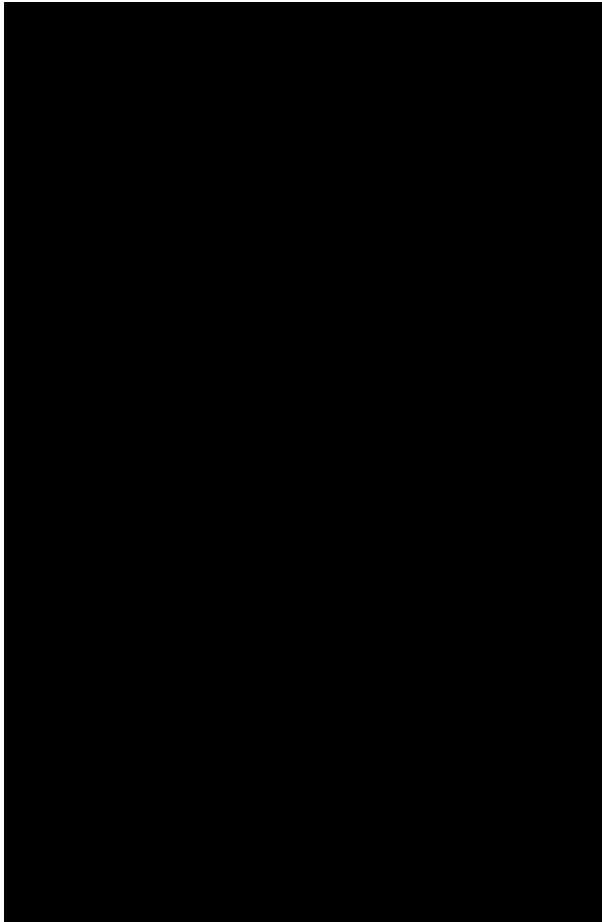


Figure 3.13

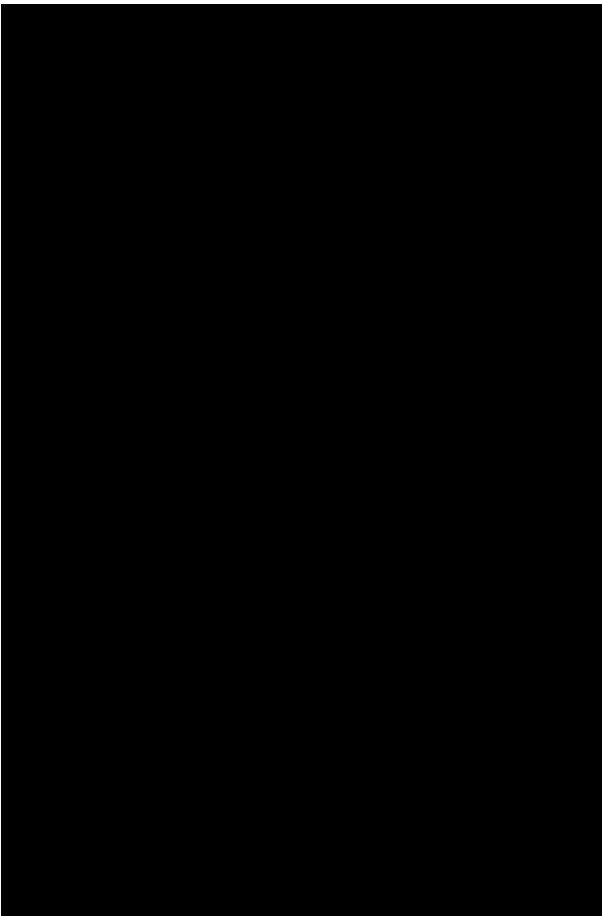


Figure 3.14

**Figures 3.13 and 3.14** Depero's reply to Azari. The Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles. Depero, 28 July 1927. Two out five pages. Getty Research Library, special collection, GETTY, 860189.

Depero quotes and makes reference to Azari's letter responding with the same degree of animosity: 'Now I reply to your observations – you write: "I do not want to work on a collaboration with you if there is nothing that is exclusively mine" I reply: pointless assertion – because you have already done everything'.

At the bottom of the second page, Depero writes: 'My clear and fraternal dream has always been to unite our two names, Depero and Azari, in a single one, i.e. the =Dinamo='.

all pages with typographical compositions;<sup>24</sup> while on the other, Azari wants his name to appear wherever possible in the book, even claiming undue recognition for some aspects in which he attempts to take credit for the printing of the book, as can be seen in the letters (see Azari, 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.11/23/26). This was not possible because although Dinamo was a multidisciplinary art house that produced publications, it was not an established publisher. As a result, Depero tells Azari that the name of the printer is necessary in order to trace the source of the printed copies.<sup>25</sup> The issue is of key importance to Azari, to the point that ‘he would not even have begun printing the book if he had known it was necessary to put the name of the printer’. He therefore suggests to Depero various alternative and misleading phrases to insert at the end of the book:

If you are still in time = in the smallest (microscopic) existing type size  
and on one of the last page of the text – (lower margin) write these words:  
Printed with types of the “Dinamo” - Milan - S. Orsola 6  
If not, if it is too late to omit it, put  
Printed in the Dinamo Mercurio printing works-Rovereto  
everything set in the smallest size but Dinamo a bit bigger than the rest  
if “Tipografia Mercurio Rovereto” has already been printed:  
write the word “Dinamo” before it set in the same typeface used for Tipografia –  
[in the margin] regardless of the absolute merits of the printing works to whom we  
will apologise in the local newspaper – I desire and want that everything produced  
by Dinamo does not feature any other name of industrial plants  
Dinamo = Printing works + industrial plants for the manufacturing of goods etc...  
etc... including the advertising posters printed for us... I’ll explain everything as  
soon as you are in Milan –

30 June 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.11

The second alternative was chosen (with no changes of the typesize) and printed on page 232 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* just before a two-colour typographical composition advertising Dinamo on page 233 (figures 3.15 and 3.16). It is clear that Azari was unable to omit the name of the printers and that the advertising composition paired with the ambiguous ‘Printed in the Dinamo: “Mercurio” printing

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<sup>24</sup> Azari rejected the idea: ‘when you say to put “Depero creation” on the original typographical pages this seems inappropriate to me because the book is already full of much more important “Depero creations” and it would diminish the artistic importance of those that are truly important – it is like writing “general and corporal” – leave those that don’t have higher ranks to say corporal – the binding is a completely different matter – the same goes for the cover but it is pointless signing it because it is evident– but do as you wish’ (August 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.23). Here, Azari is referring to the fact that even though Depero helped with finding the bolts and the binding process, he wants to explicitly state on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* cover that the binding was an “Azari creation”. As for signing the cover, he does not feel this is necessary as it is stylistically evident that it is Depero’s work. This letter removes any possible doubt as to Depero’s paternity over the aesthetics of the inside pages, while also revealing Azari’s opportunism and wiliness.

<sup>25</sup> During the Fascist era, printing works had to be declared so the police could control and eventually censure texts that did not conform with the tenets of the regime. Two copies of every publication had to be given to the police and closely checked, especially in the case of the renowned socialist and anti-Fascist printing works, Tipografia Mercurio (on this topic see Zamboni, *Vita e ideali*, 2010).

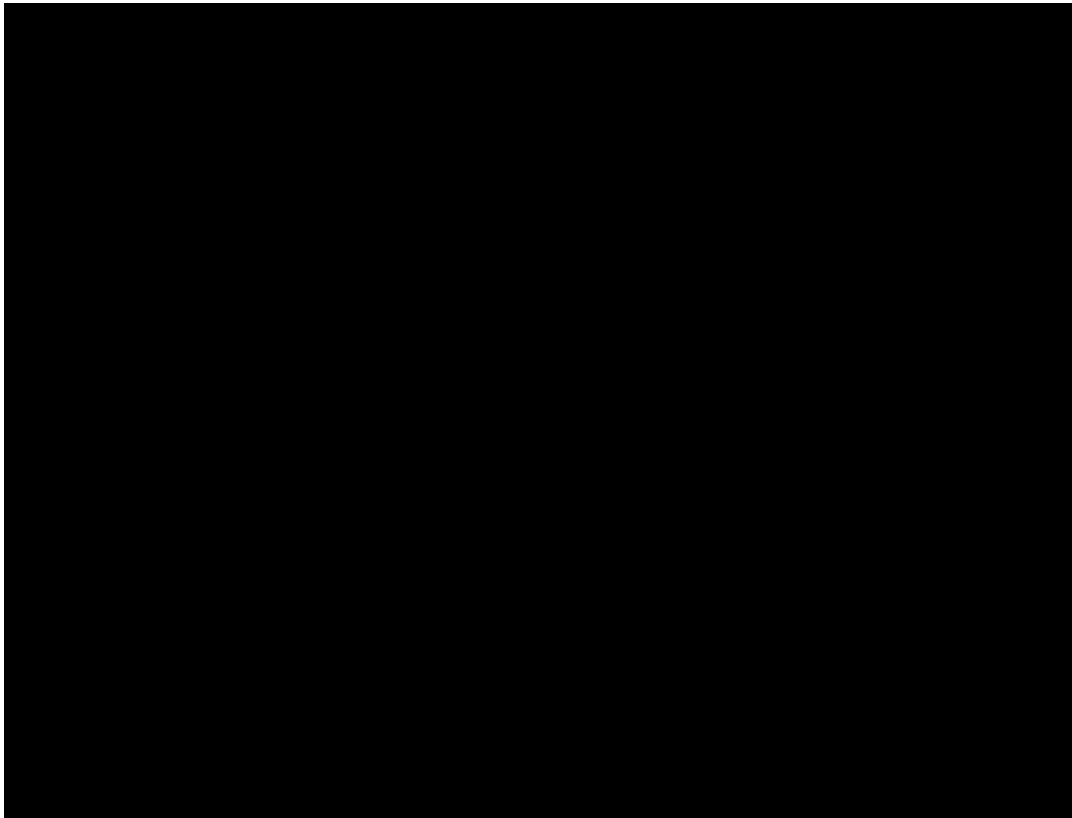


Figure 3.15 - page 232

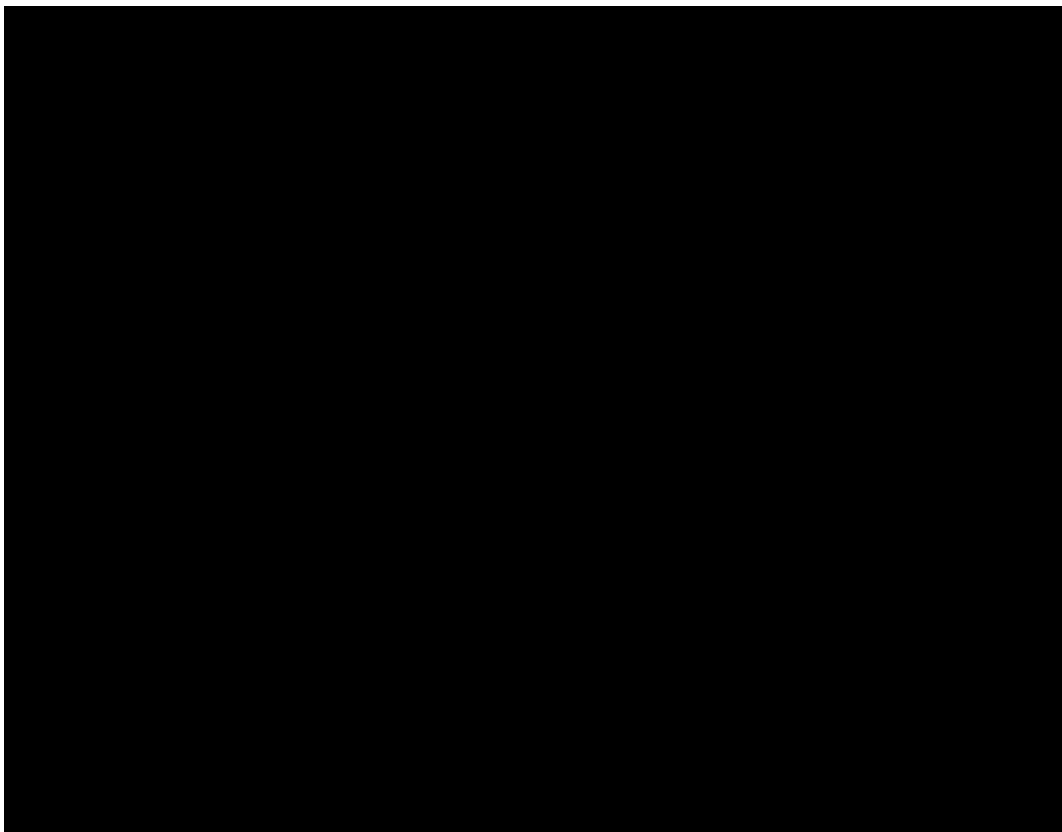


Figure 3.16 - page 233

**Figure 3.15** The page reads: Printed in the DINAMO: „MERCURIO” PRINTING WORKS - ROVERETO  
**Figure 3.16** Two-inks typographical composition for Dinamo-Azari.

works' was in some way supposed to suggest that Azari was the creator of the typographical compositions designed by Depero.<sup>26</sup> By way of consolation, under the 'printers' category in the list of Futurist artists divided according to discipline (see figure 3.17) we find the names Azari, Cesare Cavanna, Carlo Frassinelli and of course Depero, together with the name of Ferruccio Zamboni, owner of Mercurio which, although printed in orange and vertically as if it was added later on or less important/different from the others, is accredited among the Futurist printers.

Finally, from Azari's letters we can infer that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was printed between early September – when he asks Depero for updates ('Is the book finished? - 9 September 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.7.23) – and December 1927, after which we can deduce that the book had already been printed (27 December 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.29).

### 3.2 Depero and the Mercurio printing works of Ferruccio Zamboni

The first contact between Ferruccio Zamboni<sup>27</sup> and Depero took place in the summer of 1912, when the typographer printed a postcard designed by Depero for the Third Congress of the Association of Trentino students held in Riva del Garda on 15 September 1912 (see Scudiero, 2010, 86).

In June 1913 Mercurio printing works published Depero's first self-produced book entitled *Spezzature. Impressioni-segni-ritmi* (Breakages. Impressions-Signs-Rhythms). After a few years away from Rovereto, Fortunato Depero returned home, founding his Futurist house of art. Tipografia Mercurio once again began printing all of the promotional materials, including invitations and fliers, of the Futurist *serate* (*soirées*) held at Depero's art house. Between 1923 and 1926 Depero spent time in Milan, Rome and Paris, and only in 1927, after his return to Rovereto, did the

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<sup>26</sup> Azari did not let things lie and did everything he could to omit Mercurio: 'if the publisher's name isn't stated then at least the printer's should but one can't replace the other – if we can do without it, I'd be tempted to get the page redone – I think the question of whether the dinamo publishing house has its own printers or not is of little interest, especially abroad [...] please remove Rovereto as it was printed in my printing works in Milan' (August 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.23). And: 'please don't put any reference to the printers in the book because I printed the book on my premises – anyway, for the printer it is worthless publicity [...] in Rome I will do what I can to fix it' (August 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.18). In reality, Azari did not have any printing facilities or skill and, by writing 'In Rome', he probably meant to ask help to his administrative Fascist contacts at the central government in Rome, see notes 16, 17 and 18, in order to avoid mentioning the name of the Mercurio printing workshop in the book.

<sup>27</sup> In 1910 Ferruccio Zamboni, the compositor of Tipografia Economica printing works in Rovereto, purchased the business after it closed, renaming it Mercurio (Mercury), in honour of the messenger of the gods. Renowned as a socialist (and later anti-Fascist, see Depero's closing comment in his report - section 5.2.1 on page 156) print shop, Mercurio printed all kinds of typographical products, from manifestos and obituary notices to prohibited anti-Austria, socialist, and anti-clerical publications. The Mercurio print workshop still operates today, more than a century after its founding, overseen by the fourth generation of the Zamboni family. For a detailed biography of Ferruccio Zamboni and his workshop see: Zamboni, 2010, *Vita e ideali*.



professional partnership between Mercurio and the Futurist artist resume: this time to print *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.<sup>28</sup>

The printing of the book involved a complex collaboration between Fortunato Depero and the Mercurio team: Ferruccio Zamboni, Lionello Buffato, and Enrico Andreatta, respectively the owner, the type compositor, and the machinist. Depero produced all of the writing, illustrations, and typographical designs compiled in the volume. Only later was there an exchange of correspondence on corrections and improvements to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* between Depero and Azari.

We know that Depero used to go to Mercurio to watch the printing process in order to be in control of it and, above all, because he was interested in choosing the right type (Zamboni, 2010, *Vita e ideali*, 21-36). On the basis of the specific skills of the figures involved in the printing process, we can imagine that the feasibility of these layouts was discussed by Depero, Zamboni and Buffato. Zamboni supervised the printing process, Lionello Buffato dealt with the typesetting and composed the typographical lines that the machinist Enrico Andreatta printed. When the lines are straight, flush left/right, centred or justified, the process is relatively simple, even when detailed. If, however, words are composed in a circle, in a diagonal formation, vertically or in special forms, then difficulties arise with the composition using movable type. During the imposition process of these specific configurations, Buffato used string and even strips of rigid paper and cardboard to make sure that the composition remained tight and in position. This helped prevent the printing machine carriage from raising the types and spaces of the typographical composition and therefore smudging the sheets of paper. Furthermore, the types were limited and for this reason Buffato composed a maximum of 5-7 pages at a time, which Enrico Andreatta subsequently printed. This quantity of pages obviously varied depending on the complexity of the pages themselves. Having printed them, Andreatta disassembled the printing forme and cleaned the type so that Buffato could compose more pages. The process started again for another batch of pages: composition -

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<sup>28</sup> After that, the collaboration with Zamboni continued until 1933, printing most of the publications designed by Depero, to be mentioned: *Numero unico futurista Campari* (1931), *Futurismo 1932 anno X° S.E. Marinetti nel Trentino* (1932) and the three issues of *Dinamo futurista* (1933). There is little in the way of documentation on the relationship between Mercurio, Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: a couple of paragraphs written by Maurizio Scudiero (2010, 86-88), a two-page article by Marco Zamboni (grandson of Ferruccio - see Zamboni, 2010, 'Antiche tipografie', 81-85) which makes brief mention of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, both published in the magazine of the cultural association of Rovereto Library; finally, a brochure on the history of Mercurio printing works, in which there is just a short reference to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, self-published by Marco Zamboni (2010, *Vita e ideali*...). In 2014 he kindly agreed to be interviewed for around two hours on the printing of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (of which I have a video recording in HD but neither the transcription nor the translation). These materials were used to draft this part of the chapter and the text included in the 2017 reprint, 'Making of the Bolted Book' (see Camillini, 2017, pp. 22-27), also relevant to this thesis.

imposition - printing (Scudiero, 2010, 86-87, Zamboni, 2010, *Vita e ideali...*, pp. 21-24; and on the basis of interviews granted to me by Zamboni, 2014).

The inside pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* were undoubtedly printed using the ‘Urania-Milano’ flat-cylindrical printing machine, which is conserved today at the Biblioteca Civica of Rovereto (figure 3.18).<sup>29</sup> Because of the thickness of the stock, the two-color (black and silver) cover was printed using the ‘Platina Ideale’ treadle-powered printing press produced by Nebiolo (c. 1900). This press, which was later used to print Socialist, irredentist, and partisan protest publications, is now part of the Rovereto War Museum collection.

Although the book proves that Depero often acted on his own initiative – the recommendations he ignored from Azari (on the paper, format and content, as in the case of the Boccioni quotes) being a clear example – Azari’s contribution to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was crucial: from the conceptualisation to the bolted binding, from financial and various other forms of support regarding multiple aspects of the book to his almost obsessive attempts to try and control all of the pages.<sup>30</sup> As is often the case, it is the artist who is credited for the artistic innovations and achievements and so it is important to recognise the role he played as publisher, agent and partner of Depero’s in the process of producing *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

Yet, despite Azari trying to claim the credit for printing the book, it was in fact printed in full by Mercurio, more than likely with the direct involvement of Depero. The Mercurio team worked on the artist’s commission without contributing in design terms but they did offer the benefit of their technical and artisanal experience.

In conclusion, we can state that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is a book by Depero on Depero, produced with the collaboration of Azari and printed by Mercurio. Depero was responsible for the creation of the work and its content in terms of both organisation and design, as we will see in the next chapter.

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<sup>29</sup> The Urania company was acquired by its rivals Nebiolo of Turin in 1919.

<sup>30</sup> Several letters reiterate Azari’s desire to receive drafts and prints of every page of the book (see Azari’s letters: MART, Dep.3.1.8.7, Dep.3.1.8.12, Dep.3.1.8.21 and Dep.3.1.8.23).



Figure 3.17 - Page 16

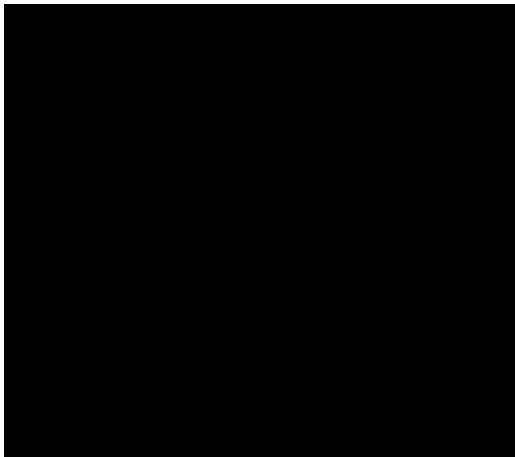


Figure 3.18

**Figure 3.17** Pages 15 and 16 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* present the list of Futurists divided according to discipline. On the latter, listed under the '*tipografi*' (typographers) section, see the name of Zamboni, printed in orange and vertical. For further information on the other names listed, see footnotes 56 and 57 on page 260 of this thesis.

**Figure 3.18** Lionello Buffato (left) and Enrico Andreatta (right) while they are using the 'Urania - Milano' flat-cylindrical printing machine at the Mercurio print workshop. In the background, Ennio Zamboni, son of Ferruccio Zamboni and father of Marco Zamboni. Zamboni private collection, c. 1930.

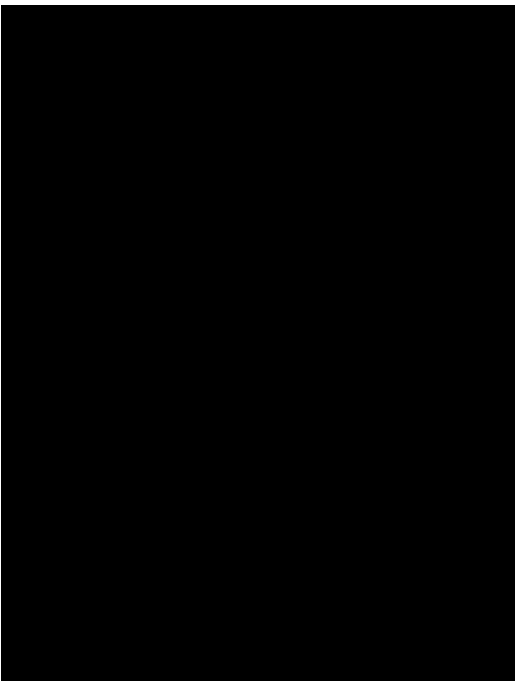


Figure 3.19

**Figure 3.19** Mercurio printing works advertisement. Zamboni private collection, c. 1930.

The advertising page reads: 'Tipografia Mercurio. The best of all!'. Here, it is interesting to note the two typefaces in use: at the top/centre, Bernhard Antiqua combined with Sansone (at the bottom), two faces often used in the typographical compositions of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, proving the limited amount of types at the Mercurio printing works. On this topic see chapter 4.



Figure 4.1 - page 18



Figure 4.2 - page 19

**Figure 4.1** 'Tavola dei commutatori' (Table of Commutators).  
In English, 'commutators' is an electrical attachment to a dynamo or motor, this word was surely chosen to give the book the connotation of a machine/dynamo.

**Figure 4.2** 'Le illustrazioni' (The Illustrations).

#### 4 Analysis of the structure and pages of the *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

In order to provide a detailed description of the book, the aim of this fourth chapter is to study *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, analysing the internal structure and some pages as an exemplification of the typographical compositions presented in the book. The analysis will focus both on the aesthetic appearance of the pages, examining the typography and layout, as well as content.<sup>1</sup>

To carry out this study I used the reprint edited by Luciano Caruso and published in 1987 by S.P.E.S. of Florence and the 2017 reprint published by Designers & Books.<sup>2</sup> Both reprints are identical to the original published by Dinamo-Azari with the exception of the page numbers introduced by curator Luciano Caruso in his 1987 reprint. In addition, the typefaces printed in the original are more defined than those of the 1987 reprint where the smaller sizes in particular are a little more blurred. This is not the case with the 2017 reprint which was digitally printed using high-resolution scans of the original.

For ease of reference, I used the page numbering reintroduced in Caruso's reprint even if Depero and Azari agreed that this should be eliminated.<sup>3</sup>

##### 4.1 Content structure of the book

Pages 18 and 19 are titled 'Tavola dei commutatori' (Table of Commutators, in which the word 'commutator' makes his book a promotion 'engine' for his art, figure 4.1) and 'Le illustrazioni' (The Illustrations, figure 4.2). They appear to be two contents pages divided according to content type with the texts separated from the images;

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1 For a relatively complete translation of most of pages from *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, see the 'Selected Annotated Pages From the Bolted Book' in the reader's guide to the 2017 reprint (Bedarida, Camillini, Fernandez, 2017, 28-40). The method of analysis adopted can be applied to the entire book but this would be repetitive and redundant; for this reason I have decided to consider a sample of pages which I personally believe to be the most interesting in terms of graphics and content. The pages examined provide an overview of the typography throughout the publication. This chapter fed into the drafting of the short description of each page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* which was published in Bedarida, Camillini and Fernandez, 2017, pp. 28-40 and here: [www.boltedbook.com/page-by-page/](http://www.boltedbook.com/page-by-page/). To this end, in the summer of 2016 I was contacted by publishers Designers & Books to whom I provided the draft of this chapter and collaborated with as a research consultant, contributing to writing the description of some pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

2 This choice stemmed from the fact that the photographic reproduction of the original publication, flat and unbolted, is prohibited by the Archivio del '900, and this was a necessary condition to ensure that the pages remain unaltered and can be placed on top of each other in order to describe and identify them. In parallel, I also consulted and compared three copies of the original *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, two at the Archivio del '900 and one, a version with metal cover, at Castello del Buonconsiglio in Trento (see figure 7.19), without however removing the bolts.

3 In a letter dated 13 March 1927, Fedele Azari writing to Depero, agrees with him as regards the 'abolition' of the page number: 'I approve of the abolition of the page number – or right in the bottom corner – white bold on black'. In the note to the side Azari adds to this by remarking on his opinion about page numbers: 'But it is better without numbers' (Azari, 13 March 1927, MART, 3.1.8.8). To this end, Fanelli and Godoli draw a parallel between numeration and binding using bolts, arguing that the book can be compared with a mechanical object: 'as it can also be disassembled and reassembled through operations such as the replacement or changing of the order of the pages, which were not numbered' (Fanelli and Godoli, 1988, 38).

with the first page showing the structure and the chapters of the book. In both pages, each chapter is separated by lines that isolate and group together the content.

The order of Depero's two contents pages does not correspond with the actual sequence of the pages in the three original copies considered. This could mean that the page order was not decided by Depero-Azari until a later stage or that it underwent changes due to requirements that emerged during the printing and production phase (insertion of potential sponsors, reconsiderations and content that had to be added, like in the previously analysed case of the phrases of Mussolini and Boccioni or the promotional pages). For example, the front page and the page dedicated to Dinamo-Azari are not considered in the first chapter of the book. In the table of commutators Depero includes the list of 'Riviste futuriste estere' (Foreign Futurist Magazines) under the second chapter 'La dinamo' (The Dynamo), yet this actually appears on page 231 in the final part of the book and not at the beginning. The text 'Il futurismo immortale' (The Immortal Futurism) that appears on page 59 of the 'Manifesti murali' (Wall Manifestos - *murali*, literally 'murals') chapter is not mentioned in the table of commutators, while the *Fulmine distruttore* (Destructive Lightning) painting included in the illustrations contents page under the 'Quadri' (Paintings) category is missing from both the original book and the reprint (Depero, 1927, 18-19).<sup>4</sup>

These inaccuracies convinced me to create a contents list which, interpreting the Table of Commutators and the Illustrations pages, displays the entire arrangement of content presented in the book, acting as an objective summary of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* (figure 4.3).

In the first chapter we find on page 11 the typographical composition 'Sparo questa creazione Futurista in segno di festa a F. T. Marinetti' (I Set Off This Futurist Creation As a Sign of Celebration for F. T. Marinetti - *sparo*, literally 'shoot'); in the handwritten notes presenting the book (figure 4.4), Depero explains how *Depero futurista 1913-1927* was dedicated to Marinetti (Depero, 1927, MART, Dep.6.4.45, 1).

The following chapter is called 'La dinamo', which presents amongst other things: the Futurist movement with a list of all of the artists connected to it, texts and quotations from Mussolini, Boccioni and Marinetti, including the text 'Depero glorificato da Marinetti' (Depero Glorified by Marinetti), publishing

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<sup>4</sup> There is no painting by Depero called *Fulmine distruttore*, Scudiero uses this title referring to another of Depero's paintings, *Fulmine compositore* (Compositional lightning, 1926 - Scudiero, 2014, 261).

house Dinamo-Azari, Depero's autobiographical summary, and a list of 52 of his exhibitions (figure 6.10).<sup>5</sup>

The third chapter looks at the wall manifestos, texts written and described as 'ideological' by Depero because he uses them to present his ideas on the disciplines he covers in the book and his professional work. This is why Depero uses the word 'manifesto', while 'wall' hints at his desire to hang them so he can spread his ideas more widely: 'Necessità di auto-rèclame' (The Need for Self-Advertisement), a justification of the author's self-promotion; 'Arte è creazione' (Art Is Creation) and 'Plastica d'oggi' (Plastic Arts of Today), manifestos focused on the artistic and Futurist avant-gardes; 'Ritratto psicologico' (Psychological Portraits) and 'Architettura della luce' (Architecture of Light), both exploring Depero's painting: the former introduces the innovation of depicting the 'interior physiognomy of the person' rather than their outward appearance, while the latter explains the use of 'solidified light', showing two examples of it on page 79 where the painted rays of light seem to assume solid form (Depero, 1927, 71-77).

Manifestos on Depero's ideas in the field of advertising for industry and the design of promotional displays and pavilions can be found in 'Architettura pubblicitaria' (Advertising Architecture) and 'Manifesto agli industriali' (Manifesto for the Industrialists); these manifestos are followed by images of projects from Depero's portfolio which, like case studies, offer concrete examples of the theory espoused in the manifesto: *Padiglione del libro* (Book Pavilion) for publishers Emilio Treves, Emilio Bestetti and Calogero Tumminelli, *Padiglione tricolore* (Tricolour Pavilion), and the *Padiglione Fascista* (Fascist Pavilion).

From page 97 to page 105, in the third and fourth chapters after the manifestos, Depero inserts a series of paintings that do not seem to be connected with any of the ideological manifestos, apparently a little section unto themselves. On the illustrations contents page, these paintings feature at the beginning of the list under the heading 'Paintings' yet in reality we find them at the end of the chapter. For example, the *Ritratto psicologico dell'aviatore Azari* (Psychological Portrait

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5 Dinamo (Dynamo) is a key term for Fortunato Depero and his book that has three connected meanings: the first meaning of 'dynamo' relates to Dinamo-Azari, the publishing house of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* and Fedele Azari's Futurist art gallery. From the correspondence relating to *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, it would appear that 'Dinamo' was initially supposed to be a joint venture between Depero and Azari. *Depero futurista 1913-1927* would eventually be published by the Dinamo-Azari publishing house, therefore wholly owned by Fedele Azari. For further on this topic, see section 3.1.2. Secondly, Dynamo is used to mean generator but is also a synonym for dynamism and energy, and therefore the inspiration and engine that propels Depero's art. In fact, in the table of commutators under the chapter dynamo, Depero includes the dearest things to him: the Futurist movement, Dinamo-Azari, Marinetti, Mussolini and Boccioni. The third meaning post-dates the release of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*; in fact, three years after Azari's death (in 1930), Depero begins to publish his Futurist magazine *Dinamo Futurista*. The printing matrix on page 7 depicting an electric dynamo was later reused on flyers and advertising pages promoting Depero's magazine, which closed after just three editions.

## Depero futurista 1913–1927 - contents structure

### Chapter 1

#### Introduzione - Introduction

p. 1 Frontespizio - Front page

p. 2 Firma di Depero e numerazione della tiratura - Depero signature and edition number

p. 3 Frontespizio addizionale - Additional frontispiece

p. 5 **Pagina di presentazione - Presentation page**

pp. 7-9 Dinamo-Azari: due pagine di promozione della casa editrice e della galleria d'arte futurista di Fedele Azari - Dinamo-Azari: two pages promoting Fedele Azari's publishing house and Futurist art gallery

p. 7  
Pagina promozionale della Dinamo-Azari - Promotional page for Dinamo-Azari

p. 9  
**Annuncio dell'avvio della Dinamo-Azari - Announcement of the launch of Dinamo-Azari**

p. 11 **Dedica a F. T. Marinetti 'Sparo questa creazione futurista in segno di festa a F. T. Marinetti (I Set Off This Futurist Creation as a Sign of Celebration for F. T. Marinetti)**

p. 13 Pagina con grafica stampata al margine destro - Page with a graphic printed on the right margin: *Depero futurista 1913-1927* | Edizione Dinamo-Azari Milano Via S. Orsola, 6

p. 18 **Tavola dei commutatori - Table of Commutators**

p. 19 **Le illustrazioni - The Illustrations**

### Chapter 2 - p. 14

#### La dinamo - The Dynamo

p. 14 **Movimento futurista - Futurist movement**

pp. 15-16 Lista degli artisti aderenti al movimento - List of all Futurist artists

p. 17 Il futurismo mondiale - The worldwide Futurism

p. 20 Testo di Marinetti, 'Marcire e non Marciare' - Marinetti's text, To March, Not to Rot

p. 21 Parole di Mussolini - Mussolini's quotations

p. 23 Parole di Boccioni - Boccioni's quotations

pp. 24-25 **Fortunato Depero sintesi autobiografica - Fortunato Depero: Autobiographical Summary**

p. 27 **'Azari e Depero partono per una discussione a 5000 metri' - Azari and Depero Leave for an Artistic Discussion at an Altitude of 5000 Meters**

pp. 29-33 **'Depero glorificato da Marinetti' - Depero Glorified by Marinetti**

p. 34 Parole di Boccioni - Boccioni's quotations

pp. 36-37 52 Esposizioni di Depero - 52 Depero's Exhibitions

p. 38 Parole di Boccioni - Boccioni's quotations

p. 39 Salone Depero alla prima internazionale d'arte decorativa. Monza, 1923 - Depero's hall at the First International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Monza

p. 41 Sala trentina alla prima biennale di Monza - progettata da Depero, 1923 - Room of Trentino region at the First International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Monza designed by Depero

p. 43 Sala Depero al Grand Palais mondiale d'arte decorativa di Parigi, 1925 - Depero's room at the Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts of Paris

p. 45 Gruppo Depero nel padiglione futurista alla XV biennale di Venezia, 1926 - Depero's artworks in the Futurist pavilion at the 15th Venice biennial

p. 47 Composizione tipografica che riassume tutte le differenti abilità di Depero nel campo delle arti - Typographical composition that summarises all Depero's skills in the field of arts

### Chapter 3 - p. 49

#### Manifesti murali - Wall Manifesto

p. 51 'Necessità di auto-rèclame' - The Need for Self-Advertisement

p. 53 'Arte è creazione' - Art Is Creation

pp. 55-57 **'Plastica d'oggi' - Plastic Arts of Today**

p. 59 **'Il futurismo immortale' - The Immortal Futurism**

pp. 61-63 'Racconto grafico' - Graphical Tale

pp. 65-67 'W la macchina e lo stile d'acciaio' - Long Live the Machine and the Steel Style

p. 69 **'Il nuovo fantastico' - The Fantastic New**

p. 71 'Ritratto psicologico' - Psychological portrait

p. 73 *Marinetti temporale patriottico - ritratto psicologico* (Marinetti Patriotic Storm. Psychological Portrait), painting, 1924

p. 75 *Ritratto psicologico dell'aviatore Azari* (Psychological Portrait of the Pilot Azari), painting, 1922

p. 77 'Architettura della luce' - Light Architecture

p. 79 *Treno partorito dal sole* (Train born Out of the Sun), painting, 1924. *Ricamatrice - architettura della luce* (Embroiderer, Light Architecture), painting, 1924

p. 78 Parole di Marinetti - Marinetti's quotation

p. 81 'Glorie plastiche' - Plastic Glories

pp. 83-85 **'Architettura pubblicitaria - manifesto agli industriali' (Advertising Architecture - Manifesto for the Industrialists)**

pp. 87-91 'Architettura tipografica' - Typographical Architecture

p. 87 Progetto per il padiglione della Venezia Tridentina alla fiera campionaria di Milano - Project for the Tridentine Venice Pavilion at the Milan Trade Fair

pp. 89-91 **'Il padiglione del libro (Architettura tipografica)' - Book Pavilion (Typographical Architecture)**

p. 93 Padiglione tricolore (verde-bianco-rosso); Padiglione fascista, due foto - Tricolour Pavilion (Green-White-Red); Fascist Pavilion, two pictures

### Chapter 4 - p. 111

#### Plastica in moto -

#### Plastic in Movement

p. 113 'Il Quadro in moto' - Painting in Movement, text by Alexander Archipenko

p. 114-117 'Il complesso plastico motorumorista 1915-27' - Motorumorist Plastic Complex 1915-27, text by Depero

p. 117 *Panoramagico* (Panoramagic), motorumorist plastic complex, 1928. *Fiera* (Fair), motorumorist plastic complex, 1924

p. 119-121 'Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo' (Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe) manifesto by Balla and Depero, 1915

p. 121 'Motorumorist-plastik' (Motorumorist-Plastic) German article regarding Depero's invention published in 1927

p. 122 'Fortunato Depero se divierte' (Fortunato Depero Has Fun), article about Depero, Buenos Aires, 1927

p. 95 Boccioni's quotation / Parole di Boccioni

p. 97 Dipinti Depero - Depero's paintings  
p. 97 *Splendori alpestri* (Alpine Splendour), painting, 1918. *Casa del mago (angolo del mio atelier)* - Magician's House (a Corner of my Workshop), painting, 1920, both paintings exhibited at the Rome biennial - 1924

p. 99 *Gara ippica fra le nubi* (Horse race Among the Clouds), painting, 1924; *Ciclista moltiplicato* (Multiplied Cyclist), painting, 1922, both paintings exhibited at the Italian Art Exhibition in New York, 1925

p. 101 *Radio-incendio* (Radio-Fire), painting, 1922, painting exhibited at the 15th Venice biennial - 1925

p. 103 *Megafoni di bestemmie* (Megaphones of Blasphemies), painting, 1924, Rome biennial - 1924

p. 105 *Discussione del 3000* (Discussion of the 4th Millennium), painting, 15th Venice biennial, 1926.

p. 107 **'Sparo questa creazione Futurista in segno di festa a F. T. Marinetti (I Set Off This Futurist Creation as a Sign of Celebration for F. T. Marinetti)**

p. 109 'W il futurismo' (Long Live Futurism)



<p><b>Chapter 5 - p. 124</b> <b>Teatro magico - Magic Theatre</b></p> <p>pp. 123-132 'Teatro magico' - Magic Theatre p. 125 Personaggio meccanico per il teatro magico Depero - (Mechanical character of Depero's magic theatre), exhibited at the International Theatre Exposition of 1926</p> <p>pp. 133-135 'Il canto dell'usignolo' (The Song of Nightingale), text. Set design and costumes for the ballet</p> <p>pp. 137-141 'Balli plastici' (Plastic Dances) p. 139 'Teatro plastico' (Plastic Theatre), a text by Gilberto Clavel about Plastic Dances play.</p> <p>p. 141 'Macchina del 3000' (Machine of the Year 3000), press release and further information about the Plastic Dances</p>	<p><b>Chapter 6 - p. 143</b> <b>Casa d'arte futurista Depero - Depero's Futurist House of Art</b></p> <p>pp. 145-146 Creazioni tipografiche Depero - Depero's Typographical Creations, typographical compositions, 1927</p> <p>pp. 147-149 'Storia sintetica della casa d'arte Futurista Depero - Coincise Biography of the Depero Futurist House of Art p.149 'L'officina futurista Depero: le preziose collaboratrici' - Depero Futurist Workshop: the Precious Collaborators; 'L'infaticabile direttrice Rosetta' - The Untiring Director Rosetta, two photographs, 1920</p> <p>pp. 151-152 'La maison magique de Depero' (The Magic House of Depero); Marinetti's text about the Depero Futurist house of art, french, n.d.</p> <p>p. 153 'Gli originalissimi cuscini e arazzi Depero' - The Very Original Depero's Cushions and Tapestries p. 155 <i>Mucca in montagna</i> (Cow in the Mountains), tapestry featured on <i>la rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia</i> (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People), No. 5, 1926</p> <p>p. 159 <i>Guerra-festa</i> (War-Party), 1925, tapestry acquired by the National Gallery of Modern art - Rome for the the 15th Venice biennial</p> <p>p. 161 <i>Rinoceronti</i> (Rhinoceroses) and <i>Guerrieri</i> (Warriors), tapestries, 1923, International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts of Paris, 1925</p> <p>pp. 163-175 'Cuscini Depero - originalissimi - coloratissimi' (Depero's Cushions - Very Original - Very Coloured)</p> <p>p. 177 'Disegni coloratissimi per sciali' - Very Coloured Pattern for Shawls International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts of Paris, 1925</p> <p>p. 179 'Giocattoli sintetici Depero' - Depero's Synthetic Toys, First International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Monza, 1923</p> <p>p. 181 Piatti di rame sbalzato Depero - Depero's repousse copper dishes, 1923; 'Martellatori-macchina' (Hammerers-Machine), International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts of Paris, 1925</p>	<p><b>Chapter 7 - p. 183</b> <b>Pubblicità Depero - Depero's Advertising</b></p> <p>p. 185 Quattro loghi della Casa d'arte futurista - Four different logos of the Depero Futurist house of art / Depero, n.d.</p> <p>pp. 187-199 Pubblicità Depero per l'aperitivo Campari - Depero's advertising for the Campari's aperitif p. 187 Pagina d'apertura - opening page</p> <p>p. 189 <i>Squisito al Selz</i> (Delicious With Seltzer), 1926, advertising painting, 15th Venice biennial</p> <p>pp. 193-199 Varie pubblicità per Campari - Various Campari's advertisements</p> <p>p. 201 Clienti della casa d'arte Depero - Clients list of the Depero's house of art</p> <p>pp. 202-212 Serie di articoli riguardanti la pubblicità Depero - Series of articles and texts regarding Depero's advertising</p>	<p><b>Chapter 8 - p. 215</b> <b>Onomalingua - Onomalanguage</b></p> <p>p. 217 'Onomalingua' - Onomalanguage p. 219 'Verbalizzazione astratta di signora' (Abstract Verbalization of Lady), Rome, 1916</p> <p>p. 221 'Tramvai' (Tramway), Rome, 1916</p> <p>p. 223 'SiiO VLUMMIA - torrente' (SiiO VLUMMIA - Creek), 1916</p> <p>p. 225 'Canzone rumorista (ritmo cinese); Rumorist Song (Chinese Rhythm), Rome, 1916</p>	<p><b>Colophon - p. 227</b></p> <p>p. 227 'Grido ai futuristi' (Cry to the Futurists), Depero's text, n. d.</p> <p>p. 229 Quattro inserzioni pubblicitarie di compagnie che hanno finanziato la pubblicazione di <i>Depero Futurista</i>: 1. G. Bologna &amp; C., Fabbrica bulloni. 2. Società anonima Tensi, cartiera. 3. Campari, azienda di bevande 4. G. Monzani &amp; C., officina fotomeccanica - Four advertisements of companies that helped the publication of <i>Depero Futurista</i>: 1. G. Bologna &amp; C., Bolts factory. 2. Tensi corporation, paper factory. 3. Campari, drinks factory 4. G. Monzani &amp; C., Photo-mechanic workshop</p> <p>p. 231 'Riviste futuriste estere' - Foreign Futurist Magazines</p> <p>p. 232 Crediti: 'stampato nella tipografia della Dinamo: "Mercurio" - Rovereto' - Credits: Printed in the Dinamo: "Mercurio" Printing Works - Rovereto</p> <p>p. 233 Dinamo-Azari, typographical composition</p> <p>p. 234 Depero typographical composition</p>
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**Figure 4.3** Schema showing the complete book arrangement, titles in red indicate that the pages have been analysed.

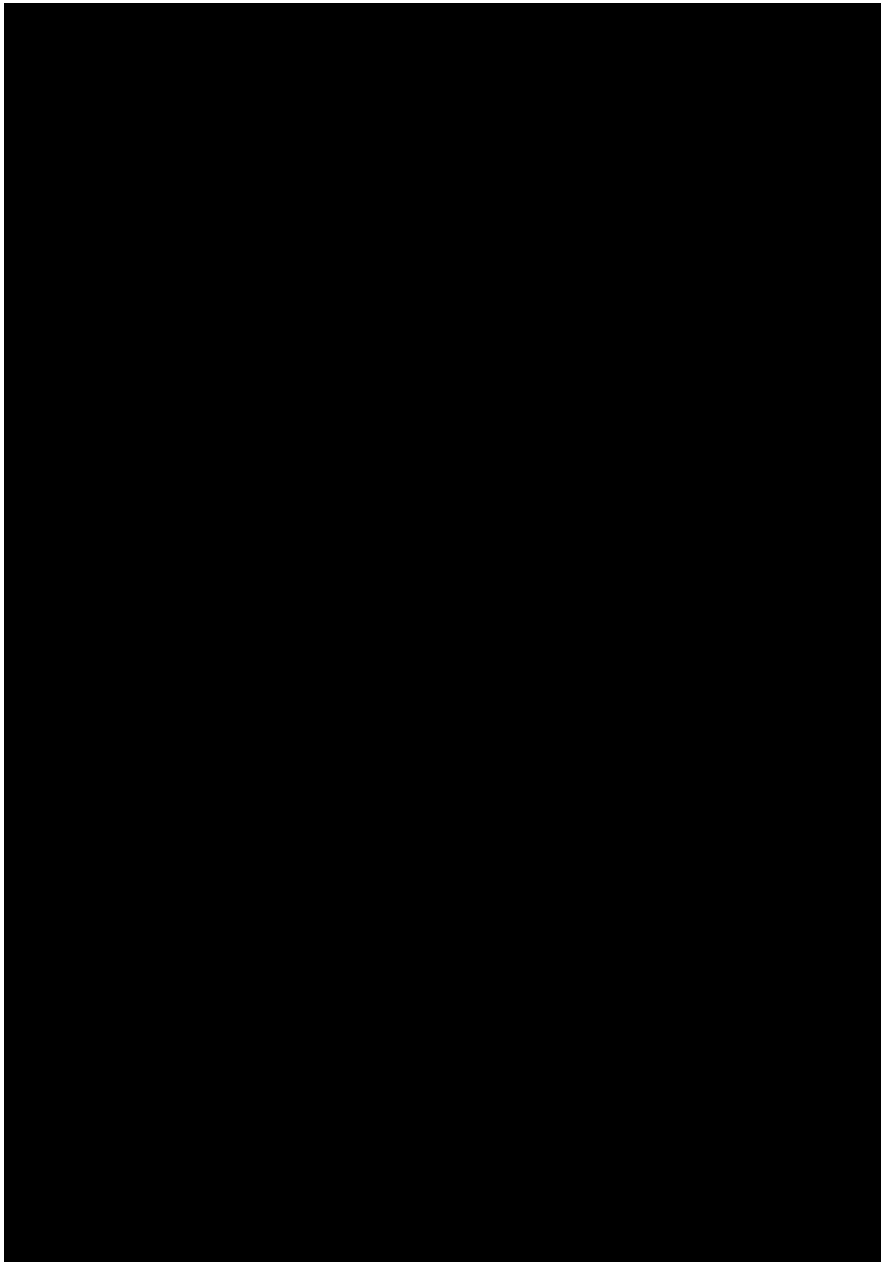


Figure 4.4

**Figure 4.4** Depero, F. 1927. *Un libro assolutamente nuovo. "Depero-Futurista-1927"* (A Completely New Book. 'Depero-Futurista-1927'). Archivio del '900, MART of Trento and Rovereto. MART, Dep.6.4.45. Seven pages presenting the *Depero futurista 1913–1927* book handwritten by Depero in 1927. The entire document exists in the Archivio del '900 but only parts of the first page were used as advertising card as well as in the presentation page (p. 5) of the book *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. 'Exceptional typographical Futurist presentation - Edition bolted machinery. Opinions, critiques and translations: Italian, French, English, German, Spanish, Polish. Depero-Futurista has nothing in common with regular books. It is an artistic object in itself, a typically Futurist work of art' (Depero, 1927, 5)

Translation of Depero's handwritten note, page 1:

DEPERO-FUTURISTA-1913-1927 Dinamo-Azari Edition. A completely new book. 'Depero-Futurista-1927.' Italian Edition of Dinamo-Azari. It can be found at Depero's workshop - Rovereto (Trentino) viale dei Colli 18. Original book of Art. Depero's showcase portfolio in Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Theatre and Decoration from 1913 to 1927. Exceptional typographical Futurist presentation, bolted.

opinions, critiques and translations: Italian, French, English, Polish, German.

Depero-Futurista has nothing in common with regular books; It represents an artistic object in itself.

90 are the illustrations with three-colour out of the text.

Depero offered this artwork as sign of celebration towards HE (His Excellency) F. T. Marinetti. This book represents

of the Aviator Azari - 1922) is indicated as the final painting in the contents when it actually appears on page 73. The logic of Depero's 'Paintings' section is difficult to comprehend and I do not consider it to be part of the 'Wall Manifestos' chapter. The fourth chapter, 'Plastica in moto' (Plastic in Movement)<sup>6</sup>, looks at Depero's 'Complesso plastico motorumorista' (Motorumorist Plastic Complex) invention, a work of art that goes beyond the 'framed picture' and 'sculptures made from a single, static material', and which Depero describes as 'l'essere vivente artificiale' (the artificial living being) (Depero, 1927, 116).

The fifth chapter, 'Teatro magico' (Magic Theatre), showcases Depero's artistic and professional research in the theatre industry, beginning with *Balli plastici* (Plastic Dances) created in Rome together with Swiss poet Gilbert Clavel in 1918.

The last two chapters deal with the production of the 'Casa d'arte futurista Depero' (Depero Futurist House of Art) and 'Onomalingua' (Onomalanguage, Depero's term is itself a new coinage), about which Depero writes:

The final part of the book is dedicated to the Casa d'arte Depero founded in Rovereto in 1921. A decorative artistic workshop managed by Depero and his untiring partner Rosetta.

The tapestries, cushions, knick knacks and repousse copper established themselves everywhere and were present at many regional, national and international exhibitions. These products are abundantly illustrated.

The book finished with an amusing chapter, 'L'onomalingua'. This is an almost abstract literary expression; a curious interpretation of the languages of materials, animals, all of the elements of the Universe: wind, water, storms, machines etc.... This book-catalogue demonstrates Depero's versatility and the progress of his uninterrupted march, which began with difficulty in 1913 and continued right through until 1927.

Depero, F. 1927. *Un libro assolutamente nuovo*. MART, Dep.6.4.45, p. 6

In reality, this extract from Depero's reproduced handwritten notes does not take account of chapter seven, 'Pubblicità Depero' (Depero's Advertising, pp. 183-213), reflecting another contradiction between the two content pages. In fact, the chapter 'Depero's Advertising' appears in the table of commutators between the chapters

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<sup>6</sup> In Italian when used in the field of art, the word plastic can refer to art in general or to the discipline of modelling, i.e. working and manipulating a plastic substance such as clay, wax, plaster or paint. In 1915, with the manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*, Giacomo Balla and Depero introduce the concept of 'complesso plastico' ('plastic complex'), a necessary word for two artists who were not able to describe their works with a simple definition of sculpture or painting. Plastic complex represents all those works that lay the foundation for 'the dream of a total work of art, able to incorporate all of the languages of artistic research, from painting to sculpture, music and architecture' (MART, n.d.). As such, plastic complexes are works that combine different materials and artistic techniques. *Plastica in moto* (Plastic in Movement) and the *Complesso plastico motorumorista* (Motorumorist Plastic Complex) are Deperian evolutions of the plastic complex already explored with Balla, but which further satisfy Depero's need to incarnate movement, sound, sensoriality in general and all of the issues dear to Futurist research.

‘Depero House of Art’ and ‘Onomalanguage’ while on ‘The Illustrations’ page tapestries, cushions, advertising and repousse copper are all grouped together under ‘Depero Futurist House of Art’.

Although the first page of the advertising chapter is a different colour (p. 183), usually indicating the start of a chapter, in this case it seems that Depero wishes to contain the sphere of advertising within the artisanal dimension that is the Depero house of art.<sup>7</sup> The chapter shows some of the graphics designed by Depero for Campari, followed by a list of the house of art’s main customers (p. 210) and, finally, a collection of articles on Depero’s artistic activities and the Italian and international awards it won (pp. 202-212).

Though simple, the above description raises an even more interesting and complex question regarding the inconsistencies in the book. There may be various reasons for this: as seen in the previous chapter, the process of producing *Depero futurista 1913–1927* involved several different figures (Depero, the publisher and the printer) who primarily communicated in writing; this correspondence, irregular and sometimes chaotic, was characterised by corrections and compromises relating to both technical aspects and content.

One could assume that Depero, as a sole editor/creator, could have kept better control over the entire structure. Maybe he purposefully did not want the book to be used in a conventional way (with a contents page faithful to the actual sequence of the content as in the case of traditional static/fixed binding). This would justify certain inconsistencies in terms of content and explain, at least partially, why *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was a ‘completely new book’ and what kind of book it was: a hybrid between the artist’s book, the art book and a promotional book that retained some aspects of traditional book structures.<sup>8</sup>

## 4.2 The layout structure of the pages

According to Lamberto Pignotti and Stefania Stefanelli, Futurist typographical and verbal-visual experimentation is divided into two distinct types: ‘It is necessary to make a preliminary distinction between “parole in libertà” [words-in-freedom], which represent the type of experimentation characteristic of the start of Futurism, and “tavole parolibere” [free-word tables] in which the intention of structuring a verbal-visual language is achieved in full.’ (Pignotti and Stefanelli, 1980, 36).

The intention in Futurism was to make a clean break from the poetry and art that

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<sup>7</sup> Coloured paper is already used to separate other chapters: Wall manifesto, Onomalanguage, Plastic in movement, Magic theatre etc.

<sup>8</sup> On this topic see chapter 7 of the thesis.

preceded it, creating a code in which texts and images – where the images consist of typographical constructions – are blended together. It is a language of collages and onomatopoeia and, although not universally comprehensible as a result, it satisfied the Futurists' expressive requirements.

In terms of Marinetti's work, *Zang tumb tuuum* (figure 4.5) and the texts it contains (figure 4.6) are regarded by the two art historians as typical examples of words-in-freedom while *Le mots en liberté futuristes* (figure 4.7) and tables such as 'Une assemblée tumultueuse. Sensibilité numérique' (figure 4.8) exemplify free-word tables (Pignotti and Stefanelli, 1980, 37-39).

In the catalogue of the *Grande esposizione nazionale futurista* (Great National Futurist Exhibition, 1919), in some cases Marinetti uses the two terms as if they were synonyms. On other occasions, he makes a distinction between them, associating words-in-freedom to 'Futurists that have a particularly musical sensibility [...] and who deform the materials of the tongue', and the free-word tables to Futurist artists who have a 'more artistic sensibility [...] and express it with lines and colours, typefaces deformed and combined in picturesque fashion' (Marinetti, 1919, 'Tavole parolibere. Grande...', 25). The distinction between free-word tables and words-in-freedom is made by Marinetti even if he does not respect it consistently in his writing.

In the book *Futurism: An Anthology*, edited by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman, only the term words-in-freedom is used; free-word tables does not appear at all. Richard Hollis describes *Zang tumb tuuum* as 'a kind of verbal painting', referring to its linguistic dimension rather than its layout. In fact, the texts are arranged in a traditional manner, not displaying any special graphical solutions. Again according to Hollis, 'Marinetti realized that the letters that made up words were not mere alphabetic signs', and therefore words can function as images (Hollis, 1994, 38).

If we want to provide a definition of the two typologies, we could say that words-in-freedom are more focused on the literary and verbal aspect while free-word tables are experiments that 'involve the visual aspect', where words have a formal and compositional value rather than a merely linguistic value (Polacci, 2011, 569). It is a useful distinction, as words-in-freedom retain some impression that they can be read, whereas free-word tables cannot usually be read in any conventional sense.

Another classification of Futurist poetry that is useful for studying *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was made by Christopher Wagstaff: on the one hand, through the collage technique, the readability of the text is 'destroyed', resulting in a text that is more suitable for contemplating than for reading. On the other hand, the author-artist uses typographical possibilities and linguistic strategies, such as the variation of the type sizes, colours and layout, or the repetition of words, in order to

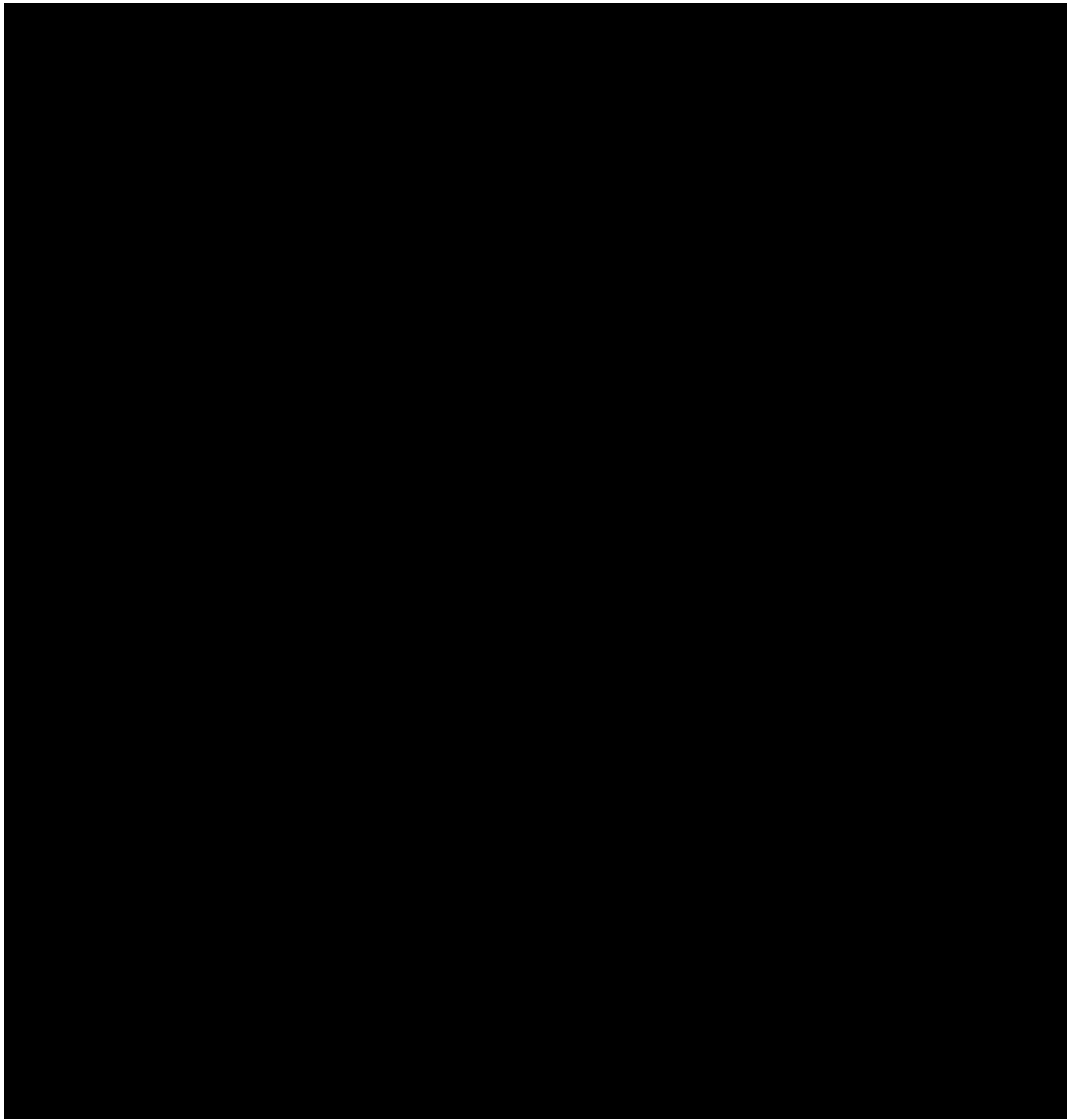


Figure 4.8

**Figure 4.5** Marinetti, F. T. 1914. *Zang tumb tuuum. Adrianopoli ottobre 1912. Parole in libertà*. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of L'Arenario.

**Figure 4.6** Marinetti, F. T. 1914. 'Pallone turco frenato' (Captive Turkish Balloon). In *Zang tumb tuuum. Adrianopoli ottobre 1912. Parole in libertà*. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". p. 217. Courtesy of L'Arenario.

**Figure 4.7** Marinetti, F. T. 1919. *Le mots en liberté futuristes, parole in libertà*. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Bibliothèque Kandinsky - Centre Georges Pompidou.

**Figure 4.8** Marinetti, F. T. 1919. 'Une assemblée tumultueuse. Sensibilité numérique' (A Tumultuous Assembly. Numerical Sensibility). In *Le mots en liberté futuristes, parole in libertà*. Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia". p. 107. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Kandinsky - Centre Georges Pompidou.

Looking at the free-word tables of *Les mots en liberté futuristes* it is also interesting to note how some typographical elements derive from printed materials of the era: for example, the letter 'P' and the extended semi-circle, used by Marinetti to give the composition dynamism, in all probability corresponds with the logo used by Pirelli in the early 1900s.

emphasise and strengthen a specific part of the text (Wagstaff, 1987, pp 48-49). These categories correspond to free-word tables and words-in-freedom respectively.

In the case of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, the typographical experimentation belongs to the second type (akin to words-in-freedom) given that the text remains legible at all times. Excluding the eight chapter ‘Onomalanguage’, none of the other pages in the book contain poetry and therefore cannot be classified as either words-in-freedom or free-word tables. Rather, they are typographical experiments with which Depero communicates his ideas and his art. He alternates graphical-verbal pages, comprising brief texts laid out using empty spaces and graphical elements (e.g. see figures 4.9, 4.10, 4.11 and 4.18), with pages of discursive prose laid out using geometrical (e.g. figures 4.22, 4.23, 4.24 and 4.31) or alphabetical designs (e.g. figures 4.20, 4.21, 4.26).

#### 4.2.1 Typefaces

According to Wagstaff: ‘The types are nineteenth century and the book is almost completely devoid of types associated with the modern typography movement’ (Wagstaff, 1987, 49). In fact, many of the types date to the early twentieth century (see below), but Wagstaff’s point – that the modernist design of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* relies on typefaces predating modernism – is valid. The catalogues of Italian typefoundries in the early twentieth century presented customers with hundreds of types without specifying their author or origin; the practice of copying foreign typefaces, particularly those of the prolific German and English foundries, was common in Italy at that time.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the types associated with the ‘modern typography’ mentioned by Wagstaff, such as Paul Renner’s Futura, spread through Germany from late 1927, while the first original designs of Italian geometric sanserifs date to the early 1930s (Nebiolò’s ‘Semplicità’ of 1931 being an example).

The book uses different kinds of types which are repeated and combined in all of its typographical compositions: for the small body copy, Depero mainly uses the serified types Romanisch (1898) and Archiv-Antiqua (1907), and occasionally the sanserif Aurora-Grotesk (1909). Sansone/Block (1908) and Bernhard-Antiqua (1912), heavyweight types with a gestural design (non-geometric edges), are frequently used for titles and to highlight words and phrases in the text.

For emphasis, Depero makes wide use of characterful types – some with art nouveau features – like Barnum/Herold Reklameschrift (1901), Sezessions-Grotesk (1898), Korinna (1904), Lukrativ (1906); or in any case with strong features, like

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<sup>9</sup> As suggested by the injunction campaigns carried out by foreign foundries – in particular Schriftguss K.-G. of Dresden and J. G. Schelter & Giesecke of Leipzig – on the pages of Italian typography magazines to discourage the distribution of counterfeit versions of their alphabets (Rattin and Ricci, 1997, 66-67).

Etienne (1880), Fette Kursiv-Grotesk (1892 - see Hardwig, 2019) and the fat face Normande/Normandia (1860).

As also seen in the previous chapter, the use of various kinds of types from various periods suggests that Depero was obliged to use ‘found’ typefaces, available at the printing house. Depero experiments graphically with these, treating the pages as independent artboards. In fact, even though some are used more often for certain purposes (serif for the body copy, sanserif for titles), the various types used, around a dozen in total, are mixed and matched without any precise rule applied as standard throughout the book, their function and hierarchy changing from page to page.

### 4.3 Structure and layout

Below, in order to analyse the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, I divide the two different categories according to their function: on the one hand, pages as ‘statement’ operating like posters or graphic advertisements; on the other, ‘manifesto pages’ which include continuous and ideological texts. Starting from these two categories, the following part of this chapter focuses its attention on content, through the translation of significant parts of the text, description of the typographic layout of the pages, and lastly, analysis of the typefaces used by Depero (in the captions of the figures).<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Statement pages

##### 4.3.1.1 Presentation page (p. 5)

Beginning with the page that presents the book (figure 4.9), Depero describes the book using bombastic phrases and adjectives such as: ‘exceptional Futurist typographical presentation, the most sensational art book of our time. [...] Bolted machinery edition’ with an ‘exceptional typographical Futurist presentation.’ Under the headline ‘GLOBAL SUCCESS’, Depero declares: “‘DEPERO FUTURISTA” has nothing in common with other books. It is an artistic object in itself, a typically Futurist work of art’ (Depero, 1927, 5).

The text is enclosed by rules that almost act as a frame for the composition.

##### 4.3.1.2 Announcement of the launch of Dinamo-Azari (p. 9)

Signed by Fedele Azari, page 9 officially announces the launch of Dinamo-Azari. Although it had already existed as a Futurist gallery since 1923, from this page we

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<sup>10</sup> In this regard see the type analysis carried out by Florian Hardwig and published on *Fonts in use* website. Starting from ‘Making of the Bolted Book’ (Camillini, 2017) and the draft of this chapter which I uploaded to academia.edu in 2016, he also looked into the typefaces used by Depero, coming to similar conclusions and recognising some typefaces that I had not managed to identify (these are acknowledged in this text): <https://fontsinuse.com/uses/25601/depero-futurista-dinamo-azari>.



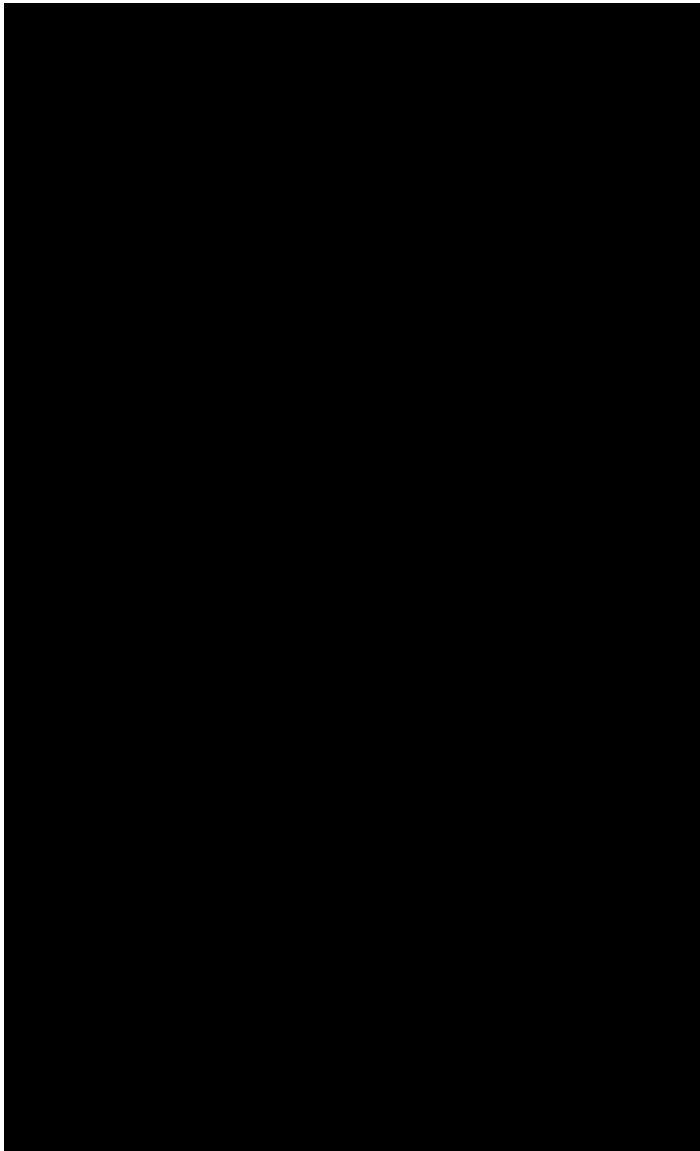


Figure 4.10 - page 9

**Figure 4.9** Presentation page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

On this page Depero mixes together sans-serif condensed fonts, particularly for the title and the parts to be emphasised (DEPERO FUTURISTA, NINETY and the price 100 Lire), the former might be Schelter & Giesecke's Schmale fette Steinschrift. 'DINAMO-AZARI' is composed in a bold condensed art nouveau font; this design was marketed by the Nebiolo foundry of Turin with the name Barnum. The Barnum typeface appears to be a perfect copy of the Herold Reklameschrift typeface designed in 1901 by Hermann Hoffmann for the German foundry Berthold (Richard Gans also sold this design as Regina). The word 'ILLUSTRAZIONI' and the descriptions under the name of the publisher are composed in Sansone, a sans-serif typeface with rounded corners and short descenders produced by the Reggiani Foundry of Milan. This type is one example of a copy type used by Depero and the Mercurio printing works of Rovereto, in fact Enrico Reggiani foundry of Milan renamed and sold a copy of the Block typeface designed by Hermann Hoffmann in 1908 for Berthold, the same design was cast between 1920 and 1926 as Block (schrift) by the Poppelbaum foundry in Vienna. See the Reggiani specimen: [https://issuu.com/archiviotipografico/docs/fonderia\\_reggiani](https://issuu.com/archiviotipografico/docs/fonderia_reggiani) (Fonderia tipografica Enrico Reggiani, 1937). SUCCESSO MONDIALE is composed of Aurora Grotesk, an early twentieth century rational sans-serif typeface cast by the German type foundry C.E. Weber (c. 1909). This design was available from many different European foundries under different names (Normal-Grotesk by Haas, Edel by The Ludwig Wagner Type and Nebiolo Cairoli - see Hardwig, 2019). The descriptive parts (see the three bottom lines) are composed with a grotesk font very similar to Berthold's Ideal Grotesk and Bauersche Giesserei's Venus typefaces.

**Figure 4.10** Page announcing the launch of Dinamo-Azari.  
For fonts in use on this page compare the type analysis above.

can deduce that the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* marks the launch of a broader artistic and commercial venture: ‘art workshop · publishing house · exhibition of paintings, sculptures and various plastic arts · factory and warehouse of original-modernity [*original-modernità*] · posters · industrial art · applied art · modern furniture · trading of ideas · review of Futurism and all avant-gardes’ – and, as highlighted in bold in the bottom right – ‘**esclusività Depero**’ (exclusive rights to Depero), formalising a partnership first formed in 1922 as the exclusive agent of Depero (figure 4.10).

As well as presenting Dinamo, the page describes *Depero futurista 1913–1927*:

This book is: MECHANICAL bolted like an engine; DANGEROUS. Can be used as a projectile. UNCLASSIFIABLE. Cannot be placed alongside other books in a library. It is therefore in its external form ORIGINAL—INTRUSIVE—INSISTENT like DEPERO and HIS ART. The volume DEPERO-FUTURISTA is not to be found on a bookshelf or on other furniture susceptible to scratches. The book’s true home is on top of a soft-resistant “Depero” Cushion.\*)

This final sentence concludes with an asterisk which refers the reader to the address of Dinamo where these cushions could be purchased, making this page a genuine advertisement in every respect.

Using horizontal and vertical bold rules, the layout is divided into two parts, the left side focused on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and the right on Dinamo and notable for a series of words arranged in a halo pattern which describe the company: ‘modernity, originality, launching, synthesis, speed and Futurism’. The entire text is printed in orange with the exception of the word ‘Dinamo’, in black. The composition was sketched out by Azari in a letter to Depero, in which he beseeched him to repeat it ‘possibly two times in the book’ (Azari, 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.7.20.1/2/3/4).

#### 4.3.1.3 | Set Off This Futurist Creation as a Sign of Celebration for F. T. Marinetti (pp. 11 and 107)

Another example of a statement page is the composition that we find on page 11 and which is repeated on page 107. It is an explicit dedication to Marinetti laid out like a half sphere-sunburst (figure 4.11).

Due to the range of exclusively bold characters, there is less contrast in this composition compared with that on the previous page. The entire composition is decorated and formed by black lines. One element that gives the page dynamism is the diagonal layout of the words which represents a break from the traditional composition of movable types in exclusively horizontal or vertical lines.

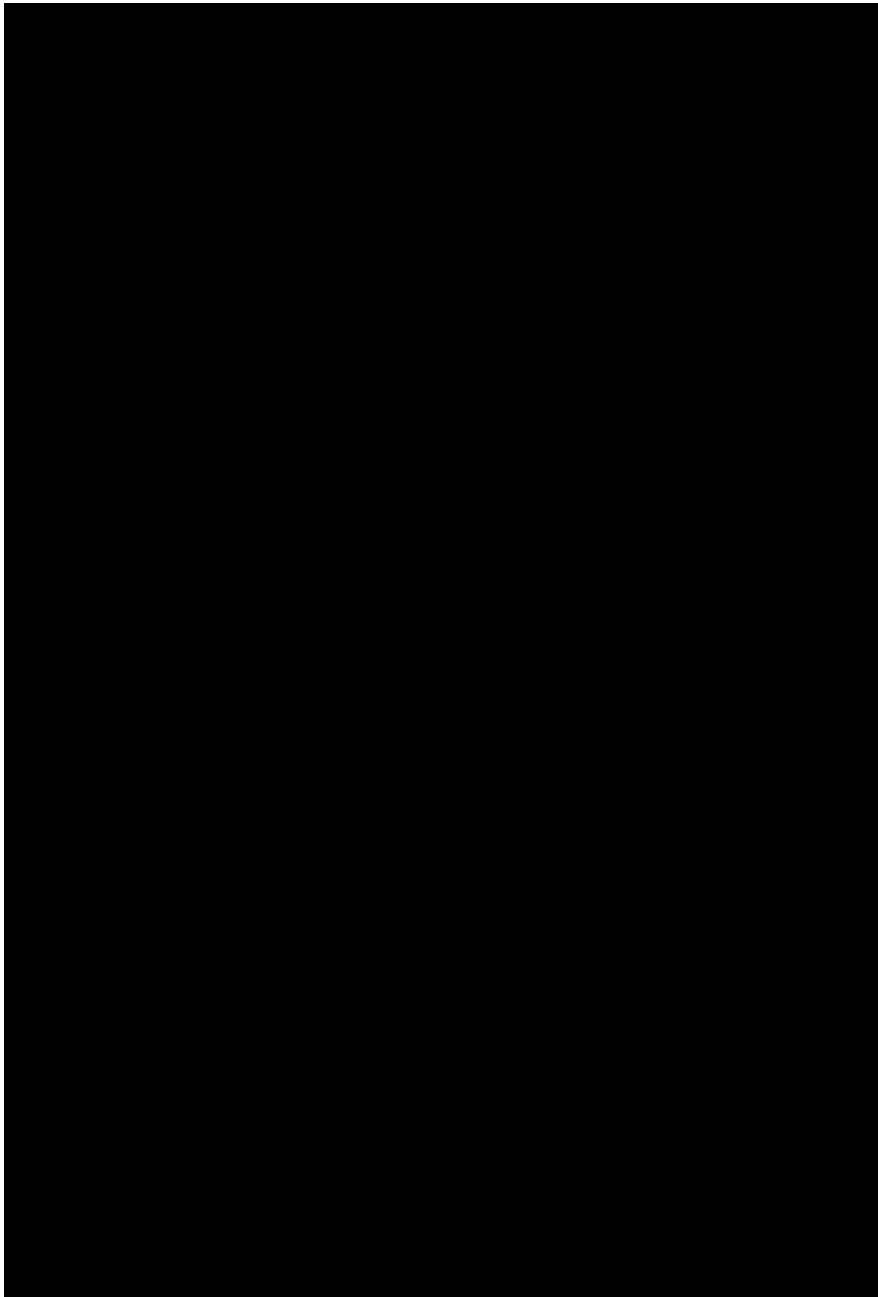


Figure 4.12 - translation of pages 11/107

**Figure 4.11** Dedication to F. T. Marinetti. 'Sparo questa creazione futurista in segno di festa a F. T. Marinetti' (I Set Off This Futurist Creation as a Sign of Celebration for F. T. Marinetti).

Here Depero once again combines the typefaces used on page 5, Sansone, a condensed sans-serif for the W's that mean 'VIVA' ('long live'), and Aurora Grotesk for his signature in the bottom right. The words used to describe Marinetti 'temporale-patriottico' (temporal-patriotic) are composed in Lukrativ, a compressed face with stub serifs issued before 1906, while 'cuore-bombarda' (heart-bombard) is set in Bauer's Schmale Etienne, a typeface originally produced by Wagner & Schmidt in 1880.

**Figure 4.12** Translation of pages 11 and 107. Words are used in the composition that enable Depero to communicate his admiration for Marinetti, combinations of words such as heart-bombard and diviner-diamond which make little sense even in Italian, but they are a characteristic of the Futurist language, e. g., a bombard was a cannon or mortar used in medieval times.

According to Hollis, Futurism is important precisely because of this break ‘with the symmetrical layout of the printed page. It created the precedent for the Dadaists’ typographical innovations in Germany and lent its name of Futurism to the experimentalism in Russia’. From the words-in-freedom of Marinetti and the other Futurists, graphic prints (pamphlets and reviews) were disseminated all over Italy with words set free; words that stood out for their dynamism and asymmetry but which were often devoid of a hierarchy of information and therefore of the type ‘that obscures the message’ (Hollis, 1994, 38-43).

Barry Seldes, talking about El Lissitzky’s typography in *Dlia golosa* (figures 2.30 and 2.31 above), argues that the diagonal layout serves to create dynamism and to ‘to upset the traditional typographic field’. Seldes continues by calling this graphic expedient a ‘violation of the field’, or rather, ‘a principle meant to electrify the sensibilities of the new man and jolt him into action’ (Seldes, 2000, 146).

Perhaps Lissitzky’s pages, even more so than the Futurist pages, assume social as well as formal connotations, representing the vibrancy of the historical context. If Futurism literally (and graphically) embodies the revolutionary charge of Fascism and the first decades of the twentieth century in Italy, Constructivism symbolises the cultural fervour and activism unleashed among the Russian people subsequent to the 1917 Revolution.

#### 4.3.1.4 Futurist movement (p. 14)

On page 14 (figure 4.13) there is an introductory page to Futurism in which Depero compares the movement to a kind of energy plant or large machine, dividing its members into two classes: the ‘centrale di creazione’ (‘creation plant’) for those involved in the artistic production, and the ‘centrale di azione’ (‘action plant’), which also indicates those members that are active at an organizational level. Marinetti is described as the engine. Finally, Depero closes the page with an invitation to create a kind of newsletter for all of the world’s Futurists in order to ‘foster relations’ within the movement.

The layout with the large F and T letters on their sides – probably made from thick rules, not wood type – which obviously stand for Filippo Tommaso, are a precursor to the design of the cover of *Futurismo 1932 anno X S. E. Marinetti nel Trentino* (figure 4.14), a publication created in honour of Marinetti’s visit to the Trentino. In both cases, combined with the full-points (squares in the first and circles in the second) the letters become almost abstract, geometric decoration.

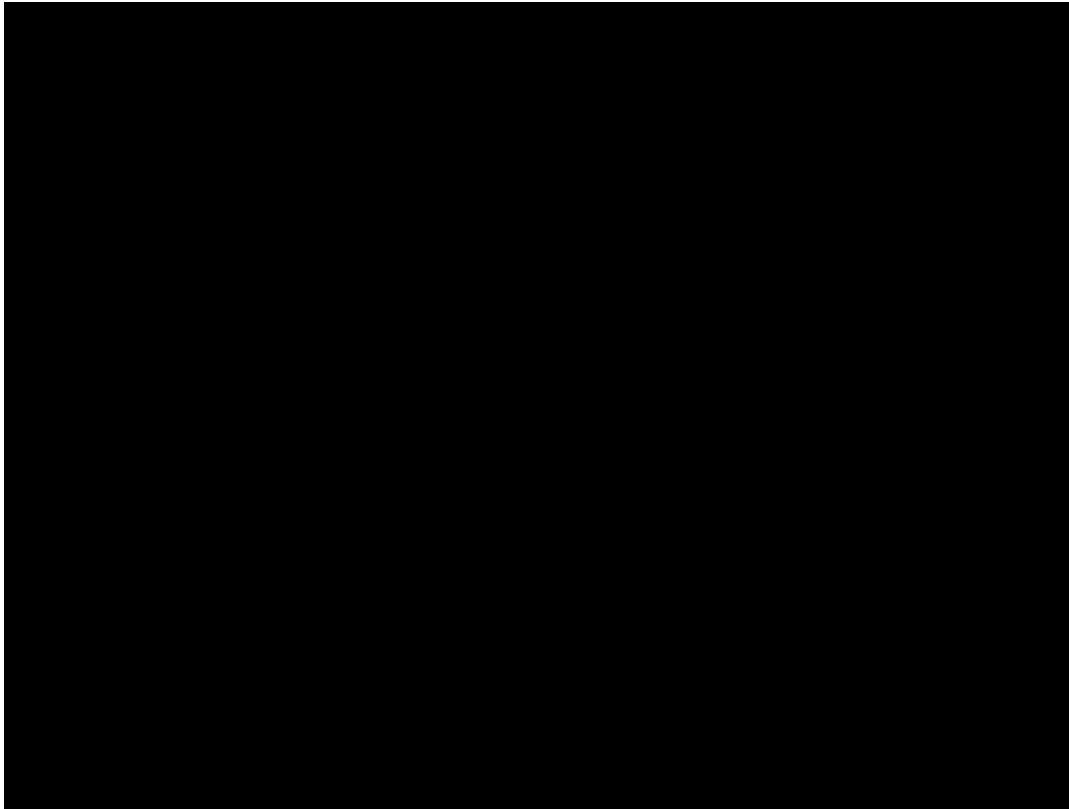


Figure 4.13 - page 14

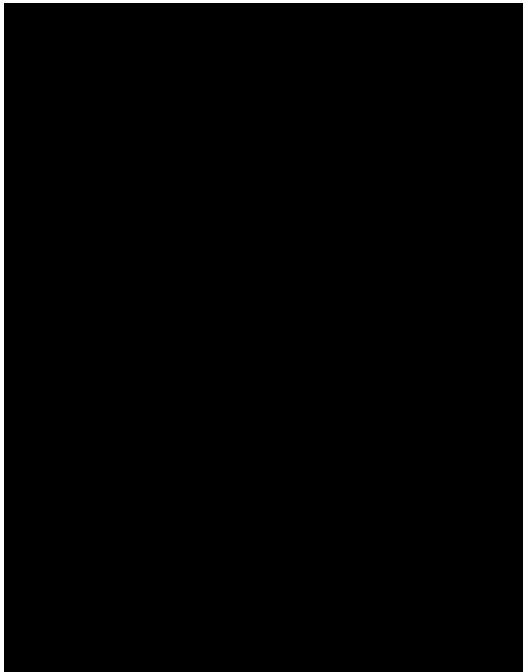


Figure 4.14

**Figure 4.13** 'Movimento futurista' (Futurism Movement). In this page dedicated to Futurism, Depero makes clever use of Marinetti's initials (F and T), which he has enlarged, rotated, and placed at the center of the composition. Here once again Sansone/Block is used for the name of Marinetti, whereas the titles and the address of the movement's headquarters are in Aurora Grotesk, and are combined with the Halbfette (bold) Romanisch (1898) produced by Schelter & Giesecke. Several German type founders had versions of this type, variously called Romanisch, Römisch, Elzevir, or Antik. In Italy the typeface was marketed, among others, by the Nebiolo Foundry of Turin with the names Romano and later Raffaello, only years later Grimoldi foundry in Turin later sold the same design named as Padova. The bottom lines are composed with Normandia/Normande.

**Figure 4.14** Depero, F. 1932. *Futurismo 1932, Anno X S. E. Marinetti nel Trentino*, printed and published by Mercurio printing works. MART, Dep.6.18.30. 24,8 x 34,2 cm, 56 pages.

This publication inspired Peter Saville for the design of the album cover *Movement* (1981, Factory Records) by English band New Order.

#### *4.3.1.5 Azari and Depero Leave for an Artistic Discussion at an Altitude of 5000 Metres (p. 27)*

'Azari and Depero Leave for an Artistic Discussion at an Altitude of 5000 Metres' on page 27 is the only genuine example of graphic interaction between text and photos in the book (see figure 3.1). The names of the two artists are arranged diagonally and interact with angles in the two images, the one on top cropped into the shape of a trapezium. The photos refer to the flight that Depero and Azari made above Turin in 1922 to publicise a Depero exhibition and have nothing to do with the action described (artistic discussion at altitude).

Although it does not have a real information-communication goal other than to reiterate the partnership between Depero and Azari, this page can be regarded as a somewhat rare attempt among Futurist publications to use modern typography (sans-serif type together with photography in a dynamic-asymmetrical composition, see section 2.3.3).

The typefaces used on this page are Breite Magere Grotesk (Schelter & Giesecke, 1870), Aurora Grotesk and Sansone. The condensed sans-serif between the two photos was most likely printed from wood type.

#### *4.3.1.6 Typographical compositions (pp. 145 and 146)*

On pages 145 and 146 (figures 4.15 and 4.16) two typographical compositions mark the start of the 'Depero Futurist house of art' chapter. The first consists of the name of the artist repeated five times with orange letters alternated with black letters. The lettering is drawn by hand, probably reproduced by means of photo-engraved relief block.

The following page, 'Depero's typographical creations', has a strong graphic impact also due to the overprinting of black on orange, a graphic choice also employed on pages 89 and 233 and not common in the typography of those years.

Discursive text is missing from both pages. In addition, the second is entitled 'typographical creations' but actually opens Depero's art house chapter, which only contains products (tapestries, cushions, shawls, toys and so on). For these reasons the two introductory pages appear to have a purely decorative function.

#### *4.3.1.7 Collection of articles on Depero's work (pp. 207-208)*

These pages form part of a section of the book (202-212) that gathers articles praising Depero's artistic output (figures 4.17 and 4.18). There are various types of text: extracts from catalogues, newspaper articles, correspondence, many of which are cut out without retaining the original publication information (author, date, place).

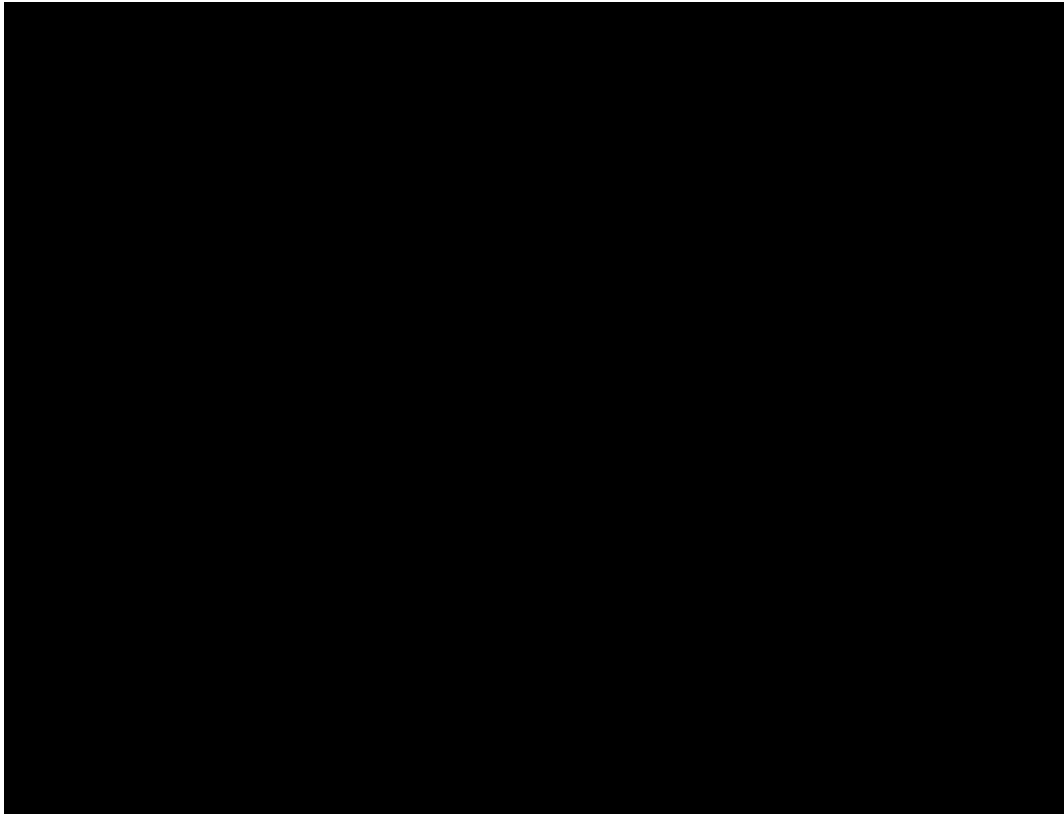


Figure 4.15 - page 145

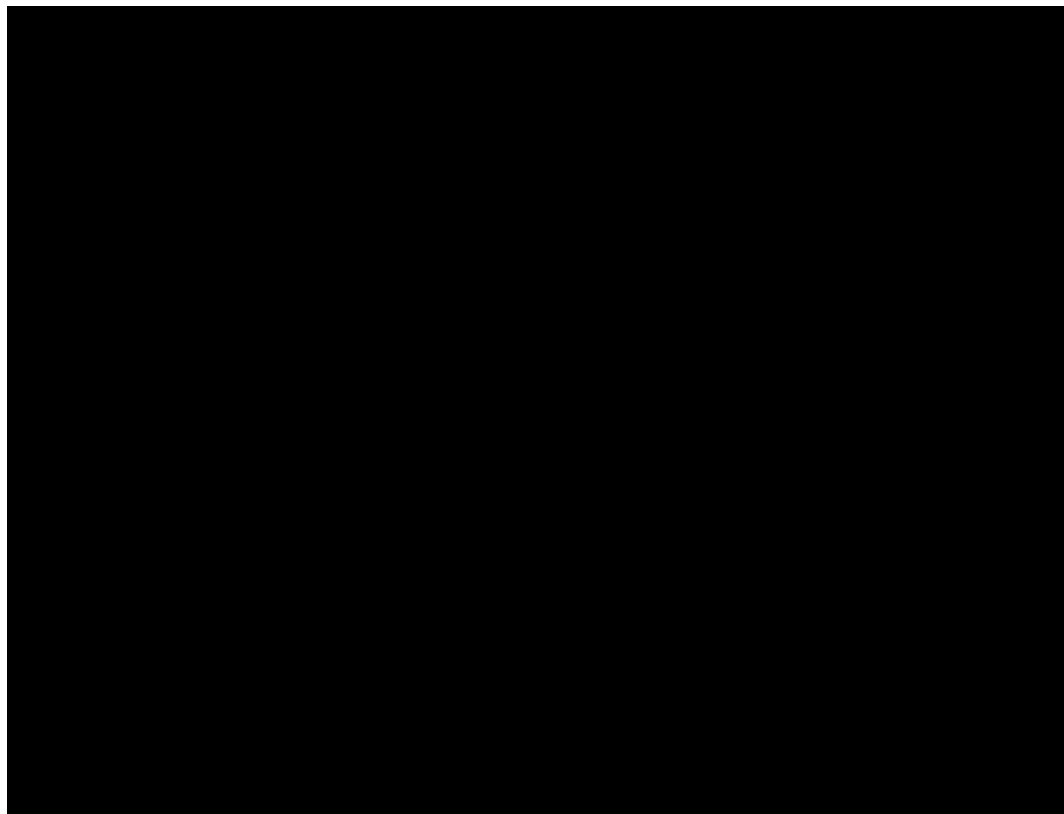


Figure 4.16 - page 146

**Figure 4.15** This lettering on page 145 is also repeated on page 234.

**Figure 4.16** Page 146, the typographical composition reads: 'Creazioni tipografiche Depero' (Depero's typographical creations). Here, Depero combines various different typefaces: grotesk extra condensed and regular, the abovementioned sans art deco Sansone and, finally, a slab serif. No doubt typeset with wood type, due to the size of the letters.

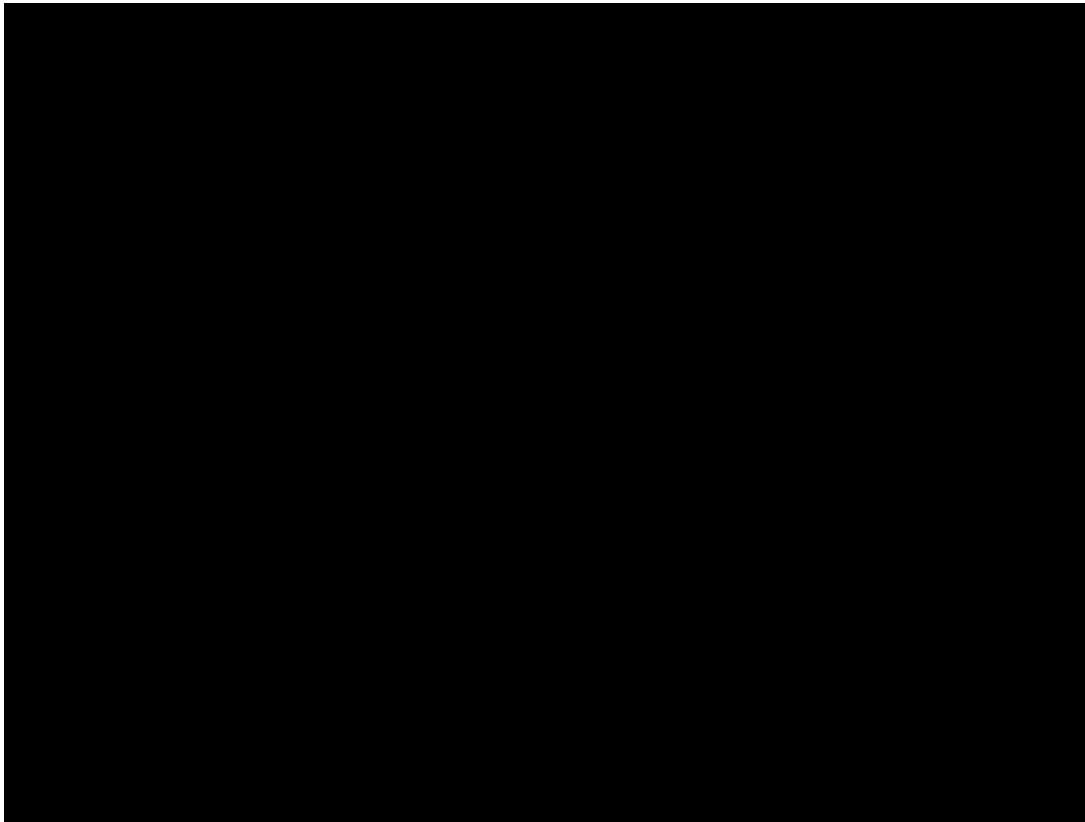


Figure 4.17 - page 207

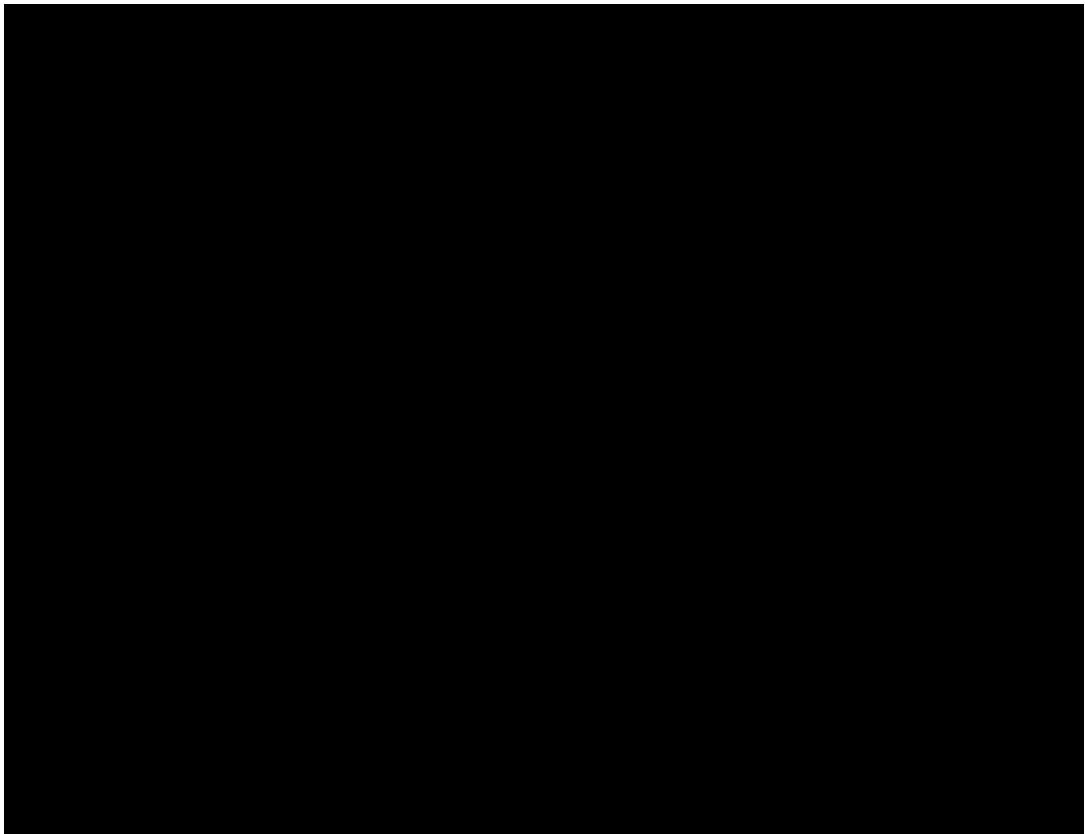


Figure 4.18 - page 208

**Figure 4.17 and 4.18** Collection of articles on Depero's work. Both pages are composed using Archiv-Antiqua type for the text, with bold italic and Aurora-Grotesk for emphasis.



There is no connection between the texts: they are selected mixing languages, year of publication, and the topic and discipline to which they refer. Page 207, for example, has an extract in which Prince Umberto II of Savoy praises the work Depero exhibited at the Monza biennial of 1923; a list of the works published in *La rivista* (May 1926); an anonymous comment on Depero's works at the 1926 *Fiera campionaria di Padova* (Padua Trade fair), and another on the exhibition at the Galleria Bragaglia; an article from local newspaper *Il Brennero* on Depero's Fascist tapestries, and another (with no mention of the publication, year etc.) on prototypes of Fascist pavilions. Again without citing any sources, page 208 has excerpts praising advertising works (Verzocchi) and exhibitions in Milan, Monza, Parma and Paris.

As well as these, the section includes texts on prizes, acting as a testament/proof to the qualities and successes of Depero and his artistic abilities and, at the same time, reflecting the most vainglorious side to his character.

Depero prints texts that already exist, choosing the most salient and praiseworthy extracts, and lays them out in daring and original typographical compositions: blocks of short justified texts, arranged asymmetrically across the page horizontally, vertically or diagonally. Bold rules at the sides of the blocks emphasise where each one starts and finishes, making them easier to read.

#### 4.3.2 Manifesto pages

##### 4.3.2.1 *Fortunato Depero: Autobiographical Summary* (p. 24)

Although it does not include Depero's ideas on a discipline, I have included this 'autobiographical summary' among the manifesto pages because it is a relatively lengthy text (figure 4.19). Appearing on the page that precedes a black-and-white portrait of Depero, here Depero offers a romanticised description of his life:

[...] My father who would get excited at the drop of a hat, he was very religious  
Mother cook all eyes and heart.  
Disobedient I was sent to a German boarding school in Meran: the food  
was bad and I never liked Germans [...] At 14 I fell in love with Rosetta,  
at 18 I whisked her away to Rome.  
Then the War: She earned for both of us, I had no money, just my life and my art.  
I became acquainted with the Futurist tornado and its devilish creators.  
I got drunk on Marinetti's motto: 'to march, not to rot'. [...]  
From 1915 I could only think about Futurism.

Depero, 1927, 24

The text is laid out in two columns/text blocks which, held together by Depero's initials, 'FD', at the centre, form a single asymmetrical composition with the title set diagonally.

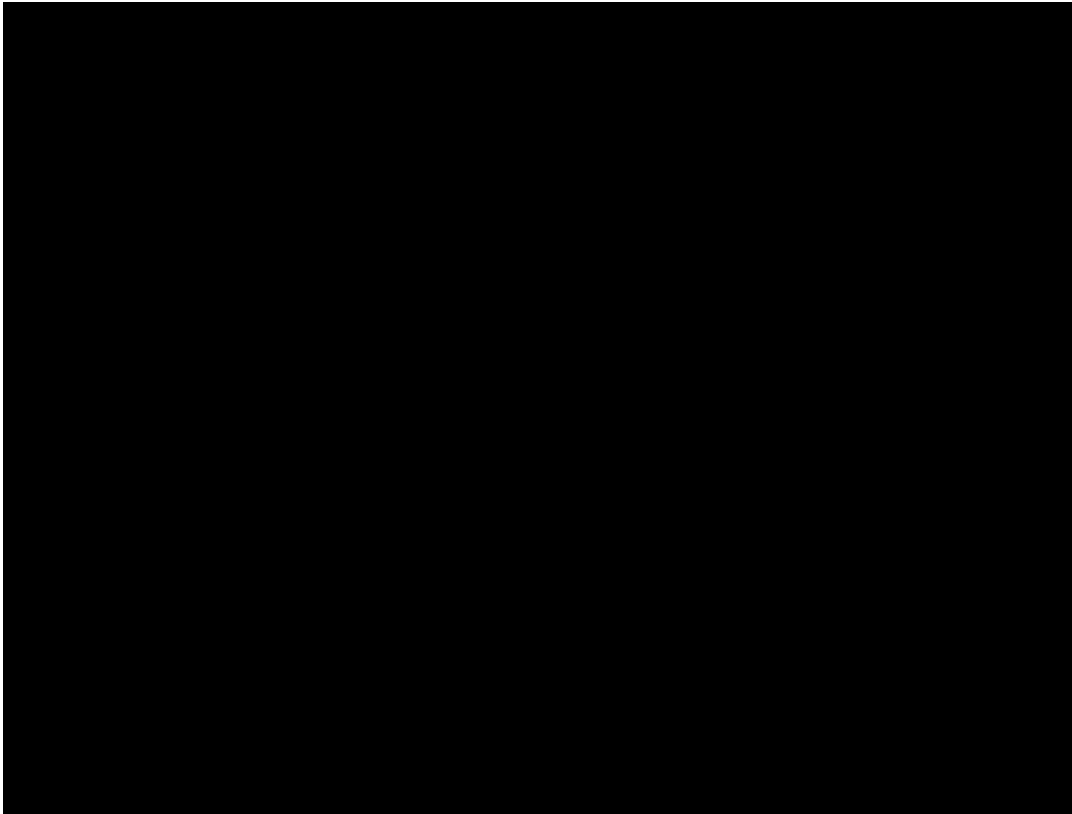


Figure 4.19 - page 24

**Figure 4.19** 'Sintesi autobiografica Fortunato Depero' (Fortunato Depero: Autobiographical Summary). Depero chose the following typefaces for this page: Nebiolo Normandia for the body copy, an Italian version of the English fat face font and inspired by the Normande typeface designed by Hermann Berthold in 1860; Sansone for the title, paired with Aurora-Grotesk VII for emphasis.

#### 4.3.2.2 Depero Glorified by Marinetti (pp. 29-33)

From a typographical perspective this is probably one of the most impressive parts of the book: on page 29, as if it was an opening/front page, we are presented with a square composition entitled 'Depero Glorified by Marinetti' printed in big caps, upside down and back to front on green paper, rather unusual graphical choices for the typographical standards of the time (see figure 7.3 on page 225). This is followed by a long text praising Depero written in first person by Marinetti, which occupies pages 31, 32 and 33, with the last two pages a gatefold. The entire text is laid out in the form of large letters which spell the name Depero and fill the three pages (figures 4.20/4.21).

The content is gushing in its praise of Depero: 'those who have lived close to Depero, experiencing the exuberant, sometimes frenetic gesticulations of his muscular, slim body, always pulsing with artistic enthusiasm, find my description of him as a "magician" completely appropriate', continuing with a lot of anecdotal hot air which at times is apparently invented and nonsensical: 'seven years ago an imbecile that attempted to contradict me with insolence was grabbed and thrown against Depero's "Casa Magica" painting. The old man crashed to the floor'.<sup>11</sup>

When reading the text contained in the last three letters of the composition ('ERO') my feeling is that Marinetti – or more likely Depero, perhaps in agreement with the printer – used graphical strategies for decorative purposes, i.e. in order to fill and complete the alphabetical composition of his name: from the upper crossbar of the letter 'E' through to the end of the letter 'R', Marinetti quotes an article in French by Henri Martinie (1881-1963), taken from *Art & Décoration*, which discusses Depero's tapestries at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris (1925). The final letter (the 'O' of Depero) is filled with typographic rules with the lower part of the letter cut away to leave space for Marinetti's signature.

In books on art, foldout pages are usually reserved for reproductions of artworks that need more space; in the case of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* they are reserved for a typographical play on Marinetti's praise of Depero. The text contains a republished article, includes decorative graphical elements and seems to meander without any real purpose other than to complete the composition and offer proof of Depero's typographical ability, thereby revealing the egotism of Depero, himself as a work of art, celebrated by the founder of the Futurist movement.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Casa Magica', literally Magic House. There are no references to an artwork of this name by Depero: Marinetti may be referring to the picture on p. 97 of the book *Casa del mago (angolo del mio atelier)* - Magician's House (a Corner of my workshop).

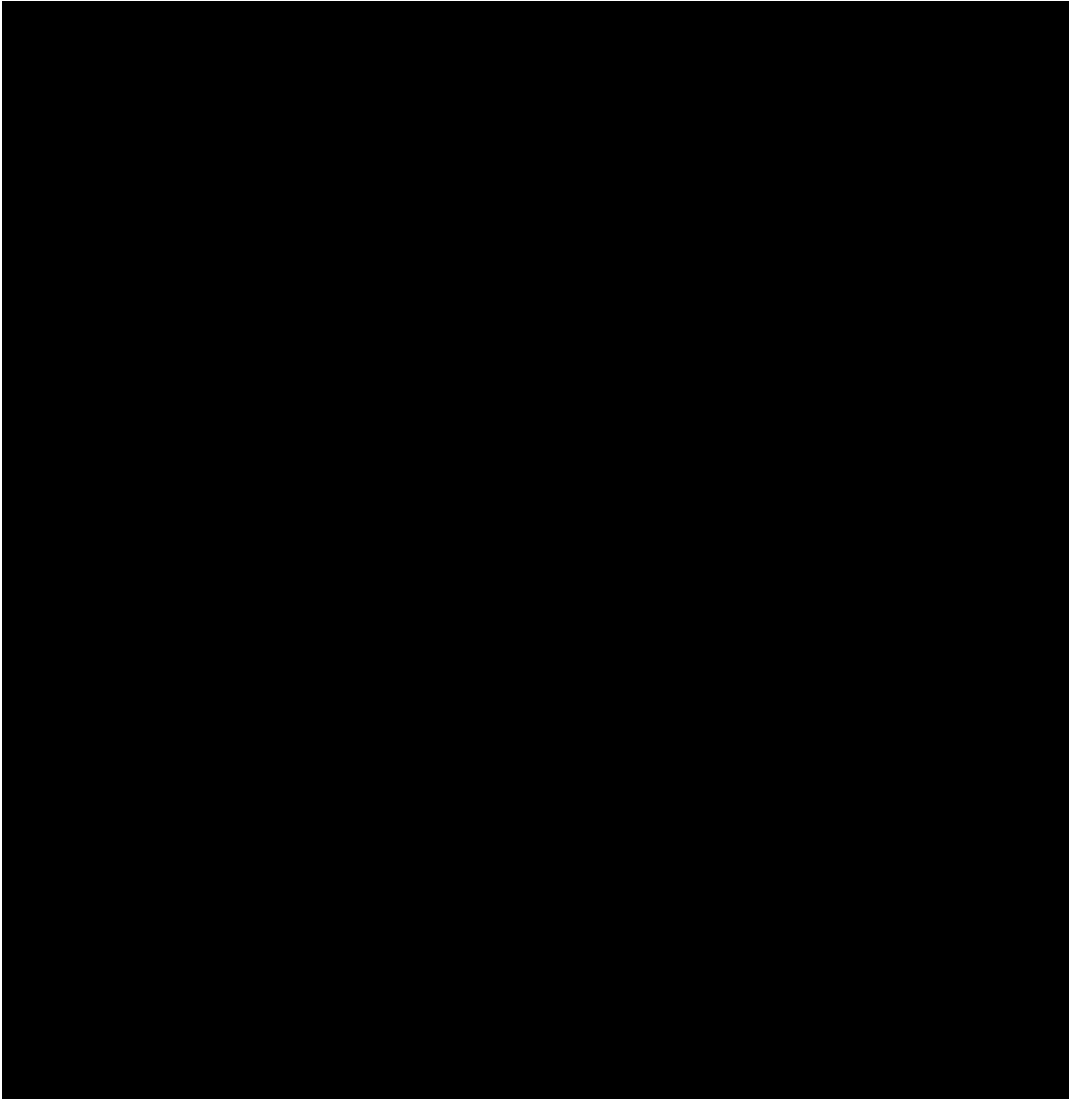


Figure 4.21 - pages 32 and 33

**Figure 4.20 and 4.21** 'Depero glorificato da Marinetti' (Depero Glorified by Marinetti). The text typeface is Archiv-Antiqua (with bold for emphasis), while the title is composed of an unidentified sans-serif (probably wood) type. The ending paragraph and Marinetti's signature are emphasised with the use of Sansone.

With no references or bibliographical notes accompanying this text, we can assume that Marinetti wrote it specifically for *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. The text concludes with an invitation, almost a warning for commercial ends, by Marinetti: ‘Italians I recommend that you love and glorify the masterpieces of this great Italian, now global, master’.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Plastic Art of Today* (pp. 55 and 57)

One good example of a manifesto page is certainly the ‘Plastica d’oggi’ (Plastic Art of Today) manifesto on pages 55-57 of the book (see respectively figures 4.22 and 4.23).

In terms of content, Depero describes plastic art, a contemporary movement, by detailing the artistic avant-gardes that preceded Futurism and how the latter is the perfect fusion and evolution of the previous ones. The following page works in the same way but only describes the Futurist avant-garde, littered with emphatic metaphors and adjectives typical of the Futurist manifestos (e.g. ‘very hard, very fast, flag-red, metallic, our pictures are hallmarked by the serrated zigzags of crackles’).

These pages are also known as the ‘Le pagine rotanti’ (the rotating pages) for the obvious reason that the reader has to turn the book to be able to read it (Caruso, 1987 and Passamani, 1981).

A large arrow indicates the start of the manifesto and the reader then proceeds to read the text segments, which are marked with progressive numbers, in an anti-clockwise direction.

At a formal level, it is interesting to note how Depero completely fills the composition, completing the circular portions with repeated characters: a series of ecc. ecc. ecc. (‘etcetera’) on page 55 and a series of dots to close the circle on page 57 (see close-up details on the following page).

#### 4.3.2.4 *The Immortal Futurism* (p. 59)

This page praises Futurism with strong tones: ‘FUTURISM is the violent expression of our race, aggressive and revolutionary; [...] FUTURISM is the method of Italian art which thanks to MARINETTI has reaffirmed the world’s faith in its CREATIVE GENIUS. The immortal Futurism has given new value to the real traditions of Italian art, which has always been: creation – triumph – revolution’ (figure 4.24).

The text is laid out in a large semi-circle at the bottom of the page. A large arrow indicates the start of the text, almost pushing it down and filling the upper part of the page. There is no evident relationship between these graphical choices and the content of the text.

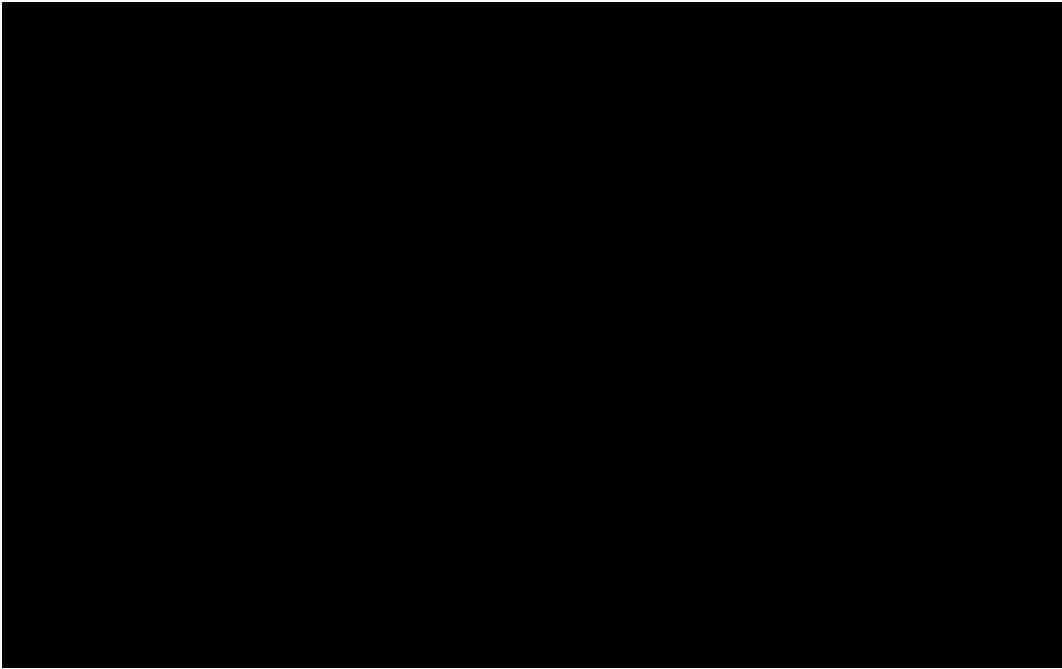


Figure 4.22 - page 55

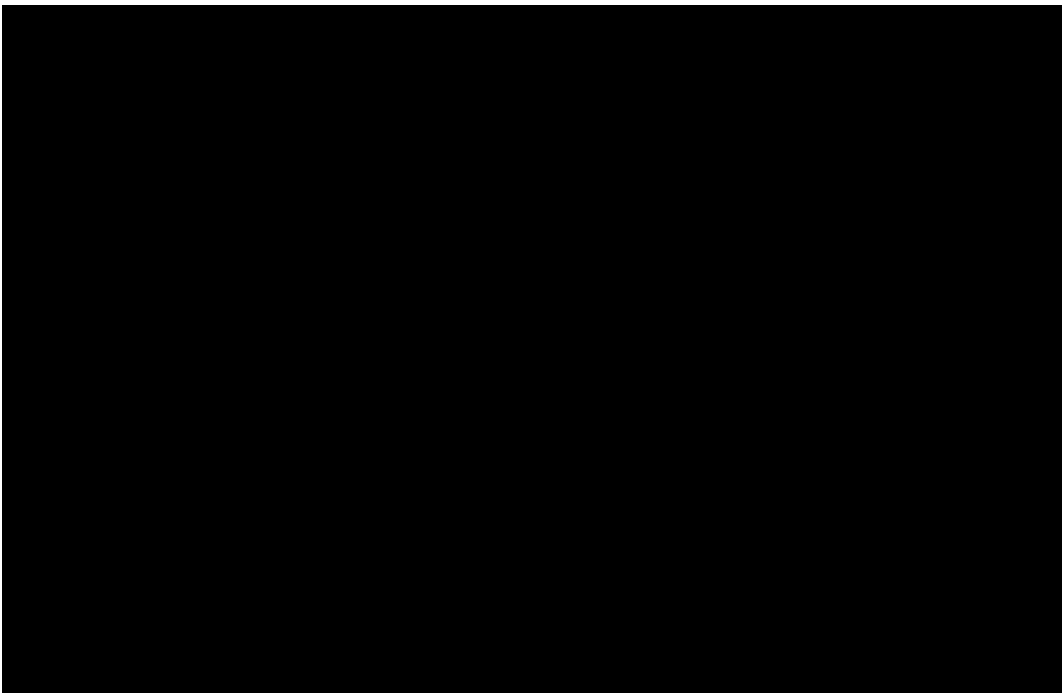


Figure 4.23 - page 57

**Figures 4.22 and 4.23** 'Plastica d'oggi' (Plastic Art of Today). For an integral translation (by Simon Pleasance) of these pages see: Del Junco, 2014, pp. 400-403. The text is in classic discursive prose and the font used for the text is Archiv-Antiqua light, bold and italic (in the second page), a typeface produced in 1907 by Benjamin Krebs foundry. All titles are set in uppercase Bernhard Antiqua, a freely drawn heading face designed in 1912 by Lucian Bernhard for Bauer type foundry. On the second page of the manifesto, Depero uses Normandia/Normande to emphasise the adjectives that describe Futurism, combining it with Aurora sans-serif.

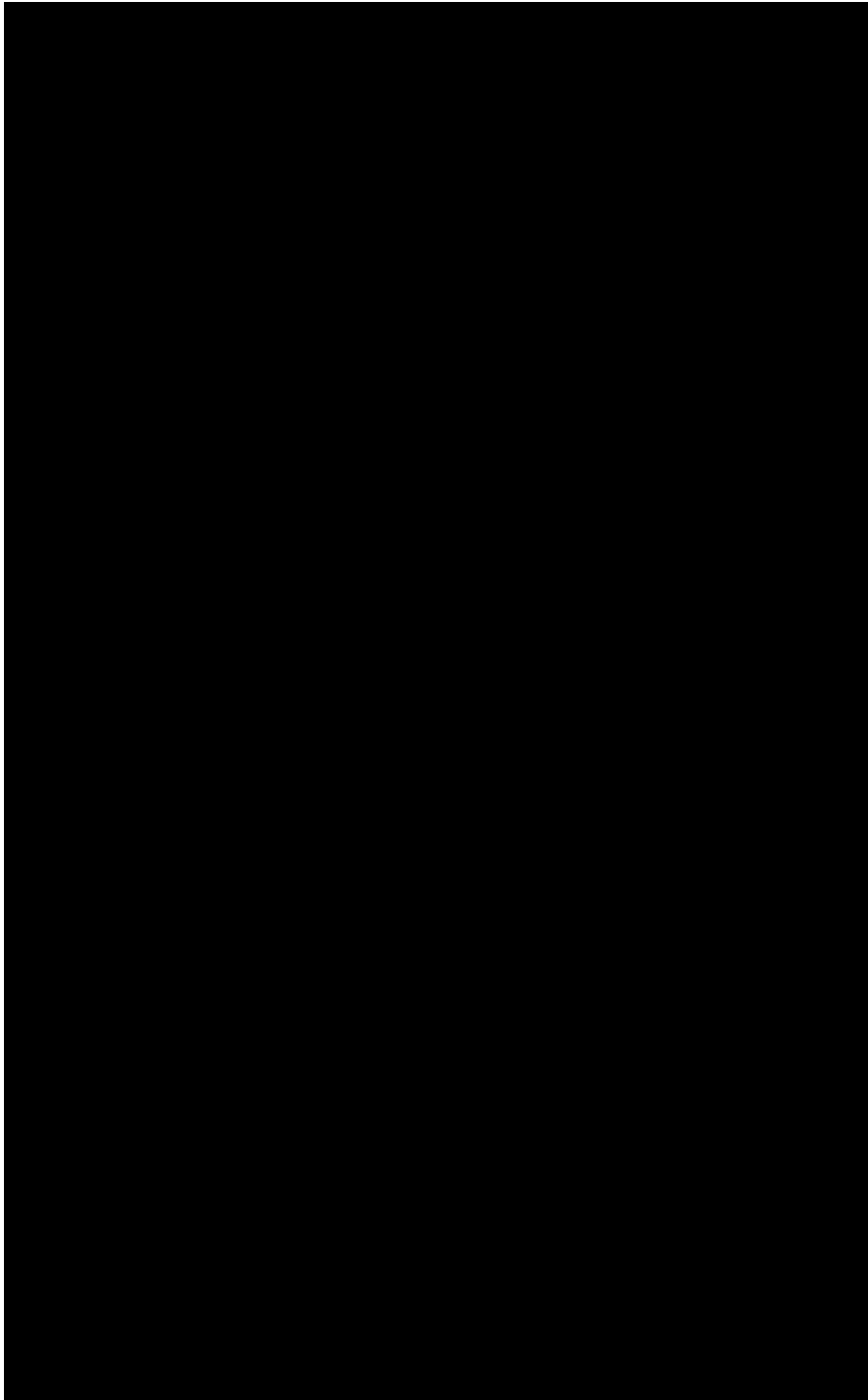


Figure 4.25 - page 69

**Figure 4.24** 'Il futurismo immortale' (The Immortal Futurism). On this page we find Romanisch paired with Bernhard-Antiqua. The bold wide grotesk for 'Marinetti' is unidentified.

**Figure 4.25** 'Il nuovo fantastico' (The Fantastic New) body text is composed entirely set in Sansone/Block (in at least five different type sizes), the title is set in Barnum/Berthold Herold. This page also features Lukrativ for "meccanici" and a compressed typeface variously called as Lodi (by Fondografica typefoundry) or Licia (by Reggiani - see Hardwig, 2019).

#### 4.3.2.5 *The Fantastic New* (p. 69)

'Il nuovo fantastico' (The Fantastic New, see figure 4.25 on the previous page) is a manifesto-text by Depero in which he describes how he has created a 'mechanical and artificial' universe: the left side of the page divides the universe into three categories: 'mechanical humanity, mechanical landscape and the animal world'. Under each of these Depero inserts words that refer to recurring elements in his artwork; mechanical men, women, devils and idols under the category 'humanity'; mechanical trees, mountains, clouds and flowers under 'landscape'; and various animals under the 'animal world' (elephants, mice, snakes, birds, beetles etc).

The text on the right, laid out in a large triangle, uses the typical rhetoric of Futurism and Depero, taking the art of the past as an example: 'In the artworks of the finest artists of centuries past, one of the most valued qualities was CREATIVITY. To create an original a work of art you must have CREATIVITY.'<sup>12</sup> The content, at times almost superficial or in any case devoid of any real artistic reflection or innovation, is mainly designed to talk about Depero and his style. This part is followed by a comment by Marinetti on Depero's creativity, in smaller type size.

Depero concludes this text with a list of fantastical elements that he created and which recur in his works, constituting what he terms the 'new fantastic' ('nuovo fantastico'): 'triangular, squared HANDS, with few or many fingers [...] invented FEET, invented BODIES, spherical PEOPLE, cubic, loose-limbed, screwed-together, pachydermic PEOPLE. Non-existent FLOWERS [...]

The left side of the layout is characterised by large curly brackets which create a sense of order when reading the text.

#### 4.3.2.6 *Advertising Architecture* (p. 83)

On page 83 we find another manifesto entitled 'Architettura pubblicitaria' (Advertising Architecture - figure 4.26), which opens the section of the book in which Depero defines himself as an architect. The manifesto develops on the following page becoming the 'Manifesto agli industriali' (Manifesto for the Industrialists, page 85 - figure 4.27).

In these pages Depero cites Russia as an example to follow, 'where Futurism was adopted as the state art. [...] It is necessary to glorify genius, creators, inventors, constructors with the materials required to make their miraculous creations, with structures and materials typical of the era in which they lived' (Depero, 1927, 83).

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<sup>12</sup> The aversion to the past is typical of Futurist manifestos. Depero also takes a positive view of the past, see 'Il Futurismo e l'arte pubblicitaria' (Futurism and Advertising Art - figures 6.31, 6.32 and 6.33).



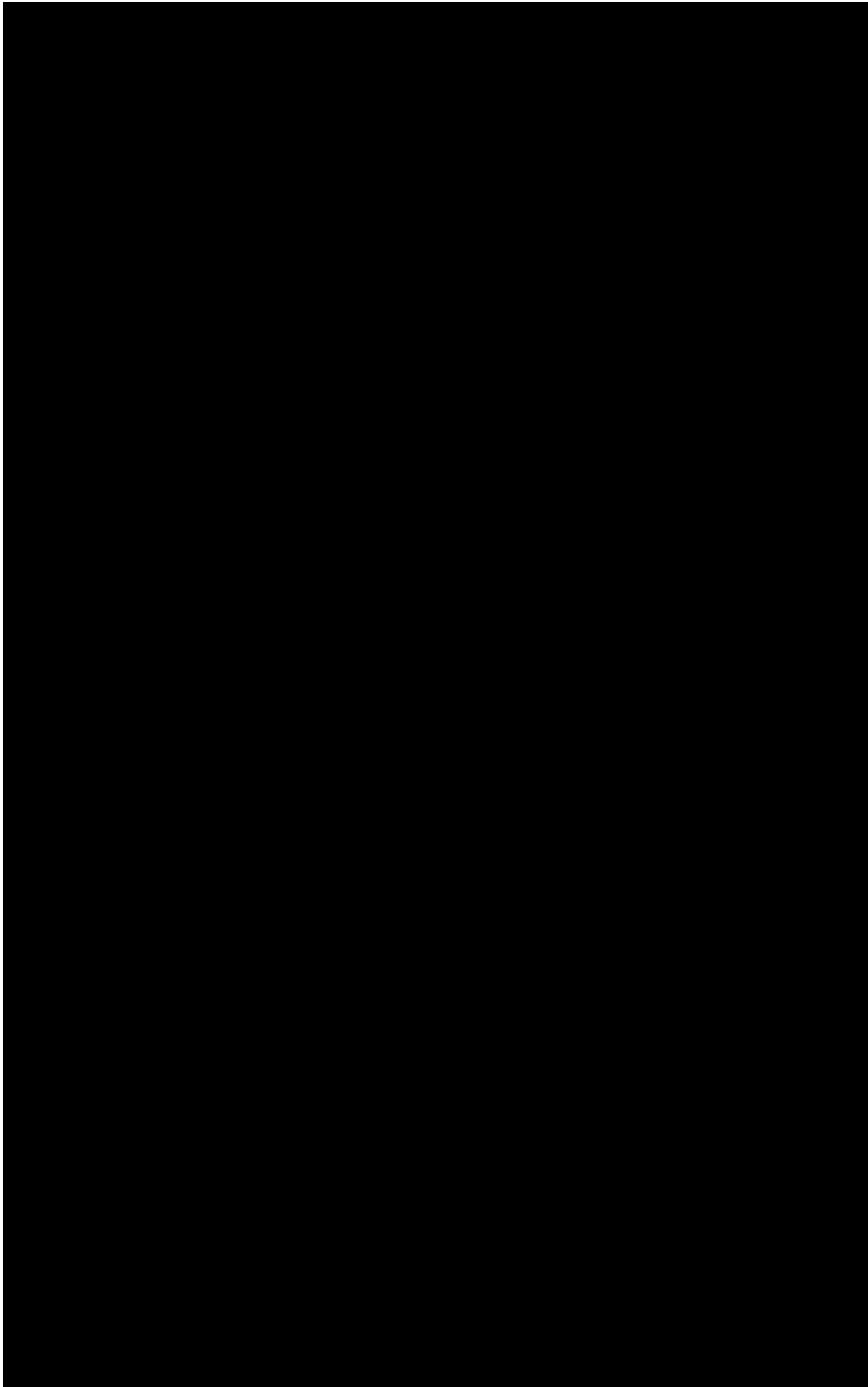


Figure 4.27 - page 85

**Figure 4.26** 'Architettura pubblicitaria' (Advertising Architecture).

Both pages are mainly composed using Archiv-Antiqua type (with bold for emphasis), mixing it with different weights and kinds of types, above all to attract the reader's attention to a specific passage in the text: the lines that form the A's crossbar are set in Block and Normande. According to Hardwig, 'MARTELLATORI-MACCHINA' (Hammerers-machine) seems to be set in Aurora-Grotesk VII breithalfbrett, while 'GLORIE PLASTICHE E VILLAGGIO FUTURISTA' (plastic glories and Futurist village) is in Aurora-Grotesk II halbfett (1912 - Nebiolo typefoundry had a similar design of the latter sold as Cairola tonda neretta. ). The two big uppercase headlines ('ARCHITETTURA PUBBLICITARIA') are similar to this series but not identical. They are heavier than Aurora's VII cut and lighter than the V (in Italy available as Etruria from Fonderia Tipografica Cooperativa of Milan), and are distinguished by a very small aperture in the letter 'C and a short middle arm in 'E' (Hardwig, 2019).

**Figure 4.27** 'Manifesto agli industriali' (Manifesto for the Industrialists). For a more in depth analysis of this manifesto, see chapter 6, section 6.3.2 of this thesis.

Once again, Depero fills the composition in the middle of the left stem, completing it with a repeated series of full-points, while the following line in the right stem is completely blank.

Depero continues by drawing a parallel between his time and ecclesiastical patronage, emphasising the importance of advertising poster and pavilion:

I compare the poster to the HOLY PICTURE; you industrialists are the bishops and popes of yesteryear, our real patrons. As well as a sacred image of your products, i.e. a poster, we will also make a Temple for them, a pavilion, to display them with dignity. Buildings and pavilions where the style of steel will TRIUMPH, the style of CRYSTAL, the style of the MACHINE. Pavilions of light, of crystal, of metals, of cloths, inspired by liquors, pens, pumps, fruit, flowers, bottles, etc. Domes colored with giant pencils, toothed booths, serrated, spiral-shaped, drill-shaped, for mechanical specialties. Pink and orange pavilions made like coronas and chalices for the famous BITTER CAMPARI.

Depero, 1927, 85

In the final paragraph Depero mentions pavilions made of liquor, pens, pumps etc., everyday consumer goods, some of which were produced by his clients (Campari, American Lead Pencils, and Pirelli). In the same text Depero fulfils both a theoretical goal – that of publishing his ideas – and the practical-commercial purpose of proposing them to hypothetical clients offering proof of his creative ability.

The text is composed in the form of two large capital ‘A’s and it is interesting how on both pages Depero seeks to balance his compositions: on the first he divides the title into two words, laying them out vertically to the sides of the large A, while on the second page the title to the left is balanced by a symmetrical block of excess text on the right of the composition.

#### 4.3.2.7 Book Pavilion (*Typographical Architecture* - p. 89)

This page presents the book pavilion designed by Depero for publishers Treves-Bestetti-Tumminelli and created for the third Monza biennial of 1927 (figure 4.28).

It says:

In accordance with publishing house Bestetti, Tumminelli, and Treves Bros., the artistic committee of the III Biennial has chosen Futurist painter Depero to create the book pavilion. [...] Depero has audaciously written a new architecture essay intimately connected with the theme “TYPOGRAPHICAL ARCHITECTURE”. Depero has already repeatedly presented his idea and concepts about pavilion, fair and exhibition architecture, which is generally constructed in a style that clashes with its purpose and content. In fact, we have seen pavilions for cars, machines, planes etc. in Greco-Roman and Baroque style! Rather, their style should be suggested by the lines, colours and objects they contain. Depero begins his architectural programme with the “Book pavilion”, INSPIRED BY TYPOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERS in the most audacious and persuasive way.

Although this extract mentions an essay entitled ‘Typographical Architecture’, the Archivio del ’900 does not contain any texts with this name by Depero and all documents connected with ‘Architettura tipografica’ conserved in the archive refer

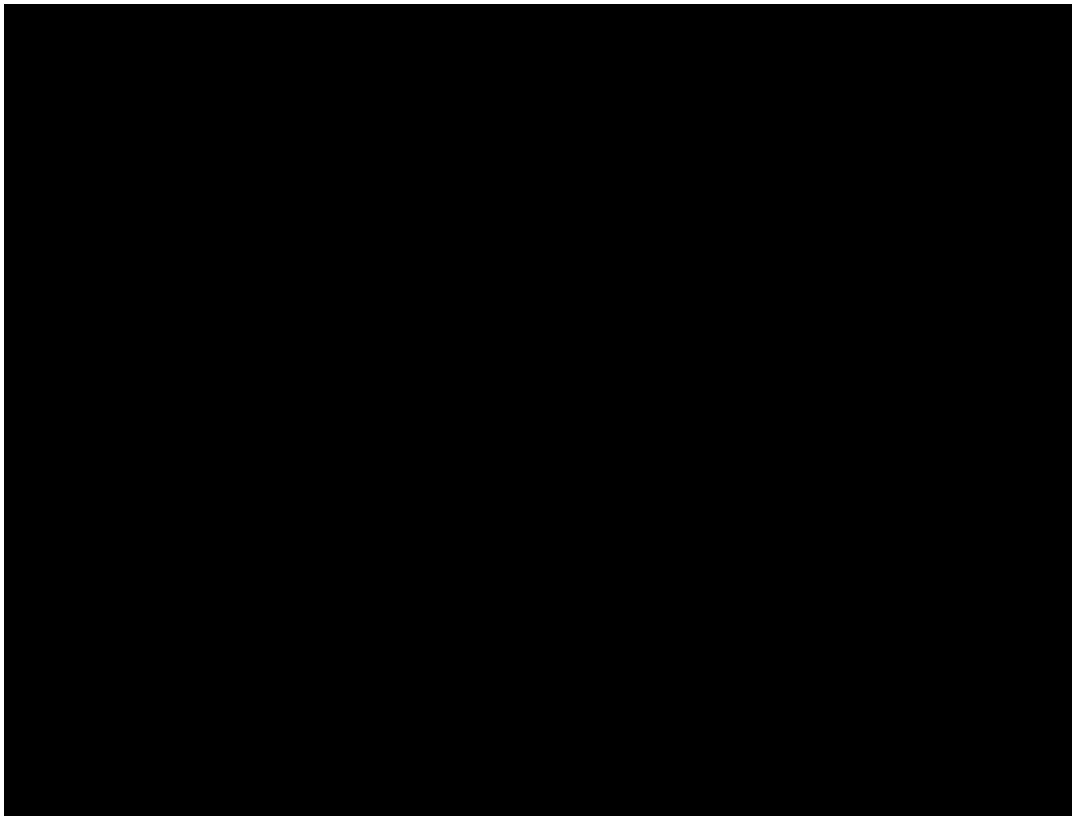


Figure 4.28 - page 89

**Figure 4.28** 'Padiglione del libro (architettura tipografica)' - Book Pavilion (Typographical Architecture).

This page is one of the few cases in which the descriptive parts are composed with a sans font variously called Fette Grotesk, Old Gothic Bold and Doric, paired with Block/Sansone.

back to this page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. The text is written in third person (the only two wall manifestos, together with ‘Il nuovo fantastico’, presented in this way), in a descriptive, journalistic style. To the sides of the composition there are what appear to be two large titles ‘Padiglione del libro’ and ‘Architettura tipografica’ (‘Book Pavilion’ and ‘Typographical Architecture’), between which the text/caption ‘Book Pavilion’ is repeated. In addition, page 89 precedes a photograph of the pavilion exhibited in the garden of the biennial (figure 6.6). I am of the opinion that the text on page 89 is a Monza biennial press release on the pavilion that Depero has perhaps rehashed and edited for *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.<sup>13</sup> If I am right, this use of an existing text (or an edited version) represents a kind of concrete case study on the ideas Depero previously espoused in ‘Advertising Architecture’. In addition, it also shows how the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* are, for Depero, a graphical-compositional exercise in which he demonstrates his typographical abilities.

The rest of the text focuses on the concept of the pavilion: ‘gigantic, permeating, packaged, superimposed letters; letters removed from the names BESTETTI-TUMMINELLI-TREVES form the central and lateral blocks of the pavilion. [...] Other companies will bravely follow the example of BESTETTI-TUMMINELLI-TREVES and employ the Architect Depero [...]’ The extract reiterates the content of the first part of the text and page 83: creating stands that are connected with the materials they promote (giant pencils, liquors etc), in this case developing a pavilion formed from letters for his client that publishes books.

Though ‘Typographical Architecture’ suggests a study on the structure of the typographical discipline (see section 2.3.3 with reference to the ideas of Moholy-Nagy, Lissitzky and Tschichold), Depero interprets the concept literally as architecture made of letters. To this end Burke writes: ‘He claimed to pursue “typographic architecture”, but he interpreted this phrase somewhat superficially and what he proposed did not correspond to Tschichold’s structural approach’ (Burke, 2007, 130).

The layout of the page has a strong graphical impact with a Constructivist flavour and is characterised by three large letters (A, A and T, which probably refer to the title) which are overprinted with the three blocks that make up the text.

#### 4.3.2.8 *Magic Theatre* (pp. 123-132)

‘Teatro magico’ (Magic Theatre - figures 4.29 and 4.30) is one of the longest manifestos in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. It presents all of the Deperian ideas

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<sup>13</sup> The first two lines seem to be an edited version of the letter on p. 204 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* in which Guido Marangoni, director of the Monza biennial, commissions Depero to design the pavilion. In reality this letter is only an extract (see original document part, Dep.3.1.6.8), in which Depero chooses and reproduces only a part of the text and completes the rest of the composition using ellipses.

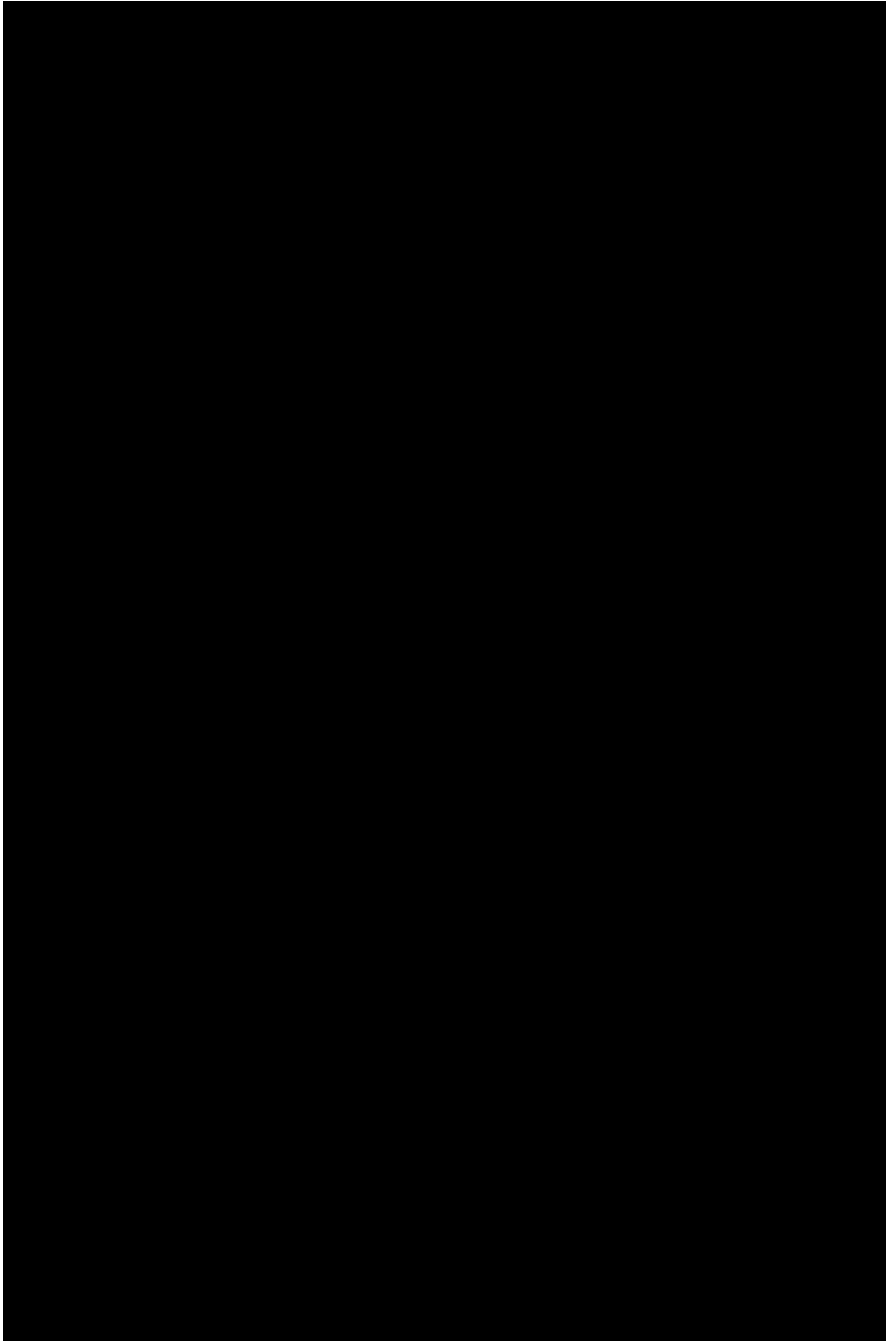


Figure 4.30 - page 131

**Figures 4.29 and 4.30** Two pages from 'Teatro magico' (Magic Theatre) manifesto. The manifesto is followed by romanticised anecdotes (on page 133) with which Depero describes his most important theatre projects: *Le chant du rossignol* (The Song of the Nightingale), *Balli plastici* (Plastic Dances) and *ANIHCCAM del 3000* (ENIHCCAM of the Year 3000, see section 5.2.3 and figure 5.33). With regard to the first of these, Depero describes a chance meeting with the painter Mikhail Larionov in Rome who acted as a go-between between him and Sergei Diaghilev. In 1916 Depero received a commission for the 'plastic scenography' and 'mechanical costumes' of the Russian ballet, which was then given to Matisse and ultimately cancelled (Depero, 1927, 133).

About typography, in these pages, Depero uses all of the typefaces seen until now and on page 131 introduces two more art deco typefaces (see figure 4.30, bottom lines on the right column): Sezession bold (1898 - note the word 'ITALIANE' on the bottom right corner) and Korinna (1904), both created by Berthold foundry.

applied in the theatre and, at the same time, proposes to revolutionise the set designs of the time through ‘movable sets’, which reflect the dynamism of everyday life, and the use of ‘exaggerated tricks’ such as cross-dressing and artificial flora and fauna. The ‘vertical floor’, the use of ‘automatons’ and the ‘merging of the scene with the orchestra’ (Depero, 1927, 129-131).

The linear text takes the form of two columns throughout the manifesto. Only at the focal and most emphatic points of the text are the words laid out in all directions (horizontal, vertical and diagonal, in particular on p. 129), enlarged or emphasised in bold to give them greater expressive power. It is interesting to note how bold rules are used quite unusually here, arranged vertically inside the text sometimes to mark the start and end of an extract and sometimes to give a specific passage greater emphasis.

#### 4.3.2.9 *Onomalanguage* (p. 217)

Page 217 marks the start of the Onomalanguage chapter (figure 4.31) with an introductory text that explains what Depero’s ‘creation’ consists of. The first few lines immediately explain that Onomalanguage derives from ‘words-in-freedom’ and onomatopoeia. For Depero, Onomalanguage achieves its communicative goal more effectively than traditional poetry, using a more ‘rudimentary’ and simple language made up of sensations translated into onomatopoeia and universally comprehensible syllables: ‘with *Onomalingua* it will be possible to talk and efficiently come to an agreement with the elements of the universe, with animals and with machines. *Onomalingua* is a poetic language of universal comprehension for which no translations will be required any more’ (Depero, 1927, 217).

The entire text is set in a right-angled triangle whose hypotenuse follows the slant of the title. Depero also uses previously-seen typographical design choices on this page: the diagonal layout of the title and subtitle; and the addition of words in order to complete and finish the composition (e.g. the word ‘etc.’, see the 12th line down from the top of the triangular composition).

#### 4.3.2.10 *Abstract Verbalization of Lady* (p. 219)

After having introduced the onomalanguage invention, Depero shows concrete examples of his ideas, therefore the following pages are onomalanguage poems and words-in-freedom poems, the first of which, ‘Verbalizzazione astratta di signora’ (Abstract Verbalization of Lady - figure 4.32), verbally translates a woman mainly using onomatopoeia and bits of spoken words, alternated with short phrases that introduce the most emotive parts (e.g. ‘Essa è ben fatta - mi piace

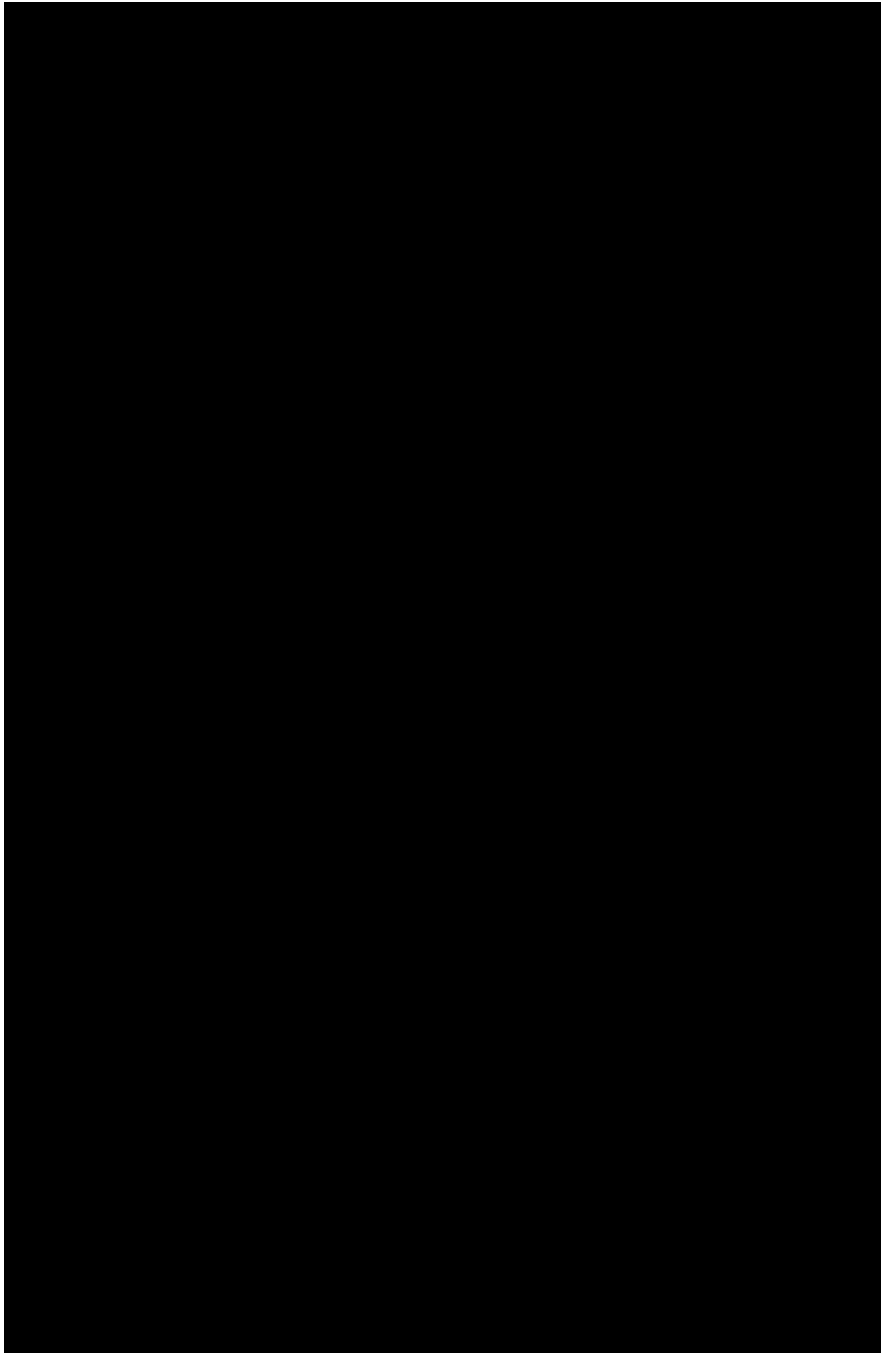


Figure 4.32 - page 219

**Figure 4.31** An introduction to Depero's *onomalingua* poetic language. The text reads: 'it derives from onomatopoeia, from noise, from the brutality of Futurist words-in-freedom. It is the language of forces of nature: wind · rain · sea · river · stream · etc. of the noise-making artificial beings created by man'. The title is composed of extra condensed sans-serif wood type, a design that stands out for its low contrast; this typeface may be the Title gothic typeface produced by the Inland Type Foundry in 1905. For the rest of the composition the typefaces used are those already seen on the other pages: Sansone or Berthold Block Condensed for the subtitle and Romanisch for the body text typeface. To highlight certain words Depero increases the contrast with the text type, choosing heavier and thicker set typefaces like Bernhard Antique and Barnum/Berthold Herold.

**Figure 4.32** 'Verbalizzazione astratta di signora' (Abstract Verbalization of Lady - 1916), onomalanguage poem. The main typeface used is Romanisch; the use of Bernhard Antiqua italic to represent the swishing of the skirt is also interesting. The word 'capelli' (hair) is again composed in Barnun/Herold Reklameschrift bold condensed.

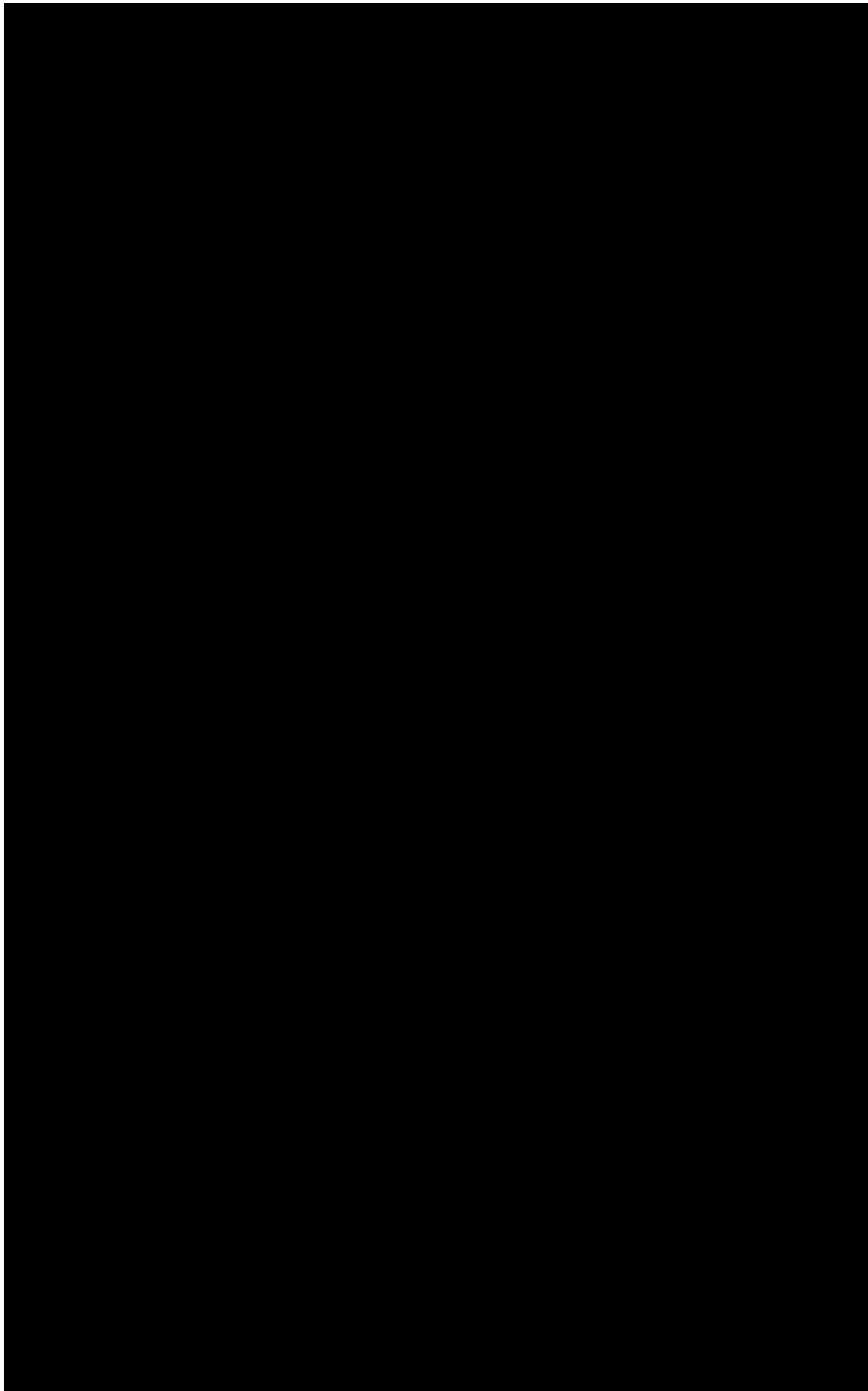


Figure 4.34 - page 223

**Figure 4.33** 'Tramvai' poem.

The customary typefaces are mixed and repeated in this page: Archiv-Antiqua and Romanisch in various weights (roman, italic, bold italic) for the main text, while Sansone, Aurora-Grotesk and Normande are used to emphasise specific words. Depero reserves sans-serif type for this expressive use of typography.

**Figure 4.34** 'SiiO VLUMMIA - Torrente' onomalinguistic poem.

The entire text of this poem is printed in orange ink and composed in Romanisch (roman and italic), except for the title and the exclamation mark at the end of the poem which are set in Bernhard Antique and Sansone.



assai - dentro di me nasce e si sviluppa un dialogo-vago-intimo-confuso' - 'She is well put together - I like her a lot - a dialogue-vague-intimate-confused is born and develops inside me').

Light rules are used as dividers to classify the emotional and physical description of the woman referred to in the title; the thematic compartments created (they read: 'locks, sentiments, clothes, description of the scene') are introduced by short syntactically readable texts and are followed by onomatopoeias and nonsensical texts laid out in the 'square/rectangular' sectors which are created (note the repeated sequence of onomatopoeias invented by Depero in the top-right: 'pizzzz pizzzz' repeated many times).

#### 4.3.2.11 *Tramvai* (p. 221)

This poem is followed by 'Tramvai' (figure 4.33), another poem that alternates short phrases that introduce an imaginary dialogue between a passerby and a tram, an exchange that takes the form of fantastical onomatopoeia and incomprehensible dialogue. When first published in *L'Italia futurista*, the title was spelled *Tramwai* and, perhaps because of the magazine's compositional limits, the layout was completely different, without rules, and with less inventive typography (see figure 2.16).

The text is laid out in three columns and separated using lines. Depero uses sequences of letters of increasing/decreasing size to express the idea of shouting, e.g. 'Auaaa!' or 'L'Italia'.

#### 4.3.2.12 *SiiO VLUMMIA - Torrente* (p. 223)

On page 223 we find 'SiiO VLUMMIA - Torrente' (figure 4.34), an onomalinguistic poem that translates the sound of a stream. There is no comprehensible text but the letters S, SC and SI – whose sound in Italian brings to mind that of flowing water – are frequently used (*torrente*, literally 'creek').

The poem is laid out in a strict geometric form, alternating justified texts with texts aligned flush left. Depero seems to want to set the tempo of the rhythm by separating the onomatopoeias with typographic rules and making use of indents and typographical spaces.

The chapter finishes with two 'Rumorist Songs'. The first simulates the sounds of the Chinese language, while the second is a series of sounds and noises. Neither have genuinely comprehensible text.

#### 4.4 Summary observations on the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

Christopher Wagstaff offers an interesting perspective: ‘Depero gives his message an elaborate typographic form to attract the attention of the reader, thus giving the book the air of a sample book of examples of art applicable for practical or commercial ends’ (Wagstaff, 1987, 48-49). In this regard, the forms of the typographical compositions seem to function decoratively to demonstrate Depero’s compositional ability.<sup>14</sup> And so all of the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* are innovative typographically and, at the same time, they are advertising prototypes.

But this is not the only goal of the book. Depero strives to communicate his ideas on the various artistic disciplines, often concealing messages of self-promotion in them. This is an undeniably opportunistic and self-referential strategy, but it is perhaps only naive on the surface: as we will see later on in the thesis, it is also indicative of Depero’s unwillingness to distinguish fine art from commercial art.

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* presents Depero as a publicist, architect, decorator, painter, sculptor, set designer and Futurist poet.<sup>15</sup> His versatility is tangibly demonstrated by this book, celebrating his own talents while also seeking to attract new customers for the artist. As such, the pages become models for hypothetical advertisements and the book becomes a catalogue of examples in which Depero’s personal content could be replaced by text serving commercial purposes of future clients. The emphasis given to a specific passage or word could just as easily accommodate the name of a customer.

From a graphical perspective, the typographic principles defined in Marinettian manifestos are implemented in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, with various types used on the same page and emphasis provided by their variation in size (figures 4.9, 4.27 and 4.30). Depero makes expert use of the innovative possibilities in avant-garde typography: he varies the colour of ink, also using metallic silver on the cover, and lays out words and phrases diagonally, particularly for pages that are less dense in terms of text (figures 3.5, 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The compositions analysed: circular (figures 4.22/23), in the form of letters (figures 4.26/27) or triangular (figures 4.31), add nothing to the meaning of the manifesto but decorate them and make them unusual and innovative. However, in this particular regard Claudia Salaris argues that ‘more than one connection can be singled out, as far as the page composition is concerned, with The State Plan for Literature: Collection of the Literary Center for Constructivists’, in which the text is composed in circular form and with a serif type (Salaris, 2003, 102 - see figure 4.35).

<sup>15</sup> On page 15 and 16 of the book we find the list of Futurist artists divided according to discipline and Depero’s name appears in every category with the exception of ‘musicians and sound artists’ (see figure 3.17 on page 81). The list of Futurist artists is divided into: poets — freewords poets [paroliberi] — propagandists, ‘machines protectors’, musicians, architects — ‘dynamic set designer’ [scenodinamici], theatre artists, ‘tactilists’, typographers.

<sup>16</sup> See Marinetti’s manifestos examined in chapter 2 of this thesis.

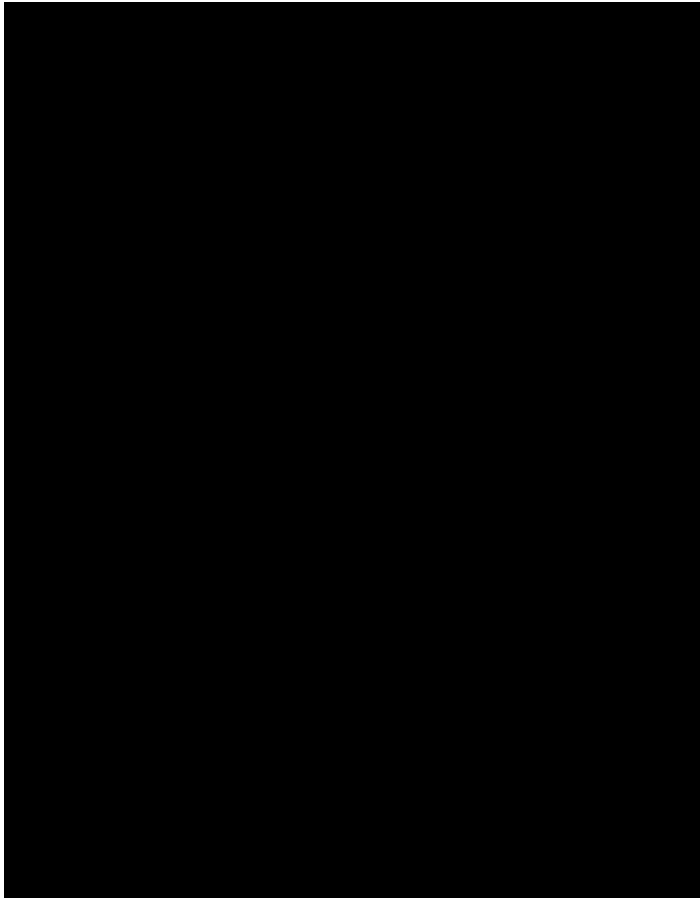


Figure 4.35

**Figure 4.35** Il'ia Sel'vinskii and Kornelii Zelinskii. (eds.). 1925. *Gosplan literatury: Sbornik Literaturnogo tsentra konstruktivistov* (The State Plan for Literature: A collection of the Literary Center of the Constructivists). Moscow and Leningrad: Krug. p. 119. Courtesy of Getty Research Institute. GETTY, no archive shelf mark available.  
Typographic compositions of this kind were very common in Constructivism.

The typographic rules, the various sizes of the type, the diagonal layout and the use of the entire compositional area seek to give the pages hierarchy and an order: characteristics which, according to Hollis, were lacking in the previous Futurist Poesia editions and which serve to communicate the message, whether ideological or promotional/commercial (Hollis, 1994, 42).

Depero took inspiration from the words-in-freedom of Marinetti but moved beyond them by exploiting white spaces as a positive, compositional element. Depero was influenced by, and also contributed to, the fervid period of international artistic, graphical, editorial and poetic production of which both Futurism and he himself can be considered an integral part. Because, as Tschichold asserts, ‘the function of printed text is communication’, we can hypothesise that the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* demonstrate the (reciprocal) influence of the experimentation of avant-gardes such as Constructivism, Dada and the New Typography taking root in Germany which led to the advent of modern graphic design (Tschichold, 1995, 67).<sup>17</sup>

While Marinetti’s books are often laid out in a single column with a single ink (black) and, with the exception of the free-word tables, only have a few typographical variations in the text (size and type of character), Depero uses typographical rules, lays out his texts in two or more columns, employs diagonal typesetting, and artfully composes text within geometric or letterform shapes. However, the quest for symmetry and graphical balance in some of the compositions contrasts with the canons of Futurism and modernist typography. For example, the wall manifestos (figures 4.22-4.26) contrast with the aversion towards the ‘Harmony of a setting’ professed by Marinetti.

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<sup>17</sup> On the relation between negative (blank) and positive (printed) typographic spaces, see Marinetti’s *I poeti Futuristi*, 23-28 and Tschichold (1925) on section 2.3.3 of this thesis.





## **Part 2: Indexical analysis and interpretation**

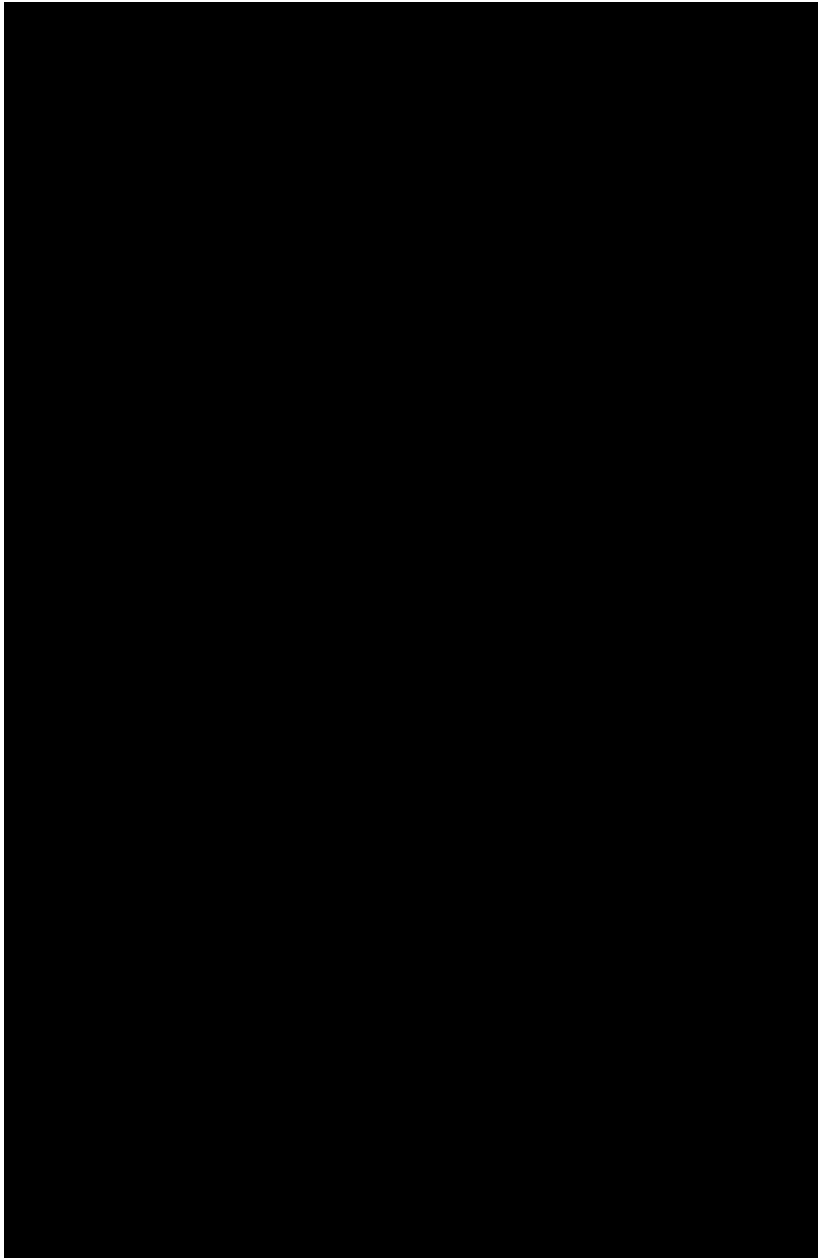


Figure 5.2 - Page 78

**Figure 5.1** Page 21. Mussolini's words also reappear on page 78 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (see figure 5.2). Part of the quote seems to have been used in the German display at the *V triennale di Milano* (1933), designed by Paul Renner. His Futura was shown in a specially typeset quotation from Mussolini: 'We dare not plunder the inheritance of our fathers, we must create new art.' It is not clear whether Renner was responsible for choosing this text; it may have been chosen by the Bauer typefoundry, but it seems possible that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* book was the source for it (see Burke, 1998, 138).

**Figure 5.2** Page 78. Mussolini's quote is followed by two additional phrases by Boccioni and Marinetti respectively: 'It's necessary to hang, shoot, those who deviate from the idea of a grand Futurist Italy.' (Boccioni, 1913. 'Contro la vigliaccheria artistica italiana'. In *Lacerba*. Year 1. No. 17. 1 September 1913. p. 191, cited By Depero, 1927, 78). On Boccioni's quotation and the related discussion between Depero and Azari see pp. 77-78 of the thesis.

The last of the three quotations is distinctive for its use of verbs in the infinitive, as was typical of Fascist and Futurist propaganda slogans, and includes the famous motto revived by Mussolini himself: 'Marciare e non marciare. Affermare, slanciarsi, battersi, resistere, riattaccare! Indietreggiare mai! Marciare e non marciare!' - 'March and don't rot. Assert, soar, fight, resist, start again! Never yield! March and don't rot!' (Marinetti, c. 1908-1909, in Marinetti, 1924, 13, cited By Depero, 1927, 78).



## 5 Fortunato Depero's political involvement and the artwork he produced for the Italian Fascist Party

As mentioned in the introduction, Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* are currently enjoying a new surge of interest. Yet, from the immediate post-war period through to the early 1960s, interest in Depero's work dwindled and his work no longer enjoyed the attention of critics, curators and collectors as it had done in the pre-war years. This downturn in interest may have stemmed from his late arrival on the avant-garde scene and his consequent relegation into the less innovative second wave of Futurism;<sup>1</sup> or it may have been because in these years the focus of the art world switched to new areas of research and analysis, like abstract art and pop art; but it was probably also due to his connections with Fascism, an affiliation and collaboration that did not go down well on the international scene – particularly in the immediate post-war period.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I aim to analyse the political context in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was created and how it is inextricably linked with the Italian Fascist regime.

On page 21 (figure 5.1) of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Depero inserts the following quotation from Benito Mussolini:

We must not merely be contemplative  
we must not exploit the legacy of the past  
we must create a new legacy to stand alongside our ancient legacy  
we must create a new art  
an art of our time

Mussolini, 1926, cited by Depero, 1927, 21

Benito Mussolini spoke the above words on 5 October 1926 during his speech at the Perugia Academy; Depero preferred to omit the final line: 'a Fascist art'.<sup>3</sup> We

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1 Despite the fact that Depero joined the movement in the end of 1914 and wrote 'one of its most important manifestos' in 1915, he only came of age artistically at the end of the 1910s, i.e. after the death of Boccioni and the first generation of Futurism (Belloni, 2014, 348 and Crispolti, 1958, 34–51).

2 To this end, on 1 June 1949 Depero, disappointed at being excluded from the *Twentieth-century Italian Art* exhibition (28 June – 18 September 1949 at the MoMA), sent curators James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr a list of works with the addresses of their respective owners in the hope that they might change their minds (Depero, MART, Dep.3.1.42.15 - 1 June 1949). A week later Barr wrote to John Salterini, an Italian American metal furniture producer and friend of Depero's, telling him that there was no chance of Depero's work being included (Barr, MART, Dep.3.1.42.6 - 8 June 1949). Depero finally wrote to Gianni Mattioli, a consultant for the organisation of the exhibition, collector and personal friend: 'Today I received another letter from Salterini – dated June 15 with attached Mr. Barr's reply, in which he strictly excludes me because my works do not belong to the period 1910–15. Also the following have been excluded on purpose: Prampolini, Dottori, Fillia and others, because they belong to the second Futurist wave. The letter uses these terms, not to more candidly call them Fascists!' (Depero, MART, Dep.3.1.34.72 - 20 June 1949).

3 The extract was given in full by the periodical *Critica fascista* in the article 'Risultanze dell'inchiesta sull'arte fascista' (Results of the Investigation into Fascist Art): 'Art marks the dawning of every civilisation. Without art there is no civilisation. We must not be merely contemplative, we must not exploit the legacy of the past. We must create a new legacy to stand alongside our ancient legacy. We must create a new art, an art of our time, a Fascist art.' (Mussolini c. 1926, cited by Bottai, 1927, 62). For more on this topic, see pp. 77–78 and the conclusion of this thesis.

do not know why Depero left out the conclusion regarding politics, but an obvious assumption is that he thought it was too controversial for the international aims of his book. Although Mussolini had already demonstrated his interest in art<sup>4</sup>, this particular quotation, if considered in its entirety, unites the spheres of art and politics in a single pronouncement.

Regardless of the abridgement, which will be further discussed later in this chapter and in the conclusion of the thesis, the choice of including the Duce's words raises questions about Depero's involvement in and stance on Fascism, especially because the book was meant to collect and advertise the work of the artist not only in Italy but also abroad.

As discussed in previous chapters, Depero's Futurist artistic career and practice developed during the First World War and continued after the end of the Second World War. Since 1986, when the historian of Fascism and Mussolini's biographer Renzo De Felice organised a conference on the relationship of the avant-garde to Fascism, this topic has been widely addressed by historians and art historians.<sup>5</sup> Earlier studies focused on the Fascist ideology in the making; on the exchanges, reciprocal influences and shared cultural references between Futurism and Fascism; and on the role played by several Futurists during the *Ventennio* (the period of government by the National Fascist Party).<sup>6</sup> Recently, art critics and scholars have given attention to the relationship between the Fascist regime and the wider artistic and cultural production under the dictatorship. The exhibition *Margherita Sarfatti. Il Novecento italiano nel Mondo* (Ferrari, Giacomini and Montaldo, 2018) documented the extraordinary constellation of artists and galleries connected by Margherita Sarfatti, one of the

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4 Regarding the affinity between politics and art, during his speech at the opening of the first *Mostra del Novecento* exhibition at Palazzo della Permanente in Milan, Mussolini had said: 'There can be no doubt that politics is an art. It certainly is not a science.' (Mussolini, 1926 cited in Barocchi, 1991, 9-12). Mussolini talks about 'civilisation', about 'a new art' that reflects the contemporary life of the time, an art that belongs to the people and the Fascist period. With regard to the ambivalence between (Fascist) politics and life, Camillo Pelizzi asserts: 'Above all else Fascism is and must ever increasingly become a way of life' (Pelizzi, 1925, 45). According to Bürger, the avant-gardes wanted to reunite or at least reduce the distance between art and life (Bürger, 1984, 50-51). Commenting on Bürger's assertions, Andrew Hewitt adds: 'the utopian projects of the avant-garde were oriented toward stale academic aesthetics, but also toward the aestheticization of life itself' (Hewitt, 1993, 21). Both forms of thought were even more true in the case of Futurism, an avant-garde that certainly takes account of the main arts (see the manifestos on painting, sculpture, poetry, music and so on), but which also revisits aspects of daily life, as demonstrated by the manifestos on cooking, *Manifesto della cucina futurista* (Manifesto of Futurist Cooking, 1930) and clothing, *Il vestito antineutrale* (The Antineutrale Dress, men's Futurist fashion manifesto, 1914); *Manifesto della moda femminile futurista* (Manifesto of Futurist Women's Fashion, 1920).

5 See: De Felice, 1988. Although the symposium held at the Fondazione Agnelli dates 1986, the related proceedings were published only in 1988.

6 On this topic, see also: De Felice, R. 1965. *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1922*. Turin: Einaudi; Crispolti, E. 1986. *Storia e critica del futurismo*. Bari: Laterza, (especially pp. 183-246); Mosse, G. L. 1990. 'The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective'. In *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 25.No. 2-3. May-June 1990. pp. 253-268; Salaris, C. 1992. *Artecrazia: l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. Florence: La nuova Italia.

protagonists of the political and cultural scene during the regime. *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics. Italia 1918-1943* held at the Fondazione Prada in Milan (2018) was not only a ‘spectacular’ display, but a stimulus for academic debates about curatorial activities aimed at presenting the Fascist heritage of the country, not without parallels to the present state of national politics (Celant, 2018).<sup>7</sup> Yet, Depero’s relationship with the Party has never been fully addressed with reference to the content of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. This chapter sets out to make such an analysis.

In 1945, Depero submitted a report to the post-war authorities in Trento: *Relazione dei miei rapporti artistici con il fascismo* (Report on my Artistic Relations with Fascism), in which he declared that he was extraneous to Fascism. Following a critical reading of Depero’s declaration, this chapter will give an overview of the key moments in the relationship between Futurism and Fascism. Understandings of Fascism have changed over time, but for this analysis, I have decided to rely on an encompassing and detailed definition of Italian Fascism provided by historian Emilio Gentile:

As an ideology and political phenomenon Fascism was not the creation of Mussolini but the embodiment of the beliefs, ideas, myths and plans of a mass movement that developed in response to the Great War and as an antisocial reaction on the part of the middle classes. Acquiring its own independence as a new organised political force, as well as proposing to ensure the protection of an economy and society based on private property, it wanted to enact a political and cultural revolution through the destruction of the liberal regime and the creation of a new state conceived on the original basis of the totalitarian organisation of civil society and the political system.

Gentile, 2002, 271-272

Taking the quotation from Mussolini in *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a starting-point, this chapter considers and reassesses the relationship between Fortunato Depero and Fascism by an analysis of works included in *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and a selection of his related works from the 1930s. In examining Fortunato Depero’s political involvement and the artwork he produced for the Fascist Party, I aim to further contextualise *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and probe its relation to the intentions of its creator.

### **5.1 Futurism and Fascism: negotiating the art-politics relationship**

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* included a reproduction of Depero’s painting *Marinetti. Temporale patriottico* (Marinetti. Patriotic storm, 1924 - see figures 5.3 and 5.4), which was possibly meant to synthesize visually Marinetti’s energetic personality

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<sup>7</sup> The ‘spectacle’ offered by the accurate reconstruction in the exhibition was object of analysis and criticism during the recent conference panel titled *Curating Fascism* at the CAA - College of Art Association Conference 2018, held in New York.

(the figure of the man, his gestures and voice, mobilizing and disrupting the background), his oratorical abilities (there are red arrows coming from his mouth) and his passionate nationalism (his heart bears the colours of the Italian flag).<sup>8</sup> This oil on canvas was a gift by Azari and Depero himself to the movement's leader on the occasion of his 'Solenni onoranze nazionali'<sup>9</sup> (Solemn National Honours), arranged by Mino Somenzi, Enrico Prampolini and Fedele Azari on the 23th - 24 November 1924 (Passamani, 1970, 71-72). Simultaneously, the First Futurist Congress was organised through a collaboration between founder members and new heterogeneous young sympathisers of Futurism from all over the country, who flocked to Milan for the occasion (Salaris, 1992, *Artecrazia...*, pp. 30-56). Like many others, Fortunato Depero contributed to the congress with a talk about commercial art, showing his advertising work, and presenting the Futurist waistcoats that he had designed (Salaris, 1992, *Artecrazia...*, p. 57). As Salaris noted, this two-day gathering was not only a moment of propaganda and a signal of liveliness, but also a celebration of Marinetti as the precursor of the new regime. This public endorsement aimed to support the official acknowledgement of the artistic movement, in exchange for the Futurists' relinquishment of their political aspirations (Salaris, 1992, *Artecrazia...*, p. 54). This appears very clear from Marinetti's words published in the journal *L'impero*, before the conference:

Futurism, an ideological and artistic movement, was only active politically in the nation's darkest hours.

During the War, the Italian Futurists were politically united around revolutionary, anti-socialist, anticlerical and antimonarchy interventionism. Their political differences came to the fore after the War. Having contributed to the creation of Fascism, many Futurists left the movement with decidedly anticlerical and antimonarchy sentiments. Others remained with the movement. Others still dedicated themselves to their art, unable to cope with the nausea that politics gives artists. These various schools of Futurism will be established at the congress.

Marinetti, cited in Salaris, 1992, *Artecrazia...*, p. 56

The conference was a crucial encounter for discussing the way in which the movement wished to position itself, and find its role within the new political circumstances emerging from the Fascist victory at the elections on 6 April 1924

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<sup>8</sup> In *Fortunato Depero nell'opera e la vita*, Depero describes the founder of the Futurist Movement as defender of 'Italian talent', with extraordinary oratorical abilities that were able to seize his audience (Depero, 1940, 5-6): 'his oratory lashed the packed stalls, balconies and galleries. Proud of his Futurist madness, in the face of the wisdom of the past, in front of ferocious crowds, Marinetti fired off his shots with perfect precision. [...] Marinetti the orator and declaimer intrigues [...] his oratory skills effectively contributed to the quick and resounding Futurist propaganda all over the world [...] when he speaks he roars and explodes. His images live in the physical space, they whistle, dance and create anguish like a visible sea of pulsating crowds'.

<sup>9</sup> Event consisting in a celebratory parade for Marinetti through the streets of Milan.

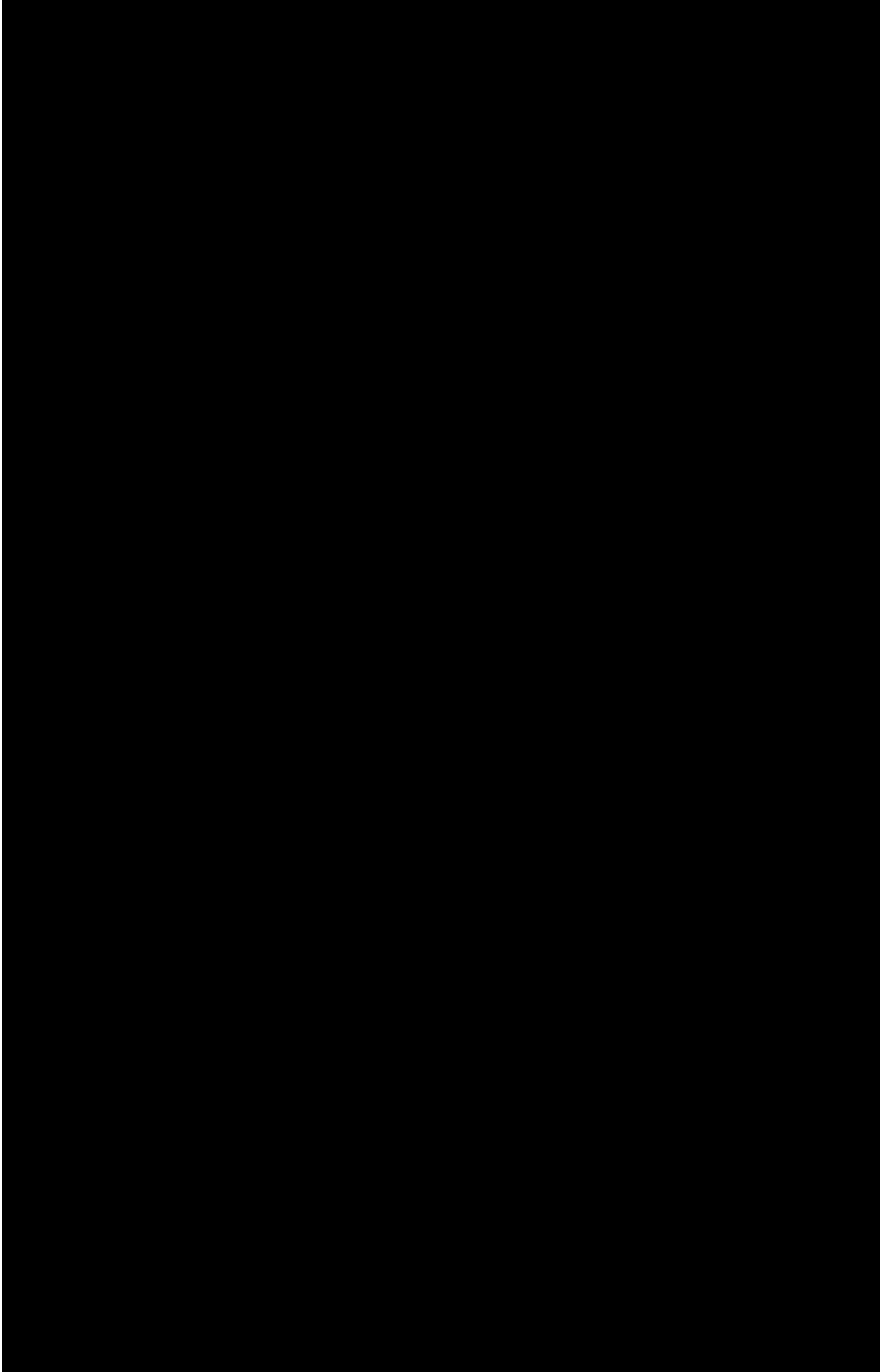


Figure 5.4

**Figure 5.3** 1924. *Marinetti. Temporale patriottico* (Marinetti. Patriotic Storm).

**Figure 5.4** 1924. *Marinetti. Temporale patriottico* (Marinetti. Patriotic Storm, 1924). Painting hung at the Fondazione Prada in Milan during the exhibition *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics. Italia 1918–1943*. Photo: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti. Courtesy: Fondazione Prada, Milan. The frame of the painting was designed by Fedele Azari (see the caption of figure 3.1).

(Salaris, 1992, *Artecrazia...*, p. 58). Earlier, in June 1920, a few days after the conclusion of the First Fascist Congress, Marinetti had in fact left the Party, joined by Mario Carli and Neri Nannetti (Gentile, 1988, 136). There were several reasons behind this decision, according to their declarations. Despite joining the *Fasci italiani di combattimento*<sup>10</sup> a year earlier in 1919, they now considered the positions of the Fascist Party reactionary compared to the initial revolutionary charge. Thus, the Futurist leader and his supporters had decided to cut the connection with Italian politics and Mussolini's Party: in their views, Fascism was becoming reactionary and monarchical, and Mussolini too politically opportunistic: the combination of Fascism with Futurists' revolutionary, republican and anti-Catholic stance would have been impossible (Gentile, 1988, 136-137). These events were a rupture in the strong relationship between the two movements that had characterised the previous two years.

This rupture came after earlier collaborations, sharing of ideas and style of action. As mentioned earlier, scholars have dedicated much attention to the relationship between the two movements. In his *Futurismo e fascismo*, Marinetti goes as far as attributing Futurism the role of the precursor of Fascism (Marinetti, 1924).<sup>11</sup> Even at the time, this position was considered arguable, but scholars agree on the existence of moments of shared political action and ideological and stylistic similarities. The two movements collaborated towards similar objectives, especially in 1919, to the point that Futurists participated in the foundation of the Fasci of Combat in Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan in 1919. Yet, even though Walter Adamson demonstrated a stronger link between Fascism and the Modernism of the intellectuals gravitating around the Florence magazine *La voce* (Adamson, 1990, 359-390), there were evident similarities and congruence between Futurism and Fascism, especially in their Nationalist Modernism which emerged from the experience of the First World War (Gentile, 1996, 40).

According to Roger Griffin, Fascism represented an alternative Modernism and not a rejection of modernity (Griffin, 1991, 47-48), as historians had argued during

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<sup>10</sup> The *Fasci italiani di combattimento* (Italian Fasci of Combat) was Benito Mussolini's first political movement and later evolved into the PNF, the National Fascist Party, in 1921. It was founded following the meeting held in Milan at the Palazzo degli Esercenti in Piazza San Sepolcro on 23 March 1919. Those that attended the meeting are also known as the *sansepolcristi*, a synonym for the founders of Italian Fascism.

<sup>11</sup> In the article 'L'arte fascista futurista' (The Futurist Fascist art), Marinetti adds: the Futurists foresaw everything 18 years ago, in a weak Italy they imposed innovative Italian pride with their fists and sticks. They went to war with fearless Italian pride, they didn't give up hope at Caporetto, [...] they were Mussolini's first supporters in the squares, in the political meetings, in prison' (Marinetti, c. 1927, n.p., MART, Dep.8.1.2.86 - see figure 5.5). At the same time, Mussolini openly stated his debts to Futurism: 'I formally declare that without Futurism there would never have been a Fascist revolution' (Mussolini cited by Gentile, 2003, 41).



Figure 5.5



Figure 5.6



Figure 5.7 - page 93

**Figure 5.5** Marinetti, F. T. 1927. 'L'arte fascista futurista' (The Futurist Fascist Art). Press clipping extracted from an unknown newspaper, undated (probably c. 1927). MART, Dep.8.1.2.86-88. Marinetti's words are followed by a Fascist pavilion designed by Depero.

**Figure 5.6** c. 1925. *Padiglione tricolore. Verde-bianco-rosso* (Tricolour Pavilion. Green-White-Red). Photograph: gelatin on silver print on fiber-based paper. 35 × 29.5 cm. MART, Dep.7.1.3.4.88. This prototype model for a Fascist pavilion has never been realised.

**Figure 5.7** 1927. *Padiglione Tricolore. Verde-Bianco-Rosso* (Tricolour Pavilion. Green-White-Red). *Depero futurista 1913-1927* includes exactly the same picture displayed in the Marinetti's article alongside another unrealised model for a Fascist pavilion, c. 1925.

the immediate postwar period (Gentile, 2002, 43-44). Facing the industrialisation and urbanisation of the country, Fascism participated in the conflicts and tensions of contemporary social change, working towards the construction of a modern and future Italy based on a totalitarian ideology (Gentile, 2002, 265-307).<sup>12</sup> Futurists were undoubtedly celebrators of modernity, since their very first manifesto in 1909: machines, speed, and movement were expressed in both stylistic and subject choices of their works, and evidently resonated with declarations of a young Benito Mussolini: ‘the word that synthesises and unmistakably characterises our world-wide century character is movement. Movement everywhere and acceleration of the rhythms of our lives’ (Mussolini, cited by Gentile, 2002, 289). Boccioni defined the Futurists’ attitude as ‘modernolatria’ (‘modernolatr’y’), meaning the union between modernity and idolatry (Boccioni, 1914).<sup>13</sup> Matei Calinescu has pointed out that avant-gardes tend to ‘a radicalized and strongly utopianized version of modernity [...], a sharp sense of militancy, praise of non-conformism, courageous precursory exploration’ (Calinescu, 1987, 95). Nonetheless, the Fascist ideology attracted Futurists as well as other intellectuals who saw in the unfolding of the Futurist movement’s political agenda a materialisation of such aspirations of modernity (Gentile, 2002, 287). They were fascinated by the Fascist call for mobilisation aiming at the regeneration of the Italians and the construction of a new civilisation of Italy-specific modernity.<sup>14</sup>

The cultural movements and intellectuals pursuing modernity shared the cult of the nation and a nationalist agenda, expressed in the myth, rooted in the Italian Risorgimento, of *Italianismo* (italianism), meaning the belief that Italy’s destiny for the twentieth century was to be marked by great successes. Emilio Gentile named this Italian way to modernity ‘Italian Modernism’ (Gentile, 2002, 288-289). It entailed an enthusiastic attitude and rejection of any form of nihilism and decadence, and an understanding of modernity as an acceleration of the rhythm of time, an invention and multiplication of the technological means, and human exploitation of nature. These processes were supported by the aim to grow Italy into a country able to compete and excel on the world stage.

The renewal envisioned for the country was complemented by the aspiration to create a ‘New Italian man’, indispensable for the fulfillment of the country’s destiny. This change was conceived as part of a spiritual revolution of the Italians, one rooted

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<sup>12</sup> On the relation between Fascism and Modernism see: Adamson, 1990, pp. 359-390 and Hewitt, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Coined by Boccioni in *Pittura e scultura futurista* (1914) and preached by Prampolini, Paladini and Pannaggi in *L’arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista* (Futurist Manifesto of Mechanical Art) see *Noi. Rivista d’arte futurista*. Year I. No. 2. 2nd Series. May 1923. Rome.

<sup>14</sup> See also: Ben-Ghiat, 1996, pp. 293-316.



in the irrational energy of feelings and emotions able to overcome the crisis of modernity towards a higher state of consciousness, and able to create new modern myths for a modern nation. In this respect, the role of cultural producers – artists and intellectuals, was to inform and mould the modern consciousness.

The myth of the regenerative violence belonged to the same sphere of spiritual revolution. The idea of the morality of war relied on the idea of national palingenesis; in other words, a necessary process for the formation of a modern Italian consciousness from its primeval roots.

Before 1918–1920, Marinetti conceived a political role for the arts and for Futurism. He believed that art could politically commit to a cultural/spiritual revolution in the country, enacted through action and violence (Gentile, 1988, 106). The final consequence of this commitment was the foundation in 1919 of the PPF, *Partito Politico Futurista* - the Futurist Political Party.

After the party's dissolution in 1920 and following the 1924 Congress, Futurists lowered their aspirations, renouncing direct intervention in the political agenda of the country. Already in 1918, Marinetti had distinguished between political and artistic Futurism, but it was in the conference that he eventually abandoned the political utopia. As it emerges from his writings at the time, the movement withdrew from its active militant role to return to its discipline-specific research on aesthetic values, for which he aimed at finding a new, official role in the newly instituted regime.

The Fascist regime and Party were well aware of the fundamental role of art and cultural production in contemporary, mass society. In the view of Walter Benjamin, the philosophical connection between politics and art lies in the media used to subjugate the masses: 'the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses [...] has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values' (Benjamin, 1999, 234).<sup>15</sup> As will be further discussed later in this chapter and in this dissertation, the regime completely penetrated society thanks to mass propaganda, making every aspect of life Fascist in character, and with ideals to control the population. As George L. Mosse suggests, it was the Futurists' highly successful propaganda for their own cause, using all means to attract attention – as with their Futurist *serate* (see note 15 on page 21 of this thesis), for instance – that 'anticipated the success and function of much of the political liturgy of European Fascism' (Mosse, 1990, 257-

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<sup>15</sup> In *Fascinating Fascism* Susan Sontag also writes: 'National Socialism – or, more broadly, Fascism – also stands for an [...] ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of the intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders)' (Sontag, 1975, n.p.). However, as Robert Paxton notes, although very eloquent, Susan Sontag's observation applies most to German regime (Paxton, 2004, 305).

258). According to Germano Celant, Futurism is ‘the first artistic movement of mass society’ in that it embraced and involved within its confines a much broader public, talking about art and culture through newspapers and publications that were accessible to everyone and not just in specialist, elitist magazines (Celant, 1981, 36). Yet, the Italian Fascist regime never institutionalised a specific art movement or style as its official state representative, and it never adopted a unitary politics of culture. Less so did it celebrate the Futurists.

As suggested by Crispolti, the legitimation of a specific artistic and cultural production took place in practice through acknowledgment received by artists on specific public commissions (mural paintings as well as the acquisition of mobile artworks) and institutionalised exhibition settings (Crispolti, 1988, 251). The first step towards the reorganisation of culture was the Congresso of Bologna about cultural institutions, chaired by the influential Fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile in 1925. The regime set up several regional and national exhibitions organised around three main exhibitions events: the quadrennial of Rome (instituted in 1931), the Venice biennial, and the triennial of Milan (relocated to the current Palazzo dell’Arte in 1933). For instance, being selected to represent the country on prestigious international occasions, such as the Biennial in Venice, was a means for validating artists and groups (Crispolti, 1988, 261-264). Beside these institutionalised occasions, the regime organised a network of exhibitions organised in the provincial, interregional and national Trade Unions. In the 1930s, several shows were organised with the specific role of political propaganda, such as the *Esposizione del decennale della vittoria* (Exposition of the Tenth Anniversary of the Victory, Turin, 1928), *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Rome, 1932-33), the *Mostra coloniale* (Colonial Exhibition, Como, 1937) and the *E.U.R. Esposizione Universale Roma* (also known as *E42 - Universal Exposition Rome*, 1942).

During the latter period of the dictatorship, the Fascist government became an active and organised supporter of the arts. Two art awards were instituted: the more conservative Premio Cremona (Cremona Prize, 1939–1941) and its antagonist the Premio Bergamo (Bergamo Prize, 1939–1942). More importantly, Giuseppe Bottai, former member of the Futurist party and subsequently Minister for National Education, instituted an ‘Office for Contemporary Art’ in 1940 (‘Ufficio per l’arte contemporanea’). Two years later, it passed the law n. 717/49-1942 (also known as *Legge del 2% - Law of Two Percent*), which was designed by the Futurist minister of culture Giovanni Bottai to favour investments in art for new public buildings.<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>16</sup> Law still operating today.

this institutional context, the position of Futurists – Crispolti claims – was ‘neither supported nor celebrated’, but they managed to create a space of creative freedom from which to operate within the regime (Crispolti, 1988, 261).

## 5.2 Fortunato Depero's relationship with Fascism

### 5.2.1 Between necessity and ideology: Depero's report on his artistic relations with Fascism (1945)

Below I examine the document entitled *Relazione dei miei rapporti artistici con il fascismo* (Report on my Artistic Relations with Fascism, figures 5.8-5.25), a 1945 manuscript by Depero consisting of 18 pages in which he lists his collaborations with the Fascists.<sup>17</sup>

With regard to this document Günter Berghaus, who enlightened me on the political involvement of Depero, writes: ‘it is in my view such an exemplary piece of whitewashing that it does deserve full publication. Considering the masses of repetitive literature and catalogues on Depero, the omission of this extraordinary document is deplorable and cannot be justified’ (Berghaus, 1996, 291).

As an artist registered with the *Sindacato Nazionale Fascista delle Belle Arti* (Fascist National Union of Fine Arts)<sup>18</sup>, Fortunato Depero had to present this report to the new anti-Fascist authorities installed by the Allies in order to preserve his working status, somehow defending and justifying the artwork he produced for the regime.

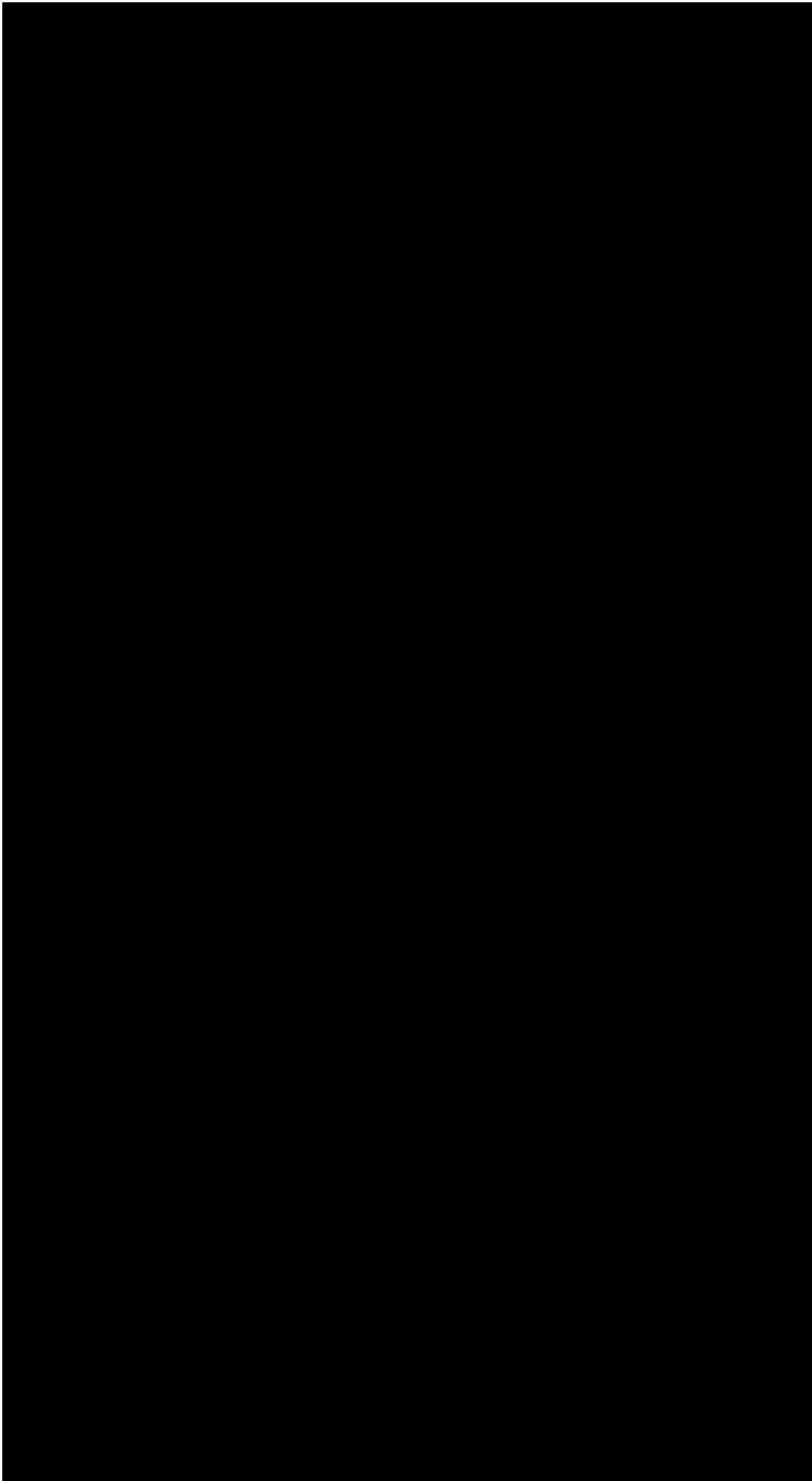
The report begins with a rhetorical introduction in which Depero, using scales as a metaphor for justice, places on ‘one side everything that may appear to my detriment – all of the human and justifiable errors committed in good faith and, if one believes so, due to misplaced enthusiasm or carelessness of spirit, or due to political incompetence or because of pardonable artistic generosity’ (Depero, 1945, 1).

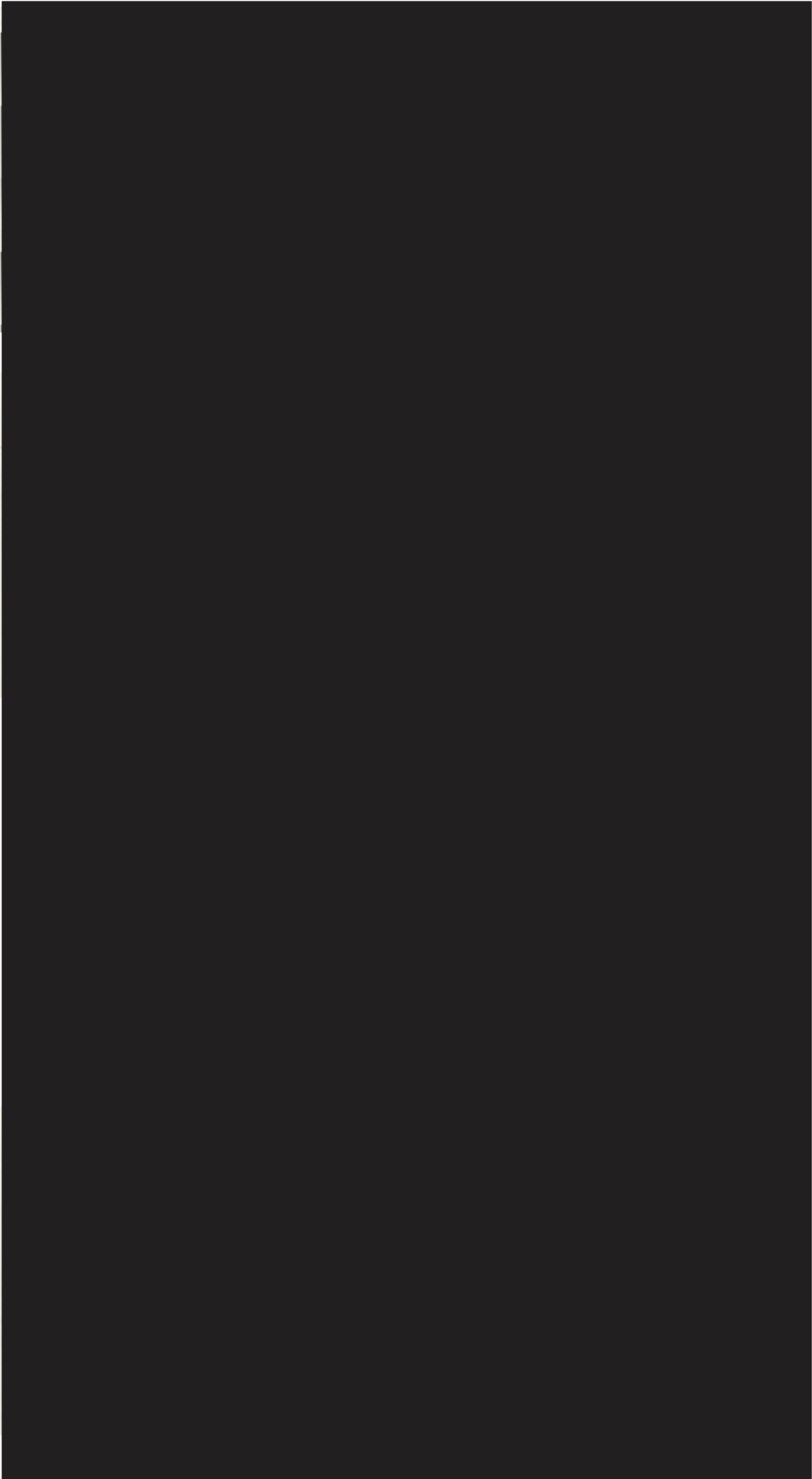
On the other side of the scales he puts all of the ‘documented and recognised activist-artistic and artisan work that I have produced/proposed and established for 30 years with daily exertion, with uninterrupted battles, supported by my artistic faith which still drives me on today, with honour and love for my country... For a new aesthetic and a new art’ (Depero, 1945, 1).

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<sup>17</sup> The document is conserved at the Archivio del '900 (MART, Dep.4.1.145). Given the corrections and eliminations present it is possible that this document is a draft; given the inquisition-type scenario in which Depero writes the report it is not possible to establish whether the described facts are completely true. Parts of my analysis on this document were published in the article ‘Believe, Obey, Work. Artistic Relations Between Fortunato Depero and Fascism’. In *Progetto Grafico*. No. 33. Autumn 2018, pp. 35-48.

<sup>18</sup> The union was the Fascist body that monitored registered artists and checked that they demonstrated Fascist ideals in their work. Headed by Antonio Maraini, the union was tasked with curating the exhibitions of Fascist artists as well as the Venice International Art Exhibition (Venice biennial). Unlike Joseph Goebbels' Reichskulturkammer in Nazi Germany, artists were not obliged to register.





Depero concludes the introduction with: ‘The disproportion between the two weights is so contrasting and dissimilar that despite today’s ardently revolutionary and dramatic climate my conscience is clear and my spirit free of all clouds’ (Depero, 1945, 2).

The report continues with a bullet-pointed list of assertions with which he validates his artistic choices made before the end of the Second World War.

1. ... I explored popular art – rustic art – genuine and applied art – theatrical and advertising art – sacred and Fascist art – and if necessary I will [also] explore Communist art – I took an interest in black and American art, floral and aviation art – In short, all kinds of art, given my artistic thirst and restless productivity.<sup>19</sup>

Depero, 1945, 2

From the very start of his report, Depero approaches the question from an artistic perspective rather than one of political ideology. Whether religious or political art, whether in line with his beliefs or not, it is all art and therefore worthy of being explored by Depero the artist. As such, Depero begins his defence by emphasising how his sole interest is art and how this comes before all issues of political or religious ideology. The term ‘necessary’ establishes a key aspect of Depero’s apology: it is a question of financial necessity, i.e. not ruling out any form of work, even if connected with the opposing ideology (Communism), if the situation so demands.

Depero’s apparent disinterest in the question of Fascist art also derives from the fact that this report was addressed to anti-Fascist and partisan authorities and, as such, his alleged interest ‘also’ in Communist art is a pandering attempt to curry favour and obtain clemency. The inserted ‘also’ denotes Depero’s close attention to this phrase and reflects an afterthought.

As we will see repeatedly in the analysis of this report, the existence of the artist, i. e. the need to make a living, becomes a recurring theme in Depero’s defence:

2. ... I did some decorative Fascist work, I repeat, because I was commissioned, because I too had to earn my daily bread – like all the artisans that made furniture or clothes, or did work for Fascist organisations. Therefore I believe that this does not represent any kind of culpability

Depero, 1945, 3

Here, in order to justify himself, Depero attempts to minimise the extent of his working relations. The use of ‘commissioned’ suggests that Depero was just carrying out orders of the dictatorial regime which he could not refuse and, once

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<sup>19</sup> Manuscript insertion above the line is here included in square brackets, and this style is employed in further quotations from the report.

more, the need to work to support himself. By 'decorative work' Depero may be referring to the projects carried out for the Fascist Party buildings ('case del fascio' and the 'case del Balilla') and work for OND organisation (see section 5.2.6 of this chapter), or to the public commissions (figures 5.69-5.73 and 5.79).

Depero then starts listing works that have peculiar references to the shared Fascist and Futurist ideology:

3. I wrote some Fascist and warlike lyric poems – these are imaginary pieces about poetic states of mind. Because in my mind I have never addressed the political problem; the analysis of the Party, the historical or philosophical-political debate has [never ] been grist for my mill – and my instinctive daily attention was always focused exclusively on art. Depero, 1945, 3

With this paragraph Depero seeks to absolve himself of blame for his Fascist writings, probably referring to *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People) lyrics and *A passo romano* (Roman Step, figure 5.85). The latter was published in the early months of 1943: it is a collection of Fascist propaganda writings and lyric poetry, 1000 copies of which were printed by a Fascist publishing house. The book in question gathers violent and chauvinistic thoughts rather than the 'poetic states of mind' described by Depero.<sup>20</sup>

4. ... I have never asked anyone if they are French or German, Chinese or American – priest or socialist, anarchist or monarchist, Fascist or Communist. I have only asked if they are interested in Art or not. I have looked them in the face and I have listened to them to understand if they are intelligent or not and if their interest in art is in old or new art. And when I came across important personalities or *gerarchi*<sup>21</sup> that didn't understand or were resistant and hostile, I never hesitated to exclude them from my contacts and judgments – whether to my benefit or detriment. Depero, 1945, 4

Depero once again approaches the question from an artistic angle, reiterating his complete lack of interest in political ideology, and concludes the fourth point with an example designed to demonstrate his integrity when faced with high-ranking political figures. Here, Depero mentions his meeting with Minister Dino Grandi in which the artist asked for financial support for his trip to New York; Grandi replied that all he can do is to telegraph the consul asking them to assist Depero during his visit.<sup>22</sup> On arriving in New York, Depero met a consul 'ignorant about art'. A

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<sup>20</sup> 'Energetic steps with automatic movements [...] as if the cobblestones were composed of enemy skulls, as if with every step you had to crush the head of an Englishman with your left foot and the head of a Bolshevik with your right' (Depero, 1943, 44).

<sup>21</sup> Fascist Party official rank.

<sup>22</sup> See note 18 on page 78 of this thesis.

disappointed Depero expressed his negative opinion of the consul, who then created ‘hostility and obstacles for the entire duration of my tough and successful stay in America’ (Depero, 1945, 4-5).

In the following points of the report, Depero briefly summarises his relations with Fascism over the previous 20 years:

I dedicated all my artistic and decorative activities [to] my tapestry workshop in Rovereto between 1921 and 1927 – without occupying myself with politics in any way whatsoever – I wasn’t even a member of the Party. I left for America and stayed there all of 28-29 and part of 30 – always devoting myself to my art. I returned and I settled in Milan for 3 more years continuing with my artistic-literary and poetic work

Depero, 1945, 5

In 1934, Depero designed and presented a project for his decorative art workshop in Trento, a proposal that was approved the provincial federal secretary. While Depero was purchasing the furniture for the workshop, the federal governor of Trento, Alfredo Leati<sup>23</sup>, was moved to Bologna causing the establishment of Depero’s workshop to fall through. A bitter Depero writes: ‘During this stay in Trento I signed up with the Fascist Union of Fine Arts and the PNF of Rovereto. I was a member (only) from 1933’ (note the word ‘only’ in brackets - Depero, 1945, page 6).

Between 1932 and 1938 he carried out various artistic projects – publishing three issues of *Dinamo futurista* ‘only occupying myself with Art’ (Depero, 1945, 6). Given the inertia of the Union of Fine Arts, in 1938 he took it upon himself to organise the Union Art Exhibition, generating a collective reawakening among the artists, but the union authorities of Trento and Rome blocked it:

Humiliated and embittered by this undeserved measure I dedicated myself exclusively to my ideals and began producing some well-publicised inlay works in boxwood together with the Sani company of Trento.

These works continued until the spring of 1943. I did not carry out any Fascist activity during this period either if you exclude a table inlaid with Fascist symbols that we offered as a gift to Federal Secretary Primo Fumei in the hope of sparking his interest in this pitch-perfect new decorative application.

Depero, 1945, point 7, page 7

In 1940 Depero split from the Union of Fine Arts for good following his exclusion from the Fascist Union of Fine Arts. Although the appointed federal secretary did not carry out the withdrawal of the membership card, Maraini suspended the permanent invitation to the Venice Biennali that Depero had enjoyed. The same year, bitter but ‘not at all discouraged’, Depero concentrated on the book *Fortunato Depero nelle*

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23 Alfredo Leati, Federal Secretary of the Trento National Fascist Party in 1934.



*opere e nella vita* (Fortunato Depero, His Works and His Life), an autobiographical summary of the activities he carried out between 1914 and 1940 (Depero, 1945, point 8, page 8).<sup>24</sup> The book was something of a success and caught the attention of Giuseppe Toffano, director of E.N.I.T. (The Italian National Agency for Tourism), who commissioned Depero to produce various ‘plastic dioramas’<sup>25</sup> to send to the relative foreign offices for propaganda on Italian beauty’, works that would continue until 1943. Depero mentions a mosaic destined for the Munich office, in which he inserts a stitched cross and a *fasces lictoriae*, ‘believing them to be formally necessary, but the director had them removed saying that tourism has nothing to do with politics’ (Depero, 1945, 8bis and 9).

When recounting works pursued for Fascist officials, Depero feels the need to underline his estrangement from their political positions. In the report, he minimises the circumstances of this commission: ‘as you can see, until 1943 my political participation was [almost] zero – even if at the start of my 1940 book there is a little portrait of the Duce’ (Depero, 1945, page 9). It is curious how the word ‘almost’ is a super-script insertion (see figure 5.18, seventh line from the top, on the right side of the text), as if it was cleverly added latter on or perhaps designed to be less legible and to soften his position to the Allied authorities.

A similar sycophantic approach is repeated in point 10 of the report in which Depero describes his working relationship with Italo Foschi, prefect of Trento, who commissioned a number of tapestries from Depero. In exchange for these commissions and ‘wishing to present [his] new poems as well as contribute to the assistance of the soldiers’, Depero offers to publish his most recent poems for free. Depero has the following to say about this book of poetry: ‘This contains the Fascist poems that I will probably be reproached for, and this little volume appeared just before the fall of Fascism’ (Depero, 1945, point 10, pp. 9-10).

The use of ‘probably’ denotes his awareness that the unmistakable Fascist connotation and content of these poems meant that he had little chance to escape the judgement of being linked to the regime. Yet, the choice of the affectionate and diminutive ‘little volume’ to describe his book serves to diminish an overtly politicised work.

Depero continues by referring to another collaboration with the Party, ‘ – if it can be described as such – because this too was also a commission. I was commissioned to design a project for a War Exhibition’ (Depero, 1945, 10). As previously discussed,

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<sup>24</sup> Volume curated by Legione Trentina with 600 numbered copies produced by Editrice Mutilati e Invalidi.

<sup>25</sup> In Italian Diorama also signifies a depiction, in this case a landscape, produced using the mosaic technique.

Depero considers a Fascist commission an order, and not the choice of voluntary collaboration based on ideological sympathy. Furthermore, he remarked (with similar logic) that, as a professional artist, he has to work and earn a living, whatever the belief of the client. As such, therefore, his collaborations with the regime should not be regarded as a crime.

The report then focuses on the 1943–1945 period spent in Serrada, where Depero took refuge in the summer of 1943 just before the Allied forces began bombing the Trento area. There, he devoted himself to his painting, ceasing the ‘decorative’ activities of his Futurist art house (‘decorative’ makes reference to the Fascist commissions, Depero, 1945, 11).

Depero concludes by returning to the initial metaphor of the scales as a symbol of justice: ‘the difference between the extent to which I can be reproached and that for which I can be credited seems so disproportionate to me as to make any related discussion superfluous’ (Depero, 1945, 11).

Although Depero finishes his report with this conclusion, he quickly changes tack and continues to talk at length, recalling other anecdotes from his life by which to prove his interest in art and artistic production rather than politics and Fascism. Below is a brief summary of the contents of the last five pages, which were intended to demonstrate his disengagement from political matters and the success and diversity of his career: in 1914 Depero deserted the military in Austria and went to Rome to enrol as a volunteer and fight the battle of Col di Lana<sup>26</sup>; discharged and ill he returned to Rome to focus on his avant-garde studies, attracting ‘derision – disappointments and setbacks – but at the same time gaining the favour of Russian intellectuals of the time’, including Sergei Diaghilev<sup>27</sup> (Depero, 1945, 12).

In 1917–18 Depero met Swiss poet-patron Gilbert Clavel with whom he created the ‘plastic theatre’<sup>28</sup>, generating both artistic and critical interest. This acclaim enables Depero to demonstrate that he was ‘driven by an innate passion for art that was above exaggerated nationalism and xenophobia – even if it belonged to the Futurist movement – with which I was never totally in agreement’ (Depero, 1945, 12). This is disingenuous, given that Depero had stated in his ‘autobiographical summary’ (*Depero futurista 1913–1927*, p. 24) that ‘from 1915 I could only think about Futurism’.

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<sup>26</sup> A town on the border between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy, Col di Lana was a battleground during the First World War.

<sup>27</sup> Impresario of the *Ballets Russes*, in 1916 Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Depero to create the sets and costumes for the never-produced ballet *Le chant du rossignol* (The Song of the Nightingale), set to music by Stravinsky. Also for Diaghilev, Depero produced costumes and sets for Cangiullo’s *Il giardino zoologico* (The Zoological Garden).

<sup>28</sup> The term refers to the *Balli plastici* show (literally translated as Plastic Dances but also known as Plastic Ballets), this was jointly conceived by Depero and Gilbert Clavel in 1918.

Depero talks about an ambassador, specifying ‘Fascist’ ambassador with a superscript insertion, who did not approve of an exhibition of his tapestries at the embassy, and he then continues with other first-person anecdotes:

An excellent *sansepolcrista*<sup>29</sup> that knew of my struggle and my hunger, as well as my talent, for 25 years, who said to me (sitting in the armchair of a large Milan hotel while I struggled to find a few thousand lira to pay six months of backdated rent): Depero, if you want to make some money sell potatoes, don’t make art. And do you want to know what a Fascist secretary abroad phoned to tell me when I found myself in a moment of urgent need: “Dear Depero we were born to suffer – sort yourself out”  
Depero, 1945, 13-14

Letters held in the State Archives of the Duce’s private secretariat (Segreteria particolare del Duce 1922–1945), and addressed to MinCulPop,<sup>30</sup> document the low estimation Depero was held in by the regime. In the letters, Depero writes multiple times asking to receive an audience, support and acknowledgment from the Party. Having been refused an audience with the Duce to present his book *Fortunato Depero nelle opere e nella vita* to him in person, Depero tasked Roberto Suster, from the same area as him and director of Stefani, a leading Italian press agency and affiliated to the regime, to deliver the book of poetry *A passo romano* in order to receive authorisation for its dedication to the Duce. Suster accompanied this request with a letter in which he describes Depero as an ex-voluntary combatant, old Fascist and artist of splendid international fame. Luciano Celso of MinCulPop responded to Depero’s request as follows: ‘the work sent by Depero is one of the usual Futurist prose pieces in more or less lyrical style. [...] His enthusiasm is vibrant and honest, the ingredients, however, add up to little more than usual. There is no lack of grammatical errors [quotations follow]. It seems out of the question to authorise the dedication to the Duce of such a mediocre piece of writing’ (Suster and Celso, cited by Berghaus, 1996, 301).

The list of events serves to support the following assertion, which is the actual conclusion of the confession:

I wanted to recall a few [episodes] not to present myself – as somebody might suppose, as a victim of Fascism – after having occasionally and in the last year contributed artistically to it – but I wish to clearly and palpably assert, as many

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<sup>29</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>30</sup> MinCulPop is short for Ministry of Popular Culture, the Italian government ministry tasked with overseeing culture and the organisation of Fascist propaganda. Taking its inspiration from Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda, from 1935 MinCulPop took control of the most important national propaganda bodies and institutions (Cannistraro, 1975, 97): Istituto Luce (literally translated as ‘Light Institute’, where Luce is the acronym for L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa, i.e. The Educational Film Union), E.N.I.T. (Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo - Italian National Agency for Tourism), Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico (National institution for Ancient Drama); the Discoteca di Stato (Istituto centrale per i beni sonori ed audiovisivi - Central Institute for Sounds and Audiovisual State Asset).

people know – that Fascism has never understood me – protected me whatsoever – promoted – supported or defended me as I have deserved and even less so has it enabled me to earn dignified sums.

Depero, 1945, 14

This passage is more lucid and reasoned than the previous apologies; Depero admits that just the previous year he had worked for the Fascists but stresses that he had never got rich or received favourable treatment in return. He is aware that he cannot be judged a ‘victim of Fascism’ as he had enrolled with both the Union and the Party. This paragraph betrays his Fascist leanings but also his disappointment at having never been esteemed to his satisfaction.

The document ends with a list of anti-Fascist personalities from Trento and a closing note at the bottom of page 16 regarding the printer of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: ‘N. B. I forgot to say that the three issues of *Dinamo* and the book *Depero futurista 1913–1927* were printed by Tipografia Mercurio belonging to Ferruccio Zamboni, a friend and printer I admire and my printer of choice, even if his equipment is modest and he is an anti-Fascist’ (Depero, 1945, 16).

The report seems to have achieved Depero’s desired effect on the Allied authorities; in fact, after the end of the Second World War, he went back to America (1947–9) and was a guest of people with connections in high places (e.g. Frederick Kiesler; on this topic see Bedarida, 2019, 131 and Depero, 27 January 1948, MART, Dep.3.3.1.22.55).

### 5.2.2 Tension between urban and rural identities

After the First World War, in which Depero had voluntarily enlisted to serve, he returned to his hometown of Rovereto – a town not far from the border with Austria that had been heavily damaged during the war – without the necessary means to revive his artistic career in post-war Italy.

End of 1918. End of the war. End of unspeakable sufferings. With a few bundles, with little money, with my tail between my legs I returned to my tormented land. I return to see our mountains, which had been bombed and were now decorated with Italian flags. I return to embrace my father whom I had not seen for years and with whom I had not been able to correspond. Two armies divided us. I meet him on a cold morning, on his way to his daily mass. That day he doesn’t go to church and returns home with us. I can still feel that embrace, close, alive and warm.

Depero, 1940, 255

In this biographical note Depero does not conform with the customary Futurist view of ‘war as the world’s only hygiene’. War is the cause of the destruction he sees around him. He feels compelled to travel (Viareggio, Milan and Paris) with the aim of promoting his art and gathering commissions and funds in order to set up his workshop (1919) in Rovereto again.

During his travels Depero seems to have realised that the calm of country and pastoral life is not only restricted to Southern Italy but that the landscape of the entire nation contrasts with the phenomenon of the modern metropolis (Lista, 2012, 282). Depero takes note of this and partly makes rural post-war Italy the subject of his research. The work that stems from this realisation could be regarded as a safe and familiar refuge from the onslaught of modernity that he experienced in war.

Anthony White adds: 'By rejecting the metropolitan, and industrial themes of his earlier avant-garde work [...], Depero formed part of a broader movement immediately after World War I known as the "call to order" which saw artists such as Pablo Picasso move away from the modernity and cosmopolitanism of the avant-garde and return to a historicism influenced by more traditional, national conceptions of art' (White, 2015, 128). In parallel with the Return to Order (or 'call to order', as White calls it) the *Strapaese*<sup>31</sup> cultural and literary movement developed in Italy, designed to defend and protect the country's rural and rustic character.

Between 1918 and 1926 Depero seemed to identify most closely with the Return to Order and *Strapaese* movements producing paintings such as *Splendori alpestri* (Alpine splendour, 1918 - figure 5.26) and *Il muggito creò la vallata* (The Roar Shapes the Valley, 1924), both of which were reproduced in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. These paintings do not depict a modern Italy or its industrialisation but instead celebrate its rural character.<sup>32</sup>

This interest in vernacular culture represents a dualism with respect to the figure of Depero and his artistic production: alongside paintings representing mountain territory, he maintained an interest in the constants of Futurism, such as modernity, the machine, industry, and war. This dual interest is evident in the consecutive works on pages 155 and 159 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927 – Mucca in montagna* and *Guerra-Festa*. The first of these is a tapestry (1926 - figure 5.28) that reproduces his oil painting *Mucca in montagna* (Cow in the Mountains, 1924–25). It depicts a peaceful and common mountain scene through his geometric and fragmented shapes of pure colours without chiaroscuro. By contrast, we are presented with *Guerra-Festa* (War-Party, 1925 - figure 5.29), a tapestry that celebrates war, depicting it as a colourful battle between soldiers that march mechanically as they stab their adversaries to death. In the background there is a mountain landscape once more,

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<sup>31</sup> Having developed in Valdarno in the early 1920s before spreading throughout Italy, it was a movement inspired by populist and traditionalist, anti-European and anti-American Fascist. Diametrically opposed to *Strapaese* was the *Stracittà* movement, which supported Fascism's embracing of the modern and industrialised world.

<sup>32</sup> The rural theme is revisited from time to time by Depero throughout his entire body of work. For a more in-depth iconographic endowment/analysis of this argument see: Scudiero, M. 2010. *Depero: l'uomo e l'artista*. Rovereto: Egon Edizioni.

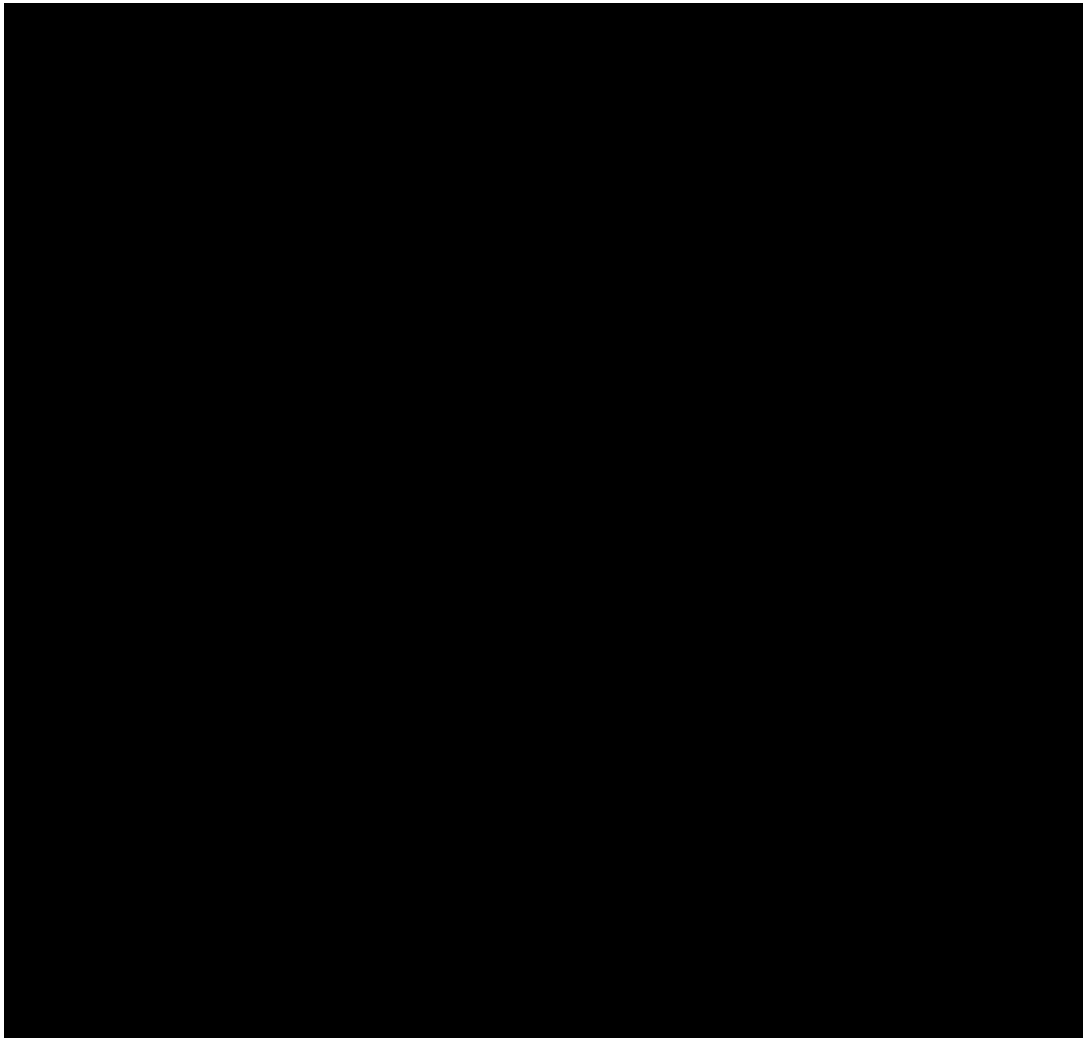


Figure 5.28 - page 155

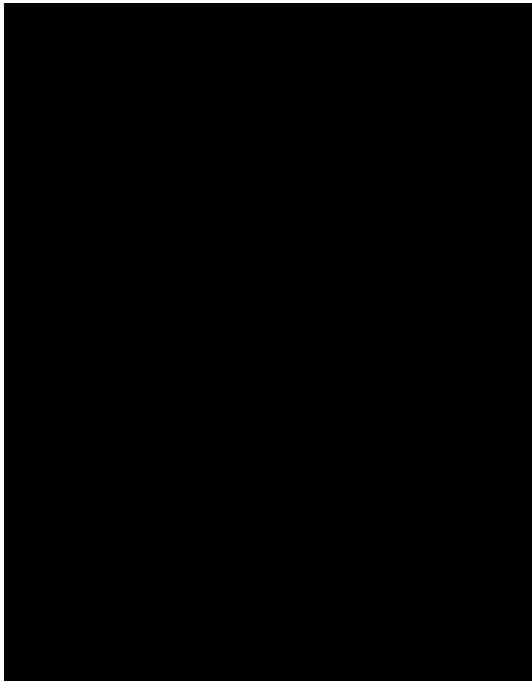


Figure 5.29

**Figure 5.26 and 5.26 macro** 1918. *Splendori alpestri* (Alpine Splendour) reproduced in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

**Figures 5.27** 1926. *L'aratura* (Ploughing). Oil on canvas. 143 × 87.5 cm. Courtesy of GAM, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin.

**Figure 5.28** 1924–1925. *Mucca in montagna* (Cow in the Mountains) reproduced in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

**Figure 5.29** 1926. *Guerra-Festa* (War-Party). Tapestry acquired by the Italian Government for the National Gallery of Modern art - Rome on the occasion of the 15th Venice Biennial. For its reproduction in *Depero futurista* see page 159.

Although *Mucca in montagna* and *Guerra-Festa* were produced less than a year apart, their themes and subject matters are completely different, highlighting Depero's attention to different arguments that developed at the same time. As such, it appears that, on one hand, Depero seeks inspiration from the placid rural landscape, on the other he has an ongoing interest in the Futurist values of modernity, industrialisation, mechanisation, nationalism and war.

but, unlike in the previous work, the mountains are tormented and being bombarded by cannon shots coloured with the Italian tricolour, which explode in the air like fireworks. The scenarios depicted here may be references to the First World War; both *Mucca in montagna* and *Guerra-Festa* were probably inspired by the Trentino Alto-Adige region, Depero's birthplace and an important location of war action.

Both urban/industrial and rural/agricultural ways of life were reflected in Fascist ideology of that time. In this regard, Gentile states: 'Fascist Modernism aimed at the realisation of a new synthesis between tradition and modernity'. Referring to Mussolini's statements from 1924, he argues that tradition was considered as a spiritual and ever changing aspect of a civilisation, not frozen in the past (Gentile, 1996, 42). The ambition of an Italian way to modernisation was accompanied by the glorification of the ideal of the 'good peasants' connected to the land and traditions. This idea became even more evident when the Fascists' ruralist agenda and propaganda unfolded.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the ambiguity in the subject matter of Depero's works fully responds to the Fascist ideology: preserving the style pertaining to his early Futurist production, his work embraced the ambivalence of the Fascist ideology. This continued in the following years: in the next sections, I will examine later aspects of formal ambivalence in Depero's work.

### 5.2.3 From mechanical splendour to metallic style

In 1922 the *Manifesto dell'arte meccanica* (Manifesto of Mechanical Art)<sup>34</sup>, written by Enrico Prampolini together with Vinicio Paladini and Ivo Pannaggi, was published in *Noi* (We) magazine. It was influenced by the mechanical splendour celebrated by Marinetti,<sup>35</sup> asserting:

1. We Futurists want to transmit the spirit of the Machine not in its exterior form, creating compositions that make use of all forms of [artistic] expressions and also genuine mechanical elements;
2. We want these forms of expression and mechanical elements to be coordinated by an original poetic law and not a scientific law that we have learned [...];
4. We want the Machine to become the source of inspiration for the evolution and development of the plastic arts.

Prampolini, Paladini and Pannaggi, 1923, 1-2

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<sup>33</sup> About Fascist Ruralism see: Morgan, 2004, 119-124; for an unorthodox interpretation of the Fascist Ruralism and its territorial expression, see: Pennacchi, 2008, pp. 125-155 and 201-241.

<sup>34</sup> First published in a special issue of *La nuova Lacerba*, no. 1, June 20, 1922, p. 7 (single issue published in Rome by Ivo Pannaggi and Vinicio Paladini). I consulted the extended version, with Enrico Prampolini as co-author, which was published a year later on *Noi*. *Rivista d'arte futurista*, no. 2, May 1923. *Noi*, was an international review of avant-garde art which was published in Rome between 1917 and 1925. Founded, edited, and designed by Enrico Prampolini, and co-edited by Bino Sanminiati, its coverage included all the major avant-garde movements of the period and contributors ranged from the Futurists and Giorgio De Chirico to Tristan Tzara, Pierre Reverdy, Stravinsky, and Lord Berners. For further info on this magazine see section 2.2.2.4 of this thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Marinetti, F. T. 1914. *Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica*. See page 40 of this thesis.

Following the publication of the manifesto, the machine played an even more important role in Futurist works; and mechanical art, thanks also to the theoretical activities of Paladini, became part of the official Futurist programme of the 1920s. From the end of the 1910s, Depero had already begun to show an interest in and experiment with the theme of the machine.<sup>36</sup> Always attentive to the new direction of the movement, he began to experiment further with mechanical art and design that, as Depero himself put it, embodied the ‘metallic style’ (Lista, 2012, 266–272). Even *Depero futurista 1913–1927* itself, described by Azari as ‘mechanical, a book bolted together like an engine’, can be considered as an example of Depero’s metallic style (Azari in Depero, 1927, 9).

One example of this metallic style is the *Ritratto psicologico dell’aviatore Azari* (Psychological Portrait of the Pilot Azari, 1922 - see figures 5.30, 5.31 and caption of figure 3.1), a painting on page 75 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* that was produced in the same year that Prampolini, Paladini and Pannaggi’s manifesto was published. The painting’s subtitle, ‘man-aviator-blue made of space, next to worldly man, lover of elegance and beautiful women; circled by sky-airplane-workshops’, expresses Azari’s ambivalence: aviator by day, lover of the good life by night. Both personalities are framed in the technological and industrial culture, represented respectively by the plane and the smoking factory chimneys (Depero, 1927, 75).

The following year Depero produced *Motociclista, solido in velocità* (Biker, Solid at Speed, 1923 - figure 5.32), a painting that depicts a motorbike driven by a motorcyclist who seems to have been geometrically sculpted from iron, blending into the machine. The background of the painting seems to represent the dynamism and roar of the speeding motorcycle, depicting it through a pattern of geometric figures, also metallic in appearance, whose colours range from grey to pink.<sup>37</sup>

The *ANIHCCAM del 3000* (ENIHCCAM of the Year 3000, in which machine – ‘macchina’ – is written backwards, figure 5.33), shown on page 141 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, can also be filed under the metallic style according to Lista (Lista, 2012, 268). Created by Depero and set to music by Franco Casavola, it formed part of Marinetti and Rodolfo De Angelis’s *Nuovo Teatro Futurista* show.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Meccanica di ballerini* (*Ballerina idolo*) - Mechanics of Dancers (Ballerina Idol, 1917) and *Balli plastici* (Plastic Dances, 1918) are two examples in which the protagonists are robots and mechanical figures, distinctive elements of Depero’s experimentation.

<sup>37</sup> The painting uses the pictorial style employed by Depero a year earlier in *Ciclista moltiplicato* (Multiplied Cyclist, 1922, reproduced in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, p. 99), in which the bicycle and the man blend into a single image that is set against a geometric background of metallic tones and nuances.

<sup>38</sup> During the show the actors mimicked the movements of machines with mechanical movements and onomatopoeic sounds. The costumes were cylindrical, probably inspired by locomotives, the dance could have been seen as a fusion of man (the actor) and the machine (the locomotive). On the page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* dedicated to the show (p. 141) Depero erroneously calls the director of the theatre company Alfredo rather than Rodolfo De Angelis.



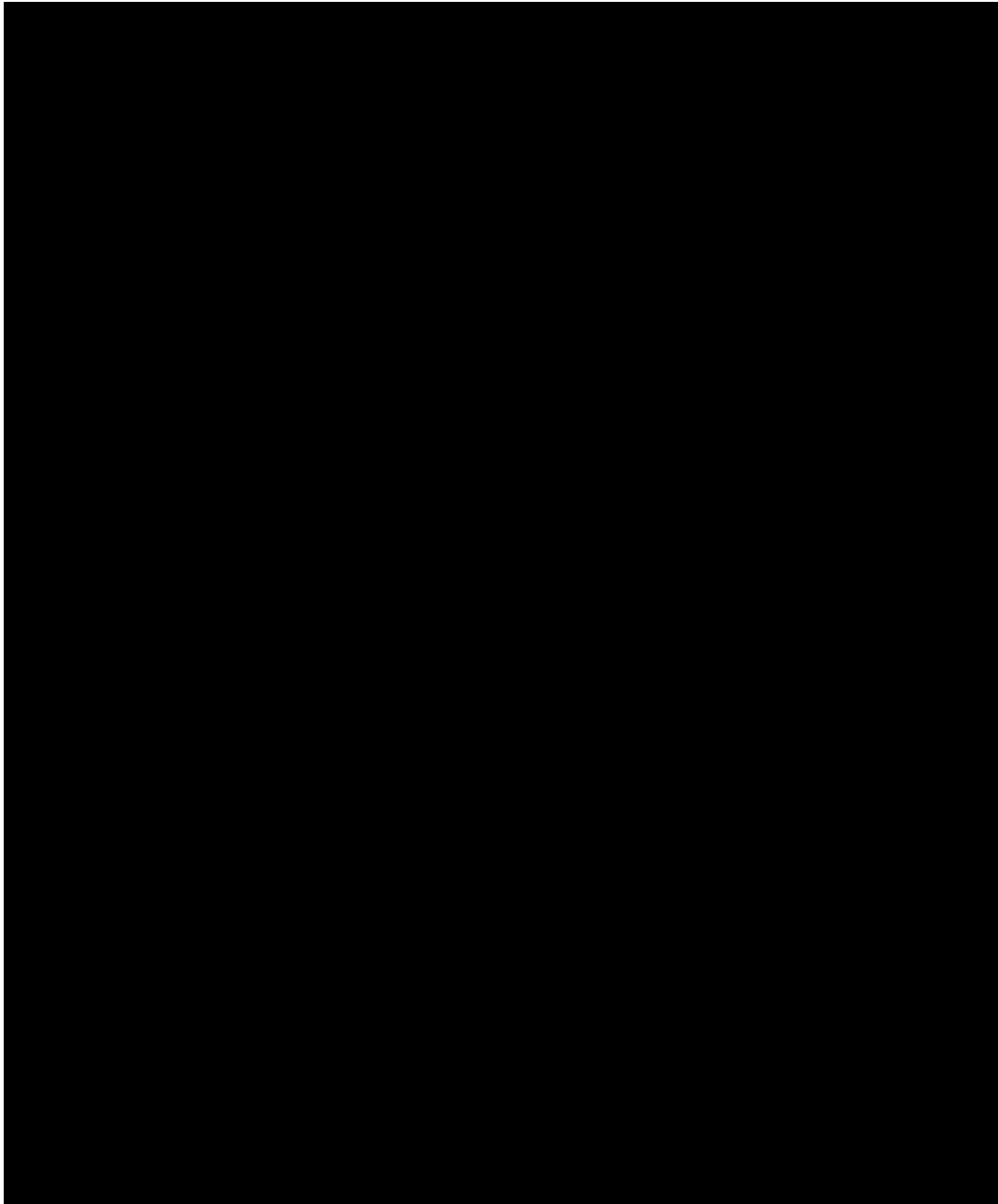


Figure 5.32

**Figure 30** 1922. *Ritratto psicologico dell'aviatore Azari* (Psychological Portrait of the Pilot Azari). The black and white photograph of the painting in question reproduced in *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is accompanied by the following subtitle: man-aviator-blue made of space, next to worldly man, lover of elegance and beautiful women; circled by sky-airplane-workshops.

**Figure 31** 1922. *Ritratto psicologico dell'aviatore Azari* (Psychological Portrait of the Pilot Azari). Oil on canvas. 93 × 140 cm. Private collection in Brescia, Italy.

**Figure 32** 1923. *Motociclista, solido in velocità* (Biker, Solid at Speed). Oil on canvas. 140 × 90 cm. Courtesy of CIMA, New York.

The show was performed on 11 January 1924 at the Trianon theatre in Milan and later repeated during a tour that visited 28 Italian cities.

#### 5.2.4 From metal to steel

Between the 1920s and the 1930s, both in the writings and in the artefacts he produced around the theme of the machine, Depero gradually began to alter his tone:

Using the 'Metallic style formula', Depero evokes the formal choices of geometric squaring [...] When, however, he uses the 'Steel style' formula he also seems to indicate characteristics of strength and determination which are more ideological, i.e. far less innocent and neutral in the context of the new Italian political landscape.

Lista, 2012, 272

On 18 November 1934, on the occasion of the First National Exhibition of Mural Décor for Fascist Buildings, Depero published 'Stile di acciaio' (Steel Style)<sup>39</sup> in the newspaper *Il secolo XIX*, a theoretical essay in which he outlines the characteristics of the artistic style and lifestyle that he himself created. In reality, this text does not contain genuine guidelines but rather consists of an ode to the machine, which Depero addresses directly:

Correctly and naively, a person (highly unqualified with regard to art) observed at the last Venice Biennale that out of thousands of paintings there was not one motorcycle, fast car or powerful dynamo... Patience, my dear machines: a minority of Futurists extol you with grandiose poetry, with crackling verses, with images of steel, with soaring lyrics.

Depero, 1934, 22-23

The text continues with paragraphs praising the mechanical world ('MACHINES: the splendour of your wheels: the rhythm of your gears; the structure of your muscles, your clear skin, the grey of an inalterable mirror... are our mechanical poetry, our geometric anatomy... Our style') and, with the increase in the narrative rhythm, it becomes more enthusiastically nationalistic. Depero slowly introduces the political and Fascist element: 'As you can see, dear machines, you need not fear, through our plastic and poetic genius, and through our patriotic courage, you will be glorified in the way you deserve...' he continues by associating himself to both Futurism and Fascism, as if they were intertwined: 'We Futurist and Fascist men are not weak pawns...' (Depero, 1934, 22-23). Depero then refers to the cult of the leader by comparing man and machine:

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<sup>39</sup> 'Stile di acciaio' was reprinted for the fifth issue of *Stile futurista. Estetica della macchina* (figures 5.34, 5.35 and 5.36), a magazine edited by Fillia and Enrico Prampolini. The article is supplemented with works carried out by Depero for the PNF which accurately represent the steel style described in the text. The content of the text revisits verses and ideas already proposed in the wall manifesto 'W la macchina e lo stile d'acciaio' (Long Live the Machine and the Steel Style - figure 5.37) published on pages 65-67 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*.

Since the powerful Mussolinian dynamo was introduced, dear machines, you have breathed your steel atmosphere. A lofty, tough and incredibly selective atmosphere. Just as rarefied mountain air invigorates the strong and kills the fragile, Mussolinian air strengthens the healthy, the enthusiasts, the optimists, the hardworking, and cruelly kills the weak, the uncertain, the cowardly and the conservative.

Depero, 1934, 22-23

In this paragraph the steel metaphor is certainly interpreted as a synonym of strength but also characteristic of an unpleasant atmosphere which, a few years later in 1938, would result in the laws for the 'defence of the race'. Depero introduces the concept of race in his text, of white 'style', pre-empting the anti-semitic laws of the Nazis, first, and then the Italian Fascists:

[Ancient] Egyptians had a style, and the Chinese, the Indians, and the negroes have a style. We, whites of the twentieth century, the century of speed and steel, the century of Fascism and Futurism, will also have a powerful, inevitable style thanks to the machine. Our style will be that of the tricolour steel. The splendour of mechanics, the breath of the machines has embraced the burning body of our homeland.

Depero 1934, 23

In these sentences, we also come across yet another key metaphor of Futurist politics: the homeland as a body. Depero revisits the state-body association adopted years previously by Marinetti in his *Democrazia futurista* (Futurist Democracy),<sup>40</sup> in which the Futurist leader wrote of a 'concept of a new Futurist humanity consisting of revolutionary, elastic, improvised violence, of spirit, muscles, iron' and asserted that:

The Italian democracy is for us a body which must be liberated, unchained, lightened, in order to accelerate its speed and increase its productivity by a hundredfold. The Italian democracy of nowadays is the most favourable environment for its development. War-revolution environment [...] hygienic need for continuous, transforming and improvising gymnastics.

Marinetti, 1919, *Democrazia futurista*, 305

Marinetti mixes machine and man, envisaging a new form of humanity made up of flesh (muscles) and alloys (iron), while the state (the democracy) is a body that must be unchained in order to improve its production efficiency, as if he were still talking about machines. For Marinetti, this scenario is made even more positive by the fact that the prevailing climate is one of 'war-revolution', or rather ferment and new beginnings following the Great War which had wiped the slate clean.

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<sup>40</sup> A 1919 book in whose dedication Marinetti describes it as the 'first Futurist political work' even if it revisits the ideas already presented in the Futurist political agenda (manifesto of 1913) written by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo and Marinetti. Marinetti alternates Futuristic proposals ('abolition of mandatory conscription' in favour of a voluntary army, gender equality in the workplace and in politics) with ideas that would later be revisited and fine-tuned by Fascism such as the establishment of 'schools of courage and patriotism', a forerunner to the Opera Nazionale Balilla youth organisation and the cult of sport, physical exercise and bravery (Marinetti, 1919, *Democrazia futurista*, 3-219).

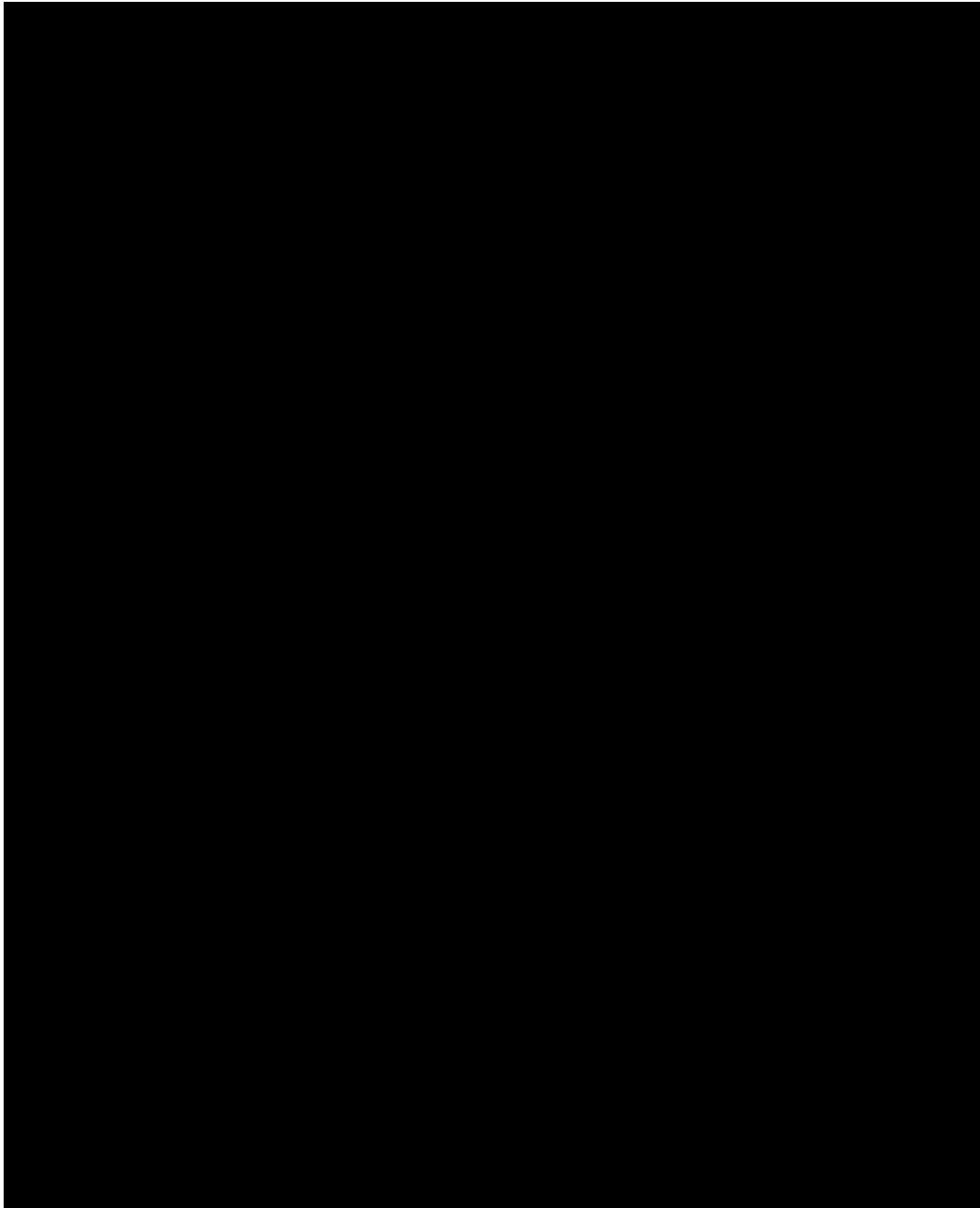


Figure 5.37 - page 65

**Figure 5.33** *ANIHCAM del 3000* (ENIHCAM of the Year 3000). In *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Milan: Dinamo-Azari.

In this page Depero also includes a press clipping extracted from the Italian newspaper *Il corriere della sera* that reads: 'Il ballo "macchina" creato in Russia'. A new dance christened "the Machine" has been created. The arms of the dancers imitate the movement of the pistons of a steam engine while their feet tap like reasoning hammers. The music imitates the din of the workshops' ('The machine-dance created in Russia' in *Il corriere della sera*, 1 March 1927, 15). Alongside the brief description of the plot, Depero inserts the photo of the 'Machine dance' which the artist accuses of plagiarising his *Macchina del 3000*: 'the plagiarism or at the very least my absolute precedence is evident' (Depero, 1927, 141). It is interesting to note how Depero highlights the dates of publication of the two dances with an arrow (see the enlarged detail of figure 5.33).

**Figure 5.37** 'W la macchina e lo stile d'acciaio' (Long Live the Machine and the Steel Style). In Italian 'W' stands for 'VIVA', i.e. 'long live'.

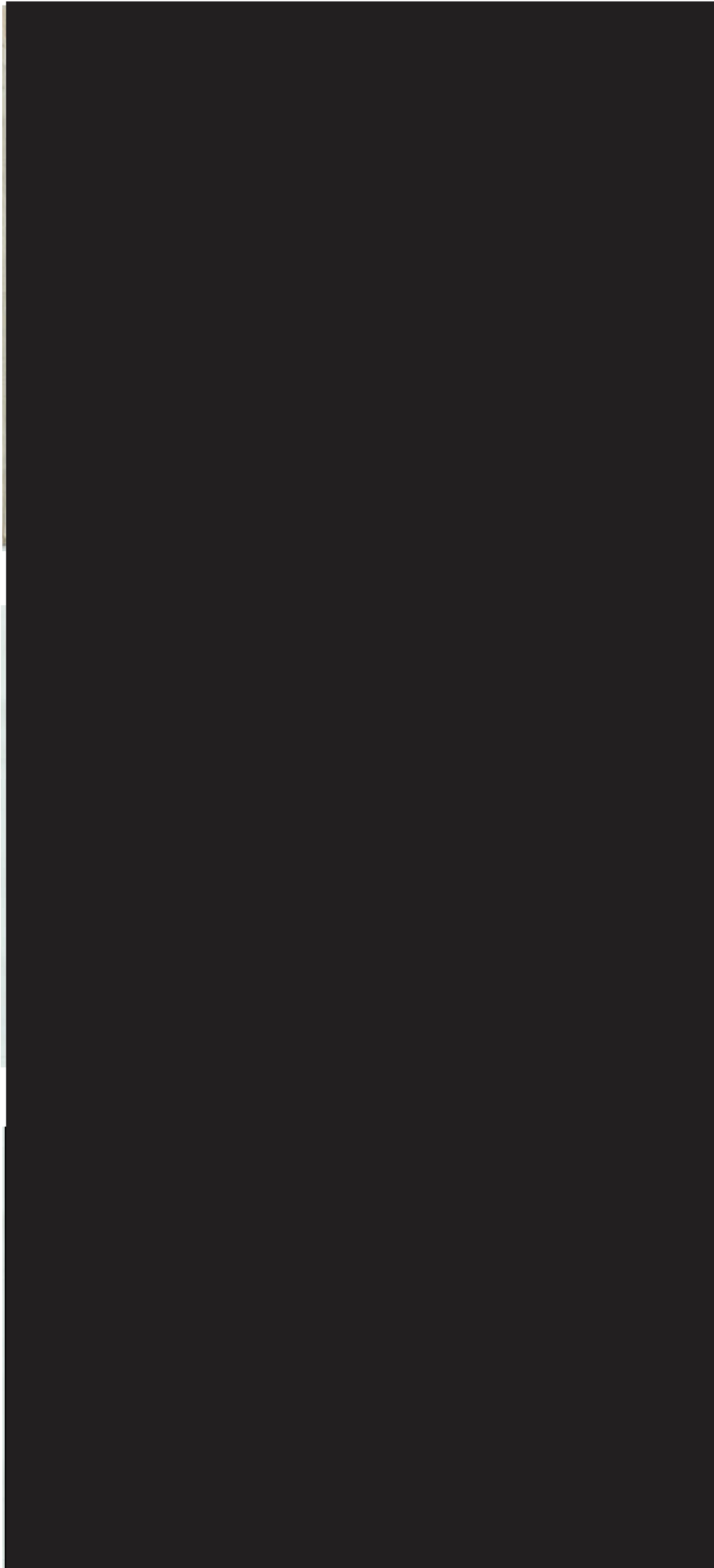


Figure 5.36

**Figures 5.34/5.35/5.36** 1934. 'Stile di acciaio' (Steel Style). In *Stile futurista. Estetica della macchina. Rivista mensile d'arte-vita*. Year I. Vol. 5. December 1934 - XIII. Torino. Courtesy of Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi - Università degli Studi di Milano.

Cover and spreads from *Stile futurista. Estetica della macchina. Rivista mensile d'arte-vita*. The article included also the Depero's projects for the Casa del fascio proposal exhibited at the *Prima mostra nazionale di plastica murale* (First National Exhibition of Wall Decoration, 1934 - see figures 5.69, 5.70, 5.71, 5.72 and 5.73).

As regards the human physicality of the state, Benjamin writes: ‘The material from which Fascism creates its monuments – which it considers to be like iron – is above all so-called human material. And it is thanks only to these monuments that this human material finds any forms’ (Benjamin, 1972 cited by Hewitt, 1993, 186). Adopting the metaphor of state as a body is an example of the aestheticisation of politics diagnosed by Benjamin. Above all, it expresses the way in which Fascism (also through Futurism) has spread among the masses, the people that constitute the state, the body of the country. In this regard Andrew Hewitt (Hewitt, 1993, 137) adds:

Aestheticization is not simply a subjugation of political discourse to the discourse of aesthetics, it entails the subjugation of *all* value to the dictates of a central organizing metaphor. This metaphor subsequently serves as the legitimation for both aesthetic and political systems. The central metaphor around which discourse is structured, with a mechanistic rigor, in the Futurist text is the metaphor of the machine. [...] To understand the State one must understand the body, and to understand the body one must understand the machine.

Hewitt, 1993, 137-144

For the Futurists the machine is not only explicable with the enthusiastic fervour for technological progress of the early twentieth century, it is also a synonym for the productivity and orderliness of the state around which political discourse can be structured.<sup>41</sup> For Marinetti, mechanical aesthetics perfectly explain the dynamism and workings of the ideal Futurist society, i.e. a productive society that constitutes a strong and powerful state (body).

Benjamin explains the other Futurist constant – ‘revolutionary war’ and the assertion that ‘war is the sole hygiene of the world’: ‘all efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war, and only war, makes it possible to set a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale’ (Benjamin, 2008, 41). War is the common goal and the ‘necessary’ condition used by movements to unite the masses.<sup>42</sup> As seen in the previously discussed painting *Guerra-Festa*, warfare is viewed positively, an ideal that enthusiastic Futurist and Fascist nationalism must aspire to.

Depero concludes his text with the following paragraph:

There it is dear machines, I clearly, faithfully and with the greatest conviction declare and exhort the victory of your unmistakably original style; a style that Futurism discovered and that the Futurists developed and one which, in the name of our omnipresent DUCE and our beloved leader Marinetti, will lead to the greatest of successes.

Depero, 1934, 23

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<sup>41</sup> In parallel with the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Fedele Azari published *Per una società di protezione delle macchine* (Towards a Society for the Protection of Machines), a manifesto in which he argues that the machine ‘will free us from the slavery of manual work’, multiplying and optimising production (Azari, 1927, 1 - see figures 5.38 and 5.39).

<sup>42</sup> One example is the German Third Reich which, thanks to the pressure exerted by Goebbels on Hitler, came to pursue a total war, closing businesses not essential to the war effort, conscripting women into the labour force, and enlisting men in previously exempt occupations into the Wehrmacht (Longerich, 2015, 549-550).

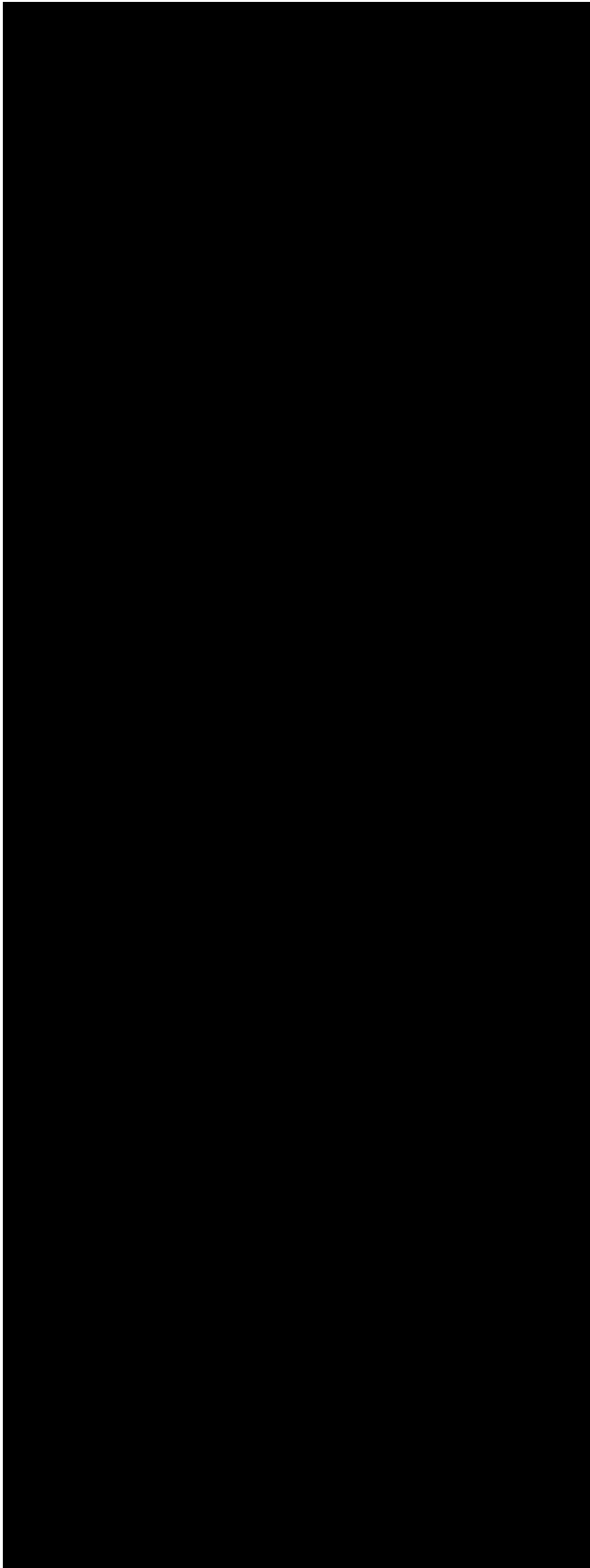


Figure 5.39

**Figures 5.38/5.39** Azari, F. 1927. *Per una società di protezione delle macchine* (Towards a Society for the Protection of Machines). Courtesy of Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi - Università degli Studi di Milano.

Two pages manifesto praising mechanical world in which Azari stated that machines are living beings with their peculiar intelligence and sensibility. Note that *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, of which Azari was the publisher, was advertised around the edges of the first page.

Depero's ode to the machine, at times rhetorical and incomprehensible, shows just how absorbed he is by the aestheticisation of Mussolini's Fascist politics and how totally enslaved he is to the metaphor of the machine professed by Marinetti. Depero propagates the aesthetic of the machine and the Fascist credo through his art and writings. Depero praises both leaders: Marinetti and Mussolini, art and politics on the same level.

#### 5.2.5 The aestheticisation of politics and steel style in Depero's illustrations for politicised magazines

Fascism took firm hold among the masses thanks to its 'carnavalesque' and omnipresent aesthetic, establishing itself and spreading thanks to a widespread propaganda strategy. Firstly there was the 'logo', the *fascis lictoriae* (literally meaning bundles of *lictors*) borrowed from the Roman Empire and applied to every item of propaganda; the cult of the leader through the face of Mussolini, reproduced with his bald/shaved head, a strict observer of the regalia of every parade and show; the Mussolinian mottos and quotes – concise and repeated ad infinitum, they owed much to Futurist linguistic experimentation ('credere, obbedire, combattere - believe, obey, fight', 'Mussolini ha sempre ragione - Mussolini is always right'); finally, power through the complete media control of all forms of communication – at the end of 1934 the Fascists owned 66% of all national and local newspapers (Heller, 2008, 99-121).

Mussolini himself began his ascent to power in newspaper editorial offices: in 1909 he edited Trento-based *l'Avvenire del lavoratore*, in 1912 he was editor of *Avanti!*, the Italian Socialist Party newspaper, and in 1914 he founded and edited *Il popolo d'Italia* (The People of Italy) and the related supplement *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (henceforward referred to as *La rivista*).<sup>43</sup> This was a luxury monthly designed to communicate to a broad public.

Thanks to Fedele Azari's insistent approaches to chief editor Luigi Poli, the first contact between *La rivista* and Depero came about in July 1924. Depero would design the cover<sup>44</sup> (see figure 5.40) with three rotating *fascis lictoriae*, whose tracks formed

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<sup>43</sup> Founded in 1923 by Arnaldo Mussolini and faithful Mussolinian follower Manlio Morgagni, a lead editor always very attentive to politics and the public role of the magazine, together with Marco Luigi Poli, chief editor and in charge of the magazine's layout. Leading artists and designers of the day, such as Erberto Carboni, Marcello Dudovich, Bruno Munari, Marcello Nizzoli, Enrico Prampolini, Xanti Schawinsky and Mario Sironi, contributed to the magazine. The magazine's head offices were at the Alfieri & Lacroix printing works.

<sup>44</sup> The magazine issue in question (no. 7) was a really delicate one, because only one month before, on 10 June 1924, Giacomo Matteotti was kidnapped and killed by Fascists. The decision to publish a cover with the Fascist emblem was probably made in order to demonstrate strength embodying the regime ascent to the power.



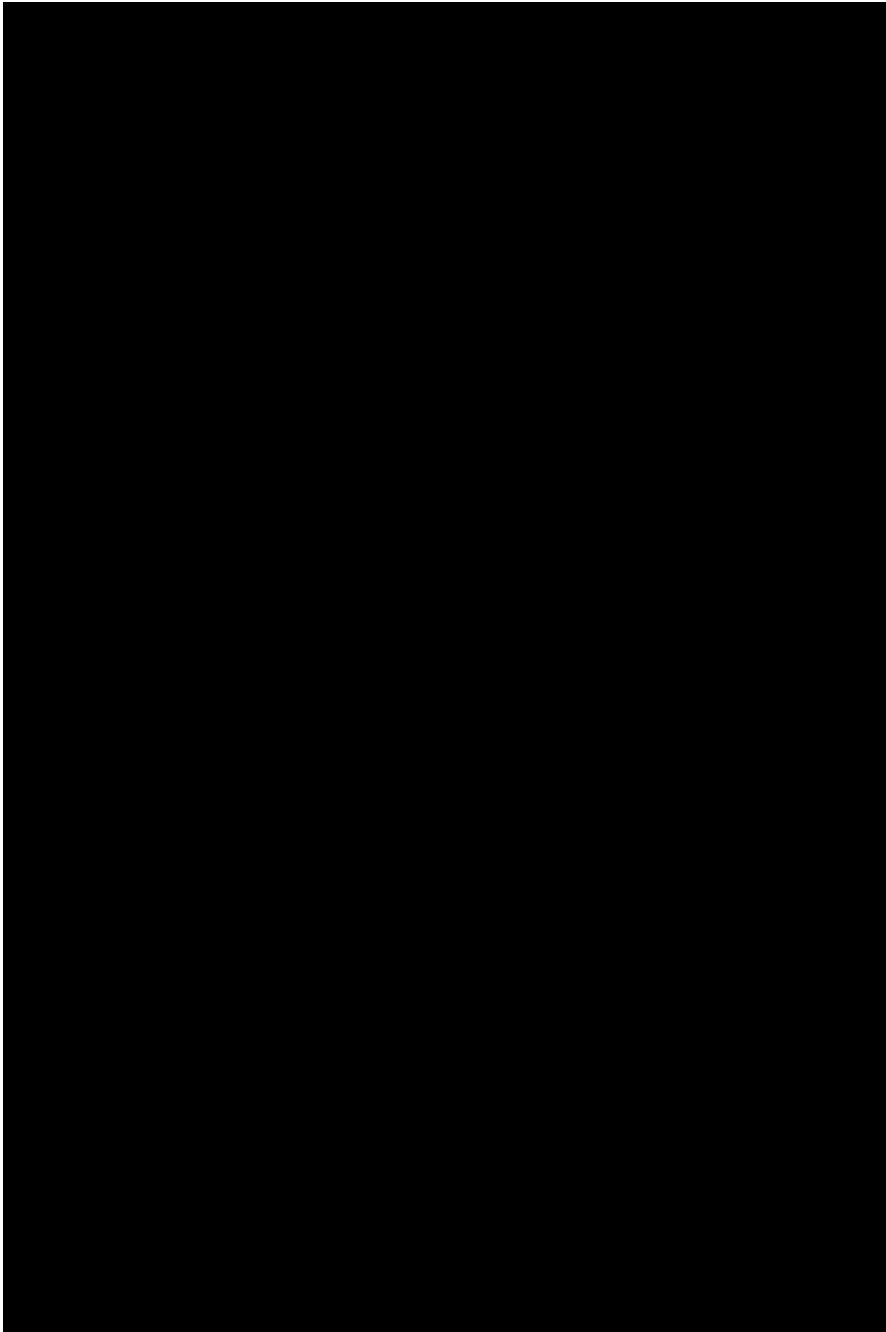


Figure 5.42 - page 177

**Figure 5.40** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People). Year II. No. 7. July 1924. Milan. Magazine cover by Fortunato Depero. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

The subject designed for the cover was already used by Depero for *Sintesi fascista* (figure 5.41), an oil painting dated 1924. At the bottom of the cover we see a patterned ornament, obtained repeating a module made of two geometrical elements. It is common to find such decorative frame and pattern in the Depero's artworks of of that time (see figure 5.42).

**Figure 41** 1924. *Sintesi fascista* (Fascist Synthesis). Oil on canvas. Private collection.

**Figure 42** c. 1925. *Disegni coloratissimi per scialli* (Very Coloured Motif for Shawls). In *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Milan: Dinamo-Azari. Two silken shawls by Depero, exhibited at the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts of Paris, 1925.

Italian tricolours, an effective and original form of communication for the magazine.

In a letter, Azari writes (MART, Dep.3.1.7.4):

You will also have seen the publication 'Rivista del popolo d'Italia' with your cover – 'a great success' – Poli said that even *comm.*<sup>45</sup> Morgagni, who had more difficulty than anyone, remarked: 'good, good, Depero must do more work'. The newspaper salesman display *La rivista* in a special way. A great success that I am very pleased about, as if I had done it myself. [...] Having heard Poli's enthusiasm I told him that I had others he could review and when he requested to see them I took them to him right away.

Azari, 12 August, 1924

Following this first cover Depero would illustrate the first issue every year up until 1927 to grab the attention of readers and beat the competition at the newsstand (Sironi, 2009, 627-629). As the letter suggests, encouraged by this success, Azari showed other sketches to Morgagni who was quite taken by a sketch done for the Christmas issue of December 1924 in which the birth of a fasces is announced by three shooting stars (figure 5.43).

Possibly judged to be too nationalistic and irreverent with regard to the sacredness of Christmas, it was immediately modified for the January issue, with the fasces replaced by the number of the new year (1925) and the Christmas shooting stars with regular stars (figure 5.44). In this way Depero demonstrated great versatility and speed in modifying and adapting the graphical elements used for the covers, essential skills given the pressing deadlines of editorial offices. It was the start of a fruitful collaboration between the artist and the editorial office that spawned numerous cover illustrations and articles.<sup>46</sup>

In December 1926, Depero was presented by the periodical *1919: rassegna mensile illustrata della vecchia guardia fascista*<sup>47</sup> (1919: Illustrated Monthly Review of the Old Fascist Guard - figures 5.61 and 5.62) as 'one of the most devilish and violent proponents of Futurist Art in new Italy' in an article that also includes a little preview of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. In addition, perhaps once again due to the mediation of Azari, Depero also began doing illustrations for this magazine (Anonym, 1919, 1926, 33-37).

Here it is worth noting how Depero had begun collaborating with magazines affiliated with the Party before the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

However, this substantial part of his artistic output is not included in his book. I

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<sup>45</sup> Abbreviation for the title of Commander in the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

<sup>46</sup> Depero later illustrated the covers of the following issues: June 1925 (figure 5.45), January 1926 (figure 5.46), September 1926 (figure 5.47), January 1927 (figure 5.48), October 1928 (figure 5.49), February 1932 (figure 5.50), April 1935 (figure 5.54).

<sup>47</sup> Magazine edited and founded in Milan in 1926 by Mario Giampaoli, militant and federal Fascist in Milan from 1926 to 1928. He was removed from all political and managerial roles in 1929-1930 by Arnaldo Mussolini because of his violent approach (Canali, 2010, n.p.).

believe that this decision was taken on the basis of the context and the evolution of events: in 1927 Depero thought that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* might help to launch his career abroad (as his trip to New York immediately after the book was published may suggest). Outside of Italy (and Germany), showcasing his collaborations with the Fascist Party was neither necessary nor likely to be looked upon very kindly. In addition, as seen in this chapter, the break between Futurism and Fascism took place in 1924, three years before the publication of the book. So, for Depero politics was probably not a topic to prioritise in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. In the 1930s, however, Depero was happy to toe the Fascist Party line perhaps because he saw the regime as the best source of job opportunities.<sup>48</sup>

Morgagni was disappointed that Depero had begun working for a rival magazine and in January 1927 both monthlies, *La rivista* and *1919*, came out with covers designed by Depero, severely damaging their professional relationship. Their collaboration broke down irretrievably in March 1927 when Morgagni commissioned the cover of *La rivista* from Depero only to discover that Depero had once again produced the cover of the rival magazine:

Dear Mr. Depero, rather than starting your letters with 'Long live Morgagni' you should demonstrate that you are a friend of mine and LA RIVISTA. I have seen that you have worked closely, cover included, with another Milan magazine. The fact that it is written by very close friends of mine should have persuaded you not to accept their offer of work. Of course, you could say: I work where I want, and that is fine but I must tell you, and it hurts me to say this, that after everything we have done for you I would never have expected you to do something like this and that, with equal sincerity, I must bid goodbye to you as one of our contributors. I will, however, continue to admire you.

Morgagni, 11 March 1927, MART, Dep.2.7.3

Morgagni resolved the problem by commissioning another cover from Aldo Mazza as a replacement for Depero's, going against the wishes of Poli in the process who angrily wrote to Depero:

Do not be too alarmed. In due course we will reverse this absurd decision, which damages *La rivista* above all else [...] I will speak to him [Morgagni] first, then I will let you know and you will see that in July you will be producing the cover again... Just think that, after I explicitly told him otherwise, [Morgagni] took advantage of my absence to commission this cover to Mazza. The result is a real mess which will also delay us by 5 days!

Poli, 13 March 1927, MART, Dep.3.2.13.6

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<sup>48</sup> Depero (and Azari) sent copies of *Depero futurista* to politicians in order to ask for possible 'help'. Arduino Colasanti offered contacts of possible clients (e.g. Lauro De Bosis, 1928–1930 director of Italy America Society in New York, see MART, Dep.3.1.6.48/49/50), whereas the minister of education Pietro Fedele promised '5000 Lire' and 'favours' in New York in exchange for 'the very beautiful and original volume' sent to him by Depero. 'Favours' probably refers to the cancellation of duties for importing Depero's art in the USA (MART, Dep.3.1.15.56 and Dep.3.1.16.10). For more on this topic, see p. 78.

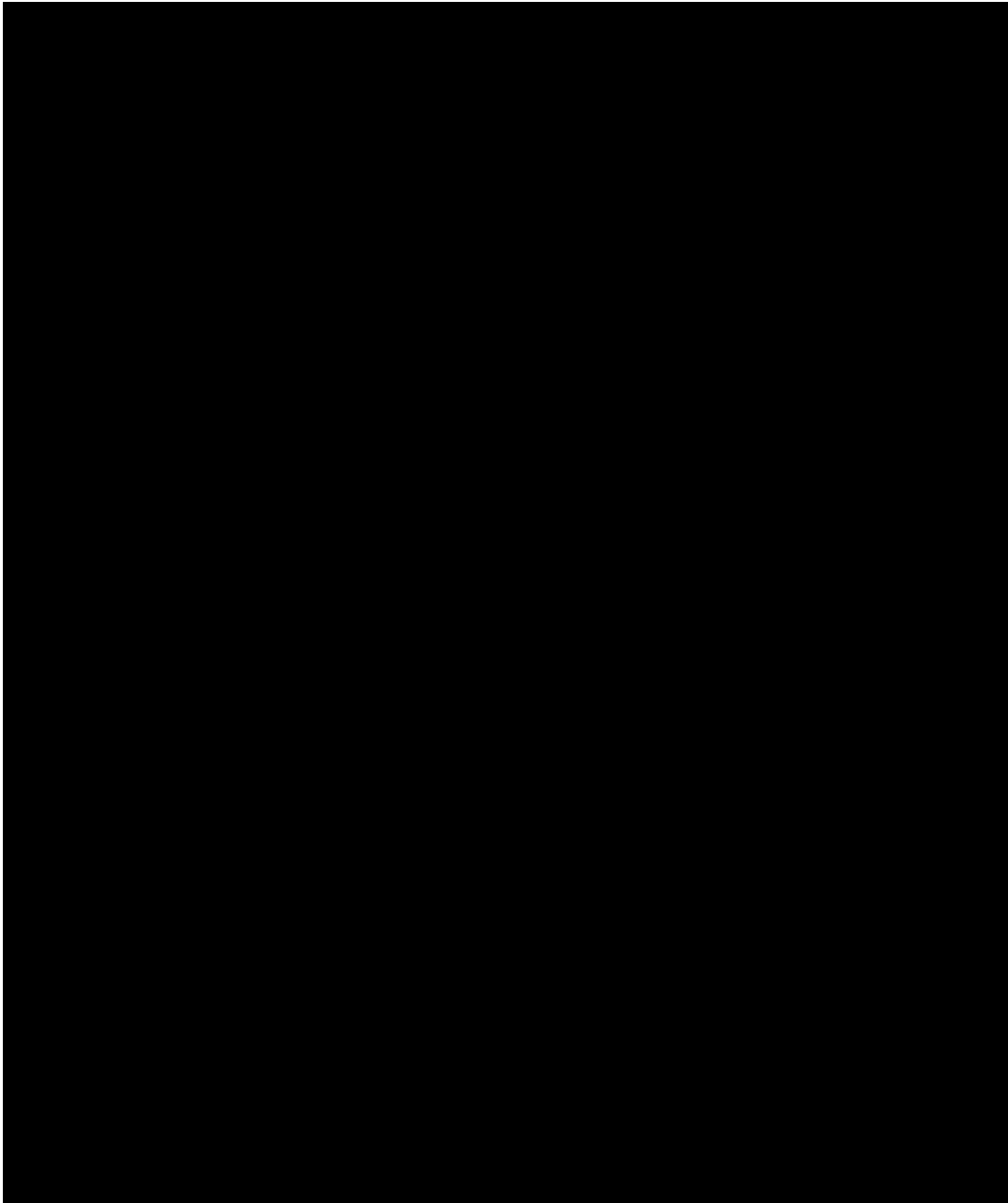


Figure 5.45

Figure 5.46

Figure 5.47

**Figure 5.43** 1924. Rejected sketch for the cover of *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People). Year II. No. 12. December 1924. Milano. Pencil on paper. MART, Dep.8.1.11.242.

**Figure 5.44** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year III. No. 1. 15 January 1925. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

**Figure 5.45** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year III. No. 6. June 1925. Magazine cover by Fortunato Depero. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.  
As it can be seen in figures 5.49 and 5.51, the floral theme represents a constant in the Depero's artistic production.

**Figure 5.46** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year IV. No. 1. January 1926. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

**Figure 5.47** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year IV. No. 9. September 1926. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

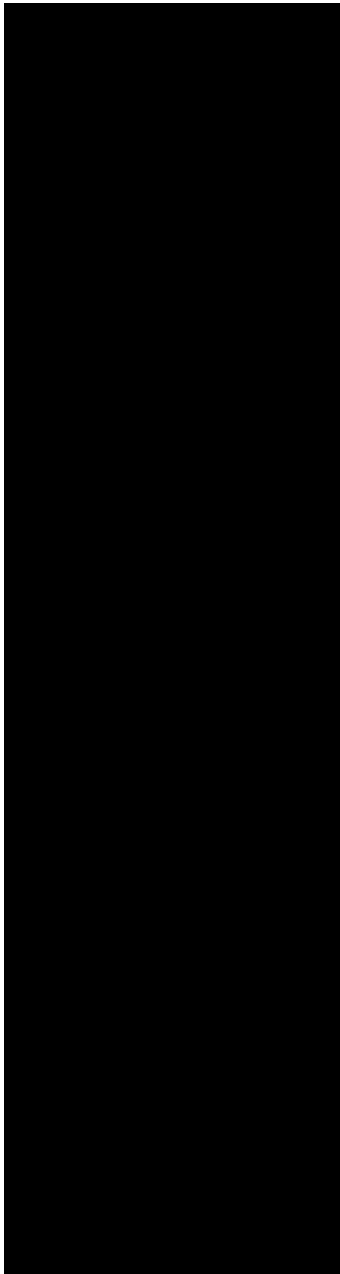


Figure 5.52

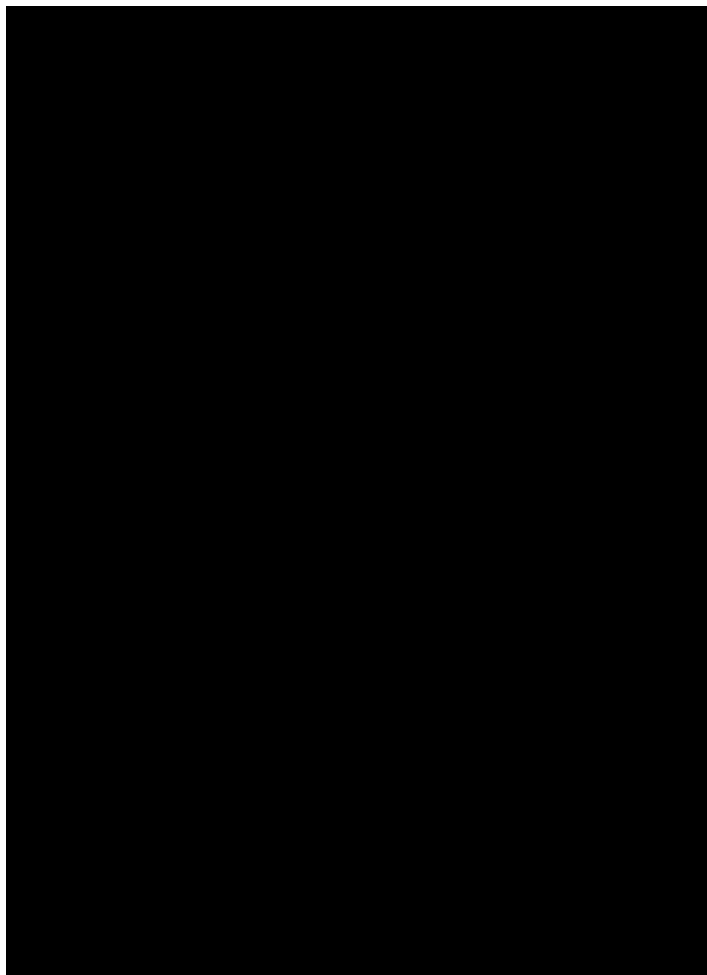


Figure 5.53

**Figure 5.48** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year V. No. 1. January 1927. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

**Figure 5.49** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year VI. No. 10. October 1928. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm. Cover for the 10th issue of *La rivista* (October 1928). The subject revisits the floral iconography used for the fabric tarsia *Fiori artificiali* (1919-1920) found on page 173 of the book (figure 5.51). Varying the colours, Depero would use this layout several times, for example in the calendar for Tipografia Mercurio in 1929.

**Figure 5.50** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*. Year X. No. 2. February 1932. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm. First cover designed by Depero for *La rivista* after returning from his journey in New York. The cover subject is one of the main Deperian theme: the man with moustaches; taken from *Plastic ballets show* (1916 - figure 5.52), the same cover proposal was refused by *Vogue Magazine* in 1929 when Depero was looking for new commitments in the USA (figure 5.53).

**Figure 5.51** 1925-1926. *Fiori artificiali* (Artificial Flowers). Design for a fabric tarsia reproduced on page 173 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*.

**Figure 5.52** 1925-1926. *Baffuto di legno* (Wooden Bewhiskered). Design for a fabric tarsia reproduced on page 169 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*.

**Figure 5.53** 1929. Rejected cover proposal for *Vanity Fair*. Pencil on paper. 31 × 41.4 cm. Private collection, Rovereto.



Figure 5.54

Figure 5.55



Figure 5.57

**Figure 5.54** *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia* (The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People). Year XII. No. 4. April 1935. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm.

The issue of April 1935 was the last cover designed by Fortunato Depero for *La rivista*. The front image consists of a black background with three coloured flag (green, white and red) alternated with steel pipes, on which, the hammer depicted in the cover probably represents perseverance and effort of the Fascist working force; while the pencil together with the pincers might represent, respectively, the action plan adopted in Africa and the strength of military action that was taking place in the horn of Africa (the Fascist attack in Eritrea and Ethiopia started between February and April).

**Figure 5.55** On November 1935, a special issue of *La rivista* was published in order to commemorate the thirteenth anniversary of the Fascist regime. The volume collected several articles that celebrated each aspect of the Fascist living: agricultures, industries and arts. Each section also contained an accompanying illustration and Depero designed on for the article by Antonio Stefano Benni (Minister of Transport from 1935 to 1939) entitled 'Le comunicazioni' (The communications). The illustration represents the main achievement reached by the regime in the field of transportations, depicting the improvement in the communication routes such as bridges, dykes and aviation.

**Figures 5.56 and 5.57** c. 1935. Two drafts cover for *La rivista*. We do not know for which issue these drafts were designed by Depero, presumably the marching soldiers were thought to represent the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia between 1935 and 1936. Pencil on paper. MART, Dep.6.34.7

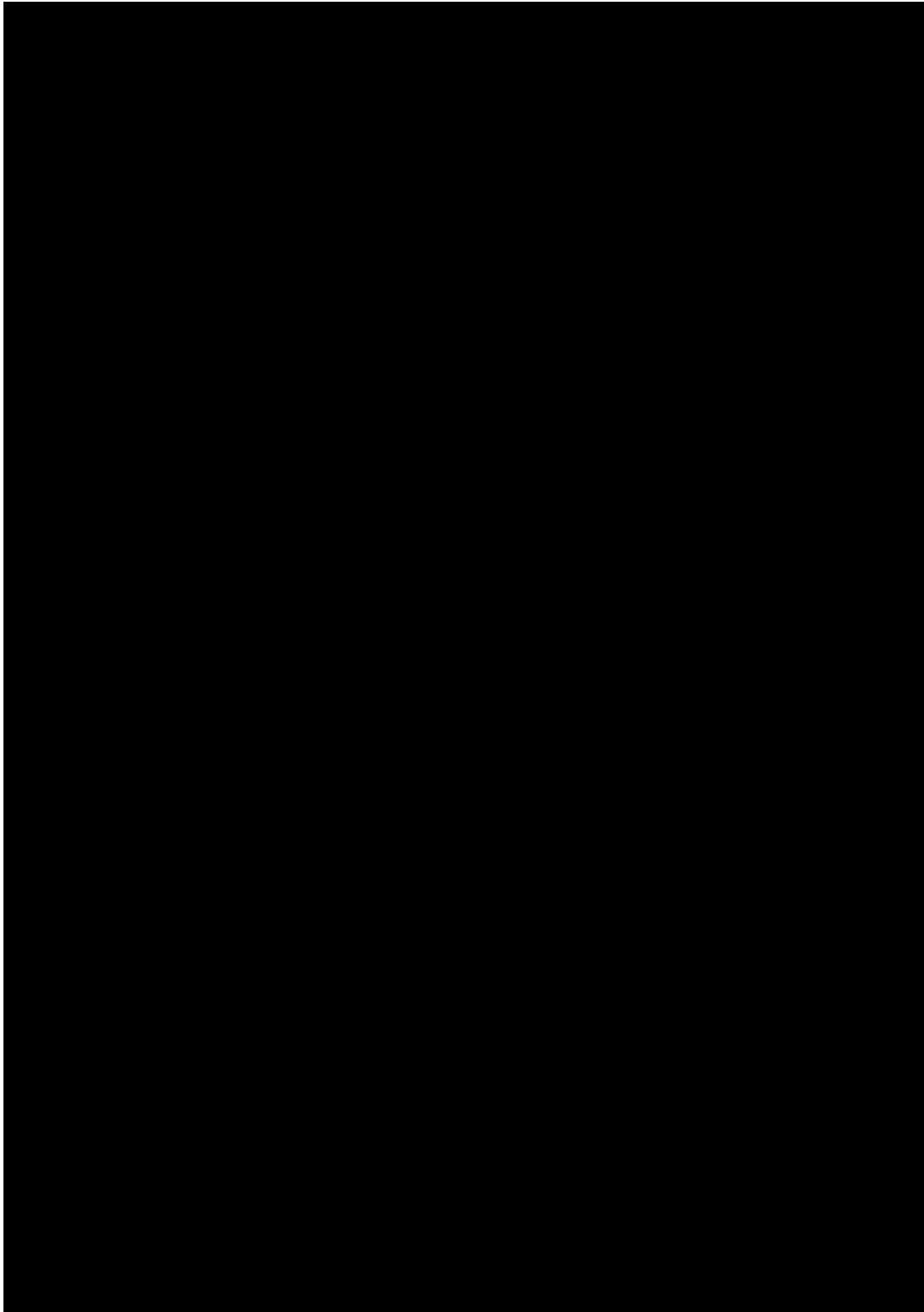


Figure 5.60

**Figures 5.58/5.59/5.60** Tempera on cardboard. Rejected drafts for May 1936 issue of *La rivista*. The cover had to celebrate the victory of the Fascist army and the Ethiopian surrender. The editorial staff of *La rivista* preferred to commission the image for this issue to Bramante Buffoni, who designed a calligraphic cover that simply states: 'Ethiopia is Italian'.

**Figure 5.58** 1936. 41.5 × 56.3 cm. MART, Dep.6.34.1

**Figure 5.59** 1936. 47.5 × 60 cm. MART, Dep.6.34.2.

**Figure 5.60** 1936. 40.6 × 55 cm. MART, Dep.6.34.3.

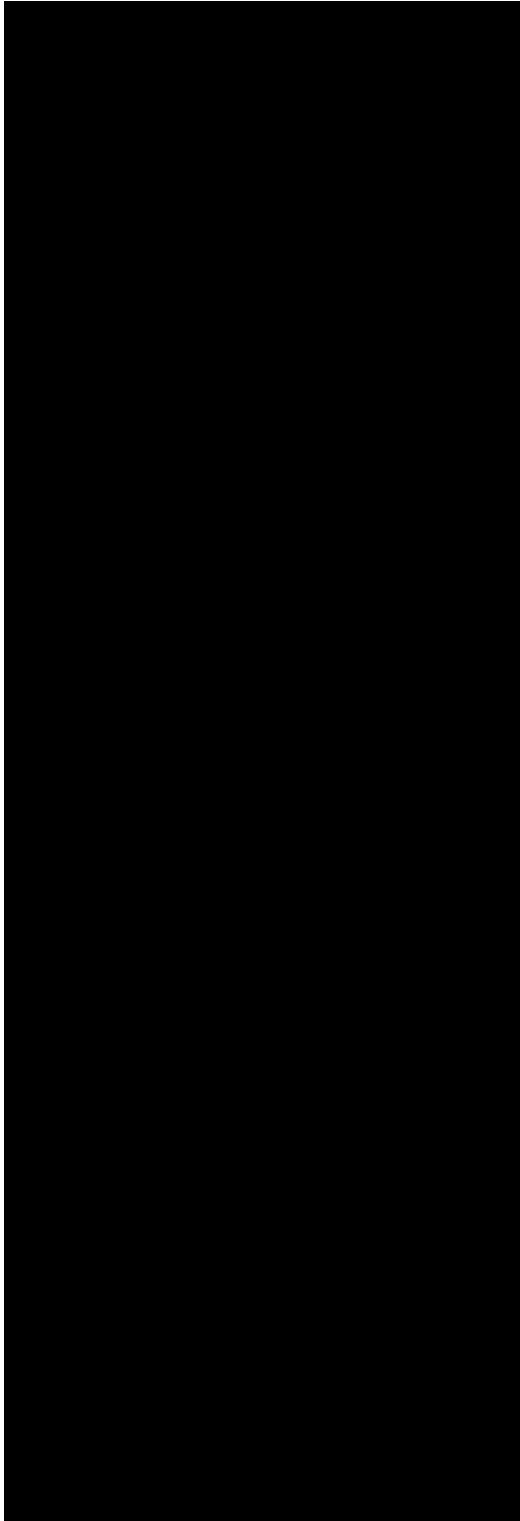


Figure 5.63

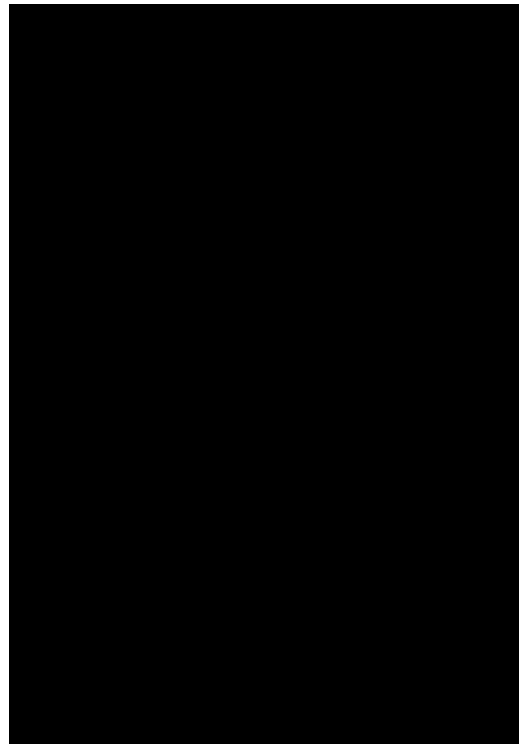


Figure 5.62

**Figure 5.61** 1919: *rassegna mensile illustrata della vecchia guardia Fascista* (1919: Illustrated Monthly Review of the Old Fascist Guard). Year III. No. 3. February 1927. Lithograph on paper. 24.5 × 33.5 cm. Magazine cover by Fortunato Depero featuring a graphic interpretation of fasces.

**Figure 5.62** 1919: *rassegna mensile illustrata della vecchia guardia Fascista* (1919: Illustrated Monthly Review of the Old Fascist Guard). Year III. No. 11. November 1927. Lithograph on paper, 24.5 × 33.5 cm. Magazine cover by Fortunato Depero.

**Figure 5.63** *Emporium*. vol. LXVI. No. 396. December 1927. Photogravure on paper. 20 × 27 cm.



Mazza's cover consists of a photographic reproduction of one of his framed paintings, quite different to the layout desired by Poli. Contrary to Poli's forecasts, the professional relationship between *La rivista* and Depero was actually interrupted for several years until 1932.<sup>49</sup>

Depero therefore began to work with other magazines such as *Emporium*<sup>50</sup> (figure 5.63) and *Il Secolo XX*<sup>51</sup> (20th Century), the latter commissioning him to produce the cover for the issue of October 1928 (figure 5.64), coinciding with the introduction of the magazine's new and modern editorial line<sup>52</sup>. Such was its success that the magazine decided to use Depero's cover (see figures 5.65 and 5.66) until October 1930. Freed from Fascist imagery, this cover still seems contemporary today, especially in its use of colour, and such work meant that Depero was in great demand as a cover designer for magazines that wanted a touch of Futurist modernism.

Between September 1928 and 1929 he moved to New York where he worked with some of the most important illustrated magazines: *Vogue*, *Sparks*, *Vanity Fair*, *Movie Makers*.

With the establishment of the MinCulPop and the Fascist Federation of Italian Journalists, in 1926, the press was even more restricted. The sports press, which was strongly controlled by the regime, also felt the impact of this situation. One of the main features of the Fascist sports press was propaganda journalism. In this regard, as well as in the major changes to the editorial teams of existing publications, new magazines were founded with the aim of promoting the Roman approach to sport as a means of educating the masses and as ultimate models of male masculinity (CONI, undated). The ultimate example of this type of publication was *Lo sport fascista*<sup>53</sup> (figure 5.67) for which Depero illustrated the cover of the first issue.

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<sup>49</sup> Depero would design the cover of the February 1932 issue (see figure 5.50).

<sup>50</sup> *Emporium* was an important Italian art and graphics magazine founded by Paolo Gaffuri and Arcangelo Ghisleri, and heavily influenced by the London-based magazine *The Studio*, an illustrated magazine of fine and applied art. It came out on a monthly basis between 1895 and 1964.

<sup>51</sup> *Il Secolo XX. Rivista popolare illustrata* contained articles on news, current affairs and literature. The monthly was founded in 1902 by the publisher of Jewish origins Emilio Treves, for whom Depero also designed the book pavilion (page 91 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* - see figure 6.6).

<sup>52</sup> The previous issue included the following caption printed together with Depero's cover: '*Il Secolo XX* transforms. After 27 years, in which it has been one of Europe's leading monthly magazines, it feels the acceleration of the rhythm of our lives and now falls in step with this rhythm...'

<sup>53</sup> Founded and edited by Lando Ferretti, a leading figure on the Italian sports scene, president of CONI (the Italian Olympic Committee) and head of the Prime Minister's Press Office (1928-1931). He sought to spread the cult of the Duce via the press, omitting news on his health, his birthday and his private life and always transmitting a virile image: his military endeavours, his sporting and popular achievements (photos with peasants while ploughing or welding - see figure 5.68).

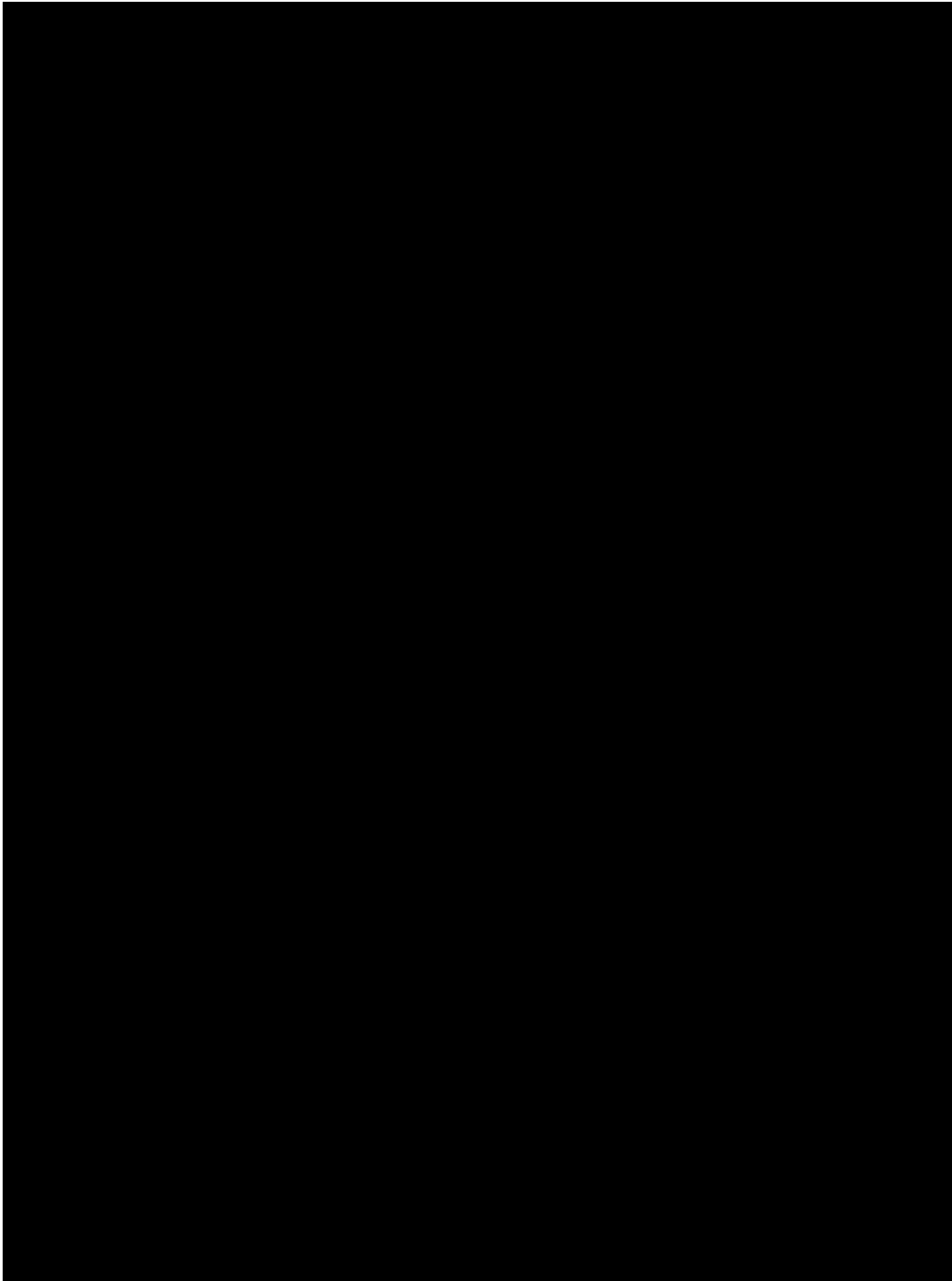


Figure 5.67

Figure 5.68

**Figure 5.64** 1928. *Il Secolo XX* (20th Century). Milan. Final layout painted by Fortunato Depero for the magazine cover. Oil on board. 49.8 × 64.1 cm. Courtesy of Merrill C. Berman Collection. Due to the great success reached by Depero's layout, this design was adopted until October 1930 as official cover, sometimes with little variations (see the two following pictures).

**Figure 5.65** *Il Secolo XX* (20th Century). Milan. 5 January 1929. Year VII. No. 6. Lithograph on paper. 29.5 × 38.7 cm. Courtesy of Merrill C. Berman Collection.

**Figure 5.66** *Il Secolo XX* (20th Century). Milan. 20 August 1929. Year VII. No. 21. Lithograph on paper. 29.5 × 38.7 cm. Courtesy of Merrill C. Berman Collection.

**Figures 5.67 and 5.68** Cover and Mussolini's dedication included in the first issue. *Lo sport fascista. Rassegna mensile illustrata* (Fascist sport. Monthly Illustrated Review). Milan. June 1928. Year VI. Vol. 1. No. 1. Lithograph on paper. Courtesy of Emeroteca Coni and Biblioteca Sportiva Nazionale - Rome.

### 5.2.6 Depero's illustrations for Fascism: the ONB (Opera Nazionale Balilla) and the OND (Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro).

Two important state institutions for promoting the values of the regime were Opera Nazionale Balilla<sup>54</sup> (National Youth Organization) and Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro<sup>55</sup> (National Recreation Club, hereinafter the ONB and the OND). Through these, Fascist propaganda was able to penetrate every aspect of the Italian people's lives: the ONB trained the future Fascist generations while the OND filled the free time of workers with Fascist activities. In many Italian cities the two organisations had their own headquarters, respectively 'Casa del Balilla' and 'Casa del Fascio', the latter also operating as a general party office.<sup>56</sup>

In 1934, the *Prima mostra nazionale di plastica murale* (First National Exhibition of Wall Decoration) took place in Genova, curated by Enrico Prampolini. The exhibition sought to create and collect new decorations for Fascist architecture. Each participant artist had to decorate a Fascist building, choosing between 15 different kinds of architecture, such as Casa del Fascio, city halls, post offices, train stations and public schools.

The style used by Depero for the magazines he illustrated in the late 1920s and early 1930s was taken up by both Party organisations the ONB and the OND. First, he created a decorative project for a Casa del Fascio entitled *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (War, the World's Only Hygiene, c. 1933-1934, figures 5.69, 5.70 and 5.71), in which the wall and floor decorations were thought to be realised either with the mosaic technique or completely made of metal. After this commission, he designed mosaics and tapestries almost without colour, in varying shades of steel, to decorate the Italian sites of the Casa del Balilla (figures 5.72 and 5.73).

In addition to this, the OND organised Hitler's visit to Rome on 6 May 1938, for which Depero designed the programme (figures 5.74 and 5.75) – a commission that surely shows great favour in upper echelons of the regime. The following month, to mark the *Terzo congresso mondiale del dopolavoro* (Third World Recreation Congress), the OND asked Depero to create an original illustration for each of the 93 provinces of the time (from Agrigento to Zara): 'Each colour illustration symbolised a Province of

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<sup>54</sup> Created on 3 April 1926 by Renato Ricci, the ONB was designed to assist and provide for the physical and moral education of children of six to ten years old (known as *Balilla*) and youths between ten and eighteen years old (known as *Avanguardisti* - avant-gardists). The term Balilla came from Giovan Battista Perasso, also known by the nickname Balilla, who led the revolt against the Austrian occupants in Genoa in December 1746 (on this topic see Zapponi, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> The OND (1925) was tasked with managing the free time of workers, tending to the moral and physical elevation of people through sport, trekking, tourism, artistic education, popular culture, social security, hygiene services and healthcare (as described in the statute - OND, 1938).

<sup>56</sup> Offices mainly designed by rationalist architects affiliated with the regime such as: Adalberto Libera, Mario De Renzi, Ludovico Quaroni, Giuseppe Terragni and Marcello Piacentini.



Figure 5.69

Figure 5.70

Figure 5.71



Figure 5.73

**Figures 5.69/5.70/5.71** c. 1933-34. *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (War, the World's Only Hygiene).

Project for the *Prima mostra nazionale di plastica murale* (First National Exhibition of Wall Decoration).

Each design refers to a specific building part and it presents a title and a short descriptive text full of Fascist mottoes.

**Figure 5.69** *Solidità fascista* (Fascist Solidity). Casa del Fascio vestibule. Tempera on cardboard. 25 × 90 cm. Real measures 4 × 2 mt.

**Figure 5.70** *Mare d'acciaio* (Sea of Steel). Casa del Fascio vestibule. Tempera on cardboard. 25 × 90 cm. Real measures 4 × 2 mt.

**Figure 5.71** *Il cuore del Duce* (Duce's Heart). Casa del Fascio vestibule. Tempera on cardboard. 25 × 90 cm. Real measures 4 × 2 mt. On 11 July 1935, Depero writing to Benito Mussolini, proposes and describes this and other Fascist artworks. There are no replies by Mussolini. See MART, Dep.3.2.21.74.

**Figure 5.72** c. 1934. *Nuova luce* (New Light). Mosaic pavement design for the Casa del Balilla. Tempera on cardboard. Scale 1:5.

**Figure 5.73** c. 1934. *Il Duce nel mondo* (Duce in the World). Meeting room design for the Casa del Balilla. Tempera on cardboard. 50 × 50 cm, real measures 3 × 3 mt. It is interesting to note how Depero took inspiration from the elements already designed for *La rivista* covers (i.e. flags - figure 5.54, areoplanes figures 5.58 and 5.60).

the Kingdom and, as well as the data relating to the Provincial Recreation Club, included a motto of the DUCE referring to it' (OND, 1938, 3 - figures 5.76, 5.77 and 5.78).

### **5.3 Embracing of the Fascist cause: between convenience and ideology**

Even if we cannot establish the absolute truth of the facts described in his 1945 report, a number of issues worth considering arise with regard to Depero: his need for money and his complaints about sustenance, and his clamouring for commissions but also artistic recognition from the Fascist Party and powerful figures such as federal secretaries and *gerarchi*. Depero always maintained an accommodating and complicit approach to the Fascist Party but one that was perhaps also justifiable given the despotic conditions of a totalitarian regime that imposed its will.<sup>57</sup>

Fascism and Futurism were allies at least until 1920, with the Futurist ideology coinciding perfectly with the 'revolutionary and modern' Fascism defined by Dombroski, one absorbed by the cult of technology and machines that celebrated the liberation from traditional social and family ties (Dombroski, 1984, 49).<sup>58</sup> Having forgotten the sad experience of World War One, Depero found himself completely engaged in the creative Futurist whirlwind and, at the same time, the impending Fascist hegemony. Following the march on Rome and the Fascist Party's rise to power in the 1930s, there was a gradual dwindling in the artistic avant-garde activities of Futurism until it became 'little more than Fascist war propaganda' in the 1940s (Berghaus, 1996, 235).

Heller defines Depero as 'by far the most inventive graphic designer of the era in Italy', playing an important role in linking Fascism with Futurist aesthetics: 'his recurring references to the *fascio* and other symbols of Fascism helped to

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<sup>57</sup> As regards the impositions of the regime, Maurizio Scudiero argues that 'as of the 1930s artists were obliged to support the Fascists' (Scudiero, 2009, 512). At the same time, Depero never missed a chance to benefit from his relationship with the Fascist Party. One obvious example is the 1936 publication entitled *Officina d'arte fascista Depero: progetto antisanzionista per lo sviluppo commerciale degli arazzi e cuscini Depero* (Depero Fascist art workshop: antisanzionista project for the commercial development of Depero tapestries and cushions). To make up for the downturn suffered by his house of art as of the mid-1930s, Depero wrote two essays, one literary and the other technical, on the project for relaunching the house of art. The publication was presented to the Fascist authorities of Trento with the aim of incentivising the recovery of the local craft industry, in line with Mussolini's autarkic programmes (see MART, Dep.4.1.84, Dep.4.1.85, Dep.4.1.86 and Dep.8.1.11.239 containing the drafts of the essays and printed cut-outs of the texts). According to Gabriella Belli, Depero resubmitted it also in 1942 but the project was never pursued and the house of art was closed for good during the Second World War (Belli, 1993, 40-43).

<sup>58</sup> In 1920 Marinetti spoke at the II congresso of the Fasces of Combat (Milan, 24-25 May) reiterating his anti-monarchy and anti-clerical stance and his support for striking for just cause, positions that were not shared by the Fascists. The ideological differences between Marinetti and the Fascists were incompatible and at the end of the year he left the Fasci followed by the Futurists and the *sansepolcristi* Ferruccio Vecchi and Mario Carli. He would backtrack in 1924, year of the Futurist congress mentioned earlier in this chapter, during which Marinetti would abandon his political aspirations but, at the same time and on an on and off basis, realign himself with Fascism.

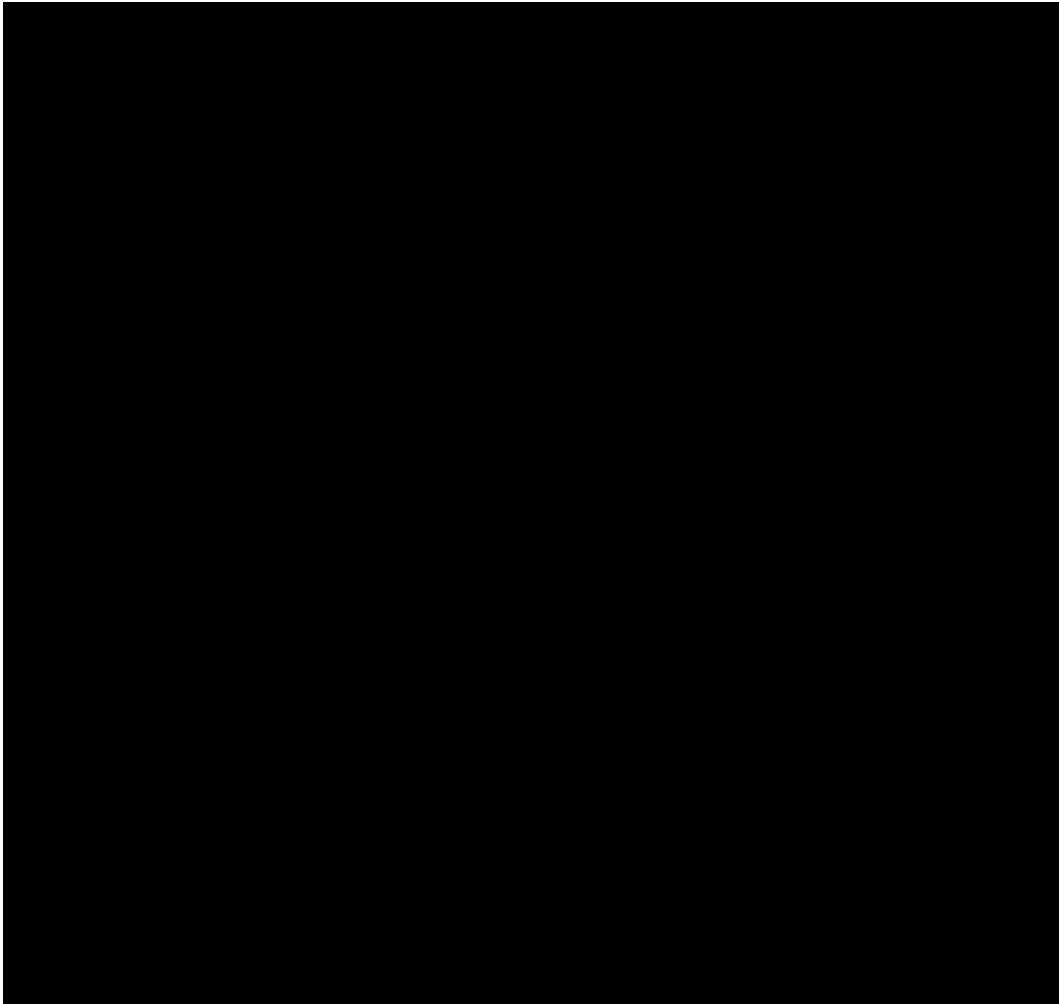


Figure 5.76

Figure 5.77

Figure 5.78

**Figures 5.74 and 5.75** *Roma. Piazza di Siena. Maggio XVI.* Program of the event designed by Depero for Hitler's visit on 7-8 May 1938. Lithograph on cardboard. 16.2 × 24 cm. Collezione Mughini - Courtesy of Libreria Pontremoli.

**Figures 5.76/5.77/5.78** *I dopolavori aziendali in Italia.* 24 June 1938. Rome: Dopolavoro (Istituto Geografico De Agostini - Novara). Collezione Mughini - Courtesy of Libreria Pontremoli.

A five-volume set published in five languages on the occasion of the 1938 *Terzo congresso mondiale del dopolavoro* (Third International World Recreation Congress), which convened first in Hamburg before moving to Rome. Cover and illustrations by Fortunato Depero, who produced 93 different illustrations for the book, each representing a different Italian region and bearing a motto by Benito Mussolini.

propagate the regime's fabricated aura of progressiveness' (Heller, 2008, 101). In effect, Depero often worked for the Fascist Party, particularly for magazines affiliated or owned by the regime. His modern, concise and colourful illustrations, so sought-after by the magazines of the time, were used to serve Fascist propaganda purposes. Depero had already established himself in the 1920s, his modern style was already well defined and widespread: his geometric illustrations were used successfully for advertising – by making them Fascist in nature, they served the ends of the regime perfectly (see chapter 6).

The changes in Depero's work can be seen from the publication of *Manifesto dell'arte meccanica* (Manifesto of Mechanical Art - 1922<sup>59</sup>) onwards: as the Fascists became more dominant, Depero switched from a metallic style to a steel style, his theoretical writings became increasingly ideological and violent, and his artwork adopted darker and more oppressive tones as a result. The icons which previously depicted puppets and animals for tapestries, theatrical productions, furniture and adverts became, all of sudden, Fascist symbols and graphic ideological depictions. His style evolved to mirror the trajectory of the regime.

As seen in this chapter, relations between the Fascist regime and artists (in particular the Futurists) were not always consistent. In addition, the most disparate forms of political thought co-existed within the same artistic movement. In fact, the over 1000 Futurists operating in Italy during the 1920s included anarchists, left-leaning artists and militant Fascists who, despite their contrasting opinions, worked together to produce often contradictory results and content. To this end, it is worth mentioning the case of Tullio d'Albisola<sup>60</sup>, a Futurist artist who belonged to the first clandestine groups that opposed Fascism and for this reason was regularly persecuted until the fall of the regime (Bochicchio, 2020, 149-155); at the same time, to ensure his survival as an artist and the survival of his family, out of his friendship and admiration for Marinetti he nonetheless produced pro-Fascist works

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<sup>59</sup> Year of the march on Rome.

<sup>60</sup> Pseudonym of Tullio Mazzotti, who worked in the family ceramic art factory in Albissola Marina (Savona - Liguria). Having come into contact with the Futurists (Farfa in particular), he began to experiment successfully with ceramics, combining traditional Ligurian ceramics with the colours and lines of Futurism. Together with Marinetti, in 1938 he published the *Manifesto futurista della ceramica e aereoceramica* (The Futurist Manifesto of Ceramics and Aerialceramics), exhibiting his works at the fourth Monza biennial and the fourth triennial of Milan. According to Luca Bochicchio, d'Albisola was imprisoned and registered as Tullio Mazzotti between 1921 and 1922 because of his opposition to Fascism, a fact that led him firstly to use his pseudonym rather than his real name so as to avoid censure by the regime, and secondly to escape to Spain in 1941 to avoid the persecution of the Fascists. In parallel, and somewhat in contradiction, the Mazzotti family enjoyed a good reputation with the local Fascio and Tullio himself was in contact with exponents of Fascism (e.g. Luigi Freddi - see note 17 on page 78 and Bochicchio, 2020, 149-171).

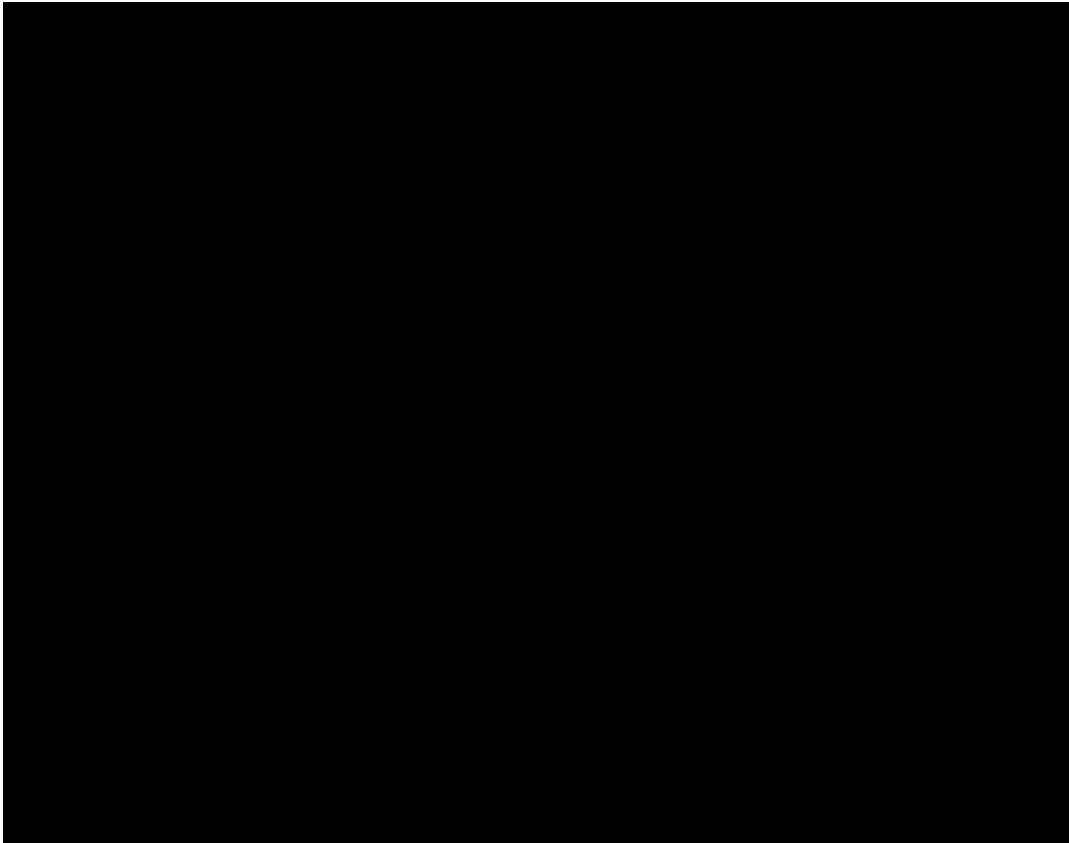


Figure 5.80

**Figure 5.79** c. 1932. Sketch of the stained glass window of the Palazzo delle Poste (Main post office building) in Trento. The project was realised in the end of 1933. 18 × 23 cm, MART, Dep.7.1.3.6.10.

**Figure 5.80** 1935. *Proclamazione e trionfo del tricolore* (Proclamation and Triumph of the Tricolor). Tempera on paper, affixed to Masonite. 141 × 228 cm. See MART, Dep.4.1.127.2. Mosaic sketch proposal designed by Depero for the public competition for the new Reggio Emilia train Station. On 11 July 1935, Depero wrote a letter to Mussolini attaching this project, we do not know which project in the end won.



and texts (e.g. the lito-tins – see d’Albisola, 1935 and footnotes 47 and 50 on pages 253-254 of the thesis).<sup>61</sup>

Like many other artists that lived under the Fascist regime, Depero had a variety of options available to him. Every analysis of his Fascist activities and writings must take account of the context and the array of choices and innumerable nuances that this involved: regardless of what he said about himself, and without reflecting on whether his ideology was simply a question of convenience or not, the facts tell us that Depero had undoubtedly embraced the Fascist cause. He exploited all the opportunities offered by the regime, also on the most debatable occasions (e.g. Hitler’s visit), and decided to include Mussolini’s words (albeit abridged), repeating them multiple times in *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (a book published during the Fascist era).

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**61** Other contradictory examples cited in this thesis: Depero himself who collaborated with Zamboni, an openly anarchic and anti-Fascist printer (see p. 156); Carlo Frassinelli, anti-Fascist printer mentioned in Fascist publications (see footnote 57 on page 260); Dradi and Rossi, both openly anti-Fascist but among the designers (including Depero) who produced the covers for *Lo Sport Fascista* (on this topic, see Barbieri, 2020, 76-96 and page 65-69 of this thesis); Xanti Schawinsky, Swiss-Jewish designer, who designed propaganda posters for Benito Mussolini (figure 5.86); Margherita Sarfatti, Fascist Jew, one of the founders of the *Novecento Italiano* artistic movement, leading figure on the Fascist cultural and artistic scene, author of the hagiographic biography of *Il Duce* as well as his lover, at least until the introduction of the racial laws in 1938, following which she had to flee from Italy (Ferrari, Giacon and Montaldo, 2018).

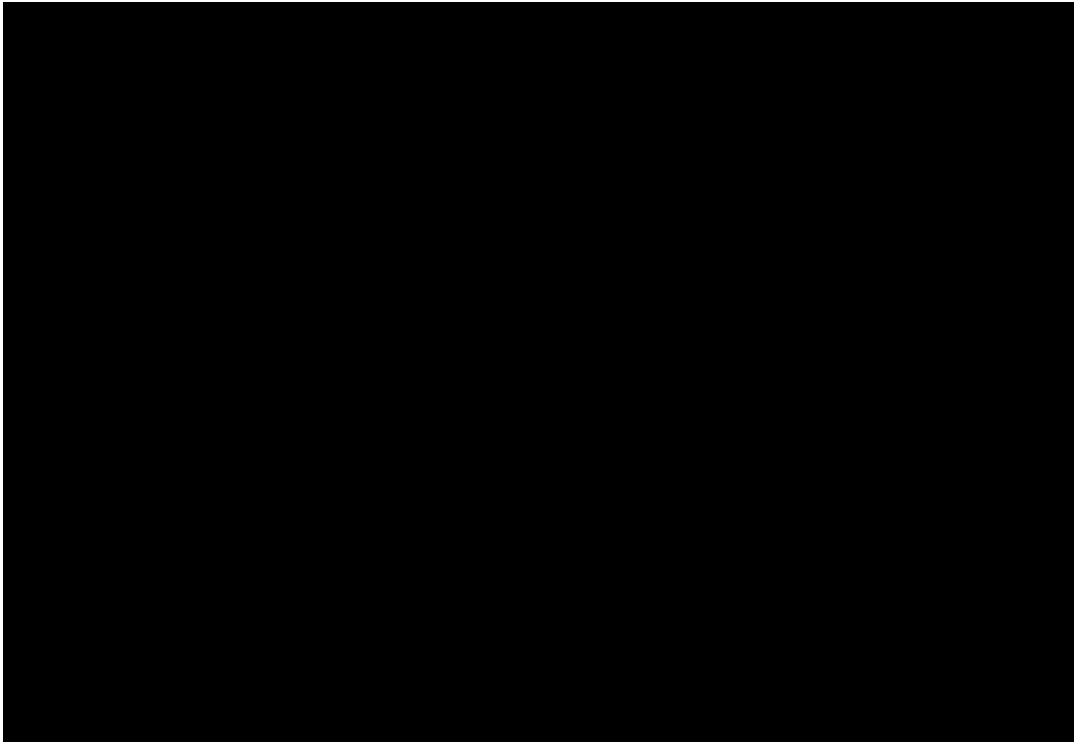


Figure 5.81



Figure 5.84

**Figure 5.81** 1935. Sketch of diploma for the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party). Tempera and indian ink on paper. 30 × 43.3 cm. MART, Dep.6.36.

**Figure 5.82** 1936. *Festa dell'uva. Numero unico. Rovereto 1936.* (Grape Festival. Single Issue. Rovereto 1936). Letterpress on paper. 20.5 × 27.6 cm. Lafuente archive.

In this occasion, beyond this catalogue, the local OND authorities asked Depero to design a carnival float (see MART, Dep.2.5.152). Depero sent promotional copies of the catalogue to different Fascist party members (e.g. Galeazzo Ciano, Minister of Press and Propaganda and subsequently Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Cornelio Di Marzio, president of the trade union confederation of Fascist artists see MART, Dep.3.1.32.3 and Dep.3.1.32.2).

**Figure 5.83** 1937. *Ala fascista* (Fascist Wing). Tapestry for Gianni Caproni Competition, VI Trento Art Union. Photograph. 16 × 12 cm, MART, Dep.7.1.3.1.177.

Giovanni Battista Caproni, known as 'Gianni' Caproni, was an Italian aeronautical engineer and aircraft designer affiliated with the Fascist regime.

**Figure 5.84** 1937. Color detail of the tapestry. Pieced wool on cotton. 94.5 × 204 cm.



**Figure 5.85** 1943. *A passo romano* (Roman Step). Trento: Edizioni Credere Obbedire Combattere.

Depero's book published by the party publishing house affiliated to the Federation of the Fasci of Combat of Trento. The book's title page begins with the phrase 'black shirt, holy war armour' followed by an illustration of a skull brandishing a knife and flags that clamour: 'Duce, to us'.

The rarity of the first edition of the book is due to the fact that following the war Depero sought to destroy as many copies as possible (Pontremoli, 2014, 116).

**Figure 5.86** Schawinsky, X. 1934. *Si* (Yes). 65.5 × 96 cm. Printed by Alfieri & Lacroix, Milan.

Propaganda poster promoting the election of the Fascist National Party. Xanti Schawinsky made expert use of the photomontage techniques to portray the dictator as an entity formed by the citizens. Mussolini's body perfectly exemplifies the Fascist metaphor of the state as a body: the people that constitute the state, the body of the country (see section 5.2.3 and the related discussion above).

The poster was included as an insert in the April 1934 issue of magazine *La Rivista*.



## 6 Fortunato Depero and advertising art

The shift of focus in the art-historical critique of Futurism expanded the area of analysis beyond the fine arts to involve the applied arts, and led to reassessment of the figure of Depero. In this process of rediscovery, the artist's advertising practice seems to be the sphere of greatest interest to museums and institutions interested in exhibiting his commercial art. The first major monothematic retrospective on Depero's work was *Depero Pubblicitario. Dall'auto-réclame all'architettura pubblicitaria* (13 October 2007 – 3 February 2008) at the MART, which exhibited the incredible collection of advertising materials held in the Depero fund of the Archivio del '900.<sup>1</sup> Examining a large sample of Depero's work, the exhibition provided an overview of his design methodology, from drafts and correspondence between the artist and customer, through to the final piece of advertising. This was followed by the Futurist exhibition organised at the Guggenheim in New York, *Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe* (21 February – 1 September 2014), the title of which, borrowed from Balla and Depero's manifesto, hinted at its focus on the multi-faceted nature of Futurist artefacts, particularly those created by the two artists. The exhibition presented numerous works of applied art by Depero, furniture, clothes and advertising products (magazine covers, advertisements and sculptures for Campari, advertising pavilions etc. - see Greene, 2014, pp. 190-201, 210-215, 218-219, 252-255). In the same year, the Juan March Foundation of Madrid inaugurated *Depero futurista: 1913-1950* (10 October 2014 – 18 January 2015), an exhibition that analysed the figure of Depero in full, dividing his career into four periods, the third of which was dedicated to Depero's 'Futurist house of art' and his production of applied art and advertising. The catalogue contains critical texts that examine the artist from various viewpoints: Giovanna Ginex analysed his most important advertising commissions, and Belén Sánchez Albarrán examined his desire to eliminate the boundary between art and graphic design (Ginex, 2014, 308-317 and Albarrán 2014, 318-326).

In addition to these exhibitions, many others on Depero's advertising work were

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<sup>1</sup> The 464-page catalogue presented over 200 original works deriving exclusively from the Depero archive. Prior to this exhibition, on this theme the following publications of the mid-1980s are also worthy of note: *Il futurismo e la pubblicità* (Salaris, 1986) in which Claudia Salaris begins studying the Futurism-Advertising relationship; *Depero futurista. Grafica e pubblicità* (Scudiero, *Depero futurista...*, 1989), the first publication entirely dedicated to Depero and advertising, and *Depero per Campari* (Scudiero, 1989) which only focuses on his work for Campari. It is interesting to note how Depero was included in the *Art et publicité* (1990) exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou where Gabriella Belli celebrated him as the 'pioneer of modern advertising graphics' (Belli, 1990, 166-179).

organised by smaller museums, foundations, and public and private galleries:<sup>2</sup> with the exception of the one at the Campari gallery, all of the exhibitions were curated by Nicoletta Boschiero (director of the Depero House of Art) or Maurizio Scudiero (curator) and accompanied by catalogues rich in iconography but rather lacking in text.

Taking this reassessment as a starting point, this chapter examines Fortunato Depero's dual interest in the field of advertising: on the one hand, what he himself described as 'self-advertisement' ('auto-rèclame') – in other words selling himself; and on the other, the commercial advertising that he did for clients (Depero, 1927, 51). I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the advertising content of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, whether through his statements or visual artefacts, as well as other original material on the topic related to this. I aim to review Depero's contribution as an innovator in the area of advertising but also to reconsider the importance of his overall thoughts on art in all its forms, without making a distinction between fine art, applied art and self-promotion or between Depero the artist and Depero the designer.

### **6.1 Futurist interest in advertising: art, politics and mass appeal**

Advertising in early twentieth-century Italy was characterised by the art nouveau style, with artists such as Leonetto Cappiello and Marcello Dudovich depicting consumer products in elaborate 'representations of fin-de-siècle bourgeois life' (Arvidsson, 2001, 161). The poster was the principal advertising medium of the era, its main protagonist often a female figure who would use or interact with the product being advertised; in some cases just the illustration of a woman was enough to advertise a brand, almost as if she personified it herself (see figures 6.1 to 6.4).

At the same time, Futurism made its appearance 'with a real inclination for advertising' as it served various connected Futurist purposes (Salaris, 1986, 13), the first being the maximum spread of the movement and its ideas. By way of proof of the Futurist interest in advertising, Marinetti's thoughts on this topic were included in

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<sup>2</sup> *Fortunato Depero e Davide Campari* (Galleria Campari, 2013), *Universo Depero* (2013, MAR - Regional Archaeological Museum of Aosta), *Fortunato Depero - Arte pubblicitaria* (2014, Riva del Garda); *Depero futurista. L'arte dell'avvenire* (2016, Galleria Matteotti of Turin), *Depero e Dudovich* (Leo Galleries, Monza, 2016), *Fortunato Depero* (2017, Studio Marco Bertoli - Modena), *Depero il mago* (2017) at the Magnani Rocca Foundation of Parma, where his advertising work once again came under the section dedicated to his house of art ('La Casa del mago'), *Depero. La progettualità. Disegni: 1920-1928* (Galleria Contini, Cortina d'Ampezzo, 2018) with a detailed account of his advertising work during the 1930s; *Fortunato Depero - Futurismo e pubblicità* (MUST! of Vimercate, 2019), *Fortunato Depero - Dal sogno futurista al segno pubblicitario* (Lu.C.C.A., Lucca Center for Contemporary Art, 2019).

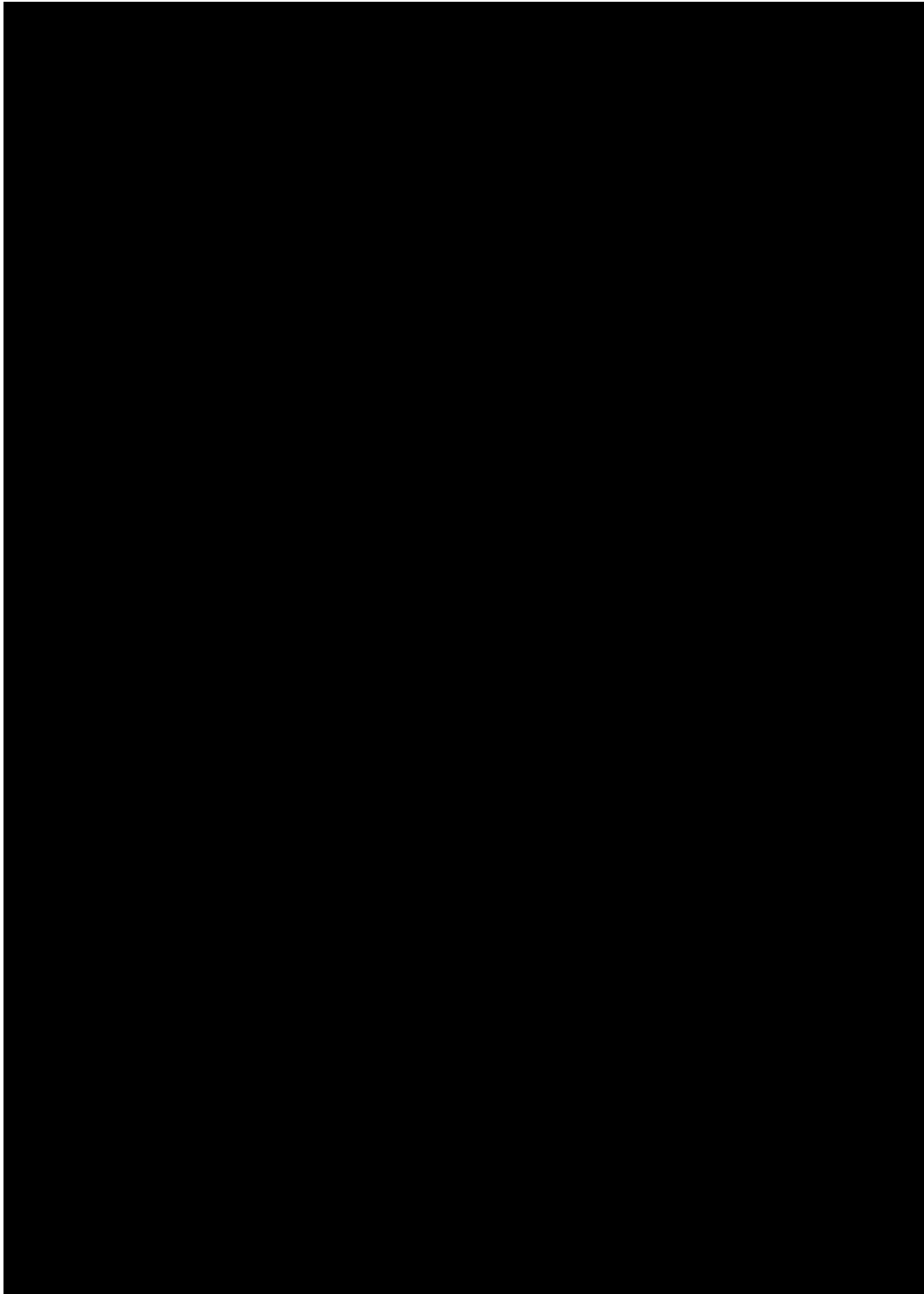


Figure 6.3

Figure 6.4

**Figure 6.1/6.2** Although 'Strega' is the Italian word for witch, the charming women depicted in Dudovich's posters do not represent a witch but rather they embody themselves the essence of the brand and the liquor.

**Figure 6.1** Dudovich, M. 1905. *Donna in blu* (Woman in blue). Poster for G. Alberti - Liquore Strega.

**Figure 6.2** Dudovich, M. c. 1925. *Donna in rosso* (Woman in red). Poster for G. Alberti - Liquore Strega.

**Figure 6.3** Capiello, L. 1901. Poster for Le Furet Corset. Courtesy of Collezione Salce Treviso.

**Figure 6.4** Dudovich, M. c. 1930-31. Poster for la Rinascente department store.

the *Guida Ricciardi. Pubblicità e propaganda in Italia*<sup>3</sup> under the chapter ‘Opinions of writers and artists on advertising’: Marinetti argues that the aim of advertising is to capture the interest of the public with ‘the utmost originality and the utmost concision, dynamism, simultaneity and global impact. Advertising is by nature Futurist’ (Marinetti, 1936, 416).

Marinetti, well-informed about crowd psychology through the writing of Gustave Le Bon, understood that manipulation and popular seduction can be achieved by exerting control over the media (Conversi, 2009, 98).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, from the outset Marinetti considered advertising as an important means of expression to spread Futurism and its aesthetic in the streets of the city: the Manifesto of Futurism (1909) itself was reproduced in the form of a flier following its publication in *Le Figaro*, and the process was repeated for subsequent manifestos and to publicise the varied activities of the Futurist movement outside the domain of printed material: evenings, street actions, concerts and shows were advertised using posters, leaflet, postcards. In addition (as seen in chapter two), through his publishing house “Poesia” and his control over the movement, Marinetti invested capital in the sponsorship and advertising of various magazines and books, issuing them free of charge and reserving numerous copies for himself purely for promotional purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Consistent with Futurism’s aversion to traditionalism and academia, the second key Futurist goal achieved through advertising was that of taking art out of museums and onto the street, once again with the aim of speaking to as large a public as possible. In his attempt to ‘explode Futurist poetry’, Escodamè (pen name of Futurist Michele Leskovic) defined the restriction of words-in-freedom to the printed page as ‘disheartening’, arguing that the ‘Futurists had already understood many years ago that a poetry of the time, eminently *popular*’, should be applied to the ‘façades of

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3 The Ricciardi Guide. Advertising and propaganda in Italy (1933?-1950) was the annual of reference with regard to Italian advertising: it gathered together the best examples, cataloguing them by type of medium (ad, political campaign, poster, printed magazine etc.), and also included critical essays by experts, a list of recognised advertisers by city and the list of official advertising agencies, as well as advice and various rules for working in the industry. The guide was edited by the editorial office of *L'ufficio moderno* (1926-1984) which, along with *La pubblicità in Italia* (1937-1941), also edited by *L'ufficio moderno*, were the only two Italian publications on advertising during the interwar period. It was edited by Giulio Cesare Ricciardi (1895-1972), the early twentieth century Italian advertiser and one of the founding members of *Campo grafico* (edited by Attilio Rossi and Carlo Dradi, 1933-1939).

4 Considered the founding stone of group psychology, Gustave Le Bon’s *La psychologie des foules* (The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind, 1895) inspired Mussolini and other masters of mass propaganda, including Adolf Hitler (Conversi, 2009, 98).

5 See page 43 of this thesis and also the interesting anecdote described by Salaris in which Futurist Aldo Palazzeschi recalls how, of the 1000 copies produced of his book, Marinetti wanted to send out 700 free of charge to the ‘most wild and unsuspected variety of persons: men from the worlds of politics and culture, prominent industrialists and professionals, men and women of society, among whom were people who were truly famous and in some cases notorious for their implacable opposition to Futurism, persons who would surely throw the book away with a curse, or would even burn it. But it was exactly those who didn’t want it, according to Marinetti, who had to receive it’ (Palazzeschi cited by Salaris, 1994, 117-118).



houses, of new architecture [...] replacing type with letters made of light bulbs and neon tubes' (Escodamè, 1933, 1).<sup>6</sup>

According to Salaris, the embracing of advertising by the Futurism movement coincided with the 'total and "global" programme of "art-life", and therefore the abolition of the traditional barriers that separate the everyday from creativity' (Salaris, 1986, 13-14); the desire of the Futurists to leave the museums, a metaphor for popularising art and making it part of everyday life, relates back to the content of the previous chapter and the entry of the political sphere into the artistic and social world, coinciding with a 'political culture in which politics is the expression of a lifestyle, an attitude towards the totality of human experience' (Mosse, 1990, 253).<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, in the *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* manifesto (1915) Balla and Depero imagine an 'integral re-creation' of the world through the 'total fusion' of art and life in Futurism – politics, art and commerce included (Balla and Depero, 1915).<sup>8</sup> Such a reconstruction of the universe reflects the aestheticisation of politics enacted by Fascism (along with Futurism) and defines Depero's broad concept of art which, with his Futurist house of art, includes the creation of paintings, sculptures and tapestries in parallel with cushions, furniture, toys, pavilions, and commercial and propaganda illustrations (figures 6.5 and 6.6).

Finally, advertising satisfies the Futurist desire for modernity, which is also shared by other avant-gardes, and Fascism (see pp. 132-135 of this thesis): in 1914, Antonio Sant'Elia envisaged and redesigned the 'modern and Futurist city' in which he reserved space for the 'réclame luminosa' (literally 'luminous advertising') at the top of skyscrapers (figure 6.7 - Sant'Elia, 1914, n.p.). The Futurist transformation of the landscape is made possible thanks to advertising, celebrated by Boccioni as a tool for the 'destruction of the traditional landscape' in his essay 'Contro il paesaggio e la vecchia estetica' ('Against the landscape and the old aesthetic'): 'Glory to the great red advertising, [...] triumphing as a complement to the landscape green with rage' (Boccioni, 1914, cited in Ripellino, 1987, 123).

In 1920s Italy, in the pre-war years and prior to the Fascist dictatorship and the second wave of Futurism, graphic design was neither established as a concept nor a profession. Its definition was under negotiation and graphic practitioners were

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<sup>6</sup> In 1927, Marinetti, in opposing the switching off of luminous shop signs in Piazza Duomo in Milan, wrote to Mussolini explaining how luminous signs gave tangible form to the Futurist aesthetic (Marinetti, 1927, 'Gli avvisi luminosi...', 1).

<sup>7</sup> For the relationship between Fascism and Futurism, art-politics-life and the aestheticisation of politics, see the fifth chapter of this thesis. See also Gentile, 2003, 42-44 and Conversi, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* see p. 20 of this thesis. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Enrico Crispolti and more recently Giovanni Lista have meticulously analysed the manifesto (see Fagiolo dell'Arco, 1972, 293-301; Crispolti, 1980 and Crispolti, 1986; Lista, 2008, *Balla...*, 46-103).

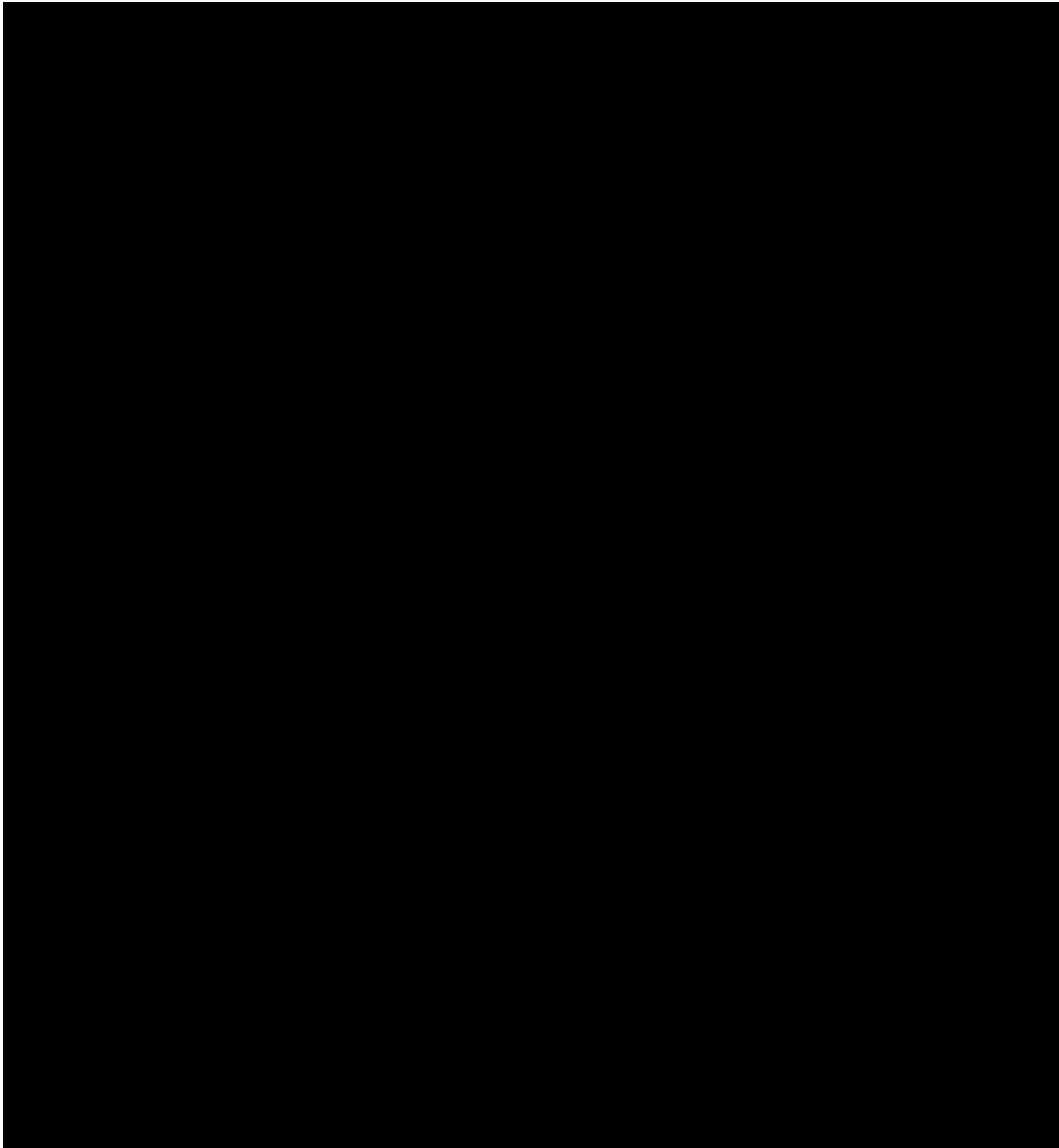


Figure 6.7

**Figure 6.5** 1927. Partial view of the room dedicated to Depero at the *Terza mostra internazionale di arte decorativa* (Third International Exhibition of Decorative Art).

Also known more simply as the Monza Biennale, it was the leading Italian exhibition of decorative and applied art. In 1930 it became the Triennale, and since 1933 it has gone by the name of the Milan Triennale.

In the outside of the Biennale Depero would exhibit the typographical pavilion for the Bestetti, Tumminelli and Treves publishing house (figure 6.6), while inside models of other hypothetical pavilions (centre), large tapestries (on the left wall) alongside commercial advertising (right wall). On the top row, from the left the advertisements designed for Verzocchi, Arturo, Aereo and Linoleum are recognisable. On the second row, at the bottom on the right, there is a *fasces lictoriae*. Bottom row, from left: tapestry with pelican, two covers of the June 1925 issue of *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia*, six India ink designs for Campari adverts.

**Figure 6.6** Page 91 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* features a Depero's photograph of his 'Book pavilion (Typographical Architecture)' designed for publishers Treves, Bestetti and Tumminelli. MART, Dep.6.27.16. Note in the bottom right-hand corner how Depero's name is preceded by the prefix 'Arch.', an Italian abbreviation for 'architect'.

**Figure 6.7** Sant'Elia, A. 1914. *Casa a gradinata con ascensori esterni* (Setback high-rise with exterior elevators). Courtesy of Pinacoteca civica di Como.

In May 1914 within the exhibition 'Nuove Tendenze' (curated by the Architects Association of Lombardy), Antonio Sant'Elia presented a series of sketches titled *La città nuova* depicting a futuristic new city. In the example shown, at the top of the building Sant'Elia reserved a space for advertising.

an amorphous group of people, coming from fine and applied art, borrowed from printing and publishing, improvised from photography and exhibition design. The need for a professional figure that could operate in the sectors of advertising and press communication was reiterated at the *V triennale* of Milan in 1933 where the German display in the industrial arts section was entirely dedicated to the discipline of graphic design. It presented standard prints designed by exponents of the New Typography movement and members of the Bauhaus, including: specimens of typefaces, including various designs by Renner, Rudolf Koch (*Kabel* - 1927) and Herbert Bayer; posters by Max Burchartz and Bayer; propaganda materials; designer packaging and labels; covers and editorial projects for magazines (such as *Die Dame*, *Der Baumeister* and *Die Form* designed by Joost Schmidt – see Pica, 1933, 415-417).<sup>9</sup> According to Chiara Barbieri, Italian designers were enthusiastic about the consistency and modernity of the German artefacts but at the same time found the materials presented by Italy in the same field ‘humiliating’ by comparison (Barbieri, 2020, 85). Nevertheless, there were modern editorial products to be found in the Italian press pavilion (‘Padiglione della stampa’) – such as artefacts designed by Alfieri & Lacroix and Edoardo Persico (*Casa Bella*), and issues of the newly-founded *Campo Grafico*, *Graphicus* – mixed together without any rhyme or reason with more traditional advertising and propaganda posters (e.g. Sinopico, De Agostini, Fratelli Alinari), illustrations (e.g. Bruno Angoletta) and traditional graphic arts (see the exhibited work by engraver Luigi Servolini – see ‘Mostra dell’arte grafica’ in Pica, 1933, 525-527). At the triennial Depero would exhibit a decorative mural painting (*Dalla metropoli alla montagna*, see Pica, 1933, 408) and contribute to the Futurist pavilion curated by Prampolini with adverts (among the few displayed) that he designed for Campari (see Pica, 1933, 571).

Following the advent of illustrated magazines in the late nineteenth century and the new developments originating in Russia and at the Bauhaus in the 1910-1920s (see sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3), the 1933 triennial was a key turning point for Italian advertising which in the second half of the 1930s switched its focus from illustrated poster art to modern communication media: notable examples include the adverts

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<sup>9</sup> Also in 1933, Mario Soresina published an article in *Il Risorgimento grafico* on the contribution that artists should make to the new Italian graphic aesthetic, revealing his familiarity with the ideas of Jan Tschichold but mixing them with a staunch Fascist ideology: ‘a graphic artist is a young man, Fascist to the core, intelligent, healthy, sober, bold, strong-willed. He is the perfect technician and the perfect aesthete. Graphic artist style nineteen thirty-three-eleventh [year according to the Fascist Era - see note 1 p. 265] is the anti-academic, anti-conservative, anti-decorative par excellence. He is the practical builder who [...] considers the use of photography in typography as one of the essential characteristics of the new graphic aesthetic. [...] The artist in typography must not create bizarre graphic trends, he rather must lay the foundations for a new Italian graphic aesthetic – that is, a Fascist one’ (Soresina, 1933, 146-147). This text (like others published by pro-Fascist artists of the time, for instance, see the writings of Guido Modiano) denotes how the description of the typical Italian modernist designer could fit to Fascist values (on this topic see, Hewitt, 1993 and chapter 5 of this thesis).

and prints made using photomontages by the talented staff of Studio Boggeri (in particular the work of the Bauhaus-trained Schawinsky for Olivetti - see figure 5.86, Munari, Max Huber, Remo Muratore, among others; Depero was also a collaborator).

According to Adam Arvidsson: ‘The Futurists – of whom many, like Fortunato Depero [...] worked with advertising, were particularly interested in advertising art, which they saw as a potential medium for a new modern aesthetic’ (Arvidsson, 2001, 161). This Futurist aesthetic, which from the 1930s onwards would be subjugated to the propaganda aims of the regime, became a key element in the development of Fascism as a media-driven phenomenon.

Fascism, with its policy of autarky, began to display an interest in private consumption, encouraging the purchase of Italian products. Italian companies like Fiat, Martini, Rinascente and Olivetti began to support this policy, opening communications offices in order to encourage the masses to consume Italian goods, at the same time assisting in the development of a new generation of advertisers that quickly abandoned the decorative style for more simple illustrations and a more synthetic formal representation (Cesarini, 1988, 23-45 and Falabrino, 2001, 99-120).<sup>10</sup> The growing importance of advertisements and the pervasive attention of the Fascists to all types of media saw the Sindacato Nazionale Fascista delle Belle Arti - Fascist National Union of Fine Arts announce the *Prima mostra nazionale del cartellone e della grafica pubblicitaria* (First National Exhibition of Billboard and Advertising Graphic, 1936) at Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Roma.

## 6.2 The need for self-advertisement as self-promotion

According to Passamani: ‘the bolted book, with its specific design, was not conceived solely for formal reasons but rather as an instrument of self publicity, considered by Depero as a right/duty of the artist’ (Passamani, 1981, 175-176). Belli and Avanzi are agreed on Passamani’s assertion as they write: ‘[*Depero futurista 1913–1927*] was designed in order to promote the Dinamo-Azari publishing house as well as Depero’s professional activity’ (Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 428).

With self-advertisement Depero means publicising one’s professional expertise and services. Considered by Jennifer Ehrenberger (1995, 74) as one of ‘the pioneers of self-promotion’, Depero theorised his thoughts via the ‘Necessità di autoréclame manifesto’ (The Need for Self-Advertisement, figure 6.8) included on page 51 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: ‘self-advertisement is not a vain, useless or exaggerated

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<sup>10</sup> Examples include Marcello Nizzoli, who worked with Olivetti for over two decades; Dino Villani and his work for Motta; the above mentioned Studio Boggeri, and Federico Seneca, creative director of Buitoni and Perugina from 1920 to 1932. Seneca’s posters, with their anthropomorphic dolls and dynamic synthesis, seem to be inspired by Futurism and the work of Depero (Quintavalle, 1998, 7).

expression of megalomania, but rather a vital NEED to quickly inform the public about one's own ideas and works'. The text continues by stating how the most 'clamorous advertising' is allowed in every production sector with the exception of artistic production, where promoting oneself is seen as 'immodesty' (Depero, 1927, 51).

The phrase given greatest typographical emphasis is a categorical statement: 'It is time to be done with the recognition of the artist after his death', and this paves the way to Depero's argument that self-promotion is a necessity: 'If the artist awaits fame and recognition of his own work by other means, he will have time to die of hunger 5000 times over'. The need for self-promotion, defined at the start of the manifesto as 'vital', is explained by this phrase as the objective need for personal preservation and, being a question of personal promotion, it is down to the artist himself to take care of it (Depero, 1927, 51).

Achieving success and earning 'recognition' is another important goal for Depero. Indeed, from the start of his career, Depero constantly sought validation of his artistic genius (as he considered it), meticulously collecting every article that mentioned him or his work, cutting them out and sticking them into large scrap books that provide a chronological account of his life. Depero intensified and broadened his cataloguing activities in the 1930s and 1940s and, according to Passamani: 'it is interesting to see how the artist carried out [...] this highly detailed cataloguing of his past, aimed, on one hand, at consolidating his reputation and, on the other, at laying claim to a precise historical position' (Passamani, 1981, 272).<sup>11</sup> This cataloguing process produced various promotional monographs, some published some not, some self-produced some not, of which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is the progenitor in chronological terms.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The books produced from this painstaking cataloguing process constitute an archive of over 700 articles, reviews and critiques of Depero's output. In 1957 these materials formed the basis of the Casa Museo Depero (MART, Dep.8.3.1). Some of the materials were published for the first time in his autobiography *Fortunato Depero nelle opere e nella vita*, in which a large chapter entitled 'Depero as seen by others' presents a selection of documents about his work (Depero, 1940, see pages 385–421).

<sup>12</sup> From the first publication on his work (*Depero futurista 1913–1927*, 1927) to the last (*Catalogo della galleria e museo Depero* in 1959), he published a total of 14 monograph publications and six catalogues on his personal exhibitions, the majority of which included biographical lists. For example, *Bilancio 1913-1936: Rovereto XV: 380 segnalazioni* (1937), published by Depero at the Manfrini printing works (Rovereto), is a list of (380) projects (exhibitions, articles, theatre activities, speeches, performances etc.) which the artist carried out in the period 1913–1936. Passamani defines this work as a 'detailed curriculum vitae' of the artist (Passamani, 1981, 260). Throughout his life Depero continued to create new publications to group together all of his work, as we can deduce from the titles of the folders of notes and the paste-ups of monographical publishing projects that were never realised (conserved in the Archivio del '900 and accessible on the online database), examples of which include: *Dal 1913 al 1939. Film vissuto d'artista* (From 1913 to 1939. Artist's Lived Film, MART, Dep.4.3.19 and 21); *Per il mondo con lo zaino dell'arte* (Around the World with the Backpack of Art, MART, Dep.4.3.27 and Dep.4.3.28) *Fortunato Depero. Chiarezza & stile. Ideologie di un pittore autodidatta* (Fortunato Depero. Clarity and Style. Ideologies of a Self-Taught Painter. 1946–1947, MART, Dep.4.3.35) *Fortunato Depero. Edizione in quattro lingue centoventi illustrazioni* (Fortunato Depero. Edition in Four Languages and 120 Illustrations. 1947–48, Dep.4.3.41, Dep.3.1.39.9 and Dep.3.1.39.10).

In this regard, pages 202 to 212 (figures 4.17, 4.18 and 6.9) of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* also include a selection of domestic and international articles and tributes to his work, and the book's captions often mention if the works were exhibited at a show or if they received any particular awards or recognition. In addition, pages 36–37 include a list of the exhibitions at which Depero presented his projects in the years covered by the book (1913–1927 - figure 6.10). As well as a list of the services provided, the various forms of headed notepaper, belonging both to Depero and his house of art, include a summary of the prizes he had been awarded: in some of these, Depero also adds small advertisements on the release of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, again with the aim of enhancing and spreading his work as widely as possible (figures 6.11–6.15).

Whereas on the one hand these repeated demonstrations of the legitimacy of Depero's artistic work seem to reveal a vainglorious and perhaps insecure side to his character, on the other they are also a way of showcasing his 'CV' and giving readers a kind of guarantee regarding the quality of his portfolio.

Shortly before the book was published, Fedele Azari encouraged Depero to offer himself to Pirelli: 'Through Poli<sup>13</sup> you must immediately get in contact with the Pirelli company and present some of your designs. Any of your friezes would make a great impression on them, as primitive and remarkable for their bad taste as they are – if you start doing a few things for Pirelli you will have regular work and a global audience' (Azari, 30 December 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.20).

Depero took Azari's advice, sending his bolted portfolio and a few sketches to Pirelli, which replied to him a few months later thanking him for his material and book but 'regrettably' turning down his collaboration offer (Pirelli, 1928, MART, Dep.3.1.16.47). Although it did not work out, his attempt to establish a collaboration with Pirelli showed the ways in which Depero reached out to clients and highlights one of the main functions of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: to act as an instrument for 'illustrating' and 'launching' his art (Depero, 1927, 51).

Through an analysis of Depero's writings and work in the advertising field, this chapter is an attempt to show how he makes no distinction between fine and commercial art, and how they form part of the same activity.

### **6.3 Depero's commercial advertising work**

In the years following the First World War, the advertising industry grew prodigiously in the USA, quadrupling in size between 1914 and the Great Depression;

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<sup>13</sup> (Marco) Luigi Poli, editor-in-chief of *La rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia – The Illustrated Magazine of the Italian People*, see page 158 of this thesis.

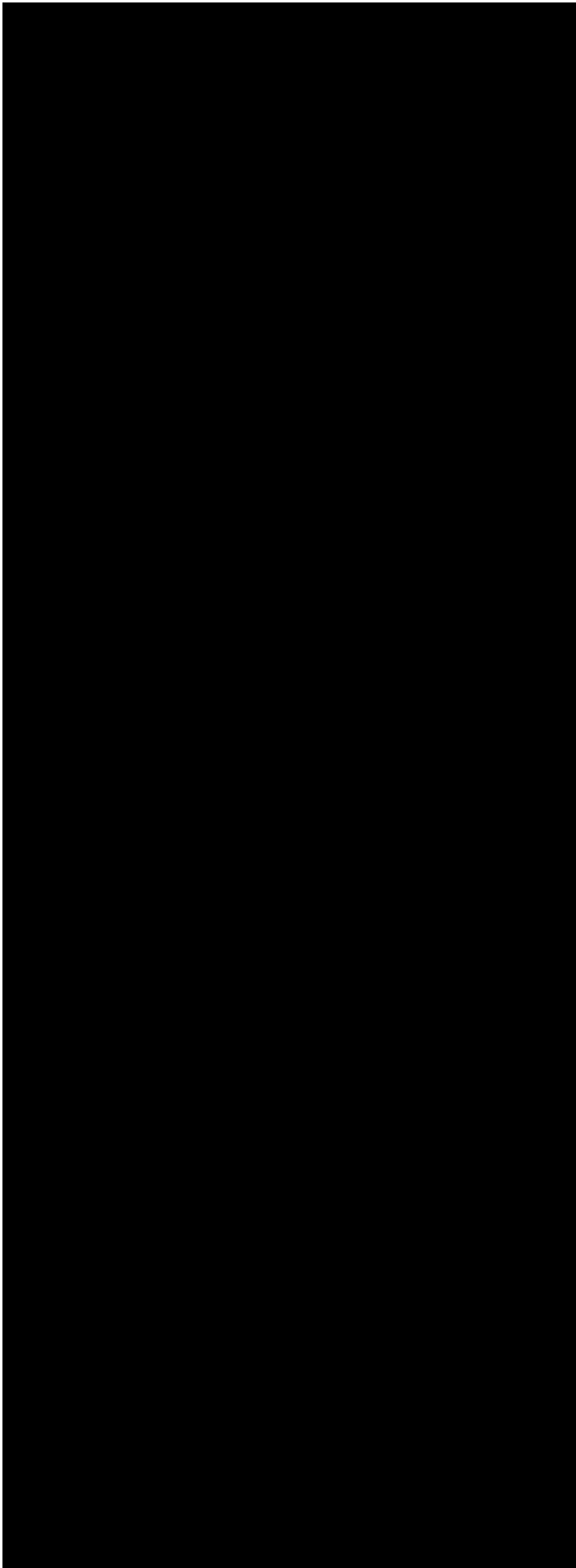


Figure 6.10 - page 36

**Figure 6.8** 'Necessità di auto-rèclame' ('The Need for Self-Advertisement').

**Figure 6.9** Two articles about Depero's billboards reprinted in *Depero futurista 1913-1927*. Notari, U., (Unknown date). 'I cartelloni di Depero' ('Depero's posters' but literally translated as 'Depero's billboards'). Anonymous author. (Unknown date). 'Il cartellone di Depero per la fiera Navigante' ('Depero's posters for the Navigante exhibition'). In *Impresa moderna*.

In *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, in what we can describe as Depero's press review, on page 203 there is an article entitled 'Depero's posters' written by Umberto Notari, a Fascist journalist who founded his own advertising agency and magazine, 'Le Tre i' (literally, 'the three i' - also known as 'I.I.I.', *Rassegna della produzione Italiana - Review of the Italian production*). The article presents Depero as an artist of his advertising agency: 'Le Tre i' which had the honour of presenting Sinopico [...] today presents a second highly inventive artist: Depero. His palette stops us dead as if someone were poking us in the eyes [...] Italian manufacturers will thank us for this highly effective new weapon which we give them to promote their products' (Depero, 1927, 203).

**Figure 6.10** '52 Esposizioni di Depero' ('52 Depero's Exhibitions').



**Figure 6.11** 1927. Depero's letterhead showing a list of the awards received by his artworks. In the logo of Depero's Futurist house of art, we see a man, probably Depero, depicted bent over a desk inside his house of art and placed on a globe. 1926-1927. Courtesy of Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles, GETTY, 860189.

**Figure 6.12** 1928. Depero's letter to his wife Rosetta. Beyond the prize list already seen, this letterhead also includes an advertisement of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* presenting it as 'novità libraria dell'anno 1928' (publishing news of 1928). MART, Dep.3.3.1.13.10.

**Figure 6.13** c. 1921-1922. Logo sketch for Depero's Futurist house of art. Pencil on paper. Size 7.7 × 7.1 cm. Picture retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007. Courtesy of MART.

**Figure 6.14** Page 185 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*. Series of logos used by Depero to promote himself and his house of art.

**Figure 6.15** 1926-1927. Monogram of Depero's initials. Collage. Size 24.5 × 33 cm. Picture retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007. Courtesy of MART.



Figure 6.15



and this American development had a knock-on effect in Europe (Pope, 1983, 18-20). The growth of the advertising industry also involved Depero who, during the 1920s, formed increasingly close relationships with both major Italian and foreign companies, and smaller-scale businesses (Avanzi, 2007, 26).<sup>14</sup>

### 6.3.1 Depero-Azari, an unbreakable partnership

This was also possible thanks to the help of Azari who, as his sales agent, responded to Depero's sketches with new sketches and suggestions on the layout, also writing comments on new customers to target: 'Gramophone is the best / splendid example of a poster, the painting of sound. Beer: good the one with the three glasses – the other one with the writing is not so good because of its industrial mentality' (figures 6.16-6.19 - Azari, 1925, MART, Dep.3.1.7.15 and Dep.3.1.7.17).<sup>15</sup>

Depero produced adverts for companies and their products, sent slogans and drawings, and if there was not already an existing contact via Azari, the latter would encourage him to prepare generic drafts that could be used for competitors if the collaboration proposal was not successful: 'Bianchi Bicycles: you put down the name of the most difficult one to deal with – but I will try all the same and if necessary I already know who to present it to in the bicycle sector. For the future remember that it is always a good idea to do three drafts for each article [...] Redo the bicycle without the wording Bianchi' (Azari, 1925, MART, Dep.3.1.7.15 and Dep.3.1.7.17).

The advertisements produced in this period would be exhibited at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris where his posters would be awarded the diploma of honour in the 'posters-street art' section.<sup>16</sup> On returning from the exhibition Depero wrote of his satisfaction regarding the about-turn in the style of the advertising he saw displayed in the city: 'a few years ago Marinetti used to say to me that Cappiello's posters dominated Paris, but they don't anymore, the best giant posters [...] are those of the Futurist painters Cassandre and

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<sup>14</sup> Many exhibitions on Depero's advertising mentioned at the start of this chapter are focused on the 1920s, the period in which the advertising commissions received by Depero's house of art reached their peak.

<sup>15</sup> The exclusive rights to Depero's services were contested by Azari and Maga, the pioneering Italian advertising agency founded by Giuseppe Magagnoli (1920), which collaborated, sometimes on an exclusive basis, with leading Italian poster designers such as Marcello Nizzoli, Achille Mauzan and SePo. Azari was even willing to offer an advance on the commission money and firmly advised against working with Maga: 'In conclusion, try to resist = refusing' (Azari, probably 1922?, MART, Dep.3.1.7.1). With the publication of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, Azari communicated that its release coincided with the launch of his 'Dinamo' art house whose list of services also clearly specified an exclusive relationship with Depero, thus making the existing collaboration between Depero, the artist, and Azari, his agent, official (Depero, 1927, 9).

<sup>16</sup> He would also win awards in the 'Fabrics' (Gold Medal), 'Toys' (Bronze), 'Art of Paper' (Gold) and 'Art of Wood' (Silver) sections (From Teofilo Rossi's letters to Depero, cited in Depero, 1940, 154).

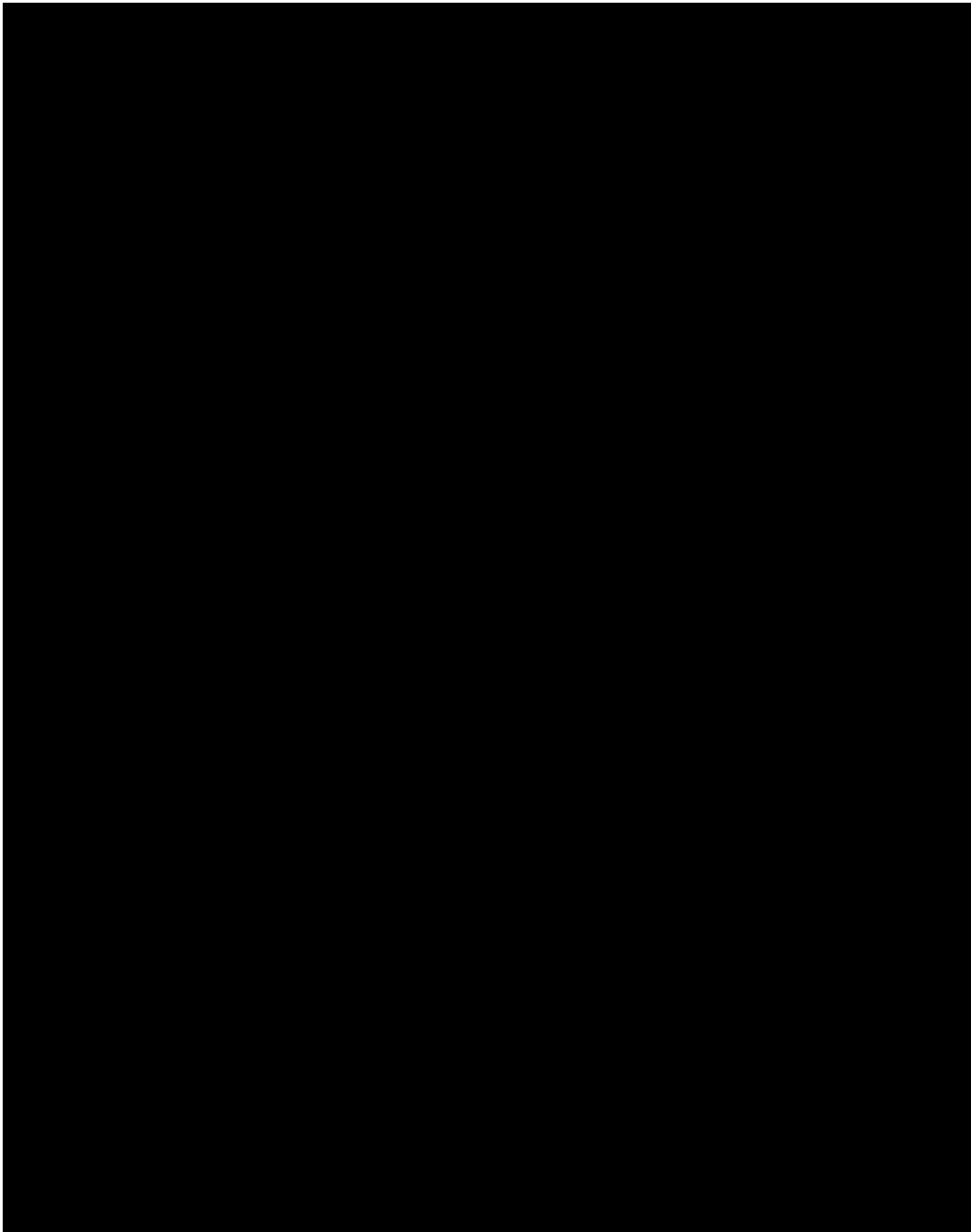


Figure 6.18

**Figure 6.16** 1924-1925. Generic sketches for gramophone advertisements. Pencil on paper. Size 12.3 × 15.1 cm. Picture of the sketch retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 239. Courtesy of MART.

**Figure 6.17** 1924-1925. Generic sketches for gramophone advertisements. Pencil on paper. Size 10.4 × 14.9 cm. Picture of the sketch retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 239. Courtesy of MART.

**Figure 6.18** 1924-1925. Generic sketches for beer advertisements. Pencil on paper. Size 11.4 × 15.2 cm. Picture of the sketch retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 239. Courtesy of MART.

**Figure 6.19** 1924-1925. Generic sketches for beer advertisements. Pencil on paper. Size 19.3 × 20 cm. Picture of the sketch retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 239. Courtesy of MART.

Colin' (Depero, 1926, MART, Dep.4.1.5 - Depero seems to have conferred honorary Futurist status to them).

In reality, the methods used by Depero to visually present products were very similar to those employed by Cappiello. To this end Ezio Godoli writes: 'Depero's symbolic representation of the product is similar to the shock imagery of Leonetto Cappiello, i.e. the *images parlantes* represented by fantastical creatures used to personify the idea of the product he wanted to lodge in the memory of the consumer' (Godoli, 2001, 936). Although Cappiello and Depero were very far apart in formal terms – the former using a figurative style in which he painstakingly softened the subjects, the latter summarising the forms using flat shades – both transformed the product, embodying it in a subject and therefore using the same communicative strategy, with Depero opting to interpret the product rather than represent it.

Depero defines the poster as 'the art of the time, [...] the poster is the symbolic image of a product, the ingenious and essential practical and pictorial expedient for enhancing it' (Depero, 1937, 22 bis). While the protagonists of Cappiello's works are always human figures, as in the case of the Campari clown, Depero's mascots are simplified and imaginary representations, as in the case of the Vido nougat jester, for example (see figures 6.20 and 6.21).

### 6.3.2 Advertising theory

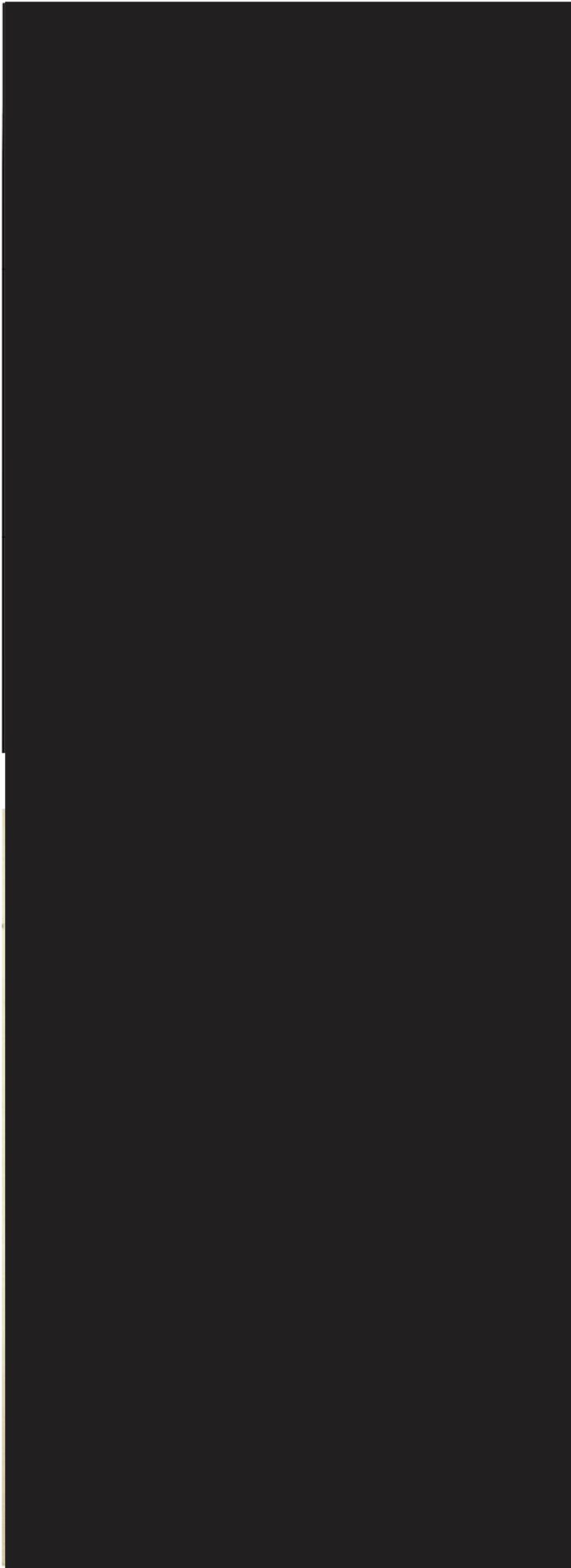
In parallel with his advertising activities, Depero also published his ideas on the theory of advertising in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: this is the premise for the 'Architettura pubblicitaria' (Advertising Architecture) manifesto and, in particular, the second part of this, entitled 'Manifesto agli industriali' (Manifesto for the Industrialists, figure 4.27), which focuses on new forms of patronage in the era of industry:

One of the biggest expressions of advertising art is without doubt the "POSTER". Yet its triumph is solely down to the industrialists. For me the "POSTER" is very important, even more so than people generally think. I compare the poster to the HOLY PICTURE; you industrialists are the bishops and popes of yesteryear, our real patrons.

[...] if the grandiose effort of Paris 1925 was superb, I guarantee that we can do more – much, much more. And finally we will be glad, radiant, if with your help we can illustrate our true style. [...] I have the utmost faith in you.

Depero, 1927, 85

Depero was clearly appealing to industrialists and entrepreneurs as potential clients. Reading on in the manifesto, Depero explicitly lists the names of Italian businesses he is interested in working with, or with which he had already had a working relationship (using capitals and larger letters compared with the main body



**Figure 6.20** Cappiello, L.  
1921. Bitter Campari poster.  
Lithograph on paper.  
Size 100 × 140 cm.  
Courtesy of Collezione Salce  
Treviso.

**Figure 6.21** 1924.  
Mandorlato Vido poster.  
Lithograph on paper.  
Size 97 × 138 cm.  
Poster reproduction retrieved  
from Belli and Avanzi, 2007,  
237. Courtesy of MART.

Figure 6.21

of the text): FIAT, ALFA ROMEO and, largest of all, CAMPARI.<sup>17</sup> Depero's manifesto seeks to position itself in the advertising field and reflects an intricate strategy consisting of various, closely-related factors: in particular a fusion of advertising and architecture. The machine style favoured by the Fascist regime is involved, along with the Futurist aim to bring art out of the museums (and churches) onto the street (see chapter 5).

Below I analyse some advertising commissions of Depero's for which there is enough documentary evidence (company correspondence, printed materials) and information to understand the design method he adopted and the client-designer relationship.

### 6.3.3 Advertising (in/as) practice

#### 6.3.3.1 Depero for Campari

Depero's collaboration with Campari represents the biggest case study of his advertising career and, in terms of his working relationships, is certainly the best documented and most widely studied by historians.

Davide Campari is regarded as 'one of the first great Italian industrialists to understand the incisiveness of the medium of advertising, combining the taste and trends of the time with the commercial experience' (Schönteich, 1989, 12).<sup>18</sup> Having abandoned the late Romantic-style narrative scenes of previous posters, in the early 1920s Campari decided to entrust his communications to the most cutting-edge graphic designers of the period, collaborating with Marcello Nizzoli, Nicolay Diulgheroff, Bruno Munari and Depero.

In 1926, Davide Campari visited the 'Venice biennale in search of artists that could focus people's attention on his products' (Villani, 1986, 6-7). Campari saw *Squisito al seltz* (figures 6.22 and 6.23 - page 189 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, the painting dedicated to him by Depero in which two men at a bar are

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<sup>17</sup> Here it is important to point out that the ideas of Depero, and in general those of the Futurists, were always communicated using a well-defined and consistent form of rhetoric: sensationalist, averse to the past and to everything that is not Futurist, far-sighted, assertive but without too much reasoning. According to Mark Thompson, 'the flippancy of their declarations was part of a populist style. Marinetti realised that cultural statements can be snappy and accessible like newspaper headlines' or like a slogan, and that this was the way to achieve widespread consensus (Thompson, 2008, 233-234). In addition, with Futurism vernacular materials became part of the sphere of the arts, examples being the poems of Francesco Cangiullo published in *Lacerba*, or *BIFSZF+18. Simultaneità e chimismi lirici* (1915) by Ardengo Soffici, in which brands and commercial slogans become words-in-freedom (fig. 2.14).

<sup>18</sup> Fourth child of founder Gaspare Campari, Davide Campari took over from his father in 1882 and, demonstrating his entrepreneurial spirit, immediately separated the industrial side of the business (production of spirits) from the commercial side (bars and points of sale). In 1910 the company became Davide Campari e C. and in 1926 he decided to change the company policy, focusing production on just a few products that had enjoyed great success thanks also to the advertisements commissioned to famous artists and copywriters of the time (Villani, 1960, 273).

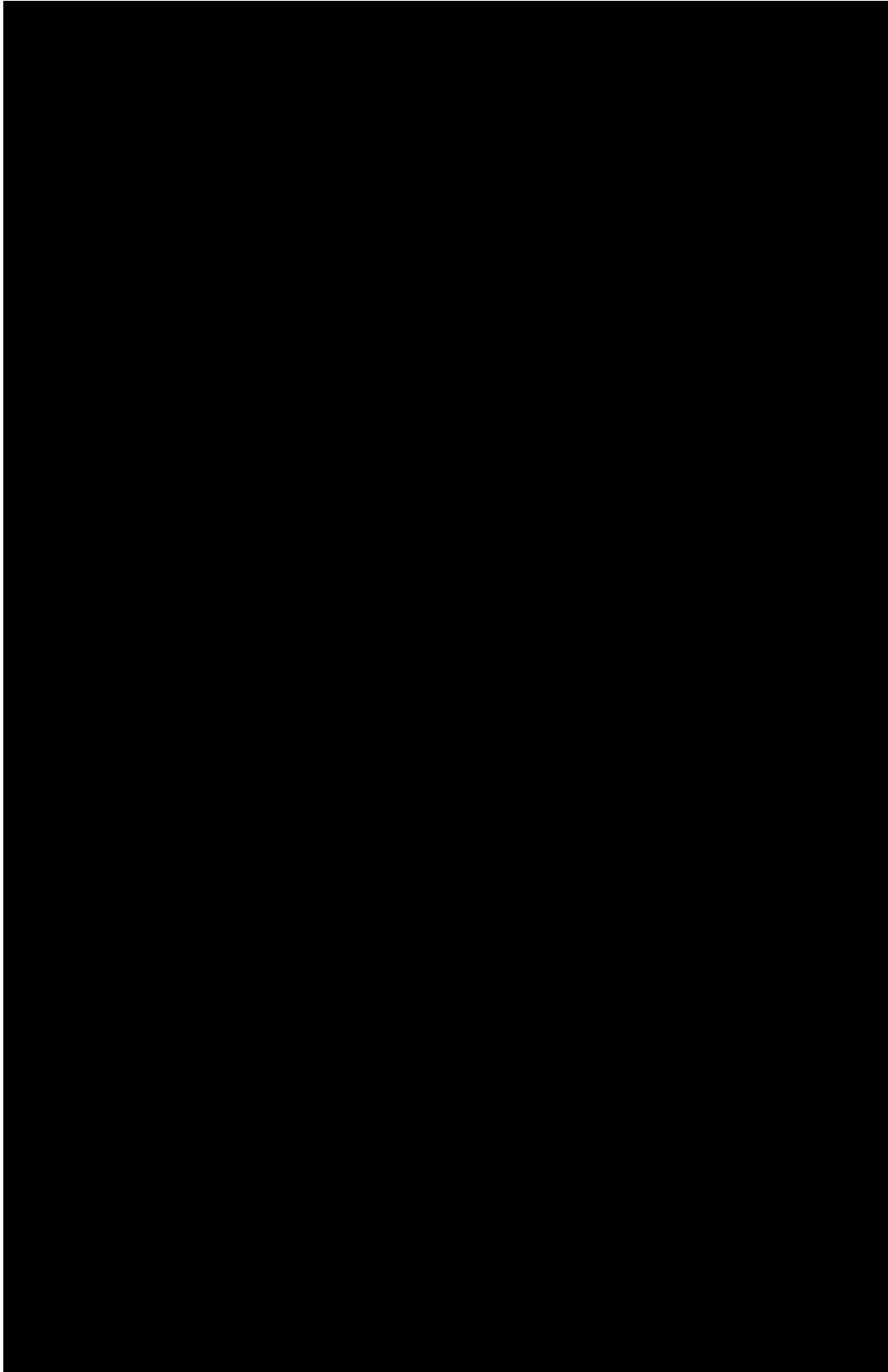


Figure 6.23 - page 189

**Figure 6.22** On page 45 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* there is a internal view of Depero's artworks exhibited at the 1926 Venice Biennale (figure 6.22), among which *Squisito al selz* (for the original photograph, see mart, Dep.8.1.2.106 and ASAC, Archive for Contemporary Art, BIENNALE, n. 494).

**Figure 6.23** 1926. *Squisito al seltz* (Delicious with Seltzer) included on page 189 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Here a caption highlights the fact that the picture is an 'advertising painting not a poster' also saying that it belongs to Davide Campari and that it was exhibited at XV Venice biennale.

served a drink from two seltzer siphons), purchased it and requested that it be adapted into an advertising poster, thus marking the start of an intense working relationship that would last over ten years.<sup>19</sup>

After the biennale, the foundations of their collaboration were laid. In a series of letters to his wife, Depero wrote: ‘The only solution [to our economic problem] is Campari. A solution that will come to pass but which we can’t rush. They are a client that we must deal with carefully. The meeting, which I hope is successful, is on Wednesday. It seems that he wants postcards and large wall posters for Paris’ (Depero, 4 March 1926, MART, Dep.3.3.1.11.1). The business negotiations continue in another letter a few days later: ‘No-one is backing down. Bad luck ad infinitum. Campari can’t make up their mind. I hope they confirm the purchase of 4 drafts on Tuesday. We’ll see.’ (Depero, 1926, MART, Dep.3.3.1.10.37). It was also the Campari company that, again in 1926, requested an urgent sketch for a ‘new advertising device being created that should be present in bathing establishments’ (figures 6.25 and 6.26), referring to a series of wooden models painted white, one of which was later produced (1933) and used as a decorative element for the automatic machines dispensing Campari Soda, a product that was only announced in 1932 but which had probably been in the pipeline for a few years (Campari, 1926, MART, Dep.3.1.6.34). The model depicted a geometric character drinking through a straw from a cone-shaped bottle – never before seen on Campari promotional materials.<sup>20</sup>

In *Depero futurista 1913–1927* Depero dedicates more than a third of the advertising chapter (pp. 183-212) to Campari. A different-coloured page, light green in this case, entitled ‘Depero’s Advertising for Cordial Campari and Campari’s aperitif’ (figure 6.27), marks the start of what appears to be yet another tribute following the previously mentioned reference in large letters included in the ‘Manifesto agli

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<sup>19</sup> In an undated letter probably dating to 1925-1926, Azari foresees the collaboration with Campari suggesting that Depero make a draft sketch of Milan Cathedral made up of Campari products (Azari, MART, Dep.3.1.7.17). The first evidence of the collaboration comes a year later: *Squisito al seltz* and a large advertising poster displayed in Paris (see figure 6.24). Depero created another version of the painting with dull colours and with the Campari wording more visible and not partially hidden. However, once completed, it was never displayed and remained with Azari, while *Squisito al seltz* disappeared from the Campari company during World War Two (Scudiero, *Depero per Campari*, 1989, 31).

<sup>20</sup> The market launch of Campari Soda was announced for the first time in *La domenica del corriere* of 10 July 1932. Campari Soda was the same drink as the one made previously by mixing Bitter with soda, a practical drink which, already mixed in the bottle, could be consumed anywhere and not just at the bar. In all likelihood the bottle was probably commissioned in the late 1920s to Depero who designed a truncated cone-shaped container resembling an ‘upside-down glass’ made from ‘transparent frosted glass’. On the lower part, in relief, was the wording ‘Preparazione Speciale, Campari & C. Milano’ and the name of the drink, ‘CAMPARI SODA’ (Campari, 1932). The bright red drink, the shape of the bottle and the transparent writing in relief on the glass ensured that the product stood out with the bottle becoming a highly recognisable icon. The documents in the Archivio del ‘900 (MART, Dep.3.1.6.34 - Dep.5.51, Correspondence between Depero/Campari) and the Campari archive provide no evidence of the exact date of the commission or that Depero designed the bottle. Nonetheless, both institutions agree that Depero was indeed the designer and that this process took place sometime between 1926 and 1928.

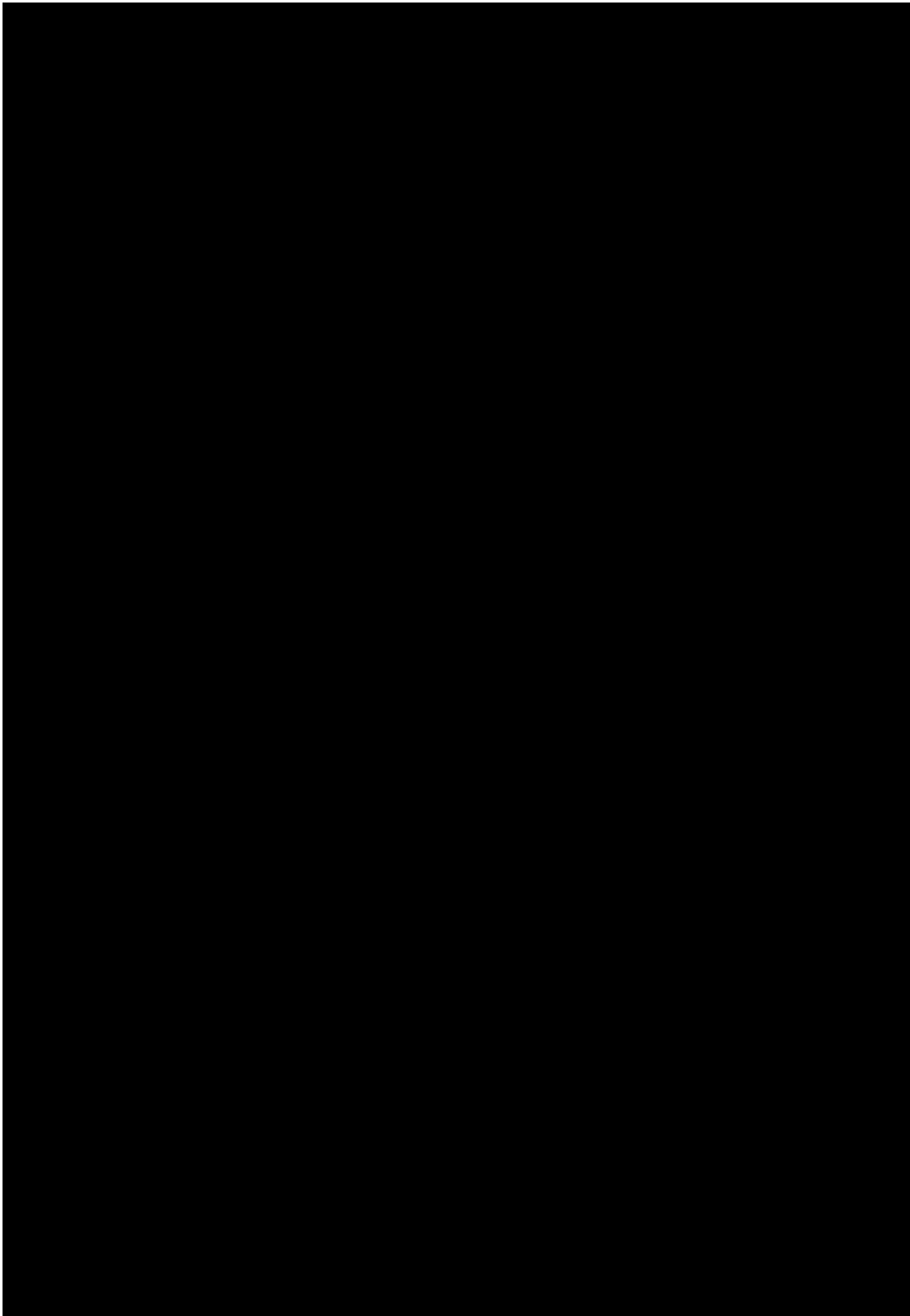


Figure 6.27 - page 187

**Figure 6.24** 1926. Depero's poster for Campari in Paris. Black and white photograph. 23 × 17.5 cm. MART, Dep.2.3.166.

**Figure 6.25** c. 1926. Decorative device for Campari vending machine; in 1930, the same puppet was reused by Depero for a *Vanity Fair* cover. White painted wood. Size 65 × 46 × 27 cm.

**Figure 6.26** 1934. Campari vending machine, Milan. Courtesy of Campari archive.

**Figure 6.27** 'Pubblicità Depero per l'aperitivo e il Cordial Campari' (Depero's Advertising for Cordial Campari and Campari's aperitif).



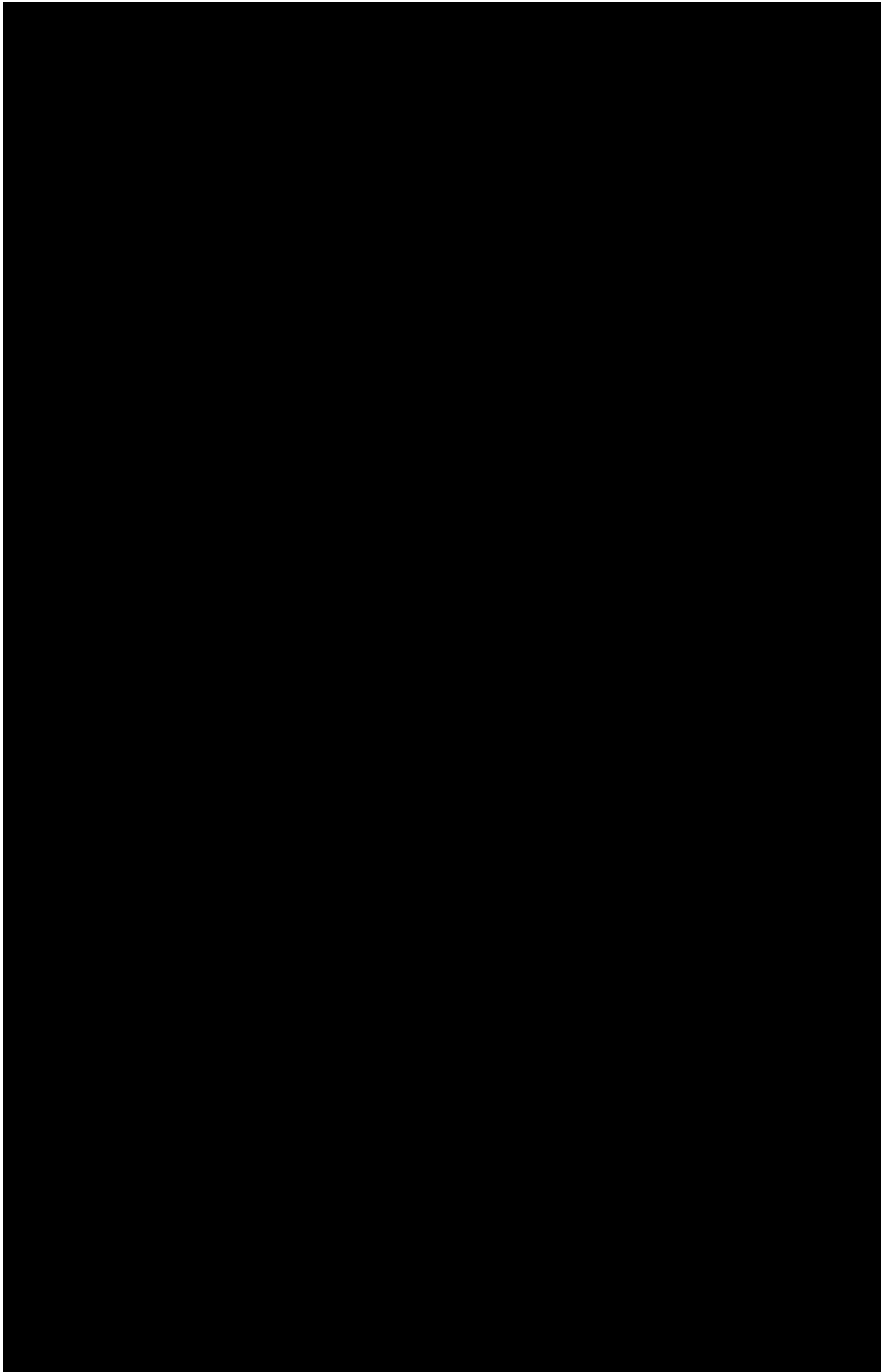


Figure 6.29 - page 199

**Figure 6.28** Two Campari advertisements: Left: 'Se la pioggia fosse Bitter Campari' (If Only Rain Were Campari Bitter). Right: 'Ancora Cordial Campari' (I Want More Cordial Campari). Note Depero's characteristic form of 'A', with a down-turned triangle instead of a crossbar.

**Figure 6.39** Six different advertisements designed by Depero for Campari.

industriali'.<sup>21</sup> This was probably because the book was sponsored financially by Campari. Further demonstration of this can be seen on page 229 with the company named among those that made the publication of the book a possibility (on this topic see section 3.1.1 above and figure 3.4 of this thesis).<sup>22</sup>

*Squisito al seltz* opens the Campari section, the caption emphasising how it is an 'advertising painting not a poster' (page 189, see figure 6.23). In doing this Depero seeks to reiterate the position he expressed in 'Manifesto for the industrialists', whereby the sacred image of the past is compared with advertising and, as such, the patron of art with the industrialist.

For Depero, having a client-patron like Campari is symbolic of the end of the art world snobbism towards applied art in the service of industry and business; even though the picture was exhibited and purchased at an art biennial, it led to an ongoing professional collaboration and an adaptation of it was requested (although never realised) for a poster, fully in line with the Futurist desire to take art away from the walls of museums.<sup>23</sup>

The following pages of the Campari section show some of the adverts created by Depero for Campari beverages (figures 6.28 and 6.29). Depero's typically iconic style is clearly evident: the physiques of the imaginary characters take the form of geometric solids while the objects represented, such as trees, bottles and glasses, are simple and schematic. The hand-produced lettering is large and bold, communicating the name of the product and the producer, and balancing homogeneously with the illustrations to create what appears to be a single image composed of lettering and an illustration. The intersections of positive and negative give the illustrations depth, seeking to compensate for the limits of the black and white print of the newspaper, the medium in which most of Depero's artwork appeared.

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21 The change in paper is mainly designed to separate the chapters and, in some cases, to emphasise specific pages, as in the case of the book's sponsors (p. 229) or the presentation page (p. 5 - figure 4.9), both of which are orange.

22 On the wishes of Azari, in exchange for the collaboration and support they gave to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, companies were referenced on the 'company friends' page (Azari, Undated letter, possibly 1926–1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.17). Giovanna Ginex states that both Campari and Richard Ginori purchased part of the print run as sponsors of the book (Ginex, 2014, 312). This is confirmed by the letter Depero sent to Mattioli in which he confides to his collector friend that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* 'was a disastrous affair [...] except for two good sales, one made by Azari to Richard Ginori and the other by myself to Campari. Now, the book is out of date. I use them just for advertising gift' (December 30, 1930, MATTIOLI ARCHIVE, no shelf mark available). Finally, there are four different colour variations of the title page of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (red/gold, red/silver, silver/gold and light blue/orange). Although there is no bibliographical proof, these variations may identify parts of the print run that were reserved for different purposes or types of buyers.

23 The idea of taking art out of museums also introduces the concept of positioning art in non-art contexts as an institutional critique of the art world. On this subject see section 7.1.3 and note 17 in the seventh chapter of this thesis.

Between 1927 and 1928 Depero produced numerous drafts, often comprising collages of pieces of coloured paper with tempera, to which he then added a variant in black and white for the sketches that Campari liked most. Depero had a preference for polychromy but the technical restrictions and budgets imposed by Campari led to the creation of black and white adverts (Scudiero, 1989, *Depero per Campari*, 33-34).

#### 6.3.3.1.1 Combining practice and theory: *Numero unico futurista Campari*

In 1931 Depero combined advertising theory and practice in publishing *Numero unico futurista Campari 1931* (figure 6.30), sponsored by Campari and created with the collaboration of poet Giovanni Gerbino and musician Franco Casavola, both of whom were sympathetic to the Futurism movement.

From its introduction, the book's aim to place art and advertising on the same plane is quite clear, Depero associating them in the same sentence and making no distinction between the picture and promotion: 'even if its promotional purpose is conceived with a sincere sense of art and even though I paint freely-inspired pictures every day, with an equal harmony of style, with the same love, with no less enthusiasm and care, using my imagination I exalt our industrial products' (Depero, 1931, 3).

The book opens with a picture of the aforementioned *Squisito al seltz*, depicted in colour in its original version, and this is followed by an important manifesto regarding advertising: 'Il Futurismo e l'arte pubblicitaria' (Futurism and Advertising Art - figures 6.31, 6.32 and 6.33). With this title Depero no longer refers to art and advertising as separate entities but as a single discipline known as advertising art. The text reiterates the ideas already espoused in the 'Manifesto agli industriali' and uses the same form of argument, beginning with the past.

The art of the future will be strongly advertising oriented – that bold lesson and unimpeachable ascertainment I have learned from museums and great works from the past – all art from past centuries has been marked by advertising purposes: the exaltation of the warrior, and of the religious; documentation of deeds, ceremonies and historical personages depicted in their victories, with their symbols, in the regalia of command and splendour – even their highest products were simultaneously meant for glorification: architecture, royal palaces, thrones, drapery, halberds, standards, heraldry and arms of every sort – there is scarcely an ancient work that does not have advertising motifs, a garland with a trophy, with weapons of war and victory, all stamped with seals and the original symbols of clans, all with the self-celebrating freedom of ultra-advertising.

Depero, 1931, 19

As in the manifesto included in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, the metaphor of the industrialist as the 'captain' of the present is introduced, and once again, in complete accord with the autarkic policy promoted by Fascism, the names of major Italian

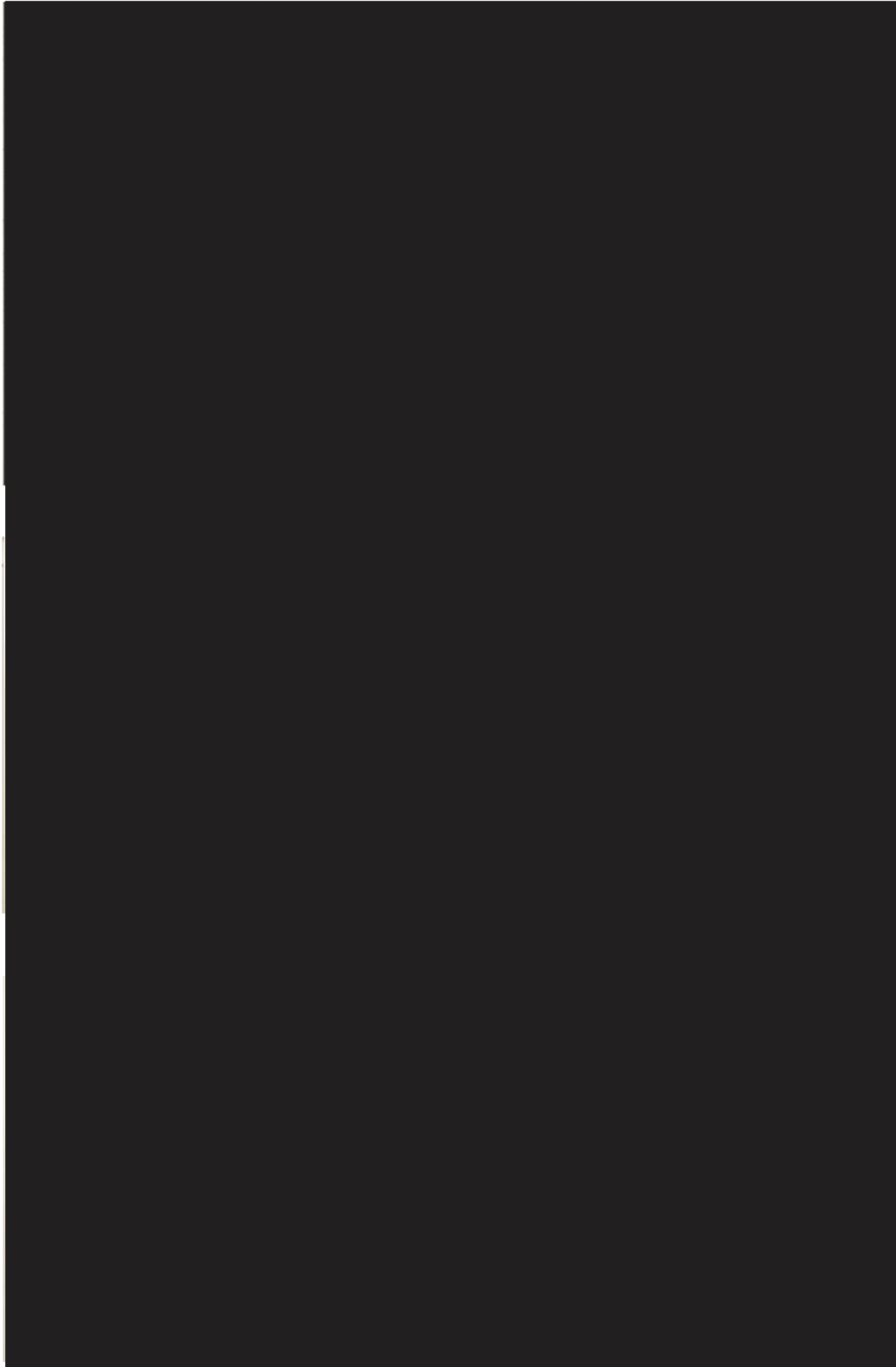


Figure 6.33

**Figure 6.30/6.31/6.32/6.33** 1931. *Numero unico futurista Campari 1931.*

Milano: Ditta Davide Campari & C.

The contents of this manifesto were previously published in the Futurist magazine *La città futurista* (no. 1 and 2, May 1929, Turin).

companies appear in capitals, companies to which Depero has proposed, or will probably attempt to propose, his advertising work.<sup>24</sup>

even today we have captains who run powerful campaigns in order to publicise their battles, their labours on behalf of their own projects and products – for example, PIRELLI, the king of infinite rubber forests, the owner of mountains of rubber, who produces millions of tires that give or increase the world's speed – isn't that a poem? a drama? a painting? an awesome architecture of the highest poetry, the most magical palette, the most diabolical fantasy? – ANSALDO - FIAT - MARCHETTI - CAPRONI - ITALA - LANCIA - ISOTTA FRASCHINI - ALFA ROMEO - BIANCHI etc., aren't their factory yards miracles?

Depero, 1931, 19

The text underlines just how important the figure of the industrialist is for Depero both in terms of economic prosperity and the development of art as well as his own business. The Futurist movement's underlying aversion to museums and academies matches perfectly the natural setting for advertising art: streets, people, cities:

One industrialist is more useful for modern art and the nation than 100 critics, than 1,000 useless traditionalists – [...] art of just that sort has been initiated by Futurism and the art of advertising – the art of advertising is extremely colourful and must be highly synthetic – a spellbinding art boldly placed on walls and the facades of big buildings, in shop windows and trains, alongside pavements and streets, everywhere; [...] even art must keep step with industry, science, and politics in the style of its time, glorifying them – [...] living, multiplied art, not isolated and buried in museums – art free of all academic restraints –

Depero, 1931, 20

Depero concludes by asserting that both he and Futurism have led the way in the advertising field, revealing his ego and his desire to continue creating advertisements:

the influence of Futurist style is decisive, categorical, evident in all advertising applications and creations – I have seen my own works, on every street corner and every space open for advertising, plagiarized and robbed, more or less intelligently, more or less tastefully – my vivacious colors, my crystalline and mechanical style, my metallic, geometrical, and imaginative flora, fauna, and people, all widely imitated and exploited – this gives me a lot of pleasure; although I have taken up the art of advertising on a deliberately restricted schedule, I can affirm, without hesitation, that I have managed to create many followers; but I should add that, in this field, I shall have a great deal yet to say –

Depero, 1931, 21

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<sup>24</sup> Isotta Fraschini, Bianchi and Pirelli are the names often mentioned in the correspondence with Azari.

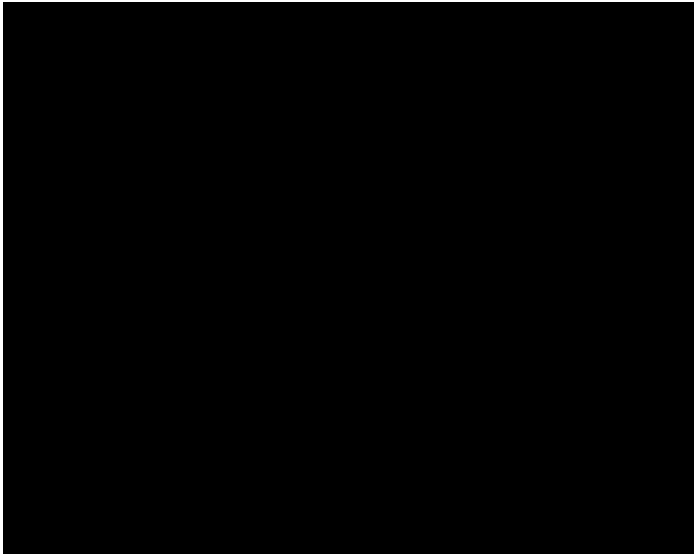


Figure 6.34

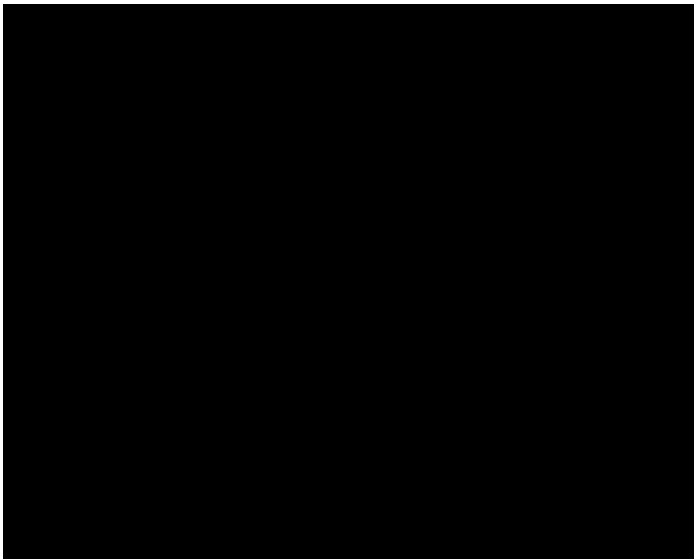


Figure 6.35

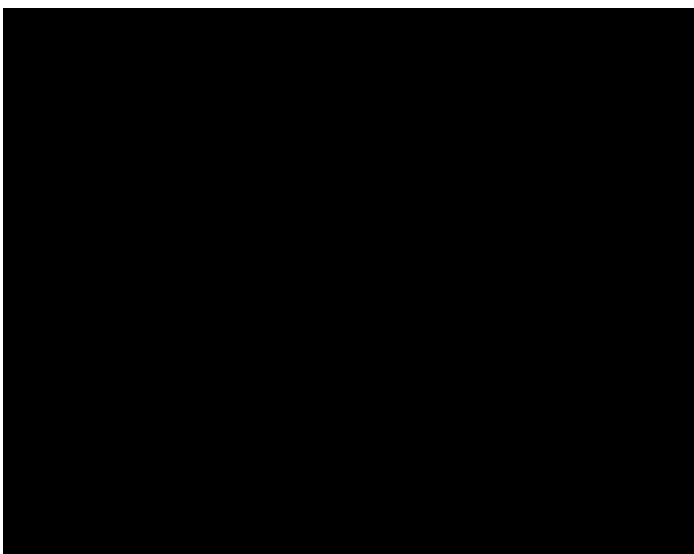


Figure 6.37



Figure 6.36

**Figure 6.34** 1931. 'Palestra tipografica' (Typographic Gym). In *Numero unico futurista Campari 1931*. Milano: Ditta Davide Campari & C. The illustration of this page was designed for an advertisement published in 1930 while the text was created for the book.

**Figure 6.35** 1931. 'Bozzetto di padiglione Campari' (Draft of Campari Pavilion). This Campari pavilion reinterprets a previous one designed for the Depero's Futurist house of art (figure 6.36).

**Figure 6.36** c. 1927-1928. Pavilion for Depero Futurist house of art, MART, Dep.4.5.43.

**Figure 6.37** Gerbino, G. 1931. 'L'ora del bitter Campari' (Bitter's Time). In *Numero unico futurista Campari 1931*. Milano: Ditta Davide Campari. Illustration and composition designed by Depero.

The rest of the *Numero unico futurista Campari* showcases the majority of the artwork already created by the Depero-Campari collaboration (figure 6.34), which is alternated with original advertising slogans and poetry specially produced for the Campari book, presented with typographical elements, illustrations and hypothetical advertising proposals such as a Campari pavilion (figure 6.35).<sup>25</sup>

In addition to 'Il Futurismo e l'arte pubblicitaria', the book also includes another long text by Depero that talks about New York and the imminent release of a book chronicling the artist's two-year stay in the American city. Sporadically, and perhaps for plausible economic reasons, the Campari name appears in capitals in a number of passages in the book in a forced attempt to elucidate the sense of the text and, at the same time, repeat the name of the sponsor.

Two years after the experience of *Numero unico futurista Campari*, Depero and Gerbino collaborated again on in the manifesto 'Poesia pubblicitaria' (Advertising poetry - figure 6.38) published in the second edition of *Dinamo futurista* (figure 6.39), the Futurist magazine founded by Depero. This manifesto also expresses the desire to avoid making a distinction between conventional poetry and advertising text, i.e. between traditional art and what could be described today as copywriting; and once again the efforts of the Futurists are described as pioneering in this respect. The manifesto finishes by arguing that there is a close relationship between an art (in this case advertising poetry) and industry.

Advertising poetry doesn't mean nursery rhymes of random words [...] but rather a real poem meant as in the highest meaning of the word.

We Futurists were the first who glorified the engine song, the metallic sparkle, the speed, the machines and the skyscrapers, either with painting or poetry [...]

We need to exalt industrial or commercial products with the same passion we exalt women's eyes (which are less sweet than... Venchi's candies).

In summary, advertising poetry meant as sister of industry, of commerce, of science and politics.

Gerbino cited in Depero, 1933, 10

### 6.3.3.2 Depero's work for Verzocchi brick manufacturer

Aware of the importance of publicity, and stemming from his own interest in art, in 1924 Giuseppe Verzocchi collaborated with 18 artists to create his company's product catalogue. Entitled *Veni vd vici* (figure 6.40), with 'vd' representing the initials of

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<sup>25</sup> The texts and images in the book are the work of Depero while the slogans created by Gerbino always carry his signature. Where Depero also contributed to writing them, both names appear. It is not known exactly how Casavola contributed. Gerbino's slogan on page 33, *L'ora del bitter Campari*, would be reused the following year as the title of a song by musician Ferdinando Crivel, a song typical of the 20-year Fascist period and still used today in some Campari adverts (figure 6.37).



Figure 6.40

Figure 6.41

Figure 6.42

**Figure 6.38** Gerbino, G. 1933. 'Poesia pubblicitaria' (Advertising Poetry). In Depero, F. 1933. *Dinamo futurista*. Year 1. No. 2. Printed by Mercurio printing works. Rovereto. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

Here, it is interesting to note the use of modernist typeface, a pointy sans serif.

**Figure 6.39** 1933. Cover of *Dinamo futurista*. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

**Figure 6.40** Verzocchi, G. 1924. *Veni vd vici. Mattoni refrattari*. La Spezia: Società Anonima Verzocchi. Courtesy of Centro Orsi.

In *Veni vd vici* catalogue, 18 artists interpreted Verzocchi's bricks through 35 artworks. The artists involved in the project were: Guglielmo Baldassini, Giulio Cisari, Adolfo De Carolis, Fortunato Depero, Marcello Dudovich, Cesare Fratino, Giovanni Greppi, Nino Maggioni, Adolfo Magrini, Pietro Marussig, Giuseppe Miti Zanetti, Marcello Nizzoli, Carlo Parmeggiani, Enrico Sacchetti, Giovanni Scolari, Primo Sinopico, Mario Stroppa, Mario Zampini.

**Figures 6.41 and 6.42** 1924. Two of Depero's artworks for Verzocchi's catalogue. In the lettering on the right we read: 'All'Inferno non si bruciano gli uomini, d'acciaio non li spezzano' (In hell they [the bricks] do not burn, the steel men can not break them). Size 12 × 18 cm. Lithograph on paper. In Verzocchi, G. 1924. *Veni vd vici. Mattoni refrattari*. La Spezia: Società Anonima Verzocchi. Courtesy of Centro Orsi.



the company and also standing for 'Vidi'<sup>26</sup>, the catalogue had the far-sighted goal of combining art and industry:

When compiling this catalogue, which at first glance may seem extravagant, my aim was to offer brick consumers something that was not so easy to throw in the bin and that provided them with all the information they needed on fire-resistant bricks from both a practical and technical point of view.

[...] On the thin pages, with a light print that does not contrast with the artistic graphics of the catalogue, I provided the lab results of the analysis and melting point of the bricks.

My sincere thanks go to the artists that enthusiastically helped me to put together my catalogue. I hope that when criticising this work people at least take into account the effort that went into creating something new and to giving an industrial product that is very "resistant" to art an Italian artistic makeover

Verzocchi, 1924, 1

Depero created three tables interpreting Verzocchi's bricks which appeared at the end of the catalogue to represent 'a stylistic switch from pastism to Futurism' (Verzocchi, 1924 cited by Zanoner, 2007, 108). In fact, Depero's contribution (figures 6.41 and 6.42), stands out quite clearly from the more pictorial works produced by the other artists involved in the catalogue.

Between 1949 and 1950 Verzocchi created his own personal art collection asking over 70 contemporary Italian painters to produce a work of a set size (90 × 70 cm) on the theme of work, together with a self-portrait, for a fee of 100,000 Lire. The works produced were exhibited in Venice in a large collective show that coincided with the opening of the art Biennial. As well as participating in the collection, Depero was also responsible for the exhibition promotional materials (figures 6.43 and 6.44).

### 6.3.3.3 Depero for U.N.I.C.A.

U.N.I.C.A. (Unione Nazionale Industria Commercio Alimentari - National Trade Union for the Food Industry) was founded in Turin in 1924 by Riccardo Gualino, who brought together four chocolate and sweet production factories in a single company: Talmone, Moriondo Gariglio, Cioccolato Bonatti and Gallettine & Dora Biscuits.

From 1927 U.N.I.C.A. commissioned to Depero to design posters and advertisements (figures 6.45, 6.46 and 6.47) focused on promoting the brand and the depiction of the marketed product. The following year saw the creation of a dummy for a never-produced advertising booklet *Unico per l'Unica* (Unique for Unica - figure 6.48, 6.49 and 6.50), which involved Depero collaborating with Futurist

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<sup>26</sup> A reference to the Latin motto of Julius Caesar *veni, vidi, vici*, meaning 'I came, I saw, I conquered'. The VD acronym was such a success that it was redesigned as V&D (despite the death of partner De Romano), superimposed on the image of a brick, appearing on all promotional materials and therefore acting as the company's signature.

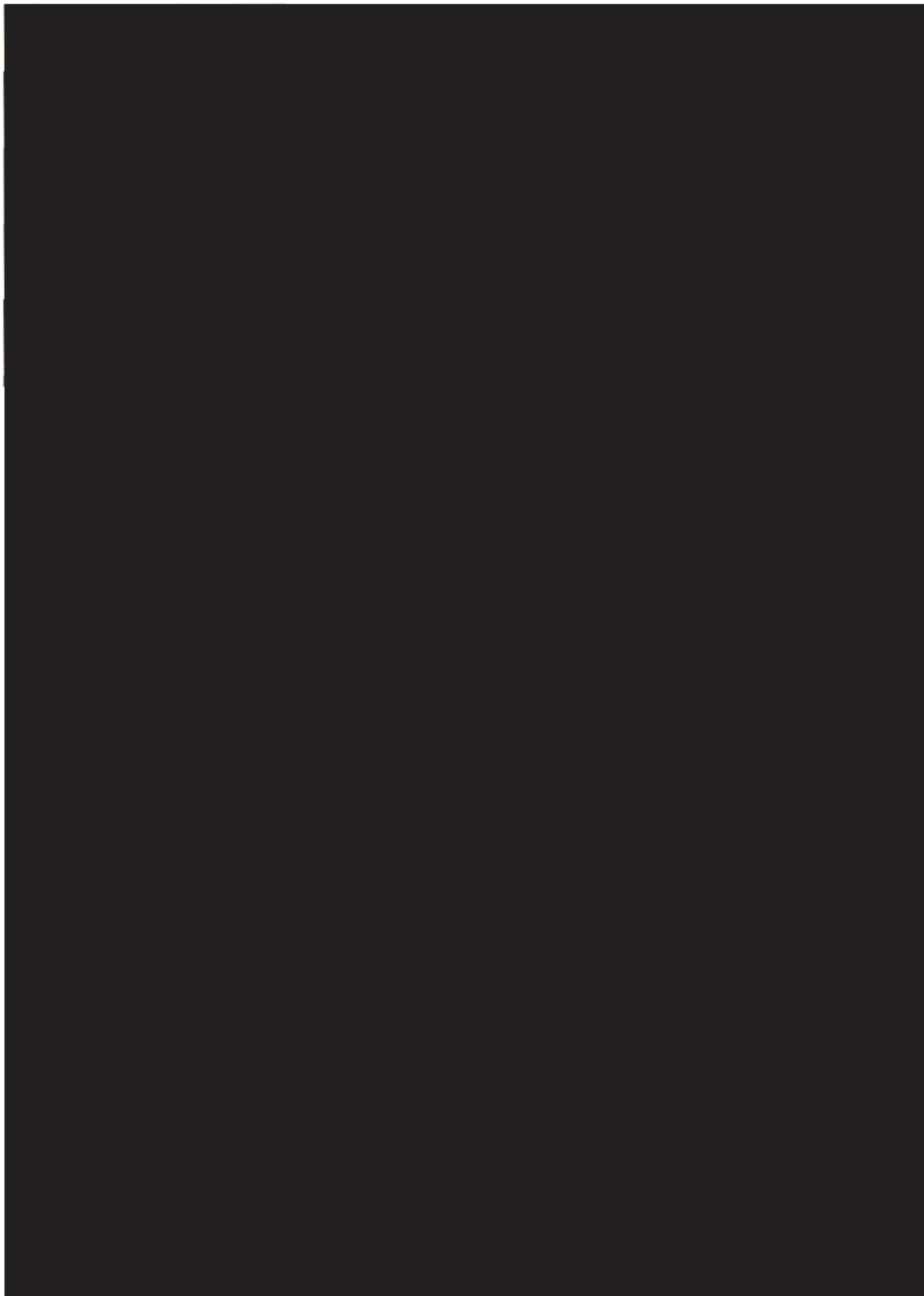


Figure 6.48

Figure 6.49

Figure 6.50

**Figure 6.43** 1950. Postcard for the exhibition *70 pittori italiani d'oggi - Collezione Verzocchi* (70 Italian Painters of Today - Verzocchi Collection). Lithograph print. 1950. 17.4 × 11.8 cm.

**Figure 6.44** 1950. Catalogue of the exhibition *70 pittori italiani d'oggi - Collezione Verzocchi* (70 Italian Painters of Today - Verzocchi Collection). Lithograph print. 1950. 17.4 × 11.8 cm.

**Figure 6.45** Sketch for Unica advertisement. India ink on paper. 1927-1928. 30.5 × 37.8 cm. MART, Dep.5.4.1.

**Figure 6.46** Draft for Unica advertisement. India ink on paper. 1927-1928. 33.2 × 28.6 cm. MART, Dep.5.4.2.

**Figure 6.47** Poster for Unica. *Uova sorpresa* (Easter eggs surprise). Lithograph. 1928. 24 × 34 cm. Picture retrieved from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 139. Courtesy of MART.

**Figures 6.48/6.49/6.50** Draft for Unica booklet. Pencil on paper. 1928. Size 21.5 × 32.2 cm. MART, Dep.5.4. Depero, F. and Gerbino, G. 1928. *Unico per l'Unica* (Unique for Unica).

In figure 6.49 we read: 'Giuseppina Baker, chocolate face, two candies her eyes, unique in the world'.

poet Giovanni Gerbino, prefiguring their later collaboration on the aforementioned *Numero unico Campari*. The pages in the pamphlet were devised by Depero and accompanied by Gerbino's slogans.<sup>27</sup>

#### 6.3.3.4 Depero for S. Pellegrino and Liquore Strega

In 1928, in parallel with his work for U.N.I.C.A. , Depero established contact with S.Pellegrino, a water and soft drinks company, and distillery Liquore Strega. Although we do not have enough information to understand Depero's relationship with the two companies, there is a sufficient quantity of sketches and advertising materials to take into consideration (figures 6.51-6.56).

Depero was already thinking about his trip to New York scheduled for the following year and needed funds for the journey. His agent Azari lived in Milan, also home to Italy's biggest companies, and so he decided that the city was the most strategic place for securing as many advertising commissions as possible: 'Now I won't be leaving Milan until I have achieved my goal, i.e. my wallet containing all the necessary' (Depero, 22 May 1928, MART, Dep.3.3.1.13.32).

In two other letters, Depero updates his wife Rosetta on his working activities: 'I have finished 15 black and white [sketches], now I am waiting for the order to send them. I am also getting ahead with the Campari ones [...] I'll soon also be ready with S. Pellegrino', and then, 'I have 10 ready for Campari, 10 Strega, yesterday I sent 16 Strega by express delivery. I did an incredible job. Don't worry, things will continue to get better and my path to success is almost guaranteed' (Depero, 1928, MART, Dep.3.3.1.13.10).

#### 6.3.3.5 Depero for American Lead Pencil

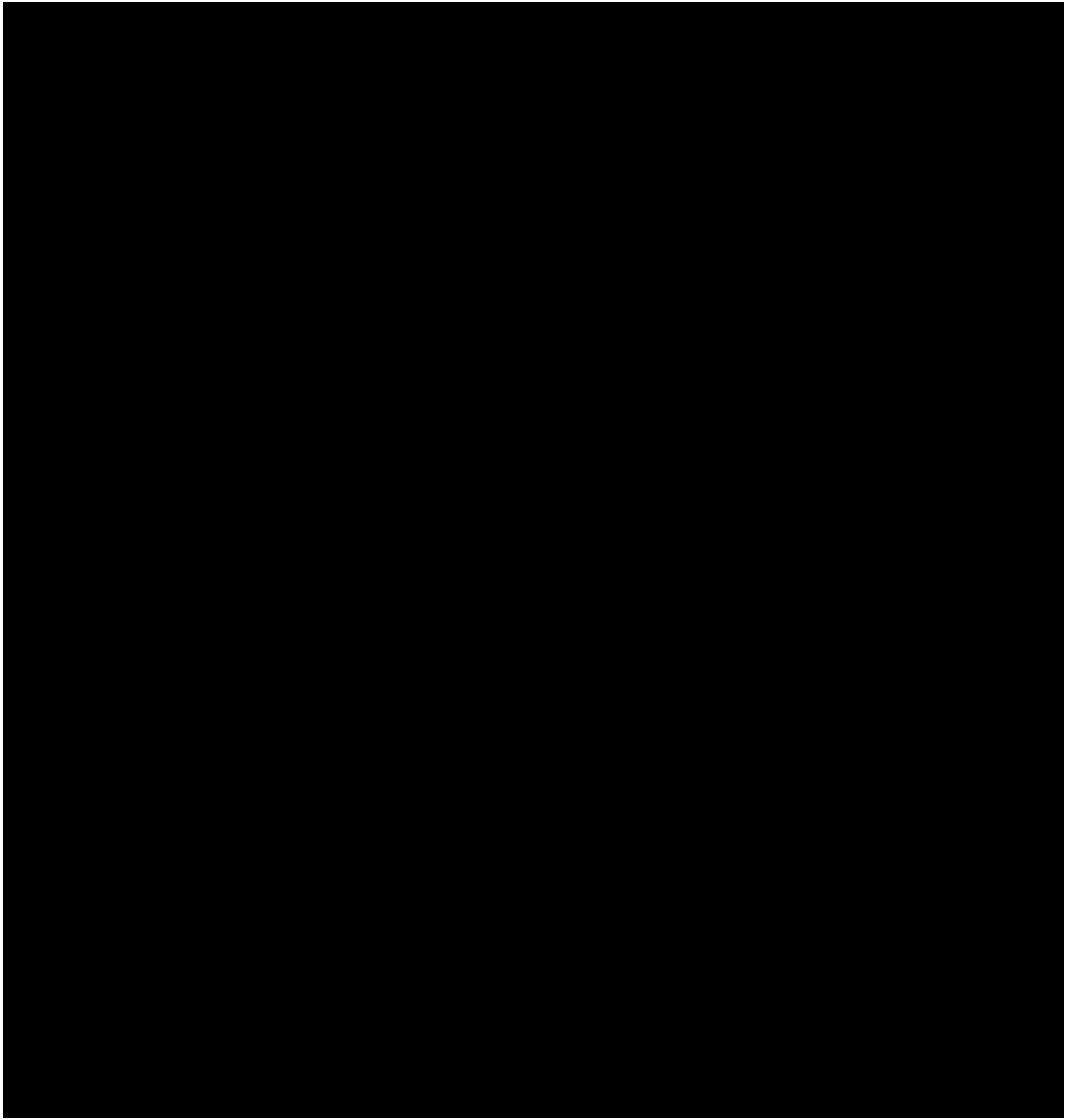
The relationship between Depero and the American pencil company is very interesting. Depero described the form their relationship took in his biography with the text 'Storia vissuta di... Matite' (Life experiences of... Pencils), and it is useful for understanding his ability to revisit projects that had been rejected and unsuccessful.

In 1926 Depero received an order to carry out poster work from an unspecified Milan pencil company. Depero prepared four sketches 'as quick as a flash' (*'fulmineamente'*) but then decided not to submit them because his recompense was a 'humiliating fee' (Depero, 1940, 228-230).

Disappointed by this episode, Depero tried not to let his work go to waste, re-

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<sup>27</sup> The possible use of Josephine Baker as a testimonial and spokesperson for the booklet was quite curious; during his stay in Paris in 1925, Depero had been quite taken with one of the showgirl's performances described as following: 'daughter of the devil, serpent of fire, fistful of lightning and seduction' (Depero, 1940, 271 - see figure 6.49).



**Figure 6.51** 1928-1929. Sketch for S. Pellegrino Magnesia. Ink and pencil on paper. 26.1 × 37.7 cm. MART, Dep.4.2.39.

**Figure 6.52** 1928-1929. Poster for S. Pellegrino Magnesia. Lithograph print. MART, Pat.360644.

**Figure 6.53** 1928-1929. Poster for S. Pellegrino Magnesia. Lithograph print. MART, Pat.360641.

**Figure 6.54** 1928. Advertisement for S. Pellegrino water published in *Corriere della sera*, 2 June 1928. Lithograph print. 43.3 × 59 cm. Courtesy of S. Pellegrino Archive.

**Figure 6.55** 1928. Sketch for Liquore Strega. India ink on paper. 23.5 × 32.3 cm. MART, Dep.5.8.

**Figure 6.56** 1928. Poster for Liquore Strega. Lithograph print. MART, Pat.360658.

proposing his ideas to another Milanese competitor and managing to sell the four pieces of work in the form of postcards (figure 6.57), 100,000 copies of which were produced.<sup>28</sup> The company changed its mind however and reimbursed his printing expenses following the negative opinions of ‘a few provincial customers’. As a result, Depero entrusted the prints to an unidentified advertising agent in Milan (probably Fedele Azari, who was based there), who distributed them at exhibitions and to Italian companies (Depero, 1940, 228-230). At the same time Depero travelled as far as Lausanne to unsuccessfully offer them to an unspecified Swiss company.<sup>29</sup>

In September 1928 Depero went to New York to seek his fortune, taking with him the postcards that had been repeatedly rejected. This time, however, the cards came to the attention of American Pencil who praised and admired Depero’s work even if it was not representative of the pencils that they themselves marketed. As a result, the general manager invited Depero to submit some sketches (figure 6.58) to the Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn advertising agency (BBDO) on 11 October 1929: ‘In front of five directors’ Depero’s black and white adverts, coloured posters and window displays were accepted unanimously (figure 6.59 - Depero, 1940, 228-230).

#### 6.3.3.6 Depero for Sani and Buxus

Similar to the aforementioned experience with *Numero unico Campari* but more regional in scale was Depero’s collaboration with the Sani furniture factory of Rovereto, for which he designed *Autarchia «IRR»: rinnovamento del mobilio e vasto sviluppo dell’intarsio* (‘IRR’ Autarky: Renewal of Furniture and Vast Development of Inlay), an advertising brochure that presents both Depero the artist and Buxus, a synthetic wood similar to the laminate covering used for furniture and interior design panels, which was obtained from the ossification of cellulose (see figure 6.62).<sup>30</sup> The brochure gathers together promotional texts written by Depero which show, through a selection of his projects created with Buxus and the inlay technique, the versatility of the material, ranging from furniture – see the text ‘Il bambino e la sua stanza’ (The Child and His Room) – to the decoration of rooms (the part entitled ‘Grandi pareti allegoriche’ - Large Allegorical Walls).

Although different methods are used, once again following the *Numero Unico*

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<sup>28</sup> The company Depero is referring to is Presbitero of Bergamo whose main sales office was in Milan.

<sup>29</sup> Swiss company Caran d’Ache, according to Gabriella Belli (Belli, 2007, 168).

<sup>30</sup> In line with Mussolini’s autarky policy, the material was developed during the Fascist period by the Giacomo Bosso paper mill, which at the end of the war commissioned Depero to produce a catalogue in English with the aim of exporting the material to the American market (for more on this catalogue see MART, Dep.3.1.41.10 and Dep.3.1.43.4). The company paid for Depero’s trip to the USA in 1947–48 but this second publication on Buxus was never produced and the material was only ever used during the 20-year Fascist regime and never outside Italy (Garda, 2000 and Scudiero, 2009, 554).

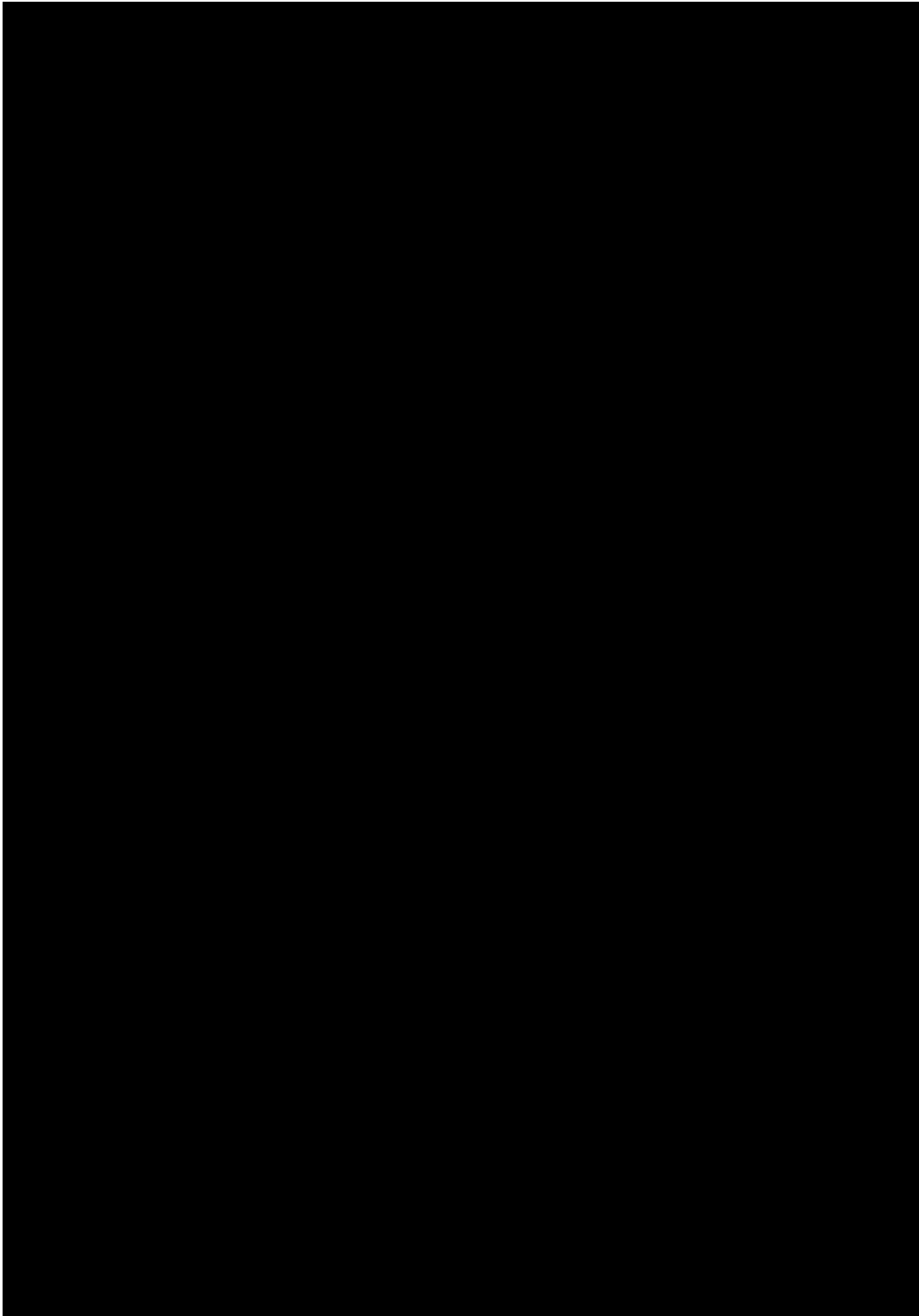


Figure 6.59

**Figure 6.57** 1926. Series of four postcards for Presbitero pencils company, mounted on cardboard by Depero. Lithograph print. 13.5 × 8.7 cm (each). Picture from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 171.

**Figure 6.58** 1930. Sketch for Venus pencil advertisement. Ink on paper. 27.7 × 15.5 cm. Picture from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 176.

**Figure 6.59** 1929-1930. Window display for Venus pencil. Paper collage. 50.5 × 30.5 cm. Picture from Belli and Avanzi, 2007, 176, see MART, Dep.6.30.4.

we have a joint venture between the client and Depero that results in a publication in which the artist's career is used to advertise the product, almost as if it were a testimonial. The commercial goal of the publication, to promote both Depero and the material, is evinced from the texts inside, a long series of eulogies on his artistic output ('As well as his paintings, distributed in galleries and collections, his decorative and advertising art has established itself at home and overseas, in America. Medals, diplomas and acknowledgments from the international press') and the advertised material, in which the name Buxus is always presented in bold capitals followed by short descriptions that seem to act as slogans (e. g. 'Buxus. The perfect material for a true revolution of your shop window' - Sani and Depero, 1939, n.p.; MART, Dep.4.1.128, Dep.4.1.129 and Dep.4.1.130).

#### **6.4 Fortunato Depero, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and advertising art**

The preface of the chapter on advertising artists recognised in Italy, included in the Ricciardi Guide of 1936, began as follows: 'What is meant by advertising artist? Those artists, designers and painters who have specialised in creating art for advertising purposes. Those who do not perceive artistic creation as an end unto itself but in relationship to the task they have been given and in harmony with the medium they have to use, and in line with the concept that the brand has to embody' (figure 6.60 - Ricciardi, 1936, 365). The advert is subjected to its intrinsic function, that of promoting the product, and at the same time Ricciardi talks about harmony, the coordination between each medium through which the brand is channelled. Unlike a picture, which can be conceived as a single piece of artwork unto itself, advertising must form part of a system.

Bemoaning the lack of a genuine school, the text admits that there is a gap between Italian and foreign advertisers which, however, is offset by 'the brilliance of the ideas, the power of the signs and the vibrancy of the colours' (Ricciardi, 1936, 365).<sup>31</sup> It is followed by the list of artists, writers and advertising printers, in which Depero's name appears (under the city of Rovereto - figure 6.61) among the great names of Italian advertising artists.<sup>32</sup> Even though Marinetti writes in the same guide that

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<sup>31</sup> The chapter of the guide entitled 'Notes on graphics', edited by the editorial team of *Campo grafico*, takes advertising compositions as examples, introducing in fine detail the creative possibilities inherent in the aspects of an advert: the tools, the layout, the type, the paper and the printing techniques that are possible.

The First National Exhibition of Billboard and Advertising Graphic poster exhibition was organised by the Fascist National Union of Fine Arts in Rome just before the publication of the annual, demonstrating the first signs of corporate organisation in the advertising sector.

<sup>32</sup> Well-known mentioned artists are: Alfieri&Lacroix, Leonetto Cappiello, Erberto Carboni, Attilio Dradi, Carlo Rossi, Marcello Dudovich, Bruno Munari, Marcello Nizzoli, Xanti Schawinsky, SePo (Severo Pozzati), Sinopico, Mario Sironi, Luigi Veronesi.

advertising is by nature Futurist, Depero was the only artist associated with the Futurist movement to be listed, apart from Bruno Munari, who was only ever a marginal figure in Futurism (Ricciardi, 1936, 517).<sup>33</sup>

Between 1920 and the mid 1930s, Depero worked prolifically with Italian and international companies in the advertising field, creating advertisements and posters but also furniture and advertising accessories (figures 6.62 and 6.63), as part of an across-the-board approach. In a 1928 letter to his wife Rosetta, Depero writes ‘Dear Nina, I am now going back to Granelli Magnesia S. Pellegrino – they have taken 2 + 3 cushions – + they have asked me to design some posters for their table water. I have had a breakthrough with this important new line of work’ (Depero, 1928, MART, Dep.3.3.1.13.54).<sup>34</sup> The following year, while Depero was in New York promoting his art on the American market, he wrote to Marinetti about a personal exhibition at the Advertising Club: ‘On 7th October I inaugurate an exhibition in Park Avenue dedicated to my advertising art – There will be the most important industrialists and advertising directors and agents. It lasts 15 days’ (Depero’s letter to F. T. Marinetti, December 1929, MART, Dep.4.1.26).<sup>35</sup> In these two documents Depero admits that he has managed to achieve his much yearned-for success in the advertising field and that he is now reaping the rewards.

I conclude this chapter by highlighting three key points about Depero and advertising: firstly, with his successive texts ‘Manifesto agli industriali’ and ‘Il Futurismo e l’arte pubblicitaria’, he defined the industrialist as a key actor in the design process both from an economic point of view – industry enjoying continuous growth and being a more prosperous market compared with that of fine art – and a professional point of view. Although peppered with typically Futurist and populist adulations, cases such as Campari and Verzocchi are collaborations worthy of study by design historians because they were examples of the perfect symbiosis between client and designer, where the former, in the guise of contemporary patron, placed their faith in the artist they had commissioned and the latter used their qualities and ideas to communicate the industrial product in a continuous dialogue with the client.

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<sup>33</sup> Munari joined the Futurism movement for a limited period of his career but was never admitted into its heart. As mentioned previously, only the opinion of founder Marinetti is included in the guide.

<sup>34</sup> In 1925 Ezio Granelli took control of S. Pellegrino and revived the company’s fortunes by purchasing and marketing the patent for the Magnesia digestif.

<sup>35</sup> Bedarida describes Depero as ‘the flagbearer of Futurism in America’, in fact, before the 1929 exhibition he had already taken part into the *Exhibition of Modern Italian Art* (1926), curated at the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York by Christian Brinton with the patronage of the Italian Government. Brinton was a keen supporter of Futurism in the United States, he would also curated the 1929 exhibition at the Guarino Gally in New York that, again, included Depero’s work. On Depero in New York see Bedarida, 2016, 43-70 and, especially, Bedarida, 2019, 115-134.



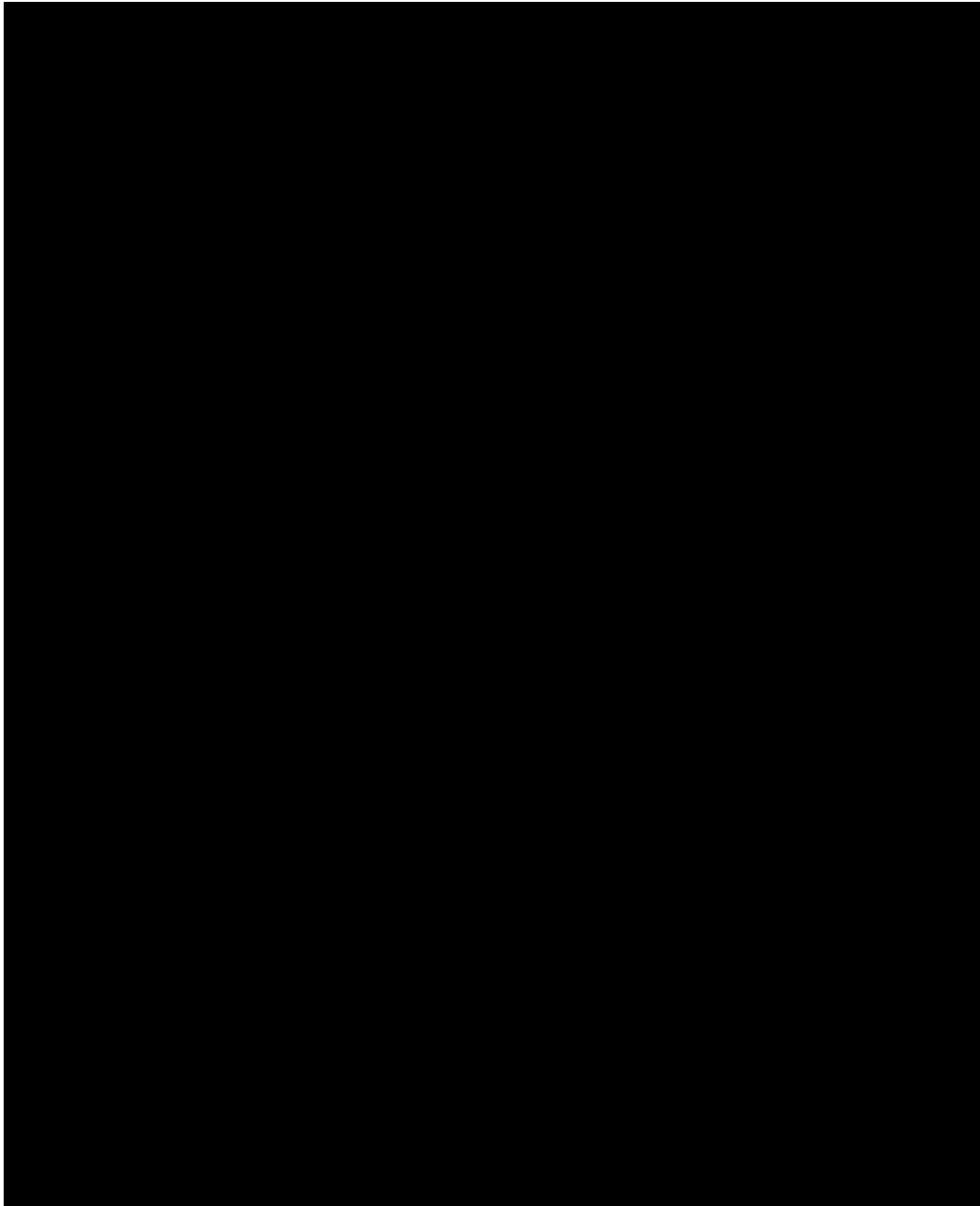


Figure 6.62

Figure 6.63

**Figures 6.60 and 6.61** Ricciardi, G. C. 1936. *Guida Ricciardi: pubblicità e propaganda in Italia*. Milano: Edizioni L'ufficio moderno / Edizioni Ricciardi. Courtesy of Museo delle Storie of Bergamo.

**Figure 6.60** On page 365 we find the list, divided by city, of the recognised advertising artists in Italy.

**Figure 6.61** Detail of page 373, in which we find Depero's name under the city of Rovereto. Courtesy of Museo delle Storie of Bergamo.

**Figure 6.62** 1932. Campari lamp. Buxus. Size 26.5 × 39 × 16 cm.

**Figure 6.63** 1927. Campari tray. Wood. Size 40.5 × 29 × 1.5 cm.

Secondly, we should also recognise Depero's efforts in promoting himself and asserting the importance of this activity, sometimes committing the sin of narcissism and megalomania but defining as 'vital' the promotion of his artistic production through any means and publicising himself in the same way as the industrial products he advertised. In four notebooks dating to 1928 (figure 6.64), perhaps his busiest year in the advertising sphere, Depero alternates sketches of ideas with lists of advertising subjects, including himself (figures 6.65 and 6.66) and his house of art. Another interesting item found in the notebooks, which further underlines the amount of work carried out by Depero in the advertising sphere as well as his lofty expectations, is his sketch for a hypothetical advertising magazine ('super magazine like no other in the world') to be called 'Depereclame' (figure 6.67).<sup>36</sup>

The third and final point is Depero's intention to eliminate the differences between fine and applied/commercial art. As mentioned, this goal, like that of popularising art, was geared towards producing a total form of art and involved numerous cultural issues (political, social and of course artistic).

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi argues that what distinguished Futurism from other avant-gardes 'was the total character of their desire for change, a desire that they applied not only to the whole domain of the arts, but also to every aspect of life', before continuing, 'however, no Futurist artist ever managed to produce works in more than one field' (Falasca-Zamponi, 1996, 45). This assertion is contradicted by the example of Depero, one of the few Futurists to experiment in multiple artistic fields: painting, sculpture, poetry, furniture design, clothing, and advertising as a branch of art applied to industry.

Marinetti introduced the spheres of politics (verbal violence, techniques of agitation, meetings etc.) and advertising (hypervaluation of Futurism's own products, massive use of posters, the distribution of leaflets etc.) into the realm of fine art (Salaris, 1994, 111). Depero on the contrary, 'was chiefly responsible for carrying the Futurist aesthetic into the realm of commercial and public application' (Drucker, 1994, 107).

I believe that Depero should be recognised not only for bringing art into the commercial sphere but also for the fusion of fine art and commercial art, of art and life, as wished for in *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*: in 1926 Depero exhibited *Squisito al seltz*, in its hybrid 'advertising painting' form, at the Venice Biennale,

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<sup>36</sup> There is no proof or documentation attesting to the actual existence of the magazine, even if five years later Depero would present his *Dinamo futurista*, a magazine that would also cover advertising, among other topics; this publication was made possible thanks to customers, mainly local, that sponsored the publication in exchange for an advert (figures 6.69 and 6.70).



Figure 6.66

Figure 6.67

**Figures 6.64/6.65/6.66/6.67/6.68** 1928.  
Depero's bloc notes. MART, Dep.5.7.

**Figure 6.64** Cover.

**Figure 6.65** Sketch for a printed background of the Depero's Futurist house of art.

**Figure 6.66** This page includes a list of advertisements that Depero had to be prepared: Coffee, Pencil, Unica, Depero itself and Campari are mentioned; below, there are some copywriting exercises using acronyms and puns. 'Erre di Depereclame. Solo réclame Depero.' ('R of Depero advertising. Only Depero advertising'). 'O.R.O. Occorre Reclame Occorre.' (We Need Advertising. Advertising is Needed').

**Figure 6.67** Sketch for magazine headline 'Depereclame. Superrivista unica al mondo. Tutta l'arte dell'avvenire sarà fatalmente pubblicitaria' (Depereclame. Super magazine like no other in the world. All art of the future will be largely advertising).

**Figure 6.68** Other linguistic exercises: 'A·R·D· Arte Reclame Depero' (A·R·D· Art Advertising Depero). 'AR-DE-RE Arte-Depero-Reclame' ('TO-BURN Art Advertising Depero'). 'PubblicitArte Depero' (Art-Advertising Depero).



Figure 6.68

Italy's most important art exhibition. The following year he exhibited commercial art, applied art and propaganda art simultaneously at the Monza Biennale, today the Milan Triennale (see caption of figure 6.5). This symbiosis is encapsulated by *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, an edition that stimulates debate about the book as a work of art, as we will see in the next chapter.



Figure 6.69



Figure 6.70

**Figures 6.69 and 6.70** Less well-known and documented than Depero's typical advertisements (mainly in colour with illustrations of mascots and puppets) were the adverts he produced from the 1930s onwards for mainly local clients, using only text and typographic ornament, with a maximum of two colours (usually red and black inks). These are equally worthy of attention as the sole use of type in the advertising field conformed with the aesthetic of the New Typography movement (see chapter 2, section 2.3.3), which was developing in the rest of Europe, but represented practically an isolated case in Italian – specifically Futurist – advertising in those years. I think that these examples can be located somewhere between Futurism and typographical Modernism: the typographical compositions seem to be the result of the new developments that happened in Central Europe, and are certainly evolutions compared with the adverts created by Depero in the 1920s. At the same time, given also the relative absence of photomontage, they cannot be considered to be modern in the same way as the examples cited in Tschichold's *Die neue Typographie* or the adverts created by Italian advertisers from the middle of 1930s on (for instance, see the work of Antonio Boggeri and his talented collaborators).

**Figure 6.69** 1932. Advertising page designed by Depero for Komarek, shutters company based in Rovereto.

**Figure 6.70** 1932. Depero's advertisement for Cavazzani, wine company in Avio-Trento.



## 7 *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and the artist's book

As already discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Fortunato Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* have recently been the subject of a re-evaluation by art historians and scholars. According to Nicoletta Boschiero, 'by the 1990s the Bolted Book was established as an art object unto itself, like a painting or a sculpture' (Boschiero, 2017, 13). By way of confirmation, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* formed part of the thematic exhibition *The artist and the book in twentieth-century Italy* (1992) at MoMA.<sup>1</sup> Although the show was nominally a collection of artists' books spanning the twentieth century, significant space was dedicated to Futurism: the accompanying catalogue concludes with 20 pages by Luciano Caruso, curator of the two reprints of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, which retraces the chronology of the avant-garde through the most prominent publications and manifestos. This concluding part and the critical, introductory texts of the catalogue (by Ralph Jentsch and Vincenzo Filacavai) refer various times to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as progenitor of the book as art object, and describe how Futurist books are regarded as 'artists' books' that contributed to the definition of 'works of art in book form' (Filacavai, 1992, 11).<sup>2</sup>

Boschiero has commented further: 'following the rediscovery of Depero and the Bolted Book in prior years [...] Depero holdings became central to Futurist discourse at the present millennium [...] important book collections kept in museum [sic] and connected to the archives saw new interest, and the book as an art object became a subject for study' (Boschiero, 2017, 13). In fact, the early twenty-first century saw a succession of exhibitions and publications on the theme in Italy: *Per sommi libri. Gli artisti delle avanguardie e il libro* (In Summary, Books. The Artists of the Avant-garde and the Book - Calcagni and Chimirri, 2001) in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was exhibited along with works (not just books) produced by avant-garde artists belonging to the Bertini collection acquired by the National Central Library of Florence. *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was also included with books from all the avant-gardes at *Alfabeto in sogno. Dal carme figurato alla poesia concreta* (The Alphabet in Dreams. From the Visual Poem to Concrete Poetry - Parmiggiani, 2002), an exhibition of visual poetry from the Middle Ages through to the second half of the twentieth century. As with the 1992 exhibition at MoMA, Luciano Caruso edited the critique on Futurism (see pp. 299-316) and on *Depero*

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1 The exhibition was repeated the following year at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice with the catalogue translated into Italian.

2 In addition to the caption of the exhibited work, see section 7.2.1 below, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is referred to by Filacavai on page 14: 'Depero's bolt[ed] book (possibly the first book-object)', and by Caruso on page 328 where, together with *Les mots en liberté futuristes* (Futurist Words in Freedom - 1919), and the litho-tins, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is described as 'one of the high points of Futurist experimentation with books' (Filacavai and Caruso in Jentsch, 1992).

*futurista 1913–1927*, asserting that ‘the “*libromacchina*” [book-machine] marks the transition from the early-period experimentation of Futurism to its desire to find practical outlets for the “typographical revolution”’, referring to typographical compositions produced as hypothetical models for advertisements (Caruso, 2002, 312).<sup>3</sup>

In 2003 Giorgio Maffei, twentieth century book collector and scholar, edited *Il libro d’artista* (The Artist’s Book), a collection of historical and critical texts on the topic. In the preface he describes the difficulty and confusion he experienced in accurately defining the artist’s book from an historical and artistic perspective (Maffei, 2003, 5).<sup>4</sup> The same difficulties are confirmed by Drucker, due to the heterogeneity of this type of artistic production and the absence of a single and comprehensive ‘critical terminology for book arts aesthetics with a historical perspective’ (Drucker, 2004, 3).<sup>5</sup>

The 2005 exhibition *Libri taglianti esplosivi e luminosi* (Sharp, Explosive and Bright Books), held at MART, focused on books from the Paolo Della Grazia<sup>6</sup> collection and the MART’s Depero collection. In addition to examples of concrete and verbal-visual poetry from the second half of the twentieth century, it concentrated on the publishing activities of the Futurist movement (and Depero’s in particular), with its magazines, books and commercial projects, and an analysis

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3 Years earlier Caruso himself described it as one of the most experimental Futurist books, see note 2 and his text in the 1987 reprint (Caruso, 1987, pp. 3-6 and 36).

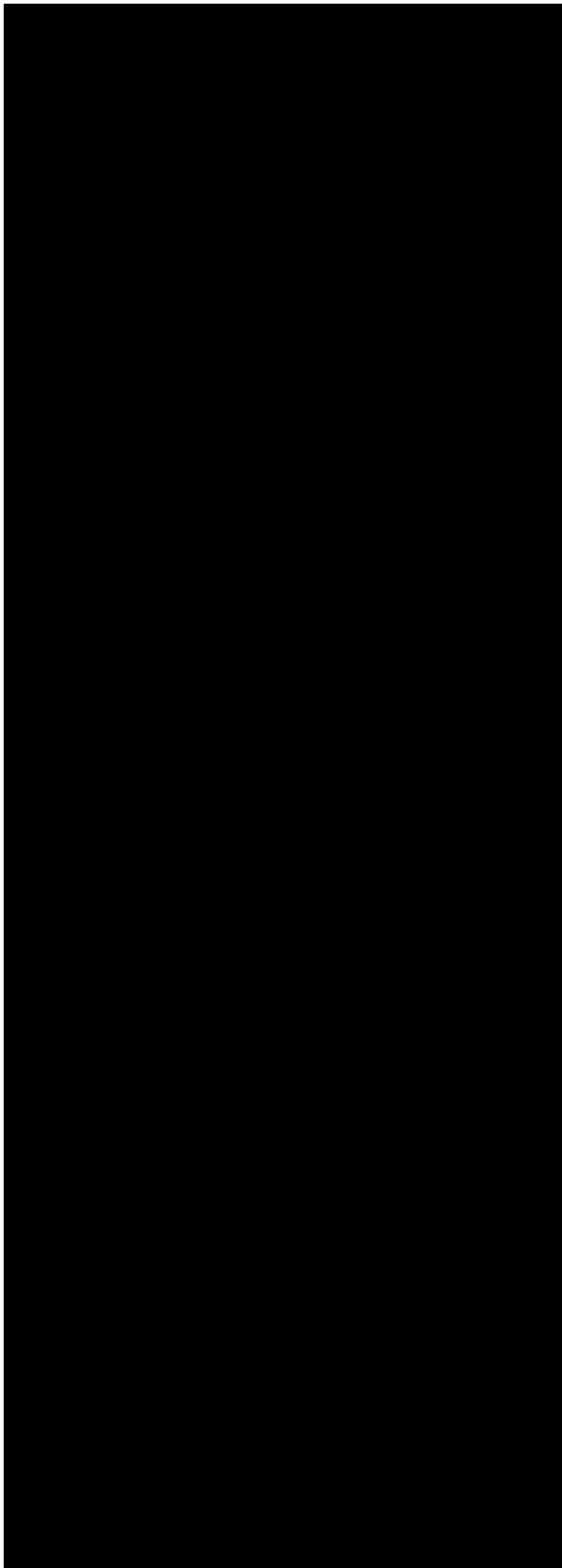
4 Maffei’s division of the ‘ideal library’ between ‘contemporary artists books’ and ‘illustrated books, *livres de peintres*, of the early twentieth century’ is very interesting. In the latter he includes avant-gardes, Futurist and not, including *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (pp. 9-31). Curiously, all of the books and relative analytical texts come under a single generic title, ‘Illustrated books, *livre de peintres*, artist’s book’. The lithotins and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* were the only two Futurist books taken into consideration (see pages 101-104).

5 Considering the studies examined when drafting this text, the difficulty in accurately defining the meaning of an ‘artist’s book’ is quite notable. With this in mind, the term ‘book art’, credited to Clive Phillpot by Robert Atkins, is used as a synonym for a broader and more correct description of artists’ books, a more inclusive definition that avoids excluding case study books or being too specific (Atkins, 1990, 48 and Phillpot, 1973, 38). Misunderstandings can arise when referring to ‘book art’ due to the fact that the term was previously used in twentieth century Germany (*Buchkunst*) to describe, in the main, the decoration by artists of regular books, sometimes in luxury editions but not necessarily - quite a different meaning to that ascribed to the term by Phillpot. In terms of its meaning, the German definition of ‘book art’ is far more similar to the English term ‘illustrated book’, a book in which the work of the author and the work of the artist are clearly distinct and do not dialogue with each other, and where the artist illustrates and decorates the content produced by the writer (Chappell, 2003, 15). Nowadays, the meaning of *Buchkunst* in German is slightly changed but it is still far from artist’s book (*künstlerbuch*) and book art as defined by Phillpot.

Another important consideration is the concept of the *livre d’artiste*, a literal translation of ‘artist’s book’ but the opposite in terms of its meaning. For Drucker, *livres d’artistes*, unlike artists’ books, ‘come into the world announcing their “importance” in their production values (expensive paper, binding, large formats, “hand” printing)’ (Drucker, 1998, 180). In fact, *livres d’artiste* are usually large books printed with refined manual techniques (like letterpress/screenprinting/etching), and distinctive for their fine materials, whose author is not necessarily the artist in question (Duciame, 1982, 90 and Balken, 1993, 70-71).

6 A collector, in 1988 he founded the ANS - Archivio di Nuova Scrittura (Archive of New Writing) in Milan, a vast documentary archive on all forms of verbal-visual artistic expression that investigates the use of the word. Since 1988 the archive has been divided between the MART (publishing and printed matters) and the Museion of Bolzano (other types of artworks - on this topic see Ferrari, 2007 and 2012).





**Figure 7.1** Phillpot, C. 1982. 'Definitions by Clive Phillpot'. In *Art Documentation. Bulletin of the Art Libraries Society of North America*. Vol. 1. No. 6. December 1982.

**Figure 7.2** Phillpot, C. 1982. 'Fruit Salad' Diagram.

Librarian and artist's book scholar Clive Phillpot dedicated various essays, classifications and diagrams to the relationship between book and art in order to provide clarity and catalogue the different types of book-work. These are two examples, above there is a list of corresponding definitions in the style of a dictionary. Below, the evolution of a simpler diagram published in *Artforum* in 1982 (pp. 77-79), in which he 'uses Boolean logic to clarify many aspects of the interrelations of art and artists, and books. [...] Works that are not (visual) art, are simply "literary". Works that are not books, are simply sculptural "book objects". So "artists' books" embraces these two categories. [...] It is divided horizontally into "unique" works and "multiple" works. I will be directing most of my attention to the multiple bookwork, since unique works normally embody a denial of the potential replicability of content and the inherent communicative value of the printed book' (Phillpot, 2013, 147-148). By comparing *Depero futurista 1913-1927* with these, the particular features by which it can be considered an artist's book emerge and these will be discussed in depth during this chapter.

Figure 7.2

of the correspondence between Depero and Azari on *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.<sup>7</sup> In the catalogue Roberto Antolini is quite emphatic in his description of the ‘pages [like] masterpieces of the typographical art’ and the book characterised by the ‘uniformity of its inspiration typical of the artist’s book which will teach the future avant-gardes’ (Antolini, 2005, 15-18). A year after this exhibition, Giorgio Maffei (together with Maura Picciau) returned to the topic, eliminating the division between the first and second halves of the twentieth century. All the books came under the category which gave its name to the exhibition held at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna in Rome and the associated bilingual catalogue/analytical text *Il libro come opera d’arte - The book as a work of art* (2006). *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was once more included among the curator’s selection of books presented and regarded as a key part of the lineage that goes from Mallarmé through to the contemporary artist’s book (Maffei and Picciau, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

In 2007 the MART organised *La parola nell’arte. Ricerche d’avanguardia nel ’900* (The Word in Art. Avant-garde Researches in the 1900s) which exhibited artworks from throughout the 1900s belonging to the museum archive’s vast collection (more than 800 artworks on show). The contribution of avant-garde publishing (see pp. 131-228 of the catalogue), and particularly that of the Futurists and Depero (pp. 45-118), is regarded as highly significant in the development of an art that explores the word and the relationship between the verbal and the visual spheres (Belli, 2007, 45-49).<sup>9</sup>

Multiple key issues emerge from the above research: all of the studies analyse the artist’s book over a long time interval with the aim of establishing a precise historical context that encompasses both conceptual art and the artistic avant-gardes.<sup>10</sup> A great deal of analysis is focused on the latter; in fact many art-historical accounts on the artist’s book tend to consider the European artistic avant-gardes of the 1900s and

7 In addition to the analysis, the catalogue’s appendix includes the full transcription of the correspondence between Azari and Depero on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* conserved in the Archivio del ’900, already partially published in the 1987 reprint of the book.

8 In the introduction to the catalogue, Maffei outlines the ‘path’ of the artist’s book in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is cryptically described as ‘if not the maximum expression of beauty then at least the most radical deconstruction of the object’ (Maffei and Picciau, 2006, 11).

9 These accounts were followed by other smaller exhibitions and publications of private collections of artists’ books, including: *Parole diseguate, parole dipinte. La Collezione Mingardi di libri d’artista* (Words Designed, Words Painted. The Mingardi Collection of Artists’ Books - Parmiggiani and Mingardi, 2008), *Libri d’artista dalla collezione Pietro Consolandi 1919-2000* (Artist’s Books From the Pietro Consolandi Collection 1919-2000 - Maffei and Vettese, 2009), *Lampi di stampa. Libri riviste manifesti futuristi dalla collezione Longo* (Lightning of Print. Futurists Books, Magazines and Posters From the Longo Collection - Gazzotti and Sacchini, 2014).

10 The period usually studied is the twentieth century although some accounts consider more extensive periods of time, beginning from the nineteenth century, from the invention of the printing press or even, as we have seen, from the Middle Ages. The lineage of the artist’s book does not differ greatly from that of the history of graphic design for which the publishing context and the visual poetry of the late 1800s and early 1900s represent common ground. See Chapter 2 for more on this.

the work they produced – in particular by Futurists and Constructivists, but also Dadaists and Surrealists – to be intended as artistic practice in book form and points to them as key precedents in the move towards this type of practice.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly in Italian literature (also due to the origins of the movement), Futurist publishing practices are always taken into account, as too is *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, which is always referenced and included in every exhibition on the theme. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find an account that clearly defines it as an artist's book. It is often described as the progenitor, inspiration and trailblazer for subsequent experimentations, or also as a book-object, but always in a brief, poorly reasoned way.

There are two main reasons for this inaccuracy: the first is the aforementioned difficulty with the literature itself, i.e. the lack of critical terminology and the inability to clearly form a single definition of the artist's book because of its nature as heterogeneous artwork. Secondly, even though the Futurists and, more generally, the avant-gardes were the first to use publishing as a form of artistic expression (in book form) earlier in the twentieth century,<sup>12</sup> it was only in the 1950s and 1960s that this practice was critically understood and considered a form of artistic practice and as artwork in its own right.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, I must also point out that the term 'artist's book' and the relative critical literature I am going to consider below in this chapter is mainly connected with the artistic trend that developed after 1960.<sup>14</sup>

With this in mind, the aim of this chapter is to understand whether *Depero futurista 1913–1927* can be considered a work of art or not, reflecting on its nature, and cross referencing existing art-historical accounts of artists' books. This goal is driven by the need for a more comprehensive and accurate account of the

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**11** I base this assertion on the words of Johanna Drucker who said in reference to Futurist and avant-garde books: 'That they were artist's books seems irrefutable, that they formed the background for much later work is somewhat questionable, since they were part of a history which was temporarily forgotten at the time artists' books emerged in 1960. But that they have an important place in that history [...] should be abundantly clear' (Drucker, 2004, 63-64). Stephen Bury also highlights the fact that when we talk about Futurism it is often easy to neglect key people in the history of the artist's book as the founder of the movement, Marinetti, is always the most dominant and widely discussed figure, putting others, such as Cangiullo, or Depero, in the shade (Bury, 2015, 20). Drucker agrees and when referencing the Futurists that experimented with publishing she names Marinetti and Depero, mistakenly referring to the latter as Francesco rather than Fortunato (Drucker, 2004, page 8). Finally, further evidence can be seen in the ample space dedicated to the artistic avant-gardes, and Futurism in particular, in the monographs on the artist's book by the aforementioned authors, both experts in the field: Stephen Bury (2015, pp. 20-31) and Johanna Drucker (2004, pp. 45-67).

**12** By publishing practice I mean systematic, organised and distributed publishing that does not consider isolated cases of the 1800s, such as Mallarmé and Apollinaire.

**13** This precise moment marks the shift 'from the notion of art as an object toward the notion of art as an idea', and also the use of language and textural means as an artistic medium preferable to conventional media such as painting and sculpture (Blacksell, 2013, 61). For more on this topic see the seventh chapter of 'Institutions and objection' in Harrison, Wood and Gaiger, 2002, pp. 795-893.

**14** The titles of the texts used when studying the artist's book are quite telling, defining a precise period of time that begins in 1960: Germano Celant's *Book as Artwork, 1960–72* (1972) or Betty Bright's *Book Art in America: 1960–1980* (2005).

multiple ways in which *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is defined by scholars. This is in response to my observation that current accounts are often inadequate/ambiguous in this respect, failing to consider the historical and critical literature on artists' books or what *Depero futurista 1913–1927* represents in terms of artistic practice in book form both in its own time and subsequently.

In the first part of this chapter, I attempt to understand what a work of art in the form of the book consists of, observing the various aspects outlined in the reference literature. Each of these aspects is then compared with *Depero futurista 1913–1927* to ascertain whether it shares some common ground with the other artists' books considered.

In the second part, I analyse the historical accounts that defined *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artist's book, drawing parallels between the various types examined in the first part of the text. Finally, I examine case studies of artists' books and other publications that display similarities to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* or which were influenced by it.

### **7.1 *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, art book and artist's book**

I begin with the words of Fortunato Depero, who described *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as: 'the most groundbreaking art book of its time' (Depero, 1927, 5). As such, from the presentation page he declares his book's existence within the art book canon. Richard Kostelanetz clearly explains the marked difference between an artist's book and an art book: 'there is a crucial difference between presenting an artist's work in a book form – a retrospective collection of reproductions – and an artist making a book. The first is the honorific art book. "Book art" should be saved for books that are works of art, as well as books' (Kostelanetz, 1985, 28). The reason *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is difficult to define is because it functions in both ways: as a self-authored 'honorific' book about Depero and as an intrinsic aspect of his multi-faceted, artistic practice.

It is important to note how Depero could never have described *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artist's book in the 1920s quite simply because the term and its associated concepts did not yet exist.<sup>15</sup> Drucker asserts that: 'we work, [...] in a post-Conceptual (post-1960s) frame, with the clear capability to articulate the idea of a work of art as well as – or even more than – its formal or thematic properties', thus entrusting scholars with the task of understanding and defining the premises of the

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<sup>15</sup> According to Stefan Klima (1998, 12), the term 'artist's book' was used for the first time (albeit without the apostrophe) at the 'Artists Books' show curated by Dianne Vanderlip at Moore College of Art, Philadelphia (23 March - 20 April 1973).

work of art and the reasons for its creation, which the artist may not always know themselves (Drucker, 2004, 5).

Secondly, reducing *Depero futurista 1913–1927* to an art book or a straightforward self-published anthology would mean only considering the pages of the book presenting artwork that existed prior to the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*; it would also mean disregarding the unpublished content created specifically for the publication – content that makes the book an original work. Some examples of original contents are the previously unpublished texts, and the wall manifestos in particular, but also the layout and the typographical compositions in general, which were created specifically for the book.

I will now assess *Depero futurista 1913–1927* according to the distinctive features of a work of art in book form.

#### 7.1.1 Authorship

The role of the artist as originator/author constitutes one of the main differences between an art book and an artist's book. The latter, in simple terms, is a book in which the artist assumes the role of author – for instance, in the writing of the texts – but is also the originator of the artwork (Phillpot, 2013, 46-47).

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* presents original content, at least in part, which together with the book itself should be regarded as a single product of Depero's intellect, satisfying the first criterion of authorship so that in this sense we can regard it as an artist's book. I begin my argument with this premise.

#### 7.1.2 Construction

Betty Bright adds that the artist's book is 'a book made by an artist. To create it an artist either executes each step of a book's production or works closely with others to give form to a vision [...] Every aspect of the book – from content to materials to format – must respond to the intent of the artist' (Bright, 2005, 3). Overseeing printing and production in person is fairly common practice when it comes to artists' books. In some cases the artist received instruction from the printer; in others, the artists equipped themselves independently in order to exert complete control over the production of their work (White, 2012, 47). The artist's book cannot be a project that is simply conceived by the artist and carried out by third parties because the production process 'is a record of its own making' and a constituent part of the artwork (Drucker, 2004, 191).

In the case of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, even though Azari and Depero decided to give it a mechanical and industrial feel (using the bolts), and even though the

book is printed by a process used for mass production (letterpress printing), when you flick through it ‘the level of craftsmanship’ that went into producing it becomes apparent (Caruso, 2002, 312-313).

As already demonstrated by the correspondence and the analysis of the creation process, the book was the product of an intense and close collaboration between Depero, Azari and the Mercurio printing works; and the fact that Depero actively contributed to the printing of the pages enables us to classify *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a book created by the artist. Furthermore, the ‘making’ is a key step in the process of creating this work because the artist explores and experiments with the means of production, changing the techniques employed to create innovative results. Examples of this can be seen on the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* that are not composed by following the rules of traditional letterpress printing, which have upside down letters and follow non-linear arrangements to produce unusual layouts compared with regular printing standards of the time (e. g. page 29 and 47 - see figures 7.3 and 7.4). With particular reference to Constructivism and Futurism, Drucker argues that the books created by these avant-garde movements were innovative from a typographical perspective thanks to the experimentation with the letterpress technique (Drucker, 2004, 49).<sup>16</sup>

As I will discuss below, the book was also used as a means to position art in ‘non-art’ contexts.<sup>17</sup>

### 7.1.3 Positioning art in ‘non-art’ contexts

Once again my analysis begins with later engagements with books and published formats in visual art practices. This is useful because these examples shed light on the previous examples of the 1920s.

According to Lucy Lippard, one of the reasons that artists of the 1960s and 1970s

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<sup>16</sup> With reference to El Lissitzky’s typography in *For the Voice*, described by Seldes (Seldes, 2000, 146) as ‘violation of the field’ (see chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, in particular pages 53-57 and 98).

<sup>17</sup> Here it is necessary to acknowledge a lineage that follows up on Marcel Duchamp’s non-art and ready-made, concepts that seek to elevate everyday items into pieces of art by placing them in artistic contexts (museums, galleries, art magazines). Only in this way does the object acquire value and artistic meaning. These can be interpreted as a critique against art, its market and its aesthetic, and the arbitrariness with which a museum/gallery labels one item rather than another as art – a critique which in reality was sterile and immediately assimilated into the very system that it was criticising, turning the ready-made into ‘a kind of “idea” art.’ The ready-made considers the work of art as a ‘binary opposition’, i.e. only when it is in the museum context is it art; outside this it is non-art. To this end, based on his experience as a gallerist Dan Graham, argues that art magazines represent a meeting point between art and non-art as magazines are a popular medium: they are subsidised by the advertising sponsorships of galleries which, in turn, need to publicise the works of their artists in the magazines themselves in order to increase their value (Graham, 1985, 8-13). Drawing a parallel, the work of art in book form is as critical of the institutions as the ready-made was. In addition, the artist’s book also levels this criticism in non-artistic contexts, making it as independent as possible of the art industry.

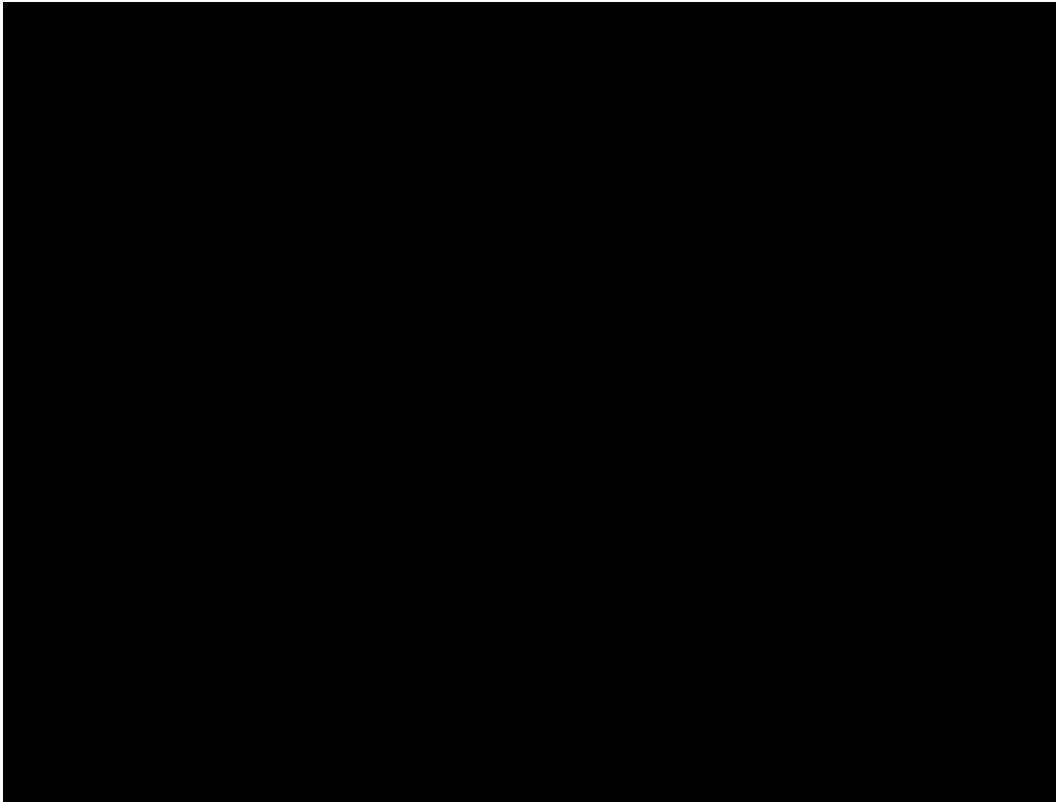


Figure 7.3 - page 29

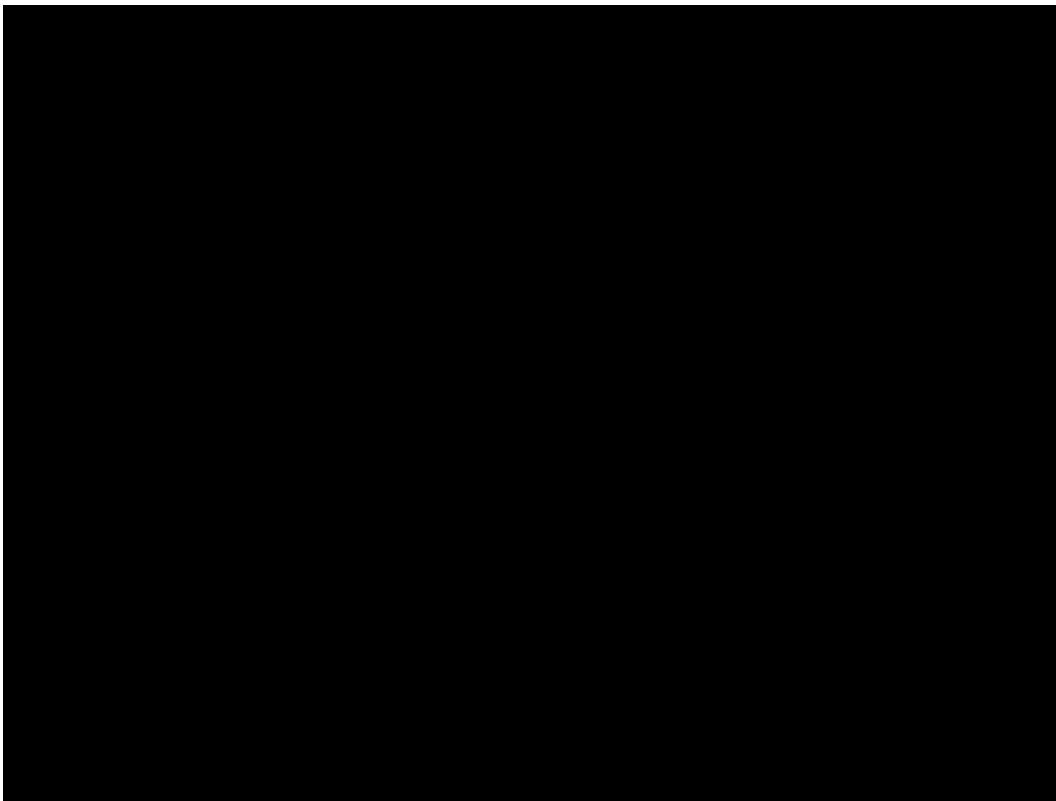


Figure 7.4 - page 47

**Figure 7.3** 'Depero glorificato da Marinetti' (Depero glorified by Marinetti). Typographical composition with movable types printed upside down and backwards.

**Figure 7.4** 'Depero architetto pittore scultore decoratore Futurista' (Depero Futurist architect painter sculptor decorator). This nonlinear typographic composition trumpets Depero's multifaceted talents as a 'world renowned' Futurist architect, painter, sculptor, and decorator.

were attracted to books as an artistic medium was because they were ‘considered by many the easiest way out of the art world and into the heart of a broader audience’ (Lippard, 1985, 45). There were several reasons for positioning the artist’s book outside of the conventional art world: the practicality of selling, disseminating and transporting a printed publication, which cannot be compared in size to a painting or sculpture; the relatively affordable cost of production per unit also for small self-produced works or independent publications; the possibility of experimenting with ephemeral art work, often ignored by the mainstream institutions that subsidise commissioned art and, above all, not having to cater to the wishes of market-oriented gallerists; last but not least, the democratic nature of the book, an accessible object for everyday consumption whose goal was to bring art to the masses, doing away with the cliché of art only being accessible to the minority (Phillpot, 1985, 128-129; Jury, 2008, 20; White, 2012, 46-48; Drucker, 1998, 175-183; Adema and Hall, 2013, 140-142).<sup>18</sup>

The desire of artists to use the book as a means of circumventing the art gallery seems to be driven by reasons similar to those of the Futurists: to break with traditional art and take art outside the walls of museums and into the city.<sup>19</sup> As seen in the previous chapters, good examples are the publication of the Futurist manifesto in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro* and the Futurist Editions of “Poesia”, popular media for spreading Futurism to a different audience, in this case the general public. These intentions were mirrored by the great interest and commitment demonstrated by Depero in applying art to the advertising and industrial fields, and by his goal of reaching out to a wider audience: Depero published his book with clear commercial, artistic and self-promotion goals, but also to profit from the sale of the publication through his and Azari’s personal contacts (Ginori and Campari) and by distributing it to bookshops. The print run of 1000 copies was sufficient to fulfil his goal of spreading his art, as already mentioned, and making it popular; at the same time, the practicality of the book medium enabled Depero to take *Depero futurista 1913–1927* with him to New York,

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<sup>18</sup> The concept of the art book as a democratic multiple developed from 1945 onwards and spread particularly during the 1970s as artists become conscious of the fact that they were not publishing straightforward books but artists’ books. In reality, this democratic ‘myth’ is contested by Drucker who argues that often the books in this period were far from democratic: sometimes they were produced in single copies or very limited edition runs, and therefore highly elitist; other times, when produced in large print runs, offset printing was anything but economical. The type of content in the books also held little appeal for a broader audience as the publications were often too sophisticated or resembled typical art gallery products. For more on this topic see Drucker, 2004, pp. 69-92. Like Drucker but taking a different viewpoint, Ulises Carrión also expressed his critical opinion on the concept of the artist’s book as a medium that subverts the canonical art system, arguing that book-work had simply replaced gallerists with another figure – the publisher (Carrión, 1980, 6-9).

<sup>19</sup> The same goes for the Surrealists and in particular the Constructivists with their publishing strategies that rejected the idea of a single work of art in favour of popular printed media like posters and pamphlets, produced en masse using printing machines in order to communicate the ideals of Communism (Hollis, 1994, 46-48).



using it as a portfolio for agencies and potential clients, a ‘portable museum’ according to Bedarida’s definition (figure 7.5).<sup>20</sup>

#### 7.1.4 An exhibition

This re-positioning of art into non-art contexts was therefore also developed as a form of Institutional critique, where a book might act as an alternative space to a gallery. ‘In some ways, it’s like an exhibit you can carry under your arm’, explains Tracy Horn in reference to artists’ books (Horn cited in Henry, 2002, n.p.). Indeed, the characteristics of these books do invite such comparisons as the author is able to present the content in a precise sequence in the same way that a curator decides which works to exhibit or the exhibition itinerary of a museum.

The idea of the book as a substitute for the art museum had to some extent been theorised in the late 1940s by André Malraux and was based on the fact that the museum exhibition decontextualises the work of art from the usual place in which the artist might have originally conceived it; in addition to this, the accessibility of printing technology and the high quality with which it can faithfully reproduce the works of art made it possible for books to act as a kind of ‘museum without walls’ (Malraux, 1974, 13-34).<sup>21</sup>

According to Janneke Adema and Gary Hall (Adema and Hall, 2013, 141-142), during the 1960s the artist’s book was also used as a specific medium to exhibit works that could not otherwise readily find a place within mainstream exhibition venues for reasons connected with the type of artefact (ephemeral) or the type of content (often politicised), because they did not interest galleries or because they were designed for

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20 On *Depero futurista 1913–1927* Raffaele Bedarida writes: ‘This landmark publication was a collection of his past achievements and a showcase of his graphic abilities. Depero used it in New York as a portable museum and as a means of self-promotion: he donated it to potential clients and exhibited both the book as a unit and its unbolted pages’ (Bedarida, 2014, ‘I Will Smash...’, 330). Depero insisted on a much larger (and more expensive) print run in order to spread and drive sales of his work but Azari convinced him that 1000 was ‘more than enough’ (see section 3.1.1 of this thesis and Azari, 16 February 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.6).

21 Malraux adds that for all those users who do not have the chance to see the original in person, the reproduction itself becomes the work of art (Malraux, 1974, 13-14). As regards the critique of the art world, Gwen Allen argues that rather than the dematerialisation hoped for by the critics, it produced ‘a strange subset of documents – texts, photographs, maps, lists, and diagrams – which served as evidence, as stand-in, as archival trace of the artistic act. With its reliance on textual and photographic documentation, conceptual art ushered in a dramatically new set of exhibition practices – practices that no longer revolved around the display of unique object but were instead based on the reproduced page (Allen, 2011, 15). In this regard, it is worth considering Seth Siegelau’s idea of ‘Primary information’ as used in relation to the artists’ publishing practices: ‘the use of catalogues and books to communicate (and disseminate) art is the most neutral means to present the new art. The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information about art in magazines, catalogues, etc., and in some cases the “exhibition” can be the “catalogue”’ (Harrison and Siegelau, 1999, 199). On the basis of these two opinions, it is important to make a clear distinction between publishing art as a book work and reproducing art in books: on one hand a printed reproduction that acts as a promotional medium; on the other a work as the sole framework for an exhibition, and that makes the exhibition in itself.

a different target audience to that typically associated with a gallery. Barbara Moore and Jon Hendricks outline further advantages of using bookwork for exhibition purposes, citing the elimination of technical problems connected with the cost of displaying, transporting and insuring the artwork, and the guaranteed durability of the medium over time (Hendricks and Moore, 1985, 87-95).<sup>22</sup>

During the 1920s, the Futurists already understood the potential of books to act as an alternative space for works of art rather than simply containing reproductions of art, hence they were prolific producers and distributors of printed books as a means of exhibiting and spreading Futurist art on a wide scale (Bury, 2015, 26). Depero shows that he is fully aware of the exhibition and narrative peculiarities that the book could offer: his *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is ‘mechanical, bolted like an engine’ (Azari cited in Depero, 1927, 9) and deliberately has no page numbers so the reader has the freedom to disassemble and recompose it without being bound by the pre-established sequence created by the codex form.<sup>23</sup> And it was Depero himself who offered proof of this approach, taking dis-bound pages lifted from different parts of the book and exhibiting them at Arnold-Constable & Co in New York as part of the *Exhibition of the Italian book* (figure 7.6); this operation of dis-binding the pages was only possible because the book was bound by bolts.

The idea of rearranging the content to suit one’s taste was also used by Marcel Duchamp in 1934 with his work *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même*.<sup>24</sup> The work takes the form of a box bearing the same title (with the exception of the comma) of another famous artwork by Duchamp, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, 1915–1923), because it contains reproductions of the preliminary studies relating to the latter.<sup>25</sup>

Talking about this work, Anna Arnar observes: ‘Duchamp consciously decided to place the notes in a box, rather than a bound book, in order to preserve a non-linear structure for the work. [...] In an unpublished note for the Large Glass, for example, he speculated regarding the creation of a “round book”’ (Arnar, 2011, 276). In 1935 Duchamp began creating a series of boxes containing reproductions of his works in

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<sup>22</sup> Making reference to the use of books as an alternative exhibition space by the curator Seth Siegelaub in, for example, *The Xerox Book* (1968), a bookwork frequently cited when discussing the artist’s book role as an exhibit. The project consisted of what could be described as a printed exhibition, a dialogue between the curator and the artists resulting in a collective exhibition exclusively in book form.

<sup>23</sup> Azari approved Depero’s idea of ‘abolishing’ page numbers (Azari, 13 March 1927, MART, Dep.3.1.8.8).

<sup>24</sup> Often simply called *Boîte Verte* (The Green Box), the box contains 94 documents (77 notes and sketches and 17 images), including reproductions of paintings, drawings, projects and loose notes made by Duchamp between 1911 and 1915. The latter are reproduced as lithographs while the drawings are produced using the collotype process.

<sup>25</sup> Often called *Le Grand Verre* (The Large Glass).

parallel with the publication of Benjamin's seminal essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1935) on the evolution of the concept of art (Bloch 1974, 25-29 and D'adda, 2004). In Duchamp's work, the absence of a pre-established order allows the reader to form multiple interpretations and make different uses of the same work; *Depero futurista 1913–1927* does the same but with the difference that the procedure is more complex because the book needs to be unbolted to enable non-linear usage.

Raffaele Bedarida asserts that '*Depero futurista* anticipated some key features of Marcel Duchamp's *Box in a Valise*' (Bedarida, 2014, Nuts and bolts..., n.p.), adding that Duchamp 'was likely impressed by Depero's use of the "Bolted Book" as a portable museum, and possibly had that in mind in 1935 when he started his project of the *Box in a Valise*' (Bedarida, 2016, 61). In reality the first box in the series (*La Boîte de 1914*, *Boîte verte*, 1934 and *Boîte-en-valise*, 1935-1941) was conceived in 1914, long before the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, and therefore the influence of the latter on the work of the Dadaist cannot be confirmed. Perhaps the contrary is more plausible, i.e. that Depero created his book taking inspiration from Duchamp's boxes. In 1929 an article on Depero was published in *Brochure-Quarterly*, a magazine edited by Duchamp (together with Katherine S. Dreier and Constantine Aladjalov); this included the same image of the book pavilion also used in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, suggesting some kind of relationship, albeit indirect, between Duchamp, Depero and *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (see figures 7.7- 7.8).<sup>26</sup>

#### 7.1.5 A documentary record

Duchamp's work is used by Drucker as a point of reference when analysing bookworks that use records and documents of their own construction or records and documents relating to the artist.<sup>27</sup> According to how this material is used, she defines and describes different types of artists' books. These include books containing records, both fictional and real, which act as the 'scripts or scores' of an event or of an experience;<sup>28</sup> books which through the use of the artist's personal materials become an information space for communicating and revealing a thought, opinion or

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<sup>26</sup> *Brochure-Quarterly* was a magazine published by Société Anonyme, Inc, an art organisation founded in 1920 by Katherine Dreier, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. The unauthored article stated that Société Anonyme endorsed Depero's 1929 exhibition at the Guarino Gallery in New York. It continued by praising Depero's artistic activities (*Brochure-Quarterly*, 1929, 24-27).

<sup>27</sup> Duchamp's Green box is described as 'the book as a private archive' through which the artist reveals his creative process, made up of preliminary studies, memories and images from his private archive, offering the reader intimate and 'voyeuristic' pleasure (Drucker, 2004, 96-99).

<sup>28</sup> 'Books as reproduced records'. Bookworks whose documentary guise serves to detail various types of experiences, as in the case of Alison Knowles' *Identical Lunch* (1971), a book that provides a detailed description of the lunch that is also her performance, carried out repeatedly attaching the restaurant bill to the description of the meal.



Figure 7.7

Figure 7.8

**Figure 7.5** 1930. Fortunato Depero and his wife Rosetta Amadori (1893-1976), who holds a copy of *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, on the rooftop of the Advertising Club in New York. MART, Dep.6.3.8.

**Figure 7.6** Installation detail of *Exhibition of the Italian Book*, held at the Arnold-Constable & Company in New York, March 15-30, 1929. Pages from *Depero futurista 1913-1927* are displayed on the wall at the top right corner. Photo by Frederick Bradley. See MART, Dep.8.1.11.162.

**Figure 7.7** Cover of *Brochure-Quarterly*, October 1928-January 1929. Courtesy of IADDB.

**Figure 7.8** Depero's article published in *Brochure-Quarterly* featuring photographs of the book pavilion, the one at the top was also used in *Depero futurista 1913-1927*, see figure 6.6 on page 182 of this thesis. Courtesy of IADDB.

aspect of the artist, both intimate and otherwise (Drucker, 2004, 335-357).<sup>29</sup>

In the context of this research, I am interested in artists' books that use pre-existing materials because *Depero futurista 1913–1927* dedicates lots of space to content of this kind, such as photographs of Depero's exhibitions and the collection of articles and commentaries on his work (pp. 202-212).

As seen in the previous chapter, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is just the first in a series of self-curated books by Depero, and these records were specifically designed to promote himself but also constitute an account of his life and his achievements; such a functional aim could perhaps make the book less relevant in artistic terms but it also conveys Depero's holistic approach to his work and its dissemination.

## 7.2 Historical accounts of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artists' book

On the basis of the reflections above it is useful to gather and to analyse the historical accounts that describe *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artist's book.

### 7.2.1 Different accounts of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artists' book

On page 5 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, Depero describes it as an art book and follows this by saying: 'It is an artistic object in itself, a typically Futurist work of art' (Depero, 1927, 5). One can speculate that he saw *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an art book because of its role in showcasing his artwork. By 'artistic object' Depero may be referring to the fact that the bolts separate *Depero futurista 1913–1927* from conventional books by making it seem like a sculptural and/or mechanical object; finally, it is a typical Futurist work of art because of its innovative design, layout and production 'that take it beyond a purely promotional vehicle' (Gatta, 2014, 215).<sup>30</sup>

Depero's references to his book as a work of art and the short presentation by Azari on page 9 seem to have influenced a number of art historical accounts of subsequent artist's books and artists' book objects: Scudiero describes it as the 'precursor of the various book-objects [...] A choice confirmed by Fedele

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<sup>29</sup> Books defined as 'Diaristic and personal statement'. Book-work that focuses on the artist, revealing and documenting his identity and communicating his message. One example is *Autobiography* (1980) by Sol Lewitt, a maniacal catalogue of all of the artist's possessions that provides a detailed and specific biography of the artist and, at the same time, demonstrates 'how generic the existence of the middle-class American is in material terms' (Drucker, 2004, 335-336).

<sup>30</sup> By 'typically Futurist' Depero may be referring to Futurist Editions of "Poesia", Marinetti's publishing house that published experimental books in terms of content, typography and layout; good examples of these publications are: Paolo Buzzi's *L'ellisse e la spirale. Film + parole in libertà* (The Ellipse and the Spiral. Film + Words-in-Freedom, 1915), *Firmamento* (Firmament, 1920) by Paolo Buzzi and *Caffèconcerto. Alfabeto a sorpresa* (Caffèconcerto. Surprise Alphabet, 1920) by Francesco Cangiullo. According to Bury, the Futurists used these as means of expression and genuine works of art, regarding them in the same way as a sculpture, performance or painting (Bury, 2015, 30-31). See chapter 2 for more Futurist examples pp. 38-41.

Azari's presentation' (Scudiero, 1988, 15).<sup>31</sup> Passamani offers a similar and limited definition of the book: 'Depero has conceived a "book object" that rejects all forms of convention', as well as Ezio Godoli: 'book-object created as a kind of self-celebration of almost fifteen years of artistic activity in the Futurist avant garde' (Passamani, 1981, 175-176 and Godoli, 2001, 373).<sup>32</sup> With regard to Italian artists' books, Luigi Paglia argues that the Futurists are responsible for 'the invention of the book-object [...] one famous example being *Depero Futurista* by Fortunato Depero' (Paglia, 2013, 80).

Others praise *Depero futurista 1913–1927* without fleshing out their claims: 'as well as being probably the best Futurist book and, at the same time, the finest example of a book-object produced by the historic Italian avant-garde' (Tomasetig, 1996, 177-178); 'the attention on the book-object reaches its pinnacle with *Depero Futurista*' and 'a few copies are bound with a heavy metal cover, bolted on, further emphasising the identity of the book as a book-object' (Salaris, 1996, 65, and Salaris, 1995, 31). Salaris also adds that, due to the presence of the two bolts, '*Depero Futurista* can be associated with the book-objects of the avant-garde tradition, including the *Zaumnaya gniga* by Aleksei Kruchenykh [Transrational book, 1915], with the cover by Olga Rozanova to which a real button is applied' (Salaris, 2003, 101-102).

Outside Italy, Alston W. Purvis describes it as 'a precursor of the artist's book, published by an artist as a creative expression independent of the publishing establishment' (Meggs and Purvis, 2016, 277). In the above-mentioned catalogue of the exhibition *The artist and the book in twentieth-century Italy, Depero futurista 1913–1927* is described as follows: '*Depero Futurista* is considered one of the avant-garde masterpieces in the history of the book-object' (Jentsch, 1992, 111).<sup>33</sup>

There are many other opinions on *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a book-object and the goal of this brief overview is not so much to refute or question what has been written on it but rather to understand the reasons behind these opinions. My own impression is that the accounts considered seem to take the same view, categorising *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as a book object (possibly the first) without clearly arguing why, their claims being largely based on the fact that the book has a distinctive bolted binding. When considering these assertions, it is necessary to consider what a book-object is and if *Depero futurista 1913–1927*'s form is a sufficient enough reason to label it in this way.

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<sup>31</sup> Scudiero refers to Azari's explanation on page 9 of the book – cited on page 248 below.

<sup>32</sup> Also Gazzotti underlines the celebratory purpose of the book: 'Depero composed [*Depero futurista 1913–1927*] in order to celebrate his fourteenth year of militancy in the Futurist movement' (Gazzotti, 2011, n.p.). In reality Depero would join the Futurists between the end of 1914 and the start of 1915, not in 1913. See note 17 on page 39.

<sup>33</sup> This comment is then followed by a short general description of the special inks (metallic and coloured) and, repeating Azari's words, how the binding gives the book the appearance of a machine.

The term book-object is credited to George Hugnet<sup>34</sup> by Carol Lufty and is used to describe books that assume a sculptural role based on formal qualities rather than informational capacity (Lufty, 1991, 143). For Phillpot, the book-object is an art object which only alludes to the book form: ‘book objects very often only look like books – they may be solid objects which cannot be opened, let alone read; they become sculpture’ (Phillpot, 1982, ‘Definitions...’, 1 and Phillpot, 1982, ‘Books, bookworks...’, 77).

According to Drucker, it relates in a sculptural way with the ‘bookish qualities of finitude, sequence, and the continual opening of spaces in the process of turning page after page from the central spine of the bound book’ (Drucker, 1996, 20-23). Others, like Carrión and Freeman, are critical of the book-object because it often takes the form of a book that cannot be flicked through, meaning that neither the artist nor the artefact are fully able to explore the codex form (Carrión, 1980, 6-9 and Freeman, 1995, 133-134).

#### 7.2.2 What *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is and what it is not

A book-object can be defined as a bookish artefact, a book that ‘can scarcely be handled as a book’ but which, even if not explicitly, is intrinsically associated with the book form (Ruhé, 1987, 45).

Although the unconventional binding of the book can only allude to a sculptural form (consider the holes, extrusion, metallic material etc.), and although the nuts, bolts, holes and absent numeration of the pages are expedients for emphasising the metaphor of the machine, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is a book in every respect and does not take a sculptural form; its pages can be turned and read.<sup>35</sup> Once again we must take account of the artistic-historic context in which it was created and the artist’s awareness of the book-object. In other words, even if this type of book did exist during or even before the periods of the avant-gardes, the artist may have created it empirically through experimentation, without being conscious of precisely what he was creating. I do not believe Depero was interested in creating a book-object as defined by the historians mentioned above; his aim was to give his artwork the form of ‘an artistic object in itself’ in the form of a book and that could be considered as a book (Depero, 1927, 5).

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<sup>34</sup> French surrealist artist and the first to use the term, referring to a book of his bound in glass in the early 1930s.

<sup>35</sup> This type of binding had already been used in fabric sample books without making them objects or book-objects.

Yet Azari's explanation of the binding in the book itself is very suggestive (see figure 4.10 on page 95):

This book is: MECHANICAL bolted like an engine; DANGEROUS. Can be used as a projectile. UNCLASSIFIABLE. Cannot be placed alongside other books in a library. It is therefore in its external form ORIGINAL—INTRUSIVE—INSISTENT like DEPERO and HIS ART. The volume DEPERO-FUTURISTA is not to be found on a bookshelf or on other furniture susceptible to scratches

Azari in Depero, 1927, 9

The anarchic, disruptive, and potentially destructive nature of the binding was something Azari and Depero consciously posited as an element of the book's originality: it does not play by the rules of normal books and cannot sit comfortably among them on a bookshelf, or even a table.<sup>36</sup>

According to Purvis, the cover of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* 'expresses its status as a physical object' (Meggs and Purvis, 2016, 277-278). In fact, we cannot really ignore the binding and the appearance of the book, both in the version with the cardboard cover and, even more so, in the ten special copies with front and back covers entirely in steel.<sup>37</sup> With the latter, Depero seeks to give an overtly physical dimension to the book, a non-traditional form, in an attempt to objectify it: with the bolts and the metal cover material Depero, stimulated by the impetus of 'modernolatria' ('modernolatrý')<sup>38</sup>, wanted to create a book that resembled a machine; the metaphor of the disassembly and reassembly of the book as if it were an engine are further proof of this.

Finally, the form and physical design of the book use materials (metal and bolts) to express a particular aesthetic location (industrial, modern) within the larger sphere of production (craft, commercial, traditional): a deliberate ploy on behalf of Depero-Azari.

Regarding the book as a machine, Caterina Crisci offers an interesting perspective:

Even the textual rearranging which is contingent upon the physical rearranging of the pages is finite and will only allow for a certain amount of reader/user input. While the reading order of the typographical items may change and the shape of the book shift to a certain extent, the essence of reading will not. [...] It is in that liminal space that transitions from one state to another can take place. In the case of artists' books it is indeed a move from static to dynamic and from homogenous/normative to hybrid. This hybridity can then separate in two different strands: one that

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<sup>36</sup> A similarly destructive cover was made of sandpaper for the book by situationist artists Asger Jorn and Gray Debord, *Mémoires* (1959), which inspired the glass-paper sleeve of the album *The Return of the Durutti Column* (1980, Factory Records).

<sup>37</sup> As clearly explained in the wording between the bolts of the cover, the binding is the creation of publisher Azari. About the steel copies, it is not possible to know for certain how many *Depero futurista 1913–1927* with a metallic cover were actually produced. The letters exchanged by Azari and Depero suggest there were ten while the literature agrees on five copies without quoting any sources. The only metal copy available for reference is kept at Castello del Buonconsiglio in Trento (figure 7.19 below). See note 19 on page 79 of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> See page 144 of this thesis.



generates a 'mutant' book with changes occurring at the level of the physical object and the other happening instead at the semantic level.

Crisci, 2012, 179

However, Crisci does not take account of the fact that the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* are mainly printed on the recto only and, with the exception of a few pages, it does not contain texts that take up more than one page. Its textual structure corresponds largely to its physical structure, and this means that readers can rearrange the book as they see fit without necessarily keeping the semantic and physical dimensions separate from each other. That said, the concept of 'hybridity' introduced here is a very accurate way of describing what *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is (and therefore also what it is not). The book seems to exist in a subtle limbo between opposites: the art book, for the works represented in portfolio style, the artist's book for its original content and, finally, the book-object for the sculptural and machine aesthetic.

Depero was fully aware of the structural peculiarities of his book and how these are crucial to the various goals of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: while maintaining the sequence of the pages and the content (established by his two tables of contents - see figures 4.1 and 4.2), he subverts them, giving the reader the chance to modify them. Depero wants his book to be both a work of art and an art book; it allows for democratization of his art in an adaptive way.

The promotional and self-celebratory goal of the book does not preclude it from being classed as a work of art, but it does make it a particular kind of art work. Perhaps it can be seen as a precursor to later artists' books produced between the 1950s and 1970s in seeking to test the barriers between art and applied art (see chapter 6).

Although Depero could not have been (completely) aware of the reflections on Duchamp's work which led to a new concept of art and relative conceptual experimentation, his book includes insights and points that share common ground with some of the defining characteristics of art in the form of a book developed decades after its publication in 1927.

On the basis of the above reflections, I believe that *Depero futurista 1913–1927* can be regarded as an artist's book, not one of those as historicised in the 1960s, but certainly an artwork that proves Depero's self-consciousness and 'control' over the medium (Bury, 2015, 15).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> According to Drucker, one of the most distinguishing criteria for defining an artist's book is the self-consciousness about the structure and the meaning of the book as a form. Whether material or conceptual, this is key to the intentions, the thematic interests or production activities of the book (Drucker, 2004, 3–4). The self-consciousness mentioned by Drucker becomes 'control' for Bury: 'Artist's books are books or book-like objects, over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself' (Bury, 2015, 15).

### 7.3 Publications that show similarities to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*

#### (or which were influenced by it)

As we have suggested, Depero attributed new uses and purposes to his book which were also shared by bookworks developed in the decades after it was published.

In this third and final part of this chapter I will look at all those books that share something in common with *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, whether in terms of content or from a formal point of view. The main aim of this final part is to provide an overview of the artist's books (as well as other types of book) that we can trace back to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

In 'La guerra elettrica' (Electrical War) Marinetti figuratively talks about nickel books with spines of no more than three centimetres which can contain 100,000 pages and more (Marinetti, 1915, 128).<sup>40</sup> This kind of premonition acts as an introduction for the type of book I will analyse below.

#### 7.3.1 Biting, explosive and illuminating books

##### 7.3.1.1 *Litolatte (litho-tins)*

In terms of their proven lineage and contribution to the artist's book, the first case studies to consider are the *Litolatte* (Litho-tins) created by Tullio d'Albisola<sup>41</sup> with the help of Marinetti and his Futurist Editions of "Poesia" publishing company, and with the financial support of Vincenzo Nosenzo, owner of a business in Zinola (in the province of Savona) which produced metal boxes and posters for the catering industry.<sup>42</sup>

The release of the first litho-tin was announced by Luigi Scrivo<sup>43</sup> in October 1932, who wrote: 'in a large printing works in Liguria work is secretly being carried out on a highly original edition of the most recent poems by His Excellence Marinetti, which is destined to be a major critical and commercial success and

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<sup>40</sup> Published for the first time in *Le Futurisme*, Marinetti translated it into Italian five years later in *Guerra, sola igiene del mondo* (War, the Only Hygiene of the World, 1915), splitting it into two essays: the first part of the essay was renamed 'Nascita di un'estetica Futurista' (The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic), while its second part was retitled 'La guerra elettrica ("Visione-ipotesi Futurista") - Electrical War ('Futurist Vision-Hypothesis')'. A shorter version of the latter part was published in *La Balza*. No. 2, 1915, pp. 1-3. For a full English translation see Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2009, pp. 98-104.

<sup>41</sup> See note 60 on page 183 of the thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Vincenzo Nosenzo was also already in contact with Farfa with whom he collaborated to create a number of metal works: *Incontro di Prue* (1929) and *Lito-latta. Sincopatia disegnata in libertà* (1931), a Futurist manifesto printed on gold-plated tin. 'Litolatta' was registered in the name of industrialist Nosenzo who financed the project economically as well as sponsoring the printing on metal, perhaps envisaging the possibility of promoting his business (Antolini, 2005, 20). For this reason all of the matter printed on metal at Nosenzo's premises is labelled 'Litolatta', even if literature uses the term *Litolatta* to refer to the two books by Tullio d'Albisola.

<sup>43</sup> Marinetti's secretary in charge of A.L.A. (*Agenzia Letterario-Artistica Bollettino. Quadrisettimanale d'informazioni per la stampa* - Art and Literary Agency - Four-weekly Bulletin of Information for the Press).

which, because of its incredible originality, will put all of the boldest publications of Paris, Berlin and London, including the amazing work of Depero and Azari, in the shade' (Scrivo, 1932, 1). *Parole in libertà futuriste tattili termiche olfattive* (Futurist Words-in-Freedom, Tactile-Thermal-Olfactory) was published the following month (4 November 1932 - figure 7.9) and consisted of 15 metal pages lithographically printed in colour on both sides and bound to a cylinder that acted as the book's spine;<sup>44</sup> a poem by Marinetti appeared on the recto of each page while the verso featured an illustration by d'Albisola offering a graphical interpretation of the 'most emotive verse of the poem. The colours and the verse in relief are the pleasant result of the emotions generated when reading' (d'Albisola, 1933, 'L'edizione di latta delle...', 4 - figures 7.9-7.12).

According to the litho-tins data sheet kept at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 'a variant unique copy exists on paper in a leather binding fastened with five metal bolts', once again bringing to mind *Depero futurista 1913-1927* (see d'Albisola and Marinetti, 1932 - Beinecke digital collections). Marinetti argued that the litho-tin represented his 'most important lyric poems', which included: 'Bombardamento di Adrianopoli' (The Siege of Adrianople), 'Sì, sì, così, l'aurora sul mare' (Yes, Yes, So, Dawn Over the Sea), 'Ritratto olfattivo di una donna' (Olfactory Portrait of a Woman - Marinetti in d'Albisola, 1935, 40). The last of these poems clearly references Depero's onomalinguistic experimentation in 'Verbalizzazione astratta di signora' (Abstract Verbalization of Lady), which we find on page 219 of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* (see figure 4.32).

In 1934 the second litho-tin, *L'anguria lirica (lungo poema passionale)* - The Lyrical Water-Melon (Long Passionate Poem) - was published in 101 copies, of which only 50 were made available for sale. This time d'Albisola was the author of the text, a love poem accompanied by the illustrations of Bruno Munari, who adopted a more figurative style compared to that previously employed by d'Albisola (figures 7.13 and 7.14).<sup>45</sup> The book begins and ends with Nicolay Diulgheroff's illustrated litho-tins logo (see figure 7.12) and Diulgheroff also produced the portrait of d'Albisola that decorates the frontispiece.<sup>46</sup> As with the previous book, the metallic edition

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<sup>44</sup> The folded inside edges of the pages are joined using copper wire and attached to brass pins inserted inside the cylinder, an experiment developed by Nosenzo (d'Albisola, 1935, 40).

<sup>45</sup> Figurative to such a degree that the local police chief temporarily banned its circulation due to the female nudity in the work (see figure 7.13). Marinetti was forced to intervene together with the Roman authorities to lift the ban (for more on this topic see Antolini, 2005, 20-26 and Salaris, 1990, 317-319).

<sup>46</sup> Having been trained at the Kunstgewerbeschule of Vienna and the Bauhaus of Weimar, Nicolay Diulgheroff was a Bulgarian architect and friend of the Mazzotti family for whom he would build the house-factory of Albissola Marina in 1934. Regarding d'Albisola's graphical interpretations for the 1932 litho-tin, Lista likens them to 'solutions akin to the constructivist lesson that d'Albisola had assimilated through Diulgheroff' (Lista, 1984, 103). According to Luisa Perlo, Diulgheroff seems to have had a strong influence on the graphical style adopted by d'Albisola (Perlo, 2001, 388).

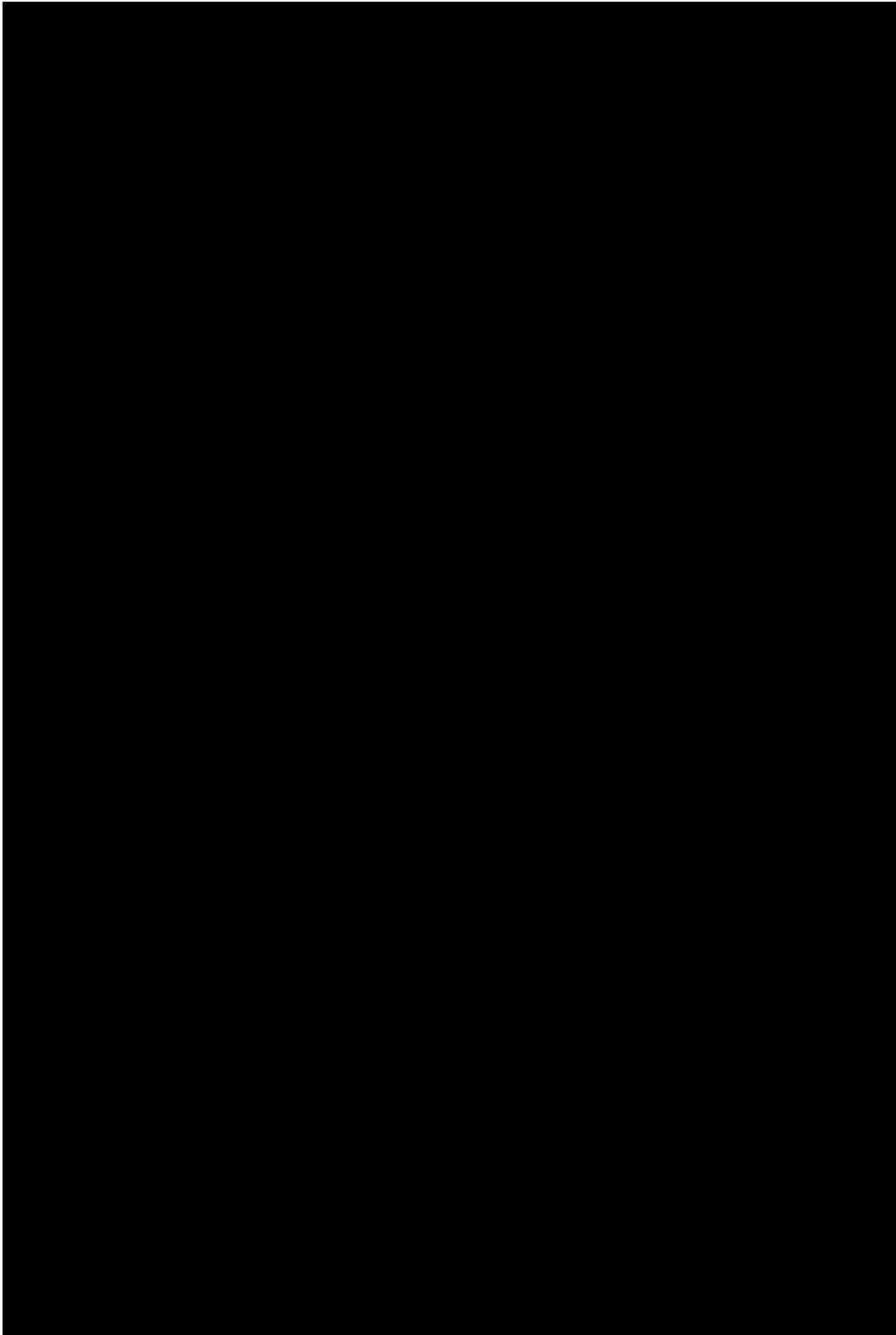


Figure 7.13

Figure 7.14

**Figures 7.9/7.10/7.11/7.12** 1932. Marinetti's and d'Albisola's *Parole in libertà futuriste tattili termiche olfattive* (Futurist Words-in-Freedom, Tactile-Thermal-Olfactory). Milan: Edizione futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense Universitaria of Modena.

**Figure 7.12** Litho-tins logo designed by Nicolay Diulgheroff. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense Universitaria of Modena.

**Figures 7.13 and 7.14** 1934. Munari's and d'Albisola's *L'anguria lirica (lungo poema passionale)* The Lyrical Water-Melon (Long Passionate Poem). Milan: Edizione futuriste di "Poesia". Courtesy of Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, The Wolfsonian-FIU.

is accompanied by a paper edition illustrated by Nino Strada and published by the Chiattonne publishing & printing works of Milan.

In a little section at the end of his *Dinamo futurista* magazine, Depero dedicates six short paragraphs to the publication of the litho-tins in which he underlines the influence on them of his own book, probably referring to the special copies with metal cover: ‘completely mechanical book. The author himself, Tullio d’Albisola, has stated that it is the direct offspring of the book *Depero futurista 1913–1927* published in 1927. [...] Dear Mr. Albisola, constrained by time and space, for now please make do with this telegraphic review and our greatest esteem’ (Depero, 1933, *Dinamo Futurista*, no. 2, p. 11). We do not know which episode Depero is referring to or how or when d’Albisola admitted to being inspired by *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. However, there is a document from the same year in the Archivio del ’900 in which d’Albisola writes: ‘Depero, author with Azari of the most interesting book in the world, still the reference text and standard for all modern publishing’ (d’Albisola, June 1933, *Il Genio...*, MART, Dep.4.4.54, 1-2).

Regardless of this declaration of respect for Depero and Azari, d’Albisola wrote that the idea for the litho-tins came to him watching Marinetti swim in the Ligurian Sea.<sup>47</sup> d’Albisola was certainly already in close contact with Depero and Azari before the publication of the litho-tins; in fact, like Depero he was represented by the Dinamo Azari art house.<sup>48</sup> Between 1932 and 1933 Depero also sent some drafts to d’Albisola for the production of a series of terra cotta tiles inspired by his Campari advertising (Antolini, 2005, 20-21 and Crispolti, 1982, pp. 17 and 41). According to Scudiero, another hypothesis about the idea of publishing books of metal could come from Marinetti himself, a great admirer of the special copy of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* with metallic cover given to him by Depero.<sup>49</sup>

Although it is difficult to establish the paternity or the inspiration behind the litho-tins, I am of the opinion that they derive from, or were at least influenced by *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, particularly the aforementioned version with the metal cover; this opinion is informed by the relationship that already existed

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<sup>47</sup> This anecdote, recounted in *Stile futurista*, should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt. Here is an extract: ‘The idea for the tin book came to me in August ’32 as I followed Marinetti during a swim of a few miles off the coast of Albissola. [...] On the wide metallic expanses of the sea the Maestro moves his arms and skims the surface with fast elastic lyricism! ... In the hut, back on shore, taken with my idea Marinetti dedicated the first metal book futuristically created by the tenacious Fascist industrialist Nosenzo to me’ (d’Albisola, 1935, 40).

<sup>48</sup> See figure 3.1 and Godoli, E. (2001). *Il dizionario del futurismo*. Florence: Vallecchi, p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> In an exchange of personal emails (on 11/11/2014) Scudiero told me that Vittoria and Luce Marinetti, interviewed for the documentary *Vita Futurista: Italian Futurism 1909-44* by Lutz Becker (Becker and Griffiths, 1987), remembered their father jealously guarding his metallic copy of *Depero futurista 1913-1927* and reading it using a bookstand. Unfortunately there is no other bibliographic evidence of this anecdote so the idea of Marinetti and the litho-tins being inspired *Depero futurista 1913–1927* remains just a hypothesis.

between Azari, Depero and d'Albisola and the fact that the latter was aware of the work that Azari and Depero had carried out together. It is also important to note that d'Albisola, too, was intent on producing a mechanical book that reflected the 'modernolatriy' already embodied by Depero's book. Some of d'Albisola's thoughts on the matter were expressed through the article 'Libri metallici' published in *Stile futurista* magazine:

We need biting, explosive and illuminating books for the poetry and youth of the Fascist era [...] The metallic publications come from the most unique of printing houses: Lito-Latta. No smell of ink but scent of young girls, no tapping of linotypes but sweet voices that speak amorously with the virile machines, no molten lead but persuasive and dazzling glances that wink at the shiny tin. [...] Today tin is an Italian product. Ilva, Nasturzio, Magona produce 50,000 tonnes a year. During the Fascist regime we have also broken this foreign record. [...] Soon we will see books of a new metal: flexible as aluminium, strong as steel but light as paper. These books, that constitute the indestructible record of our Italian glorious literature, will have plastic figures and will be embellished, in the book spine, with the filmed, documentary or abstract, and spoken development of the topic. [...] We will therefore have masterpieces that will immortalise the perfect Fascist fusion with all of the production energy of the Italian corporative system. This is the book that the Italian Futurists have foreseen following the complete revolution of publishing.

d'Albisola, 1935, 40

In reality lithography had existed since 1796 while lithographic printing on tin dates from the late nineteenth century, meaning that d'Albisola's words on the Futurists' pioneering of this technique should be regarded as ideological rhetoric rather than fact. This paean to metal and machine is typical of the veneration of modernisation and industrial development which, together with the lauding of autarky, represent some of the key values promoted by Fascism and Futurism.<sup>50</sup> Marinetti's publishing and typographical revolution were characterized by innovation and experimentation but, amid the increasing political extremism of the 1930s, Futurists works and writings gradually became more bellicose in tone and content. The third and final litho-tin that d'Albisola planned was never produced; only the text written for it by Marinetti was published, in *Il popolo d'Italia* in 1939 (Salaris, 1990, 317-319).

We can try to distinguish between the achievements of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and those of the litho-tins in terms of their artistic experimentation in book form. Antolini, for example, considers *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as an artist's books because of the already cited 'uniformity of its inspiration', i.e. the way Depero

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<sup>50</sup> The first litho-tin came with a support and a tin box on the back of which was an illustration with the word 'Duce' and a *fasces lictoriae*, also designed as if it was made from metal. The metal alloy is therefore symbolic of industrialisation but also, and above all, the power of the regime.

designed it, considering the book in its entirety, the graphical-formal product obtained, homogeneous despite its highly diverse content; and above all, the main difference is that Depero created all the content. The litho-tins, meanwhile, would belong to the book-object category, 'having been designed according to the traditional concept which divides the intellectual responsibilities of the book by type of contribution' (Antolini, 2005, 14-18): textual content, as seen in Marinetti's litho-tin of 1932 and d'Albisola's of 1934, separated from d'Albisola's visual content in the former and Munari-Diulgheroff's visual content in the latter.

Conversely, Drucker argues that d'Albisola's litho-tins are books that more clearly achieve the goal of books conceived in their totality: '*Parole in libertà futuriste* has been worked out at every level of production and conception. This 1934 book was lithographed onto tin with the stylized geometry of its layouts integrating powerfully with the hard-edged metal of its page' (Drucker, 2004, 57).<sup>51</sup>

Although contrasting, the opinions of the two scholars are both valid in their own way: for Drucker, in the first litho-tin (of 1932, not the second of 1934) the good level of integration between Marinetti's text and the illustrations, made up of d'Albisola's type and coloured forms, is quite clear. This uniformity is somewhat lacking in the second litho-tin, where the separation of text and image is more marked both because of the style of Munari's illustrations, less incisive than their predecessors, and the use of squares, which delimit and emphasise this separation (see figures 7.13 and 7.14).

Despite d'Albisola's strong influence over both litho-tins and the design level achieved (production-conception relationship), the artefact nonetheless remains the product of two or more authors: d'Albisola, Marinetti, Munari with the contribution of Diulgheroff; meanwhile, *Depero futurista 1913-1927* is an amalgam from all design perspectives, in terms of its ideas and concepts, texts, images and production, but it has just one author: Depero. Its overall design, as well as the author's awareness that he was producing a self-promotional book, makes *Depero futurista 1913-1927* an author's book-work.

### 7.3.1.2 Metal books

Another publication, less relevant with regard to artist's books and unknown from a bibliographical point of view, is the menu of the Taverna Futurista del Santopalato (Futurist Tavern of the Holy Palate). In 1930 Marinetti published the *Manifesto della*

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<sup>51</sup> Drucker also talks about *Zang Tumb Tuuum* by Marinetti but in this case innovative uses of the page, such as with 'Bataille à 9 étages du Mont Altissimo' (Battle at 9 Levels: Mount Altissimo) are 'isolated instances' and there are only a 'handful of striking examples' (Drucker, 2004, 57).

*cucina futurista* (Manifesto of Futurist Cuisine, Marinetti, 1930 in *Gazzetta del popolo*, which two years later would become *La cucina futurista* (the Futurist Cuisine), a recipe book written together with Fillia (pseudonym of Luigi Colombo - Marinetti and Fillia, 1932). These two theoretical writings on Futurist cuisine were also implemented at a practical level at the Taverna Futurista del Santopalato, a Turin restaurant conceived by Marinetti (together with Fillia), furnished by Diulgheroff and decorated by Fillia, who wrote: 'The Taverna del Santopalato will therefore be the experimental hotbed of our manifesto. Diulgheroff and I will work to metallise, light and colour the environment in order to create a suitable setting for Futurist lunches' (Fillia, 1931, 3).

'Metallise' is the right term because the two rooms that made up the restaurant were entirely covered, from the ceiling to the floor, in sandblasted aluminium with shiny pillars and large round windows that also had an aluminium trim. The restaurant curtains had a printed texture of aluminium plate (see figures 7.15 and 7.16).

On 8 March 1931, a booklet/menu in two versions was published to mark the opening of the restaurant, one with a paper cover and the other with a cover formed of two sheets of perforated aluminium bound together with fabric and metal cord (figures 7.17 and 7.18). Due to its materials and the absence of a title on its cover, this latter version could be associated with the metal-covered edition of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (figure 7.19).

It is interesting to reflect how this project realised Marinetti's intention and the Futurist reconstruction of the universe desired by Depero (and Balla) of making every aspect of life Futurist – cuisine in this case. Every detail, from the layout of the restaurant to the dishes served and even the layout of the menu, was carefully planned and designed – branded almost.<sup>52</sup>

Two publications with covers of metallic paper share something of the spirit of the metal books. The *Programma de l'almanacco Italia veloce* (1930 – figures 7.20 and 7.21) presented a planned 'Almanach of Italy at speed' that was never produced because of its high production costs. Probably designed by Diulgheroff, this programme consisted of eight inserts of various sizes containing texts by Marinetti and advertising illustrations to present the publication by Futurist artists

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<sup>52</sup> Even the dishes were designed by the Futurist artists: 'Pollo Fiat' (Chicken Fiat) was conceived by Diulgheroff, for example, while the 'Stunned sausages under the first snow and zig zag of spinach' were created by Depero, who also did the illustrations of the some of the dishes served at Santopalato. Once again in accordance with the nationalist and Fascist autarkic policy, the Santopalato menu, like Marinetti's Futurist Cuisine, coined new terms to translate all of the culinary neologisms that had become a common part of the Italian language. 'Cocktail' therefore become 'polibibita', 'barman' became 'miscelatore' and 'bar' became 'quisibeve' (literally translated as 'multi-drink', 'mixer' and 'here you drink').



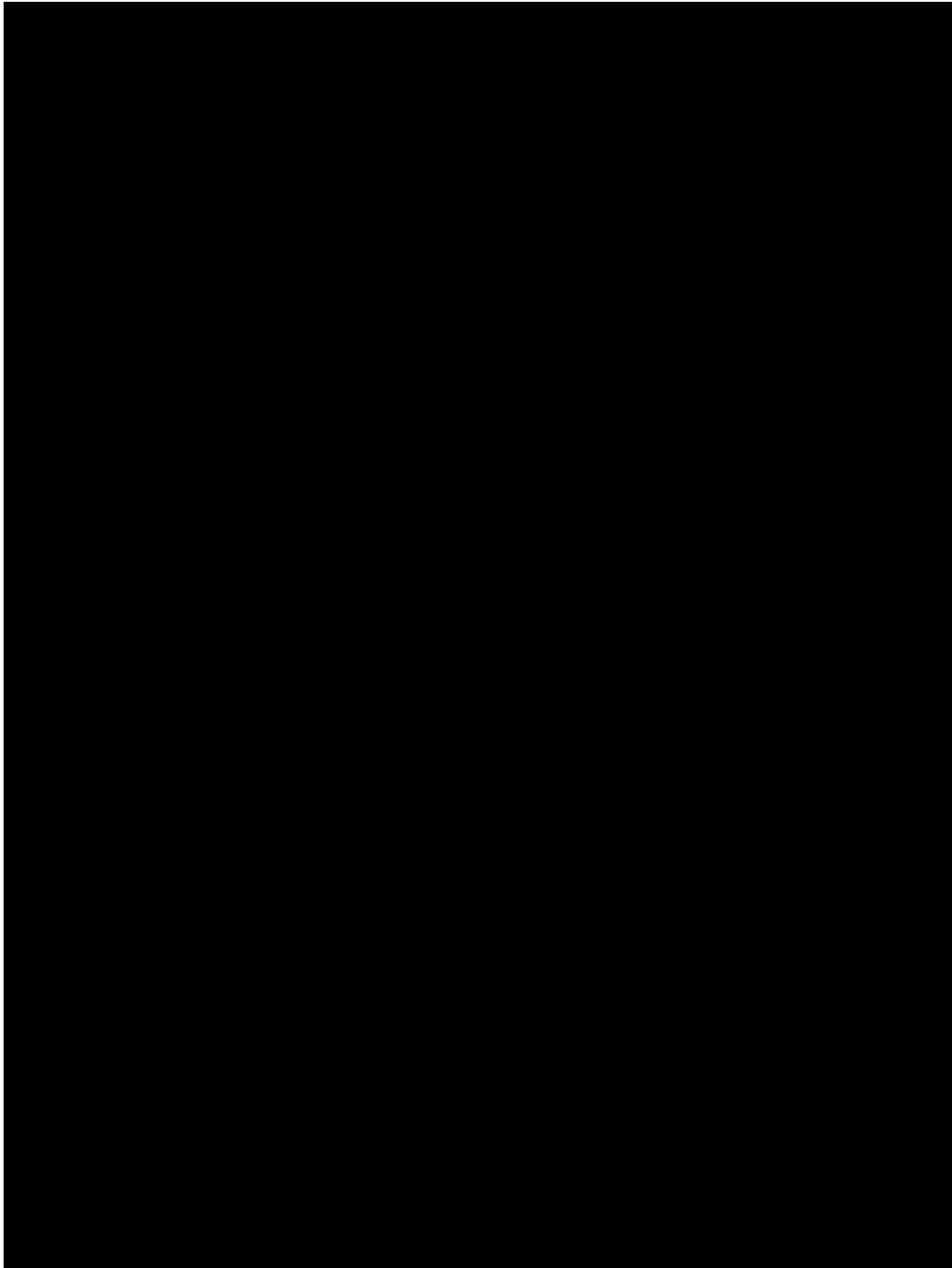


Figure 7.20

Figure 7.21

**Figures 7.15** 1931. External view of the Santopalato (Holy Palate) Futurist tavern in Turin (2 Vanchiglia st).

**Figure 7.16** 1931. Interior of the Futurist tavern. Courtesy of Metzger Archive.

**Figure 7.17** Diulgheroff, N. and Fillia. 1931. Paper menu of the Santopalato Futurist Tavern. Printed by ARS Anonima Roto-Stampa - Turin. Size 13.5×18.3 cm. Courtesy of University of Milan, Centro Apice, Collezione '900 Sergio Reggi.

**Figure 7.18** Diulgheroff, N. and Fillia. 1931. Menu of the Santopalato Futurist Tavern with aluminium cover, probably designed by Diulgheroff and Fillia. Printed by ARS Anonima Roto-Stampa - Turin. Size 13.5×18.3 cm. Courtesy of L'Arengario.

**Figure 7.19** 1927. Metal cover of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. Courtesy of Castello del Buonconsiglio of Trento.

**Figures 7.20/7.21** Diulgheroff, N. 1930. *Programma de l'almanacco Italia veloce*. Milan: Metropoli.

including Balla, Munari, Prampolini, Dottori, and Diulgheroff.<sup>53</sup> *Alta velocità* (High Speed, 1933) is a collection of poems and theatrical prose by Alfredo Trimarco which consistently praises the works of the Fascist regime and the fetishism of the machine, which is perfectly conveyed by the choice of silver paper for the cover (Godoli, 2001, 1186).

#### 7.3.1.2.1 Other bolted books

The following section gathers together and analyses the books published before and after *Depero futurista 1913–1927* that present formal similarities in terms of their look and feel, and which use bolts as their binding method.

According to Salaris, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* predates the samples of wallpaper designed at the Bauhaus (Salaris, 2003, 101); in reality, the question of influence in this case is tricky because bolted binding was a typical characteristic of upholsterer's catalogues long before Azari adopted it to bind the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*. At the same time it is true that the baby blue colour of the Bauhaus catalogue covers of the 1930s is similar to that of the card used for the cover of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, which together with the bolts, the horizontal format and the different kind of coloured papers can be regarded as formal similarities (see figures 7.22 and 7.23).

Meanwhile, one obvious tribute to *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is *Il Carroccio*<sup>54</sup> (figures 7.24–7.28), an illustrated stand-alone edition of the weekly magazine of the same name dedicated to the Fascists of Legnano, published in 1928 on the wishes of Carlo de Giorgi, journalist and local member of the Fascist Party, and edited by Fedele Azari. Like *Depero futurista 1913–1927* it is also bound with two bolts, while inside its graphics are clearly inspired by Depero's book: paper of different weights and in different colours, layouts composed of alphanumerical forms, a page containing the list of Futurists divided according to discipline, some concrete (Futurist poets, painters, advertisers etc), others more abstract, such as Futurist 'tactilists' and Futurist 'machine protectors'. On this page it is interesting to note the names listed under 'typographers', of which there are just five: Azari, Cavanna, Depero, Frassinelli, and Zamboni (figures 7.25). We already know the trio Depero, Azari, and Zamboni,

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<sup>53</sup> There are no explicit explanations regarding the design but over ten figures, the inside back cover, a foldout and a four-page insert are signed by Diulgheroff.

<sup>54</sup> A 'carroccio' was a Lombard chariot that was used in particular during the Battle of Legnano between Frederick Barbarossa and the Lombard League, playing a key role in the defeat of the emperor. From this point on, it became exclusively symbolic, adorned with the cross of the Archbishop of Milan and the banners of the general public, and political, representing the independence of the municipalities of Northern Italy. The 'carroccio' is still synonymous with the Italian right-wing Northern League political party today (Lega Nord).

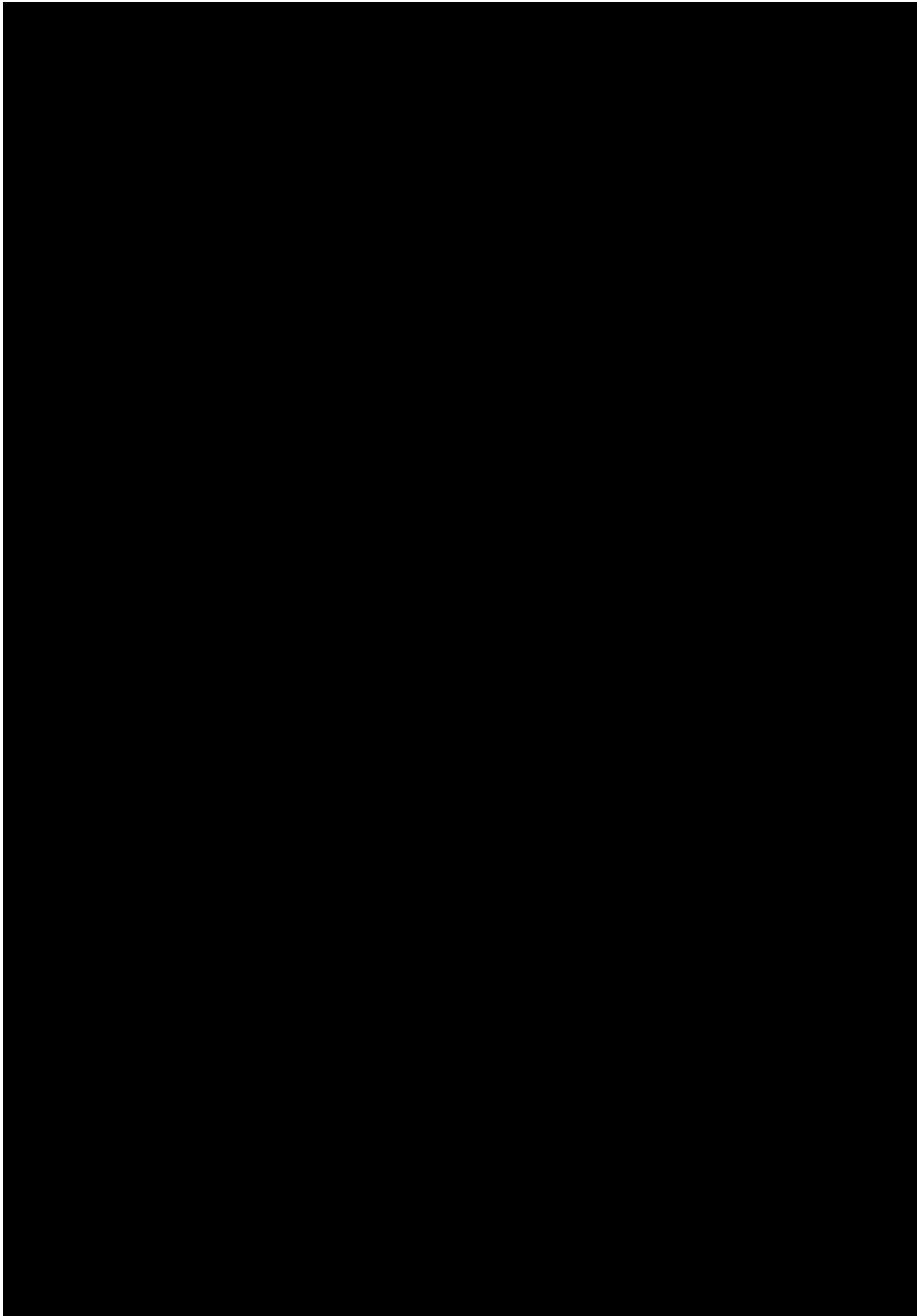


Figure 7.28

**Figures 7.22 and 7.23** 1930. Bauhaus wallpapers catalogue and pattern-book. Courtesy of Rasch Archiv. The first Bauhaus wallpaper collection, developed in cooperation with Rasch carpet company. The design broke through the usual clichés of wallpaper production: instead of large-format, illusionistic flower patterns, they show small-format structures with restrained colouring.

**Figure 7.24/7.25/7.26/7.27/7.28** 1928. *Il Carroccio*. special issue edited by Fedele Azari.

and how Azari wanted to take the credit for the typography of Rovereto<sup>55</sup>, while Cesare Cavanna<sup>56</sup> and Carlo Frassinelli<sup>57</sup> were two of the best Italian typographers, as if Azari also wanted to sell himself as a typographer and compositor, among the best Italy had to offer in the way of typographical printing.

The book includes a text signed by Azari, which also has a very similar layout to Marinetti's text on page 20 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, with phrases that act as the frame to the text (figure 7.26) The name Azari also appears several times in the publication: in almost all the disciplines included in the list of Futurist artists; and on a page advertising *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (figure. 7.27) which, rather than the name 'Depero', clearly shows the Dinamo Azari logo. For these reasons we cannot exclude the possibility that Depero had no knowledge of it.

Aside from these questions and interesting details, the rest of the publication's content is about the local *fascio* and has no artistic relevance, and for this reason *Il Carroccio* is little more than a tribute to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.

Jumping forward several decades, there is *Fluxus 1* (figure 7.29) by George Maciunas which, published in 1964, was supposed to be the first in a series of seven books presenting the activities of the Fluxus art group.<sup>58</sup> The book is bound using three bolts which hold together a series of envelopes containing printed documents on the works and performances of various Fluxus artists. The works are separated by Maciunas' typographic representations of the names of each of the artists. Over 100 boxes were assembled between 1964 and 1977 and so the appearance and content of the book can vary from one copy to the next.

The first volume was followed in 1965 by the last complete collective group anthology: *Flux Year Box 2*. When collecting material for this second edition Maciunas indicated that the edition would be 'limited to book events only, i.e.

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<sup>55</sup> See section 3.1.2 and the exchange of letters between Depero and Azari and the wording invented by Azari on the last page: 'printed at the Dinamo 'Mercurio' printing works - Rovereto'.

<sup>56</sup> Typographer whose motto was 'Nihil audentibus arduum - Nulla è difficile per gli audaci' (Nothing is difficult for the bold). He printed various Futurist publications including Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, for which he was also responsible for the typesetting on the cover, and bimonthly magazine *Il futurismo*.

<sup>57</sup> Anti-Fascist and Futurist publisher and typographer, he worked for Nebiolo and at the L'Impronta printing works (owned by Terenzio Grandi) before founding his own printing works and publishing house in Turin in 1924. He worked with the leading Italian magazines in the graphic design field, including *Graphicus* and *Il risorgimento grafico*. In 1940 he published *Trattato di architettura tipografica* (Treatise on Typographic Architecture), in which he analyses the evolution of typography, from the Renaissance tradition to the experimentation of New Typography (D'Orsi, 1998). It is interesting to note how Frassinelli is mentioned in a Fascist publication, even if he was overtly anti-Fascist.

<sup>58</sup> Developed during the 1960s and 1970s Fluxus was a network of international artists engaged in interdisciplinary artistic activities that emphasized the artistic process and the idea behind the artwork over the finished product. Once again, Fluxus owed much to Duchamp: the *Fluxkits*, for example, were reproductions of works by Fluxus artists contained in boxes/suitcases, economical, produced in series and easy to distribute (for more on this topic, see Maffei and Peterlini, 2015 and Smith, 1998).

events that are enacted by the reader automatically as he inspects the book or box' (MoMA, 2011, n.p.).

Aside from the binding using bolts, I think it is interesting to note how Maciunas decided to gather together a series of artists in a similar way to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, i.e. through a book that is also an exhibition on paper, held together by bolts. The insertion of experimental typographic compositions, each one different to the next but without any real communication goal other than to be decorative, could also represent another similarity with the typographic experimentation that Depero demonstrates on the pages of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*.<sup>59</sup> 'Distinguished for their interest in printed matter and alternative publications [...] The Fluxus group sought to erase the boundaries between art and life by making works out of the ordinary materials and events of daily existence' (Drucker, 2004, 311). Therefore, although there is no bibliographical evidence of a connection between *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and *Fluxus 1*, nor between Futurism and Fluxus, they did share common ground in terms of adopting a publishing approach designed to democratise art.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the catalogue of *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* held at MoMA in New York in 1968 was bound in studded tin. Curated by K. G. Pontus Hultén, the exhibition dealt with the relationship between art and machines, presenting works by artists from different periods, from the Renaissance through to the 1960s. It includes various Futurist works by Balla, Boccioni and Severini (Hultén, 1968). As with the binding of *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, the theme of the machine is presented using the material from which it is made: metal.

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<sup>59</sup> The cover with circular composition, for example, but also the fold-out insert attached to the book that lists the names of the artists that appear in *Fluxus 1* (see figure 7.29).

<sup>60</sup> In his *Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes*, Kostelanetz states: 'Historians of the history of BOOK-ART credit Depero with preceding GEORGE MACIUNAS in using industrial bolts in 1927 to bind a book' (Kostelanetz, 2001, n.p.). This is rather imprecise and Kostelanetz does not provide any proof of a direct connection.

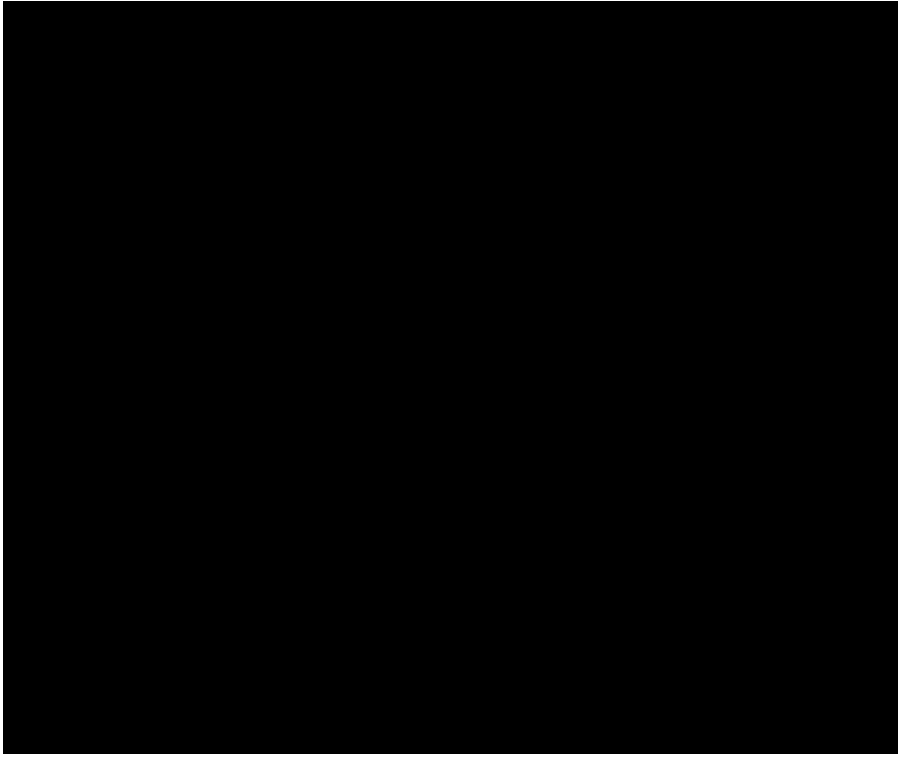


Figure 7.29

**Figures 7.29** Maciunas, G. 1964. *Fluxus 1*.

This book was edited and produced by the Lithuanian-American artist George Maciunas, consisting of a series of envelopes bound together by metal bolts, each containing printed works by a single Fluxus artist (Ay-O, George Brecht, Alison Knowles, György Ligeti, Yoko Ono, Robert Watts and La Monte Young amongst many others). Courtesy of Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.



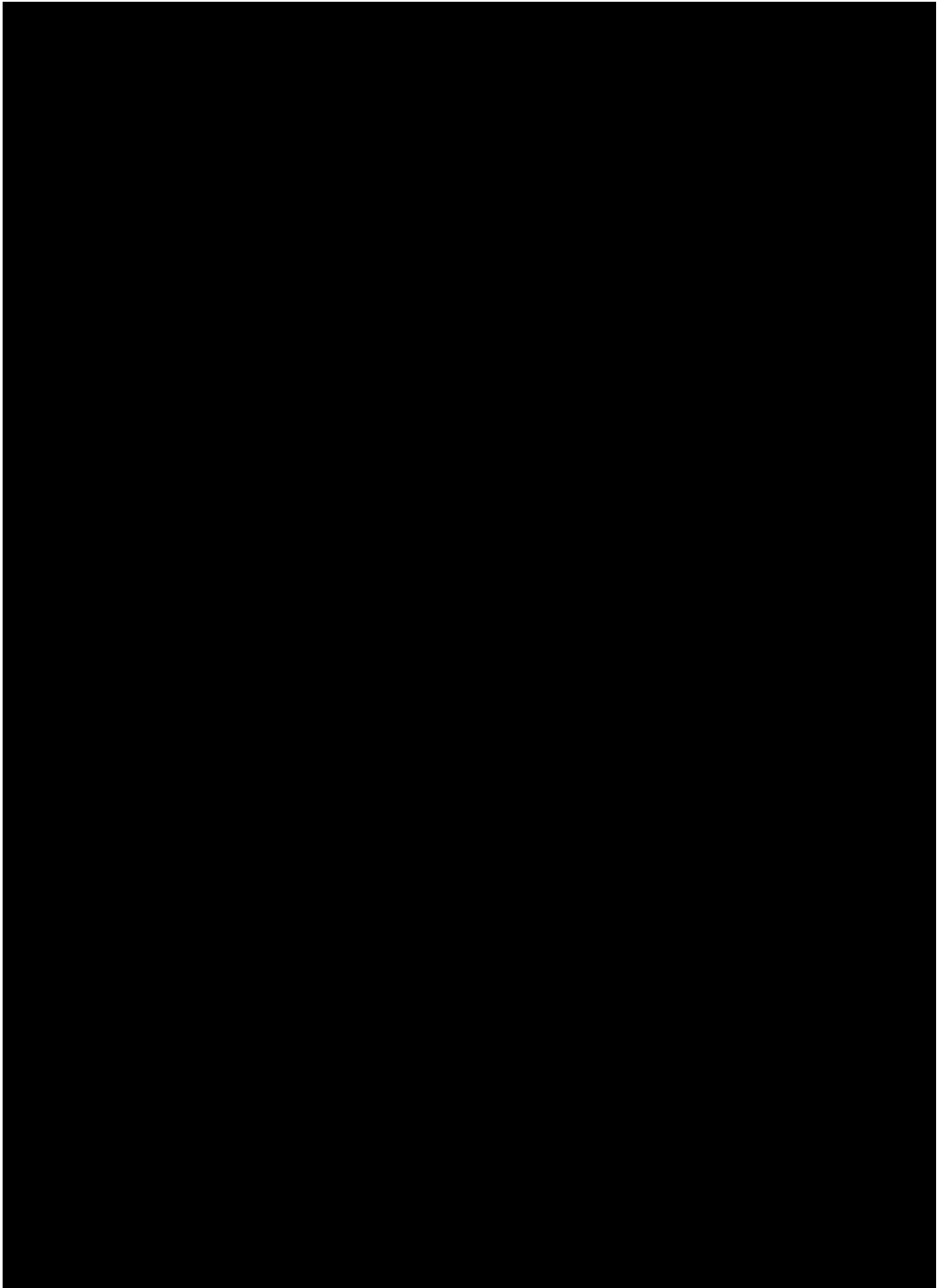


Figure 8.3

**Figures 8.1/8.2/8.3** Three portraits of Depero taken at different stages of his life: in 1911 during his youth; in 1927, the year *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was published, aged 35; in the late 1950s.

**Figure 8.1** c. 1911. Depero's portrait. 6.5 × 9 cm.  
MART, Dep.7.1.1.1.11.

**Figure 8.2** 1927. Depero's portrait. 17 × 22 cm.  
MART, Dep.7.1.1.1.127. Photo: Abeni & C. Milan.

**Figure 8.3** c. 1955–9. Depero's portrait. 5 × 6.5 cm.  
MART, Dep.7.1.1.1.194. Photo: Arte Foto Bonmassar. Rovereto.



## 8 Conclusion

Some historians have seemingly accepted on faith the hyperbole that Fortunato Depero deployed to describe *Depero futurista 1913–1927* in the book itself: ‘the most groundbreaking art book of its time [...] It is an artistic object in itself, a typically Futurist work of art’ (Depero, 1927, 5). Following the renewed interest in the study of Depero, *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was included in the coffee-table book *The History of Graphic Design* with a short caption echoing Depero: ‘groundbreaking publication on graphic design, typography, and bookmaking’ (Müller & Wiedemann, 2017, 228). The CIMA of New York dedicated the first issue of its online journal to Depero with an essay by Melania Gazzotti entirely dedicated to *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, describing it as ‘a comprehensive composite of all the Futurist graphic innovations [...] an overview of Depero’s work from 1913 to 1927 [and] a masterpiece in the history of printing where each page is a manifesto of innovative graphic design as well as an instrument with great promotional and propagandistic impact’ (Gazzotti, 2019, n.p.).

Other writers have been more circumspect: Guido Almansi, after judging Depero to be mediocre in many of his activities (which is debatable), admits that ‘he was a graphic designer of rare joy and also a great artist, in his own way; the bolted book is perhaps the most genuine and enduring document of his art’ (Almansi, 1987, 37–38). Christopher Burke calls *Depero futurista 1913–1927* ‘a maniacally egotistical book’ but also ‘a visual feast of inventive typographic display, a bravura achievement of letterpress composition’ (Burke, 2007, 130). It is certainly the latter aspect of the book that attracted the attention of collector and historian of modernist typography, Jan Tschichold, and spurred him to request a copy from Depero (see figure 2.31). Tschichold, a socialist, was prepared to overlook unsavoury political content in appreciating the typographical innovations of the Futurists.

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* emerged from the period of historical and artistic ferment between the wars, at the height of the Fascists’ rise to power.<sup>1</sup> The avant-garde verve of early-twentieth-century Futurism had largely fizzled out, and the movement was gradually transforming from a partner of the Fascists to a leaden subordinate designed to serve the regime. Poster art and art nouveau were vestiges of the previous century, and in Central Europe the rationalist style of New Typography was taking shape. Depero’s book was published in his hometown in a northern, border region of Italy, which had been part of the Austro-Hungarian

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<sup>1</sup> The Fascist Era – a parallel calendar to the Gregorian calendar which counted the years of the Mussolini government taking the regime’s accession to power following the March on Rome as day 1 – was officially established on 27 October 1927.

Empire before being annexed by the Kingdom of Italy in 1919. Having travelled and exhibited around Italy and abroad, and due to his geographical proximity to Central Europe, Depero was aware of new developments.<sup>2</sup>

Depero was destabilised by the horrors of the First World War before being taken in by the technological and bellicose aspects of Futurism: his writings glorify the cult of the machine and the dynamism of modern life from 1927 onwards. His position was constantly oscillating between antithetical positions: between localism and internationalism, between militancy and apathy towards the contemporary political circumstances, between a glorification of modernity and a fondness for vernacular traditions (see section 5.2.2).

As a result, for Depero, his book was an exercise in balancing contrasting concepts: on the one hand, there were its mechanical aspects and use of modern design choices (asymmetrical layouts, photography combined with text, a metallic binding); on the other, there was its handcraft dimension with the book bound and composed by hand using types from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as with different kinds of paper, which can also be considered an artisanal stylistic solution. These dichotomies are also reflected in his artistic and graphic production, which balances an industrial aesthetic with artisanal skill. Like *Depero futurista 1913–1927* itself, Depero's practice was both modern, geometric and, at the same time, illustrated and replete with artisanal knowledge. For example, compare his advertising activities with the costumes, tapestries, and furniture produced by his house of art.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis has sought to make a contribution to the study of Depero through *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, examining and expanding the questions raised by

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2 Among others, Depero exhibited his work in Berlin and Düsseldorf, both shows held in 1922. In 1924 he also participated in the *Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik* (International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques) organised by Frederick Kiesler. This show enabled an exchange between the artists of Futurism, Constructivism, the Bauhaus and the De Stijl movements, presenting the work of Theo van Doesburg, George Grosz, Fernand Léger, El Lissitzky, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Vsevolod Meyerhold, László Moholy-Nagy, Enrico Prampolini, Oskar Schlemmer, Lothar Schreyer, Fritz Schuhmacher, Kurt Schwitters and many others. For more on this topic, see the list of 52 Depero's exhibitions on page 36 of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and Bedarida, R. 2019. 'Towards an International Redefinition of Italian Futurism' In Bogner, P., Zillner, G., et al. (eds.). 2019. *Frederick Kiesler: Face to Face with the Avant-Garde. Essays on Network and Impact* (Berlin and Basel: Birkhäuser), pp. 115-134.

3 In terms of the dual artisan-industrial aspect, it is worth mentioning the unusual presence of two different title pages in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*: the first reproduces the layout of the cover, in which the title '*Depero futurista*', whose lettering was created by hand by Depero, overshadows the publisher's information in letterpress. The second repeats the same information with the addition of the book's reference period, but is composed entirely by letterpress machine. Between these there is a page reserved for the copy number and the signature of Depero (see Azari, 9 January 1928, MART, Dep.3.1.8.5). As such, this book showcases three different approaches on the first three pages: artistic lettering, handwriting and typography, presupposing a continuing relationship between the artisanal and the industrial and exemplifying all of Depero's artistic output: his hand-drawn advertising work; his art; his handcraft production; and his typographic and poetic compositions.

the recent reassessment of the artist. The analysis of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* and its contents tells us much about Depero: it foretells his alliance to the Fascist cause, at least until the end of the 1930s, hinting at the favours he may have enjoyed at the beginning and the obstacles he may have encountered later on as a result. Although Depero had already embarked on a fruitful and continuous collaboration with the regime and its organs before the publication of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* (most notably, his collaboration with *La rivista* from 1924), the results of this are not included in the book. However, the book does feature the words of Mussolini, undoubtedly because Depero shared in the Fascist ideology, but also as a counterpoint to the Futurist exaggeration of Boccioni's words.<sup>4</sup> Despite Azari's recommendations, these quotations are abridged: Depero omits the 'Fascist art' ending to Mussolini's proclamation, for to include it in its entirety would have meant legitimising the reduction of Futurism to an art of the regime, and for a fervent Futurist like Depero this was not acceptable.

At the same time, these quotations are part of a more intricate strategy consisting of various closely-related factors in the book: politics, style, art, and advertising. In the same way, with multiple aspects converging in a single project, Depero undeniably designed *Depero futurista 1913–1927* with commercial goals and genuinely artistic intentions. He sold the book to his established customers (Campari, Ginori), gave it away to potential customers (Pirelli, and during his trips to New York), and sent it to politicians. Depero exhibited the book, and it became a personal exhibition with contents that could be reorganised, hinting at connections with artist's books (Duchamp and Fluxus, among others).

*Depero futurista 1913–1927* showcases Depero multidisciplinary expertise, his applied art as well as his traditional art. The book has two tables of contents with which he attempts to divide the book by discipline, but these are not faithful to the actual sequence of the contents. When flicking through it, or even dismantling it, as was the original intention, any sense of order is gradually lost. It is not possible to confine Fortunato Depero and his work to a specific design discipline or artistic movement, nor is it possible to provide a single definition of *Depero futurista 1913–1927* as this would mean betraying Depero's interpretation of design, a concept based on an across-the-board approach. Categorising Depero as a typographer, graphic designer, artisan etc. would exclude other disciplines involved in his artistic production, a crucial aspect of his figure. The impossibility of providing a single definition should not be viewed as vagueness or as a sign of

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<sup>4</sup> Among the Fascist works included in *Depero futurista 1913–1927*, there are also two prototypes of Fascist pavilions in the 'Advertising architecture' section on page 93 of the book (figure 5.7).

his superficiality in the respective disciplines; on the contrary, jumping forward around 100 years I believe this indefiniteness potentially represents an additional – and extremely contemporary – way of interpreting the book, which I hope will be taken into consideration by art and design historians when studying Depero and his work: though in a different way to that of the 1920s–1930s, the designer remains an amorphous figure, his skills and interests can no longer be confined to a single profile, the work he produces can no longer be attributed to a single field of application. *Depero futurista 1913–1927* is a multifaceted artefact with many functions and many different possible interpretations, and every aspect helps us to understand Depero, a transdisciplinary artist whose work is very similar to that of a modern designer who writes, designs, operates and seamlessly moves between the private, public, social, political, artistic and commercial spheres.

Taking into account the key contribution of publisher Fedele Azari (especially in the design and production of the binding), *Depero futurista 1913–1927* was designed by Fortunato Depero, and printed with his supervision and involvement by the Mercurio print works of Rovereto. It was a commercial book to be sold, to promote and document the work of Depero, and to legitimise him as an artist. It was a showcase portfolio relating to a specific period (1913–1927), but also an atypical and pioneering artwork in the form of a book, an ideological declaration. It is a work that celebrates Depero the artist, graphic designer and artisan, a blend described as ‘total fusion’ by Balla and Depero in their manifesto of 1915 *Ricostruzione Futurista dell’Universo* (Futurist reconstruction of the universe).





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