

Writing and Multimedia. Redesigning the Futuristic Experience

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Abstract

This paper is part of the study of writing design (i.e. the graphic sign of writing) and of the concept of movement. It is placed within the context of historical references on the design of writing (as an archaic sign, pictogram, ideogram) and representation technologies (from calligraphy to typography). The relationship between graphic design (writing) and movement (animation) has been addressed in the digital environment through the design of video-graphic products analyzed on the basis of: visual theories of typographic composition; the figurative-generative languages of graphic signs, relational contexts (chromatic, dimensional, formal) along with the integration between image and photo-cinematography (where present); the duration of the audiovisual spot; of the sound component as a key to emotional reading functional to the visual narrative; of communication strategies. Kinetic typography, which integrates movement and writing, is therefore the object of study of this paper. In the field of graphic design and specifically of drawing discipline, two aspects will be evaluated: technological innovation, which made possible the video-graphic representation of the movement while physical time passes; audiovisual languages and compositional criteria for the figurative management of writing and multimedia communication. The realized projects are configured as short-term video-graphic ads and are developed in the context of audiovisual narrative in relation to the creative relationship between writing and: acting; sound; title design; heritage.

Keywords: kinetic typography, video graphics, multimedia communication.

Introduction

Due to its nature of 'graphic sign' attached to a surface through the use of devices, both analogue and digital form (from cuneiform signs engraved on a clay tablet to a writing tip on parchment and/or paper soaked by ink, up to the contemporary computer tools that trace signs on a screen), writing is one of the most powerful forms of human communication.

For over three millennia, the primordial and human communication purpose has not undergone any substantial changes. On the other hand, we have witnessed the constant experimentation and evolution of the 'putting into shape' of writing, intended as a graphic representational tool for the lasting transmission of information. Before writing was introduced, the elaboration and organiza-

tion of an oral discourse required an active memory and thought. It can be assumed that from the beginning, communication originated primarily through sounds. Singing, acting, narrating were the only ways to communicate based on the degree of attention by the auditor: Consequently, "the strongest visual appeal of attention" [Arhneim 1962, p. 303] was manifested through the primitive meaning of 'movement' or the formal quality of body gestures which, together with the human voice, served in real time from a system for distribution of thoughts and ideas [Falcidieno 2006].

«We are living in a visual age. We are bombed by pictures from morning to night [...]. We are entering a historical epoch in which the image will follow the written

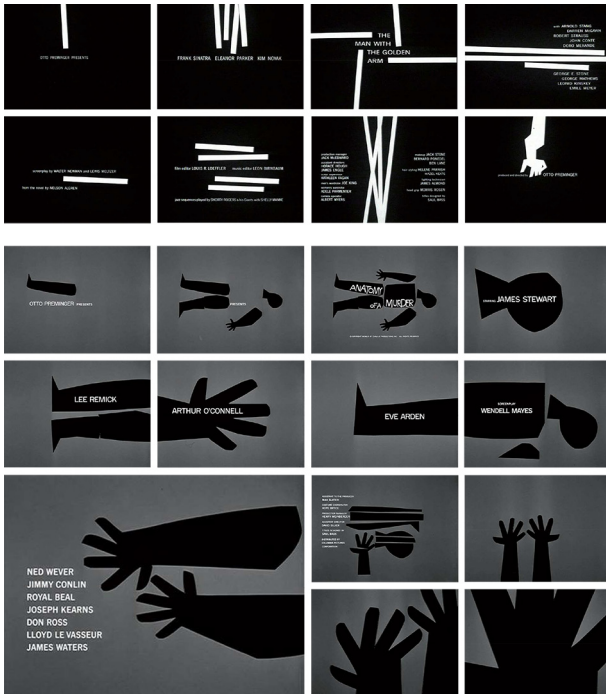


Fig. 1. Graphic signs and kinetic typography in the cinematographic work by Saul Bass. A - *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1950). B - *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959).

word» Gombrich says, referring to the only 'images' observed during a day [Gombrich 1982, p. 155]. However today, this possibility has increased. Thanks to the development of computing power available today (always in constant evolution), a new possibility is offered by the startup of forms of communication in which the original recording devices (eyes, ears, brain) are all perceptually involved. One of these new forms of communication is expressed using kinetic typography, which is the representation of information through words in motion over time. A form capable of evoking ideas and/or emotions through the dynamic visualization of writing [Lee, Forlizzi and Hudson 2002].

Thanks to the ability of transmitting emotion, kinetic typography reinforces the communicative properties of writing, becoming itself the promoter of some expressive powers. A pioneer of the use of this new form of expression

was Saul Bass (1920-1996), who applied the technique of 'frame by frame' animation (fig. 1), a process capable of creating a sequence of images that viewers perceived as a single continuous movement. Most frame by frame animations were produced by horror filmmakers in the first half of the twentieth century for opening titles. These titles were a premise to the film's story, anticipating an emotional reaction in the audience to the cinema even before the plot is revealed [2011].

The director Norman McLaren (1914-1987) used not exclusively typographic graphic-matrix signs in his animated films (fig. 2). His work consisted mainly of the perfect coincidence between the 'sound' element and the movement of 'graphic signs' (conceptual or not): a sort of 'key of the instant', that is a synergy between the musical and visual forms, which is still today one of the operative methods of kinetic typography [Vallièrè 1982].

The current development, however, aims to create new forms of animation of typographic characters, as well as of text in general, since the constant evolution of technological tools influences the typographic characters design, giving the dynamic and animated text (motion graphics) a more and more seducing and amazing task [Zerlenga 2007].

Futurism. Speed, movement, time

The awareness that has given back to the artistic current of Futurism the right to take part in the cultural heritage despite its 'national-popular' nature, is a goal that the criticism of the last century has laboriously achieved with relative delay since the latter has not remained immune from ideological-political interpretative conditions. Official celebrations as well as public and private exhibitions held in Italy and in the rest of the world, starting from the centenary of the birth of Futurism (among the most recent, Naples 2018-19) [1] [Carpi, Villanti 2018], confirm that this Avant-garde movement is now recognized as one of the most fruitful artistic and cultural experiences arising within western civilization in the modern era. Futurism was a movement of cultural battle, which exhibited a set of ideas which, although oriented towards war ideals (indicators of a historical era at the turn of the two world wars), have represented many real needs of the time. The most noteworthy was the need for a renewal of man's identity, who wanted to break with the narrow and 'immovable' patterns of the nineteenth century. This

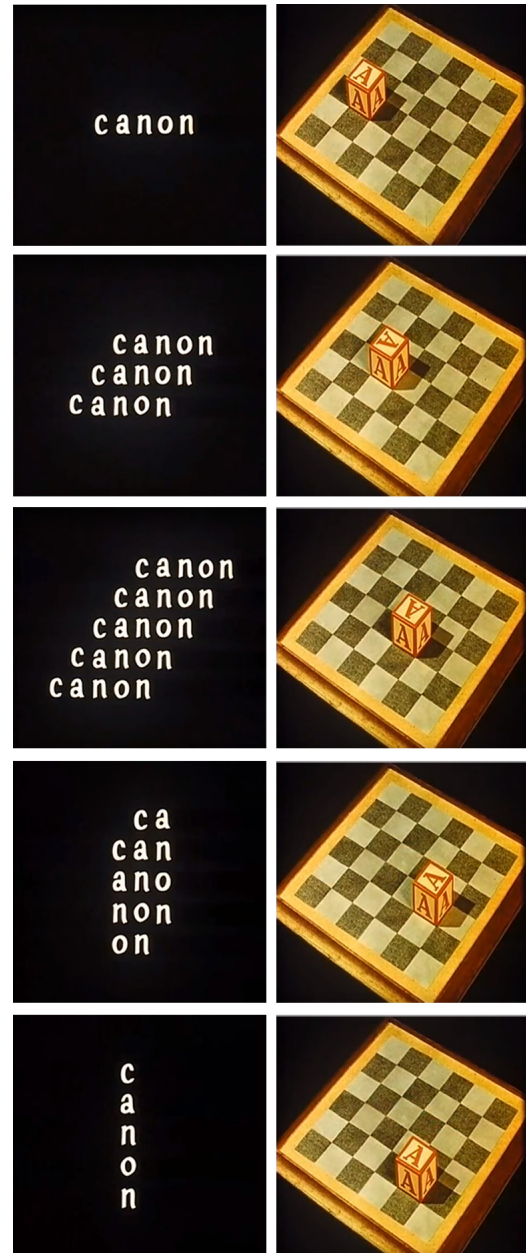
Fig. 2. Graphic signs and kinetic typography in the animated film *Canon* (1964) by Norman McLaren.

ideological position tended to: "grasp the truth of a life transformed by the age of technology [...] and to consider man and technique on the same level" [De Micheli 1981, p. 246].

This way of thinking stimulated the cultural and creative themes of the futurist Avant-garde regarding new reflections such as the analysis of reality, investigated through visions offered by the phenomenon of 'speed' and 'movement', intended as the simultaneity and interpenetration of forms and emotions. Moreover, in its broader meaning, since the 'technique' is a functional component of the form, it actively participates in the determination of the modes of existence (real and material) of the model itself. Assuming the technique as a complex of rules, which governs the practical and functional exercise of art, for the Futurists, the technique participates in the definition of an idea of 'speed' intended more and more as a 'temporal movement'. With the ideological assumptions and artistic experiments carried out in recent years by the protagonists of the futurist Avant-garde, it can be said that this artistic current, more than any other, has represented and given value to 'time' through different expressive forms (writing, music, painting, sculpture, dance, etc.) in a totally new way: a time that is no longer 'slow', made of observation, reflection and meditation, but 'fast' and strongly integrated with the environment in which the movement of a body over time performs.

The conception of futuristic 'time' legitimizes, therefore, existence and is, at the same time, proof of the existence of matter. Without time, man does not exist, he does not move things, he does not live. This position finds its maximum expression in the artistic representations of Umberto Boccioni. In his works, both pictorial and sculptural, the representation of the material, that moves displaced in the space by the motion of a body, allows the observer to perceive the simultaneous relationship with the environment 'from the inside' [De Micheli 1981, p. 256].

Time, therefore, is the key of the moment. The art privileged by Futurism was sculpture because it lives in time, is usable over time, is composed over time. Nevertheless, in the graphic production of futurism made of images on a two-dimensional support, time is represented through graphic signs that allude to movement, evidently lacking



the physical-temporal 'space' in which the real movement is accomplished. However, the graphic allusion to the movement was not new, even if new was the experimentation of unusual depth indicators through the adoption of geometric lines of force which alluded to speed (for example, to the movement of a train in a race or a motorcyclist hurtling along the road). Futurist artistic thought is therefore: "based on the complete renewal of human sensibility that took place due to the great scientific discoveries. Those who today use the telegraph, the telephone, [...] the cinema, the great newspaper (summary of a day in the world) do not think that these different forms of communication, transport and information exert a decisive influence on their psyche" since today there is an: "acceleration of life, which has, almost always, a rapid rhythm" [Marinetti 1913, p. 1].

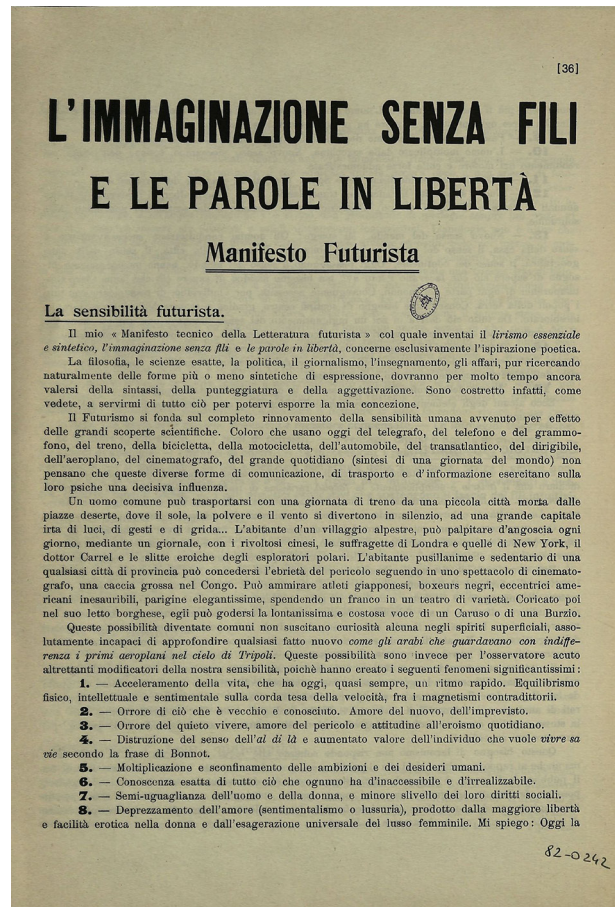
Compared to all the artistic avant-gardes, since its appearance, Futurism has come up with an aesthetic vision that embraces all fields of art, particularly revolutionizing that of typographic production. The traditional layout of the 'page' is revolutionized by the simultaneous use of characters (different sizes) according to many geometric shapes such as to link the logical expression and the meaning of the words to a singular visual communication. This type of 'page' is defined as *parolibera*, a graphic composition that arouses in the reader the allusive visual perception of a movement corresponding to the events that the text narrates. This compositional method is used for the graphic design of covers as well as a page 'style' in numerous books.

In *L'immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà*, ideological manifesto conceived by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1913 (fig. 3), the Futurists start a profound innovation in the compositional and graphic structure of the book, which is illustrated as follows: "Instead of humanizing animals, plants, minerals (a system that is by now outdated) we can animalize, vegetate, mineralize, electrify or liquefy the style, making it live in a certain way in the same life of the material. We will have condensed metaphors. - Telegraphic images. - The sums of vibrations. - The knots of thoughts. - The closed or open fans of movements. - The glimpses of analogies. - Color balances. - The dimensions, weights, measurements and speed of sensations. - The plunge of the essential word into the water of sensitivity, without the concentric circles that the word produces around itself. - The rest of intuition. - Movements with two,

three, four, five times. - The explanatory analytical piles that support the bundle of intuitive wires" [Marinetti 1913, p. 3].

For the Futurists, typographic characters are therefore an opportunity to express their ideals of dynamism, declaring how up to then the literature had exalted: "thoughtful immobility, ecstasy and sleep. We want to enhance the aggressive movement [...]. We affirm that the magnificence of the world has been enriched

Fig. 3. Futurist manifesto of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *L'immaginazione senza fili e parole in libertà* (1913).



with a new beauty: the beauty of speed [...]. Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute" [Marinetti 1909, p. 3] (fig. 4). The consequence of this assumption was that the Futurists used on the same page: "three or four different colours of ink, and even 20 different typefaces" [Marinetti 1913, p. 4], for example: "italics for a series of similar or fast sensations, bold round for violent onomatopoeias, etc." [Marinetti 1913, p. 4].

Fig. 4. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo*, published by *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909.



Parolibere: analysis of graphic signs and digital animation experiences

The first methodological-design experience carried out as a case study in the typographic art of Futurism aims at the graphic analysis and subsequent animation with the technique of kinetic typography of the cover of the book *ZANGTUMB TUMB* (1914) and the Filippo Tommaso Marinetti futurist manifest, *L'immaginazione senza fili, parole in libertà* (11 maggio 1913) (figs. 5,6).

The graphic analysis of the documents shows how both the aforesaid projects exhibit the use of words belonging to different types of fonts which, with different dimensions, are configured according to differently inclined directions and not parallel to each other. The use of bold is intended for words to which we want to associate a greater visual appeal, especially in the case of those with an onomatopoeic sound. Moreover, the latter often appear also deformed to give a greater expressive effectiveness to the meaning of the terms. In addition to the use of letters and words, there is also that of arithmetic symbols. Finally, for the most part, the directions have a rectilinear shape since, due to its geometric nature, the curvilinear appears visually softer and more sinuous, lending itself little to the aggressive language of Futurism. On these two 'tables' a subsequent design experience was accomplished. After having redesigned the 'tables' in vectorial graphics, the signs were animated by associating different dynamic effects to them [Bellantoni, Woolman 2001]. Moreover, on the graphic animation of the onomatopoeic words, corresponding sounds were associated, while the whole dynamic was accompanied by the musical composition *Macchina Tipografica* of the futurist composer Luigi Russolo (1885-1947). Signatory of the manifesto *L'arte dei rumori* (11 March 1913) (fig. 7), Russolo theorized the use of noise to arrive at composing passages consisting of pure noises instead of harmonic sounds. These disharmonious sounds were produced through a series of instruments designed by Russolo and called *intonarumori* (fig. 8) with which he started innovative musical compositions, immediately called 'futurist music'.

With reference to this poetic and taking up the methodological-design experience conducted with the technique of kinetic typography on the graphic composition of the cover of the book *ZANGTUMB TUMB* and the futurist manifesto of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *L'immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà*, in order to transform futuristic 'static' manifestos into 'kinetic', both a palette of sounds evocative of

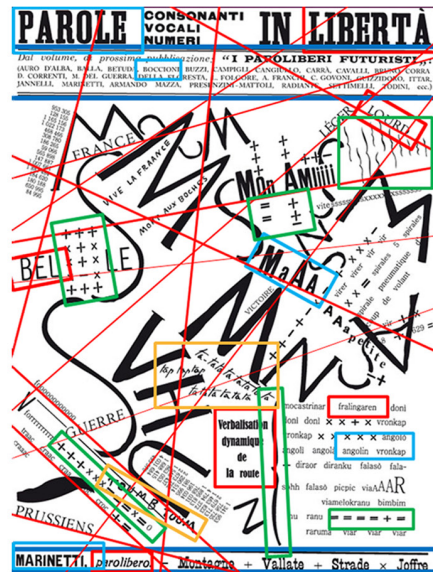


Fig. 5. A. Graphic analysis of the book cover ZANG TUMB TUMB (1914). B. Graphic analysis of the Futurist manifesto by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, L'immaginazione senza fili e parole in libertà (1913).

noises to which the words and static graphic signs used in futurist posters allude, such as the sounds of chains, locomotives, rustlings, hands of watches, etc., as well as animated digital effects, such as appearance, rotation, falling, etc. were used. In addition, the use of Marinetti's voice which, with a heavy and serious tone, shouts 'parole in libertà' (free words) and the use of innovative media have further expanded the Futurist typographic context, passing from the use of static graphic signs, which visually allude to movement, to the use of digital contexts that allow the visual perception of graphic signs that transform or move in real time (fig. 9).



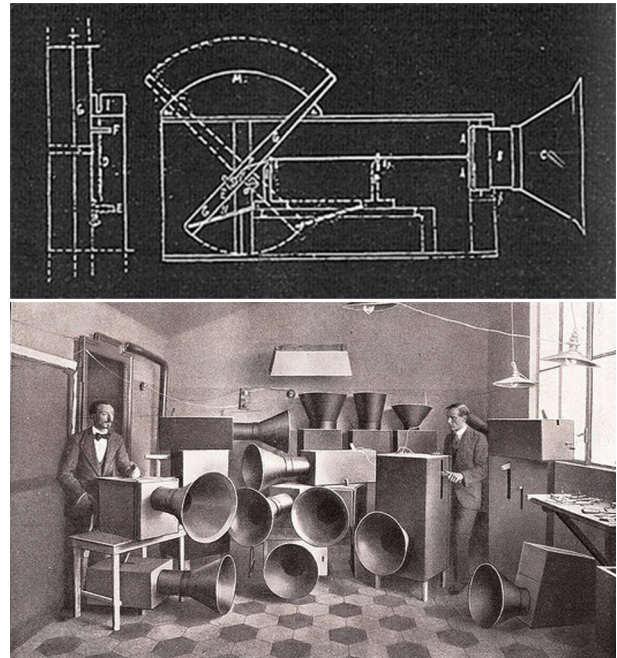
The Futurist manifesto.

From the visual sign to the integration with the sound

In terms of the relationship between writing and multimedia, the second redesign experience was carried out on the cultural manifesto of Futurism, published in the French magazine *Le Figaro* in 1909 and entitled *Manifeste du Futurisme*. In this case, the experiment made use of the kinetic typography applied to writing through the technique of video-graphic and auditory implementation [Castellano, Falcidieno 2012].

Fig. 6. Luigi Russolo, *L'Arte dei rumori*, Futurist manifesto published on 11 March 1913.

Fig. 7. Luigi Russolo and the *Intonarumori*.



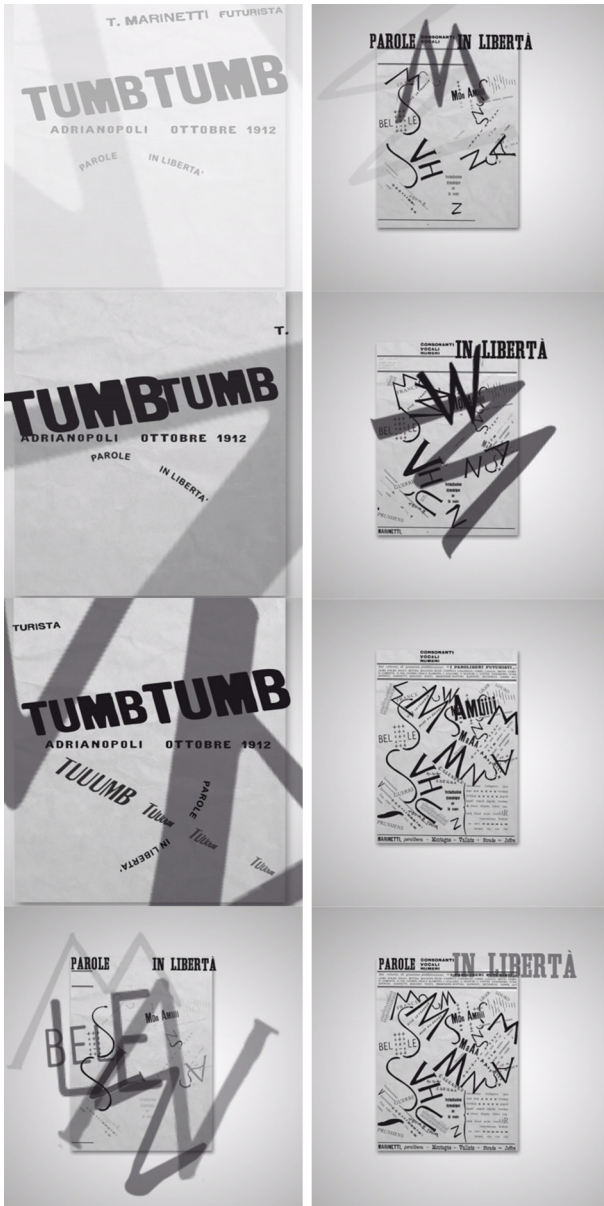


Fig. 8. Animation of Futurist posters with the kinetic typography technique.

Until the 1990s, music in the cinema was the background to the opening and closing credits as a soundtrack not synchronized with the graphic elements (writing or figures), already elaborated in kinetic typography. Only a few decades ago, the need arose to create a synchronization between the audio and visual content of the animations and, in this regard, the video clips of the early 2000s were the first examples of design in which the scenes are assembled according to the effects of kinetic typography (fig. 10).

In this direction, an ulterior experiment was carried out (an art advert) that combines the written sign with the sound. It uses a passage in visual writing of the text of the *manifesto futurista* integrated with the recital of the actor Carmelo Bene (1937-2002).

The union between these two forms of narration has been achieved using kinetic typography. The audio-video graphic project is based on the cultural awareness of Marinetti's statements which affirm that the: "punctuation must be deleted" [Marinetti 1912, p. 1] as well as they consider it necessary to produce a 'lively style': "without the absurd stops of the commas and full-stops" [Marinetti 1912, p. 1] and make «the noise, the weight and smell of objects" [Marinetti 1912, p. 3].

Sharing the opinion that an audio-visual advert made in kinetic typography is an effective communicative purpose if one of the main features is the simplicity of the visual, during the meta-project phase, the choice of the color palette was considered carefully (in relation to the content of the narration) along with a single font (to be used for the entire duration of the advert) (fig. 11).

The selected track was divided into several scenes, corresponding to a series of three colors (except the last one consisting of two). The colors of each palette were chosen starting from the first (primary or secondary) according to the chromatic variations of contrast and/or saturation. In general, the first color was attributed to the background of the scene; the remaining two, used for writing; the third as a background of the next scene. The symbolic use of colors dedicated to the written text is a function of the emphasis of the word, whose greater or lesser tonal variation corresponds to an emphasizing effect. Further graphic effects derive both from the reading of the piece as well as from the poetics of Futurism: a sense of static, speed and dynamism of words; use of mathematical signs; presence of onomatopoeias; theories of the new typographic harmony (fig 12). Returning to the use of the font, the choice fell on

Fig. 9. Music video-clip realized with the kinetic typography technique: Prince, Kiss (1988); Madonna, Music (2000); Neyo, Closer (2009); Måns Zelmerlöw, Heroes (2015).





Fig. 10. Palette of colors used for the design of the futuristic manifesto spot.

an impacting font, which reflects the aggressive canons of Futurism, the *Impact* font for the note (designed in 1965) with a thick body.

Subsequently, from the recital of Carmelo Bene's Futurism manifesto, some modalities of variation of the voice used during the monologue were selected in relation to the sense of communication: babbling, whispering, slurred speech, amplification, warbling, stridency. They were also associated with different graphic effects to attract the attention of the user through the simultaneous use of different languages, techniques and methods: a sense of static, speed and dynamism of words; use of mathematical signs; presence of onomatopoeias; typographical compositions of some pieces of text according to axonometric or perspective installations; graphic allusive signs of depth. Similarly, the visual direction for the changes of the periods (in the performance) or of the words/phrases to which emphasis was given in respect of communication was carefully evaluated (fig. 13).

Conclusion

The sources mentioned and the experiments carried out are witness to the strong value of the design: its ability to communicate through forms (static or dynamic; analogical

or digital; etc.) but, at the same time, its potential to be interpreted by the viewer [Falcidieno 2008]. The design alludes to the 'other' interpretation because the drawing is above all a cultural expression and, the more it can allude, the more cultured is the culture of the observer. The sources mentioned belong to a specific historical-cultural context. A context that justifies their use as artistic manifestos, creative tools for ideological positions of thought. In all this, design has assumed a crucial role: a never neutral role of intermediary, a medium that alludes to and which, at the same time, denotes.

The physical 'movement' that a body performs in space integrating itself with time, can be drawn statically (and, then, the drawing 'alludes' in the eyes of one who stretches to movement) or can be dynamically designed thanks to animation. The animated drawing no longer alludes to the visual perception of the movement, it is itself physical movement, real movement. The video-graphic products proposed through the two experiments are translated into animated drawings based on the creative relationship between field, writing, acting, sound, memory, etc., and, in this sense, 'communication' increases, which becomes multimedia expanding even more the already usual allusive power of drawing.

On these assumptions, the experimental theme of audiovisual communication using the kinetic typography technique was developed in laboratory form through univer-

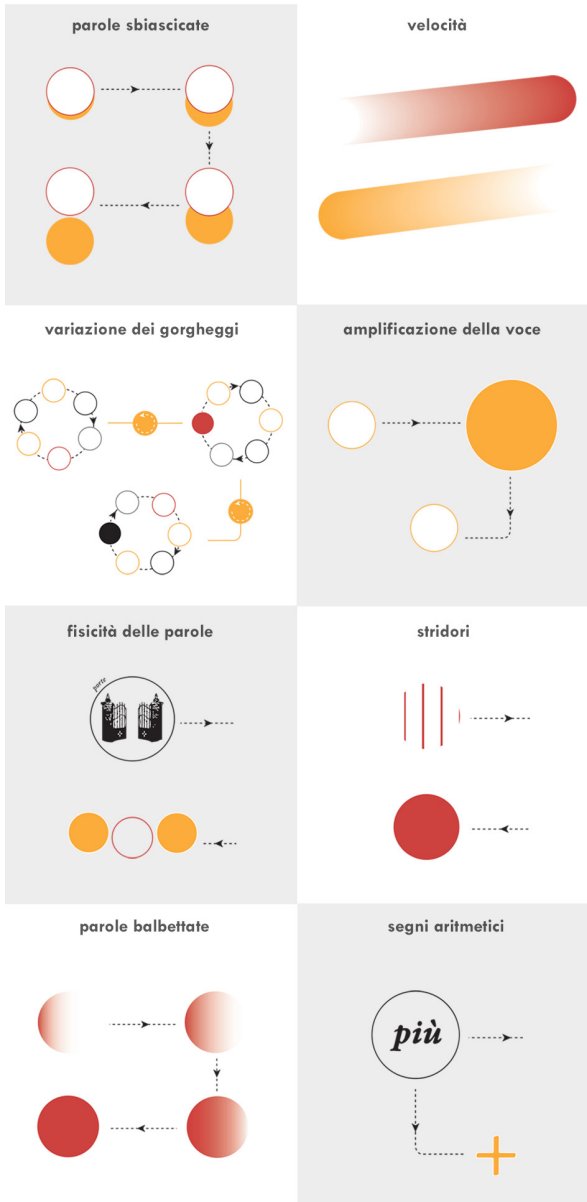


Fig. 11. Advert on the Futurist manifesto: acting effect, graphic effect.



Fig. 12. Advert of the Futuristic kinetic manifesto: kinetic typography frames.

sity-level didactic training and on the full awareness of the theoretical-scientific foundations of representation. The projects realized were configured as short-term video-graphic adverts and are part of the audiovisual narrative in relation to the creative relationship between visual writing, acting, sound, title design, heritage [2].

However, they are the outcomes of historical-cultural results (the artistic avant-gardes, here the Futurism), scientific-disciplinary foundations and technological contextualization. The reflection on the technological contribution to the methods and choices of the project deserves a sepa-

rate reflection as technology has always been identified as an opportunity, a potential in continuous transformation and always more innovative than the previous one. The design experiences proposed here based on the current technological outcome could already allude to immersive virtual reality, suggesting the setting up of multi-sensory journeys (also for the senses of smell and touch [3]) within the manifestos proposed both in the form of design and written text and, tomorrow, forms of communication and experiences that are unimaginable today even though our body and mind is the first multimedia device.

Notes

[1] The exhibition entitled *Il Futurismo – Anni '10 – Anni '20*. Boccioni, Balla, Carrà, Depero, Sant'Elia, Severini, Sironi, Prampolini was set up in Naples from 19 October to 17 February 2019 in the *Museo Civico of Castel Nuovo*.

[2] An experiment on Futurist manifestos was conducted in team within the Graphic Design laboratory (scientifically coordinated by Ornel-

la Zerlenga, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design of the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli") with Antonella Marzano (figs. 5, 8) and Riccardo Onorato (figs. 10-12) and subsequently reworked and contextualized.

[3] An example of research in this field was carried out by Laura Marcolini with *Studio Azzurro*.

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