Futurist Graphic Communication and its Reflexes in Brazil

Vanessa Beatriz Bortulucce

The artistic avant-garde of the first half of the 20th Century developed a new way of seeing words, letters and sentences that called attention to their eminently visual character, thus lending continuity and greater depth to the graphic experiments of the previous century. It was no longer just a matter of understanding a word, its meanings and phonemes. More than just a set of building blocks for words, the alphabet could also create patterns. Words had to be seen as images, which meant a major transformation in the spatial perception of the page, whether of a newspaper, a book or a pamphlet.

By championing its "typographical revolution", intimately linked with the desire for literary renewal, Futurism altered the meanings of such terms as narrative, syntax, book and the concepts of layout, composition and typography. The Italian movement so tightened the bonds between literature and graphic design that they were sometimes even seen as one and the same thing, as the text — and the apprehension of its meaning — was considered inseparable from its layout. Futurism developed a philosophy that was specific to typography and in consonance with the modern and urban poetic, rallying authors and artists to the cause of revitalizing writing, reading and graphic design through the resources of onomatopoeia, networks of analogies and an exploration of the suggestive power of fonts, italics, boldface and upper-case, thus subverting traditional syntax, broadening the field of literary experience and forging a poetic of language in which the typesetter and the personal experience of the reader were of equal importance.

Futurism's graphic renewal began in poetry and expanded toward language as a whole. Since 1905, Marinetti's *Poesia* magazine had been defending the use of free verse, which sought to break with the syntactical unity of the literature of the past. The idea of free verse evolved into the concept of *parole in libertà*, the methodology of which was expressed in the 1913 manifesto *Distruzione della sintassi - Immaginazione senza fili - Parole in libertà*. Some of the considerations in this manifesto had already been expressed in the earlier *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*, which called for the abolition of punctuation, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions.

Though Mallarmé had already done away with punctuation in his *Un coup de dés*, first published in the journal *Cosmopolis* in 1897 (and later in book form

in 1914), his poem had less reach than the bevy of manifestos the Italian poet churned out from 1912 on. Mallarmé freed the printed word from the traditional constraints of book editing; his *Un coup de dés* pioneered a new form of visual expression. Mallarmé built his poetry out of different fonts and a novel use of blank spaces on the page, creating an aesthetic akin to Japanese engravings, in which the empty spaces are as laden with meaning as those colored and drawn. In Mallarmé's poem, the lines of poetry slide across the blank page like lines in a drawing: no longer sheet music, but printed music, the music itself.

The Futurists took Mallarmé's project even further, defending the idea that words had a visual expression that went beyond their literal meaning. This implied using words in a visual way to express ideas beyond words. However, the changes in layout the Futurists made were only possible thanks to the technological advances occurring at the time. After all, it is important to remember that the real protagonists behind these typographical innovations were the machines that gave the author a new typographical format drawn from the visual vocabulary of street posters and newspaper ads. Besides the typefaces themselves, the heroic task of materializing the Futurists' ideals fell to the printing press.

The crusade against the traditional elements of syntax and graphic design found one of its chief exponents in Marinetti. The poet, theorist and founder of Futurism created poems that subverted the usual typographical logic, combining different typefaces in varying font sizes and allowing the lines to overrun the borders of the page. By manipulating the printing process, Marinetti explored the limits of the printing press, leaving the technological structure on the surface, like an exoskeletal tribute to the mechanical. The invention of the Linotype in the United States and the Monotypecaster in England allowed for the development of a whole new understanding of graphic space.

The power of Futurist typography stems from its combination of the visual and literary languages. The visual elements of the printed page are aligned with the Futurists' cherished notions of dynamism and speed, splaying the experience and rhythm of modern life across the sheet of paper (and, later, of metal). The classical orthodoxy of language and type are abandoned in favor of a new graphic form, one that sees art and design in the same light, thus establishing a new form of communication with a fondness for the advertising-speak so in vogue since the 19th Century. Communication no longer relied exclusively on the meaning of the words, but could now also harness their rapid, dynamic appearance on and in the surfaces and volumes used to convey information.

The Italian Futurists created a "typographical poetry", in which the text expressed a range of interrelated meanings, evoking sounds, smells and images; exposing itself like torn flesh, it triggered an onslaught of memories. The old poetic and material values were anathema to this typographical poetry, which assumed its own materiality, texture and tangibility, free of all symbolic or transcendental aspects, as typography pushed beyond its technical and practical values to become lyrical, revitalized and pulsating. As such, poetry and typography become one, so that the text can be read as a poem or observed as a painting, the artistic having been promoted to one of the text's prime functions.

The search for a new visualization of words transformed the page into an experimental field brimming with possibilities, taken to the limits of logic and layout. In words-in-freedom poems, the words, released from the fetters of prepositions and sentences, start to move about the page. They cluster into constellations and ribbon into calligraphic Arabesques, demonstrating their freedom and independence from a system of coordinates, living their own lives without hierarchy or limitations. Called on to represent actions or objects, they assume analogous forms, imitating a spiral here, a bullet train there, a sun, an explosion, a mountain or plume of cigarette smoke. Following an almost plastic idea, which rejects the traditional printing methods, the different families of typefaces lend form to images that use unorthodox processes to communicate visual sensations. The result is a simultaneous vision in which the reader can grasp the general meaning of the poem at first sight. The reader identifies the poem's main image just as he would that of an advertising poster.

The origin of this typographical revolution can be found in the movement's manifestos. From the first Futurist manifesto in 1909, Marinetti was already declaring his aversion to literature based on conservative values aesthetically predicated on symbolic excess. *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*, dated May 11, 1912, presented the aims of this new literary and typographical poetic: abolish the use of punctuation, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions and stress the semaphoric adjective, multilinear lyricism, and free expressive orthography, all of which would entail a new layout, the reconstruction of graphic space. For Marinetti, literature had to possess the following characteristics: 1. NOISE (manifestation of the dynamism of things); 2. WEIGHT (the faculty of flight); 3. SMELL (the thing's ability to waft and spread). These elements would be conveyed in the text through typographical interpretations, layout (a break from the traditional grid structure) and explorations of the visual possibilities of typographical families.

In the manifesto *Distruzione della sintassi – immaginazione senza fili – parole in libertà*, of May 11, 1913, Marinetti sets out his project for the radical transformation of typography:

Typographical Revolution

> I initiate a typographical revolution aimed at the bestial, nauseating idea of the book of passéist and D'Annunzian verse, on seventeenth-century handmade paper bordered with helmets, Minervas, Apollos, elaborate red initials, vegetables, mythological missal ribbons, epigraphs, and roman numerals. The book must be the Futurist expression of our Futurist thought. Not only that. My revolution is aimed at 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. On the same page, therefore, we will use three or four colors of ink, or even twenty different typefaces if necessary. For example: italics for a series of similar or swift sensations, boldface for the violent onomatopoeias, and so on. With this typographical revolution and this multicolored variety in the letters I mean to redouble the expressive force of words (...). [Trad. R.W. Flint]

Some of the proposals formulated above were never formalized, such as the use of three or more colors, though by "colors" we can also understand tonalities and intensities of black within the graphic space; the tonal variation would be responsible for transmitting the notions of weight, volume, clamor and silence, etc. After all, here was a declaration in favor of a graphic poetry conditioned and inspired by print, by the multiplicity of types and the industrial design of written information — a quick-fire, telegraphic, simultaneous poetry bound up with advertising.

Elsewhere in the same manifesto Marinetti states the need to create a literature both fast and dynamic:

> I oppose the decorative, precious aesthetic of Mallarmé and his search for the rare word, the one indispensable, elegant, suggestive, exquisite adjective. I do not want to suggest an idea or a sensation with passéist airs and graces. Instead I want to grasp them brutally and hurl them in the reader's face. Moreover, I combat Mallarmé's static ideal with this typographical revolution that allows me to impress on the words (already free, dynamic, and torpedo-like) every velocity of the stars, the clouds, aeroplanes, trains, waves, explosives, globules of seafoam, molecules, and atoms. Thus I realize the fourth principle of my First Futurist Manifesto (February 20, 1909): 'We affirm that the world's beauty is enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. (...) [Trad. R.W. Flint].

The manifestos not only espoused the typographical theory, but actually showed its visual results. Lawrence Rainey observes[1]:

> Many manifestos were originally published as independent leaflets of two to four pages in length, and from the beginning these had a marked preference for typographical display. Underlinings skip across the page, boldface characters thunder out commands, while italics writhe with urgency. These features became only more pronounced as the years went by, especially after 1912. The manifestos were increasingly printed with multiple typefaces; headlines surged up the page in columns, or slanted at vertiginous diagonals. Visuality in general became more pronounced, and illustrations were increasingly included (...)

The manifesto Il teatro di varietà, written by Marinetti in 1913, is emblematic in its use of typographical tools: different typefaces, upper-case letters, boldface listings, advertising slogans, onomatopoeia, in short, what Perloff called a "graphic image of Marinetti's theses", with a close connection with the advertising language of the late 19th, early 20th centuries: headings in bold, upper-case letters, aphorisms highlighted in the text, the use of numbers for programmatic points. The graphical Futurist poetic adopted as essential characteristics the use of sans serif letters, varying font sizes to convey notions of volume and sound, the use of onomatopoeia to accentuate the sonority of the text, colored letters (albeit from a limited palette), words placed at odd angles, which posed a challenge to the printers.

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1   RAINEY, Lawrence; POGGI, Christine; WITTMAN, Laura (orgs). *Futurism: an anthology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 45-46.

The use of varied types is one striking element in Futurist typography. While, in the 19th Century, printers preferred humanist typefaces, those close to calligraphy and to handwriting, the modern fonts were more abstract, devoid of organic flair, historical references or the traditional signs of a trade. The growing industrialization that fuelled the development of mass consumer society saw advertising emerge at full throttle, which generated demand for new typefaces, in addition to a host of other graphic tools.

New, experimental layouts had been stamped across the newspaper pages since the 19th Century, this being a space that, unlike the book, had various columns side-by-side; a rigid grille of stark vertical and horizontal lines. The avant-garde artists and poets attacked the barriers between art and the everyday world, creating new objects and practices that mixed into the urban reality. The mechanical diagrams of typography were brought to the forefront by Futurists and Dadaists, who assailed the linear limitations of metal types. They became visible theoretical tools, that whole typographical structure designed to stay behind the scenes was now occupying the surface of the page. The logical typographic process, the reasoning of the machine, in short, the craft of its making, was now center-stage in Futurist graphics: technique and poetic were now one in the same thing. This whole program was devoted to creating an art that was encrusted in real life, a tangible participant in everyday experience, something that, two years later, would be reinforced in Balla and Depero's manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*.

Magazines were the most important vehicles for Futurist poetry; in some cases, collections of poems were published in book form. In addition to *Poesia*, other key magazines were Enrico Prampolini's *Lacerba* and *Noi*, Fortunato Depero's *Dinamo Futurista*, and *Stile Futurista*. Futurist poems are an artful literary-visual hybrid, with graphic content reinforcing the literary, social and political content. The concepts of art and design are so closely related that poetry can also be seen as a graphic or plastic work beyond its literary existence. The best examples are Marinetti's *Battaglia, peso+odore* (1912), *Les mots en liberté futuristes: lettre d´une Jolie femme à un monsieur passéiste*, (1912), and *CHAIRrrrrrrRR* (1912).

Marinetti`s theory of *parole in libertà* was fundamental to the renovation of 20th-century typography. With its aggressive and totally unprecedented layout, his *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914), a collection of poems previously published in newspapers, is one of the most important works in modern typography and literature. The title is an onomatopoeic reference to the Balkans War (1912) and the book's typographical elements take on a telegraphic quality, akin to military communications, in which fragmentations, sudden interruptions and a mix of varied feelings accentuate the chaos and complexity of the conflict. It is essentially a web of analogies (in which word bombs destroy buildings of justified text) between war and words-in-freedom. Marinetti's graphic experiments became the starting point for people like El Lissitzky, the Dadaists, Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars and many others. For Perloff, the heavy boldface of capital letters used to stress sensations and events, alongside the typological variety, are elements that create an experimental text/collage that negates the difference between poem and painting.

Analogies between war and words-in-freedom can also be found in Carrà's *Guerrapittura*, published in 1915, in which *Sintese futurista della Guerra* is one of the best-known poems. Other works of note are *Ponti sull'oceano* (1914), by Luciano Folgore; *Baionette*, (1915), by Auro D'Alba; *Rarefazioni e parole in libertà* (1915), by Corrado Govoni; *L'elisse e la spirale (Film + parole in libertà)* (1915), by Paolo Buzzi; *Equatore notturno* (1916), by Francesco Meriano; *Archi voltaici* (1916), by Volt (Vincenzo Fani-Ciotti); *Firmamento* (1920), by Armando Mazza; *Piedigrotta* (1916) and *Caffeconcerto* (1919), by Francesco Cangiullo; *BIF§ZF + 18 simultaneità e chimismi lirici* (1919), by Ardengo Soffici. In all of these cases, the disintegrated language of Futurist poetry visualizes images and thoughts, allegories and metaphors, sounds and smells, bombardments and events through typographical and dactylographic elements, which follow unusual, but still perceptible lines.

The word becomes image, and two particularly important examples of this are Cangiullo's *Piedigrotta*, a visual translation of the revelry, sonority and dynamism of the Neapolitan carnivals, and *Caffeconcerto – Alfabeto a sorpresa*, completed in 1915, but published in 1919. Cangiullo achieves a symbiosis between the poem and graphic element, with the use of words, letters and numbers in a range of fonts, together forming scenes, landscapes and even human bodies, attributing playful and dramatic qualities to modern life. The "free theater" form, the use of colored pages, it all went toward creating a sort of variety theater. The *alfabeto a sorpresa* system originates in printed letters: the silhouette of each artist is formed solely of typographical signs, and the scene plays out as the reader flicks through the pages. These "letters-in-freedom" create an expressive, pictorial poetry that went on to influence the Portuguese writers Almada Negreiros and Fernando Pessoa, especially the heteronym Álvaro de Campos (more in content than in form), and, later, Alexandre O' Neill, founder of the surrealist movement in Lisbon.

Another work that manifests the theory of the liberation of letters is Soffici's *BIF§ZF + 18 simultaneità e chimismi lirici* (1915). The book's title, derived from a set of typographical characters encountered by chance in a printer's shop, resembles the newspaper headlines of the day in size and style, for Soffici opted for the same sheet size, type of paper, sheen and ephemeral status of this support. The book was printed in the format of a typical tabloid (45.8 x 34.8 cm).

Futurist typography, however, was not the preserve of books and magazines, poems and pamphlets, but could frequently be seen in other contexts too. In painting, we have Carrà's *Manifestazione interventista* of 1914, the same year Balla pitched a futurist ballet to Diaghilev. Entitled *Macchina Tipografica,* it was to be the visualization of Linotype in movement played out by six dancing puppets. The only thing to appear on-stage was the word "Tipografia", in enormous letters with actors inside, making noises and onomatopoeias. Fortunato Depero applied Futurist lettrism to his architectural research. For the III Mostra Internazionale delle Arti Decorative di Monza, in 1927, he created *Padiglione del Libro* for the publishers Bestetti-Tumminelli and Treves, in which huge letters became the building blocks of the architecture. Angelo Rognoni, for his part, wanted to make sculptures out of type. All of these endeavors reveal a Futurist

project that envisaged a total art, inserted and active within human experience and free of all constraining categorizations. The "typographical revolution" was to be immersed in everyday life, where the concept of words-in-freedom was to extend beyond the book and the text through dynamic translocations of the typographical space.

Getting back to the specific question of Futurist graphic plasticity in the more traditional supports, we cannot fail to highlight the transformations that occurred in the book, where some extremely interesting developments were taking place. Futurist books — in the fullness of the contradiction this term could provoke in the Italian avant-garde — were emblems of the country's technical and cultural progress, and they availed of all possible means of serial production, becoming interactive, media-driven and deeply creative works of art. If, during the 1910s, Futurist books focused on typographical experimentation with words-in-freedom (experiments collected and published by Marinetti in 1919 under the title *Les mots en liberté futuristes*), in the 1920s, the avant-garde redirected its project towards closer contact with the machinist aesthetic, which gave the movement fresh impetus. During this period, the Futurists, particularly Depero, Panaggi and Paladini, deepened their interest in different forms of advertising. This decade saw a broadening of typographical experimentation into new areas beyond news-papers, manifestos and periodicals to focus on different experiences.

The model of the machine was used to underscore the plasticity of the book. During the previous decade, the book's interior had been the preferred theater for the typographical revolution, that space that must be opened in order to be discovered. Covers, too, were excellent supports for typographical games, but the next step was to change the book in its essential material aspect — cover, pages, binding, pigmentation. "(...) it is the *physis* that dominates the second phase in the futurist words-in-freedom"[2]. Paper was the first thing to go, being replaced by metal, as, for the Futurists, the printed page was a sort of "plate" or "table" on which the poetic fast-food of visual images was served. Thus emerged what Perloff called the Artist's Book, which "(...) calls the stability of the genre into question (...)"[3]. The rejection of the traditional forms of word alignment is tied in with a new fluidity of language, which accentuates the intensity of the emotions. Ignoring the whole standard of composition, words and phonemes, syllables and vowels are absorbed into the surface of the page, slinking like photographic negatives across the metal sheets, exploring the space and fixing themselves to it in the most unexpected places. The relationship between the book — increasingly understood in terms of its value as an object, that is, its physicality on an equal footing with its content — and the reader becomes symbi-otic and transformed, as both bear witness to a unitary and global vision of the Futurist aesthetic world.

One important work from this period was the *libro bullonato* (Bolted Book), as the volume *Depero Futurista* (1927) came to be known. Published by the Futurist

2   LISTA, Giovanni. *Le futurisme: création et avant-garde*. Paris: Les Éditions de l´Amateur, 2000, p. 272.

3   PERLOFF, M. *O momento futurista: avant-garde, avant-guerre e a linguagem da ruptura*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1993, p. 21.

Fedele Azari, the book is considered the first book-object, with hard covers bolted and nutted into place. It is a celebration of industrial life and a defense of the machinist aesthetic, but also an innovative marketing strategy for the object of design. The Futurist who came closest to what we would call a graphic designer, the book outlines Depero's creative development. Each page has a different layout, with images sharing the space with text, words creating images and illustrations actively dialoguing with the writing. *Depero Futurista* is an example of the integration between words-in-freedom and the mechanic aesthetic, a work that takes a synoptic look at Depero's multi-disciplinary research as a painter, sculptor, poet and architect. Practically every Futurist graphic innovation is employed: folded pages, colored pages, colored text, typographical trickery, all manner of surprises created out of this playful experiment. According to Azari, the book is "bolted like an engine"[4], which means it can be dismantled to replace or reposition the pages. This reorganization of the book reflects the same praxis applied to the words, and it contributed to the destruction of any idealization of the work, explored here as an object. What we have here is the book-machine, a new ontologization designed to celebrate the mental and spiritual categories inherent to thought and the aesthetic creations of modern man.

The Futurist books produced during the 1930s reflect the aesthetic of another machine idolized by the movement: the plane. The celebration of the materials and light metals used to manufacture planes and similar craft, such as tin, Flanders steel and other alloys, became a staple of the movement's endeavors, which included invitations, posters, canvases, plate-poems, calendars, postcards, programs and flyers.

In 1930, Oscar Fusetti and Nicolay Diulgheroff published the book *Programma Almanaco Italia veloce,* which was silkscreen printed and illustrated with compositions by Munari, Balla, Dottori, Prampolini, Diulgheroff, and Pozzo, each page different to the next, given the use of eight different types of colored paper, of varying thickness. The texts were printed in handwritten letters, in red, silver, sepia, violet, green and blue ink. The cover is embossed with the publisher's logo in gold on aluminum paper, more specifically cardboard covered in Alpax, a metallic alloy. The most unique feature of this book is a partially printed cellophane sheet sandwiched between two pages, like a cinematographic superimposition.

In 1932, Marinetti published *Parole in libertà futuriste, tattili, termiche*, *olfattive,* a series of lithographic prints on metal sheets in many colors and bound into a metal spine. The work was entirely printed on Flanders steel, with a cover formulated by Diulgheroff. The graphic organization was by D´Albisola. The book was one of the most representative examples of the early 20th-century avant-garde, a rhythmic series of metal plates with a poem by Marinetti on one side and a "colored plastic synthesis" of the poem on the other, as a sort of abstract transposition.

Another work from around the same time was *L'anguria lirica*, written by Tullio D'Albisola and illustrated by Bruno Munari. This was a high point in Futurism's

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4   LISTA, op. cit., p. 274.

literary, poetic and typographical experiments. Made on Flanders sheets, the book is diminutive in size, though this does not in any way reduce its blaring declaration of the self-signifying splendor of the material. The poetry here was conceived of as an instrument of physiological and technological communication, an ongoing exploration of words as the possibility of total communication, a striking characteristic of modern poetry. These works express an idea of design that is always open to new possibilities. For the Futurists, leafing through printed pages is like watching film played on a reel. Poetry and painting, the book, theater, cinema, time, form and content: all of these elements were significant in creating words-in-freedom.

In terms of Brazil, a bold experimental approach of a very modern nature that could be discerned as far back as the 19th Century. Examples are the covers of the satirical fortnightly magazine *Os ferrões* (1875, issue 3, typography by João Paulo Hildebrandt) and the book *O escândalo* (by Valentim Magalhães and Lucio de Mendonça, typography Reis, 1888), which, as Steven Heller (2011) correctly notes[5], "achieved a level on a par with any of the mischief conceived, decades later, by the Italian Futurists and German Dadaists". The most interesting thing about these is the word-illustration, handled much like a picture, suggesting perspective (in the case of the former) or challenging the orthogonal form of verticals and horizontals characteristic of lead typography. In a very modern graphic touch, the authors' names intrude upon the title.

The graphic design for Klaxon magazine was also very close to Futurist typography, although many scholars insist on relating modernist graphics to Dadaism, forgetting that the Dadaists drew heavily from the Futurists. Here we see a variety of fonts, a huge, sovereign red "A" that manages to integrate all the words on the page, toppled-over numbers, in short, a veritable visual manifesto that remained unchanged over all nine issues. In fact, denying the influence of Futurism became something of a favorite pastime for certain modernists, such as Mario de Andrade, whose *Paulicéia Desvairada* was published in 1922 by Casa Mayença, with the "Prefácio Interessantíssimo" and cover design by the author, inspired by Ardengo Soffici's cover for *Arlecchino* (1921).

We might also mention issue number one of RASM (Revista Anual do Salão de Maio), published in 1939, with an aluminum cover by Flávio de Carvalho (one of the Brazilians who declared most openly his interest in the aesthetic of Italian Futurism), a direct reference to *libro bullonato* (Depero/Azari, 1927) and *Libro di latta* (Marinetti/Albissola, 1932). Lygia Clark's tactile books, produced decades later, were another manifestation of Futurist graphics, with deep-run associations with words-in-freedom.

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5   Apud MELO, Chico Homem de; RAMOS, Elaine (orgs.) *Linha do tempo do Design gráfico no Brasil*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2011, p. 08.

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